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The Love of God for His People

In Ezekiel 25-32 God gives a series of judgments to the nations surrounding His people. The section is a literary masterpiece with the first four chapters addressing six nations and the remaining four addressing Egypt.

Years ago a missionary from the Caribbean spoke at a seminary's chapel service. The normal sermon length was roughly 25-30 minutes. This man preached for 40 plus minutes and then said, "On the mission field, that is my introduction" (at that time in the Caribbean the expected length of a sermon was 2 to 2 1/2 hours long). This sermon is going to be like that. Much of what I will be sharing is the introduction to Ezekiel 28:25-26...

God's providence is often misunderstood. There are times when God's actions might look like

abandonment or a forsaking. Yet when we step back and look at the larger context, we arrive at a completely different conclusion! For example, Jonah was thrown into a raging sea... yet this event was the very thing needed for him to become the prophet God called him to be. So it wasn't a curse; it was a blessing! It was Paul's "thorn in the flesh" that made him humble and so reliant upon Christ.

And think of the Exodus. When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai we read this:

Exodus 19:3-4, "...Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.'"" -

Here we are introduced to the concept of being God bearing us up on eagles' wings. When it is time for eaglets to leave their nest, their mother will push them out of the nest in what appears to be a horrifying case of abandonment. One moment the eaglets are safe, secure, and happy in their nest. The next, they are falling to their death! And yet just when you might think that the eaglets are going to perish, the mother swoops down, catches them on her back, and then bears them back up to the nest. That is what it means to be "bore on eagles' wings"!

By itself, this metaphor might convey a picture of abandonment when it comes to God's care for His people. But when you step back and consider it in the context of life in a state of sin and misery, we see this verse for the beauty and comfort that it is...

Exodus 19:4a, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians [that's the context; God's dealing with Egypt at this time was exclusively negative: Condemnation! Yet in contrast...], and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings..."

Life in this state of sin and misery is difficult for both the saved and unsaved alike. But when it comes to the trials and difficulties of God's people, the Lord "bears them up on eagles' wings and brings them to Himself"!

Truly, God's plans for His people are always for "their welfare, never their calamity" (cf. Jeremiah 29:11)! We see that in the pericope we are examining. We are looking at a section which on many fronts doesn't fit into the flow of this book. It is a series of Judgments against the Secular Nations surrounding Israel (Ezekiel 25-32). And yet far from NOT fitting, this pericope is essential to our understanding of God's Care for His people!

Consider the love of God for His people when judgment comes to all the nations.

Ezekiel 25:1-2, "And the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them.'"

Ezekiel 25:8-9a, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Because Moab and Seir say, "Behold, the

house of Judah is like all the nations,” therefore, behold, I am going to deprive the flank of Moab of *its* cities...”

Ezekiel 25:12-13a, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Because Edom has acted against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has incurred grievous guilt, and avenged themselves upon them, therefore, thus says the Lord God, “I will also stretch out My hand against Edom...””

This section goes on and on like this detailing the judgments coming upon seven of the nation’s surrounding Israel.¹ Starting from the North East and going in a clockwise, spiral fashion around Judah, God’s judgment is announced: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt all will perish!

Each of the messages contain three parts:

1. A statement of the identity of the recipient.
2. The crimes for which each nation was going to be judged.
3. The judgment that would befall each nation.

Now it is important to note that this section (chs. 25–32) is dominated by the number seven. First there are seven nations referenced as receiving God’s judgment. Secondly if you’ve read Ezekiel 25-32 in preparation for today’s study, you know that the first six prophecies comprise half of the message here (chs. 25-28). The other half address Egypt (chs. 29-32).

Now, looking at the first half you will note that Ezekiel addresses two, separate prophecies against Ammon (25:1-5 and 25:6-7) which means that the first six judgments actually contain seven judgments. The last half of this prophecy, the oracle against Egypt (Ezekiel 29-32)- likewise contains seven different declarations of judgment.

Finally, there are seven date notices found in this section.

In the Bible the number seven is the number of completion/wholeness. Accordingly, that the number seven factors so prominently in Ezekiel 25-32 tells us that Ezekiel intended this oracle against the nations to be far more than a list of judgments that were coming upon some of the enemies of God’s people. What we have here is a declaration of God’s disposition and will toward all secular nations and people- which means what God is communicating here was NOT just for the people of God in the 6th century BC, BUT for all His people at all times!

The Point? God is THE Sovereign Lord of the universe with whom all have to do! He is the King of kings... the Creator and sustain of life... and THE Judge! No one will get a pass on that day... no one will slip by unnoticed.² All will stand before God and give account for every sinful thought, act, or attitude without exception.

Matthew 25:31-32a, “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels

with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him...”-

With that, consider the message that accompanies this judgment. Speaking of Ammon Ezekiel says, “And I shall make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the sons of Ammon a resting place for flocks. Thus you will know that I am the Lord (יהוה [Yhvh]).” (Ezekiel 25:5).

Listen to part of the second oracle of judgment against Ammon, “...And I shall cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I shall destroy you. Thus you will know that I am the Lord (יהוה [Yhvh])” (Ezekiel 25:7b).

Ezekiel 25:11, “Thus I will execute judgments on Moab, and they will know that I am the Lord (יהוה [Yhvh]).”

In God’s judgment against Philistia, “And I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they will know that I am the Lord (יהוה [Yhvh]) when I lay My vengeance on them” (Ezekiel 25:14).

You would have to be distracted to miss the recurring theme of this section, “...Thus they will know that I am the Lord!” The expression is used nineteen times in Ezekiel 25-32! Clearly, this is a major theme in this section! The name referenced is NOT as the many names which reference what God does as Lord. The word here speaks to His essence as God, יהוה (Yhvh)- the self-existent one (cf. Exodus 3;14; John 18:6)!

Yet what does this phrase mean? As we have seen, there is a battle raging on this earth- a battle for the heart and mind of man. When it comes to this battle, THE TELOS (or end) has and will always be either the profession or the rejection of God as Lord/master!

The fall of man revolved around this theme! Satan’s seemingly innocent inquiry drew into question whether or not Adam and Eve should submit to God’s claim of authority over them.³ And it is this battle that has continued to rage on throughout the ages. Speaking of the course of mankind in all things, Paul wrote:

Romans 1:21-23, “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

From the Fall onward, mankind has been consumed with the passion of casting off God’s authority and so living lives for themselves. And yet, it just isn’t the pagan world in which we live. Consider the disposition of Judaism at the time of Christ. Christ told the Parable of the Landowner who entrusted his servants with his wealth. When the Lord endeavored to receive

the proceeds from his estate, the servants rebelled,

Matthew 21:34-38, “And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce [this would be the former prophets]. And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first [this would be the latter prophets]; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ [*They will give him the due homage and reverence!*] But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.’”

The passion to be independent from God and so to cast of His authority is alive and well even in the hearts of God’s people. Not surprisingly therefore it is a message that has dominated many a false pulpit. Speaking both of the past, the present, as well as the future, Peter wrote:

2 Peter 2:1a, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them...”

How many pulpits today present man as THE focus of God’s redemptive plan and God as man’s servant? Truly, the war continues to rage... a war which will come to a triumphant climax on the last day. Paul speaking of the resurrected Christ declares:

Philippians 2:9-11: “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess [we are now talking about the future] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Truly, from the Fall to this present hour the battle rages on! Who sits on the throne of the Universe? Who alone deserves our homage and respect? Don’t Miss It: It is God’s intention to answer that question in everything that is going on in this world today! And thus the Telos when it comes to His judgments in this life is our submission to His Sovereign Authority: “Then they will know that I am the Lord!”

What bearing does this message have on the child of God when they enter into the valley of the shadow of death?- as God’s people did here! What message does this bring to the one suffering under God’s rod of affliction? The one cast out of the nest of comfort and relative ease?

Consider the focus of Ezekiel 28, the grace God gives to His people in their suffering. Consider the placement of this pericope in Ezekiel. As we have seen, the Book of Ezekiel was assembled late in Ezekiel’s life and so, with Isaiah, reflects a master plan behind the placement of each of the divisions of this book. Recall, the revelations and teachings of Ezekiel were

placed in this book such that they are chronologically progressive. And so we read these verses:

- Ezekiel 1:1a: “Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth *day* of the fourth month...” - that was July 31, 593 BC.
- Ezekiel 8:1: “And it came about in the sixth year, on the fifth *day* of the sixth month...” - the date now is September 17, 592 BC.
- Ezekiel 20:1: August 9, 591 BC
- Ezekiel 24:1: January 15, 588 BC

And so on and so forth. Indeed, the entire prophecy was arranged chronologically such that each chapter of Ezekiel brings us closer to the destruction of Jerusalem and so the bringing of God’s people once again into the wilderness (recall, the book’s arrangement provides a religious countdown to judgment)!

The only hiccup is our section where Ezekiel assembles a series of prophecies that he received from God which are chronologically out of order *BOTH* with themselves *AND* with the rest of the prophecy. Consider- based on the time signatures:

- The Prophecy against Tyre (Ezekiel 26-28) was received February 12, 586 BC (cf. Ezekiel 26:1).
- The Prophecy against Egypt (Ezekiel 29:1-16) was received January 7, 587 BC (cf. Ezekiel 29:1).
- The Prophecy concerning Babylon’s Ravishing of Egypt (Ezekiel 29:17-21) was received April 26, 571 BC (cf. Ezekiel 29:17).
- The Prophecy concerning Pharaoh’s broken arm (Ezekiel 30:20-26) was received April 29, 587 BC (cf. Ezekiel 30:20).

And so on and so forth.⁴ The presentation is NOT chronologically sequential NOR does it fit the chronological flow of the book. Liberal scholars on account of this say that Ezekiel 25-32 had to have been added later. Yet for us who accept, with Christ,⁵ that Ezekiel penned this prophecy, we see here a glorious message! Again, *Hebrew is more inclined to show it than to say it*. So let’s look at the overall structure of this book and so what Ezekiel is attempting to show God’s people.

The first three sections of this prophecy (Ezekiel 1-24) deal with the manifestation of God’s glory, the rebellion of God’s people, and so the judgment that was soon to come upon them. Then there’s our section, Ezekiel 25-32, which is messy and out of order (no doubt conveying the shock and disarray that occurs when God brings judgment to a nation). The next section (Ezekiel 33) announces the fulfillment of God’s judgment with the fall of Jerusalem...

Ezekiel 33:21, “Now it came about in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, that the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, ‘The city has been

taken.”

There is no way to convey the shock that this message would have been to the people of God in exile. As Ezekiel was called to imitate this shock when his wife died (Ezekiel 24:15-17), the people of God would literally have walked around in a daze, numb to life and the world at the announcement of the fall of Jerusalem. Yet when their feelings returned, their sorrow could easily have turned to anger and resentment toward God.

This no doubt is why Ezekiel/God chose to preface the announcement of the fall of Jerusalem with our section- a litany of judgment oracles against the nations. It serves as a buffer between the disciplining grace of God (Ezekiel 4-24) and the announcement of the fall of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 33)! It contextualizes the judgment of Ezekiel 33! The placement of Ezekiel 25-32 invites a comparison between God’s treatment of His people and His treatment of the pagan. Unlike God’s dealings with the nations (Ezekiel 25-32), when it comes to the discipline of His people, God always remembers mercy- WHICH TURNS OUT TO BE THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF THIS SECTION.

Now, let us consider the primary focus of Ezekiel’s message to the nations.

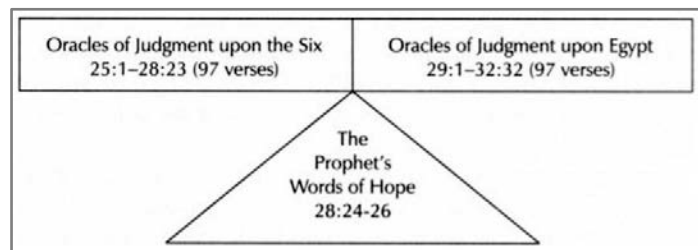
Ezekiel 28:24-26, “And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling brier or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned them; then they will know that I am the Lord God,” thus says the Lord God, ‘When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.’”

Isn’t this a strange placement? In the midst of a prophecy concerning the judgment that was coming to the nations, God informs His people that the day is going to come when these nations will be gone and yet they will still be the object of God’s love, mercy, and provision.

As glorious as this is, nevertheless it seems out of place. Doesn’t it? It turns out that this passage functions as a wedge, dividing Ezekiel’s oracles against the foreign nations into two balanced halves, virtually identical in length (see the diagram).

Ezekiel 25:1-28:23 consists of 97 verses. Ezekiel 29:1-32:32 consists of 97 verses. Now oft-times in

Hebrew poetry, the center of a prophecy or poem serves as a lynch pin on which rests that which God wants to emphasize to His people. In Ezekiel 25-32 that lynch-pin... that wedge is Ezekiel 28:24-26. That means that in the midst of God’s seemingly harsh dealings with His people (Ezekiel 1-24), right before God proclaimed the news of the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 33), the Lord inserted a message of Judgment to the nations which does NOT differ at



all from the judgments reserved for God's people except- AND THIS IS THE POINT OF THIS ENTIRE SECTION- accompanying the judgment given to God's people is a glorious message of hope!

With this, hear the words God would have His exiled people to focus on in their judgment/exile in His rebuke of Sidon, God said this:

Ezekiel 28:24, "And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling brier [this is used elsewhere of a malignant leprous wound⁶] or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned them; then they will know that I am the Lord God."- in wrath God truly does remember mercy (Habakkuk 3:2)! Though Israel is suffering under the rod, God promises here that at the end of their time in the wilderness (at the end of this age), all the pain and miseries of this life will be gone!!! No more "prickling brier" or "painful thorn."

That is the Sabbath rest that awaits all of us in Christ (Hebrews 4:9)! Truly all God's people at that time will proclaim that "Jesus is Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:9-11)! And yet between now and then, listen to the promise:

Ezekiel 28:25-26, "Thus says the Lord God, 'When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.'"

In the short run, this is referencing the proclamation given by Cyrus in 538 BC which allowed the exiles to return to their land. In this regard, the promise is a little over-stated, for after 586 BC God's people never again lived "securely" in this world. Or is it overstated? Don't Miss It! This promise ultimately is a prophecy of the coming Redeemer; the manifestation of God's holiness, who in the end will enable us to live "...securely... building houses, planting vineyards, and living securely."

Such is the glorious word of hope that God has and continues to hold out to all His people. Though the forest of God's people will at times suffer great damage and destruction- though...

- The blessings you thought were yours in Christ have all but dried up.
- Life has thrown you many curves such that you are not the man or woman you thought you'd be.
- Your way is difficult and at times you feel abandoned!

Nevertheless there is life in the "rod of Jesse" which is none other than Jesus Christ (cf. Is. 11:1)! He is all we need- not success, material abundance, ease of days, recognition. That is the message God gave His people here in Ezekiel! Recall the word of Jared Wilson:

One of the problems I have with all the ‘chase your dreams!’ cheerleading from Christian leaders is not because I begrudge anyone wanting to achieve their dreams, but because I don’t think we readily see how easy it is to conflate our dream-chasing with God’s will in Christ. You know, it’s possible that God’s plan for us is littleness. His plan for us may be personal failure. It’s possible that when another door closes, it’s not because he plans to open a window but because he plans to have the building fall down on you. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Will Christ be enough?

Let’s wrap this up... What is it that God is doing when He disciplines His people? Is He condemning them as He someday will the nations? God is preparing them for a New Heavens and a New Earth and that time when we shall walk together with Christ in a thorn-less world! In that day, we shall proclaim with our whole being, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” Yet we need not wait until then. Ours is the glorious privilege to proclaim God’s ownership of our being today! And what better way to proclaim Him than in the fire of affliction? Recall the words of Satan to God:

Job 1:10-11, “Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.”

-Christian, when in these times of woe we praise the Lord, we are possessing the epitome of all that redemption means! Through the ministration of Ezekiel, it was this that God would have His people to learn!!!

End Note(s)

¹ This is similar to what we saw in Amos 1.

² In fact, RRomans 2:5 indicates that at the Last Judgment, no sin will be missed.

³ Recall the words of Dr. Robert Reymond, “What precisely occurred in Genesis 3? In answer, our first parents permitted the serpent, through their embarrassment with God’s authority over them, to challenge God’s Word with an alternative interpretation of the tree. When the pair demonstrated their unwillingness to believe God on the basis of His bare claim of authority over them by remaining silent in the face of the serpent’s lie, they, by that silence, permitted Satan to *reduce* the Word of God to a mere *hypothesis*... This means, however, in a universe created by God that the center of authority, for man, shifted from another to himself. Man demanded that he become his own authority, that he determine for himself what is true and what is false.” (Robert Reymond in *The Justification of Knowledge*, pg. 19)

⁴ To continue, the lamentation over Pharaoh (Ezekiel 32:1-16) was received March 3, 585 BC (Ezekiel 32:1). And the Prophecy depicting Pharaoh in Sheol (Ezekiel 32:17-32) was received March 17, 585 BC

(Ezekiel 32:17).

⁵ Cf. Lk. 24:44; John 10:35.

⁶ Cf. Lev. 13:51-52 and 14:44.