

Ezekiel

Week 15

Judgment of the Nations – Part 1 *Chapters 25-28*

Introduction

This section of Ezekiel contains judgment oracles directed at Judah's seven hostile neighbors. Ammon, Moab, and Edom, the three nations to the east and southeast, are addressed first. Then Yahweh addresses Philistia to the west and Tyre and Sidon to the north. Finally, Yahweh turns to Egypt, the nation to the south. Brief oracles will be presented against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and Sidon, while rather lengthy oracles of judgment are made against Tyre and Egypt. Perhaps the reason for this focus is that Tyre and Egypt were the only two nations in the region still holding out against the Babylonians when Jerusalem fell. Throughout these oracles Yahweh repeats numerous times, "Then they [or you] will know that I am Yahweh."¹

Prophecies Against Neighboring Nations (25:1-17)

Ammon

Ammon (Heb, *'ammon*) was the name of the descendants of Benammi, Lot's younger son by his daughter, born in a cave near Zoar (Gn. 19:38). They were regarded as relatives of the Israelites, who were commanded to treat them kindly (Dt. 2:19). At the time of the Exodus, Israel did not conquer Ammon (Dt. 2:19, 37; Jdg. 11:15). However, the Ammonites were condemned for joining the Moabites in hiring Balaam, and were forbidden to enter the congregation of Israel to the 10th generation (Dt. 23:3-6).²

Because the Ammonites gloated over the destruction of Israel and Judah, they will be taken over and plundered by the peoples from the East (1-5). Because they rejoiced maliciously over Israel, they will be ruined (6-7).

Moab

Moab (Heb. *mô'āb*) was the son of Lot by incestuous union with his eldest daughter (Gn. 19:37). Both the descendants and the land were known as Moab, and the people also as Moabites (*mô'ābî*). Just prior to the Exodus, the lands N of the Arnon were wrested from Moab by Sihon, king of the Amorites. When Israel sought permission to travel along 'the King's Highway' which crossed the plateau, Moab refused (Jdg. 11:17). They may have had commercial contact (Dt. 2:28-29). Moses was forbidden to attack Moab despite their unfriendliness (Dt. 2:9), although Moabites were henceforth to be excluded from Israel (Dt. 23:3-6; Ne. 13:1).

¹ Hays, J. D. (2010). [*Message of the prophets: a survey of the prophetic and apocalyptic books of the Old Testament*](#) (pp. 215). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² Thompson, J. A. (1996). [Ammon, Ammonites](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 29). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Balak, king of Moab, distressed by the Israelite successes, called for the prophet Balaam to curse Israel now settled across the Arnon (Nu. 22–24; Jos. 24:9). As Israel prepared to cross the Jordan, they camped in the ‘plains of Moab’ (Nu. 22:1; Jos. 3:1) and were seduced by Moabite and Midianite women to participate in idolatrous practices (Nu. 25; Ho. 9:10).³

Because Moab viewed Judah with contempt, they will be taken over by the people from the East (8–11).

Edom

The Edomites (*’eḏôm, ’aḏomîm*) were descendants of Edom (Esau, Gn. 36:1–17). Modern archaeology has shown that the land was occupied before Esau’s time. We conclude that Esau’s descendants migrated to that land and in time became the dominant group incorporating the original Horites (Gn. 14:6) and others into their number. After c. 1850 bc there was a break in the culture of Edom till just before c. 1300 bc and the land was occupied by nomads.

At the time of the Exodus, Israel sought permission to travel by the king’s highway, but the request was refused (Nu. 20:14–21; 21:4; Jdg. 11:17–18). Notwithstanding this discourtesy, Israel was forbidden to abhor his Edomite brother (Dt. 23:7–8). In those days Balaam predicted the conquest of Edom (Nu. 24:18). Joshua allotted the territory of Judah up to the borders of Edom (Jos. 15:1, 21), but did not encroach on their lands. ⁴

Because Edom took revenge on Judah, they will suffer devastation at the hands of Israel.

Philistia

According to the Table of Nations (Gn. 10:14; 1 Ch. 1:12), the Philistines derived from Casluhim, the son of Mizraim (Egypt) the son of Ham (Gn. 10:14; 1 Ch. 1:12). Abraham and Isaac had dealings with a Philistine, Abimelech, the king of Gerar, and his general Phicol (Gn. 20–21; 26). In the time of the Monarchy the Philistines were almost proverbially aggressive, but Abimelech was a reasonable man. He had adopted many of the customs of the country, had a Semitic name, and engaged with Isaac in a covenant.

When the Israelites left Egypt the Philistines were extensively settled along the coastal strip between Egypt and Gaza, and they were obliged to detour inland to avoid ‘the way of the land of the Philistines’ (Ex. 13:17). The adjacent section of the Mediterranean was in fact referred to as the sea of the Philistines (Ex. 23:31). The Israelites did not encounter the Philistines in Canaan during the Conquest, but by the time Joshua was an old man they were established in the five cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath (Jos. 13:2–3). From this time for many generations these people were used by God to chastise the Israelites (Jdg. 3:2–3).⁵

³ Thompson. 775-776

⁴ Thompson, 290-291

⁵ Mitchell, T. C. (1996). [Philistines, Philistia](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 921). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Because the Philistines took revenge on Judah, the Kerethites and the rest of the coastal peoples will be destroyed.

Prophecies against Tyre (26:1-28:19)

In geographical terms, Tyre was minute. In economic terms, however, she was highly significant, and was thus an important force in the politics of the ancient Middle East. The ancient city of Tyre was an important seaport for the area which is now southern Lebanon. (Its site lies approximately midway between Beirut to the north and Haifa to the south.) The city had two harbours, one of which was on an island which lay just off the coast. In Ezekiel there are several references to Tyre's close links with the sea. Both her prowess and her predicted downfall are described using marine allusions. A substantial part of Tyre's strength lay in her seafaring ability.

Tyre's wealth stemmed from her trading. Her merchants travelled extensively throughout the ancient world and dealt in a very extensive range of goods. Her people were famous for their business skills. These skills in turn had led to prosperity.

Tyre has a long and significant history. The city is mentioned in Egyptian Execration Texts of around 1850 bc. According to Herodotus, alphabetic writing was introduced to Greece by the Phoenicians who came with Cadmus, king of Tyre. The city-state also founded the colony of Carthage around 825–815 bc.

Tyre's relations with Israel often had some economic factor. Hiram I supplied David with materials for building the palace of Jerusalem (2 Sa. 5:11; 1 Ch. 14:1). He also supplied Solomon with materials for the temple and concluded a treaty with him. Just over a century later, king Ahab arranged to marry Jezebel, a daughter of the king of Tyre (1 Ki. 16:31). Through Jezebel the worship of the Tyrian god—Baal Melqart—was introduced into Israel. Prior to the time of Ezekiel, Tyre had enjoyed a period of prosperity. However, Ezekiel, Jeremiah (25:22; 27:1–11) and Zechariah (9:2–7) all prophesied Tyre's suppression by the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre (from c. 587–c. 574 bc) was apparently a hard campaign (Ezk. 29:18). The city eventually acknowledged Babylonian domination.

26:1–21 Self-satisfaction denounced

In this oracle Tyre is rebuked for seeing the fall of Jerusalem as merely an event which will enhance her own prosperity. The Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar would lay siege against her and bring about her downfall. Delight at the downfall of others is an emotion that Christians, and others, need to deal with as it is very pervasive, but not readily acknowledged.

The word of God to Ezekiel is: 'Tyre has said that the ruin of Jerusalem will ensure her own prosperity' (1–2). Therefore he is to proclaim: 'Many nations will pillage you and your settlements, Tyre. Then they will know that I am the Lord (3–6). Nebuchadnezzar will ravage your mainland and lay siege against you. You will never be rebuilt (7–14). The coastal tribes will be appalled at your downfall and will lament your collapse (15–18). You will be dragged down to the pit. You will not return' (19–21).

27:1–36 A lament

This oracle is given as a lament. Here Tyre is likened to a marvellously-wrought merchant ship. The suppliers of her timbers and her merchandise are her trading-partners. The extensive list of countries and products gives us a clear picture of why Tyre was famous for trading. Her links spread throughout most of the Mediterranean, North Africa, Asia Minor, and the Middle East. She was able to employ foreigners in both industry and defence. Yet this ship of state was to be sunk *i.e.* Tyre was to be overthrown.

When an old-established, major manufacturer goes bankrupt and closes its doors not only its own employees are made redundant but often thousands more in satellite industries, local suppliers and services. Recession and economic collapse are some of the modern punishments a state may endure.

1–36 Ezekiel is instructed to proclaim to Tyre: ‘You gloried in your beauty (3–4). You were constructed from the finest materials (5–7). You employed many nations to build, operate, and defend you (8–11). You had many important trading partners, near and far, and your merchandise was of the highest quality and widest range (12–25). But you will lose it all on the day of your shipwreck (26–27). Your neighbours and trading partners will be appalled (28–36). You will be no more’ (36).

28:1–10 Against arrogance

The achievement of economic wealth had brought with it a sense of pride. The process is summed up in v 5—great skill in trading had led to great wealth, and great wealth had led to pride. The king of Tyre is depicted as believing he is as wise as a god. The prophecy warns that the penalty for such arrogance would be both humiliating and final. Other examples of such pride and subsequent fall are easy to find throughout history and today.

Ezekiel must proclaim to the king of Tyre: ‘You think you are a god, but you are not (1–2). Your shrewdness and business acumen have brought you great economic reward (3–5a), which in turn has made you conceited (5b). Because of your conceit, you will die a humiliating death at the hands of foreigners. When they confront you, you will just be a mortal, not a god’ (7–10).

28:11–19 Expulsion from ‘paradise’

This lament depicts the rise and fall of the king of Tyre, and hence the rise and fall of the city-state itself. The imagery is strongly reminiscent of the Garden of Eden narrative. However there is no attempt to parallel the Genesis account closely. As is often the case in Ezekiel, metaphors are freely mixed, altered and adapted to suit the language of the prophecy. The poetic language serves to highlight the extent of the fall that Tyre experienced; it was like an expulsion from paradise.

The lament to the king of Tyre is: ‘You were once the exemplar of wisdom and beauty (12), dwelling in a paradise, adorned with splendid jewels (13–14) and exhibiting blameless behaviour (15). Yet your widespread commercial activities led to oppression. Your splendour made you conceited and corrupted your thinking. Your many dishonest trading practices led to desecration of the sanctuaries. Thus you have been expelled from your paradise and laid low (16–18). Onlookers are appalled by you’ (19).

Satan Connection

From early on in church history there has been an interpretive tradition understanding this passage as an account of the fall of Satan. Though this same type of interpretation in Isaiah 14 was fervently denied by well-respected exegetes such as John Calvin (who bluntly ridiculed it), it has persisted into modern times. From a background standpoint, it must be noted that Satan is never portrayed as either being a cherub or being with the cherub in the garden in any passage of Scripture. Furthermore, Israel's understanding of Satan was far more limited than that found in the New Testament. Even in Job, Satan is not a personal name but a function (see comment on Job 1:6). "Satan" does not become identified as the personal name of the chief of demons until about the second century b.c., and he does not take up his position as the source and cause of all evil until the unfolding of Christian doctrine. Consequently, the Israelites could not have understood this passage in this way, and no New Testament passage offers a basis for departing from the Israelite understanding of it. In the context, it is a metaphorical description of the high stewardship entrusted to the prince of Tyre (as significant as the cherub's role in the garden). Rather than treating this sacred trust with reverence and awe, he exploited it to his own benefit—as if the cherub of the garden had opened a roadside fruit stand. He was therefore discharged from his position, relieved of his trust and publicly humiliated.⁶

Prophecy against Sidon: 'Know the Lord' (28:20-26)

Sidon was a neighbour of Tyre. It would suffer due punishment as well. One notable feature of this short oracle is the frequency of the phrase *then they will know that I am the Lord*. Furthermore the prophecy holds the promise of restoration for the people of God (25–26), a theme which would receive greater emphasis later.

Ezekiel is to proclaim to Sidon: 'I am against you Sidon—but I will be glorified through you. When I execute judgment on you they will know that I am the Lord (22). When I afflict you they will know that I am the Lord (23). When Israel no longer has malicious neighbours they will know that I am the Lord (24). When I gather Israel from the peoples I shall show myself holy to the nations. Israel shall dwell in safety on the land, and they will know that I am the Lord their God' (25–26).⁷

⁶ Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*](#) (electronic ed., Eze 25:2–28:21). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁷ McGregor, L. J. (1994). [*Ezekiel*](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 735). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF THE PROMISED LAND

- City
- ▲ Mountain
- Area of Ezekiel's "promised land" (Ezek. 47:13-48:35)

0 20 40 Miles
0 10 20 Kilometers

