

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“National Measure”

25.1-17

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez says his country and Syria both view the United States and Israel as enemies.

He made the remark Sunday (June 27) as Syrian President Bashar Assad concluded a visit to Venezuela. Chavez said "we have common enemies," describing them as "the Yankee empire [and] the genocidal state of Israel."

Also on Sunday, Israeli media reported that Turkish authorities banned an Israeli plane with 100 military and civilian officials on board from entering Turkish airspace. The officials were reportedly heading to Poland to visit the Auschwitz Concentration Camp.

Same day in Northern California, hundreds of pro-Palestinian demonstrators gathered at the Port of Oakland before dawn in a bid to prevent an Israeli cargo ship from unloading for the day. More than 500 people showed up about 5:30am to begin the protest, according to police estimates. By around 10am the crowd dispersed, but about 200 protesters returned in the afternoon when the second shift of dockworkers were scheduled to work.

Some workers showed up for the morning shift, but virtually none did for the second. All agreed not to unload the ship or cross the picket lines.

Then there's this headline from Amsterdam: *Fake Jews to Fight Anti-Semitism in Amsterdam.*

Excerpts:

A reported increase in anti-Semitism and harassment in Amsterdam has Dutch authorities considering an unusual solution: using "decoy Jews" to fight hate crimes. Police officers would go undercover in yarmulkes, roaming the streets in Semitic-drag to suss out haters and harassers.

Chavez, Assad, the Turks, the folks in Oakland and in Amsterdam, all might want to think about this quote from Bible scholar Charles Lee Feinberg. Describing what has happened to those who mistreat the Jews, he said

The pages of history are strewn with the wreckage of nations who, though great in the eyes and councils of the world, incurred the just wrath of an outraged God.

We have a few actual examples to point to in chapter twenty-five of Ezekiel, namely Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia.

In fact, chapters twenty-five through thirty-two measure out God's judgment against seven nations in relation to their dealings with His elect nation, Israel. In addition to the four nations I just mentioned we will encounter Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt.

Israel is at the very heart of God's plan for human history. They are God's special people, His elect nation. How you treat them will determined how you're treated.

That applies both now and i the future. Commenting on His judgment of the nations after His Second Coming, Jesus indicated that He would measure the nations by how they responded to the Jews while they were being persecuted during the Great Tribulation.

All of this is a lesson the United States better heed - especially at a time when US-Israeli relations are deteriorating on account of new, more 'neutral' policies that the current administration has adopted toward Israel.

Ezekiel 25:1 The word of the Lord came to me, saying,
Ezekiel 25:2 "Son of man, set your face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them.

Ezekiel 25:3 Say to the Ammonites, 'Hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God: "Because you said, '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,

Ezekiel 25:4 indeed, therefore, I will deliver you as a possession to the men of the East, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk.

Ezekiel 25:5 And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels and Ammon a resting place for flocks. Then you shall know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 25:6 'For thus says the Lord God: "Because you clapped your hands, stamped your feet, and rejoiced in heart with all your disdain for the land of Israel,

Ezekiel 25:7 indeed, therefore, I will stretch out My hand against you, and give you as plunder to the nations; I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish from the countries; I will destroy you, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

At the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters fled. Genesis 19: 36-38 states both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father after getting him drunk. The firstborn gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He is the father of the Moabites. The younger also gave birth to a son, and she named him Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites.

There was definitely bad blood between the Ammonites and the Israelites as far back as the Exodus. The Ammonites did not allow the Israelites passage through their lands and for this reason they were excluded from the family of God for ten generations (Deuteronomy 23:3).

In New Testament times the Ammonites were still a thorn in the side of Israel. The Pharisees were very concerned with the large number of mixed marriages between Hebrews, Moabites, and Ammonites according to the Justin Martyr. At one point a law in the Mishnah states Ammonite men are excluded, but the women can be admitted to the Jewish community.

Many scholars over the years have expressed concern regarding the Messianic line through King David because he came from Ruth, a Moabite.

After the Babylonian armies "profaned" God's "sanctuary" and left the land "desolate," they said, "Aha!" and "clapped [their] hands, stamped [their] feet, and rejoiced in heart" against the Jews.

Their celebrating would be short-lived. Either the Babylonians or some other nomadic tribes, or some combination, would come and destroy them.

The major teaching of this passage, of these chapters, is to see God's dealings with nations in regard to how they treated Israel. Still I think we can glean some personal application along the way if we're careful.

In the case of Ammon, I think the expression, "Aha!" is a key to application. It was as if they were saying, "See, I told you so; they are getting what they deserve!"

The Ammonites misunderstood the grace of God in dealing with His elect nation. They weren't 'getting what they deserved' from an impartial Judge so much as they were being disciplined by a loving Father.

We can be prone to see God as a Judge, prone to rush to judgment ourselves. Instead we must portray the Lord as a loving Father Who disciplines when He must. Especially as we look upon our brothers and sisters in the Lord, let's extend grace - giving them what they don't deserve.

Ezekiel 25:8 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because Moab and Seir say, 'Look! The house of Judah is like all the nations,'

Ezekiel 25:9 therefore, behold, I will clear the territory of Moab of cities, of the cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kirjathaim.

Ezekiel 25:10 To the men of the East I will give it as a possession, together with the Ammonites, that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the nations.

Ezekiel 25:11 And I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Google "Moabites" and you'll encounter what is called the Moabite Stone. The Moabite Stone is an important memorial of alphabetic writing. It was erected by Mesha, king of Moab, to record his successful revolt against Israel and to give honor to the god Chemosh for his victory. The stone was set up about 850BC.

The stone was discovered in 1868 by a German missionary named Klein. He was on a visit to Moab and was told by an Arab sheik that there was an inscribed stone lying at the town of Dhiban, the ancient city of Dibon. On

examining the stone he found it to be a stele of black basalt, round at the top and nearly four feet in length and two in width. There were thirty-four lines of inscription using the Phoenician alphabet.

We don't require archaeological validation of the biblical accounts but it's cool when we find it!

The Moabites claimed that Israel was just another nation, that there was nothing really special about them. They would find out just how special Israel was and is to the Lord!

This doesn't mean a nation must unequivocally agree with every policy of Israel. It does mean that nations ought to stand by her, realizing that Israel really is the apple of God's eye. It means she has a right to exist, to defend her borders, to be defended by her allies. It means we should not be moving towards a more neutral stance in our own policies as a nation.

As to our application: The church of Jesus Christ has not replaced Israel. God's unconditional promises to Israel stand and will be fulfilled. We are a mystery revealed, an altogether new work, coming from the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. We are the bride of Jesus and, thus, very, very special.

We should therefore maintain the unity of the Spirit among believers. We should guard and defend the doctrines that all believers must believe, the essentials. We should love and look out for one another - even those that are less lovely or lovable among us.

We should never forsake the assembling of ourselves together - especially in these Last Days.

The Lord loves His church on the earth. He washes us, He cleanses us, with the Word. Let's hold in high regard what Jesus loves.

Ezekiel 25:12 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because of what Edom did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them,"

Ezekiel 25:13 therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom, cut off man and beast from it, and make it desolate from Teman; Dedan shall fall by the sword.

Ezekiel 25:14 I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, that they may do in Edom according to My anger and according to My fury; and they shall know My vengeance," says the Lord God.

The Edomites, descended from Esau, were constantly at odds with Israel. The prophet Obadiah provides some insight into a specific example.

Obadiah 1:11 In the day that you stood on the other side - In the day that strangers carried captive his forces, When foreigners entered his gates And cast lots for Jerusalem - Even you were as one of them.

Obadiah 1:12 "But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress.

Obadiah 1:13 You should not have entered the gate of My people In the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction In the day of their calamity, Nor laid hands on their substance In the day of their calamity.

Obadiah 1:14 You should not have stood at the crossroads To cut off those among them who escaped; Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained In the day of distress.

This seems to describe the Edomites at the time of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. They aided and abetted the invaders, taking spoil and cutting off the escape of those who fled.

God's hand against them was going to be particularly strong, taking the lives even of the animals in Edom.

By way of application, I think it encourages us to help those who need help. It's why I like the ministry of Samaritan's Purse so much. Tragedy strikes - an earthquake, a tsunami, a hurricane. While some Christians stand on the sidelines claiming that the folks affected are receiving the judgment of God, Franklin Graham and his people rush in to help on a basic, human level, with the Gospel that saves.

It should be our attitude at all times. God is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to eternal life.

Ezekiel 25:15 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because the Philistines dealt vengefully and took vengeance with a spiteful heart, to destroy because of the old hatred,"

Ezekiel 25:16 therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast.

Ezekiel 25:17 I will execute great vengeance on them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I lay My vengeance upon them." ' ' "

The Philistines are the most oft mentioned enemy of Israel in the Bible. The "Cherethites" were a group within the Philistines. It's also a play on words. The sentence reads, "I will cut-off the 'cutter's-off.' "

This might be a good time to answer a common question, and that is, "*Why is the Holy Land called Palestine?*"

Listen to the following:

The name Palestine refers to a region of the eastern Mediterranean coast from the sea to the Jordan valley and from the southern Negev desert to the Galilee lake region in the north. The word itself derives from "Plesheth," a name that appears frequently in the Bible and has come into English as "Philistine." Plesheth, (root *palash*) was a general term meaning *rolling* or *migratory*. This referred to the Philistine's invasion and conquest of the coast from the sea.

The Philistines were not Arabs nor even Semites, they were most closely related to the Greeks originating from Asia Minor and Greek localities. They did not speak Arabic. They had no connection, ethnic, linguistic or historical with Arabia or Arabs.

The Philistines reached the southern coast of Israel in several waves. One group arrived in the pre-patriarchal period and settled south of Beersheba in Gerar where they came into conflict with Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael. Another group, coming from Crete after being repulsed from an attempted invasion of Egypt by Rameses III in 1194BC, seized the southern coastal area, where they founded five settlements (Gaza, Ascalon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gat). In the Persian and Greek periods, foreign settlers - chiefly from the Mediterranean islands - overran the Philistine districts.

From the fifth century BC, following the historian Herodotus, Greeks called the eastern coast of the Mediterranean "the Philistine Syria" using the Greek language form of the name. In AD135, after putting down the Bar Kochba revolt, the second major Jewish revolt against Rome, the Emperor Hadrian wanted to blot out the name of the Roman "Provincia Judaea" and so renamed it "Provincia Syria Palaestina," the Latin version of the Greek name and the first use of the name as an administrative unit. The name

"Provincia Syria Palaestina" was later shortened to Palaestina, from which the modern, anglicized "Palestine" is derived.¹

"Palestine" was a derogatory, not the name of an indigenous people who have somehow been displaced by the Jews. The Holy Land belongs to the Jews by God's granting it to them. It can also be shown that even in their dispersion there has always been a Jewish presence in the land.

In the verses the Philistines are described as having a "spiteful heart" and an "old hatred." Devotionally, I can see that referring to my old heart, my old nature, the flesh. Just as the Philistines were a constant enemy to Israel, so is my flesh my constant enemy, warring against the Spirit of God and against my new nature as a born-again man. So it will until the coming of the Lord for me - either at death or in the rapture.

In our Prophecy Update on Sunday I talked about major shifts in US - Israeli relations. As a nation we are on a course to withdraw support for Israel.

It's a bad course to be on! Especially in these Last Days when so much prophecy is converging just as the Bible predicted it would.

Mean time we need to defeat the flesh, strengthen the church, help those in distress but especially with the Gospel, and walk in the grace of God.

¹ http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_early_palestine_name_origin.php