

# When Even the Righteous Can't Save the City

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**A** <sup>14</sup> Then certain of **the elders of Israel** came to me and sat before me. <sup>2</sup> And **the word of the Lord came to me**: <sup>3</sup> “Son of man, these men have taken their **idols into their hearts**, and set **the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces**. Should I indeed let myself **be consulted** by them?

**B** <sup>8</sup> And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

2κ

**A** <sup>12</sup> And **the word of the Lord came to me**: <sup>13</sup> “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I **stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast**,

**B** <sup>17</sup> “Or if I **bring a sword** upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I **cut off from it man and beast**, <sup>18</sup> though **these three men were in it**, as I live, declares the Lord God, **they would deliver** neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered. <sup>19</sup> “Or if I **send a pestilence** into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast,

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<sup>4</sup> Therefore **speak to them** and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of **the house of Israel** who **takes his idols into his heart** and **sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face**, and **yet comes to the prophet**, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, <sup>5</sup> that I may lay hold of the hearts of **the house of Israel**, who are all **estranged from me through their idols**.

<sup>9</sup> And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.

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<sup>14</sup> even if these three men, **Noah, Daniel, and Job**, were in it, **they would deliver** but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God.

<sup>20</sup> even if **Noah, Daniel, and Job** were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, **they would deliver** neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.

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<sup>6</sup> “Therefore **say to the house of Israel**, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your **idols**, and turn away your faces from all your **abominations**. <sup>7</sup> For **any one of the house of Israel**, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, **taking his idols into his heart** and **putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face**, and **yet comes to a prophet to consult me** through him, I the Lord will answer him myself.

<sup>10</sup> And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike— <sup>11</sup> that **the house of Israel** may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord God.”

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<sup>15</sup> “If I cause **wild beasts** to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, <sup>16</sup> **even if these three men were in it**, as I live, declares the Lord God, **they would deliver** neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate.

<sup>21</sup> “For **thus says the Lord God**: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, **wild beasts**, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! <sup>22</sup> But behold, some survivors will be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; behold, when they come out to you, and you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. <sup>23</sup> They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord God.”

(Ezekiel 13:1-23)

# We Need a Hero

*Where have all the good men gone and where are all the gods?  
Where's the streetwise Hercules to fight the risin' odds?  
Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed?  
Late at night, I toss and I turn and I dream of what I need  
I need a hero<sup>1</sup>*

So sings Bonnie Tyler in her epic power ballad released for the movie *Footloose*. It tells of the **innate longing** the human soul has for someone who can sweep you off your feet and rescue you from emotional emptiness. She calls him a “**hero**.” What is a hero? The dictionary defines it as **a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities**. These days, we often think of comic book characters with great powers far beyond those of men who use those powers for good. Superman is probably the greatest of them.

In a kind of anti-superman (but not Bizarro Superman), just a year prior to Tyler's song, a campy B-movie kind of TV show was coming to its short three year end. *The Greatest American Hero* was a pretty bad show with an interesting premise and maybe the best theme song in TV history. It

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Tyler (singer), Jim Steinman (composer), Dean Pitchford (lyricist), “Holding Out For A Hero,” *Footloose*, Columbia (1983-84).

starred the virtual unknown actor William Katt who played Ralph Hinkley, a fumbling, bumbling everyman, an LA high school teacher who, during a field trip, encounters extraterrestrials who give him a suit which endows him with superhuman abilities such as flight, super strength, invulnerability, invisibility, and more. But he lost the suit's instruction manual and only discovers its various powers accidentally. For example, he quickly learns he can fly, but can't figure out how to land, and so crashes into things upon coming back to earth. He's a hero not because of some innate ability, but because he is willing to do what he was told in exchange for the suit.

The Bible has **many heroes**. Some have preternatural origins: **Og**, the giant of Bashan (**Deut 3:11**), two “heroes” of Moab—the bizarre **Ariel** (**1Chr 11:22**) who seem to be half human and half lion, **Goliath**, the champion from Gath (**1Sam 17:4**), and of course the pre-Flood “**heroes of old, men of renown**” (**Gen 6:1-4**). Ezekiel uses several of these motifs against Israel: **Tammuz** (**Ezek 8:14**), the dying-rising Mesopotamian god whom the Israelites brought into the temple; **Oholah and Oholibah** (**Ezek 23**), personifications of pagan women that are equated to Israel and Judah, **the King of Tyre** who likened to the “**Cherub in Eden**” (**Ezek 28:12-19**).

In our story today, we have three more heroes. Compared to these others, they are quite **unexpected**. One is a pre-flood hero. The other two are post-flood heroes. Each have their own tales of survival while not being able to save others. All are considered righteous and above reproach, which is the ironic reason why they are considered heroes! It has nothing to do with their own power.

**Noah**. He was a blameless man who walked faithfully with God in a corrupt generation (**Gen 6:9**). The world's persistent wickedness provoked God's judgment; every inclination of their hearts was evil (**Gen 6:5**). So God decided to send a great flood to destroy the world. Noah was saved by a divine warning and an ark of obedience, which he built by faith. He alone with his household escaped the flood; all other souls outside the ark perished.

**Danel** (*dn 'l*). Now, because of my pronunciation (spelling) just now and because of where I'm going to take this for the time being, we will definitely come back to this one later. He was a just king to the north of Israel who daily judged the widow's case and the orphan's cause at the gate and was honored by the gods for his piety (KTU 1.17 v). He greatly desired a son, and so he prayed to the gods who answered him, giving him Aqhat. Aqhat, however, would turn out to be an arrogant, foolish, and insulting man and so the

goddess Anat struck him dead, much to the pain and sorrow of Danel who could do nothing to reverse the goddesses' wrath, even though his own life was preserved amid the tragedy. His life was spared, but not his lineage.

*Job*. He was a blameless man who feared God and shunned evil, offering sacrifices for his children's possible sins (**Job 1:1, 5**). By enduring suffering with integrity, he was ultimately restored—double blessings after the storm. But that storm would see his ten children killed because of Satan's rage targeted at Job's faith. They were collateral damage in a cosmic war and Job, though saved himself, could do nothing to save his own children.

Today we are going to see how **Israel needed a hero**, one that could save them ... from God's wrath. But there would be no heroes to come to their rescue. Their longings had long ago been placed in the wrong heroes and this prevented them from turning to the only Hero who could save them. The lesson remains to the same today.

## Ezekiel 14: An Overview

Ezekiel 14 continues the second stage of the book with its **oracles of judgment** (chs. 12-23). It is the third leg of a

long parallel that will center on the urgent need of Israel to repent, turn, and live:

- A. “Know That I Am the Lord” (12:15) Symbolic Acts of Exile (12:1–28)
- B. “Lying Divination” (13:6) False Prophecy Condemned (13:1–23)
- C. “Idols in Their Heart” (14:3) Idolatry Indicted (14:1–23)**
- D. “Like a Vine” (15:2) Unfaithfulness Allegorized (15:1–8)
- E. “Played the Whore” (16:15) Adultery Allegorized (16:1–63)
- F. “Rebelled Against Him” (17:15) Rebellion Parabled (17:1–24)
- G. “Turn and Live” (18:32) Repentance Urged (18:1–32)
- F'. “Rebelled Against Me” (19:2) Leadership Lamented (19:1–14)
- E'. “Played the Whore” (23:5) Adultery Allegorized (23:1–49)
- D'. “Like a Vine” (21:10) Judgment Imaged (20:45–21:32)
- C'. “Made Your Idols” (22:3) Sins Indicted (22:1–31)
- B'. “Lying Divination” (22:28) False Prophecy Judged (22:23–31)
- A'. “Know That I Am the Lord” (24:27) Symbolic Acts of Judgment (24:1–27)

It will begin, as the previous chapter did, with **the Word of the Lord coming** to the prophet (14:2). This is repeated again in **vs. 12**, thus showing the two natural halves of the chapter. The Word comes to Ezekiel and speaks to him. The way the chapter is written lends itself very nicely to **a three**

column weave of two parallel oracles, each consisting also of two parts. These two oracles take us from personal inward sins to national outward disaster. The sins of the few lead to disastrous consequences for the many.

Those “few” are “the elders of Israel” (1), these in turn bring sin to “the house of Israel” (4, 6), because like the moldy veils and whitewash of the previous chapter, sin is contagious. But the sin is concealed, not out in the open like it is in Jerusalem. God then turns to the prophets in the second part as he escalates his divine judgment upon the covenant people. The second oracle takes us to Jerusalem and impending judgments: famine, sword, and pestilence. Three righteous men brought up and repeated in rapid succession as God uses them as a backdrop to the evil men of Ezekiel’s day. But what could even such men as these do save barely escape with their own lives? Thus, the final movement sees us going from hypothetical to actual judgment so that people might know that the Lord is God.

## Ezekiel 14:1-11 The Elders Hearts and Impending Doom

The first oracle begins, “Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me” (Ezek 14:1). We’ve seen

this before, “In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, *with the elders of Judah sitting before me*, the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there” (8:1). The former was likely Sept 17, 592 BC among the exiles in Babylon. Now we are just a handful of months later. Two years have passed since the book began and it is now less than five years to Babylon sieging Jerusalem.

The elders (*presbuteros*, LXX) of Israel are found way back in Exodus (Ex 18:21-26) and Numbers (Num 11:16-17, 24-30) where they are righteous men picked by Moses to lead the people and to judge disputes. They are in some ways *the equivalent of elders in the church* today. This connection to our own day will have massive relevance as we continue.

“And the Word of the Lord came to me...” (Ezek 14:2). Ezekiel isn’t just imagining words in his head. Christ, Adonai YHWH, the God of Israel, comes to Ezekiel and speaks. It is verbal and very specific.

“Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces” (3). Now, in recent years I’ve been one to be careful show you that idolatry is *usually* quite literal—actual physical statues, amulets, or other objects wherein through

magic a supernatural entity was caused to reside, thus polluting the land. But here it is clear that this refers to *idols of the heart*, and this is the way our catechisms usually talk about idolatry. The parallel “to place before one’s face” “portrays idolatry as an intentionally fixed ‘state of mind.’”<sup>2</sup>

So what does that look like? *The Orthodox Catechism* asks, “Q. 104 What is idolatry? Answer: *It is in place of that one God, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His word and works, to make or imagine, and account any other thing in which I rest my hope and confidence* (John 5:23; Gal. 4:8; Phil. 3:19; Eph. 2:12; Eph. 5:5; 1 John 2:23).” Similarly, its base text, *The Heidelberg Catechism* asks, “Q. 95 What is idolatry. Answer: *having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in the Word* (1 Chron. 16:26; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 5:5; Phil. 3:19).”

Idolatry of this kind is so *pernicious* for two reasons. First, it is *unseen* to anyone except the individual and God. Second, just *about anything can become an idol* in this sense. It is equally possible that the elders of Ezekiel’s day had become enamored with the Babylonian practices all around

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 425.

them or that they were longing for the idolatrous observances they left behind in Judah (Block). Today, people make idols out various forms of worship from new and shiny to ancient and transcendent, out of traditions because that's how we've always done it, or even doctrines, even in their own Confessions of Faith. Virtually nothing is off limits to our idol-manufacturing hearts. For as Calvin said, the heart of man is an idol factory.

It is quite noteworthy that the setting of this is not that Ezekiel is alone, but that the Word came to him **as the elders of Israel** sat before him. Did they hear or see the Word? Or was it only like those on the Road to Damascus with Saul who saw a light and were frightened? Whatever the case, the LORD now asks, **“Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?”** (Ezek 14:3b). In other words, these men hide their idolatrous hearts from you and yet dare come to me to inquire of me, like some unfaithful wife who returns to her husband and pretends she's done nothing wrong. It's a rhetorical question, and this entire thing is going to repeat itself two more times. How often do men feign holiness in public, when behind the scenes they act like a pack of ravenous wolves, gossiping, plotting, scheming, lying to the world about what they really are?

If we look at the text as a series of panels, that was panel 1 (part of Row 1A). The next panel is vv. 4-5. Listen to how much of the language is repeated but then to what is new. “Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.” The first three verses were God addressing Ezekiel. Now he addresses *them* through Ezekiel. His words are God’s words.

Notice first that the “elders of Israel” becomes the “house of Israel.” As go the elders, so goes the nation; as go the elders, so goes the church. The consequences of their disease spreads like the plague to everyone else. Such is how representation always works.

Taking *his* idols into *his* heart and setting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face is repeated except now the plural “their” becomes the singular “him.” God is zeroing in on individuals. Which individuals? “Anyone of the house of Israel.” All of them. Any of them. there is another slight change with, “and yet comes to the prophet.” This is

literally what has happened as the scene unfolds. They came *to Ezekiel*. Therefore, the Lord will answer any individual who does this the same way. Yet, we won't find out what that is until the third panel (vv. 6-7). Instead, we get **the purpose** of what God's response will be. He is going to "**lay hold of their hearts**" because they are estranged from him because of their idols in their own hearts. Even though the idols are only in their hearts (rather than outward idolatry), they are still estranged from God. How much more the actual idols taking place on the other side of the deserts stands far away in Jerusalem?

Do you ever stop to think that **the idols you make cause you in some sense to be estranged from God**? Could it be that when we are not near to God it is because of idolatry we have created? Perhaps sometimes, yes. We must be careful here, because even God's elect and called who are justified by faith can have idols in their lives. The estrangement there is not that of *salvation*, but that of *communion*. How many Christians wrestle with not feeling close to God or are frustrated at their spiritual walks or feel like God has abandoned them? At one point or another, perhaps we all do. Is it not the case that at least some of the time this is because we have idols in our hearts that have broken our intimate fellowship,

like David when he sinned with Bathsheba and had his close friend murdered? He didn't lose his salvation, but he was broken inside. His bones had dried up. He had not faced the consequences of his idolatry and he was estranged from God.

The **third panel** now tells us, using more repetition, what God says to such men who consult him (thinking they are close) and yet are estranged from him. “**Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself’**” (**Ezek 14:6-7**).

What does Christ tell the elders? What does he say to anyone in Israel who seeks God, inquiring of him, wanting to know what they should do? **Repent and turn** away from your idols. “Repent and turn” in the Hebrew is *shuvu wehashivu*, an obvious play on words. The first is a Qal imperative, the second is a Hiphel imperative. Both are of the same root word *shuv*. The difference? The first is a **directional command**, whether physically or spiritually to return

to YHWH. It implies reversing course from the idolatry of the exile. The second is **causative**. Actively remove/turn your faces from idols. It implies decisive rejection. The former is a positive motion—return to YHWH with your heart. The second is a negative motion—actively reject idols. Put another way, God is saying, “**Come home! Divorce the idols!**” That is what true repentance looks like.

What are the “**abominations**” here? That’s new. These must refer to **behaviors that they practice** because they have idolatrous hearts. My guess is that many of these could be ways that the people are treating one another, and not purely confined to religious practices. Is that not what we find throughout the NT letters where people are full of gossips, slanderers, god-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful (**Rom 1:29-30**) or where there is jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, and so on within Corinthian factions (**2Cor 12:20**) or where there is “biting and devouring one another” in the churches of Galatia (**Gal 5:15**). We see this kind of behavior all the time online with unaccountable self-elected internet police who in having nothing good to say about hardly anyone and say what they say in the most disgusting immoral ways, all as they justify doing it in the name of “truth.” That’s the heart of idolatry.

Vs. 7 adds this includes now not only anyone in the house of Israel, but also “the strangers who sojourn in Israel,” who nevertheless separates himself from God by taking his idols into his heart and again, putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face and yet they too come to a prophet to consult with god through him. The entire oracle is expanding. Soon it will encompass the entire world. That is how God answers anyone, for he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Row 1A now becomes a Part 2 in row 1B (vv. 8-11). It also contains three panels to view separately. What it will describe is the Divine entrapment that comes from God because he knows the people will not repent. First, “And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 14:8). This regards anyone who will not heed the call to repentance. It is a divine action. God—yes even the Word of God will set his face against that man. How? By making him a byword and cutting him off from the people.

This language goes back to the Torah, especially the covenant curses of Lev 26 and Deut 28-29. To be *cut off* was

exactly the promise in **Lev 17:10** and **20:3-6** because of idolatry. A man who *blesses himself in his heart* will have his name *blotted out* and God will separate him for evil (**Deut 29:19-21**). The *byword* is explicitly promised in **Deut 28:37**. Ezekiel, you remember, is a priest and as the prophet of God his job was not to make up new thoughts, but to call the people to repent of violating their covenant. That's exactly what this terrifying promise of **vs. 8** does.

The same goes for **Ezek 14:9**, “And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.” **Deut 13:1-5** promises that God will *put to death* the false prophet. This is the same root as “destroy” him here. In that same place, God says that he will *test the people* through false prophets to see whether they love him (**3**). But this isn't just bare permission. It is God's sovereign decree. “I the Lord, have deceived” the prophet, just as he sent a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets in days of Micaiah (**1Kg 22:22**), through the spirit on the Divine Council who said he would go out. *Stretching out his hand* is also found in the covenant curses of **Lev 26:25**. What all this means is that God is now about to bring the full judgment of the covenant curses to

bear upon the people—even the people already taken into Babylon.

But just how will this work its way out? The third panel tells you, “They shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike (10). This is foreshadowing for our parallel Row 2 which we are about to see. But first, the reason for it all. “That the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, declares the Lord God” (11). God is not doing this even now in his wrath in anger because he is capricious and vengeful. Rather, through it he will purify his people so that they will not defile themselves again. Only through the covenant curses and actually finally experiencing them in full judgment will they learn. *Sometimes you have to show the people.*

But of course, we all know that while this did have an immediate effect upon those who went into exile and experienced the full brunt of Babylon’s fury, subsequent generations in the OT right up to the days of Jesus returned to their evil, albeit in more subtle ways than the direct idolatry of their ancestors. The idols of the heart never went away and

it leads to the necessity of God doing something more than just judge them.

God sent his son to be **True Israel**, to suffer the curses of the covenant in his own body, that God's wrath might be fully and finally released upon the Sinless Lamb of God, the sacrifice which propitiates the sins of the world—not just Israel.

“**I will be their God, and they shall be my people**” is also found in the covenant curses of **Lev 26:12**. However, the NT quotes or alludes to it on many occasions (**Rom 9:25-26; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19; Heb 8:10; 1Pet 2:9; Rev 21:3**) as finally only being fulfilled in the Church of whom Jesus in human flesh is our God. What a wonderful blessing to know that it is us to whom the promises of the ages have come, that even a promise given here foreshadows in the elders, the nation, and the sojourners Christ's church whom he bought with his own blood.

## **Ezekiel 14:12-23 Hypothetical Judgment Becomes Actual**

Now we come to vs. 12. It begins the same way **vs. 1** did, showing that it parallels what we've just seen. “**And the word of the Lord came to me...**” (**Ezek 14:12**). Our second

Row now complements the first. How? By taking that foreshadowing of judgment into the realm of prophetic actuality. The covenant curses are coming.

Our first panel (vv. 12-13) sets us up. “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast...” (13). As before, it is addressed to the prophet rather than the people. It refers to God sending a famine through a siege, for that is what it means to break the supply of bread. Notice also the change from people to land. Previously, it was the elders, then the house of Israel, then the sojourners. But now it is “the land,” representing the totality of Israel.

The second panel takes us to the reason for our introduction this morning. “Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God” (14). Before explaining them, notice that they return in vs. 20 by the same names (also in vv. 16 and 18 in the phrase “these three men”). This shows you that those two sections are mirrors, just as we saw previously as we think about this text as a weave.

So **who are these men?** Virtually **no one** questions **Noah or Job**. They are obvious biblical names of massive importance to the OT—one the only man whose family survived the great Flood and the other a man who had an entire book written about him. Both are said to be righteous. That is their main character trait, actually. But there's something else about them. They are both **ancient figures**, even in Ezekiel's day. Noah lived thousands of years earlier, while Job likely lived sometimes contemporary to or before Abraham. Also, **neither were Jews**. Both actually lived prior to the Jews even becoming a people.

The **third name** is where we have some **serious questions**. It is spelled “**Daniel**” in your English text. But there's something critical that you need to understand about the Hebrew here. The name “Daniel” in the Book of Daniel is spelled in Hebrew as דַּנְיֵאל (dāniyyē'ēl). It has five consonants: ד-נ-י-א-ל (dny 'l—dalet, nun, yod, aleph, lamed). In Ezekiel 14:14 (and 14:20, 28:3), the name is spelled דַּנְאֵל (dānē'ēl). That is, it has four consonants: ד-נ-א-ל (dn 'l—dalet, nun, aleph, lamed). There is **no yod (y)**.

Curiously, when we uncovered one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called **Ras**

[Shamra](#) texts under the shadow of Mt. Zaphon (the Mountain of Baal) in Syria (ancient Ugarit), we discovered a story about a hero named Danel, spelled exactly the same way Ezekiel spells the name here. We call it *The Epic of Aqhat* and it tells the story of an ancient non-Jewish righteous king who, like the other two, had to face terrible judgment from God/Satan/gods in the form of losing someone close to him, although he himself was saved. The fact that he wasn't Jewish matches Noah and Job as does the timeframe in which he most likely lived.

However, Daniel of the Bible does not match either of those. He was certainly a righteous man, but he was very much a Jew and he was very likely friends with Ezekiel as they were both contemporaries brought into exile into Babylon. This seems to make the Biblical Daniel feel out of place with the other two. For this reason, most modern scholars believe that Ezekiel is actually referring to the pagan king Danel.

My take is that I believe [Ezekiel was deliberately using a double-entendre](#). Scholars rarely seem to think of the both/and when coming to decisions. But if Ezekiel is a book read by exiles in Babylon, they could have thought of the biblical Daniel. However, if the book quickly made its way to Jerusalem, with all the idolatry going on there, they likely

didn't know who Daniel was, but a likely acquaintance with the story of Danel and Aqhat, not to mention how Ezekiel subverts pagan religion throughout this book, make it no stretch to see them reading the pagan hero.

**What would the meaning be in either case?** Ezekiel points out a hypothetical that if any or all of these three men were in Jerusalem when it was sieged, they could only deliver their own lives by their righteousness. **If the Daniel of the Bible were in mind**, then the *righteousness* is brought to the front, for these men all loved the LORD, even if two weren't Jews. This would then place the emphasis on the people's *wickedness* as the reason why the city was being besieged. On the other hand, **if Danel was in mind**, since he actually worshiped Baal and not God, but was nevertheless a “**noble pagan**” as Dante might refer to him, the emphasis would be on *deliverance* and salvation. Righteousness would save them. But the rest of the people in the city will *die*, as with happened to everyone in the world except Noah and his family, Job's entire family except his wife, and Danel's son Aqhat. The former hear their friend Daniel and look to his example as a righteous man and perhaps this will invite them into repentance. The latter is subversive, for even a pagan idolator, as they have been, wasn't able to save anyone else.

Let's move on. Our third panel (vv. 15-16) continues with the destruction. “If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts, even if these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate” (Ezek 14:15-16). God would cause wild beasts to pass through the land because all the people were now either dead or deported! Now, the three are simply identified as “these three men” and the focus is on their sons and daughters—all of which were intimately involved in the stories of Noah, Danel, and Job, though not the Biblical Daniel. Clearly, the emphasis here is on destruction and death.

The second half of Row 2 now comes to us (17-19). It is a repeat of vv. 12-13. It returns us to the destruction of the Babylonian. It does it through the sword and pestilence, with the “three men” sandwiched between. “Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast, though these three men were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered. Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour

out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast...” Cutting off man and beast returns from vs. 13. Everyone, even **the animals**, are destroyed. The death and destruction is horrific here and it reminds me of a tame version of the curses in Deuteronomy. If you really want something brutal to read, sit down and study Deut 28-29. You will not be the same person when finished.

**Vs. 20** is a virtual repeat of vs. 14. “**Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter.**” They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, but the sons and daughters are emphasized again. In bringing to our minds such **heroes** of old, what we are really taken to is not their heroism, for they were **unable to save** others. Rather, we are taken to the incredible circumstances they found themselves in. A son being slain by a jealous goddess (or a series of judgments coming upon the nations). An entire family being killed in a an attack by Satan. An entire world being drown in a flood that came at the hands of the Lord himself. Incredibly, each of these men does in fact survive. But **don't think they were untarnished** by the suffering they had to endure. It changed their lives forever.

The passage ends with a final word from God. After all, he is the source of this prophecy. “For thus says the Lord God” (21). “How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast” (22)! It is a climax and a conclusion. “How much more” takes the cumulative judgments and throws them all together. But it is helpful, I believe, to see that this matches up with the repentance column from Row 1. God commanded them to repent (6). He knew they wouldn’t; he had hardened them not to. Therefore, they would bear their punishment (10).

But now, though the judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence come, we get the good news that pairs well with repentance. The good news only comes through suffering; that’s the irony of this. Both suffering and repentance are how the Gospel always works, no matter where you are in the Bible. “But behold, some survivors will be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; behold, when they come out to you, and you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it” (22).

“Some survivors.” It’s the remnant theology of Isaiah returning again. “If the LORD of Hosts had not left us a few

survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah” (Isa 1:9). “I will let a few of them escape from the sword... that they may declare all their abominations,” Ezekiel had previously said (Ezek 12:16). And that is certainly the theme repeated here. For those who survive to come out, whom those already in Babylon see their ways and deeds, they all will realize that God in his wrath is still merciful. And yet, how curious that consolation comes at the same time through so much loss of others?

Habakkuk 3:2 famously says, “O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.” Habakkuk is not calling on a pipe-dream. He is calling upon God to remember his very nature. The God who spends wrath in judgment also shows mercy and grace in the midst of it. But that mercy and grace stands tied to repentance and turning back to Christ away from the idols of the heart.

And that is the final word of the chapter. “They will console you, when you see their ways and their deeds, and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, declares the Lord God” (23). Through the

coming destruction, God will bring the people to repentance. For repentance is a work of God's Spirit upon our hearts.

Beloved, **do not wait for a coming judgment** upon our nation or upon our churches to drive you to repentance. For this is a hard lesson to learn. Painful and brutal. But rather, look to the one upon whom God's wrath finally fell, the one who did not deserve it at all. He is the only hero of this story. God brought judgment down upon Israel *and his only begotten Son* for the same ultimate cause. That you know that he does all things. And that you know that those who place their faith solely in the Son of God will be his people, and he shall be their God. This is your consolation—that Jesus suffered so that you might not. Jesus died that you might live. And if you live with him, then you know true life. For that is what the Apostle saw in his own apocalyptic vision. **“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’”** (Rev 21:3-4).

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