

Ezekiel 28
Psalm 87
Luke 2:1-21

“The Fall of the Guardian Cherub”

December 12, 2010

Last time we saw how Ezekiel warns us against the seduction of riches.
Here we see the seduction of wisdom.

You might say, but wait!
Isn't wisdom a good thing?

Wisdom *should* be a good thing,
but the pursuit of wisdom can easily become idolatrous.

It did for Adam and Eve.
“when she saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6).
And it was true:
eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil *did* give a wisdom of sorts.
But *how* you pursue wisdom is essential to whether you will ever find it!

There was another woman who was content with the wisdom of God –
even though she did not understand how God would do the impossible:

how a virgin could conceive and bear a son.

That's why we sing Psalm 87 today,
which says that the nations will be born in Zion.

Isaiah had said that Zion would give birth to a male child,
and then suddenly give birth to a nation.
Through Mary, Zion gave birth to Jesus –
and then on Pentecost, gave birth to a nation!

Ezekiel 26-28 is all about Tyre.
Ezekiel 29-32 is all about Egypt.
Lurking not so far in the background of all these oracles
is Babylon.

We'll hear about Tyre and Babylon in Psalm 87 –
both are said to have been “born in Zion.”

Sing Psalm 87
Read Luke 2:1-21

We saw last week that Ezekiel uses the same phrase to end 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)

Last week we looked at the prophecy regarding the city of Tyre in Ezekiel 26-27,
and we saw this rather strange thing:

Ezekiel says that the city of Tyre will be “no more”
and yet Tyre was never destroyed.

The city of Tyre survived the siege of Nebuchadnezzar –
as Ezekiel himself acknowledges in Ezekiel 29!

Chapter 28 is the key for understanding what Ezekiel is saying about Tyre.
Because in chapter 28, the prince of Tyre is described in terms
that go well beyond the ordinary description of an earthly king.

The problem is that Tyre is trying to be
what Jerusalem is supposed to be.

The prince of Tyre is trying to be
what the Son of David is supposed to be.

1. “I Am a God”: the Indictment of the Prince of Tyre (28:1-10)

28:1 The word of the Lord came to me:

2 “Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God:

*“Because your heart is proud, and you have said, ‘I am a god,
I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’*

It was common in the ancient world for kings to claim divine status.
But God challenges the prince of Tyre and says:

*yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god—
3 you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you;*

As we saw in Ezekiel 14, there are two Daniels that fit the description here.

The biblical Daniel and an ancient Ugaritic king Danel,
who was known as a wise and righteous king.

The biblical Daniel is certainly a wise man –
the only question is whether there is enough time by 587 BC
for Daniel to have become famous enough
for his wisdom to be considered legendary!

But it doesn’t matter which Daniel is intended –
because the point is that the king of Tyre is wiser than Daniel –

he is wiser than the wisest men in history!

And it is:

*4 by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself,
and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries;
5 by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth,*

Sounds good – right?

By wisdom and understanding he has made wealth!
Isn't that what you are supposed to do?

Think back to Solomon.
God told Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted.

He could have asked for wealth;
he could have asked for long life;

But Solomon asked for wisdom –
and therefore God gave him wisdom, wealth *and* long life!

Now the prince of Tyre has amassed his fortune through wisdom.

But this is *not* good:

and your heart has become proud in your wealth—

The Hebrew word for “wisdom”
can refer simply to the skillful manipulation of objects.

A “wise” craftsman is a skillful craftsman who is able to produce beautiful things.

So when we hear about the prince of Tyre’s “wisdom”
we need to understand that this “wisdom” has to do with his ability in trade.
He is a skillful merchant – he is “worldly wise” you might say.

He is the Gordon Gecko of the ancient world!
The Wall Street banker who has amassed power and wealth
through his skillful manipulation of the ancient economic system!

And like the Wall Street bankers of our own generation,
his great ability has resulted in tremendous wealth,
and with it, tremendous pride!

And because of the prince of Tyre’s great pride:

*6 therefore thus says the Lord God:
Because you make your heart like the heart of a god,
7 therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations;*

*and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor.
8 They shall thrust you down into the pit,
and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas.*

While it is true that the city of Tyre was never destroyed –
it is also true that the city of Tyre never again regained its position of power and glory.
For nations and cities, as well as individuals,
pride goes before a fall!

Last time we talked about the seduction of wealth.
Here we need to see the seduction of wisdom.

We live in a world dominated by experts.
Everything has become so specialized that you don't just go to a "mechanic" –
you look for a mechanic that knows about your kind of car!
You don't just go to a "doctor" –
but you look for a specialist who knows about that particular problem.
If your cat has heart trouble, you can even find a feline cardiologist!

Proverbs reminds us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.
There are lots of other ways to attain a sort of "wisdom."
You can become a "specialist" in all sorts of areas
and become famous or wealthy because of your great wisdom.

Certainly this speaks to you who are students:
beware of *how* you seek wisdom and knowledge!
But it also speaks to all of us –
because we all seek wisdom:
whether the wisdom to run our homes well,
or the wisdom to advance our careers.

Notice, though, that the prince of Tyre is not condemned for his wisdom (or for his wealth),
but for his pride.

Wisdom and wealth *with humility* are good things.
Wisdom and wealth – sought for the sake of the kingdom of Christ –
are good and blessed gifts.

But pride – as always –
pride goes before a fall.

Greg Beale has said it well:
"Ezekiel 28...conceives of sin to be the rearranging of existence around the self,
with the result that it comes to be its own creator, healer, and sustainer.
Consequently, all sin includes idolatry." (137-138)

The prideful quest for wisdom and skill puts the self at the center,

so that my life is lived for *my* benefit.
And the world would call that wisdom –
living for yourself – your family – your career.

In contrast, the wisdom of God is the cross –
the way of humility, suffering, and self-denial.

Which wisdom do you seek?

If I look at the way in which we are living right now –
I'd say most of us are more interested in the wisdom of the world,
than in the wisdom of God!

The King of Tyre has achieved power and wealth through wisdom.
The result is that he will die a shameful and inglorious death.

This phrase, “in the heart of the seas,” reminds us of chapters 26-27,
when we saw Tyre portrayed as a great ship.
The nations will come against Tyre,
and the prince of Tyre will be thrust down into the pit –
into the depths of the seas, down into the underworld.

All his pretensions to divine status will be gone:

*9 Will you still say, 'I am a god,' in the presence of those who kill you,
though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you?
10 You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners;
for I have spoken, declares the Lord God.”*

Note the language of the “uncircumcised.”
The Phoenicians practiced circumcision,
so to say that he will die “the death of the uncircumcised”
is pure insult!

Ironically, our Lord Jesus Christ will die precisely this sort of death!
The way of the world seeks wisdom, power, and glory –
and results in humiliation and death.
The way of the cross endures humiliation and death –
and results in wisdom, power and glory!

2. “You Were in Eden”: the Lament over the King of Tyre (28:11-19)

Verses 11-14 blend together Edenic and temple language.

Some have tried to apply this to Satan.

But verse 11 makes it clear that Ezekiel is talking to the King of Tyre.
Further, verse 10 insists that he is a *man*.

We need to see that the King of Tyre is not being compared to Satan –
but to *Adam*.

After all, God has been saying to Ezekiel over and over again:
“Son of Adam, speak to the house of Israel...
Son of Adam, set your face against Pharaoh...
Son of Adam, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre”

Now, all the Adamic language comes home to roost!
Remember Adam!

(Read)

11 Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me: 12 “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God:

“You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings.

On the day that you were created they were prepared.

14 You were an anointed guardian cherub.

I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.

It’s easy to this as a picture of Adam in Eden!

Adam, after all, was the signet of perfection!

He was the guardian cherub –

he was the one who was supposed to guard and keep the garden.

And Eden certainly was portrayed as a temple –

with the garden as the most holy place,

here referred to as the “holy mountain.”

All the precious stones remind us of the breastplate of the high priest –

9 of the 12 stones from Exodus 28 are listed here.

This is designed to connect the image of Eden with the image of the temple –

and also with Mt. Sinai (the holy mountain) –

and Mt. Zion –

all of which are also connected with the cherubim

(the guardians of God’s holiness –

whom we met earlier in Ezekiel 1 and 10)

And then in verses 15-18 we here three accusations,
and three judgments:

first,

15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.

16 In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.

Enoch and Noah had been “blameless” –
but unrighteousness was never found in them.
They remained humble, and walked with God.
The king of Tyre, however, did not remain blameless!

And therefore he was cast out of the mountain of God and destroyed.

Likewise, in verse 17,
*17 Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you.*

This echoes the judgment against Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16.
The one who was perfect in beauty
became proud and corrupted his wisdom –
and so he is cast down to the dust.

Third, in verse 18,
*18 By the multitude of your iniquities,
in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries;
so I brought fire out from your midst;
it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you.*

The glorious guardian cherub now spontaneously combusts –
and turns to ashes before all the nations

*19 All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you;
you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.”*

You can still see the Edenic language in verses 15 and 16.
Certainly there is still the mountain of God, the stones of fire,
the guardian cherub.

But this description of God’s judgment on the guardian cherub
makes it clear that we are really talking about the King of Tyre.

Ezekiel is not talking about Adam or Satan!
He is talking about the King of Tyre.
In the last chapter we saw that Tyre was called a ship.
But that does not mean that Tyre *is* a ship!
In the same way, the Adamic, Edenic, temple language
is designed to communicate something about the *King of Tyre*
and should not be taken as an allegory for something else.

If you want to understand what Ezekiel is doing,

then you need to know the story of Hiram.

In 2 Samuel 5, we are told that Hiram of Tyre sent cedar wood and carpenters to build a house for David in Jerusalem.

When Solomon came to the throne, 2 Chronicles 2:12 records a part of his letter to Solomon:
“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who made heaven and earth,
who has given King David a wise son, who has discretion and understanding,
who will build a temple for the LORD and a royal palace for himself.”

Hiram understood who Yahweh was – and he rejoiced to give aid to David’s son.

And so Hiram provided the skilled workers and cedar that Solomon needed.
Indeed, there is no way that Solomon could have built the temple without Hiram of Tyre.

Further, 2 Kings 10 tells us that Solomon had a fleet of ships “with” the fleet of Hiram of Tyre.

This is the original wisdom of the King of Tyre.

As 2 Kings 5:1 puts it, “Hiram always loved David.”

He understood that true wisdom required him to bow the knee to the Son of David –
and that his prosperity was dependent upon the prosperity of the Son of David.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.

So as long as the King of Tyre loved and served the Son of David,
then the King of Tyre was like Adam – a guardian cherub on the holy mountain.

Think about this for a minute.

What are the implications of this?

Normally, Israel tended to connect the story of Adam to the story of Israel.

It goes something like this:

Adam and Eve sinned and were driven away from the Garden
into Exile and death – away from the presence of God.
Israel sinned and was driven out of the Promised Land
into Exile and death – away from the presence of God.

But here Ezekiel requires us to take a broader vision:

Yes, it is still an Israel-centered, David-centered vision –
but we need to see that *Tyre* also was in Eden.

All humanity has sinned and is driven away from the presence of God –
into Exile and death.

This is why we sang Psalm 87.

Psalm 87 says that Rahab and Babylon,

Philistia, Tyre and Cush
were all born in Zion.
Next Sunday evening I'll be preaching on Psalm 87,
so we'll look more at this then,
but Psalm 87 holds out hope for the nations:
even nations (like Tyre and Babylon)
which the LORD has cursed with a curse of utter destruction!

But this shouldn't surprise us!
After all, God has a habit of saving a remnant
from those who were devoted to destruction!

Remember Sodom?
God said that he would destroy them utterly.
But he saved one family – Lot and his daughters.
And through them came Moab and Ammon.
And through Moab came Ruth, and through Ruth came David.

Remember the Canaanites?
God said that he would destroy them utterly.
But there was one woman – Rahab – whom he saved.
And through Rahab came David.

Remember Ahab and Jezebel?
God said that he would destroy them utterly.
But their daughter, Athaliah, married into the house of David,
and so one of Ahab's seed remained: Joash.
And thus Ahab and Jezebel contributed to the line of Jesus.

Oh, and by the way –
do you know where Jezebel came from?

She was a Sidonian princess.
Her father, Ethbaal, was the King of Tyre.

This is the way God works:
he takes rebels and idolaters,
and draws them into his kingdom!

3. They Shall Know that I Am the LORD: the Oracle against Sidon (28:20-23)

But as the following mini-oracle against Sidon reminds us,
the promise to Abraham still remains:
those who bless you will be blessed –
those who curse you will be cursed.

20 The word of the Lord came to me: 21 "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against her 22 and say, Thus says the Lord God:

*“Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I will manifest my glory in your midst.
And they shall know that I am the Lord
when I execute judgments in her and manifest my holiness in her;
23 for I will send pestilence into her, and blood into her streets;
and the slain shall fall in her midst, by the sword that is against her on every side.
Then they will know that I am the Lord.*

This is a fairly generic oracle.
I will manifest my glory in your midst.
I will manifest my holiness in her.

Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Here it is abundantly clear that Sidon will know who Yahweh is
when judgment comes against her.

4. No More Briers or Thorns: Israel Shall Dwell Securely (28:24-26)

We have reached the halfway point in the oracles against the nations.

And here in verses 24-26 we are reminded of the point of these oracles:

*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.*

This highlights the Adamic language used earlier in the chapter.
In the curse, God said that the earth would bring forth thorns and thistles.
Adam would toil and labor in vain.
You can see that this is not merely an agricultural point.
Yes, it is true that the ground seems to delight in bringing forth
all sorts of plants that *we* do not want!
But Ezekiel shows us that this has a political aspect as well:
the Son of David – the people of God –
are surrounded by briers and thorns.

The humiliation of the house of Israel is that they are pricked with briers
and stabbed by the thorns of the nations.

And thus it was fitting that when the Son of David came
to take the exile of his people upon himself –
to endure the humiliation and scorn that we deserved –
it was fitting that they placed upon his head
a crown of thorns.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground!

This is not merely an agricultural point!

This is a political point:

“he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found!”

He comes to establish righteousness and peace.

He comes so that all the nations might know that he is the LORD.

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.”

The people of God will only dwell securely in the land
when God brings judgment against their enemies.

Building houses –
planting vineyards –

this is what people do when they dwell securely.

What’s the point of building a house
if it’s just going to burn down when the neighboring tribe invades?

What’s the point of planting a vineyard
when we are likely going to be forced to move in a few years?

What’s the point of putting down roots?
Some of you have to deal with this!
For students (and others) who may only be here for a few months or a few years –
what’s the point of building houses and planting vineyards?

Think of what our Lord Jesus has done.
He is the holy temple, and has established us as his holy temple here.
He is the vine – we are the branches.

And because of the glorious reality of the heavenly city
we ought to reflect that glorious reality *wherever* we are!
If we are part of Jesus’ family –
then we need to put roots down wherever we are and wherever we go,
because Jesus’ family dwells securely in him!

The sorts of houses we build – the sorts of vineyards we plant –
should be designed to reflect the sort of Lord we worship!