

Before leaving for China, we concluded Ezekiel 1-24,
Ezekiel’s prophesies against Israel and Jerusalem.
In Ezekiel 24 the prophet receives word that the siege of Jerusalem has begun.
And, as a symbol of that, God strikes down Ezekiel’s wife – the delight of his eyes.

Ezekiel 24 tells us that the *next thing* will be the news that Jerusalem has fallen.
And while we – with Ezekiel’s hearers – wait for that next thing to happen,
Ezekiel gives us a collection of oracles against the nations.

God had told Jerusalem in Ezekiel 5:8, “I am against you.”

Now, in Ezekiel 25-32, God will apply that same message to the nations!
(26:3, 28:22, 29:3, etc.)

You might say that Ezekiel’s message has been “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek!”

Why the oracles against the nations?

I would like to suggest three reasons:

- 1) judgment may begin with the household of God – but it reaches every nation
- 2) they show how important Israel is to God – he will not tolerate how the nations treat his chosen people! (blessing of Abraham – “those who bless you I will bless, and those who curse you I will curse” Genesis 12:3)
- 3) Yahweh has his purposes for history – and in the end, the nations *will* know that he is Yahweh, the God who acts in and through history

Chapters 25-32 are very carefully structured.

These eight chapters consist of oracles against 7 nations

Ammon (25:1-7), Moab (25:8-11), Edom (25:12-14), Philistia (25:15-17), Tyre (26:1-28:19), Sidon (28:20-23), and Egypt (chapters 29-32)

Also, there are seven mini-oracles in 25:1-28:23

Short oracles against the five nations (25:1-26:6)

Oracles against Tyre (26:7-28:19)

Short oracle against Sidon (28:20-23)

These mini-oracles have a standard form:

introductory citation “thus says the Lord GOD”

because you ...

therefore ...

waw + perfect

and they/you will know that I am the LORD (through 26:1-6)

These oracles also use the same vocabulary over and over –
showing a tight-knit literary unit.

Like Amos 1-2, these oracles also have a geographical arrangement –
in this case working clockwise from Ammon to Moab to Edom to Philistia,
to Tyre and Sidon.

I thought about having us sing Psalm 83 –
but we'll be looking at that more closely tonight.
So instead I selected another Psalm that reflects on these nations –
and also reminds us that our only hope is if God himself goes forth against our enemies.

In Psalm 60 we pray that God will hear us from his heavenly temple
and rescue and deliver us.
Our Lord Jesus is the singer of Psalm 60,
as God raised him up in triumph against his foes.

Therefore we can sing Psalm 60,
as those who are confident that Christ will be triumphant in the end!

Sing Psalm 60
Read Matthew 1:1-17

The opening words of the New Testament demonstrate how important the exile is.
The three leading events in OT history that structure the birth narrative of Jesus
are the call of Abraham, the reign of David, and the exile in Babylon.
Matthew's use of the 14 generations is somewhat stylized
(we know from other genealogies in the Bible that he leaves out a few generations),
but the effect is to remind us that one-third of Israel's history before Christ
is a history of Exile.

As I suggested earlier, the structure of chapters 25-32 is very carefully arranged.
While there are seven nations named in judgment,
the first six take up the first half (25-28)
and Egypt alone receives the last half (29-32).
Indeed the judgment of the first six nations receives 97 verses.
And the judgment against Egypt receives 97 verses.

And right in the middle – in between the 97 verses on each side –
is Ezekiel 28:24-26.

I want you to turn over to Ezekiel 28:24-26,
because if you do not understand what is happening in the whole of 25-32,
you will not really understand any individual part of it.

The oracles against the nations are centered on this statement:

24 “And for the house of Israel there shall be no more a brier to prick or a thorn to hurt them among all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.

25 “Thus says the Lord God: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and manifest my holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they shall dwell in their own land that I gave to my servant Jacob. 26 And they shall dwell securely in it, and they shall build houses and plant vineyards. They shall dwell securely, when I execute judgments upon all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.”

This is the central point of the oracles against the nations.

Verse 25 is at the very heart of everything else:

“When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered,
and manifest my holiness in them in the sight of the nations,
then they shall dwell in their own land that I gave to my servant Jacob.”

God’s sovereignty and holiness are expressed in the restoration from exile.

It is not because of Israel’s righteousness – but because of God’s faithfulness –
that Israel will be restored.

But also, I want you to see the eschatological language surrounding verse 25:

Verse 24 points out that there will be no more briars and thorns
(in other words, the curse upon Adam will be removed),
and verse 26 talks of building houses and planting vineyards –
the sort of language God had used in the Exodus –

and both verse 24 and verse 26 speak of dwelling securely
because God has executed judgment on their enemies.

In short, God’s people will only dwell securely –
the eschatological blessings will only come upon Israel –
when God renders judgment against the wicked.

Over the next few weeks, as we go through the oracles against the nations,
we will see how these oracles are fulfilled in the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the constant refrain in the oracles is that the nations “will know that I am the LORD.”

As Christopher Wright says,

“The purpose of these oracles was not to fan Israelite nationalism,
but to envisage the next stage in God’s long-term mission
of being universally known among all the nations of the world.” (233)

It’s not clear from Ezekiel what it will mean for the nations to know “that I am the Lord.”
Certainly it means that God is sovereign over all nations, past, present and future.

But does it mean that there is hope for salvation?

Or does it simply mean that “They will know” when God destroys them?
Ezekiel never says.

What Ezekiel *thought* is rather beside the point.
In Christ, we now know that it means that there is hope for the nations as well as Israel –
as God promised to Abraham that in his seed, *all nations* would be blessed.

The Abrahamic backdrop is important,
because the first three nations are Abrahamic nations!

Ammon and Moab were sons of Lot (Abraham’s nephew).
Edom was descended from Esau (Jacob’s twin brother).
In Deuteronomy 2, God told Moses
that he had given Esau, Moab, and Ammon their own territory –
and so warned Israel not to contend with them.
But in Deuteronomy 23, Moab & Ammon are portrayed rather negatively,
because they sought to seduce Israel away from the LORD.

Later, these nations would come under David’s sway –
but then rebelled and remained a thorn in the side of Jerusalem.

As we’ll see in Psalm 83 tonight there was great hostility between “the sons of Lot”
and the people of God.
At times, the threat of Assyria or Babylon could bring Moab and Ammon
into alliance with Israel,
but other times these nations would side with Babylon against Jerusalem!

In Ezekiel’s own lifetime, when Jerusalem rebelled in 598,
Ammon and Moab sided with Nebuchadnezzar,
which led to the downfall and death of Jehoiakim,
the exile of Jehoiachin,
and Ezekiel and the rest of the captives being deported to the Chebar canal.
But around 595, Zedekiah called for a diplomatic conference in Jerusalem
Jeremiah crashes the party and condemns it,
calling them all to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.
(read Jeremiah 27:1-11).
When Nebuchadnezzar attacks again in 588 –
it appears that he believes that Ammon and Moab are in cahoots with Jerusalem.

So when he came to the crossroads of Rabbah and Jerusalem (21:18-23)
he has to decide which he will take first.

The Ammonites laugh that Nebuchadnezzar has come after Jerusalem.
But Ezekiel warns them that their laughter is premature.
He’s coming after you next!

1. The Oracle Against the Sons of Ammon (25:1-7)

a. Because You Said 'Aha' Over My Temple, Land and People (v1-5)

25:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites and prophesy against them. 3 Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God, Because you said, 'Aha!' over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile,

Three parallel clauses:

Because you said "aha" over the temple,
and over the land of Israel
and over the house of Judah

temple, land, and people –
these were the three parts of Israel national self-consciousness

The temple is central to God's work in history.

First, it was the earthly temple –
but then Jesus himself said,
"destroy this temple, and I will raise it in three days" –
as Jesus himself became the place where God dwells with his people.

And of course in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul says:

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

Think about that:

"If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."

We are often told that the OT is about judgment – and the NT is about mercy.

But Paul says that the same principle of judgment remains:

those who profane his temple will be destroyed –
the difference is that God's temple is now his church – his people!

And so God says to the Ammonites:

4 therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. 5 I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and Ammon [\[1\]](#) a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ammonites and Moabites will be overrun by the "people of the east" (Qedemites) –
a common term used to refer to various Arab tribes who would come out of the desert
raiding and plundering the settled peoples of Palestine.

But this time they are not merely raiding and plundering:
this time they are going to pitch their tents and stay!

And as the sin was threefold (the temple, the land, and the people),
so also there will be a threefold result:

They will possess, encamp and make dwellings
They will eat your fruit and drink your milk
Rabbah will become pasture for camels, fold for flocks

And indeed, the Arabs overran Ammon – and live there to this day!

b. Because You Rejoiced against Israel (v6-7)

Verses 6-7 includes another “thus says the LORD.”

This does not really stand by itself, but presumes the first:

6 For thus says the Lord God: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel, 7 therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Because Ammon has rejoiced in the downfall of Israel,

Therefore behold!

In verses 4-5 God’s actions were paralleled by the actions of the peoples of the East,
but here God emphasizes his work in judgment:

I will hand you over as plunder.

I will cut you off

I will make you perish.

I will destroy you.

All the things that God said he would do to Israel for his sins,

God now says he will do to Israel’s enemies.

God does not play favorites.

He is just.

He is an equal opportunity judge!

The wages of sin is death (for the Jew first, and also for the Greek!).

If you sin, you will die.

And then you will know that I am the LORD.

This is a refrain throughout all of Ezekiel (occurring 72 times throughout the book).

But 18 of its 72 uses in Ezekiel occur in these 8 chapters.

When God brings judgment –

when he pays back those who mocked and plundered his people –

then they will know that he is the LORD.

2. Because You Say “Judah Is Like All the Other Nations”: the Oracle Against Moab (8-11)

In the second oracle, the LORD turns to Moab in verses 8-11.

8 “Thus says the Lord God: Because Moab and Seir [2] said, ‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,’ 9 therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. 10 I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations, 11 and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

In the first oracle, God directly addressed the Ammonites,
and states “then *you* will know that I am the LORD.”

But in the rest of the oracles in chapter 25,

God speaks of the nations in the third person –
and concludes “then *they* will know.”

In chapter 26, God will return to the second person, “you” –
so it may just be a stylistic twist.

But the effect is to provide some contrast:

Ezekiel is never sent to Ammon –
nor to Moab, Edom, or Philistia.

These messages are not designed to communicate to the nations.

They are designed to communicate something to Israel.

What does the oracle to Moab say?

After all, there is a certain irony in this oracle.

Moab is condemned for saying that the house of Judah is like all the other nations.

Of course, the prophets have been saying that Israel is like all the nations –
and declaring that Israel deserves judgment for it!

But when Moab says that Israel is like the nations, God gets upset!

Why?

Because Moab is not just insulting Judah.

Moab is insulting Yahweh.

In one sense it is certainly true that Israel is like all the other nations.

God has reminded them of this for centuries!

But it is one thing for God to rebuke his people for failing to live up to his high calling.

It is another thing entirely for a nation like Moab to say that Israel is like them.

Because Moab is also making a statement about God and his purposes.

This is blasphemy – and so God will do something about it

and therefore the people of the East will come in judgment against Moab.

The cities in verse 9 were originally in the tribe of Reuben –
but had belonged to Moab at least since the fall of Israel 150 years before

Still, the Ammonites get the short end of the stick – even in the oracle against Moab!

This oracle is echoed in 2 Peter 3:4,
when Peter speaks of those who mock, saying,
“where is the promise of his coming?”
which has the same effect of saying that there is no benefit of belonging to God.

People today often say this!
What is the point of being a Christian?
God hasn't done anything for 2,000 years –
and isn't likely to do anything again!
Christians are no different from anyone else!

But as Peter says,
“do not overlook this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years,
and a thousand years as one day.
The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness,
but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish,
but that all should reach repentance.” (3:8-9)

But lest you forget, Peter immediately warns:
“the day of the Lord will come like a thief,
and then the heavens will pass away with a roar,
and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved,
and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” (3:10)

The message to Israel is that God is still their God.
In spite of their sin and rebellion –
in spite of the judgment that is coming upon them in the exile –
God will not abandon them forever.
God will not forget his people –
and in the end, he *will* make all things right!

(Seir was probably not in the original text but crept in from a marginal note – Block 19)

3. Because You Acted Revengefully Against the House of Judah: the Oracle Against Edom (12-14)

In verses 12-14 Ezekiel turns to Edom – the descendents of Esau, Jacob's brother:

12 “Thus says the Lord God: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them, 13 therefore thus says the Lord God, I will

stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword.

Because Edom took vengeance against Judah,

This is a grievous offense – because Esau was Jacob’s brother,
and a brother should know better.

Psalm 137 speaks of this same event:

“Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem,
when they said, ‘Raze it, raze it, to its very foundations.’”

Edom took revenge on the house of Judah.

Once again, there is nothing wrong with *God* taking vengeance on Judah –

“vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the LORD”!

But it is not for Edom to take vengeance!

Therefore, God says,

I will stretch out my hand against Edom:

Cutting off man and beast

I will make it desolate

I will lay my vengeance upon Edom.

And God’s vengeance covers the whole of Edom from Teman to Dedan

(Teman was long associated with Edom, but Dedan is further south –
seems to be the southern edge of Edom)

But this time it is the people of Israel who are the instrument of vengeance:

14 And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord God.

This recalls Obadiah, verses 15 and 18

“15 For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations.

As you have done, it shall be done to you;
your deeds shall return on your own head...

18 The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
and the house of Joseph a flame,
and the house of Esau stubble;
they shall burn them and consume them,
and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau,
for the Lord has spoken.”

Some have wondered how this could be.

Because there is no known instance of the nation of Israel
enacting God’s judgment against Edom.

It was the Nabateans coming out of Arabia that drove the Edomites out of Petra
(the modern name for Teman).

So what does Ezekiel mean by Israel “doing in Edom according to my anger”?

Again – remember that these oracles are written more for Israel than for Edom.
God is saying that eschatological judgment comes through Israel.
Yes, *God* is the one who will make all things right.
But God will make all things right through Israel.

And in Acts we hear about how Paul suddenly realized on the road to Damascus
that all that God had promised to Israel at the end of history,
has happened to Jesus in the middle of history.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel.

He is the one who receives the inheritance promised to Israel.

He is the one who accomplishes all that God spoke by the prophets.

And so when Herod – the Idumean – the Edomite –
is struck down and eaten by worms (Acts 12:23)
because he refused to give glory to God,
we should see this as Jesus, the true Israel,
fulfilling what was spoken by Ezekiel,
and bringing the vengeance of God upon Edom.

4. Because the Philistines Acted Revengefully: the Oracle Against the Philistines (15-17)

Verses 15-17 then close our passage with the oracle against the Philistines.

15 “Thus says the Lord God: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, 16 therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast. 17 I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I lay my vengeance upon them.”

The Philistines are also condemned for taking vengeance against Israel,
and especially for their “never-ending enmity.”

From the days of the Judges the Philistines had remained hostile to Israel.

The idea “scorn or malice” in the soul connects with oracle against Ammonites.

The idea of vengeance connects with the Edomites.

And so God says that he will act in vengeance against them
(without reference to who the agents will be).

There is a play on words in verse 16, when he says that he will cut off the Cherethites.
(The word “cut off” is the word “carat” – which is spelled almost exactly like Cherethite.)

The Cherethites had once been David’s bodyguards (Cherethites and Pelethites)!

When David had defeated Goliath of Gath,

many Philistines seem to have honored the giant's pledge –
that the Philistines would serve David.
Many years later David took refuge in Gath
(and many Philistines – especially Gittites from Gath,
and Cherethites and Pelethites – served him).

But now the Cherethites have betrayed the house of David –
a theme that will come back in the oracles against Tyre
(the rest of the seacoast – v16).
And their wrathful rebukes – their own malice – will come back upon themselves

If the nations betray the Son of David,
they open themselves up to the retribution of God.

Conclusion

The oracles against the nations do not give you the right to bring vengeance on others.
“Vengeance is mine,” says the LORD, “I will repay.”
God said that first in Deuteronomy 32:35 –
reminding Israel that *he* is the one who makes all things right.
But Paul quotes this in Romans 12,
when he calls the church to live at peace with all men.
You are called to love your enemy.
You are called to feed him, to clothe him – to “overcome evil with good.” (12:21)

If you trust God to make all things right in the end,
then you can endure unjust suffering patiently in the present.

In Revelation 6:10 the souls of the martyrs cry out,
“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true,
how long before you will judge and avenge our blood
on those who dwell on the earth?”

I want you to see how the spirit of Ezekiel 25 is fulfilled in the martyrs.
There is a confidence that God will make things right –
and there is also a reminder that unjust suffering is our lot in life!
(Revelation 6:11 goes on to say, “Then they were each given a white robe
and told to rest a little longer,
until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete,
who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”)

The blood of the martyrs cries out for justice –
and justice *will* come.

“But ultimately God will not be ashamed to be known as the God of those who have suffered for him, and the knowledge of his universal lordship will then be universally recognized even by those who sought unremittingly here on earth to stamp that knowledge out.” (Duguid, 327)