

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Glorified In Your Midst
September 30th, 2012
Ezekiel 28:1-24
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Ezekiel 28. I gave you a little bit of background on Ezekiel when we discussed the profile of a false prophet on September 16th but let me just remind you of a few of those details. I mentioned that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were partner prophets around the time of the Babylonian Exile and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Jeremiah ministered to those remaining in Judah and Ezekiel ministered to those who had been taken captive to Babylon. Those of us who are doing the RMM Bible reading plan read this particular text on Tuesday and it struck me like a load of bricks. I was not planning on preaching on this text actually, but in my prayer time I really felt God directing me quite forcibly to it, probably more forcefully than I can ever recall. I believe God wants us to study this text together today, though I'm not 100% sure why that is. Let's read it; we'll read most of verses 1-24 and then we'll talk about the place of these oracles in the Book of Ezekiel generally before talking specifically about cultural sin and the purpose of judgment specifically. Hear then the Word of the Lord:

¹The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Because your heart *is* lifted up,
And you say, ‘I *am* a god,
I sit *in* the seat of gods,
In the midst of the seas,’
Yet you *are* a man, and not a god,
Though you set your heart as the heart of a god
3 (Behold, you *are* wiser than Daniel!
There is no secret that can be hidden from you!
4 With your wisdom and your understanding
You have gained riches for yourself,
And gathered gold and silver into your treasuries;
5 By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches,
And your heart is lifted up because of your riches),”

⁶Therefore thus says the Lord GOD:

“Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god,
7 Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you,
The most terrible of the nations;
And they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom,
And defile your splendor.
8 They shall throw you down into the Pit,
And you shall die the death of the slain
In the midst of the seas.
9 “Will you still say before him who slays you,
‘I *am* a god’?
But you *shall be* a man, and not a god,
In the hand of him who slays you.
10 You shall die the death of the uncircumcised
By the hand of aliens;
For I have spoken,” says the Lord GOD.”

¹¹Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ¹²“Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD:

“You *were* the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
13 You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone *was* your covering:
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes
Was prepared for you on the day you were created.
14 “You *were* the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.
15 You *were* perfect in your ways from the day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.
16 “By the abundance of your trading
You became filled with violence within,
And you sinned;
Therefore I cast you as a profane thing
Out of the mountain of God;
And I destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the fiery stones.
17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;

You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;
I cast you to the ground,
I laid you before kings,
That they might gaze at you....

²⁰Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²¹“Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against her, ²²and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Behold, I *am* against you, O Sidon;
I will be glorified in your midst;
And they shall know that I *am* the LORD,
When I execute judgments in her and am hallowed in her.

²³ For I will send pestilence upon her,
And blood in her streets;
The wounded shall be judged in her midst
By the sword against her on every side;
Then they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

²⁴“And there shall no longer be a pricking brier or a painful thorn for the house of Israel from among all *who are* around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 28:1-24. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

This chapter is part of a section of text running from chapter 25 – 32 that is often given the heading: “Oracles Against The Nations” and there are some things that we learn by looking at that body of text as a whole that we’ll highlight briefly before getting into the specific content of chapter 28.

Oracles Against The Nations

The first thing that Ezekiel wants us to understand here is that:

1. God is Sovereign over the nations of the world

Generally speaking the prophets of God spend most of their time speaking truth to God’s people. Most of their fiercest attacks are directed INTERNALLY – we talked about that a couple of weeks ago when we talked about the Profile Of A False Prophet. The correct target for most of the big guns in the arsenal of God’s Word is in fact the heart of God’s people, the Bible says that again and again. But. God is also Sovereign over all the nations of the earth, whether they worship him in response or not. And so many of the prophets will include a section in their books called “Oracles Against The Nations”. Isaiah does it, Amos does it, Jeremiah does it and

Ezekiel does it. The point of it is to remind God's people and the nations generally that God is Sovereign over all things. Ezekiel makes this point with some rather obvious symbolism. He mentions 7 nations – 7 is generally the number of Divine Perfection. This is not accidental, it's sort of a prophetic convention – Amos does it too. He also mentions nations from all the four points of the compass – north, east, south and west. If you read this section carefully you can't miss what the prophet is saying: no matter where you look; no matter what geo-political event you consider, remember this: God is in charge. God is large and in charge and he works all things toward his good purpose.

2. God in his Sovereign wisdom may use evil means to chastise and purify his people

One of the things that you notice when you read the 7 oracles against the nations is who is not mentioned. Babylon. Leaving out Babylon in the 6th century B.C. would have been like leaving out Germany if you wrote a prophetic book like this in 1942. They were THE BAD GUY; leaving them out would demand explanation. Just imagine that for a second; imagine doing this in 1942 and saying that God is going to judge all the evil nations in the world: he will judge Norway and Finland and America and Canada and Switzerland and Italy and Bulgaria. The end. That would inflame people in 1942 and so would this have. Half the nation of Israel was living IN EXILE IN BABYLON and they are waiting to receive word of the destruction of Jerusalem BY BABYLON and the prophet tells a nice stirring story about God's Sovereignty over all the nations of the earth and how the bad guys are going to get their due and there is no mention of BABYLON. Why would he do that?

When you read Ezekiel you are surprised to discover the Babylon is not yet the object of God's wrath, Babylon in Ezekiel is the instrument of God's wrath. Ezekiel has already said that when judgment falls on Tyre for example, it will come through the agency of Babylon:

For thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar^f king of Babylon,...
^gHe will slay with the sword your daughter *villages* in the fields; he will heap up a siege mound against you, build a wall against you, and raise a defense against you. (Ezekiel 26:7-8. NKJV)

He says the same thing about Egypt, that he will use Babylon to punish Egypt. Not only does the prophet say that God is using Babylon to punish these nations, he also says that he is using Babylon to punish Israel! He said that way back in chapter 17, talking about the King of Israel:

I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me. (Ezekiel 17:20. NKJV)

God says he is going to use Babylon to teach his own people about justice! This must have been very difficult for the people of Israel to hear but in truth, it was not the first time they had been told this sort of thing. Way back in Isaiah, about 100 years before, when Assyria was the bully on the block, the prophet said this:

¹⁷**The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you** and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.” (Isaiah 7:17. NKJV)

What are the prophets trying to say? They are trying to say that God uses evil agency to accomplish his purposes of chastisement and purification with respect to his own people. Now, we have to be careful here, the Bible does not say that God is the author of evil. Nor does it say that Assyria and Babylon get away with it just because it served God's purpose. No. The prophets always remind us that the evil motivations of secondary agents are ALSO judged by God. God says in Isaiah 10:

“Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger

And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.

⁶ I will send him against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath...

⁷ **Yet he does not mean so,**

Nor does his heart think so;

But it is in his heart to destroy,

And cut off not a few nations....

¹²Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *that He will say*, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.” (Isaiah 10:5-12. NKJV)

This is deep water. I cannot explain this to you any better than our grandparents said it 300 years ago. In The Baptist Confession of Faith our grandparents said this:

God has decreed in Himself from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, **all things which shall ever come to pass.**

- Yet in such a way that **God is neither the author of sin** nor does He have fellowship with any in the committing of sins, **nor is violence offered to the will of the creature** , **nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away**, but rather established.

- In all this God's wisdom is displayed, disposing all things, and also His power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree. (The Baptist Confession Of Faith, Section 3, Paragraph 1)

God is in charge. He has decreed all things that come to pass. His normal means is to use agency and yet not in such a way that God is the author of sin or in such a way that the will of the creature – be that creature the King of Assyria or the King of Babylon - is forced. Those men did what they wanted to do, but what they wanted to do served God's Sovereign decree. In all of this the wisdom of God is displayed. Indeed, his ways are higher than our ways and past finding out.

Listen, let's bring this in here, what this means, if this is true, is that God could conceivably use a despicable country like, say Iran, to accomplish his Sovereign purposes of chastisement and purification with respect to his people. Don't assume that you know which side of the board God is playing.

The third thing I want to say with respect to understanding this passage is that:

3. The leader of a people is often truly representative of those people

When you read Ezekiel 28 you notice that the oracles are addressed against “the prince of Tyre”; the Hebrew *naw-gheed* means “leader”, “chief” or “governor”. God is addressing the Head of State but he is speaking to him about the sin of the culture GENERALLY. It isn't that this particular King, in this case Ithobal II, is a crazy person who thinks that he is God – it is that the culture generally has become like Adam and Eve – they think they are LIKE GOD able to determine good and evil for themselves. The point that I want you to notice here is that often in the Bible the King or the Head of a people is taken by God as truly representative of the people from which he arises. So in Daniel, Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are in some respects, one and the same, as later in Daniel Alexander and Greece are foreseen as essentially one and the same. The point is that a culture will often give birth to a characteristic leader who represents for good and bad the essential nature of the nation. Frequently in the Bible, a people can be expected to give birth to an archetypal leader and God often addresses this leader in wrath as representative of the nation.

Think about that for just a second. There is an old line that says: “People get the leadership they deserve”, meaning that while people enjoy mocking and abusing their politicians, it is wildly foolish and near sighted to do so. We made those men and women; we created them by our common values and in a democratic system we elected them. We give birth to our leaders out of the depths of our own hearts. Think about Barack Obama for a second. He is half black and half white. He is son of a Muslim father and a Christian mother. He is the American melting pot. He is the American dream. He is more rock star than bureaucrat, more style than substance; more celebrity in chief than commander in chief. He is The President you would have if a group of 30 year old media consultants went into a science lab to create a politician out of the essential DNA of modern day America. In the Bible it is often to men such as these that God addresses himself in Sovereignty.

Now, let’s look at what God says to this representative leader about cultural sin and coming judgment.

The Cultural Sin Of Tyre and Her Head:

First of all the King of Tyre, the representative head of this fallen culture is rebuked for:

1. The sin of pride

Look at verse 2:

“Because your heart *is* lifted up,
And you say, ‘I *am* a god (Ezekiel 28:2. NKJV)

You are just like Adam and Eve! You think that you are like God able to decide right and wrong for yourself. You have lifted yourself up and seated yourself on the Throne of the Almighty. In verse 4 he tells us why they think of themselves so highly:

⁴ With your wisdom and your understanding
You have gained riches for yourself,
And gathered gold and silver into your treasuries;

⁵ By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches,
And your heart is lifted up because of your riches),” (NKJV)

You think that knowing how to make money is the same as knowing truth, you think that being financially shrewd is the same thing as being morally discerning, but it's not. Boy I tell you, that is an accurate observation of humanity nature, is it not? 9 times out of 10 in our culture if a person has made a lot of money at something, they now assume that they are experts in everything! They bought stock in Apple back in 1994 and now that makes them experts in philosophy, politics, marital conflict and 18th century French literature – they know it all now! Money makes us assume that we are wise. We see money as a way of keeping score in the great race of humanity and so we think that if we have a lot that must prove that we know a lot and that makes us think that we are something that we are not. That is human nature in a nutshell. That is also North American history in a nutshell.

Secondly, they are rebuked for cherishing:

2. Delusions of grandeur

There is a lot of “Garden of Eden” imagery in this oracle. In verses 12-14 God is speaking sarcastically. He is saying: “You think yourselves to be the pinnacle of humanity. You think you are perfect in beauty and wisdom. You think that all the good things of the earth were made for you and you alone. You think that you are the chosen ones, the anointed Cherubim, Guardians of God’s glory, you believe in your own Manifest Destiny over all the earth and you think the favour of heaven belongs to you as a birthright and that it can never be taken from you. Fools! Whatever favour you enjoyed lasted only

Till iniquity was found in you. (Ezekiel 28:15. NKJV)

People who are doing really well and who are enjoying a long string of good fortune tend to cherish delusions of grandeur. They start believing that they are blessed of the heavens, that they live under the Sunshine of God’s eternal favour. They start using phrases like “Manifest Destiny” and “American Exceptionalism”. The problem is that whatever Divine Favour they might have once enjoyed is lost once they become infected with sin and iniquity. Sin makes commoners of us all; Providential Favour is no man’s and no nation’s perpetual birth right.

It has been bizarre listening to the candidates in this year's American Presidential race attempt to outdo one another in giving voice to these delusions of grandeur on a national scale. Declaring that you believe in American Exceptionalism has become a pre-requisite for entry into federal politics south of the border. This sort of talk blows my mind. Does no one remember the history of Israel? Peace, peace when there is no peace. We are God's people, we have the temple, we can never lose. How'd that work out? Does no one remember the history of Rome in the 5th century? Rome began to perceive herself as the Protector of Mother Church as the chosen instrument of God's Providence and as the Light of God among the dark pagan nations, surely the Lord would never allow The City of God to fall and for darkness to rule over light? How'd that work out? Does no one remember British history? The white man's burden? To make the world England for the good of man and Gospel? How'd that work out? Every country that has ever dared think that it had a monopoly on God's favour has experience disaster – usually of the catastrophic and irreversible flavour. This is not the Promised Land! This is not Eden, we are not building the City of God – the City of God descends from heaven when the earth lies in ruin. That's what the Bible says – but every generation has had its nation and its leader who thought they were doing the work of God for God over creation. God is never co-opted by national pride. No matter whose national pride we're talking about today.

National pride and cultural delusions of grandeur in the Bible and in history seem to summon the wrath and judgment of Almighty God. So it was in Tyre and also in Sidon. The oracle against Sidon is interesting because it doesn't mention the specifics of the sin – leading some scholars to believe that they were of a piece with those of Tyre – maybe, maybe not, we don't know. What we do know is that at verse 20 the focus shifts from the nuances of cultural sin to the purposes behind Divine Judgment. Ezekiel highlights two:

The Purpose Of Divine Judgment

- 1. The glory of God**
- 2. The peace of God's people**

Look again at verse 22:

‘Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Behold, I *am* against you, O Sidon;
I will be glorified in your midst;
And they shall know that I *am* the LORD,
When I execute judgments in her and **am hallowed in her.** (NKJV)

Our great grandparents used to talk about why the Final Judgment was necessary. Have you ever thought about that? People are separated at death – when a saved person dies their soul goes to the throne of God to await the resurrection, when an unsaved person dies their soul goes to hell and begins to immediately experience torment. If that is the case, why do we even need a Final Judgment? People used to ask that question and do you know how our Great Grandparents answered it? For the glory of God. They believed that God is glorified in the reward of the righteous and in the condemnation of the wicked. God displays in cold reality all of the consequences of human sin, he shows all of the hurt, all of the blasphemy, all of the generational brokenness and he declares: GUILTY!!! He assigns punishment and no one in all creation says: “Well that was harsh”; No! They say instead: “God’s ways are right and he is just in all his doings. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!” If that is true of the Final Judgment then it is also true of every lesser judgment. Every time the judgment of God is visited upon the earth inside of human history it serves the purpose of his glory. It restores God to a proper gravity in the minds of men and women. We talked last week about how the universe was designed with God at the centre in the same way that our solar system was designed with the sun at its centre. The Hebrew word for glory *kaw-bode* means “heaviness” or “gravity”. The heaviest thing has to go at the centre! If anything other than the sun functions as the centre of gravity for a planet in the solar system then it will lose its orbit and it will crash into planets and eventually it will collide with and be swallowed by the sun. So it is with human beings. When God becomes a light thing to us, when he is of no matter, when something else becomes our centre of gravity we are set – nations are set – upon a collision course with other orbiting bodies and eventually they will collide with and be consumed by the GRAVITY of God Almighty. And thus judgment on the one becomes mercy to all others. When God shows up to judge the most arrogant and off centre nation, all the other nations experience an immediate upgrade in the gravity of God. God grows – not in reality – God’s actual glory can never be diminished or increased – but our sense of his gravity, our WORTH-SHIP of his gravity increases and this tends to diminish and forestall our own descent into idolatry and conflict – with others and with our maker. The judgment of God

upon the most arrogant of nations serves his glory and accomplishes the hallowing of his name. Remember that the next time you pray the Lord's Prayer.

Lastly, God's judgment also serves to liberate and to set at peace God's covenant people. Verse 24 says:

²⁴“And there shall no longer be a pricking brier or a painful thorn for the house of Israel from among all *who are* around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 28:24. NKJV)

Sidon had been a frequent irritant to Israel and a source of military harassment. When she is humbled, that will no longer be the case and God's people can worship him without persecution or duress. What is true of these lesser judgments points to the greater realities of the final judgment. The Bible closes with that very promise. When all the enemies of God's Glory have been judged and cast down, the people of God will see his face, they will glorify God and they will enjoy him forever. Revelation 21 says:

²²But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine [£]in it, for the [£]glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. ²⁴And the nations [£]of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor [£]into it. ²⁵Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into [£]it. ²⁷But there shall by no means enter it anything [£]that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Revelation 21:22-27. NKJV)

In the end there is only one centre of gravity in God's universe. In the end there is only God's glory and those who delight in it. They shall see his face and no one will harass them, no one will defile them, no one will attack them. For those who hate the glory of God, those who would make themselves Gods and seat themselves upon his throne at the centre of the universe are no more. They shall not enter. But only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Blessed are all those whose names are written there.

Conclusion:

It doesn't take a ton of spiritual sensitivity to notice that this chapter of the Bible seems especially relevant again in our day. We live in the days of pride and arrogance, where economic gain has made a mighty nation diminish God and cherish delusions of grandeur. We live on the doorstep of that nation and whatever God does there to restore his gravity will splash over here,

of that we are certain. So what do we do? Watch and pray. Watch. Watch ourselves because this story is not just their story; it is the story of every human heart. Pray. Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come – and that sort of thing. Watch and pray. And preach and reach. As God is glorified – as his gravity increases in our day through his various judgments upon the earth – people will listen in ways they have not previously. Preach the Word with boldness. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Watch and pray, preach and reach, for indeed the Lord has a day against every high and lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.