

Studies from Ezekiel

I made a study in the last send out concerning the Lord's use of the term 'My land', focusing on Ezekiel chapter 36. Ezekiel may not be the most popular prophet, but a careful study of his book justifies the title 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.' In the light of what is happening at the moment, I thought you might find it interesting to look at the weighty oracles God decrees against Tyre.

Ezekiel's prophecies can be divided into three broad sections. Chapters 3-24 are basically predictions of God's judgement against Judah: warning after warning that the prophet spoke or acted out, that the nation would no more survive than the northern nation of Israel had done when deported from the land 100 year earlier by the Assyrians.

Following this come a series of prophecies against the nations round about, who had wrought revenge on Israel. Chapters 25-32 are mirrored in part by prophecies in Isaiah Jeremiah and elsewhere, eg Obadiah against Edom.

Following the overthrow of Judah by Babylon in 587, a prolonged silence ensues before Ezekiel is freed by the Lord to prophesy again, probably a thirteen-year period. The next sequence of prophecies are all geared to the time when the Lord would bring His people home again: something which Ezekiel himself would not live to see.

If we look at the mid-term prophecies, the oracles against the nations, we will see, (amongst others), words directed against Edom, to the east of Judah, and against the Philistines to the west - the modern day Palestinians). Whereas in the opening chapters God had been concerned that His people should know Him as Lord; his concern here was that they should know He is the Lord. This of course remains His great desire to this day - though just as people in those days did not welcome the fact that God would miraculously manage to bring the Jews back to their Promised Land, so today, there are very many who do not want to admit the reality of the God of Israel.

The nations were indeed delighted when Judah fell. David Pawson tells us that the phrase Hip! Hip! Hooray! comes from the cry Hip! hip!, which is made up of the three initial letters of 'Jerusalem has fallen!' in Latin. It is rather disillusioning to discover that the phrase has such an anti-Semitic roots!

One of the clearest principles in all Scripture, which works at individual and corporate level, is that what we sow we shall also reap. Chapters 25-32 are an explosively powerful picture of God paying back these surrounding nations for

exploiting the fall of Jerusalem for their own advantage, and inflicting further intense sufferings on the people who remained behind.

Relatively speaking, the Ammonites, Philistines and Edomites were small players: one chapter (Ezekiel 25) suffices for several. (Do reread these texts: they will take you into parts of the Bible you may not have visited recently. I'm a great believer in getting into any part of Scripture where God speaks in the first person: even the hard parts!) Tyre, however, was on an altogether plane. Made prosperous through trade, its reduction to the status of a ghost city, with the cries of the wounded sounding through its streets would have been a source of great astonishment to the surrounding nations.

Descriptions of the judgement on Tyre are surprisingly detailed. Moreover, in the portrayal of the king of Tyre we met someone who was so inextricably linked with evil that he serves as a model of the enemy himself.

The city of Tyre, as it stood, would not just be completely destroyed but would be completely thrown down and would become 'a place for fishermen to dry their nets.'

How did this come about? Not just at the hands of the Babylonians, but in an assault by another unusually determined aggressor: Alexander the Great, who swept down on Lebanon en route for Egypt. The inhabitants of Tyre evacuated by fishing boats to the island that lay a kilometre or so off the shore, where they assumed that they would be safe. With utter ruthlessness, Alexander ordered every brick stone and piece of timber in the town to be demolished. The refuse was thrown into the sea to make a causeway that reached right out to the island. This is how Tyre was 'thrown into the sea.'

Modern Tyre has been built on this island; the old city is just a lump of bare rock, as Ezekiel prophesied so long ago.

Ezekiel 28, along with Isaiah 14, is one of the few passages in Scripture, which indicate the state of Lucifer's heart. We see it puffed up with pride; something that God will by no means permit. However much the enemy has, he can never be satisfied: he always wants more – and sets out to acquire it for himself.

God achieves His purposes through blessing and through judgement. It requires spiritual authority to achieve spiritual results. **Ultimately, Israel will not be restored or saved either by political initiatives or by military solutions. What is called for is spiritual authority. May God bless those who are working to achieve this, and for all who are seeking to be a witness in the Middle East.**

Footnote:

Perhaps a word of warning might be in order here. When the Lord first used the 'oracles' of prophets such as Isaiah Jeremiah and Ezekiel to fuel our intercession for the nations back in 1980, He drew strong parallels between certain nations today and the ancient nations of Babylon, Edom and Moab. This was helpful, so long as we did not push the comparison too far, and end up effectively claiming that were direct equivalents of modern day nations or belief systems, as opposed to being 'a type of.' We are called to be prophetic, but not simplistic. As always, there is a fine line between realising that God may be speaking through a text of Scripture and going too far the other way and pinning undue weight on it.