

graceWORKS ! GOING DEEPER! **The Papou Study Bible** is a daily study provided by me to help



folks explore the depth and joy of the “conneXion” life of God. It’s my personal study, and is not intended as a doctrinal statement or statement of any church or denomination or congregation. It’s also my belief that “grace” works, and the servant of God should always want to go deeper. Multi-tasking as usual, I’m also calling this the “Papou Study Bible.” I’m writing it as if I were speaking to my girls Paige, Stephanie, and Ashley, and any descendant they have (particularly Nicole, Joey, Matthew, Dylan, Julianne, and Lizzie, who know me as “Papou”). And to anyone who wants to consider me a spiritual Dad or “Papou.” I want them to be able to study the Bible with Papou (grandpa in Greek) after I’m gone---and if they don’t, I’ll haunt them. The Scriptures say it’s noble to “search the Scriptures daily” to verify truth like the ancient Bereans did (Acts 17:11). My folks came from Berea. My incredible Dad (and your grandfather and great grandfather, guys), Vasil Charles Valekis taught me to do this like he did---every day until I die. He taught me and everyone I know to go to church no matter what and to put God first. While Mama (Maria Pagona Stratakis Valekis)

never really did this, she made sure we listened to Daddy on this one. She would have hit us with a spatula or frying pan or worse if we didn’t. This is a simple sharing my “daily search.” And I’d like to think it is a continuation of God’s life through my Dad through me. Both my “Dads” by the way. And a way to honor him, mama and our loving “Dad”---God. And for all of us to be together, in Spirit, even when we I join them in heaven. I like to use the Blue Letter literal, very “visual,” Greek translation a lot to help “visualize” these truths the beautiful way Greek enables you to view. And I like to share this with folks serving in an elder capacity, or any capacity, to grow them, challenge them, and stretch them. But especially share it with my girls. And when you study these, I’ll make sure to connect with you from heaven. *Ever an orthodox Greek, Jim Valekis*



**ChristIN
YouSeries**

Colossians 1:27 (King James Version)

²⁷To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is

Christ in you, the hope of glory

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Ezekiel 14 Part 1 Intro²

These chapters are fascinating to me! I’d almost been afraid to go through them, for fear I’d get caught up in something tedious. How dumb! God’s word is fascinating and joy to read, and the insights that come from thinking biblically and living biblically, through the lens of Christ, is amazing. This chapter speaks of idols in our hearts and “stumbling blocks.” Let’s see what the Lord has for us to learn.

Enjoy!

¹ NOT TO BE REPRODUCED OR UPLOADED TO WEB WITHOUT EXPRESS PERMISSION OF AUTHOR.

² New International Version (NIV)

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(Author’s note: This translation, and the study notes that accompany it in The NIV Study Bible, Copyright 1985,1995, 2002, 2008, 2011 are also referenced throughout and paraphrased frequently in the notes.)

Ezekiel 14 New International Version (NIV)

14 Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.

Note: The NIV study bible says there is an apostasy that is taking place here. It takes the form of worshipping the gods of neighboring people along with the worship of Yahweh. That struck of the very heart of the covenant relationship of Yahweh with Israel.

Exodus 20:3-5 New International Version (NIV)

³“You shall have no other gods before^[a] me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

Footnotes:

1. **Exodus 20:3** Or *besides*

This idolatry was not just limited to those still living in Israel. It was also a problem for the exiles, among whom Ezekiel lived.

²Then the word of the LORD came to me: ³“Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces.

Note: Two sins will repeatedly be brought out here.

1. Setting up idols in the heart!

2. Putting wicked stumbling blocks for your face (for your eyes to concentrate on).

Now I’ve always thought John the Baptist’s ministry was to help people remove things that might be stumbling blocks before their faces because the Lord was coming, and he was warning them to put things they were engaged in and doing out of the way.

Let’s take a quick comparative view of how his ministry is described in the gospels.

Mark 1:2-8	Matthew 3:1-11	Luke 3:2-16
<p>2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”</p> <p>MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF STRAIGHT PATHS: “Well-placed paths for him to come to you---things with no obstacles in the way.”</p> <p>4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. LITERALLY: “repentance INTO forgiveness of sins”</p> <p>5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, Note: Confession is involved. . . .they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with^[in] water, but he will baptize you with^[in] the Holy Spirit.”</p> <p>Note: Like Acts 19 says, John preached a baptism of repentance. It was a preparatory baptism for Christ, who would baptism them in two things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Holy Spirit • and Fire 	<p>In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea “Preaching” meant a declaration of good news in this world. It was used to declare victory in battle. 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Note: Heaven is near! Some call this the “first heaven.” It’s got all the messed up stuff Adam threw into it. And yet all of God’s truth to encourage us and remind us of who we really are in Him! Loved, and forgiven!³</p> <p>3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”</p> <p>Note: This is a cool concept. In the time the original prophecy in Isaiah 40 was written to which this refers, representatives were sent ahead of a monarch to prepare the way for his visit. Get the place cleaned up! Remove obstacles. Again, I think that ties into the concept in Ezekiel of removing stumbling blocks that you’ve set up before you face. Stumbling blocks that undoubtedly had to do with whatever idol was in your heart.</p> <p>4 John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. Note: He did not live a life of luxury. He lived a life of simplicity. The NIV bible says it was a visual protest against self-indulgence and I’ll add the pagan luxury-life approach of the day. (Christ talked about those in soft clothing living in Kings palaces, almost dismissively in Matthew 11:8.⁴</p>	<p>2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for [Greek – INTO] the forgiveness of sins. Note: I wonder if this ritual is more for us than it is for God. He has forgiven us from the beginning of time. This helps us “feel” it, perhaps?</p> <p>4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 And all people will see God’s salvation.’”</p> <p>Note: Again, the NIV says before a king made a journey, the road he took was improved. So leveling the roads, and taking perhaps stumbling blocks out of the way, were part of the process. If for nothing else, our stumbling blocks keep us from seeing Jesus more clearly!</p> <p>7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? NIV says this refers to the coming destruction of Jerusalem.</p> <p>8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and</p>

³ Ephesians 1:3 – He chose us before the foundation of the world to be Holy and Blameless in His sight.

⁴ Matthew 11:8 - they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

	<p>5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.</p> <p>6 Confessing their sins Note: 1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.</p> <p>they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.</p> <p>7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.</p> <p>10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.</p> <p>11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with (IN) the Holy Spirit and fire.</p>	<p>every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”</p> <p>We will see something akin to this in the next chapter in Ezekiel, where the vine is discussed.</p> <p>10 “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.</p> <p>11 John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”</p> <p>So John is referring to a sin of omission here. The sin of omitting to doing good.</p> <p>12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”</p> <p>13 “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.</p> <p>Don’t be dishonest or skim off the top!</p> <p>14 Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”</p> <p>Notice---He did not tell them to not be soldiers. He actually told them to be content with their pay. Wonder what unions would think of that!</p> <p>15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with[AGAIN, IN] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with[IN] the Holy Spirit and fire.</p> <p>Footnotes: Luke 3:6 Isaiah 40:3-5 Luke 3:16 Or <i>in</i> Luke 3:16 Or <i>in</i></p>
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The NIV study Bible says the stumbling blocks spoken of by Ezekiel represent the physical representations of idols.

But how does this play out in our lives.

What are some of the things we idolize in our hearts today?

What are some of their physical representations?

What are some of our “stumbling blocks” we need to clear out of the road to our hearts for the Lord to come in and dine with us?

How can we possibly use them as stepping stones in our lives for our next step of growth?

Something worth considering.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
STUMBLING BLOCKS
..... **A N D**
STEPPING STONES
IS HOW YOU USE THEM
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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