

Gel for Brains

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Ezek 14:3

(BHS)

(NIV)

בְּנֵי־אָדָם	1	Son of man,
הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה הָעִלּוּ גִדּוּלֵיהֶם	2	these men have set up (their) idols
עַל־לִבָּם	3	in their hearts
וּמִכְשׁוֹל עֲוֹנָם נָתְנוּ	4	and put wicked stumbling blocks
נֹכַח פְּנֵיהֶם	5	before their faces.
הֲאֶדְרֹשׁ אֶדְרֹשׁ לָהֶם:	6	Should I let them inquire of me at all?

The phrase “son of man” occurs 93 times in Ezekiel. It has none of the messianic connotations that it does in the NT. Some translations convey this by glossing, “Mortal” (NRSV), “Human” (NCV), etc. I added “their” to line 2 so you can more easily coordinate with Hebrew. The idiom in line 4 is, “stumbling block of their iniquity.” Line 2: *‘ālāh* means, “Go up,” and in the causative stem means, “cause to go up,” i.e. “set up.” Think of a wood or stone idol that must be positioned and fastened down. These Jews in the exile have metaphorically done this—in their hearts.

Before their faces (line 5) they also placed a *mikshōl* (line 4). This word is built on the verb “stumble.” It signifies an obstruction. “You shall not ... put a *mikshōl* before the blind” (Lev 19:14). Why not? Because it would trip them up. What sort of fool would purposely put a *mikshōl* in front of their own faces? They go stumbling about through life because they can’t see. God emphatically says to the prophet (using the intensifying infinitive, line 6) that he won’t listen to people like that. He won’t speak to them until they get rid of these encumbrances (Ezek 14:6ff).

See the word for “idol,” *gillul*. The verb *galal* II means “to soil.” And *gel* means human “dung.” What can I say about this? A person who sets up an idol in his heart has sh-t for brains. And this foolish way of thinking goes hand-in-hand with stumbling around blind. A person like that, God ignores.

The great sin of ancient Israel was setting up wood and stone idols. The northern tribes worshipped golden calves. Both kingdoms worshipped Baal. Take a look at 2 Kings 23 for a list of all of the gods they served. Eventually, the whole land was depopulated, and a remnant relocated to Babylon—where they no longer bowed to wood and stone. Apparently, they learned (the hard way) not to make graven images. And presumably you—who are reading this right now—also do not serve graven images.

But the true and living God could see into the exiles’ hearts, and they had “set up” spiritual idols there. Their idolatry had become internalized.

Samuel said that disregarding the Word of God is like idolatry (1 Sam 15:23). If you presume to ignore what God has spoken, you will of necessity blind yourself, and stumble around haplessly because you are not living in reality. Why would God listen to you? He isn’t your real Lord when you are off stubbornly doing what you want.

Habakkuk says that the Chaldeans’ own strength is their god, and they worship the tools of their trade (Hab 1:11, 16). If you trust in your own competency you will of necessity blind yourself to God’s promises, and stumble around making decisions without regard for the fact that God takes care of you. Your pride will spiritually trip you up again and again until you learn humility. How can you have a thankful heart when your thinking begins with yourself? Why would God listen to you, if your own talents are your gods?

I'll give you one more. Jesus said that you cannot serve both God and money (Matt 6:24). If your peace of mind is *really*, deep down, because of your income and investments, you can't truly worship God. Because you aren't truly trusting him. Paul said that some Christians were like that, and "have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim 6:10). In other words, they put a pecuniary *mikshôl* before their faces, so they stumble into troubles. Why? Because they weren't living in reality. And this is you, if you first trust, for example, Social Security for your life instead of God. People who do that have you-know-what for brains.

But take heart! The Spirit-empowered dynamic of the Christian life is one of faith and repentance. Jesus teaches us to repent of what we had been foolishly trusting in, while simultaneously claiming his promises we had disregarded. By doing so, a path is cleared before us so we can faithfully live out the gospel without hindrance. And this process continues until our crucified and resurrected Savior, "Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:3). Amen, Come Lord Jesus!