

SESSION SEVENTEEN

THE "TYRE ORACLES" OF EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 26–28

I. THE INTERPRETATIVE PROBLEM

Chapters 26–28 of Ezekiel, dealing with the oracle against Tyre, occur in the context of chapters 25–32 in what is often referred to as the "doom oracles." In this series of oracles, God speaks judgment against several neighboring nations of Israel. One people group that receives extended treatment is the city of Tyre (26–28). The concluding chapter to this segment (ch 28) singles out the leader(s) of Tyre for special condemnation. The one who is addressed as the "king of Tyre" in 28:11-19 has received particular attention because of the many superhuman things said of him. Various solutions have been proposed: (1) Ezekiel was describing Tyre's human king who served as the representative (a "guardian cherub") for Tyre's patron deity Mekart;¹ (2) Ezekiel was describing the pagan "god" behind the king of Tyre and who empowered the human king (possibly Baal); (3) Ezekiel was describing Tyre's king, Ethbaal in highly poetic language, comparing him with Adam (so Merrill²); and (4) Ezekiel was actually referring to Satan (several conservative interpreters including Chafer, Feinberg, and Ryrie take this view). Most all admit that this is one of the more difficult passages in the OT to interpret, and the problem is compounded by the fact that the figure in view is never designated specifically by name in the text. Yet this is not a moot question, because the answer we give to this has a bearing on our theology of Satan. So, the challenge for us remains: can this "king of Tyre" refer to Satan? If so, what hermeneutical method is being employed to arrive at such an understanding?

II. BACKGROUND TO EZEKIEL

A review of the historical basis of the book is crucial to our understanding of the author's mindset. The book revolves around the Babylonian exile of 586 BC and the question of God's glory in relation to it. Ezekiel himself was taken captive in 597 BC when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. Along with many other choice young men of Israel, he was removed to the dusty plains of Babylon. There, he and other exiles longed for their home in Jerusalem. Yet, the homeland was characterized by terrible spiritual infidelity to YHWH and deep involvement of idolatry.

¹ Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1986), 883.

²Merrill, for instance, takes the Adam view. He states, "The language of this dirge is filled with reference to primordial themes, such as 'Eden, the garden of God' (v. 13), the 'guardian cherub' (v. 14), and expulsion from 'the mount of God' (v. 16), so much so that one can hardly fail to see the fall of mankind underlying the fall of the ruler of Tyre. This is likely the intent of the oracle, for all wickedness, whether in a ruler or a common man, finds its source ultimately in Adam, the 'anointed cherub' who fell through pride" (Eugene Merrill, "A Theology of Ezekiel and Daniel," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Chicago: Moody Press, 1991], 384). Cf. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 294-95.

Consequently, God's glory and honor appear to be in great jeopardy. God's people have been conquered by an ungodly heathen nation, and in the ancient near east the conquering nation was often considered to have the superior god(s). Hence, many would question if YHWH was indeed supreme. Furthermore, the Israelites that remained in the land after 597 totally dishonored YHWH by their immense departure from the worship of YHWH (cf. Ezek 8). Thus, the glory of YHWH needed vindicating both in the homeland as well as among the exiles. YHWH pronounced severe and imminent judgment on Israel, although He gave her even further opportunity to repent after 597 BC. However, Israel continued in her wicked apostasy so that YHWH did act decisively in behalf of His glory and honor. Babylon, God's agent of judgment, brought swift retaliation against Zedekiah's revolt in July/Aug of 586, and Jerusalem was burned to the ground.

Hence, the book revolves around the crucial episode of 586. Chapters 1–24 deal with Israel's wickedness and deserving judgment preceding the destruction of 586. By ch 24, Jerusalem is under siege and her fate certain, while the downfall of Jerusalem is confirmed in ch 33. The interlude of chapters 25–32 (not chronologically placed) is inserted in the text to treat the nations who mocked Jerusalem's fall. The final portion of the book deals with the hope and promise of a renewed people of God in the land. "The author's purpose throughout the entire prophecy was to keep before the exiles the sins of the nation which were the grounds for her punishment, and to sustain and encourage the faithful remnant concerning future restoration and blessing."³

III. INTRINSIC GENRE OF EZEKIEL

The *intrinsic genre* of Ezekiel is to uphold the glory of YHWH . . .

- A. by vindicating God's judgment upon His covenant people whose wickedness has finally brought them into exile (1–24)

Undoubtedly the nation had dishonored YHWH's name and glory. Yet, some felt that the punishment for their disobedience had been dealt with by the events of 597, and now they only had to await repatriation. Being YHWH's people, there was some security in thinking He could never punish them too drastically without losing face in the eyes of the heathen. Nevertheless, the prophet, as YHWH's spokesman, demonstrates their utter unworthiness of any consideration from God, to the end that they might be shamed to repentance.

- B. by pronouncing judgment upon Israel's neighboring nations who mock and rejoice in the downfall of God's people (25–32)

Israel was not alone in failing to learn from God's discipline. Her neighbors failed to see that God was disciplining His own people. If God deals so sternly with His own, how much more should the Gentile nations tremble. For them to mock or rejoice over Israel places them in greater jeopardy.

- C. by holding forth the promise of a future restoration and temple ministry for God's people (33–48)

There, in that future restoration, God's glory shall be supremely manifest in the eyes of Israel as well as the Gentile nations.

³Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 297.

IV. TYRE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DOOM ORACLES

A. Significance of the Doom Oracles (25–32)

In his well-argued thesis on the doom oracles, Frank Oakerson capsulizes the argument of Ezekiel this way:

Ezekiel was a book of hope to Israel that demonstrated God had not forsaken His people. Ezekiel did this by explaining why they were judged by the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people. He inspired hope by showing that God still honored the Abrahamic covenant (1) by dealing with the nations who despised or lightly treated Israel's preeminence among the nations, and (2) by showing how God would literally fulfil the Abrahamic covenant with respect to the seed and the land.⁴

A key to this section is the verse, "that they may know that I am YHWH," occurring some eighteen times. "In chapters 25–32, Ezekiel showed God judging Ammon, Edom, Moab, the Philistines, Tyre, and Sidon, because each of these nations had despised or failed to treat with respect the chosen people of God."⁵

Ezekiel very carefully places the doom oracles between ch 24 and ch 33. In ch 24, the prophecy of the destruction of the city and the Temple is given, with the city under siege. In ch 33, news arrives from Judah to inform the exiles of the destruction of the city and the Temple. The doom oracles serve a useful function of preparing Ezekiel's readership for this disastrous news. The doom oracles show that Israel's sin did not cancel the *Abrahamic covenant*: God defended Israel, even though Israel was in exile.

In the Abrahamic covenant, God said that He would curse those who cursed Israel (מקלל־יִשְׂרָאֵל). The term קלל means to hate, to despise, to treat flippantly, to fail to show the respect due someone, and to treat with contempt. This is precisely the attitude of these nations in Ezekiel toward Israel. Consequently,

Ezekiel placed the doom oracles between ch. 24 and 33, because he knew when the exiles heard the news from Judah, all hope would be lost. Therefore, to prepare them, to build them up so they could take ch. 33, and not despair, Ezekiel placed the doom oracles between ch. 24 and 33.⁶

B. Historical Notes Regarding Tyre

During the reigns of David and Solomon, friendly connections apparently existed between Israel and Tyre (II Sam 5:11; I Kgs 5:1; 7:13; 9:11; I Chr 22:4). Nevertheless, these friendly relations deteriorated as noted by the following episodes: (1) In 875 BC, Ahab, king of Israel, took Jezebel to be his wife. "Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, a former priest of Astarte, and then king of Tyre (I Kgs 16:31)."⁷ (2) In 835, Joel spoke of a prophecy of judgment upon Tyre (Joel 3:4).⁸ "The cooperation between Israel and Tyre had ceased, and Tyre was guilty of

⁴Lloyd Frank Oakerson, "The Significance of the Doom Oracles in Ezekiel 25–32 to the Argument of the Book" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Seminary, 1977), 2.

⁵Ibid., 6.

⁶Ibid., 45.

⁷John C. Beck, Jr., "The Fall of Tyre According to Ezekiel's Prophecy" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Seminary, 1971), 7.

⁸The date of 835 BC for Joel is certainly debatable, and a good case can be made for dating Joel around

being a trade center for the sale of Jewish slaves"⁹; and (3) Tyre participated in the rebellion against God's administrator of judgment. "As the time of the captivity of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem approached, Jeremiah warned Tyre to submit to Babylon because the Lord had made Nebuchadnezzar ruler of all nations (Jer. 27:3, 6, 8)."¹⁰

At the time of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Tyre was the commercial center of the Mediterranean world. The alliance that Tyre sought to make with Zedekiah against Nebuchadnezzar in 594-593 was anti-theocratic. God's will was for Nebuchadnezzar to take Jerusalem, because God's people had to be judged and their iniquity dealt with. The attitude of Tyre to Israel's downfall (e.g., 26:2) secured her sure judgment from God. This judgment occurred in three stages: (1) the destruction of the walls and towers of the mainland city during the 13 year siege of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Josephus, *Ant.*, 9.14.2), (2) the destruction under Alexander the Great in which even the island city was destroyed (cf. Josephus, *Ant.*, 11.8.3-4), and (3) the complete and final destruction in AD 1290. From Mk 3:8 and Acts 21:3-6, it is obvious Tyre had been rebuilt, but during the Crusades, the Moslems recaptured Tyre and made a complete destruction so that ever since then it has been a place where fishermen dry their nets.¹¹

V. INTRINSIC GENRE OF EZEK. 26–28

The intrinsic genre of these three chapters is to pronounce judgment and prophesy destruction upon Tyre for her boastful and arrogant attitudes!

the time of the Babylonian captivity.

⁹Beck, 7-8.

¹⁰Ibid., 8.

¹¹Ibid., 38.

<i>CYCLE 3</i>		
<i>CYCLE 1</i>	<i>CYCLE 2</i>	CONFRONTATION OF THE LEADERSHIP BEHIND TYRE
RUIN OF TYRE FORETOLD	LAMENTATION OVER CITY OF TYRE	<i>LEADER OF TYRE</i> <i>KING OF TYRE</i>
Attitude of self-gain— "Because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem"	Prideful attitude— "I am perfect in beauty"	Self-exalting attitude— "I am a god"
God's response— "I am against you"	Basis of Tyre's exaltation— her riches and trade profiteering	Guilt— "you make your heart like the heart of God"
Coastlands astonished/lament	Lament— All appalled at Tyre	Lamentation— Privileged & exalted state corrupted
CHAPTER 26	CHAPTER 27	CHAPTER 28
<i>Literary Unity!</i>	"I shall bring terrors on you, and you will be no more" (26:21)	"You have become terrified, and you will be no more" (27:36)
		"You have become terrified, and you will be no more" (28:19)

There is a movement throughout the unit toward greater implication of guilt. As each cycle unfolds, there is a refining of the root problem and guilt involved until at last the leadership behind the city is exposed and denounced.

VI. EXAMINATION OF THE CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS

Notice is frequently made of the distinction of the leaders involved in Tyre's downfall in ch 28. In vv 1-10, the leader (רִגְלִי) is addressed, while in vv 11-19, the king (מֶלֶךְ) is addressed. For this reason, and because of the superhuman ascriptions given the king, many see a reference to Satan. Some of the traits in 28:11-19 will now be considered.

A. Shift of Titles

The term "leader" (Heb רִגְלִי from the verb root רגל) when used as a substantive, means "what is conspicuous or in front." The term can be used of a national king such as David (I Sam 25:30), the Messiah (Dan 9:25), and even the antichrist (Dan 9:26).

B. Seal of Perfection

This is from מִדְּבַר meaning "measurement" or "proportion." *BDB* suggests "exhibiting perfect proportion".

C. In Eden

The references to Eden (עֵדֶן) seem to refer to the literal garden-paradise of the Genesis account (but take note of Ez 31:3-9,16,18). [Note: this could possibly look beyond the historical garden to a heavenly Eden in much the same fashion as the tabernacle does—cf. Rev 2:7; 22:2].

D. Covering (vs 13) — מִסְכָּה

Although this word occurs only here, it is derived from מִסְכָּה, to “overshadow or screen.” The word was used of the screens of the tabernacle that shielded God's place of dwelling. In Ez 10:9 we are told that “the appearance of the wheels was like the gleam of a Tarshish stone” suggesting that the cherub figures possibly had a related nature.

E. Anointed Cherub (מְמִשָּׁח כְּרוּב)

This is probably the most crucial trait, for in Scripture the cherubim are angelic beings who are always presented in very close proximity to God (note the position of the cherub representations located in the Holy of Holies). They also play a major role in Ezekiel's prophecy, as they are the “living beings” of ch 1 (see 10:15). There is general agreement that the cherubim are of the highest class of angels. The difficulty lies in the translation of the verse, specifically in how we translate אָנֹכִי before the title. The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* text has אָנֹכִי-כְרוּב, “you are the cherub” However, this could conceivably be pointed אָנֹכִי, translated “you were with the cherub” (so *RSV*). The Syriac understands it this way as well as does the LXX (metaVtou ceroub). Nevertheless, the difficulty is resolved in vs 16 where the subject of the context (note the ה suffix on הַמְמִשָּׁחִים) is placed in apposition to “cherub.” Thus the two are equated, and it is the “king” who is the *cherub*. The term “anointed” (Heb מְמִשָּׁח) would have the idea of being consecrated for special service.

F. The Holy Mountain of God (vs 14)

This is a frequent phrase in the OT referring to Zion from which God's rule went forth (Dan 9:16; Ps 2:6; Ps 48:1). The city of God's rule seems to have a parallel beyond the literal. In Isa 65:17, after the announcement is made that the Lord is creating a new heavens and a new earth, Isaiah adds, “They shall do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain” (65:25). Also in this eschatological context is Isa 57:13, “But he who takes refuge in Me shall inherit the land, and shall possess My holy mountain.” Furthermore, we have the revelation of Heb 12:22, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels” God's holy mountain, His city in the OT (Ps 48:1), is to play a role in both the millennium and eternity. The use of the phrase elsewhere could suggest that something more than an earthly city is meant.

G. Blameless in your Ways (תָּמִים)

Although the term is often used of humans (the righteous—Prov 11:20, Ps 119:1), it is also used in reference to sacrificial animals that are “without blemish” (Ex 12:5). Thus, the term can carry the idea of being free from imperfection. In either case, it hardly fits the literal king of Tyre.

H. Conclusions

A number of different interpretations have been advanced to account for these unusual descriptions, but all of them seem to see some parallel to another figure than the literal king of Tyre (e.g., Eichrodt—“It makes use of a myth telling of the primal man and how he dwelt on

the mountain of God, in order to bring out all the wickedness of the king of Tyre"¹²). The characteristic traits above do not all conclusively refer to Satan, but they all certainly allow for a reference to Satan. The fact that “Eden” and “My holy mountain” can possibly refer to more ultimate realities in Scripture suggests that this passage could have reference to Satan. The idea of “My holy mountain” would at least seem to rule out a primal man mythological figure or first man Adam. Likewise, the idea “you were blameless until” would not suit the king of Tyre's character. Nevertheless, the weightiest factor is the matter of “the anointed cherub,” which prompts a more seriously probe as to the divine author's full intention.

VII. HERMENEUTICAL BASIS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF SATAN

A. Archetypal Literature Employed

In discussing the characteristic of shareability in human language, Dr. Johnson makes note of the implication that human experience and thought is of a shared and common type. Furthermore, shareability involves “the expectation of a few basic types of common experiences and thoughts of which individual are instances and modifications.”¹³ As Ryken notes, “an archetype is a symbol, character type, or plot motif that has recurred throughout literature.”¹⁴

The theological monomyth of blessing, tragedy, judgment and redemption form the building blocks of the supreme motif of God's Word. Consequently, typology and prophecy serve as agents to further these themes in espousing the idea that the will of God must operate without restraint. God's right to rule is challenged at the very onset of recorded revelation by “the evil one.” This archetype of an intended restraint and even usurpation of God's rule is fundamental to the unity of Scripture. The word of judgment of Gen 3:13-19 involves this “evil one” who works against God's rule. “Satan, in the deceptive exercise of his might, dictates what is right to the destruction of men and society.”¹⁵

At stake is the serious matter of human enslavement to sin that further judgments throughout Scripture serve as warnings to confront men. The enmity between the evil one and the seed of woman continues as conflict with the promise note that the evil one is under judgment and subject to eventual destruction. Dr. Johnson notes with regard to the Gentile nations,

While one nation was chosen, the other nations became the unique arena of the evil one (Rev 20:8). His wills deceptively lead them to achieve his diabolical and destructive ends. Thus uniquely they share his guilt and are objects of His judgment.¹⁶

¹²Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 392.

¹³Elliott E. Johnson, “Process of Interpretation: Re-cognition of the Author's Willed-Type Meaning” (class lecture notes, Dallas Seminary, Spring 1980).

¹⁴Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*, 22.

¹⁵Elliott E. Johnson, “Prophetic Genre: Purpose and Content of Prophecy” (class lecture notes, Dallas Seminary, Spring 1980).

¹⁶Johnson, “Prophetic Genre: Temporal Judgment” (class lecture notes, Dallas Seminary, Spring 1980).

B. Immediate Archetypal Characteristics

1. A number of peculiar characteristics in this context bear witness to the archetypal manner in which Satan is brought into view. First of all, there is a certain fluidity in which the king of Tyre is introduced. Eichrodt notes,

The reproach addressed to him does not reveal any personal details about his character or his political policy, but is couched in terms so general that any Tyrian king might have served as its target. It is rather that the kingship *per se* is being prosecuted and sentenced in the person of its representative.¹⁷

We might want to say that it is the spirit of Tyre that is dealt with more than a particular king. In fact, Tyre's king at the time, Ethbaal III (591/90 - 573/72), is not even mentioned by name.¹⁸ Thus, it is not a far stretch of the imagination that the ultimate personality behind Tyre's anti-theocratic spirit should be implicated along with all others who share the guilt of Tyre's condemnation. In fact, we might even anticipate this from the cyclical nature of ch 26–28 in which the chapters build up to a greater implication of the guilt and leadership behind Tyre.

2. There is also an obvious anti-theocratic spirit at work in Tyre. The opening indictment against Tyre was for her blatant malicious joy at the fall of Jerusalem: "I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste" (26:2). Tyre was partly responsible for Jerusalem's downfall since she had entered into alliance with Israel to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, God's agent (Jer 27:1-8). Now Tyre rejoices at Jerusalem's downfall for the self-enrichment this means for her in having her commercial rival removed. This is quite characteristic of Satan's consistent opposition to God's people (Gen 3:15; 1 Chr 21:1; Rev 12:4,7,13,17), and in harmony with God's promise in Gen 12:3 to curse those who exhibit a "disparaging attitude" to His chosen nation.
3. The idea of merchandising, so prominent with Tyre is also characteristic of Satan. Just as Tyre drew many other countries into participation with her, so as to further her own self-interests, so Satan drew many other angels into his rebellion for the purpose of furthering his selfish interest of usurping God's throne. This character is continued throughout scripture and epitomized in eschatological Babylon of Rev 18 which is noted for her merchant trading and cooperation with the beast: "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality" (Rev 18:3). Note also Ezek 27:29-32 with Rev 18:17-19. Indeed, this "evil one" is "the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Rev 12:9). The lucrative trade of Tyre's king had produced great wealth (including gold and silver), but this had only served to increase his pride.
4. Of all the characteristics of Tyre and her leaders, her boast of usurping God's place is the most condemning (28:2,6,9). "When the king of Tyre claimed to be a god, he was displaying the same spirit as the one who promised Adam and Eve that they could be as

¹⁷Eichrodt, 390.

¹⁸Charles H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary (OT)*, 1282. The king's name is also spelled "Ittobalos" in some sources.

God (Gen. 3:5)."¹⁹ How true this is of Satan's nature to propagate this false hope (Dan 7:8; 8:9; Mt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:3-4; and Rev 13:6).

5. The fact that the figure of Ezek 28 was blameless in his ways until unrighteousness was found in him fits well with the remark in 1 Tim 3:6 of the warning of the "condemnation incurred by the devil."
6. The fact that Satan can be the responsible agent for the manipulation of nations is not only reasonable in the case of Tyre but surfaces repeatedly in Scripture. Lk 4:6 is a good example: "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish" (cf. Dan 10:13; Rev 13:4, 7).
7. The manner in which Satan is brought into view under the address of the king of Tyre is another archetypal characteristic. In the garden temptation of Gen 3, Satan is never referred to explicitly, but under the "cloak" of a serpent that Scripture later specifies as Satan (Rev 12:9). Mt 16:23 (Christ's rebuke of Peter) is a good illustration of a human individual being addressed, yet with Satan in view: "Get behind Me, Satan." Here, Peter is participating in and reflecting the will of Satan much in fashion as the king of Tyre does.

VIII. RESOLUTION OF THE INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM

While Satan is described in Ezek 28:11ff., there is a connection to the historic kingly figure. The king of Tyre was emulating in so many ways the work and activity of Satan, and was participating in the unique arena of the evil one. The anti-theocratic spirit of the nations (Ezek 25–32) was epitomized in Tyre and her king. The king of Tyre reflects the diabolical spirit of Satan, and indeed Satan was the one motivating the human "ruler" of Tyre. Consequently, his fall is an expression of the archetypal form of judgment that Satan himself participates in. Thus, in indicting the king of Tyre, Ezekiel casts him in the clothing of the "evil one" himself so as to awaken the reader to the utterly contemptible actions and attitudes that the king of Tyre was carrying out. Dyer concludes,

Speaking of God's judging the human "ruler" of Tyre for his pride (Ezek. 28:1-10), the prophet lamented the satanic "king" of Tyre who was also judged for his pride (vv. 11-19). Tyre was motivated by the same sin as Satan, and would suffer the same fate.²⁰

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

God's words to the "king of Tyre" come as a stinging rebuke: "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty." This refers, of course, to a heart lifted up in *pride*. There is certainly a lesson in this for all of us. If we are not careful, we can become enamored with ourselves and fail to remember where our "beauty" comes from. Whatever we have is from the Lord, given by His grace. We are not to focus on our beauty, but rather on the Giver. God may give us a wonderful intellect, but we are not to let that fill us with pride. He may give us the voice of a great orator, but we are not to be puffed up about this. He may elevate us to a high position of service, but we are to remember that the "Lord Jesus" was so humble. Humility is a virtue that every Christian leader must have! Beware the Devil's tempting thoughts to get us thinking about ourselves and how great we are!

¹⁹Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 159.

²⁰Charles Dyer, "Ezekiel," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary (OT)*, 1283.