

How To Create a Culture of Death

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Ezekiel 28. Now if you're a guest or a visitor with us this morning, you may be wondering why would we be in Ezekiel? Well, there's two reasons for that. The first one is that we as a family of faith are walking through the entirety of scripture over a three year period, just one, sometimes two chapters a day. There are 66 books in the Bible, you have to walk through all 66, and congratulations, you have decided to visit during the time that we're in Ezekiel. Now the second reason for Ezekiel is not just the fact that you have to "complete the assignment" to get through the Bible reading plan, is that one of the things that we are studying in the book of Ezekiel is how much of a parallel there is between the world of Babylon 2,500+ years ago and the world that you and I are walking in today.

Allow me to extrapolate on that. The Jewish people had been warned for hundreds of years that if they did not repent of their rebellion toward God, that what we know as the Babylonian captivity would take place. They ignored the prophets, they ignored the priests that were holy, they ignored "Thus saith the Lord," and today we find ourselves here in chapter 28 where the Israelites find themselves in a foreign land, speaking a foreign language, and with a foreign faith completely surrounded them. The parallel is not so much the socioeconomic that's walking or that's around them, as it is that their faith has been displaced, the temple is no longer applicable for worship, the sacrifices are no longer appeasable as far as their world is concerned, and you and I today as a believer in Jesus Christ, we must confess that over an elongated period of time, we have slowly been headed toward what eerily looks like a Babylon of years gone by.

Today in chapter 28, beginning in verse 11, we're going to deal with one of the most, or at least according to the experts, one of the most difficult passages in all of the Bible. Verses 11 through 19 of Ezekiel 28 are addressed specifically to the king of Tyre, the king of Tyrus. In a moment, we're going to read through this passage. There have been those that claim that this is actually a story about the king himself. Others have said this is an allusion about humanity in general, specifically who we know as the character of Adam and Eve that walked in the garden of Eden. And then there are those, myself included, who believe it's beyond the king of Tyre, it's beyond the person of Adam, that what we're about to read is actually an account of what we know as the fall of Satan, when he went from Lucifer, the lighted one, to Satan, the accuser. We're about to read

that he walked in the garden of Eden. Adam did, of course, the king of Tyre never did. We're about to read that he walked in the mountains of the Lord among the stones of fire. Neither Adam nor the king of Tyre ever did that. What we're about to see in the first 10 verses that addresses the prince of Tyre, verses 11 through 19, the king of Tyre, we're about to see what Jesus displayed for us in Matthew 16. Remember Simon Peter makes this great profession of faith and after so Jesus says that he must go to the cross. Peter says, "You'll never go to the cross as long as I'm around." Remember what Jesus' words to him were? "Get behind me, Satan." The king of Tyre was a despicable person, Babylon was a despicable place, but what we're about to see is the Lord's going to reach all the way back to the beginning of sin, the beginning of rebellion, and share with us something very strategic, that you and I must understand that all that is wrong with his world, all that is contrary to who God is, has its origination in the original fall, in the original display of sin, and all you and I have done throughout time is find new creative ways to display it.

Here beginning in verse 11 of chapter 23, it says,

11 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. 13 Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. 14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. 16 By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. 17 Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. 18 Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. 19 All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.

It's harsh words for a harsh scenario, in fact, what we just read, I believe, is the Lord using the rebellion of the king of Tyre, using the rebellion of Babylon and doing what any normal, great, public speaker would do. We oftentimes to illustrate a present reality will pull from the past a story of days gone by as an illustration of what we're seeing

before our face, and so the Lord here in chapter 28, in the midst of the Babylonian captivity, goes all the way back to the original rebellion, and what I want to share with you today is that when we have rebellion against the ways, the will, and specifically the word of God, the only natural byproduct is death. You and I today live in a culture of death. Babylon was a world of death.

You don't believe that Babylon was a culture of death? When the Babylonians came into Jerusalem and they originally began the process of taking them captive, if your name wasn't Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach or Abednego, or if you weren't one of the elite few, what did they do? They killed you. They ended your life. After they ended your life, then they destroyed and put to death your home, your business, and eventually the temple. They make their way into Babylon, by the time we get to chapter 2 of the book of Daniel which is a parallel to Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar, this man of incredible ego, has a dream, can't remember his dream and so he brings all the soothsayers and all the Chaldeans and says, "Please, tell me what my dream was and the interpretation." They say, "Oh, we can't do it." He says, "Fine, if you can't do it, I'll kill you all." So he kills the Jewish people before they come into Babylon, he kills his own people who cannot interpret his dream, and later in that chapter, he commands people to bow to his statue and when they don't do it, what does he do? He throws them in the fiery furnace. It's not a Nebuchadnezzar issue, it's a Babylonian issue because four chapters later, Daniel is praying in his home, he's taken captive and put in the lions' den because the punishment of praying to the wrong god was death. Babylon is all about death and you and I live in a culture surrounded by death. We rarely, if ever, promote life. Let me tell you why. God is the author of life and we rarely, if ever, promote God in our culture.

So what I want to walk through today is how is it that we create a culture of death, whether that's in our own lives, maybe even the business that we run, the school that we attend, most assuredly the culture that we walk in, how do we do so? If you want death to reign supreme, the first thing you've got to do is remove God from the equation. You see, God is the author of life. You would not be here today if it was not for God. The breath in your lungs, your ability to hear, to see, whatever faculty you have is from God and God alone. But you and I know we live in a culture that must see it that we remove God from every aspect of our lives. How dare we be reminded that there is a God that we came from. That's exactly what Lucifer did. Let me remind you, a parallel passage here is in Isaiah 14 where it says, "Hear, O Lucifer, son of the morning. I will ascend unto the mountain of God. I will exalt my throne above the holy one." What does he try to do? He tries to remove God from the equation.

Notice in those first couple of verses his appearance. He is beautiful to look upon. His tabrets made great music. In fact, it even goes on to say that he was perfect in all aspects. You see, the reason we remove God from the equation of our lives is we fall for the lie that we "did this" ourselves. We fall for the lie that, "I don't need anybody else. I got this." And so what did he do? He decided to rebel against God because he did not like the fact that he was not in charge. You realize that a culture of death begins when we say, "I'm in charge." By the way, in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve did fall to the temptation, we'll talk about that in just a moment. According to 1 Corinthians 15, it says

in Adam all die. We live in a culture of death because we've removed God from the equation of our culture.

Now allow me to kind of lighten it up just a little bit. Some of you may have heard of an analogy or of an illustration, it's used somewhat in a humorous sense. Have you ever heard somebody call somebody else a pole turtle? Now a pole turtle is kind of an old ranchers' illustration. The story goes a little something like this. It's somewhat of a parable that you're driving or walking down the road and all of a sudden you see a fence post with a turtle on top of it. It seems absurd, does it not? And as you observe that "turtle" on the pole, there are several realities that must be addressed, one of which is this, that that turtle is not fulfilling the function as a turtle should while he's on the post. He's of no use to anybody when he's on the post. And last but not least, he didn't get there by himself. And yet we've created a pole turtle culture. Do you know why? Because we've said, "God, we don't need you anymore." We've said, "God, get out of our lives." And so what happens? We end up putting ourselves as a turtle on a pole. Do you know what? When you take God out of the equation, you're no good to anybody. When you take God out of the equation, you cannot fulfill the purpose by which God created you and you forget that he's the one who established you in the beginning.

So the way that you create a culture of death initially whether it be the fall of Satan, whether the garden of Eden, you and I in our lives today, is you remove God from the equation. The second thing you do is based in verse 14, is you eliminate all aspects of personal responsibility. Verse 14, "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." Listen to verse 15, "You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and you have sinned."

Now allow me to peel some layers there for a moment. You get the idea that who used to be Lucifer who is now Satan has no remorse for anything that he did. In other words, he's justifying it. He's rationalizing it. And it is the Lord coming and saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, you have violated, you have sinned, you have gone and moved contrary to." And yet you and I live in a world today where nobody wants to take blame for anything they've done. It's always somebody else's fault. You know, we not only get that from Lucifer, we get it from the garden of Eden. Gentlemen, allow me to remind you the original stupid husband statement. Garden of Eden. They've eaten of the forbidden fruit. The Lord comes to Adam and says, "What happened here?" And he says, "The woman you gave me." Now he done made 'em both mad at that point because he blames the woman but what does he really do? He blames God. He said, "If you hadn't given me her, we would have never had this mess." Yet we have a culture today that nobody wants to take personal responsibility for their own inequity, do we? No, in fact, we have created an entire structure where you can blame everybody but yourself and that's okay because if they hurt your feelings, we will put whatever they are to death. We'll shut down their business. We'll silence their voice. We'll even remove their ability to communicate in the public forum. Hm, it's a culture of death, is it not, because it's always somebody else's fault.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to grow in acquaintance with one of the most unique individuals I've ever met. This individual not only had higher education in, but he was hired as a consultant to investigate and prosecute employee theft. Here's what his job entailed. You own a business or you're part of a large business, and you recognize that there are objects that are missing or money that has gone missing. You would hire this individual and his firm and he would come in and he would investigate and discover how is it that this could be gotten away with, how did you pull it off. Now I won't get into all the details of all the businesses that he investigated but he has investigated individuals who after hours are literally driving lawnmowers out the back door, to accountants who are pushing the wrong numbers on the keyboard on purpose, and everything in between.

What's interesting is not the companies that he worked for or the cases that he prosecuted, what's fascinating is the response of those whom he caught. Now we're not talking about accidentally taking a paper clip home at night. We're not talking about, "Oh, I didn't realize that was the company's stapler. I thought it was mine." I mean, we're talking big money, big objects, and oftentimes would go into the hundreds of thousands of dollars or they would have never called him in the first place. He interviewed those that had no formal education and those who had PhD's. He interviewed those that worked for companies for decades and those that had only worked there for a few months. And when he presented the evidence, he had camera footage, he had paper trails, he had everything that he needed, when he sat across from, it didn't matter who it was or what they had done, do you know what he heard every single time? They rationalized it and justified it and said, "They owed me. I worked too much and get paid too little. They don't respect me. They don't approve of me," or whatever it may be, "and so therefore I was only taking what was rightfully mine." Woo, you say, "Where did we get that?" Lucifer. Garden of Eden and thousands of years of human history.

Do you find it interesting that here in this passage the Lord is literally coming to Lucifer, the king of Tyre, humanity, the Babylonians, you and I saying, "Hey, you've sinned. You've messed up. You've done that which you shouldn't have done. You've violated my word." And there's no response. Why? Because we've become a culture today who actually specializes in, and if you'll allow me to say it in a college community, we major in the rationalization of our sins. "Surely it couldn't be my fault. Surely it couldn't be because of my poor choice. Surely it couldn't be because of my misgivings. It must be somebody else." You see, when you remove God from the equation, the next step is to dismiss or eradicate any aspect of personal responsibility.

Now let me share with you the third step. Once you eliminate personal responsibility, you ignore the impact that your decision has on anybody but yourself. We pick up the story in verses 18 and 19. It says, "You have defiled the sanctuaries of the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more." Let me tell you what the Lord is telling "Lucifer" through the person of who we know as the king of Tyre. He's

saying that, "Because you have decided to do what you've done, this will not be isolated to you, this will not just be in your sphere of life. You've defiled the sanctuary, you've defiled the community, you've defiled the culture, you've defiled the families, you've defiled those who will carry your namesake for generation after generation after generation." If you haven't read through the Old Testament, one of the most frustrating, most disturbing yet most enlightening sections you have is in the book of Numbers when a man, husband, or a dad, in some cases even a wife or a mom, will violate the word of God and the Lord's response is, "Nobody from your family can come into the tabernacle again for 3-4 generations." And I know what you're thinking, "But that's not fair." Here's the problem and you can quote me on this, this is a Meyersism, you get to choose your sin, you don't get to choose your consequences. And yet we live in a world today that manufactures the consequences before we "commit" the sin. We remove God, then we eradicate any form of personal responsibility, then we ignore how this will impact anybody else.

Let's just take this specific case. Here we have Lucifer, the anointed cherub, the lighted one, the bright one, the original worshiper, the original "Number 2" in the universe. He decides to remove God from the equation. He decides that he's going to blame everybody else but he ignores the impact. You see, there's really a threefold impact of his original rebellion. The first one is to the other angelic hosts. I'm sure you're familiar with this, in fact, John Milton in his famous work, "Paradise Lost," years ago brought to light in the literary world that there was a great number of angels who decided to follow Lucifer. In fact, biblically speaking the book of Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4, state that the angelic beings in great number followed him. According to 1 Peter 3, those angels are now bound in darkness to the day of judgment. It didn't stop with the angelic beings, according to Romans 8:22 it says that all creation groans now because of sin. We live in a fallen messed up world today because sin entered the equation. Last but not least, your ancestors and mine, Adam and Eve. Garden of Eden. Cool of the day, walking with the Lord. Everything's fine until who shows up? You guessed it, this guy. He shows up, the author of death, the originator of death and what does he say? "Oh, this will make you like the gods. It'll taste good. It'll be great." But what did Adam and Eve do? They removed God from the equation because they didn't listen to his word, they listened to the mouth of the serpent. They took away personal responsibility because Adam blamed everybody but himself, but they ignored the impact it would have on others.

You know, there's no record in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve sit down and have a conversation and go, "You know what? If we decide to do this, how is it going to affect our children? How is it going to impact the world at large?" Why? Because when you're in a culture of death, all you care about is you and what you want and what you desire, and you don't think about what will this mean down the road, what will this mean for future generations, how will this impact me in five years, 10 years, 15 years? What will this do 50 generations from now? You know that's why we still need the Old Testament, right? Because it shares with us not only the prophetic picture of a needed Messiah but it shows us this continual pattern of humanity falling into the trap of sin and ignoring how it will impact others.

Yet you and I live in a world today where we've decided to remove God from every equation of every aspect. We live in a culture today where nobody as whole is willing to take responsibility for their own sin and we ignore what that behavior will do to anybody else down the road. Why? I hate to tell you this but we're not very much different than the character that we just read about. Babylon was a culture of death. If you find yourself on the wrong side of the proverbial line, death. If you don't do it according to how somebody says, death. If you don't fit the Babylonian picture, death. And yet you and I today find ourselves in the exact same position, yet the Bible makes it very clear that God is the author and the originator of life.

You know, in John 10:10 it says, "The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, but I have come that you may have life more abundantly." You do realize that it was the death on the cross that necessitated the resurrection of the dead. What did Jesus say? He said, "Though I be placed on the cross, I will rise again." In fact, in Matthew 12 he says, "I'm only going to give you one sign, just one. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Here's what Jesus said, "If you want to change the culture of death and in your life, if you want everything to be reversed as an individual and as a culture, allow me to be the primary character in the equation of your life." Here's the irony, church: in the desire to gain personal freedom, all we've done is create death. It is by our faith and belief in Christ Jesus that we receive life and yet it is a message and a voice that is growing eerily faint in our world today. In a culture of death, Jesus Christ says, "I will bring you life. I will bring you forgiveness. I will bring you redemption. I'll bring you reconciliation. I'll bring you restoration. And I'll take that pattern and reverse it." In a world obsessed with death, today would we believe on the one who is the giver of life.