

Ezekiel 26-27
Psalm 72
Luke 1:1-25, 57-80

“A Lament over Tyre”

December 5, 2010

Ezekiel 26-28 is one unit, but we’ll take two weeks to go through it.

There is essentially one message given in three ways.

You can see this in the conclusion of each chapter:

“I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more.” (26:21)

“you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever” (27:36)

“you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever” (28:19)

What makes this message so interesting

is that Tyre still stands in exactly the same place today!

There is no evidence from scripture – or from history –
that Tyre *ever* came to a dreadful end.

The city of Sur (the modern pronunciation of Tyre) still stands.

In order to understand what Ezekiel is doing here,
we need to understand the context.

Ezekiel 24 told 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.

As we saw last week, 28:24-26 are the key to the whole section (25-32).

God is going to fulfill his promises to Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, and to David.

Chapters 25-32 consists 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 (29-32)

We saw last time the short oracles against the first four nations (25)

Now we will look at the oracles against Tyre (26:7-28:19).

The two long oracles are against Tyre and Egypt –

the two nations that still opposed Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem.

And we should remember Christopher Wright’s point that

“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.” (Wright, 233)

We sing about that in Psalm 72 –

a Psalm that portrays the Davidic king (rather than Tyre)

as the one who receives the wealth of the nations.

Sing Psalm 72

Read Luke 1:1-25, 57-80

The Lament over Tyre is a ringing condemnation of false worship.

The idolater seeks a blessing from his god.

And so long as the god produced the blessing,
the idolater continues to worship his idol.

That's why Ezekiel portrays the idolatry of Tyre in commercial terms.

Idolatry *does* pay – in the short run.

But when the idol falls short –

when the old “high” that it produced fails to satisfy –
then the idolater turns to the next god.

When Tyre falls, there will be another source of material gain.

Babylon, Rome, Baghdad, London, New York, Hong Kong...

Cities come and cities go.

When will it stop?

When will it satisfy?

When will the world's lust be fulfilled?

Lust is never fulfilled.

Whether it is lust for sex,

lust for power,

lust for possession,

lust is never satisfied –

because it is seeking to fulfill a desire that has been twisted from its proper course

We were made for fellowship with God.

We were made to find our delight and satisfaction in him.

And when a being who was created for a relationship with the Creator,

sets out on a course of trying to fulfill that desire with created things,

no amount of created things can fill that void!

Our passage today consists of the first two parts of Ezekiel's Lament over Tyre –

this week we'll focus on the city of Tyre;

next week we'll focus on the king of Tyre.

1. God's Judgment against Tyre (Ezekiel 26)

a. I Am Against You, Because You Rejoiced Over Jerusalem (26:1-6)

26:1 In the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me:

Which month was this?

We are not told – it is possible that the month dropped out.

But the eleventh year is the year of the fall of Jerusalem.

2 *“Son of man, because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, ‘Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken; it has swung open to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste,’*

Tyre is a city built on an island off the coast of modern Lebanon.
Even before the fall of Ninevah in 612 BC,
Tyre had taken advantage of the conflict between Babylon and Assyria
to establish dominance over the trade routes of the ancient world.

In verse 2 Tyre says that the destruction of Jerusalem will work out for her good.
Tyre is obsessed with commerce and the material prosperity that came with it.
The Fall of Jerusalem opens the way for Tyre to control
the overland trade routes with Egypt and Arabia.

But Tyre needs to learn what her former king (Hiram) had known:
the good of Jerusalem is good for all nations.
God’s promise to Abraham was that through Abraham’s seed
all nations would be blessed.
Therefore, to rejoice over the downfall of Jerusalem is the height of folly!

If you mock Jerusalem, you mock Jerusalem’s God!

3 therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. 4 They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers, and I will scrape her soil from her and make her a bare rock. 5 She shall be in the midst of the sea a place for the spreading of nets, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. And she shall become plunder for the nations, 6 and her daughters on the mainland shall be killed by the sword. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Tyre was an island city 600 yards off the coast.
But God says that he will bring the nations against Tyre
as “the sea brings up its waves.”
And in the end, Tyre will be left as a bare rock.

b. I Will Bring Nebuchadnezzar in Judgment (26:7-14)

Verses 7-14 then speak of the instrument of God’s judgment:
Nebuchadnezzar.

7 “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers. 8 He will kill with the sword your daughters on the mainland. He will set up a siege wall against you and throw up a mound against you, and raise a roof of shields against you. 9 He will direct the shock of his battering rams against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. 10 His horses will be so many that their dust will cover you. Your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as men enter a city that has been breached. 11 With the hoofs of his horses he will

trample all your streets. He will kill your people with the sword, and your mighty pillars will fall to the ground. 12 They will plunder your riches and loot your merchandise. They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses. Your stones and timber and soil they will cast into the midst of the waters. 13 And I will stop the music of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more. 14 I will make you a bare rock. You shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall never be rebuilt, for I am the Lord; I have spoken, declares the Lord God.

There are a couple of problems for understanding verses 8-14.

First, Ezekiel describes the ordinary measures one uses for capturing a city.

Of course, battering rams and siege mounds don't work so well for an island fortress!

Now, in verse 8 Ezekiel says that the King of Kings (Nebuchadnezzar) will destroy Tyre's daughters on the mainland.

So maybe we should understand Ezekiel as referring to what Nebuchadnezzar will do to the mainland cities and villages.

Because the second problem is that Nebuchadnezzar never defeated Tyre – and certainly he never reduced the city to bare rock.

Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city for 13 years after destroying Jerusalem, but the city was only captured by Alexander the Great more than 200 years later.

And even then the city was never destroyed.

Tyre still stands – to this day!

The city (now called Sur) is still in the same place, and has never been destroyed.

Now, you might say, “But Pastor, how do you know this?”

Are you trusting the reports of ancient historians more than the Bible?”

No, actually, I'm relying on the words of Ezekiel himself!

Because if you look over at Ezekiel 29:17, you discover that Ezekiel knew this!

“In the 27th year [in other words, more than 15 years after chapter 26 – in other words, after the siege of Tyre has *failed*]

in the 27th year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:

‘Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre... yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against her.’”

And so God promises that he will give Nebuchadnezzar victory over Egypt instead.

Ezekiel himself says that Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre failed.

And yet Ezekiel did not think that this negated the validity of his earlier prophecy!

So how do we square that with Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 26?

There are two things that we need to see here.

- 1) Nebuchadnezzar does everything that Ezekiel said he would do.
He destroyed the cities and villages on the mainland.
He besieged the island city.
And while he never captured the island city,
he did plunder everything else.
- 2) Curiously, however, verses 13-14 are *not* done by Nebuchadnezzar!
God says that *I will make you a bare rock.*

The final destruction of Tyre was never attributed to the Babylonians,
but to God himself.

We need to remember that even as Ezekiel's prophecies against Jerusalem
were warnings of God's eschatological judgment –
so also the oracles against the nations speak of the final judgment as well.

Indeed, as we go through the oracle against Tyre,
we will see lots of parallels to Revelation 17-18 –
the oracle against Babylon the Great.

And as we will see next week,

Tyre is portrayed in terms that are bigger and more expansive
than could possibly be fulfilled by the island city.

Tyre is representative of the city of man.

Nebuchadnezzar will do damage to Tyre –

but only God himself – through the greater King of Kings – Jesus Christ –
will turn it into a bare rock.

And this is confirmed by...

c. The Lament of the Princes of the Sea (26:15-18)

In verses 15-18 the princes of the sea lament over Tyre –

all the kings who have traded with Tyre now are dismayed at her passing.

15 "Thus says the Lord God to Tyre: Will not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when slaughter is made in your midst? 16 Then all the princes of the sea will step down from their thrones and remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground and tremble every moment and be appalled at you. 17 And they will raise a lamentation over you and say to you,

*"How you have perished, you who were inhabited from the seas,
O city renowned, who was mighty on the sea;*

*she and her inhabitants imposed their terror on all her inhabitants!
18 Now the coastlands tremble on the day of your fall,
and the coastlands that are on the sea are dismayed at your passing.'*

The structure of Revelation 17-18 follows very closely the pattern of Ezekiel 26-27.

Revelation 17 speaks of the destruction of the Great Prostitute, Babylon the Great –
and then in Revelation 18, the kings of the earth lament over her.

Whether you call this city Tyre, Babylon, Rome, Baghdad, Hong Kong, New York –
this city is the city that controlled the trade and commerce of the nations.
This is the city of Man.

d. I Will Make You Go Down into the Pit (26:19-21)

But God says that *he* will make this city go down in to the pit (verses 19-21).

19 “For thus says the Lord God: When I make you a city laid waste, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you, 20 then I will make you go down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the world below, among ruins from of old, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I will set beauty in the land of the living. 21 I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more. Though you be sought for, you will never be found again, declares the Lord God.”

The “deep” is the language used of the primordial waters in Genesis 1.
The “pit” is the language of the underworld – the grave.

“The world below” is literally ‘the land of the depths’ –
which suggests that Ezekiel viewed the grave as a sort of “country”
inhabited by “the people of old” –
which fits well with the biblical conception of death
as a passing from one realm to another.

In death you do not cease to exist.
In death you pass one from realm (the land of the living)
into another (the land of the depths).

In ANE religion, the gods might pass back and forth between the land of the living
and the underworld.

But for Ezekiel, when God banishes you to the underworld –
when you go down into the pit –
you *never* return.
“You will never be found again.”

Maybe you were a little uncomfortable with the way I handled
how “literally” we should take the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy.
Hopefully you can see in verses 19-21

how Ezekiel is dealing with more than just a physical city.
How can the city of Tyre “dwell in the world below”?
With “those who go down to the pit”?

Certainly it would be possible for the city to sink beneath the waves –
and that could be a figurative fulfillment of such a prophecy –

but all you need to do is look at a aerial satellite map of the modern city of Tyre
and you can see that very little (if any) of the ancient city is submerged!

So the point is not the physical submersion of the city of Tyre.
The point is “going down to the pit – *to the people of old.*”

It is the people of Tyre who will perish before God’s wrath.
And all their beauty and glory will be brought to a dreadful end.

The dominion of Tyre over the seas and maritime trade will come to an end.

In other words, the critics and mockers who say,
“Aha! The city of Tyre is still standing – therefore Ezekiel is wrong!”
are in trouble.

Because Ezekiel’s point was that the coming of Nebuchadnezzar
signaled a worse judgment to come.
It is not the coming of Nebuchadnezzar that should send shivers down your spine –
though that will be bad enough! –
it is the coming of God Almighty in judgment!

And this judgment is portrayed as a cataclysmic shipwreck in Ezekiel 27.

Remember that Ezekiel is not proclaiming this on the walls of Tyre –
but by the Chebar canal,
among the exiles of Jerusalem.

This is not a call for Tyre to repent –
but for Jerusalem in exile to repent!
The wealth and prosperity of Tyre was no doubt a great lure for those who were “down and out.”

And “To those tempted to be seduced by Tyre’s prosperity, he proclaims Tyre’s ultimate doom.
The city whose strength comes from her location in the heart of the seas
will be drowned in the heart of the seas....
The sea may impress us with its power when whipped up into a storm,
but for the ancient reader it possessed a mythological status
as the personification of the forces of chaos
that continually opposed the forces of order and threatened to overwhelm them.”
(Duguid, 337)

2. The Shipwreck of Tyre (Ezekiel 27)

27:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Now you, son of man, raise a lamentation over Tyre, 3 and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrances to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, thus says the Lord God:

And even as Revelation 18 details the economic clout of Babylon,
so also Ezekiel 27 details the economic clout of Tyre –
here portrayed as a magnificent merchant ship –
“a ship perfect in beauty”!

Ezekiel has previously used the idea of the “beauty” of Jerusalem
in Ezekiel 16.

The “linen from Egypt” is another connection to Ezekiel 16 –
as Yahweh had wrapped the foundling in fine linen.

Especially if you reflect on the connection that Revelation 17-18 draws
between Ezekiel 16 (the great prostitute) and Ezekiel 27 (the great commercial center)
it should not surprise you that the beauty of Tyre will prove to be as fleeting...

a. A Ship Perfect in Beauty (27:3-11)

“O Tyre, you have said, ‘I am perfect in beauty.’

4 Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders made perfect your beauty.

*5 They made all your planks of fir trees from Senir;
they took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.*

*6 Of oaks of Bashan they made your oars;
they made your deck of pines from the coasts of Cyprus, inlaid with ivory.*

*7 Of fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail, serving as your banner;
blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah was your awning.*

*8 The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers;
your skilled men, O Tyre, were in you; they were your pilots.*

*9 The elders of Gebal and her skilled men were in you, caulking your seams;
all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you to barter for your wares.*

We sang in Psalm 72 about how the gold of Sheba and the abundance of Lebanon
would be given to the Davidic king –
and how all nations would be blessed through the Son of David.

In other words, Psalm 72 speaks of how economic and political dominion
belong to the Royal Son.

Here in Ezekiel 27, Tyre is portrayed as having usurped the role of the Son of David.
(As we’ll see next week, this is personified in the king of Tyre himself).

The soldiers of Tyre (verses 10-11) reflect Tyre’s alliance with Egypt.
They will seek to defend Tyre against the Babylonian attack.

*10 “Persia and Lud and Put were in your army as your men of war.
They hung the shield and helmet in you; they gave you splendor.
11 Men of Arvad and Helech were on your walls all around,
and men of Gamad were in your towers.
They hung their shields on your walls all around; they made perfect your beauty.*

Tyre is trying to become what Jerusalem is supposed to be.
Tyre is trying to supplant the holy city!
But – like the counterfeit city Babylon in Revelation 17-18 –
Tyre is a counterfeit ship.

b. The Ship’s Manifest of Abundance (27:12-25)

This merchant ship trades with all the kingdoms of the earth.
Verses 12-15 start with Mediterranean markets and Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
Verses 16-19 turns to Palestine and Syria,
verses 20-22 focus on Arabia,
and verses 23-24 moves east to Mesopotamia.
In other words, all the world trades with Tyre.

Tyre is the commercial capital of the world.

*12 “Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of every kind; silver, iron, tin,
and lead they exchanged for your wares. 13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech traded with you; they
exchanged human beings and vessels of bronze for your merchandise. 14 From Beth-togarmah
they exchanged horses, war horses, and mules for your wares. 15 The men of Dedan [1] traded
with you. Many coastlands were your own special markets; they brought you in payment ivory
tusks and ebony. 16 Syria did business with you because of your abundant goods; they
exchanged for your wares emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, and ruby.
17 Judah and the land of Israel traded with you; they exchanged for your merchandise wheat of
Minnith, meal, [2] honey, oil, and balm. 18 Damascus did business with you for your abundant
goods, because of your great wealth of every kind; wine of Helbon and wool of Sahar 19 and
casks of wine [3] from Uzal they exchanged for your wares; wrought iron, cassia, and calamus
were bartered for your merchandise. 20 Dedan traded with you in saddlecloths for riding.
21 Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored dealers in lambs, rams, and goats; in
these they did business with you. 22 The traders of Sheba and Raamah traded with you; they
exchanged for your wares the best of all kinds of spices and all precious stones and gold.
23 Haran, Canneh, Eden, traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad traded with you. 24 In your
market these traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and
in carpets of colored material, bound with cords and made secure. 25 The ships of Tarshish
traveled for you with your merchandise. So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the
seas.*

The economic power of Tyre results in her great beauty and glory.
All the best goods of earth pass through Tyre.
Verse 25 concludes this description with an ominous statement:
“So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas.”

c. The Coming of the East Wind and the Sinking of the Tyrian Ship (27:26-31)

But when the east wind blows –
when the wind of judgment blows –
Tyre will sink like a stone.

26 *“Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas.
The east wind has wrecked you in the heart of the seas.
27 Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners and your pilots,
your caulkers, your dealers in merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you,
with all your crew that is in your midst,
sink into the heart of the seas on the day of your fall.
28 At the sound of the cry of your pilots the countryside shakes,
29 and down from their ships come all who handle the oar.
The mariners and all the pilots of the sea stand on the land
30 and shout aloud over you and cry out bitterly.
They cast dust on their heads and wallow in ashes;
31 they make themselves bald for you and put sackcloth on their waist,
and they weep over you in bitterness of soul, with bitter mourning.*

Tyre has sought to replace Jerusalem as the city at the center of the universe.

Psalm 48:7 says that when the kings of the earth gathered against Jerusalem,
“you destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind.”

Now the east wind blows against Tyre.

Revelation 18:17-18 says,

“And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea,
stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,
‘What city was like the great city?’”

d. The Pilots of the Sea Lament over Tyre

Even so, the pilots of the sea lament in verses 32ff:

32 *In their wailing they raise a lamentation for you
and lament over you:*

*‘Who is like Tyre, like one destroyed in the midst of the sea?
33 When your wares came from the seas, you satisfied many peoples;
with your abundant wealth and merchandise you enriched the kings of the earth.
34 Now you are wrecked by the seas, in the depths of the waters;
your merchandise and all your crew in your midst have sunk with you.
35 All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you,
and the hair of their kings bristles with horror; their faces are convulsed.
36 The merchants among the peoples hiss at you;
you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.’”*

Sure, the city of Tyre stands to this day,
(And yes, that is a pun – the modern name of the city is “Sur”!)
it stands as a warning to all peoples.

It stands as a warning to Christians to be careful how you interpret prophecy!
When you see the words “it shall be no more forever” –
don't assume that it's “obvious” what that means!
But Tyre also stands as a warning to the mockers.
You can find hundreds of mockers online with comments like
“reality 1, Bible 0.”
As Peter said, scoffers will come in the last days, saying
“Where is the promise of his coming?”
Tyre hasn't fallen yet – do we need to wait a million years?!

But Ezekiel's lament over Tyre has a far more basic point.

It speaks to those tempted by the seduction of riches –
the lure of prosperity –
the love of “stuff”!

Ezekiel seeks to defuse the seductive power of wealth
by showing where it leads in the end!

“Like those who traveled first class on the *Titanic*, with all its unparalleled grandeur,
those who place their trust in this world
are traveling on a comfortable one-way trip to” a watery grave (Duguid, 338).

We live in a day when the seduction of riches has almost entirely overwhelmed the church.
We say we don't believe the “health and wealth gospel” –
We say we don't believe that personal prosperity is what the Christian life is all about.

But what are the things that we talk about?
What are the things that we *pray for*?
Health matters.
Job matters.
Family matters.

And we always are so busy that we don't really have much time for discipleship –
it takes so much time just to keep everything else going...

But what are the things that we always have time for?
We always have time for job and family and health.
Oh, and Notre Dame football!

Please notice that I'm saying “we” here.
I fully believe in using the second-person plural in preaching –

but this is describing precisely *my* struggle as well!

Even as a pastor I can get so preoccupied with my *work*
that I neglect discipleship!
I can always find something to do – rather than make disciples!

But take heart!

God will not let us stay this way.

He *will* do something about it.

Sometimes God shows us the hook before we bite, and we avoid the pain.

But other times, God disciplines us by letting us bite down on the hook.

As Thomas Boston put it,

“As when one walking heedlessly is suddenly taken ill of a lameness:

his going halting the rest of the way

convinces him of having made a wrong step;

and every new painful step brings it afresh to his mind.” (in Duguid, 340)

If you don’t learn any other way, then God will discipline you
and this discipline ‘produces a harvest of righteousness and peace
for those who have been trained by it.’ (Heb 12:11).

The other way is to learn to resist the attractiveness of such seduction!

We must learn from Tyre that idolatry *always* ends in the grave.

It may take a while!

But as Revelation 18 shows,

judgment *will* come in the end.

This is the message that John the Baptist came to preach.

As his father, Zechariah had said,

“you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God,

whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Jesus came to forgive your sins.

Because in the tender mercy of our God,

he accomplished what we could not do.

He gave light to us – who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

He has guided our feet into the way of peace.

Let us then, as our Lord commanded,

“deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him!”