EZEKIEL

Chapter 28

*Prophecy Against the King of Tyre*

**The word of the LORD came to me:  2 “Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ”‘In the pride of your heart you say, “I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.” But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god. 3 Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you? 4 By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself and amassed gold and silver in your treasuries. 5 By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth, and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud. 6 ”‘Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “‘Because you think you are wise, as wise as a god, 7 I am going to bring foreigners against you, the most ruthless of nations; they will draw their swords against your beauty and wisdom and pierce your shining splendor. 8 They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas. 9 Will you then say, “I am a god,” in the presence of those who kill you? You will be but a man, not a god, in the hands of those who slay you. 10 You will die the death of the uncircumcised at the hands of foreigners. I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD.’” have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD.’” 11 The word of the LORD came to me:  12 “Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ”‘You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. 14 You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. 15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. 16 Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. 17 Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. 18 By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. 19 All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.’”**

Of the three major oracles directed against Tyre in chapters 26–28, none is as intriguing—and puzzling—as this one. While its basic message is crystal-clear (overweening pride as cause of downfall), its details emphatically are not. The reader will immediately note parallels with the biblical narrative of the creation and fall in Genesis 1–3, as well as with aspects of the high priestly vestments in Exodus 28. (CC)

The bulk of chapter 28 easily divides into two counterbalanced sections, 28:1–10 and 28:11–19. The first can easily be subdivided into an indictment or accusation (28:1–5), followed by the sentence of judgment in 28:6–10. Then 28:11–19 takes the form of a lament. The usual literary devices separate these sections from one another. Internally in each, the interpreter often meets “polymorphism,” that is, abrupt changes of persons and settings from stanza to stanza. (CSB)

Two further units are appended to the chapter. Ezek 28:20–23 is ostensibly another Gentile oracle against Tyre’s sister city, Sidon, although its contents give no specifics and almost epitomize a Gentile oracle. (CC)

The concluding verses of the chapter (28:24–26) constitute a short salvation oracle. Within the classic prophetic outline, we do not expect oracles of salvation until later, but Ezekiel has a number of short salvation oracles that in many respects anticipate chapters 34–48, where the salvation of reconstituted Israel is the main theme. The repetition of the recognition formula (“and/then they will know that I am Yahweh”) four times in five verses (28:22–26) indicates what Yahweh’s real concern is in these virtual appendixes, and reminds us to what an extent this formula is God’s signature formulation of the Gospel promise. (CC)

It may be of passing interest to note that Tyre is the location of the earliest building known to have been constructed to be a church (a.d. 314), in contrast to earlier house churches. (CC)

**28:2** *ruler of Tyre.* May refer to the city of Tyre as ruler, or to Ittobaal, the king then ruling Tyre (see v. 12). (CSB)

*pride.* Cf. 27:3; Pr 16:18; Ac 12:21–23. (CSB)

The syntax is complicated, and although the conclusion of the thought does not really come until 28:6 (“because … *therefore*”), the essence of Yahweh’s indictment against the king of Tyre is summarized in this opening verse. More details of the setting will follow, but the accusation of self-deification is not all that different from the sin of “be[ing] like God,” which the snake dangled before Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, and in which they readily indulged. This *Ursünde* (the primal sin) is the cause of *Erbsünde*, original sin, which all children of Adam inherit, and from which only Christ can redeem us (e.g., Rom 5:12–21). The application here is not universal, just to one sinner—the king of Tyre—but the theological point is the same. As a violation of the First Commandment and thus of God’s entire Law, this sin is a constant of human history, even if it often is not recognized or acknowledged. And in recent times, especially in some versions of “New Age” thought, the quest to be like God is quite explicitly and crassly urged as the essence of “spirituality.” (CC)

**28:3** *Daniel.* See note on 14:14. (CSB)

There is no justification for taking the verse as two questions (as NIV does, with the LXX and Syriac in antiquity). Neither does the context suggest sarcasm, as some construe it. There is nothing reprehensible about wisdom, as such. In fact, the Bible often regards it as one of God’s greatest gifts. The problem arises in the response, what one does with God’s gift. If one momentarily factors out the condemnation for the arrogant response, this and the following verses remind one of the neutral way in which chapter 27 had discussed Tyre’s commercial prowess; it too was a good gift that was sinfully misused. (CC)

**28:4-5** These verses illustrate the usual usage of “wisdom” in the OT. It is not always an overtly religious or theological term; here wisdom is ascribed to a pagan. Nor does it refer to any theoretical, intellectual power of any sort. Of course, the Scriptures, especially the book of Proverbs (see also Job 28), acknowledge that God is the source of all wisdom, but ordinarily that is simply taken for granted in the biblical text. “Wisdom” has to do with the art of mastering life, and hence the hundred and one situations addressed in the sentential collection of Prov 10:1–22:16 or the proper behavior vis-à-vis the opposite sex in Proverbs 1–9. Very often, however, it concentrates on some specific skill, gift, aptitude, and so on. Its application here is to Tyre’s business acumen. As far as that “wisdom” is concerned, about all that is new here is that the prosperity described in chapter 27 was no happenstance, but deliberate and official royal policy, achieved by the wisdom that God the Creator had given Tyre’s king. The reader must note that it is not that “wisdom” that is condemned as such, but the extreme pride, even the arrogation of divinity to himself that that wisdom engendered. (CC)

Of course, the basic hermeneutical principle of “Scripture interprets Scripture” must ultimately be brought to bear also on passages such as this. It is risky to try to fit the different nuances of “wisdom” into a chronological framework, but the total biblical context gives very explicit theological meaning to “wisdom.” It is developed by Solomon in Prov 1:20–33 and the following parts of the book where wisdom is personified, and flowers when wisdom is hypostasized as the preincarnate Christ in Prov 8:22–23. Inevitably, then, the NT identifies “wisdom” with the Word incarnate, Christ himself, or speaks of the essence of all true wisdom as the confession and practice of the Gospel. (CC)

**28:6-7** The punishments for the king’s arrogance will be threefold. Two are summarily mentioned in 28:7; the third is developed in more detail in 28:8–10. The first two replicate the way an idol would be treated by an invading army. First, the “beauty of [his] wisdom” would be eliminated, here probably referring to the destruction of all the king’s tangible accomplishments (buildings, navies, fortifications, etc.). Second, his “radiance” or halo, which he, claiming divinity, had dared to place upon himself would be “desecrate[d],” indicating that as a mere mortal he had no legitimate claim to such divine glory. (CC)

**28:7** *foreigners.* The Babylonians; see next phrase. (CSB)

**28:8-10** The final verses of the judicial sentence dwell on the third, climactic aspect of the judgment, namely, the king’s ignominious and everlasting death. He will be cast down into the “pit” (28:8). The Hebrew term refers to the grave, often poetically enlarged to describe the whole realm of the dead, as though it were a mass grave. “The pit” (שַׁחַת, see the first textual note on 28:8) connotes the eternal grave of all unbelievers, who in OT language are called the “uncircumcised” (28:10). That is, they are outside God’s covenant of grace and “righteousness” through faith (Gen 15:6), which he established with Abraham, to whom he also gave circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Genesis 17), corresponding to Christian Baptism in the new covenant (Col 2:11–13). (CC)

**28:8** *pit.* Cf. Job 33:22, 24; see note on 26:20. (CSB)

In “the pit,” any and all illusions that the king is an immortal deity will be falsified forever. The same idea will be developed in more detail (and in a way more reminiscent of Isaiah 14) in 32:17–32 of Egypt. Ezek 28:9 initially expresses the denial of the king’s divinity with a rhetorical question, and then 28:10 follows it with the obvious answer. The “violent death” of 28:8 and “the death of the uncircumcised” in 28:10 are substantially synonymous. That uncircumcision was a disgrace to the Israelites is expressed many times, especially regarding the Philistines and Canaanites. Herodotus attests that the Phoenicians practiced circumcision, as apparently did many of Israel’s neighbors. Hence, the expression is insulting to the Tyrians, just as it would be if it were said of apostate Israelites. In both cases, the point is that, regardless of the physical mark, they are excluded from the covenant that grants eternal life. (CC)

**28:10** *uncircumcised.* Used here in the sense of barbarian or uncouth. The Phoenicians, like the Israelites and the Egyptians, practiced circumcision (see 31:18; 32:19). (CSB)

Van Dijk proposes that עֲרֵלִ֛ים should not be translated “uncircumcised,” but “castrated.” He reasons from the practice of mutilating the genitals of the corpses of uncircumcised enemies as a sign of contempt, even for the dead. For example, in 1 Sam 18:25–27, David produced the foreskins of two hundred slain Philistines as the bride price of his first wife. With further abandon, van Dijk claims that “foreskin” in 1 Sam 18:25–27 is a euphemism for penis, so that the slain were castrated. However, the OT evidence does not support van Dijk’s claims. There is some extrabiblical evidence, such as Egyptian texts and base reliefs that make plain that the Egyptians, who also practiced circumcision, often amputated the penises of slain enemies, partly as a way of tallying how many of the enemy had been killed. But this does not change the well-attested meaning of עָרֵל in the OT from “uncircumcised” to “castrated”! (CC)

Still, those other texts may help the modern reader understand different kinds of “death” in the ancient world, and why to “die the death of the uncircumcised” (Ezek 28:10) was considered particularly ignominious. Many commentators understand the expression to imply that the uncircumcised dead would be consigned to the most undesirable part of the netherworld, the lowest part of hell, together with other vile and unclean persons. Just as Scripture suggests that there will be degrees of glory for the redeemed in heaven, other passages do indicate degrees of punishment and dishonor in hell (see Ezek 26:20; 32:19, 23). (CC)

I HAVE SPOKEN – The verdict is sealed by final appeal to God’s Word (“for I have spoken”) and the signatory formula (“says the Lord Yahweh,” 28:10). (CC)

**28:12** *lament.* See note on 19:1. (CSB)

*king of Tyre.* Cf. v. 2, but see note on Isa 14:12–15. (CSB)

*model of perfection.* “Model” is lit. “seal,” as in Hag 2:23, where Zerubbabel is called God’s “signet ring.” With cutting irony Ezekiel depicts the proud king of Tyre as the first man created, radiant with wisdom and beauty. (CSB)

Already this first verse, as well as what follows, does not sound like a קִינָה (“lament/dirge”). Expressions of grief are entirely lacking. Instead the prophet first describes the Tyrian king’s self-image in order to explain why judgment was necessary. Yahweh’s judgment speech begins in earnest in 28:15, and the preceding verses serve to indicate why it was necessary and inevitable. (CC)

Three phrases are used to describe the king of Tyre before his fall. The first one, however, is very unclear, and much debated (see the textual notes). I have understood “guarantor” as using the metaphor of a seal, which will stamp the symmetry of God’s “very good” creation (to borrow language from Genesis 1) on everything. The other two attributes we have met before. “Full of wisdom” echoes 28:3–5, as well as recalling the “wise,” that is, expert sailors in 27:8. “Perfect in beauty” repeats Tyre’s boast in 27:3, with which, as in 27:11, Yahweh seems to be in agreement. (CC)

Here, as in the following material, Yahweh affirms the king’s incomparable splendor and position prior to his *hubris*, which is ample justification of the coming divine judgment. The strategy is similar to that of chapter 27: Yahweh does not deny that the city had beautifully constructed ships and flourishing trade, but then he exploits their pride in their accomplishments by turning the ship into a figure of disaster. (CC)

**28:13** *You were in Eden.*† Like Adam (Ge 2:15). Ezekiel continues to use imagery of the creation and the fall, borrowed from the accounts of primeval events with which the king of Tyre was familiar. Both Adam and the prince of Tyre were in a position of glory and beauty, and both fell into serious sin (see 31:9, 16, 18). (CSB)

It appears as if Yahweh is deliberately breaking up the phrase from Genesis, “the garden of Eden” (e.g., Gen 2:15), into “in Eden” (בְּעֵ֨דֶן) and “the garden of God” (גַּן־אֱלֹהִ֜ים). He is careful to describe it as “the garden of God [אֱלֹהִים],” not “the garden of Yahweh,” in order not to associate the revealed, covenant name of God with this pagan who worshipped other gods. “Eden” and “the garden of God” will appear together again in 31:8–9 in an oracle against the pharaoh of Egypt. (CC)

*every precious stone.* Unlike Adam, who was naked (Ge 2:25), the king is pictured as a fully clothed priest, ordained (v. 14) to guard God’s holy place. The 9 stones are among the 12 worn by the priest (Ex 28:17–20). (The Septuagint lists all 12.) (CSB)

The similarity of the list of precious stones here with those on the breastpiece of the Israelite high priest (Ex 28:17–20) is obvious. As claimant to divinity, the association with gems would be familiar; statues of idols were often arrayed with precious stones (cf. the “man,” apparently the angel Gabriel, of Dan 10:5–6). Although Ezekiel, a priest (1:3), utilizes a list familiar to him, he seems to be at pains to make plain that he is not comparing the king of Tyre with the Israelite high priest. Already the phrase “guarantor of symmetry” in the previous verse points to the first man, Adam, as God’s deputy and representative, not to a high priest. The only possible connection would be if Tyre were one of those places where the king usurped the role of high priest, but of that we have no evidence. Depending on translation, the jewels are described as inlaid in gold settings, not in any חֹ֤שֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט֙, “breastpiece of judgment” (Ex 28:15). (CC)

Besides the similarities in the lists of Exodus (28:17–20) and Ezekiel (28:13), there are also differences, and it is not certain whether those have any significance. Both lists group the stones in triads, presumably reflecting their arrangement in rows. Both lists begin with the same two stones, but from there on the order differs. Ezekiel’s second triad is identical to the fourth triad in Exodus. If these shufflings have any significance, it would seem to be to warn the reader not to associate the two lists in any substantial way. More likely of significance is the absence of one entire triad in Ezekiel. (The LXX restores it, but whether that represents the original text, part of which has been accidentally omitted in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Old Testament or whether it is an artificial harmonization is impossible to say.) In Exodus, a total of twelve was important, because each stone represented one of the twelve tribes, but in Tyre the total might have been without significance. My judgment is that Ezekiel’s purpose in listing the gems is simply to illustrate concretely the fabulous wealth and splendor of the king of Tyre before his fall. (CC)

*settings and mountings.* For the precious stones. (CSB)

*on the day you were created.* Cf. v. 15; Ge 5:2. (CSB)

The use of the Niphal of the verb בָּרָא, “created,” at the end of 28:13 (and again in 28:15) is assuming that the king of Tyre is a *creature*, not the creat*or* he apparently claimed to be. The plural form of “prepared” (כּוֹנָֽנוּ) indicates that the precious stones listed previously are the subject; their origin was more or less simultaneous with God’s creation of the king. (CC)

**28:14** Especially the beginning of the verse bristles with difficulties, but, if my translation is correct, the king of Tyre is addressed as a cherub, “anointed” as a “guardian”—presumably of the garden. Apparently the king is called a “cherub” because that was his own claim. Archaeological finds amply illustrate that this idiom was common coin of the Tyrian realm, because Tyrian art is replete with cherubic figures, and some of them have faces or are found in settings that at least suggest royalty. There appears to be no connection with the cherubim in Ezekiel’s visions in chapters 1–11, which are described quite differently. (CC)

A cherub is a creature, in contradiction of the king’s claim to divinity, but there is no expression of disapproval by God to the Tyrian king’s styling himself as a “cherub.” In the biblical view (cf. God’s address of human potentates as “gods,” אֱלֹהִים, in Ps 82:11) and in accord with Luther’s view of the kingdom on the left hand, God has established human authority (Rom 13:1–7), no matter how it wishes to be addressed. (CC)

Exactly what he had been appointed to protect or guard is not specified, but the idea appears to be in accord with God placing Adam “in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). A less likely parallel is the placing of cherubim (plural instead of the singular here) “to guard the way to the tree of life” after the expulsion from paradise (Gen 3:24). Equally unlikely in my judgment is some analogy with the cherubim who “covered” the ark; the same verb whose participle is here translated “guardian” is used in both Ex 25:20 and 1 Ki 8:7 for cherubim “covering” the ark. If the purpose of the “covering” was protective, the possibilities of parallel are perhaps thinkable. This interpretation could fit the cherubim erected in the holy of holies of the temple (1 Ki 6:23–28; 8:7) as well as the cherubim over the ark (Ex 25:20). No doubt Tyre had sanctuaries, and in pagan ones idols usually occupied the adytum, but it seems doubtful that a god would need cherubic protection. (CC)

That the cherub was also “on the holy mountain of God” (Ezek 28:14) nonpluses some interpreters. How can he be both in God’s garden and on his mountain? If the reference is to some Tyrian tradition, we know nothing of it, and the question cannot be answered. But if the point of departure is biblical, there are possibilities. Genesis 2–3 does not clearly situate the garden of Eden on a mountain, but if gravity operated before the fall as it has since, the garden would have had to have been elevated so that the four rivers could flow out of it. But even if only metaphorically, it is clear that the association of garden and mountain was known in Israel. (CC)

The “mountain” of God is most often associated with Mount Zion (and with Mount Sinai, which is called “the mountain of God” [e.g., Ex 3:1], but that is probably not relevant here), and since part of the meaning of the temple was that of a prolepsis of paradise restored, the mountain picture might have been retrojected to paradise itself. Furthermore, paradise restored is clearly labeled a mountain, and sometimes it is debatable whether the reference is to the present or the future Zion (or both!). This language is especially common in Isaiah. Is 11:9 is clearly eschatological: “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.” Equally clearly are several references in Isaiah 25: “On this mountain, … [Yahweh] will swallow up death forever” (Is 25:7–8, quoted or alluded to three times in the NT, but without the mountain reference: 1 Cor 15:54; Rev 20:14; 21:4), and “The hand of Yahweh will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trampled down under him” (Is 25:10). In the famous parallel passages of two eighth-century prophets, Is 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3, the prophecy is clearly eschatological, but also Zion-centered: “In the latter days, the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the highest of the mountains.” And in Isaiah 14, a pericope already mentioned as having many parallels with Ezekiel 28, “Helel son of dawn” (Vulgate: *lucifer*, Is 14:12) is described as aspiring to “sit on the ‘mount of assembly’ [הַר־מוֹעֵ֖ד] in the far north” (Is 14:13). In addition to the “mount,” that passage has two other clear exmythological metaphors; in biblical context, the heavenly “assembly” would be occupied by angels (1 Kings 22; Job 1–2), not gods. The second metaphor is the location of the mountain in the “north.” That appears again in Ps 48:1–2, where Yahweh describes Zion as “his holy mountain … in the far north,” applying the imagery of Mount Zaphon (“Mount North,” i.e., Mount Casius, the Canaanite equivalent to Mount Olympus) to Jerusalem. (CC)

Finally, even aside from the above biblical references, the merger of “garden” and “mountain” locations here may be no problem if Ezekiel is merely echoing Tyrian language. It must be remembered that mytho*logy* has a “logic,” which is not that of Western thought. Compare the fluidity in the roles—and even the genders—of many pagan deities. (CC)

Parenthetically, we can note yet that the idea of Eden being on top of a mountain has been very influential in religious poetry (e.g., both Dante and John Milton). Apparently, there are many similar Muslim traditions, presumably adapted from Jewish and/or Christian sources. (CC)

The “fiery stones” among which the cherub-king “walked about” (or “back and forth,” as הִתְהַלָּֽכְתָּ, the Hithpael of הָלַךְ, could be rendered) are, arguably, the most obscure of all in this verse. They will be mentioned again in 28:16. Guesses, naturally, are abundant, some of them quite wild sounding. There are possible parallels in both Akkadian and Ugaritic texts, but both of them of uncertain meaning. There is considerable sentiment equating the “fiery stones” with the “precious stone[s]” mentioned in the previous verse. Poetically speaking, and perhaps reflecting a touch of Tyrian pagan magic, that is very possible. Depending on their location, and especially if מְסֻכָה, “covering,” in 28:13 had something to do with a “hedge” or “fence, wall,” they might have signaled the inaccessibility associated with divinity. (CC)

*as a guardian cherub.* Cf. v. 16. The Genesis account has cherubim (plural) stationed at the border of the garden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Ge 3:24). Some read “with” instead of “as.” (CSB)

*holy mount of God.* Cf. v. 16. This does not reflect the Genesis story. See Isa 14:13 for the figure of God dwelling on a mountain. (CSB)

*fiery stones.* The precious stones (v. 13; cf. Rev 4:1–6; 21:15–21). (CSB)

**28:15** *You were blameless … till.* The parallel to Ge 2–3 is clear (see Ge 6:9; 17:1). (CSB)

This verse begins a major shift in the oracle. The rest of it (through 28:18) sounds like a judgment oracle, describing Yahweh’s judgment on the king for his abuse of an originally divine appointment. It can be subdivided into three parts (28:15–16, 17, and 18). Each contains an accusation and uses prophetic perfects (or imperfects with *waw* consecutive) to describe the judgment. One would be surprised to find any parallel to this in Tyrian mythology. (CC)

The description recalls the fall of Satan (see the beginning of the commentary on chapter 28). Moreover, almost certainly Yahweh is applying to the king of Tyre a description of the fall of Adam and Eve (precipitated by Satan, Genesis 3). This is evident by the use of “created” (בָּרָא, 28:13, 15; the same verb used in Gen 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3–4), just as it was evident by the use of “garden” previously (Ezek 28:13). Ezek 28:15 gives no specifics about his sin except the general term עַוְלָה, “iniquity,” perhaps here “sin*ful*ness” more than mere “sin,” which implies a basic change in his רֶּרֶךְ, “conduct, behavior,” perhaps even “character.” The remaining verses will give us some concrete details, which we have heard before, particularly his pride in his success in trade. (CC)

**28:16** *widespread trade … filled with violence.* Tyre’s major crime. (CSB)

Finally, Ezekiel returns to the theme of Tyre’s trade as the occasion and manifestation of its claim to divinity (cf. 28:2–5 above). If the king were really divine, he could make his own rules or at least regard himself as above the law of ordinary mortals. It is another application of the dictum that any infraction of God’s moral law is ultimately disobedience to the First Commandment (Ex 20:3; Deut 5:7). Tyre apparently had a reputation in antiquity for subethical business practices. Compare the Bible’s use of כְּנַעֲנִי, “Canaanite,” in the often pejorative sense of a dishonest businessman, most relevantly in Is 23:8 (Isaiah’s oracle against Tyre). Tyre was the main survivor of the original Canaanite population after Israel conquered the promised land under Joshua. “Illicit profit” and other translations may obscure just how strong the language is here; usually חָמָס refers to physical violence, even murder (e.g., Ezek 7:23). The Bible nowhere condemns trade or “capitalism,” as such, but the fraud and other dishonest behaviors to which it is vulnerable. (CC)

In 28:16b, the resultant judgment, Ezekiel may reveal his priestly background by using a liturgical verb, literally, “profane, desacralize,” when God says, “I expelled you.” Certainly in OT usage, the liturgical and the ethical were connected. Just as “holy” applies to worship, so “clean” applies to daily life. The holy and the unholy are mutually exclusive—yet God justifies the ungodly, sanctifies and restores holiness to sinners by his grace in Christ. God declared the king “defiled” (unclean and unholy), seeking to move him to repentance, but the proud king of Tyre would not have repented; if he had, only God’s declarative statement of forgiveness (justification) could have altered the king’s state of being “defiled.” The use of such liturgical language continues into the NT, and into our own usage, as when we confess that we are “sinful and unclean.” (CC)

**28:17** *threw you to the earth.* Expulsion from the heavenly garden. (CSB)

The second accusation and ensuing punishment in this verse are sequels to the first ones (28:15–16). Here the themes of 28:2 and 28:7 are highlighted: overweening pride in “beauty/splendor” and “wisdom.” They were gifts of God to be received with thanksgiving and to be used to his glory, not a means of self-aggrandizement. As the king of Tyre had once flaunted them before his fellow kings, now they will gloat over his downfall into “the netherworld,” that is, hell, often called Sheol (see the textual note on אֶרֶץ in this sense here in 28:17). He who was once ensconced in the garden on “the holy mountain of God” (28:14) is now consigned to the underworld. (CC)

**28:18** The third accusation returns once again to the unscrupulous trading practices of Tyre, focusing on its king. Such behavior “defiled, profaned, desecrated” (the verb חָלַל again, as in 28:16) the sacred place. Again a liturgical term is used in a moral sense. (CC)

Whatever the details of the punishment, the theological point is the familiar one of sin causing its own destruction; its own punishment is inherent in the iniquitous behavior itself. “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal 6:7). The ashes after the conflagration will give little evidence of the former glory. (CC)

**28:19** The oracle ends on words almost identical to the final ones of the previous oracle (27:36). As its use in Job 18:14 intimates, בַּלָּהָה, conventionally translated “horror,” probably implies the netherworld again. Perhaps the metaphors are slightly mixed, but, although empirically he is exterminated, in another sense he has become a denizen of the underworld, a horrible end, as far removed from the holy mountain as conceivable. The very thought of the finality and irreversibility of death is always, from an earthly perspective, a horrifying prospect. But the Bible (and thus the OT too!) has much more to say about death, so that all who believe in the resurrected Christ do not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). (CC)

*A Prophecy Against Sidon*

**20 The word of the LORD came to me:  21 “Son of man, set your face against Sidon; prophesy against her  22 and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ”‘I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory within you. They will know that I am the LORD, when I inflict punishment on her and show myself holy within her. 23 I will send a plague upon her and make blood flow in her streets. The slain will fall within her, with the sword against her on every side. Then they will know that I am the LORD. 24 ”‘No longer will the people of Israel have malicious neighbors who are painful briers and sharp thorns. Then they will know that I am the Sovereign LORD. 25 ”‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When I gather the people of Israel from the nations where they have been scattered, I will show myself holy among them in the sight of the nations. Then they will live in their own land, which I gave to my servant Jacob.  26 They will live there in safety and will build houses and plant vineyards; they will live in safety when I inflict punishment on all their neighbors who maligned them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.’”**

**28:21** *set your face.* See note on 20:46. (CSB)

*Sidon.* See 27:8 and note. This is the only time in the OT that Sidon is mentioned apart from Tyre (cf. Isa 23:1–4; Jer 47:4; Joel 3:4; Zec 9:2). (CSB)

**28:22** *I am against you.* Possibly because of Sidon’s involvement in the Jerusalem summit conference (Jer 27:3; see note on 5:8). (CSB)

*I will gain glory within you.* The Lord’s glory would be recognized in Sidon’s punishment. (CSB)

I will display my glory” (וְנִכְבַּדְתִּ֖י, 28:22) pinpoints Ezekiel’s overriding concern in 28:20–23. The Niphal form theoretically could be translated as a passive, but is better understood in a reflexive sense: “I will show myself glorious” or the like. The Niphal of כָּבַד appears in Ezekiel again only in 39:13, where God displays his glory by destroying Gog (cf. “I will establish my glory among the Gentiles” in 39:21). (CC)

Its most important antecedent is probably in Ex 14:4, 17–18, where Yahweh’s display of his glory is given as his motivation for the rout of the Egyptians in the exodus. The recognition formula is repeated there, “Egypt will know that I am Yahweh” (Ex 14:4, 18), just as it is repeated here, “and/then they will know that I am Yahweh” (Ezek 28:22–23). I will endorse Allen calling this a “typological parallel.” It is a classical example of inner-OT typology, of which there are many examples. (CC)

As Christians recognize, the correspondence extends into the NT, possibly expressed most explicitly in the Johannine theme of Christ’s “glorification” in his crucifixion, which was simultaneously his triumph over death and Satan (see John 17). To complete the typological picture, it applies to believers, who daily die and rise with Christ in Baptism (Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13), until Christ returns again in glory, ushering in the bodily resurrection and the final victory over all opposition at the consummation. Thus not only this oracle, but all the Gentile oracles can begin to be appropriated as an intrinsic part of the Gospel, of a piece of what Christ did climactically in being incarnated “for us men and for our salvation” (Nicene Creed). (CC)

The שְׁפָטִ֖ים, “punishments” (28:22), will be detailed slightly at the beginning of 28:23. Although these will, indeed, be judgments, the forensic background of the word should not be forgotten. These are basically “verdicts” of the heavenly court, by which all history is constituted. (CC)

Parallel to “I will display my glory” (נִכְבַּדְתִּ֖י, 28:22) is “I will display my holiness” (וְנִקְרַּ֥שְׁתִּי, 28:22). Sometimes God’s glory and holiness are two sides of the coin: his holiness is his glory concealed, while his glory is his holiness revealed. But here the two verbs are used almost synonymously. (In Ex 29:43 the two together form a hendiadys.) Everywhere else in Ezekiel, the Niphal of קָדַשׁ has a public character, effecting confession of Yahweh (20:41; 28:25; 36:23; 38:16 [of the defeat of Gog again, like the Hithpael in 38:23, and developed in 39:27]). That idea is probably implicit here as well, although localized in one city. But in “holiness” the accent is not, as such, on Yahweh’s “weight” and dignity, as on the zealous fire native to his essence that burns up all resistance. His “holiness” can also bring blessings, as when he provided water in the desert (Num 20:13). The two concepts, but with the functional accent on “holy,” are paired also in Lev 10:3 in connection with the destruction of Nadab and Abihu by divine fire after they had “offered profane fire before Yahweh” (Lev 10:1) by unauthorized use of incense. (CC)

**28:23** Yahweh’s agents of judgment are now unleashed to do their deadly work in Sidon’s midst. The accent is totally on Yahweh as the cause of the judgment, which is the confession Yahweh wants the people to make, however grudgingly; there is no reference to Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh’s agent in carrying out the judgment. Instead, here we have the agency of “plague,” “blood,” and “sword,” similar to the agency of plague,” “famine,” and “sword” in 5:12 and 6:12, and “famine,” “wild animals,” “sword,” and “plague” in 14:12–20. (CC)

**28:24** *painful briers.* For references to Israel’s enemies as briers see Nu 33:55; Jos 23:13. (CSB)

As we have seen, Yahweh has the habit of repeatedly interjecting brief oracles of hope or salvation (e.g., 11:14–21; 16:59–63; 20:33–44) in the midst of extended judgment oracles. The real purpose of his judgment oracles is to elicit repentance and prepare the people to receive his Gospel promises in faith; those promises become his major theme in chapters 33–48. The *waw* (“and”) at the beginning of the verse connects it syntactically with what precedes, so technically we must regard it as transitional to what follows. Here the Gospel is stated in terms of Israel’s permanent release from the obloquy of its pagan neighbors, of which Sidon is only the last named example. One might have expected this Gospel promise not to come until chapter 33, after the end of the oracles against Egypt (chapters 29–32), but in a way, its impact is greater here. (CC)

In the great reversal, God’s own people, the new Israel, finally will be freed from their rebellious tendencies and will confess the lordship of their God and all that follows from that. (CC)

**28:25** *When I gather … Israel.* A frequent promise in Ezekiel and later (see 11:17; 20:34, 41–42; 29:13; 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; 38:8; 39:27; Ne 1:9; Zec 10:8, 10). (CSB)

*my servant Jacob.* Cf. 37:25. For the promise see Ge 28:13; 35:12; Ps 105:10–11. (CSB)

The citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh,” indicates that the essence of the promise prepared for by the transitional 28:24 has definitively begun. A major part of the great reversal will be the regathering of God’s people and their resettlement on their own land. This by itself will demonstrate Yahweh’s holiness in the eyes of the nations. Ezek 36:16–32 will develop this theme at length. The NT terms the Christians scattered throughout the world as the “diaspora” (διασπορά, James 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1), and the Gospel promise is that at the return of Christ, God’s new Israel, consisting of all baptized believers (Gal 3:26–29), shall be gathered together into the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21). (CC)

From the OT perspective, only one land could be their “own,” namely, that promised to “my servant Jacob” (Ezek 28:25). The phrase occurs again in Ezekiel only in 37:25, but is frequent in restoration oracles of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Why is Jacob singled out? The patriarchal promise was first given to Abraham, of course. The traditional answer is that all of the sons of Jacob were heirs of the promised land, whereas Abraham and Isaac each had one son (Ishmael and Esau, respectively) who was excluded from the promise. (CC)

**28:26** *live there in safety.* A perennial ideal that had become an especially meaningful promise (cf. 34:28; 38:8, 11, 14; 39:26; Lev 25:18–19; Jer 23:6; 32:37; 33:16). (CSB)

*houses … vineyards.* Basic necessities of the good life (cf. Isa 65:21; Jer 29:5, 28; Am 9:14). (CSB)

The “security” of the reconstituted Israel is emphasized by repetition. Concrete signs of security in permanent repatriation will be the building of houses and planting of vineyards. Secure living is often comparably described as occurring under one’s own vine (arbor) and/or fig tree (2 Ki 18:31 || Is 36:16; Micah 4:4; Zech 3:10). But this security is not one that is sufficient by and for itself as the ultimate possession. Rather, it involves the recognition and confession of Yahweh as “their [his people’s] God” (Ezek 28:26), an allusion to the oft-repeated (in slightly different words) and basic covenant promise, “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (e.g., Lev 26:12; see also, e.g., Gen 17:8; Ex 6:7). (CC)

Like all OT promises, this one is couched in terms of the old covenant, the not-totally-known future in terms of the known past. It is not annulled in the NT, but fulfilled in Christ, where all the terms are filled with their ultimate Christological intent. “Israel” is no longer a theocratic nation; “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) consists of all baptized believers in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike (Gal 3:26–29). The present “promised land” is not to be defined or limited geographically; as in the formulation of the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3), the parameters of the present kingdom of God extend to the ends of the earth. Yet they are still concrete: God’s kingdom comes and is present where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached faithfully and his Sacraments, Baptism and his Supper, are administered rightly. Thus the “body of Christ” is where Christ’s body and blood are sacramentally present and received in faith (1 Cor 10:16–17; 11:23–32). His Word and Sacraments promise the resurrection of the body and life in the eternal heavenly land. And the security from enemies is not any mortal’s own achievement, but the ultimate gift of Christ himself and his victory over Satan and all his cohorts. Thus in the eschaton, God will dwell with his redeemed people in Christ; “they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). (CC)