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Ezekiel 28 and the Fall of the First Man

NORMAN C. HABEL

In the light of recent discussions on the Fall narrative of Genesis 3, the text of Ezek. 28:1-19 has come in for considerable comment.¹ A separate treatment of Ezek. 28:11-19 therefore seems appropriate.² In this study we shall analyze the basic message of Ezek. 28:11-19 and indicate the importance of the tradition³ of the fall of the first man reflected in this passage from Ezekiel. The exegete is obligated to scrutinize every facet of the inspired prophetic word so that he may be led to a fuller

¹ This discussion arose in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod partly through an essay by the author, *The Form and Meaning of the Fall Narrative* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1965). See pp. 26—28.

² Among recent treatments of this subject, mention should be made of H. G. May, "The King in the Garden of Eden," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* (New York: Harpers, 1962), pp. 166—76; J. L. McKenzie, "Mythical Allusions in Ezekiel 28:1-28," *JBL*, LXXV (1956), 322—27. An excellent commentary on this passage is by W. Zimmerli, *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962), Band XIII, pp. 661 to 689.

³ The term "tradition" is used in a neutral sense as a technical term to designate a body of material which was handed down on a specific subject and preserved in a specific circle of Israel. The historicity of an ancient event which a tradition preserves is not brought into question by the use of this term.

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comprehension of God's message and method of communication in that written word which addresses us. The following analysis is a contribution to that end, rather than a new interpretation of the passages under discussion.

EZEK. 28:1-10

Ezek. 28:11-19 is part of a larger collection of oracles against the nations (chs. 25—32), of which a major grouping is associated with the island fortress of Tyre (26—29). The closest relevant context of Ezek. 28:11-19 is the preceding prophetic oracle against the "prince of Tyre" in 28:1-10. While the ruler of Tyre at the time of these oracles was probably Ittobaal, both the prince of Tyre in v. 2 and the king of Tyre in v. 12 are typical figures which represent Tyre. It is doubtful whether any of the characteristics of a specific king of Tyre are intended in these oracles. The same attitude of hubris is descriptive of other rulers and nations (Ezek. 29:3; Is. 14.12-13).

Ezek. 28:2-10 should not be considered a variant of the Fall tradition in Ezek. 28:12-19. The same theme of a proud and wise ruler appears in both, but the orientation of the two sections is radically different. Ezek. 28:2-10 has the form of a *judgment oracle*; the *reproach* delineated in vv. 2-5 and summarized in v. 6 provides the ground for the *threat* of *future* death in vv. 7-10. The authority of the divine threat is underscored by a concluding *ki* clause: "Because I have spoken." Verses 12-19, however, are designated a *qinah*,

a lamentation (v. 12; cf. 27:2), in which the fate of the king of Tyre is described in terms of a *past* downfall. The sequence of thought in vv. 2-10 runs as follows: a ruler who has employed his wisdom effectively to achieve great wealth (cf. Prov. 8:14-21) becomes proud, presumptuous, and wise in his own eyes (cf. Jer. 9:22; Prov. 26:12). In his pride he asserts: "I am God [El], I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas." This arrogance proves his downfall. Because of his wisdom he considers himself "as wise as a god." Yahweh threatens this ruler with future death and destruction at the hands of "the most terrible of the nations" (v. 7). Like all rebellious men he must descend the pit of Sheol and die an ignominious death (vv. 8-10). By contrast with this ruler described in Ezek. 28:1-10, the king spoken of in 28:12-19 does not claim to have reached the abode of God from earth and thereby usurped God's position but is portrayed in terms of the first man, who is already living in Eden, the garden of God on the mountain of God. He has been created by God to dwell there in perfect harmony with God. Because of his sin he is expelled from that holy mountain by a guardian cherub. The elements of Eden, creation of a man, the cherub and blamelessness which permeate Ezek. 28:12-19 are completely absent in Ezek. 28:2-10.

The closest parallels to Ezek. 28:2-10 are texts such as Is. 14:12-21 or the story of the tower of Babel, where arrogant humans try to storm the heavens and usurp divine authority in some way. Is. 14:13-15 reads:

"You said in your heart,
I will ascend to heaven
above the stars of God;
I will set my throne on high;

I will sit in the mount of assembly
in the far north;
I will ascend above the heights of the
clouds;
I will make myself like Elyon.⁴
But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the depths of the Pit."

The possibility that in 28:2-10 Ezekiel is employing ancient mythological imagery as an *ad hominem* polemic against Tyre cannot be excluded. Although the expression 'ani 'el can be translated "I am El," there is no clear indication in the text that an ancient myth describing the rejection of El as head of the Canaanite pantheon is involved.⁴ Inasmuch as the prince of Tyre claims to be God, he naturally affirms that his impenetrable island rock is really the abode of God. In the background may lie an allusion to the mythological abode of the gods in the mountains of the far north found in the Ugaritic texts (cf. Is. 14:13; Ps. 48:2). The name Tyre is synonymous with the Ugaritic *gr*, mountain, which is used in connection with the home of the Canaanite gods. Several times the abode of El is designated "the source of the two rivers amid the channels of the two deeps" (Baal III i 5-6 *et passim*). However, the choice of the expression "the seat of the gods in the heart of the seas" (Ezek. 28:2) is governed first of all by the peculiar physical character of Tyre. The repetition of the idiom "in the heart of the seas," in the later context of verse 8, suggests that the proposed mythological connotation is not integral to this expression. More pertinent for the interpretation of Ezek. 28:2 is the ancient Near Eastern practice of royal self-identification. The prince of Tyre has

⁴ See M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1955) pp. 97-104.

usurped more than deity; he has presumptuously employed the very title of self-identification used by Yahweh as the Creator God (Is. 45:22; 46:9). Like the Egyptians condemned by Isaiah, the prince of Tyre must learn that he is "a man and not God" (see Is. 31:3).⁵ One other connection with Canaanite mythology has been seen in the reference to Daniel (28:3), but no definite conclusions can be drawn. The Ugaritic Daniel is a heroic king who rules justly. He is not, however, lauded for his wisdom. The relevance of Ezek. 28: 2-10 for an understanding of the traditions found in Ezek. 28:11-19 is therefore rather minimal.

EZEK. 28:11-19

Despite numerous textual difficulties and the possibility of textual amplifications (see Zimmerli), we shall propose a translation of the text at hand as the basis for our subsequent discussion.

Then the word of Yahweh came to me: "Son of man, raise a *lamentation* over the king of Tyre and say to him, "Thus says the Lord, Yahweh:

You were a perfect signet,
filled with wisdom
and flawless in beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God;
all the precious stones adorned you
(carnelian, topaz, jasper,
chrysolite, beryl, and onyx;
sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald);
your ornaments were wrought in gold,
and your own engravings.

On the day you were created
they were made.

With an anointed guardian cherub
I appointed you.

You were in the holy mountain of God;

you walked among the stones of fire.
You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created
until a sin was found in you.
Through the abundance of your wealth
you became filled with violence
and you sinned.
So I rejected you from the mountain of
God
as a profane thing,
and the guardian cherub banished you
from among the stones of fire.
Your heart became proud because of your
beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom
on account of your splendor.
I cast you to the earth;
I exposed you before kings,
to feast their eyes on you.
Through your numerous iniquities
and your fraudulent trading
you profaned your shrines.
So I produced fire in your midst;
it consumed you.
I turned you to ashes upon the earth
before the eyes of all who saw you.
All the peoples who know you
are appalled at you.
You have become a catastrophe,
and you will disappear forever.

Ezek. 28:12-19 is designated a *qinab* (v. 11). The *qinab*, while translated "lamentation," is not to be confused with the cultic lament form frequently employed in the Psalms. The *qinab* form has a monotonous 3-2 meter which is designed to reflect the mournful attitude of weepers. The Book of Lamentations presents the classic illustration of this literary form. In Ezek. 28: 12-19 the form is pressed into the service of the prophet's proclamations of judgment against the city of Tyre. Although the lamentation portrays Yahweh addressing the fallen king of Tyre in terms of the

⁵ See further Zimmerli, pp. 667-69.

fallen first man, the text must be taken along with the other oracles against Tyre (e. g., 28:1-10) as one of the messages of future doom for that city. Nebuchadnezzar was probably besieging Tyre at the time this lamentation was delivered.

The lamentation begins by describing the previous state of glory enjoyed by the individual addressed. The ignominy of his subsequent downfall is thereby heightened. Verses 13 to 15 make it apparent that this individual is addressed as though he were the first man whom God had created and placed in the garden of Eden. This man is first of all entitled a "perfect signet." The term translated "signet" is used in Jer. 22:24 and Hag. 2:23, where it refers to Jehoiachin and Zerubbabel respectively. Whether the term is intended to emphasize only the splendor and beauty of the individual, or whether the concept of a chosen ruler is necessarily implied, is debatable. The term is no doubt appropriate in reference to a ruler of Tyre. Some scholars see here an allusion to the first man as king in the garden of Eden. But royal elements in the text can be quite readily understood in the light of the application of the first man tradition to a royal figure. It is therefore rather precarious to identify the first man as the first king of the garden of Eden.⁶ The rulership of man over the earth in Gen. 1:26-28 and the dominion of man over the animals in Gen. 2:19-20 naturally suggest the suitability of the first man tradition as a portrait for a king such as the king of Tyre.

The second attribute applied to the first man is that he was "filled with wisdom."

⁶ A full discussion of this question is given by H. G. May (see n. 2).

Zimmerli maintains that the wisdom motif is secondary to the first man tradition (p. 677) and was infused into the lamentation of Ezek. 28:12-19 because of Ezek. 28:2-6, where the prince of Tyre is exalted for his great wisdom. The wisdom theme, however, is connected with creation and first man motifs elsewhere in the Old Testament. Job 15:7-8 and 38:2-7, for example, connect first man, wisdom, and creation accents. Prov. 8:22-31 relates wisdom and creation in a different sense. In Gen. 3 the "cunning" snake tempts the woman to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil." The woman sees the fruit of that tree as a means "to make one wise" (3:6). In Gen. 3:6 wisdom is a desired goal for the first pair, while in Ezek. 28:12 it is a natural endowment which becomes corrupted through sin. (28:17)

The addressee of the text is also described as "flawless in beauty." This is precisely the claim which is placed in the mouth of Tyre in Ezek. 27:3. "O Tyre, you have said, 'I am flawless in beauty'" (Cf. 32:19). Because Tyre, through its rulers, had claimed the attributes of the perfect being (cf. 28:6), the image of the first man living in his pristine beauty and perfection provides a logical model to portray the king of Tyre, who represents Tyre and whose fall was impending.

As the first man, the addressee is located in Eden, which is here identified as the garden of God. In Gen. 2:8 Eden is identified as the territory in which the garden of God was located rather than as the garden itself. The Eden theme is a favorite of Ezekiel, who regularly associates the garden image with it (36:35; 31:9, 16, 18; cf. 27:23). In Ezek. 28:14 a second tradition about the

primeval abode of God and hence of the first man, is introduced. This abode is the cosmic mountain of God, a frequent concept in Canaanite mythology. Baal is associated with "the mounts of El Tsaphon, the holy place" (Baal V iii 44 f). Baal, who is sometimes called Baal Tsaphon (Baal of the North), builds his temple in the "recesses of the north" (Baal II v 55). Both Ps. 48:2 and Is. 14:13 use a similar expression to describe the abode of God "in the highest north." The abode of El at "the confluence of the two deeps" is apparently the same location viewed from a slightly different cosmological perspective (cf. Ps. 46:2-4).⁷ It is plausible that the Gen. 2:10-14 passage dealing with the source of the primeval rivers is related to this cosmic mountain concept (cf. Ezek. 47:1-12). This mountain is "the mount of assembly" (Is. 14:13), where the council of heavenly beings congregated before God. The allusion to a cherub figure at this point in Ezek. 28:14 is therefore consistent with the ancient concept of the cosmic mountain as the abode of God and His council. The presence of this archaic mythological imagery to describe the dwelling place of God does not imply that the Israelite writers thereby espoused the crass mythological view of reality current in the ancient Near Eastern world. Polemical and poetical considerations governed the Israelite writers' use of imagery taken from their pagan environment.

⁷ See the discussion of H. J. Kraus, "Psalmen I" in *Biblischer Kommentar* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), pp. 342-46. How the stones of fire relate to the ancient abode of God remains an enigma despite recent attempts to identify them. See May, p. 169, and C. Fensham, "Thunder Stones in Ugarit," *JNES*, XVIII (1959), pp. 273-74.

The beauty and brilliance of the primeval man is heightened by his attire, which was adorned by precious stones and some kind of ornaments. This feature of the text may have been dictated to some extent by the robes worn by the king of Tyre himself. The list of precious stones described is similar to that used to adorn the robe of the priest in Ex. 28:17-20. The contrast between the clothing of this royal first man and the nakedness of the primeval pair in Gen. 2-3 is immediately obvious. The skins which God provided for the primeval pair in Gen. 3:21 were the symbol of acceptance for a couple who saw their nakedness in terms of shame and disgrace. The rejection of the king of Tyre is final, however, and hence no symbol of reconciliation grace is to be expected. Rather, he was to be "exposed" before kings (Ezek. 28:17). The text does not explicitly speak of disrobing, although this form of public disgrace may be implied. The fact that Tyre did not actually fall at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 29:17-20) can hardly be taken as a suggestion of ultimate divine approval.

Not only is this primeval figure defined as a perfect specimen living in Eden, but his personal creation is also affirmed. "On the day you were created . . ." in verse 13 reappears in verse 15. The agent of the passive is clearly God, since the verb *bara'* is normally used only as a technical term for sovereign divine acts of creation (Gen. 1:1; 2:4; 5:2; etc.). The Polal form of *kūn* is used to describe the making of these stones and has a meaning similar to *bara'*.⁸ It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion

⁸ See Deut. 32:6; Job 31:15; Is. 45:18; and Ps. 87:5 f. For the parallel use of this term in Baal texts see Pope, pp. 50 f.

that this man, created by God, given precious stones also created by God for that man, living in Eden, and described as blameless, can be anyone other than the primeval first man.

This first man is also characterized as "blameless" (*tamim*). This is the man who (v. 14) walked (Hithpael of *blk*) among the fire stones of the divine abode. These two Hebrew forms are associated with the ancient primeval and patriarchal figures of Genesis. Enoch "walked with God" before he was taken (5:22, 24), as did Abraham and Noah. The same form of the verb is used of God Himself living in the garden (Gen. 3:8). *Tamim* is associated with this verb in Gen. 6:9 and 17:1 in connection with Noah and Abraham respectively. The term designates a completely harmonious relationship between God and a chosen individual. Nothing exists which is injurious to that relationship. The first man was created *tamim*, and the "perfect" relationship persisted until the intrusion of sin. Whether the plural of *derek*, "way," is to be understood as "rule" (cf. Hos. 10:13; Prov. 31:3; *et passim*) or as "activities" is probably of secondary significance since in the application of the Fall tradition it is the activities of the king as lord and representative of Tyre that are primary.

The character of sin as a force which disrupts a relationship is illustrated by this text also. The relationship in this case is described as previously unbroken. The poetic passive "sin was found" (v. 15) in no way exonerates the culprit. The original sin of the first man is then explicated in terms of the specific situation in Tyre. Tyre's downfall was due to greedy trade and violence (*chamas*). The expression "filled

with violence" (v. 16) is employed in Gen. 6:11 to describe the situation which caused the downfall of all men in the Flood.⁹ The inner ground for the downfall of the first man figure in Ezekiel was that pride or hubris which he exhibited in relation to the perfect beauty and splendor given by God (v. 17; cf. vv. 2-6). Verse 18 supplements the specific sinful acts of the king of Tyre with a reference to profanation of temples. The historical details of this allusion remain obscure at this time.

The punishment for hubris is described both in terms of the first man and of the city of Tyre. The first man tradition preserves the picture of a cherub ejecting the rebel figure from God's paradisaal abode. Gen. 3:24 uses the plural form "cherubim," with no additional descriptive features. The concept of cherubs guarding the divine temple or dwelling place was common in the ancient Near East.¹⁰ The action of the cherub in the banishment of the first man is paralleled by the expulsion of man by God Himself. Instead of being *tamim*, the first man became *chahal*, "profane," before God. The expelled figure remains on earth as in Gen. 3. We have no parallel to the frequent theme of arrogant figures attempting to storm heaven from earth and then being cast into the underworld

⁹ Cf. also Ezek. 7:23; 8:17; 12:19. For a long time scholars recognized the strong similarities between Ezekiel and the terminology of the so-called Priesterschrift source of the Pentateuch. Terms like *chamas*, *tamim*, *bars*, *shachat*, and others are typical in Priesterschrift texts. Some scholars would see *chamas* in Gen. 6:9 as the Priesterschrift's term for the primeval sin of mankind which led to its downfall, viewed in terms of the Flood. The tradition of man being rejected from Eden, however, is said to be part of the Yahwist narrative.

¹⁰ N. Habel (see n. 1), p. 20.

as an appropriate act of retribution. The judgment of God in Ezek. 28:17-19 as it relates directly to the ruler of Tyre involves international disgrace, destruction of Tyre by fire, and ultimate annihilation. The image of judgment through fire from God is found in the oracles against the nations in Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14. Whether this element was suggested by the "flaming sword" reference in Gen. 3:24 cannot be ascertained. No suggestion of future restoration or hope is given at the end of this Ezekiel portrait.

EZEK. 28:12-19 AND GEN. 2—3

In addition to the foregoing treatment of Ezek. 28, a simple tabulation of the similarities and differences between the account of the fall of the first man in Gen. 2—3 and the allusions to the Fall in Ezek. 28 may prove helpful. The comparative features presented in the table at the bottom of this page should require no further preliminary explanation.

The similarities between the two portraits of the first man seem obvious to this writer. The fall of the first man is a truth

which God entrusted to His inspired spokesmen from an early time. Both of these texts preserve that same ancient truth. The different accents of the two presentations, however, are also instructive. The snake, the woman, and the trees are conspicuous by their absence from the Ezekiel narrative. The holy mountain, the wisdom of man, the stones of fire, and other features represent new elements in the portrait of the first man as described by Ezekiel. Several explanations of these factors are plausible. Either Ezekiel was led to apply the Fall tradition of Gen. 2 quite freely to the rise and downfall of the king of Tyre, or Ezek. 28 and Gen. 2—3 are dependent upon different Fall traditions current in ancient Israel, or both Ezekiel and the writer of Genesis drew upon a common Fall tradition and both applied it to a specific situation of their contemporary audience. The work of the Spirit is vital in the proclamation of these messages concerning the Fall regardless of which of the above historical developments actually took place. Some may be inclined to suggest that the historical background to the question is

Gen. 2—3

Man "formed" by God
 Man lives in a garden
 The garden is in Eden
 Eden is "in the east"
 Animals are present
 Man is naked
 Man is sinless and unashamed
 Man desires to become wise
 Man rebels to "become like God"
 Man disobeys by eating of the tree
 Man knows good and evil
 Man is expelled from the garden
 Cherubim guard the way to the tree of life
 A flaming sword also guards the way
 Man is not permitted to eat and live forever

Ezek. 28

Man "created" by God
 Man lives in a garden
 The garden is Eden
 Eden is on the holy mountain of God
 A cherub is present
 Man wears royal attire
 Man is "blameless"
 Man is full of wisdom and beauty
 Man rebels through pride of heart
 Man disobeys through violence and trade
 Man's wisdom is corrupted
 Man is expelled from the mountain
 A cherub expels man
 Judgment by fire
 The judgment of God is to be forever

even more complex than the simple alternatives we have proposed.

One aspect of this entire question is clear. Ezek. 28:12-19 represents a reformulation of a Fall tradition in terms which are meaningful and appropriate for the Tyre situation at the time of Ezekiel. Ezekiel made the Fall event relevant for the King of Tyre by describing the downfall of that king as though he were the first man. Certain features of the story are apparently drawn from the circumstances surrounding the city of Tyre and not from any known tradition. The violence and trade through which the pride of the ruler of Tyre was exhibited is an obvious example of such features. In other portions of the text it is probably futile to try to distinguish between those elements of the story which are drawn from a past tradition and those which are suggested by the prevailing circumstances. Two important conclusions can be drawn from the above observations. First, through this text of Ezekiel we gain a deeper appreciation of how a truth was received by an inspired prophet and interpreted by that prophet as a fresh, dynamic word of God in a new situation. Ezek. 28:12-19 is therefore a significant prophetic interpretation of the Fall event. Second, the character of Ezek. 28:12-19 as a prophetic interpretation of the Fall event raises the possibility that Gen. 2—3 is likewise a prophetic interpretation from an earlier era in Israel's history. Such a possibility must be investigated by means of a thorough study of Gen. 2—3.¹¹

If we argue that Ezekiel is borrowing directly from the text of Gen. 2—3, despite

¹¹ This is what the present writer tried to demonstrate in the work cited above.

the obvious divergencies between the two portraits of the first man, then it becomes evident that Ezekiel was led to ignore certain elements of the Genesis narrative as secondary in communicating the primary message of the Fall to another situation. Furthermore, he was apparently not compelled by an earlier text (or tradition) to adhere to details but felt free, under the guidance of God, to modify certain features to make them more appropriate for his proclamation. Again, it is probably foolish to attempt a minute sifting of the text of Ezekiel to ascertain precisely which features of the Genesis original were modified and which were preserved intact. In any case, we are led to the conclusion that the prophetic word of God was not a static repetition of past axioms or creeds but a living and biting reformulation of what had been received as the inescapable word of God for the prophet's own day.

Those who propose that Genesis and Ezekiel drew from different Fall traditions also have textual evidence to support their position. The mountain, the fire stones, the cherub as a guardian in the garden, and similar elements are not necessarily connected with the particular issue concerning the king of Tyre. If this position is held, many of the same conclusions can be drawn as those outlined above. In addition, however, we may gain a deeper awareness of the fact that God's Word does not stem from an idealized monolithic set of prophetic dogmas but is the realistic working of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of many different prophets in numerous different circumstances and with a great variety of backgrounds to meet specific needs of specific people at specific

times. In this accent of the Word of God we have the assurance that the written Word which we have received speaks to every sort and condition of men in our generation. The writer to the Hebrews reaffirmed this truth in the opening sentence of his work: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets. . . ."

A solidarity exists between all men and Adam "because all men sinned," says St. Paul. In Adam all sinned. This truth is one which both Gen. 2—3 and Ezek. 28 proclaim by presenting the Fall in a form which directly involves the audience of their own day. That kind of proclamation is also incumbent upon us today.

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