



Ezekiel 25:1-5, 15-17; 26:1-6. Universal Accountability.

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We live in a world of vastly variant cultures, with geography playing a large part in their origin. Separated by an inability to communicate with one another, ancient civilizations grew independently and as each continued to grow and form, each developed its own language and culture. Even today, with our modern communication and ease of travel, there are still thousands of unique people groups who maintain their own language and much of their uniqueness. However, throughout history there is one common thread among all known cultures: each one, in its own way, places a great emphasis on some form or forms of religion. From the time when God breathed life into humanity, a life that is formed in His image, mankind has recognized the existence of God and has sought to worship Him in some way.

At the same time, God has been progressively revealing Himself and His purpose to mankind. He has done so through His word, as recorded by faithful and inspired patriarchs and prophets, through the Holy Spirit who guides those who have faith in Him. God ultimately and completely revealed His word to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Creator and Judge who came to us in the form of a man to clearly express His grace and love for us so that through Jesus we can finally know Him, and through Him we can finally find sure forgiveness for our sins.

However, in this historical process, most people who have heard of Jesus have rejected faith in Him, preferring their own form of religion and ritual. Others have never heard of Jesus Christ and His message of grace and forgiveness. Just as the nation of Israel was under continual attack by their pagan neighbors for their faith, the church today is under continual attack from those who reject the notion of submitting themselves to the Creator, Yahweh, Jesus Christ. What is the basis and motive of these attacks on the church, and where do these people find their justification?

The experience of ancient Israel gives us some insight into these questions. Incubated in Egypt, the nation formed from the sons of Abraham and coalesced into a unique culture, a people that God would use to reveal Himself to all of the world: it was from Abraham and through the line of David that Jesus was born. However, as a nation, Israel was anything but obedient to God. Rather than follow God, the people chose to immerse themselves in the pagan cultures of the region of Palestine. The intrigue that resulted from their alliances with the pagan nations culminated in their political and social absorption by them. Israel split

into two kingdoms, the northern which was assimilated by Assyria, and the southern which was destroyed by Babylon.

Holy scripture is clear and uncompromising when it comes to identifying the reason for the demise of the nation of Israel: God promised to protect Israel and give them a land as long as they honored Him as God. Their apostasy resulted in the removal of that hand of protection, and the nation was lost. Israel was held accountable for their rejection of God. In and during the demise of Israel, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied concerning that loss. They also spoke of the state of the other nations and the nature of their accountability to God. These are nations that made no commitments to God as Israel had done. These were pagan and ignorant nations, much like those today who do not recognize or honor God. And, like ancient Israel, much of the modern church today is becoming more like the pagan nations in which it is immersed, and is facing a similar fate as it moves further from the protecting hand of the LORD.

Ezekiel 25:1. *The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,*

As with other true prophets, Ezekiel knew when the message he heard was from the LORD. Ezekiel was given a gift from God to discern His word in a very literal sense, and to be able to communicate that word to those who needed to hear it. Ezekiel would preface such oracles with a formula, "the word of the LORD came" to clearly identify the nature of its source. Ezekiel's prophecies have proven to be accurate, and the message he presents is entirely consistent with the body of Holy Scriptures. When we observe Ezekiel's prophecies concerning Israel's neighbors we also see a snapshot of the world that today's church is trying to emulate. Following Ezekiel's prophecy, we may think twice concerning the wisdom of that choice.

1. SIN MOTIVATED BY PAGANISM.

Ezekiel 25:2. *Son of man, set thy face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them;*

As a "son of man," Ezekiel is reminded of his frail humanity. The title occurs frequently in the Old Testament and is a subtle reminder of how God uses frail and normal people to do great things when they are available to serve Him. The patriarchs and prophets are not super-powered people. They are ordinary people who turn to God for strength and guidance in extraordinary circumstances. Jesus used this identical title to refer to Himself during the His earthly ministry to accentuate His humanity and humility.

God called Ezekiel to set his "face" against Ammon. We may get a mental picture of Ezekiel as he turns to the north and northwest and focuses on this region. Ezekiel was often asked by God to act out his prophecies prior to

explaining them, and such a gaze is quite probable. Also this phrase translated “set thy face” was a common literary formula to describe a firm decision to focus one’s attention and purpose in a specific direction. God was instructing Ezekiel to focus his attention and prophecy on the nation of Ammon.

Israel was no stranger to the Ammonites. This nation descended from the family of Lot, Abraham's nephew. This family and tribe descended from Lot's incestuous relationship with his own daughter.¹ The Ammonites worshipped the mythical god Molech² with pagan rituals that included temple prostitution and child sacrifice. Solomon, after taking Ammonite wives, established the worship of Molech in Israel,³ a move that brought with it centuries of great pain and stress to the kingdom. The Ammonites were usually seen as antagonistic towards Israel, and the two nations met in battle frequently.⁴ The Ammonites came from a region that is roughly in the area of modern Jordan, and we find a direct reference to the ancient nation in the name of Jordan's capital of Amman.

Ezekiel 25:3. *And say unto the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity;*

Though Ezekiel was called by God to prophesy to the descendents of Israel who were in captivity, God also instructed Ezekiel to bring some messages to other nations. Such prophecies serve at least a two-fold purpose. First, they expose the godless state of the nations, and they bring some encouragement to the persecuted Jews who hear the message of judgment that will come upon their pagan oppressors. The first object of this judgmental scrutiny is Ammon.

God called upon the people of Ammon to hear the prophesy of Ezekiel. Most likely, there would have been no Ammonites in the range of Ezekiel's voice, but what the well-known prophet had to say would spread by word-of-mouth quickly. Furthermore, God has continually demonstrated His ability to preserve the content and form of His word throughout the ages, so there is little need to speculate as to the ability of the Ammonites to hear Ezekiel’s message. Still, the message was as much for Israel as it was for Ammon.

"Because thou saidst, Aha!" The descendents of Lot were usually antagonistic towards the descendents of Lot's righteous uncle, Abraham, and found great joy in the difficulties that Israel experienced. Ammon celebrated the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem, interpreting it as a defeat of the God of Israel. To the

¹ Genesis 19:36, ff.

² Molech is also known as Milcom.

³ 1 Kings 11:5, ff.

⁴ 1 Samuel 1:11; 2 Chronicles 20:1, et. al.

Ammonites, this only gave them reason to think that their god Molech was the victor. The Ammonites also celebrated the destruction of the nation of Israel when it was destroyed by the Assyrians. They also were celebrating the current demise of Judah as Babylon besieged Jerusalem and took the Judeans captive.

As familiar as Ammon was with Israel, it was a witness to the many miraculous works that God did for Israel. Still, Ammon refused to acknowledge God, preferring their own fabricated god Molech with its pagan and sensual ritual practices.

Ezekiel 25:4-5. *Behold, therefore I will deliver thee to the men of the east for a possession, and they shall set their palaces in thee, and make their dwellings in thee: they shall eat thy fruit, and they shall drink thy milk. ⁵And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the Ammonites a couchingplace for flocks: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.*

The Ammonites felt arrogant and secure as they witnessed what they interpreted as the "demise" of Israel's God. Their assessment significantly predates the "God is dead" doctrine of the late 19th century. Obviously, Ammon failed to remember the miraculous way in which God delivered the Israelites against Ammon's own armies in the past.⁵ "I will deliver" is written in a verb tense that can also be understood as "I am continually delivering." Just as Ezekiel prophesied the imminent destruction of Judah, he referred to the judgment against Ammon as equally imminent. History would prove the prophesy. The demise of Ammon was inexorably attached to the demise of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar finished his conquest of Judah, he turned his imperialistic fervor towards Ammon. Like Judah, Ammon faced the armies of Babylon and was overpowered by this new enemy. Soon afterward the Babylonian empire would fall to the Medo-Persians. The region would later fall to the Greeks under Alexander the Great, then to the Romans, and most recently to the Ottomans. It was nearly two thousand years following the demise of the Roman Empire, long after the death and resurrection of Jesus that local political control would return to the area of Jordan.

Ezekiel prophesied the destruction of the Ammonite cities as they would be laid waste and empty, only to fall back into farmland. The palaces and dwellings that illustrated their hubris would be replaced by the flocks of sheep and the camels of nomads. The capital city of Rabbah would be reduced to piles of stones, serving only as a refuge for animals. The ancients believed that the influence of their gods was very territorial (since each geographic culture developed its own gods). Their defeat at the hands of the Babylonians would make them think that their god, Molech was defeated by the god of the Babylonians. However,

⁵ 2 Chronicles 20:1, ff.

Ezekiel's prophesy clearly states that the demise of Ammon (and its sister nation of Moab) would be at the hands of the God of Israel, not Nebuchadnezzar.

Many of those who stand against the gospel today are much like Ammon as they also celebrate any defeat that is experienced by the modern Christian church. They point in their own hubris at the hypocrisy of Christian leaders who compromise their ministry through breaches of integrity. Depending upon their own pagan religions and systems of belief that promise a false security, they will find themselves before God at the final judgment in disbelief when they stand before God without the forgiveness that is found only at the foot of the Cross of Calvary.

2. SIN MOTIVATED BY PREJUDICE

Ezekiel 25:15. *Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred;*

Ezekiel's prophesy then turns to the southern nation of Philistia. We may remember some of Israel's battles with the Philistines involving Samson,⁶ Saul,⁷ and David.⁸ Unlike most of the rival nations that surrounded Israel, Philistia was not formed from Abraham's descendents. Philistia was a coastline settlement of mostly Aegean sea-faring merchants, established as an identifiable nation only by a loose confederation of its five independent, and often rival, city-states. The Philistines were also workers of iron, and that contribution to technology helped to make their military a formidable force. The militant and industrious Philistines had little in common with an agrarian Israel other than their desire for conquest over the region.

The Philistines are best characterized by their desire for the complete annihilation of Israel. It is from Philistia that we derive the modern name of Palestine. The Philistines occupied the coastal region south of Israel that we currently refer to as Gaza. We may see some parallels in the ancient setting of Israel and Philistia with the modern setting of Israel and Palestine. Gaza is the original Palestinian "homeland" and was not a part of the land that was divided up among Israel's tribes. Modern Palestinians see the presence of Israel in Gaza as an illegal occupation and many, like their Philistine ancestors, desire only the complete destruction of Israel.

As we observe verse 15, we may note that we can simply replace the name "Philistines" with the name "Palestinians" and the verse still holds true today. Unlike the Ammonites who saw the demise of Israel as a spiritual duel between

⁶ Judges 14, ff.

⁷ 1 Samuel 31.

⁸ 2 Samuel 5.

Molech and the God of Israel, the Philistines viewed Israel primarily with personal hatred and vengeance, seeking only to destroy it. However, we can never completely remove the rivalry that neighboring nations saw between their own pagan gods and the God of Israel. The gods of the Philistines included Baal and Asherah, two pagan deities that the Israelites embraced in their apostasy.

Ezekiel 25:16-17. *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethims, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast. ¹⁷And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.*

Like the demise of the Ammonites, the destruction of Philistia would be tied to the destruction of Israel. As one of the more militant of Israel's neighbors, the Philistines always proved to be a very difficult adversary to conquer. David was able to quell the violence for a brief period, but the Philistine's hatred toward Israel reached beyond the years of any man. Philistia fell to Babylon, Babylon fell to Persia, who fell to the Greeks, who fell to the Romans, etc. God's destruction of Philistia was utterly complete. The area of Gaza was under foreign domination for centuries and no actual nation of Palestine was ever established. When the Ottomans were defeated in the late 19th century, Palestine returned to a loosely bound archipelago of rival city-states. If modern Palestinians were to acquire a free homeland in Gaza, it would be the first time that the region was self-governing since the days of the Israelite kings. Few people realize that there has never been a sovereign "nation" of Palestine.

Likewise, there are many people today, who like the Philistines, simply reject God because they reject what the gospel stands for, and they are characterized by hatred and bigotry towards Christians and Jews. The central characteristic of saving faith is the submission to God as LORD. Many people, driven by their own pride and self-sufficiency, cannot take their personal wants and desires and place them under the authority of another. They cannot sacrifice the power that they perceive that they gain from self-sufficiency and surrender that power to God. The only way to rationalize the maintenance of power and control is to summarily reject the gospel and those who place their trust in it. We can see that Palestinians and their Arab allies still harbor all of the same hatred and bigotry towards Christians and Jews, and as America enters the Battle for Israel we see that hatred and prejudice more vividly than ever.

3. SIN MOTIVATED BY PRIDE

Ezekiel 26:1-2. *And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, ²Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha,*

***she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me:
I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste:***

Tyre, and its sister city of Sidon were the primary cities of the region of Phoenicia, a coastal area to the northwest of Galilee. The region was given to the tribe of Asher, one of the sons of Israel, but never subdued. One might remember how Hiram, king of Tyre made an alliance with Solomon to provide resources for the building of the temple and then, using the conscripted labor from the Israelites, for the building of the pagan cities. It was through this act of forced conscription that the nation of Israel ultimately divided.

The "Aha" represented as the response of Tyre to the destruction of Israel is the same word expressed as that of Ammon. Tyre's interest in the land of Israel was not based upon their rivalry of gods, or of hatred and prejudice. Tyre (and Sidon) were merchant cities, and their financial profits came from commerce in the region. The demise of Israel would open to them the trade routes that link three continents. The ruin of Israel would mean much more profit for Tyre, hence the statement, "I shall be replenished." We see Tyre as a materialistic city, seeking materialistic gain rather than geographic conquest.

Ezekiel 26:3-6. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. ⁴And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. ⁵It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. ⁶And her daughters which are in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

The gloating over the demise of Israel, inspired by their hubris and materialistic greed, set them against God's purposes. As an enemy of God, the future of the nation is only doom. As a coastal city, its citizens are very familiar with the phenomenon of the repeating cycle of waves on the shoreline. The first wave would come, as with these other nations that Ezekiel describes, from Nebuchadnezzar. The destruction would leave the fortified city as exposed as bare rock, that on a shoreline is useful only for the spreading of fishing nets for mending. "Daughters in the field" can be understood to represent individuals. However, it can also be understood to represent the smaller hamlets of people who depend upon Tyre and Sidon for protection. The battle for Tyre, which was initiated with a siege, was preceded by the destruction of those outlying hamlets and villages, along with the despoiling of their resources. The exchange of the land and its peoples from one invading army to the next would be like sea waves that break over the region in devastating cycles.

Ezekiel's prophesy would serve as a reminder to the people of Tyre that the reason for their demise is their arrogance towards the God of Israel, an arrogance inspired by their materialistic success. The character of that arrogance is evident by a quote from later in Ezekiel's prophesy:

Ezekiel 28:1-7. *The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, ²Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: ³Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: ⁴With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: ⁵By thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: ⁶Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; ⁷Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.*

The arrogance of the King of Tyre went far past simple materialism. By the time Israel was subject to Nebuchadnezzar's sword, the king of Tyre had lifted his own status to that of an emperor. Unlike the Ammonites who held that their god, Molech, was greater than the God of the Jews, the king of Tyre held that he was shown greater than the God of the Jews by Israel's demise. Money, possessions, and power can easily bring a person to the conclusion that they have no need for God, and by so doing, set themselves in array against Him.

Each of the nations hated Israel for quite different and almost exclusive reasons. Yet, each was held accountable to God for their attitude: attitudes that would define them as God's enemies and would seal their doom. We may often point our fingers at the nation of Israel, the descendents of Abraham, and rightly argue that they were accountable to God for their actions. Their actions did bring about the removal of God's hand of protection over them as they came to learn a very hard lesson about the sovereignty of God, a lesson that the modern Christian church may be forgetting. However just as Israel was accountable to God, so were its pagan neighbors. Each shook its fist at God for a different reason. The Ammonites preferred their own God. The Philistines preferred their imperialistic hatred. The people of Tyre preferred their materialistic gain, and its king saw such gain as an indicator of his own deity.

We observe similar reasons for rejecting God today. Like the Ammonites, many people bow to their own gods, gods that are fashioned by the craft of human hands and human imaginations. They have substituted the icons of faith with the icons of secular humanism and entitlement. They see no need for God as long

as they are satisfied with what they find in their worldly and pagan deities. This may apply to those who cling to any of the world's various religions, to one who rejects religion, but still bows to another authority.

Like the Philistines, many people simply shake their fist at God and His church with a spirit of hatred and bigotry. These may use many rationalizations to seek to destroy anything that is representative of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Some have even ascribed to different religions so that they can expressly justify their hatred of Israel and all who honor her God.

Like the king and people of Tyre, many people are lulled into the comfort that comes from realized self-sufficiency in personal power and possessions. They have no need for God since they think that all of their needs are fully met by the works of their own hands.

The result of the sum of these worldly philosophies, systems of belief that can only be the fruit of satanic submission, is a world that it is chaos. Rather than being characterized by God's love, this world is best characterized by satan's hatred as nations stand against nations and governments abuse and oppress their own citizens.⁹ Though the children of God have always been the object of satan's hatred, there has been no time in history when so much violence has been brought against the bride of Christ and its Israelite sister.

There is an error common to all of these rivals of the faith: They are not immortal. All people will find themselves before God in the final judgment and be held accountable for their choices. Upon death all that will matter will be their relationship with God, and those who spent a lifetime rejecting Him will not find any of those things they valued in this world to be of any use. They will find themselves standing before God without the unconditional forgiveness that comes only through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This world is full of people-groups, and most of them are similar to those listed by Ezekiel. They have rejected God for any number of self-rationalized reasons. Unless they can hear and respond to the gospel they are doomed to an eternity in death that is characterized by what they chose in life: separation from God. Those who do not love God in life, will not find a loving God in death. All people are accountable.

⁹ Consider the example of Dr. François Duvalier, known as "Papa Doc" (April 14, 1907 – April 21, 1971), was the President of Haiti from 1957 to 1971. In 1964 he announced himself President for Life. He ruled until his death in 1971 in a regime marked by autocracy, corruption and state-sponsored terrorism through his private militia known as Tonton Macoutes. It has been estimated that he was responsible for 30,000 deaths and the exile of thousands more. The suffering in Haiti brought on by the January 2010 earthquake is a direct result of the poverty brought upon that nation by Duvalier.

What about those who do love the Lord? If one truly loves God, one can see the dilemma facing those who do not. This should motivate every believer to set aside any encumbrance that Satan would introduce and look for every opportunity to share God's love with those who are lost. Since Jesus commissioned the faithful to "Go, ye therefore," evangelism is not an option. Those who love the Lord are now accountable for the spiritual state of those around them. Christians are called to be the salt and light to purify and illuminate a dark world.¹⁰ Every Christian can start each day with the prayer, "Lord, give me an opportunity to share your love in a special way today." If every Christian did this, there would be far more people who will not suffer the fate of the Jews, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and the Phoenicians, for it is this prayer that separates us from those pagan nations. Let us make this a daily prayer.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:14-16.