

International Tension

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[0 : 00] I noted today that a man has just broken the world record by speaking non-stop for 124 hours.

Tempting, isn't it? I'm looking at eight chapters tonight. And some of you know how long I take over one chapter sometimes.

So settle in. We might have toilet breaks later on. Let's pray. O God of the universe, you've disclosed your purposes for this universe to us in your word.

Open our eyes, our hearts and our wills to see, to understand, to obey and submit.

For the sake and glory of your holy name. Amen. There's a trend in some modern Christian songs that I'm not particularly very fond of, I must say.

[1 : 16] And that is to have what's called a bridge. We've had it tonight in one of the songs and it seems to me that more and more we keep getting these bridges as though modern Christian songs are trying to emulate Venice or something like that.

It seems to me as a sort of pause. We have the chorus and then we sort of pause before we get to the next chorus. And there's an element of frustration in me because often I find the bridges are a bit dull as part of the whole song.

And I'd much rather just sing the chorus again and be done with the bridge. Now, I'm not just a grumpy old man having a little whinge here. But it does strike me that the eight chapters, mind you, that we're looking at tonight is a bit like a bridge in one of those songs.

It's a deliberate bridge. And the eight chapters tonight incorporate oracles or sayings against seven different nations that I'll come to in a minute.

They're often skipped over, I guess, by people like me who don't particularly like bridges and would rather get to the better stuff that follows. And I can understand that in the book of Ezekiel.

[2 : 21] For 24 chapters, Ezekiel has prophesied words almost exclusively of judgment against Israel. It's pretty meaty stuff and it's obviously central to the message of the book of the prophet Ezekiel.

At the end of that, in chapter 24, Jerusalem is under siege. So, in chapter 24, verse 2, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that's in verse 1, the word of the Lord came to me, mortal, write down the name of this day, this very day.

The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. Now, that's a modern newflash. It's an ancient newflash in modern speed.

That is, that very day, Ezekiel is told, Jerusalem is besieged. It would have taken many days to hear that news by a human news correspondent who would have had to travel overland 1,500 miles to bring that news.

But God's revealed it to him this very day, Jerusalem is under siege. A siege that lasted in the end for 18 months.

[3 : 37] Sieges in warfare in general are quite terrible things. In ancient warfare, it was typical. You'd surround a walled city and you'd basically try and starve them out.

They'd not have a food supply and often not a water supply and you would besiege in the end that they would just give in and capitulate. And we know from the Old Testament and other sources that in this 18-month terrible siege of Jerusalem, that the Jews within the walls of Jerusalem, they had water from a water tunnel dug earlier by Hezekiah, but some of them even practised in the end cannibalism to stay alive in this terrible 18-month time.

It's not only in ancient warfare, of course. What we're seeing in Gaza is a bit like a siege and in some ways that's what Israel is trying to do is to stop the tunnel leaks getting out into Egypt from Gaza.

A terrible, terrible situation. And the same, for example, in more recent years in Sarajevo, where I was on holidays recently, seeing the tunnels they dug for a kilometre or so under the walls to try and bring food and supplies in when Sarajevo was besieged in the early 90s.

Ezekiel 24 ends in tension. Jerusalem is besieged. Away in exile is Ezekiel and those in the refugee-type camp with him.

[5 : 01] And from God's word, they know that this exile, this siege has just begun in their home city, Jerusalem, which at that stage still had its temple standing.

They'd been deported 10 years earlier, nearly, and now for this day onwards for 18 months, it would take a bit longer for them to hear the end of the siege and its result. They wonder what is going to happen.

And so at the end of chapter 24, we get from verse 25, Remember, for the last five or so years, Ezekiel's mouth has been closed, at least his tongue stuck to the top of his mouth, unable to speak, except for the very words that he was commanded by God to speak.

But on that day, when the news comes of what will be the fall of Jerusalem, after 18 months of siege, on that day, your mouth shall be opened to the one who has escaped.

And you shall speak and no longer be silent, so you shall be assigned to them, and they shall know that I am the Lord. 24 chapters of almost unrelenting judgment come to an end.

[6 : 37] But we're in suspense. We want to know the outcome. We want to move on to hear the news of the escapee from Jerusalem. But we get this bridge.

And at one level, deliberately, it is adding to and sustaining the tension. This is the bit of Ezekiel that's not chronological. So all the oracles thus far have been in chronological order.

And the ones from chapter 33 onwards will be also in chronological order. But Ezekiel, or whoever has actually compiled this book, has brought together the oracles against seven different nations, not against Israel, and put them together in the middle.

It's a bridge to, in part, rhetorically create suspense. That we're waiting, and we're waiting, and we're waiting, and waiting for the news to come.

It's adding to our own tension, as we read this book. And it would have added, in a sense, perhaps even for the exiles at the time, as some of these oracles do fit in this chronological period.

[7 : 46] But it's also adding a theological weight. For we'll see that at the heart of this passage is really a bridge from judgment to hope.

Because what follows in the 33 to 48 chapters of Ezekiel are almost totally words of hope, not judgment. So this section functions for us as creating that bridge of suspense.

A bit like my frustration singing these songs with dull bridges. I'd rather sing the chorus again and get straight into it. And so here, this is delaying us, slowing us down, so we actually feel the length of a siege.

If you were under siege in Jerusalem or any other place for that matter, every day would feel like a year. How long are you going to last? And that's what this section of Ezekiel is doing.

Creating that sense of waiting and longing, at least in this case, for the news to come. Like so much of Ezekiel, the book, it is very artfully structured.

[8 : 55] I've already shown how the book as a whole is structured with this bridge in between judgment and hope, deliberately and theologically giving us a transfer of ideas.

But in this section itself, chapters 25 to 32, eight chapters, seven nations are dealt with. The first six dealt with anti-clockwise, if you can picture Israel in the middle.

So starting from the east, six nations going from east down to south, to the west and up to the north. Ammon and Moab, down to Edom, across to Philistia on the Mediterranean coast, up to Tyre and then Sidon.

Six nations in that order. In the middle, there's just a little couple of verses of hope, which we'll come to later.

And then the last, the longest oracle against Egypt. Not a direct neighbour, but apart from Babylon, the main superpower of the time, the only potential rival to Babylon's world empire.

[9 : 59] For the oracle of Tyre, which is the longest of the first six, seven times we get the expression, this is what the sovereign Lord says, or in different translations, something like that.

And in the oracle to Egypt, seven times again, the word of the Lord came to me, deliberately structured with these numbers seven. There are 97 verses of the first six oracles, and 97 verses of the one to Egypt, and three verses in the middle, to do with Israel.

So, it's very carefully structured. The number seven, of course, suggests completeness coming from the seven days of the week in Genesis 1 and the beginning of Genesis 2.

And so, here the idea is, yes, these are really these seven nations, but typically in the earlier part of the Old Testament, there are seven enemies of Israel in the land itself that are to be defeated in Deuteronomy 7, as it happens, for example.

So, here the idea is of a sense of completeness as well from this number seven. And the centre point comes at the end of chapter 28.

[11:09] We'll come back to these verses, but let me just read them at least verse 24 now. The house of Israel shall no longer find a prickling briar or piercing thorn among all their neighbours who have treated them with contempt, and they shall know that I am the Lord God.

It's a sort of backhanded hope for Israel, an implicit hope because of the judgment coming upon their enemies and their neighbours.

But that statement of hope, small though it is here, in the centre of this bridge, is the key for unlocking these eight chapters and why they're here. Well, from east to south to west to north we go.

In chapter 25, four neighbours of Israel that we heard from the reading, be thankful that we didn't hear all eight chapters read and all eight chapters preached. We might really be here for a very long time.

These four nations have been constant problems for Israel. The first three are actually related to Israel. Ammon and Moab descend from the sons of Lot in the book of Genesis.

[12:22] Edom descends from Esau, the twin brother of Jacob in the book of Genesis. So, they are meant to be kinsfolk but more often than not in the Old Testament they're enemies. When Israel arrived in the promised land in the time of Joshua, they had earlier passed through in Numbers and Deuteronomy, Eden, Moab and Ammon without fighting although those nations were reluctant to let them through to a degree.

The Philistines on the west coast, on the Mediterranean coast, they were more recent arrivals. They only arrived in about the 12th century BC from somewhere else in the Mediterranean it seems and they settled along the Gaza Strip in effect.

Gaza, the city today, was one of their five cities. Ashkelon that you've heard of in the news in recent days was another of their five so the Gaza Strip is technically smaller than what was Philistine territory and they were the arch enemies of Israel in the early settlement years in Joshua, in Judges and in 1 Samuel as well.

David fighting Goliath, Goliath was a Philistine for example. When Samson brings down the temple and commits the original sort of suicide terrorism act in Judges it's against the Philistines that he does that.

They're ancient enemies. Why these nations? Ammon and Moab were gloating at the capitulation of Jerusalem yet to be destroyed but it's capitulation.

[13:49] It's just like what you read in the English tabloids in the last couple of weeks. They are gloating that Australia lost the Test Match series and they are all ready to inflict something upon us in the ashes in England later in the year.

Well, at a more serious level of course Ammon and Moab are rubbing their hands thinking our enemy has been defeated by Babylon. They're enjoying the defeat of Israel.

They're boasting about it. Chapter 25 verse 3 say to the Ammonites because you say aha over my sanctuary when it was profaned and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate and over the house of Judah when it went into exile that is because you're laughing and gloating that they've fallen and there's already an exile.

The same for Moab in verse 8 for example. They say the house of Judah is just like all the other nations and God is saying by implication here no it's not.

They might have capitulated but they're still special. Edom and Philistia they wreak vengeance. Edom we know joined in with Babylon to help defeat Jerusalem.

[15:05] We read that in Psalm 137 amongst other places. So for them it's the issue of vengeance. Chapter 25 verse 12 thus says the Lord to Edom because Edom acted revengefully against Judah and grievously offended in taking vengeance upon them and similarly the vengeance idea in verse 15 about the Philistines.

Well for gloating and for vengeance for these four nations all of them will suffer destruction at the hand of God. Verse 4 for Ammon as an example therefore I'm handing you over to the people of the east.

East where Babylon is. Similarly for Moab in verse 9 therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the towns on its frontier the glory of the country names of some of its places.

I will give it along with Ammon to the people of the east as a possession. Interestingly Israel was not allowed to take Ammon and Moab as a possession in Deuteronomy 2 but here God is transferring it to Babylon.

And similarly later for Edom and for the Philistines God will avenge against them for their vengeance against Judah. What this is saying to us is that even though God is punishing Judah even though Jerusalem is capitulated and it has a puppet government supposedly in the hands of Babylon although it's resisting against it that's why the siege is on it's not the end for Judah.

[16:39] As I say it's a sort of backdoor hope in a way it's just a little flicker of a hope here. Judah remains special. You gloat over their defeat I will punish you.

There remains something about God and Judah though the whole of Judah is about to be wiped out as Jerusalem will fall at the end of this siege.

A hundred miles north of Jerusalem was a major Mediterranean trading port. The four nations mentioned so far were fairly small in international affairs at this time but further north was something much greater much more influential one of the major trading ports of the ancient world renowned for its beauty in effect an island with a causeway across to the mainland although the causeway was substantially built later by Alexander the Great.

It was the centre at this time of economic wealth of mercantile power in the ancient world. Against it is a much much longer oracle than the four we've seen in chapter 25.

This is the nation of Tyre Tyre and its king are doomed judged by God.

[18:07] Seven times thus says the Lord God a word of judgment. This oracle at the beginning of chapter 26 is dated after Jerusalem fell and as a result of its fall its destruction the walls obliterated the temple destroyed Tyre seized the opportunity to claim the trade routes and the trade and economic vacuum left by Jerusalem's fall not that Jerusalem was that big but it has no sympathy for Judah it's just greedy for more and so it's prepared to come and pick up the pieces of broken Judah and add it to its own wealth and economic might.

So chapter 26 verse 2 mortal because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem aha broken is the gateway of the peoples it has swung open to me I shall be replenished now that it is wasted that is I'll pick up the booty I'll loot the place I'll get some economic benefit from the end of Jerusalem but thus says the Lord in verse 3 it will face God's wrath and then thus says the Lord again verses 7 and 8 Nebuchadnezzar the mighty emperor of Babylon its general the one leading the siege against Jerusalem he will besiege Tyre something that in history happened for 13 years although in the end Tyre didn't in the end get destroyed then the effect of Tyre's fall will reverberate around the world try to imagine it might be hard but the collapse of the major economic force its reverberations will be felt along the coastlands all the other nations so verse 15 thus says the Lord

God shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan when the slaughter goes on within you they fear the tyrant of Tyre in its prime and they will fear the vacuum that its collapse leaves and thus says the Lord for the third fourth time Tyre will be laid finally to waste verse 19 as a result of being laid waste in chapter 26 chapter 27 for the fifth time thus says the Lord lament Tyre's fall not lamented in the sense of you grieve it this is a really sad thing but lamented in the sense of slight mockery of its own boastful power the meter of the poetry of verse 27 is a bit like a funeral dirge in a way similar to say

Amos chapter 5 that is this is now casting into the funeral of Tyre in a sense its real death as a nation and as an economic force the reason for this in verse 2 of chapter 27 Tyre you have said I am perfect in beauty it's like the wicked witch in snow white who's the fairest of them all you think you're perfect in beauty in fact Tyre ancient Tyre was a beautiful city your borders are in the heart of the seas your builders made perfect your beauty they're boastful proud they're arrogant verses 4 to 11 in fact portray Tyre as a ship an understandable analogy to use when Tyre was this economic trading port it really was the main port of the ancient Mediterranean world at this stage with trade going all over the place and that's why it was so wealthy the ship verses 12 to 25 is laid and with goods it's as though

Ezekiel somehow has got the merchant's inventory for one of the ships sailing out of Tyre and there are goods that come from all over the place even Tarshish way away in Spain probably and various other places around the ancient Near East but this ship that's described really the city in verses 12 to 25 sinks in verses 25 to 29 and then is mourned at the end of the chapter it's a bit of a parody it's likening the city to the ship which was of course its main means of wealth but it sinks and is lamented not because lots of people necessarily grieve it but as a way of forcefully showing its death in a sombre slightly mocking tone sixthly thus says the lord against time in chapter 28 verse 2 the focus now shifts to the king of time but still symbolizing the whole nation not just the one person he's hugely wealthy verse 4 of chapter 28 by your wisdom and your understanding you have amassed wealth for yourself and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries imagine all the port taxes that this king has become wealthy from all the goods from exotic places that have ended up in his palace built on trade but therefore thus says the lord in verse 7 i will bring strangers against you the most terrible of the nations they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor and so seventhly against

[24 : 07] Tyre thus says the lord in verse 12 lament the king Tyre is destroyed and lamented chapters 26 and 27 and in chapter 28 the king is destroyed and then lamented two parallel sections in a way making up this long oracle of seven parts against the economic might of Tyre and the king sins in particular but the nations as a whole are described here in verse 16 to 18 in the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence and you sinned verse 17 your heart was proud because of your beauty you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor and in verse 18 by the multitude of your iniquities in the unrighteousness of your trade violence pride corruption in effect are being described in those three verses and so the mighty wealthy and boastful nation of

Tyre to the north of Judah is brought to naught it was godlike in many ways exercising a vast control the king of Tyre it seems maybe even was thinking of himself as a god so supreme in control and wealthy was he you can imagine them writing a sort of song about ancient Tyre you know rule oh Tyre oh Tyre rules the waves Tyre never never shall be slaves can't quite think of a tune but you get the idea the living god will have none of it he'll have none of this boastful arrogance and pomp and circumstance of Tyre and that's why this oracle of judgment is here and then almost as a footnote the sixth side on its smaller neighbor to the north in verses 20 to 23 of chapter 28 six nations six neighbors of

Judah surrounding it on every side more or less all gloating and reveling in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem but God will have the final say and God will have the last laugh the seventh and final nation is not an exact neighbor that's Egypt the oracle against Egypt is as long as those other six put together again 97 verses running from chapter 29 through to the end of 32 Egypt was the only possible rival to Babylon's supremacy of these days in fact not long before they'd actually fought a sort of drawn match 605 but since then Babylon was getting stronger and stronger the reason why Egypt is addressed at such length here is because Egypt was the only political hope for Judah of course it was a vain hope a futile hope because of God rather than Babylon but the Israelites besieged and even before the siege began as they brought about this foolish stupid unrest against Babylon their supremos in effect in this decade 598 to 588 the puppet king resisted Babylon tried to get Egypt on side to fight against Babylon it was a futile gesture and that's what brought the siege of Nebuchadnezzar and in the end the destruction of Jerusalem they weren't going to leave it standing for the second time so to Egypt many in Judah turned you know that in the book of Jeremiah for example he was taken forcibly with others to exile in Egypt because they thought that was their only place of hope but Egypt itself will be defeated by Babylon is the sombre warning of this oracle as well seven times the word of the

Lord came to Ezekiel again this sort of complete number seven times the word of the Lord came to him in chapter 29 verse 1 to 16 saying that Pharaoh likened to a crocodile because they inhabited the Nile and the Nile was central to the fertility and wealth of Egypt Pharaoh would be slain that word came in time of the siege the word of Egypt in verse 17 to 21 of chapter 29 Nebuchadnezzar will plunder Egypt something he later did the third time the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel about Egypt in chapter 30 verses 1 to 19 that Egypt will be judged on the day of the Lord a fourth time the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel about Egypt saying that Nebuchadnezzar will break the arms of 26 at the end of that chapter it's interesting that the

[29 : 22] Pharaoh of the time Hophra likened used the symbol of a strong arm for himself so look at verse 21 as just a sample of this mortal I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt it is not

being bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage so that it may become strong to wield the sword the very symbol the strong arm of this Pharaoh is used as the picture of breaking here here is the big chief strong arm who's become the little chief broken arm not so intimidating it's making a mockery of the boast of power of the Egyptian Pharaoh and the point is there is no hope for rescue for Judah from Egypt if they turn to Egypt for rescue it is futile a fifth time the word of the

Lord came to Ezekiel about Egypt that Egypt is like a cosmic tree a tree as big as the universe and it will be felled and cut down we talk of tall poppy syndromes this is a huge tree syndrome and it will be chopped down some of you know I've just been this last week speaking at a preacher's conference in Burma in Rangoon and still the effects of Cyclone Nagus are around there were some huge trees in Yangon and they've fallen and just near the hotel where I was staying there is this area it's not really a park it's a wasteland in a way and still the stumps of those fallen trees are there massive trees with and the world will fall down in judgment by

God a sixth time the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel concerning Egypt saying that Egypt is like a monster but will be destroyed that's chapter 32 verses 1 to 16 and then the last part of 32 seventh time the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel saying that Pharaoh and his army will be sent to the underworld to Sheol to the place of the dead and this section is a bit like a little guided tour of Sheol pretty depressing really it's a bit like the funeral rites of Egypt corresponding in a way to the laments about Tyre this is death this is the end of Egypt when the roll is called down yonder Egypt will be there is what this is saying think of what this means then to a rather motley despondent group of refugees by the Cheba Canal in Babylon they lamented how can we worship the Lord in a strange land you can is the message here you can because Yahweh is supreme Yahweh is sovereign Yahweh is sovereign over every nation great or small that's the message of this passage to those refugees in exile not to the Jews holding out in the siege in Jerusalem not to them who are turning to Egypt for hope the book of Ezekiel is a message to the exiles to those who felt rather hopeless as refugees in exile this international roll call of seven nations they're all doomed to fall great or small doomed to fall because Yahweh the God of Israel the one true living God is sovereign above all the schemes of man

Yahweh's purposes will not be defeated by any nation by any king by any wealthy economic supremo man yes the fall of Jerusalem the destruction of its temple at the end of this siege looks as though God has abandoned Judah that it's like one of the other nations that it is no longer special to God of Israel at all but there is a moral consistency in God's judgment that he judges Israel for its sins for its idolatry its refusal to heed God's word for acting like a pagan nation in effect we saw that in the vision of chapter 8 a couple of weeks ago the terrible idolatry of all sorts and by all people committed in the very courts and in a precinct of the holy temple of Jerusalem there is a moral consistency in God's judgment whether God's people or the Gentiles but

[34 : 40] I wonder as we read through this so briefly I wonder if it struck you how peculiarly modern up to date these words are boastful nations ruling the waves arrogance in their economic power their trade and commercial might and influence over not just their employees but over the world in many ways the godlike nationalism we haven't had time to look at the words that describe the kings as being like God and playing God in effect king of Tyre and king of Egypt and the blind and rather amoral patriotism then and now rulers full of arrogance power ruthlessness and wealth we haven't moved far in two and a half millennia have we this word still sounds the truth of today as it did then you see these oracles remind us that kingdoms rise and fall not just as part of a natural random sort of thing kingdoms rise and fall under

God even kingdoms dealing with other kingdoms where God's people are not directly involved so Babylon will destroy Tyre up there and when Tyre doesn't quite fall will be sent to destroy Egypt but in a sense none of that is directly affecting Israel or Judah the people of God that is it's not just God's sovereignty when his own people are involved with other nations it's God's sovereignty when other nations are involved with other nations even if they're not God's people kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall it's hard to imagine how quickly all that happens a hundred years ago the sun was reputedly never setting on the British Empire it doesn't rise on a British Empire today and some would say that Britain is struggling not to be subsumed by the EU the

Third Reich was going to last for a millennium well millenniums are pretty quick then it didn't last very long the might of the Soviet Union was going to conquer the world but a crumbling hole in a wall in Berlin in 1989 brought an end to it like a stack of dominoes the might of the United States looked pretty impregnable a decade ago maybe a few months ago we see all those vain hopes and

patriotic boasting attached to the President Elect of the United States for whom we certainly must pray but God bless America sounds a little bit hollow in the light of these oracles of Ezekiel it strikes me but not just nations think of the corporate wealth and influence and power yielded by individuals and companies in our world the

Microsofts and Nikes and Googles of our world in 1999 now a full decade ago and maybe it's changed in the financial collapsing General Motors was bigger than Denmark in its financial influence Toyota bigger than Norway and Ford bigger than South Africa that was a decade ago and now a decade later General Motors and Ford at least were begging George Bush for money to stay alive what looks so mighty and powerful so quickly collapses and falls in a heap major banks and companies would be down the gurgle without governments bailing them out in the last six months the top companies of the 20 years ago are very different from the top companies of today and in 20 years time it'll be a similar change we don't quite notice the change when we see it just day by day people rise people fall companies rise companies fall nations rise nations fall and it's all under the sovereignty of the

God of the universe and these verses here these chapters here are warning us not to pin our hopes on some form of nationalistic patriotic fervor some form of political system some form of political hero or guru or leader not to pin our hopes on some trading wealth or security and finances or anything like that the global financial crisis is probably a very timely warning because it makes us realise how real and supreme God is over a world that until a few months ago looked so secure and rich and strong but as well as warning these oracles against nations provide great encouragement as I said I was just in Burma this last week teaching and got back yesterday my third trip to that country it would be very easy to be despondent in Burma if you're a believer a Christian the government is one of the worst in the world rated I think in the top three or four or five of corruption in the world the government have all the wealth all the rich cars all the transport the electricity they've got everything and the poor live on a few dollars a week

[40 : 47] Christians struggle to survive because they're oppressed in that country and just in the last fortnight the government's issued another decree to try and close down all churches that meet in flats or apartments you see churches are not allowed to build church buildings unless they're an official church like the Anglican church or the Roman Catholic or a couple of others but the independent type churches and the spread of Anglican and other churches are forbidden in a way well they still go on my friend who pastors a city church in Yangon the president of the college I teach in he said they come to us every few months and say you've got to close down you're illegal he says oh okay they go he stays and they keep on meeting and they keep on singing aloud their praises on the top floor of an apartment in Burma it's surprising the Christians say we're waiting the government will fall it cannot last forever because God is supreme it's been a real challenge to realise the strength and depth and reality of good biblical faith this word here is a great encouragement to

Christians in despair who think that they're the terrifying regime or the economic power that is enslaving them in some way has got no light at the end of a tunnel it's reminding us in comfort and hope that God is supreme this really is a bridge from judgment into hope which will reach full blooming in the chapters from 33 onwards as we'll see in the next couple of weeks at the heart of this section with 97 verses to six nations before it and 97 verses to one nation after it are three verses of hope for Israel chapter 28 verse 24 verse 24 to 26 verse 25 the house of Israel shall no longer find a prickling briar or a piercing thorn among all their neighbours who have treated them with contempt and they shall know that I am the Lord God thus says the Lord God when I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered and manifest my holiness in them in the sight of the nations then they shall settle on their own soil that I gave to my servant Jacob they shall live in safety in it and shall build houses and plant vineyards they shall live in safety when I execute judgments upon all their neighbours who have treated them with contempt and they shall know that I am the Lord their God the defeat of these nations implies hope for Israel far away in exile by Chiba's canal at the refugee camp there is hope not in Jerusalem but as we've seen in recent weeks there in exile where the glory of the Lord had decamped to as we saw also a couple of weeks ago these oracles against these nations are directing us very clearly to the purpose of God in this world the purpose of God is not the simple protection comfort and ease of God's people all too often we think so human centredly about God's purposes and gospel if that were the point then Jerusalem would still stand it would be safe and

impregnable and the temple would be there but not so did you hear the refrain in these words of hope did you hear the refrain in the chapter that was read for us for all through these eight chapters of oracles against nations and embedded in the heart of the oracles of hope for Israel that I've just read comes the refrain at least fifteen times in these chapters minutes that you may know that Yahweh is God that they may know that Yahweh is God there at the end of verse twenty-four and they shall know that I am the Lord God it's there at the end of verse twenty-six in chapter twenty-eight and they shall know that I am the Lord their God to Ammon back in chapter twenty-five at the end of the oracle against Ammon then you shall know that I am the Lord.

To Moab, chapter 25, verse 11, then they shall know that I am the Lord. To Edom, at the end of verse 14, they shall know my vengeance, says the Lord God.

[45 : 32] To the Philistines at the end of verse 17, then they shall know that I am the Lord. And so on, to Tyre, to Sidon, to Egypt and to Israel.

You see, God's purposes in this universe are that the people of this universe know that God is God. It's a God-centred purpose for the universe.

And they will know Him in judgement if they refuse Him. They will know Him in salvation if they submit to Him.

God wants the whole world, you see, to know that He is God. You see, in these oracles against the nation, we see the special role of Israel. But it does not disqualify the notion that God is the God for the whole universe.

And He wants the whole universe to know. And when He brings Egypt and Tyre and Ammon and Sidon all to their knees in judgement, it is not just because He's having fun persecuting them for bad deeds.

[46 : 30] It's because He wants them to know that God is God, that Yahweh is God, not Baal or Marduk or Pharaoh or the king of Tyre or anyone else who lays a claim on the throne of the divine sovereign of the universe.

He wants them to know that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is the God of the universe. And He'll bring them to their knees so that they see Him. And as He does so, for those who see Him and respond with faith and repentance, they will see Him as their saviour.

It is a God-centred purpose for this universe, that God's glory will fill the universe, as Isaiah 40 puts it, same idea in effect. And that's why He's punished Israel, so that they know that He is God.

And when He brings them back to the land, it is for the sake of His glory in the world, as we'll see in chapter 36 to come, and so that they may know that He is God.

He actually punishes Israel for the sake of the other nations, that they will then be punished and they will see the restoration of Israel and they will come to see that God is God. It doesn't necessarily mean that everyone is saved when they will know that I am Yahweh.

[47 : 39] But in judgement or in salvation, at the end of history, every knee will bow before this sovereign and glorious God.

Let's pray. O God of the universe, sovereign in glory, unchallenged in control of all things in this universe, may we live for Your glory and purpose.

May Your name be known and revered throughout the world. For those who boast in their own sovereignty and control over their lives, over their companies or nations, bring them to their knees to submit to Your authority.

And for those of Your people, oppressed, enslaved, under oppressive, powerful, anti-Christian regimes, give them hope from this Your word, that they may know that You are sovereign and that kingdoms rise and fall at Your command and that on the last day, every knee will bow before You. Amen. Amen.