

**“Economic Arrogance”**  
**Ezekiel 28:1-19**  
**February 22, 2009**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Chapters 25-32 of Ezekiel contain what is called “oracles against the nations.” These oracles were common to many of the prophets and contained God’s words of judgment against Israel’s enemies. Ezekiel prophesies against seven different nations, with most of his attention given to Tyre (chapters 26-28) and Egypt (chapters 29-32). We are going to focus on the judgment against Tyre, a Phoenician town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, just north of Israel. It was a city of significant wealth, and is judged because of its economic arrogance.

Tyre became wealthy because its location allowed it to develop as a major trading port. The city was built in two parts, one on the mainland and the other on a small island just off the mainland. The island part of the city had an excellent harbor, and a causeway had been built in the tenth century BC that allowed the easy transport of goods from the harbor to the mainland. As a result of this arrangement, and no doubt from some good management as well, Tyre prospered. When the Assyrians were capturing all the nations around them, Tyre had enough money simply to pay the Assyrians to leave them alone, as well as to defend them from any other nation that might lust for their wealth. They convinced themselves of their invincibility and became proud. It was because of this economic arrogance that Ezekiel’s oracle of judgment was spoken against them.

It’s not hard to see how we are going to be able apply this to ourselves. There are quite a few similarities between Tyre and America. We too are a type of an island. We have become a nation of great wealth, perhaps the wealthiest in the history of the world. But it feels like that is starting to change. I don’t know of very many people who feel wealthy right now. As the economic recession tightens its grip upon us, this text invites us to consider whether our economic problems may be caused by God’s judgment. It is not without precedent, because it happened in this ancient city of Tyre. Their success in producing wealth caused them to become arrogant, and their arrogance led them to think of themselves as divine, and God, who for the sake of his own glory will brook no rivals, stepped in to bring judgment. Is it possible that this process is playing out in our own land? If so, what should we as Christians do about it? I would like for us to consider these questions as we look more carefully at the judgment against Tyre and its king.

**I. The Rise of a God**

The sin of Tyre and its king was the ancient sin of seeking to be as God. Remember that the original temptation came when Satan said to Eve, **“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”** (Gen. 3:4-5). Now the king of Tyre was saying the same thing. He said, **“I am a god”** (28:2). There were two particular qualities of divinity to which he laid claim—wisdom and wealth. These are tied together in verse 4 when he says that he had gained wealth by his great wisdom. What’s missing, of course, is the proper response of humble gratitude to God.

Concerning this claim of divinity, notice that the city was a victim of its own success. All of their plans for prosperous trade had succeeded, with the result that they were now a very wealthy city. The lesson is this: we are most vulnerable to this sin of pride and considering ourselves to be like God when we succeed. Romans 1 talks about the unveiling of God’s wrath against sinners. It is very interesting to see what form the judgment of God takes in Romans 1. God simply gives people what they want. All their plans and desires succeed, but since their hearts have not been changed, they inevitably want the wrong things. That’s what happened to this city of Tyre. If our hearts have not been transformed to want to bring glory to God through our obedient worship of him, then getting what we want is actually the worst thing that could happen to us. Have you ever daydreamed about the genie in the bottle myth? The bottle is uncorked and the genie comes forth to grant you three wishes. What would you wish for? Do you see in this the seduction of being God-like? To be granted whatever we want is to be like God. Our will, not God’s, will be done. Until our will has been sanctified and brought under God’s will, to succeed in our desires will take us further from God. That is what is so dangerous about the health and wealth gospel taught in some churches. This teaching says that if we just ask in the right way, then God is obligated to give us whatever we ask for. The problem with this is that it leaves unchallenged the assumption that we know what is best for ourselves. The Bible is clear that the fastest way to get into trouble spiritually is to get what we want before our hearts have been transformed to want what God wants.

When we see how dangerous it is to get what we want, it gives us a different perspective on our current economic challenges. Could it be that this current economic storm is part of God’s merciful judgment? Perhaps what he is doing is weakening the grip of the god of this world, the god of materialism. What is your reaction when you open your 401(k) statement and see that it has lost 40 percent of its value? Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to consider what happens in your heart if things go exactly as you intend with your retirement account. You have plugged in your annual contribution, your assumption of an average 8 percent annual return, and then watch as the software tells you that you will have over one million dollars when you reach retirement age. Then as you track it each year, you watch as it happens just as you planned. Some years your return is only 4-5 percent, but then in others it is ten percent or more. If your heart is like mine, you find yourself more frequently checking your online

retirement account to watch it grow. And each time its value grows, your delight increases and your trust in God decreases just a little. You find yourself longing for the time when your plans for retirement will come to fruition, and you can kick back and enjoy a life of prosperous fun. But when the value of the fund is rapidly falling, the response is quite a bit different. For one thing, you don't want to check up on its value at all. And you are forced to imagine a life without all that money. And then it hits you—you will do just fine without it. You realize that God will provide, and it will be okay.

God is so good to us in this economic downturn, to lessen the grip of materialism upon our souls and to tighten our faith grip upon him. He is judging us in mercy now before we get to the point of Tyre, full of pride to the point that we think of ourselves as god-like.

## II. The Fall of a God

Chapter 27 portrays the judgment upon Tyre as being like a sinking ship. It describes the building and outfitting of the ship as being done to the highest standards. **“Your builders made perfect your beauty”** (27:4). The ship had everything necessary for its efficient operation, including pilots, rowers, and skilled craftsmen to keep it in good repair. And its trade was extensive. Most of chapter 27 is a detailed list of all that was valuable in the economy of this time. Tyre was involved with all of it. In short, the ship Tyre is depicted as a highly efficient business machine.

Notice how this proud city is judged. **“So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas. Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas. The east wind has wrecked you in the heart of the seas”** (27:25-26). It was sunk like the *Titanic*, which believed itself to be unsinkable. It was that proud and mistaken belief that led to its sinking. Similarly, Tyre became a victim of her great success. Riding low in the water because of its heavy load, it could not survive the great storm that came upon it.

It is not hard to see how our current economic calamities are of the same category. We are a victim of our own consumer society. As people define themselves by what they possess and consume, they end up consuming more and more. When the money runs out, there is no need to slow down. Borrowed money can be used to continue fueling a vigorous consumer lifestyle. The whole thing becomes a house of cards that collapses in on itself.

This may answer the question of how the judgment comes, but not why. Ezekiel's favorite phrase throughout the book appears at the outset of God's announced judgment against Tyre. **“Then they will know that I am the Lord”** (26:6). This phrase occurs fifteen times in chapters 25-32. God judges the nations for the sake of his own name. This is why he judges the nations. He will brook no

rivals, and they must know that Israel's God, Jehovah, is the only true God. That brings us to an important question. Is it selfish of God to insist that he alone be accorded divine status? It sounds to some like God is being a little insecure here. Why can't he simply allow others like Tyre and its king to think of themselves as divine, even though he knows they are not? Why does God intervene with judgment?

I think there are at least three reasons God must intervene to bring judgment, why he can't just live and let live when it comes to those making rival claims for divinity. First, it would be a lie, and God cannot lie. To be God means to be at the center and to have everyone else agree to this center. Another way of speaking about being self-centered is to describe it as wanting to be God. The problem is that there can only be one center since there is only one God, and for anyone other than the true God to be in that center is false. Were God to give up the center, the entire universe would collapse.

Another reason God cannot tolerate rivals, but must judge them, is that whenever humans lay claim to divinity, violence and multiplied iniquity results. That's what happened with Tyre. **"In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned"** (28:16). It's not hard to see why this is the case. When men and women want to be as God, our self-perception as the one around whom things should center collides with the perceptions of others who think the same thing. A marriage where both husband and wife think they should be the center will be a conflicted relationship. Were God to allow everyone who wants to claim deity to continue unchecked, it would not threaten him, but it would destroy human community and all good things.

A final reason why God does not sit idly by when humans want to become as God is that he knows that our greatest joy comes when we center ourselves on him, the true God. We know that because of the Bible's description of heaven as both a place of everlasting joy and a place where God is at the center. Isaiah 61:7 is speaking of those who will live in heaven when it says, **"they shall have everlasting joy."** And the book of Revelation shows us several pictures of heaven, all of which have the Lamb of God in the center. Heaven, the place where God is in the center, is a place of everlasting joy. Those two features of heaven are not coincidental, but related to one another as cause and effect. Heaven is a place of everlasting joy precisely because it is centered on God. God is acting out of love as he insists on being the only one to receive our ultimate worship.

### **III. The Knowledge of the True God**

Ezekiel says repeatedly that God acts in order that **"they will know that I am the Lord."** What we are to learn from this current economic storm is that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the true God. The true God is a God of judgment. He will brook no rivals, and at the end of the day all who have raised

themselves to challenge God's sovereign rule will be brought low in judgment. Only God's word will be ultimate. There is an interesting contrast in our passage. At the beginning of chapter 28, the king of Tyre says, **"I am a god"** (v. 2). And then in verse 10 God says of him, **"You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, declares the Lord."** Whose word was ultimate? God's word cannot fail.

The true God is not only a God of judgment, but one of mercy. Six hundred years after Ezekiel wrote these words against the king of Tyre, another king was born. In so many ways he was just the opposite of the king of Tyre. Instead of increasing his wealth to staggering proportions, he gave up his wealth and lived as a poor man his entire life. Instead of climbing the ladder of ambition until he was on the top, he descended the ladder until he became the lowliest servant. But most significantly, instead of pretending to be God, he really is. Jesus really is the Son of God, the second member of the holy Trinity. These two kings also have something in common. Both died in humiliation, under the judgment of God. But even in this there is a significant difference. The king of Tyre was judged for his own pride, while Jesus was judged for ours. He was judged so that our penalty might be removed from us and we might be forgiven. This is the true God, a holy God of judgment and of forgiveness.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let's close with two applications, two things to focus on during this time of economic turmoil. First, Ezekiel reminds us that the goal of all God's actions and his central passion is that he should be known and acknowledged among the nations for who he is. The application is to make this mission our primary goal. We are to do so with our money, our time, and our prayers. As we do so, we will find ourselves more fully alive and more joyful.

Second, embrace God's view of the good life. Our materialistic world, just like the city of Tyre, has a view of the good life it is trying to sell. The good life in our materialistic world is one with a good job, which means only one thing—a good salary. It includes a McMansion in the suburbs and a vacation home at the lake or the beach. It would certainly have to include new cars every 2-3 years and early retirement that would allow one to play and travel until you die, hopefully at least 25 years after retirement. While there is nothing wrong with any of these things in themselves, at the end of the day they have nothing to do with the good life. God's view of the good life is portrayed in the Lord's Supper, of which we are about to partake. It includes walking in the joy of forgiveness and in fellowship with the Lord.