

“The LORD of the Nations”

Introduction: As we have been traveling with Ezekiel for some six weeks now, and have another six or so to go, it might be helpful to see where we have come in the book, and where we are heading. In chapters 1-3 we heard Ezekiel’s call and commissioning to speak to the people of God who were in exile in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. His call included a dramatic vision of God’s glory (which the choir just put into song!). In chapters 4-24 we have been listening to God’s hard, but righteous and just judgment of a people who have been persistently disobedient and have besmirched God’s name and character as a result. Because of this, we have seen the glory of God depart from his Temple and from Jerusalem. Chapters 25-32, our focus today, consist of God’s judgment on the seven nations that surround his people, of which we have read a sampling of two. Chapters 33-39, you will be relieved to know, will be about restoration and hope, and 40-48 will consider God’s new temple, the return of his glory, and future blessings, all of which will lead us nicely into the season of advent and the coming of the glory of the Lord in Jesus.

Now, well might we ask why, after spending a couple dozen chapters addressing the sins of his own people, God turns Ezekiel toward Israel’s neighbors. Moreover, what possible relevance do Ammon, Moab, Edom, the Philistines, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt, most of which exist now only in museums of archaeology, have for us some twenty-five centuries later? What gets driven home, and is repeated over 60 times in the book, is the phrase, “Then you will know that I am the LORD.” God wants the nations of the world, as well as Israel, to know that he is LORD of them all. For the nations it would be a wake-up call; for Israel it would be an encouragement. For us, it might be both!

With that in mind, what were God’s issues with the nations? Primarily, there were two.

I. God’s Issues with the Nations

A. First, some of these nations, which Ezekiel names in a clockwise manner, beginning in the northeast of Israel, had directly opposed the Israelites, had rejoiced in her downfall, and were, as a result, touting the superiority of their gods. Helpful to be aware that in the decade or so leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, the smaller nations in the region of Palestine were dominated by the two great world powers of the day—Babylon and Egypt, of which Babylon was the greatest threat. So, the smaller nations spent much time and effort either jostling for Babylon’s favor, or trying to band together for defensive security, in what proved to be very fluid alignments. So, for example, Ammon and Moab had joined with Babylon in its siege and attack on Israel, the one that had led to the first exile. So, the Israelites then made an alliance with Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyre, and Sidon. But, when Babylon attacked Israel again, her allies did not come to her aid but stood back with relief and delight that the fury of the Babylonians had not come upon them. The land of Israel laid waste? Her Temple desecrated? Her people off to exile, again? Many of the nations around them rejoiced, concluding that her God was blind and beaten, unable to save his people.

B. The second issue God had with these folks is seen in the character of the Kings of both Tyre and Egypt. Here’s the self-understanding of the king of Tyre: “I am a god. I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas” (28:2). And hear that of the king of Egypt: “The Nile belongs to me; I made it for myself” (29:3). These were both powerful nations. Tyre was like a large multinational corporation,

having grown incredibly wealthy through her expertise in trade. Egypt was a powerful military presence. As the chapters unfold regarding each, what we hear is how wealth and power and worldly wisdom ran these nations, fueling their arrogance and pride and leading to the carrying out of oppression and injustice. Needless to say, the Lord was not pleased. His promise was to bring each to their knees.

## II. Timeless Truths for all Nations

A. What can we learn from how God responded to these seven nations? First, it is a picture of how much this good shepherd cares for his people and his purposes. Though the nations had been nasty, the nations would be held accountable for how they treated both the Lord, and his people. His promise in Genesis 12 to bless all the nations on the earth through the nation of Israel also included the promise to curse those who had cursed them. This would have been of great encouragement for those sitting in exile to hear. The Lord was neither blind nor beaten and would, in his time, come to their aid.

B. Second, these chapters (25-32) give us a sobering picture of the transience of the empires of the world. Hearing words that spoke of the eventual downfall of nations like Tyre and Egypt would highlight that even the most powerful of economic and military nations would not stand forever if they continued to ignore the Lord. It would be like hearing that the United States would one day become a Third World nation. The stark reality that we need to take to heart is that the great empires that have dominated the world of their day, from Babylon to Great Britain, have all come and gone, rising and falling, as one writer puts it, like great waves of the ocean that roll on for miles but, when fueled by their own arrogance and power, ultimately crash into pathetic little ripples on the shore. Neither diamonds, not dictators, nor even democracies are promised to last forever, only the kingdom of God.

It's worth mentioning here that when God goes on in chapter 28 to describe the ultimate fall of Tyre, he gives Ezekiel metaphors from the first chapters of Genesis to describe it. The king is pictured as having been in Eden, the garden of God, walking amid its beauty. He has been given great responsibility as a "guardian cherub," and has everything he could need. But his heart became proud and his wisdom corrupted. He turned to selfishness, became filled with violence, and, as we have heard, sought the throne of God for himself. So, simply, God threw him out (28:11-19). This text is often used to describe the fall of Satan, as well as that of Adam and Eve, and it may certainly include both. But overall, what we hear described is a narrative that occurs again and again in human history, that of the human race turning its back on the blessings and the glory of God and pursuing glory for itself. God won't stand for it, either as individuals, or as a nation.

C. Third, these chapters help to flesh out the picture the Bible gives us of the sovereignty of God, that he is Lord of all, even of those who may not acknowledge it, and that all things serve his purpose. God has given us great human freedom to make and act on our own plans, but he also, in some way, remains behind and over all that happens, bringing his own purposes to fulfillment in the process.

In this regard I am reminded of a line from the movie *Braveheart*. When William Wallace is charged with treason against the king of England, he claims that he never swore allegiance to the king. In response, the judge says, "It matters not. He is your king." In a similar vein, the Lord Almighty, the God who has revealed himself in Jesus, is the King of kings, the ruler of heaven and earth, whether acknowledged willingly or not. The NT writers make this abundantly clear. Paul uses the words of an ancient hymn about Jesus to make this point to the Philippian church:

God has exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [Phil. 2:9-11]

D. Fourth, this passage leads us to consider the dramatic difference between the kings of the world, and the King who is Jesus. Notice at the end of our reading for today that the king of Tyre, though he claims to be a god, is to die a violent death at the hands of uncircumcised foreigners. One might ask, how is this different from what happened to Jesus on the cross at the hands of the Roman political establishment? Well, while both were kings, and while both died in humiliation, under the judgment of God, what caused the king of Tyre's death was his own pride. But what caused the death of king Jesus was *our* pride.

As the beginning of the hymn stanza from Philippians describes it:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

What an amazing king that describes! The king of Tyre, and those who seek to be exalted like him, will fall to the underworld, never to return from death. King Jesus, and those who seek follow his way of humble service, will rise from death and be exalted with him in glory, for all eternity. Jesus is the true king. Jesus is the one who can rightly claim to be divine. Through his death and resurrection, he has regained the beauty of Eden on our behalf. What an assurance and hope that we have! What a story we have to tell to the nations.