

## EZEKIEL 14:1-11- THE LOVE OF GOD AND IDOLS

Summary Statement: We love what our hearts worship. God wants to take his people (“My People”) and bring them into obedience to him by giving to his people hearts of flesh. We have hearts that worship someone, or something. God’s punishment and chastisement is to conform us to his image, to make us people fit to live in the land. His wrath is to bring about repentance, so we will look to him for mercy.

FCF: We are idolaters. What is first in our hearts, what we care about, or love the most is what we worship as “GOD”.

Every time I read God’s Word, I am struck by God’s faithfulness and patience! May God be pleased to “strike you with this reality”.

### INTRODUCTION

Believe it or not, all who call upon the name of the Lord has divided hearts (hearts *trying to be loyal to two Lords*).

Remember: *Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the life and the behavior.*

We must come to understand that idolatry is simply the desire for something other than God at the center of our lives as our guiding star, the source of meaning in our life. As such, idolatry is the sin behind every sin, the life-lie that drives all of our choices and values. The object of that idolatry varies from person to person. There are probably as many different idols as there are human beings.

Idols of “beauty”; “power”; “success”; “money”; “self-sufficiency”...

## **BACKGROUND**

There can be a difficulty in reading the prophets. Luther said: “They have a queer way of talking, like people, who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them what they are getting at.”

### **I. EZEKIEL’S PROPHECY OCCURS DURING THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY- A “COVENANT LAWSUIT” AGAINST GOD’S PEOPLE.**

- A. Who are the Prophets: God’s covenant “prosecuting attorneys.” Remind them of Moses’ words and prepare them for Jesus’ Word! With Elijah the Prophet’s ministry, we have a change in the course of God’s prophetic revelation. The prophets (like Moses and Samuel) are not mediating and praying for Israel, but now are accusing Israel of imminent judgment to come because of breaking God’s covenant with them!
- B. Exodus Reversal: God brought Israel out of slavery from Egypt so that they could worship him; now he reverses their fortunes and turns them back into slavery for their sin and the worship of idols.
- C. God had warned Judah that she would be punished for her sins like Israel who had already been defeated by Assyria.
- D. Assyria’s power diminished, Egypt wanted the Israel territory, Babylon wanted it as well. It was a powerful, strategic, geographical place to hold as a nation.
- E. Jehoikim, King of Judah (of David’s line) was a puppet king of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. Babylon defeated Egypt in 605BC at the Battle of Carchemish and Jehoikim became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. Later, he would switch his allegiance back to Egypt, break his covenant with Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar gathered his armies to destroy he and his land. (Jehoikim died before Nebuchadnezzar got there, and his son, Jehoichin had to face his wrath and be taken into exile to Babylon.
- F. Jerusalem was destroyed and Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.
- G. *Realpolitik and Vox Populi; Religion and Revelation.*
- H. The Israelites hoped that the exile would be short in duration, but it was longer than anyone had expected.

- I. Outline of Book: chapters 1-24: Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem; chapters 25-32: Judgment on the Nations; chapters 33-48: Blessings for Judah and Jerusalem.

**II. EZEKIEL 14 IS IN THE CONTEXT OF GOD TELLING THE ISRAELITES HOW AND WHY HE WAS PUNISHING THEM FOR THEIR SINS, BUT OFFERING THEM HOPE FOR THE FUTURE BECAUSE THEY ARE GOD’S PEOPLE.**

- A. “Peace, peace,” from false prophets and counselors, “when there was not peace.”- 13:10
- B. Prophets prophesied from their “own visions”- 13:17
- C. There was much superstition and outright idolatry in Judah- 13:18; 20-21
- D. BUT- there was hope with true repentance, because of God’s covenant promises to Abraham:
  - a. They needed new hearts; these would be given. They would be obedient and love his statutes and commandments and they would inherit the promise of the land because of God’s commitment and faithfulness to his promises and to his people- 11:17-21.

**III. IDOLATROUS HEARTS**

- A. The elders of Israel come to Ezekiel to inquire of the LORD- - this is what they should have done; it is like us going to church- 14:1-5.
- B. The LORD reveals that their idols- - those things and people they love more than the LORD- - were in their hearts (8:10-12).
- C. God uses HIS WORD to convict idolaters and cause the hearts to be clean. *God’s Word always places our hearts on trial before the Great Judge of Heaven and Earth!* Heb. 4:12-13.
- D. The implication is that we may be outwardly religious in our actions by harboring idols within our hearts.
  - o Moralizing approach to sin- “Just try harder”- - “Just do it” (as Nike says). It aims at the behavior, but not the fount from which the behavior flows.
  - o Psychologizing approach to sin- “You just need to know God loves you more, etc. then you will behave.” No- -even

those “needs to know God loves you” is the symptom of a greater problem of the heart.

- The “sin behind the sin” if you will is idolatry. This is the sin that must be revealed, faced, confessed and repented of if there is to be real change.

E. God calls for repentance from the idols that:

- a. They focus upon in their lives- the idols are their main object of worship (they are *torn between two loyalties*).
- b. They love and worship from their hearts- it is an internal “heart” problem.
- c. They separate them from the LORD- keeps us from seeking the Kingdom of God and its righteousness first.
- d. They cause stumbling in the lives of God’s people- the “sins that so easily beset you”.
- e. They cause God not to answer his people’s prayers- our sins and false worship keep our prayers from being answered by God- - HIS PRAYER is for us to repent - - first!!- 14:6-8.

#### **IV. GOD’S PUNISHMENT IN THE EXILE AND HIS PUNISHMENT OF HIS PEOPLE**

- A. Purpose of his punishment- - repentance and restoration- 14:11a.
- B. Notice God’s great patience with his people- - his wooing and calling them back to himself because he loves them (although faithless idolatrous adulterers) – “If we are faithless, he abides faithful.” “God is not wanting any to perish, but for all to come to repentance!”
- C. They shall be “My People and I may be their God”- 14:11b- God’s covenant promises to Abraham- Read Genesis 17:1-8. Underline every place in your Bible that says “MY PEOPLE” AND “THEIR GOD”. Amazing promises and reality because of his great love and affection for those who he loves.
- D. Deuteronomy 4:25-31.
- E. Deuteronomy 5:29.
- F. Deuteronomy 8:11-20- Don’t forget what the LORD your God has spoken to you!

## **V. FUTURE HOPE: GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE**

- A. You could say that Israel's problem throughout the period of the OT, the reason she was never fully able to enjoy the blessings of God's covenant, was that *her heart was simply not in it*.
- B. The Lord's Covenant Commitment and Love to His People- Ezekiel 36:22-32.
- C. The Israelites will have pure hearts because of One Faithful Israelite named Jesus Christ who is the climax of God's covenant:
  - 1. Adam-Tree
  - 2. Noah-Ark
  - 3. Abraham-Circumcision
  - 4. Moses-Law
  - 5. David-Kingly Dynasty
  - 6. All fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the "yes" and "amen" of God's covenant promises. The One whose Birth we celebrate during this Advent Season! The One who was our wisdom from God; our "ark" of salvation; the one circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day to represent his people and complete his work of fulfilling the Law perfectly so that his Spirit might circumcise our hearts; the One who sat down on David's throne in Heaven at God's right hand! Whose ministry is representing his people as God's Priest, interceding for them according to God's will and committing himself to weeding out all the foul idols that swallow up the devotion and worship of our hearts that belong to God alone!!

## **VI. We are a People with Circumcised Hearts!**

- A. Romans 2:25-29- Circumcision is a matter of the heart!
- B. Matthew 15:3-11- The heart must be cleansed – we can outwardly be religious but inside full of death and deception (Mt. 23:25-28- outside of the cup "clean" but inside is unclean- -outwardly righteous but inside full of dead men's bones- -

outwardly religious, but inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- C. Our hearts love everything and everyone but God- -thus the reason the fear of man is a snare.
- D. What do you love and cherish, ultimately worship the most this day?
  - A. Self
  - B.
- E. As God used HIS WORD to weed out the idols in his people in the OT through the Prophet Ezekiel, so God uses HIS WORD today to search us out, deeply within our hearts, in order to transform his people so that we might inherit the land of God promised so long ago to Abraham, and was bought at a precious price by Abraham's Seed, who is Christ. Read Hebrews 4:12-13.
- F. God knows us better than we know ourselves and is more committed to us that we are to him- -thus the importance of his covenant promises. Notice Jesus' words *in the present tense* to the His Local-Visible Churches in Revelation:
  - A. Jesus holds his Churches in His hand and is in our midst. He knows all about us and searches us out by His Word. He claims that the church at Ephesus had "left their first love", implying that even good churches are tainted with sin.
  - B. Jesus writes to them differing messages, but the same form:
    1. To My Church...
    2. Identification that Jesus is LORD of His Churches...
    3. He says "HE KNOWS" what they do well and poorly...
    4. He rebukes and commends (reminding us that he wants to encourage us in our labors, but wants us to be ever mindful of idolatry because we always have something that needs daily repentance)...
    5. He promises and threatens: "I WILL"...
    6. He promises "To those who overcome"...
    7. He exhorts all the churches to HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD... "He who has an ear, let him hear."

The difference between religiously minded idolaters and true Christians is that Christians repent not only of their sins but also of their very best deeds, their best righteousness, in order to receive in its place the righteousness of Christ, to which they cling whole-heartedly!

Because of God's great love for us in Christ, we are confident that God alone can forgive us when we repent of our idols. That he will not only forgive, but that he is committed to smashing every last idol, every affection, every divided loyalty which craves and desires anything other than HIM! He who began a work will continue it and we as the people of God look forward to the Day when God shall ultimately destroy all sin and the idolatry in his people when we shall see him face to face and what we know by faith will be a reality when we shall dwell in God's presence and the glory of the Lamb, and...

**HE SHALL BE OUR GOD AND WE SHALL BE HIS HOLY PEOPLE!**