

JUSTICE OVER POWER

Lesson 4 Ezekiel 25–32

RECAP

Take a moment to share about your experience with last week’s “Spiritual Practice” and “On Mission” sections.

JUSTICE OVER POWER

In this lesson, Ezekiel began to shift his attention from the judgment and fall of Jerusalem toward Judah’s seven hostile neighbors.¹ God warned of the justice He would enact on the powerful nations committing injustices toward both God and His people. In these chapters, special attention is given to the powerful city of Tyre and the nation of Egypt.² God used Babylon not only to judge Israel, but also the surrounding nations. Each nation received poetic oracles containing satiric lists of abuses and predictions of their coming destruction.³

READING PLAN

We encourage you to read the entire section of Scripture using the following reading plan.

Day 1: Ezekiel 25

Day 2: Ezekiel 26–28

Day 3: Ezekiel 29–30

Day 4: Ezekiel 31

Day 5: Ezekiel 32

OVERVIEW

The questions in this lesson will focus on **Ezekiel 28, 31, and 32**.

¹ The neighboring powers are Ammon, Moab, and Edom to the east, Philistia to the west, Tyre and Sidon to the north, and Egypt to the south.

² Many scholars believe that the emphasis on Tyre and Egypt was because they were the only two nations in the region still holding out against the Babylonians when Jerusalem fell. Hays, J. Daniel, and Tremper Longman. *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*. Zondervan, 2017. 215

³ Each of the messages contained at least three parts: identity, crimes, and judgment of each nation.

Here is a brief summary of the chapters that will not be covered by questions in this lesson:

- **Chapter 25** focuses on the injustice committed by Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia against God's people. The Ammonites gloated over the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of her people (**25:1–3**). The Moabites also gloated over Judah's demise, which caused the Lord to bring desert tribes to invade their borders (**25:8–11**). The Edomites treated Judah in a particularly hostile manner (**Obadiah 1–14**), so God used Israel as an instrument of vengeance against Edom (**Ezekiel 25:14**). Philistia received much of the same indictment due to their hostility toward Judah (**25:15–17**).
- **Chapters 26–27** are specifically devoted to the city of Tyre.⁴ **Chapter 26** includes a prophecy of doom (**26:1–6**), a prediction of King Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and capture of Tyre (**26:7–14**), other nations' observance of the judgment on Tyre (**26:15–18**), as well as God sending Tyre to the "the pit" (**26:19–21**). **Chapter 27** references Tyre's prosperity in trade (**27:1–25**) and contains imagery of the coming destruction (**27:26–36**).
- **Chapters 29–30** are primarily dedicated to Egypt.⁵ They contain lists of indictments and predictions of destruction. The words against Egypt addressed the ruler (Pharaoh), the people, and the land. Egypt's fall is captured in the poetic imagery used to communicate judgment.

⁴ **Chapter 28** is also about the kingdom of Tyre.

⁵ **Chapters 31** and **32** also focus on Egypt.

QUESTIONS

Day 2: Chapter 28⁶

1. What are some of the accusations given against the prince and king of Tyre?⁷ (28:1–19)
 - a. How does this passage make the connection between wealth and pride? (28:2–5)
 - b. What were the results of the king of Tyre’s wealth and pride? In what ways did God enact judgment toward him? (28:16–19)

⁶ “Some of the phrases in this passage describing the human king of Tyre may describe Satan. Great care must be taken to interpret these verses with discernment. It is clear that at times Ezekiel describes this king in terms that could not apply to a mere human. This king had been in the Garden of Eden (28:13), had been ‘ordained and anointed ... as the mighty angelic guardian’ (28:14), and had access to the holy mountain of God (28:14), but was banished from there (28:16–17). Ezekiel, therefore, may have been condemning not only the king of Tyre but Satan, who had motivated the king to sin.” *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1345

⁷ “Two most likely candidates for this Tyrian king who ruled in Ezekiel’s day are Ittobaal II and Ethbaal III. It is also possible that the language about this king was purposely vague in order to couch his identity so that any Tyrian king might have served as its target. Like the inhabitants of Tyre, Tyre’s ruler was guilty of pride and self-aggrandizement (Ezekiel 27:1–9; see also Proverbs 6:17; 8:13; 16:18).” Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020. 596

c. Does the way God described the prince or king of Tyre sound like any of your contemporary leaders? (For example: in your workplace, church, community, school, etc.)
If so, what might that imply?

d. Proudful leaders are not a new phenomenon. Thinking through your spheres of influence, what might you be called to do about this reality?

2. “Tyre was the religious center of Baal worship and the major maritime power in the Mediterranean, thus the most powerful opponent of the Babylonians in the region.”⁸ In light of this information, why do you think God focused His justice over power on this particular city?

⁸ Hays, J. Daniel, and Tremper Longman. *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*. Zondervan, 2017. 215

3. Consider the imagery of Eden in **Ezekiel 28:13–18**.⁹ What is the connection to the king of Tyre and its significance?

a. The king of Tyre's pride told him that he earned for himself all the wealth and power that, in fact, God had given him. In what ways has this type of dynamic played out in your life?

b. How can you give God the glory today, rather than yourself?

⁹ “The statement ‘you were in Eden, the garden of God’ (**verse 13; 31:8–9**) must mean that the king of Tyre is being compared to someone who was in the garden of Eden. The verses describe someone in an exalted position who was favored by God but who became corrupt and lost that position. This could describe the first man, Adam. Yet even granting the figurative nature of language, it seems that something more than a human creature is in view.” Cooper, Lamar Eugene. *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*. Vol. 17, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. 226–267
Regardless of who the imagery may be representing, the sin of pride is always something that God condemns.

4. Ezekiel pronounced that Sidon¹⁰ would be judged with a plague and the sword (**28:22–23**). In what ways does this demonstrate God’s justice?

5. Note the use of the phrase, in various forms, “*they will know that I am the LORD.*” (**28:23, 24, 26; 29:6, 16, 21; 30:19, 26; 32:15**)

What does this phrase tell us about God’s purposes in judgment?

Day 4: Chapter 31

6. In **chapter 31**, Ezekiel received a message from the Lord about Egypt. He compared Egypt to Assyria and the cedars of Lebanon.¹¹ List a few of the descriptions of the cedar in **verses 3–9**.

¹⁰ “Sidon was a Phoenician city-state located to the north of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast. Like the nations addressed in the preceding oracles, Sidon had apparently displayed hostility toward God’s covenant people (**28:24**).” Chisholm, Robert B. *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets*. Baker Academic, 2009. 271

¹¹ “Lebanon was known for its cedars. In the ancient near east cedar often was a symbol of royalty and majesty, and in the Bible, cedar frequently is mentioned in association with the construction of luxurious buildings such as palaces and temples.” Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020. 598

See also **Judges 9:15; 1 Kings 4:33; 5:6; 2 Kings 14:9; Ezra 3:7; Psalm 29:5; 92:12; 104:16; Ezekiel 31:15–18**

a. How does the imagery of the cedar tree in **verses 3–9** help reveal Egypt’s sin? (**31:10**)

b. What does the imagery reveal about God’s sovereignty over the powerful leaders and nations? (**31:11–14**)

7. Throughout **chapter 31 (verses 14, 16, 18)**, Ezekiel described what ultimately happened to the tree¹² in terms like “depths of the earth,” “the pit,” and “grave.”¹³ How is justice being illustrated in these images?

¹² Although the reference to the tree described Assyria’s judgment, the message in this chapter is ultimately directed at Egypt. A similar judgment would soon come against Egypt.

¹³ “Sheol is often described as the home of all who die, hence the frequent translation ‘grave.’ This is not strictly accurate. Though in the Old Testament the godly may fear being abandoned by God to Sheol (**Psalm 88:3**), nowhere is a righteous man actually said to have gone down to Sheol.” Johnston, Philip S., *The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament* (Ph.D. diss.; Cambridge Univ., 1993).

Day 5: Chapter 32

8. There are times where we would like to blame leadership for the things that have gone wrong. However, Ezekiel included the land, the people of Egypt, and past nations, in the indictment against Pharaoh found in **chapter 32**. Why do you think the inclusion of all four entities is important?
- a. What might be the significance of Ezekiel warning the leader of the nation before he warned the people of the nation?
- b. How will God bring about this judgment on Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt? (**Ezekiel 32:1–21**)
9. In **32:22–30**, Ezekiel ended this chapter by pronouncing similar judgments on surrounding nations. Observe the chart on the following page, which highlights the similar language condemning each nation.

Assyria (32:22–23)	Elam (32:24)	Meshech and Tubal (32:26)	Edom (32:29)	Princes of the north & Sidonians (32:30)
<i>Assyria lies there</i>	<i>Elam lies there</i>	<i>Meshech and Tubal are there</i>	<i>Edom is there</i>	<i>All the princes of the north & the Sidonians are there</i>
<i>surrounded by the graves of its army,</i>	<i>surrounded by the graves of all its hordes,</i>	<i>surrounded by the graves of all their hordes.</i>	<i>with its kings and princes.</i>	<i>with others who have died.</i>
				<i>Once a terror, they have been put to shame.</i>
<i>those who were slaughtered by the sword.</i>	<i>those who were slaughtered by the sword.</i>		<i>Mighty as they were, they also lie among those slaughtered by the sword,</i>	<i>They lie there as outcasts with others who were slaughtered by the sword.</i>
<i>Their graves are in the depths of the pit,</i>			<i>with the outcasts who have gone down to the pit.</i>	<i>They share the shame of all who have descended to the pit.</i>
<i>and they are surrounded by their allies.</i>				
<i>They struck terror in the hearts of people everywhere,</i>	<i>They struck terror in the hearts of people everywhere,</i>	<i>They once struck terror in the hearts of people everywhere.</i>		
<i>but now they have been slaughtered by the sword.</i>	<i>but now they have descended as outcasts to the world below. Now they lie in the pit and share the shame of those who have gone before them.</i>	<i>But now they are outcasts, all slaughtered by the sword.</i>		

Regardless of the differing levels of power or influence of each nation, they all ended up in the same place. What does that tell you about the weight of sin and the justice of God?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

It is often easy to criticize and even disdain those in positions of power. However, God asks us to respect and pray for those in authority, humbly laying aside our personal opinions. What could it look like for you to bring your leaders (political, cultural, religious, etc.) to God in prayer?

How might you implement praying for your city, state, and nation's leaders as a regular practice in your life?

ON MISSION

Power is not necessarily good or bad, but the way in which we use our power results in justice or injustice. Consider that the stewardship of your resources and gifts are an avenue of justice to those in need. How might God be asking you to use your resources and gifts to cultivate justice?

Some examples:

- Contact a local school to see what their needs are for assistance or volunteers.
- Listen to someone's story who may have a different experience than you.
- Help with the resettlement of a refugee family.
- Partner with a local organization to help teach someone English.
- Provide training opportunities for first-time legal offenders.

In this section of Ezekiel the Scripture clearly teaches us that when power is abused, God brings judgment. Yet when power is used for justice, we get to partner with what God is doing.

What is your next step in sharing your God-given power with others?

TAKEAWAY SUMMARY

When you think about justice over power, what is one key takeaway from this lesson?

Write a brief summary of your takeaway on page 106.

PRAYER REQUESTS

SERMON NOTES

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the user to write their sermon notes.