

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 28

Content & Intent

Broader Unit (Component of Ezekiel 25–32): Ezekiel 28 belongs to the extended cycle of oracles against foreign nations in chapters 25–32, which interrupts the judgment-and-restoration movement of the book to address Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. Within this unit, chapters 26–28 form a Tyre sub-cycle: chapter 26 announces Tyre’s fall, chapter 27 laments it as a wrecked merchant ship, and chapter 28 exposes its *root cause* — the prince’s self-deifying pride — before pivoting to Sidon and closing with a promise to Israel. The broader unit’s claim is that YHWH alone is sovereign over the nations; their pride and hostility toward His people will be judged, and His glory will be vindicated before the world.

This Text — Content: Ezekiel 28 contains four distinct oracles. The first (vv. 1–10) addresses the *prince (nagid)* of Tyre — a human ruler, Ithobaal II — who has claimed to be a god on the basis of his commercial brilliance and accumulated wealth. God announces he will die the death of the uncircumcised at the hands of strangers, proven to be merely a man at the point of his death. The second oracle (vv. 11–19) is a lament over the *king (melek)* of Tyre, employing Eden-mythology and guardian-cherub imagery to describe a being of surpassing beauty and wisdom whose pride corrupted him and whose violence led to his expulsion and destruction. The third oracle (vv. 20–23) turns briefly to Sidon, announcing judgment that will demonstrate YHWH’s holiness. The fourth unit (vv. 24–26) closes with a promise to Israel: when the surrounding nations are judged, Israel will dwell securely, and YHWH will be sanctified in them before the nations.

This Text — Intent: God is confronting the deepest and most persistent idolatry of the human heart: self-deification — the claim to be one’s own god, to owe one’s greatness to oneself, and to stand above accountability. Through the prince/king of Tyre, God is holding up a mirror to every human pretension to autonomy and self-sufficiency. The intent is simultaneously to expose (pride as the root of every false throne), to warn (self-deification ends in destruction), to assure (God’s people are not forgotten while surrounding nations rage), and to declare (YHWH alone is holy, and His holiness will be publicly vindicated). The chapter does not end in judgment but in promise — which means the intent is not merely to terrify but to reorient: away from the false throne of the self, toward the One whose holiness is the only stable foundation.

Subject Sentence: The self-enthroned heart is the most ancient rebellion — and the most certainly doomed.

Primary Claim: God dismantles every throne the human heart builds for itself — exposing self-deification as the root of all pride-driven destruction — so that His people will stop trusting in human glory and rest their weight on the only One whose holiness is unshakeable.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Identity of the “King of Tyre” in Verses 11–19 — Human Ruler or Supernatural Being? This is the passage’s most significant and recurring interpretive controversy, touching both hermeneutics and systematic theology. Three readings require evaluation.

Reading 1 — Strictly human (historical Tyrian king as hyperbolic lament): Some interpreters, largely within critical scholarship and certain Reformed exegetes (notably John Taylor, Moshe Greenberg), argue that the Eden imagery, the guardian cherub language, and the description of perfection before corruption are all hyperbolic royal lamentation conventions — the kind of elevated rhetoric used in ancient Near Eastern laments for fallen kings. On this reading, the “king of Tyre” is simply the human ruler addressed in elevated poetic terms, and the cherub reference describes the king as a guardian figure over his city, not a supernatural entity. **Acknowledge:** This reading rightly insists that the text’s primary referent is the fall of Tyre under its proud king, and that reading every detail as supernatural biography invites over-allegorizing. The rhetorical-lament genre is a genuine feature of the text. **Qualify, however:** The specific language — “Eden, the garden of God,” “holy mountain of God,” “blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you,” “the anointed guardian cherub,” “I cast you from the mountain of God” — exceeds any known convention for laments over historical rulers, and attributes to the king a pre-fall blamelessness followed by expulsion from a sacred space that maps onto no historical biography of any Tyrian king. The language requires more than a hyperbolic human referent.

Reading 2 — Direct description of Satan’s original fall: Much popular preaching and some systematic theology (reflecting John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as much as exegesis) reads verses 11–19 as a direct, transparent account of Satan’s primordial rebellion and expulsion from heaven — the passage becomes the primary biblical text for reconstructing the fall of the devil. **Refute as the primary reading:** The text is explicitly addressed to the king of Tyre — “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre” (v. 11). To leap immediately past that address to a purely supernatural biography severs the oracle from its literary context and makes the Tyrian king a mere pretext for a different subject. This reading tends to make the passage’s *applicational force* disappear — it becomes cosmic history rather than a word addressed to a human condition. Furthermore, the details are not entirely consistent with a straightforward Satan-biography: the figure is driven out by the abundance of *trade* and *violence* (v. 16), imagery that fits a mercantile city-state’s king far better than a purely spiritual fall.

Reading 3 — Typological composite (preferred Reformed reading): The oracle employs the Tyrian king as a type whose pride and fall *mirrors and participates in* a deeper pattern — the archetypal rebellion of a created being who turned from worshiping the Creator to worshiping himself. The Eden imagery, the cherub language, and the “day you were created” language press through the historical king to the spiritual reality his sin enacts. Whether the “anointed guardian cherub” language describes the king’s *role* (he was as a guardian cherub over Tyre, now corrupted) or reaches toward a background in the corruption of a heavenly figure whose pride seduced human civilization into the same pattern, the text’s primary force is typological: here is what pride *does* — it takes what was gifted, beautiful, and appointed, and destroys it from within. **This reading best accounts for the text** because it honors the address to the historical king, takes the elevated language seriously on its own terms, does not flatten it into mere hyperbole, and locates the passage’s power in its *claim* rather than in biographical reconstruction of Satan. The Tyrian king’s fall illustrates and participates in the most ancient pattern of created-creature self-deification.

The Phrase “Wisdom” and Commercial Success (vv. 4–5): A minor but important interpretive issue: Tyre’s prince credits his own *wisdom* for his wealth (v. 4, “by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself”). Some prosperity-adjacent readings use this passage to validate commercial acumen as a form of wisdom. The Reformed reading recognizes the irony the text intends: the prince’s “wisdom” is precisely what becomes his downfall when he mistakes the gift for the Giver and the instrument for the source. The text does not validate commercial wisdom — it exposes its idolatrous potential.

The Sidon Oracle (vv. 20–23) — Often Neglected: Interpreters regularly treat the Sidon oracle as a structural footnote between the Tyre material and the closing Israel promise. This is a mistake. The Sidon oracle introduces the distinctive phrase “they will know that I am the LORD” (v. 23), which is the driving refrain of the entire nations-cycle. The purpose of judgment is *not* merely retribution but *the public vindication of YHWH’s holiness* — which directly sets up the closing promise to Israel. Preachers should not skip verses 20–23.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 14:12–15** — The “Helel ben Shachar” (Day Star, son of Dawn) oracle over the king of Babylon employs almost identical rhetoric: a figure who said “I will make myself like the Most High” and was brought down to Sheol. This passage is the closest canonical parallel to Ezekiel 28’s prince/king oracles and confirms the typological pattern: pride in created splendor, claiming the divine prerogative, ending in destruction. The two passages mutually illuminate the archetype.
- **Genesis 3:1–24** — The Edenic background of Ezekiel 28 is not decorative. The garden of God, the cherub, and expulsion from a sacred space directly invoke Genesis 3’s pattern: the original rebel is the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve to

“be like God.” Ezekiel 28 replays that fall in the public history of nations — the Tyrian king does what the first humans were tempted to do, and the expulsion is analogous.

- **Proverbs 16:18** — “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Ezekiel 28 is the most extended prophetic illustration of this Wisdom principle. Preaching the chapter should connect it to this axiomatic Wisdom claim — this is not an isolated event but a universal pattern embedded in the moral fabric of creation.
- **Daniel 4:28–37** — Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment and restoration narrate the identical claim at the level of individual biography: the king who said “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?” is brought low until he acknowledges that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” Where Ezekiel 28 ends in destruction for Tyre, Daniel 4 ends in restoration — showing that the *purpose* of God’s dismantling of human pride is ultimately to bring even the nations to acknowledge Him.
- **Philippians 2:5–11** — The Christ-hymn presents the direct counter-pattern to the Tyrian king and all self-enthroning pride: the One who was in the form of God *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. This is the anti-Tyre, the anti-Eden rebellion: not seizing but giving, not ascending but descending. The gospel’s answer to self-deification is not merely prohibition but an alternative Lord who demonstrates the beauty of the opposite posture.

Aim: To expose the self-enthroning dynamic in every reader’s heart as the root of their instability and loss, and to reorient them toward the One whose holiness is the only throne that holds — and whose gospel makes such reorientation possible.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
28:1–2	The word of the LORD comes: address to the prince (<i>nagid</i>) of Tyre; his heart has become proud, saying “I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods”	<i>Nagid</i> = prince/leader; the claim is explicit self-deification
28:3–5	The LORD acknowledges the prince’s wisdom and commercial success; by his	Irony: the gift (wisdom) becomes the occasion for the sin (pride); wealth

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	wisdom he has gained great wealth; his heart has become proud in his riches	becomes the evidence used to prove the deity-claim
28:6–8	Because the prince’s heart is like the heart of a god, God will bring strangers against him; he will die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas	Death at the hands of enemies is the refutation of the deity-claim — gods do not die
28:9–10	“Will you still say ‘I am a god’ in the presence of those who kill you? — you are a man, not a god, in the hands of those who slay you”; he will die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners	The death-moment is the moment of proof: mortality answers the deity-claim; “uncircumcised” signals death outside covenant and honor
28:11–12a	Second oracle formula: “The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre”	Shift from <i>nagid</i> (prince) to <i>melek</i> (king); shift from prose oracle to lamentation genre
28:12b–13	Description of the king’s original state: “the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty”; in Eden, the garden of God, adorned with every precious stone; the workmanship of his settings and engravings was prepared on the day he was created	Eden imagery; “created” (<i>nibra’ta</i>) — this being’s existence is creaturely, not divine; the beauty is gifted, not inherent
28:14	“You were an anointed guardian cherub; I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the stones of fire”	The most disputed verse; “anointed guardian cherub” — either the king’s role described in elevated terms or a figure whose pattern the king enacts; holy mountain language parallels Eden
28:15	“You were blameless in your ways from the day you were	Pre-fall perfection; unrighteousness (<i>’awlah</i>) —

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	created, until unrighteousness was found in you”	the corruption is internal, not imposed
28:16	“In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from among the stones of fire”	Trade/commerce as the mechanism of corruption; violence follows pride; expulsion parallels Genesis 3
28:17	“Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor”	Root identified: pride in gifted beauty; wisdom corrupted by the very splendor wisdom produced — the inversion of Proverbs
28:18–19	“By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you”; the nations see and are appalled; “you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever”	Final destruction; the fire of judgment emerges from within (self-generated ruin); “shall be no more forever” — total and irreversible
28:20–21	Third oracle: word of the LORD against Sidon	Brief, structural; Sidon was Tyre’s close neighbor and related power
28:22–23	“I am against you, O Sidon, and I will manifest my glory in your midst”; pestilence and sword; “they shall know that I am the LORD”	Driving refrain of the nations-cycle; the purpose of judgment is the vindication of YHWH’s holiness and the nations’ acknowledgment
28:24	Transition to Israel: “no more shall there be for the house of Israel a brier that pricks or a thorn that hurts	The surrounding nations’ judgment removes the threat to Israel; judgment and promise are two sides of

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	them among all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt”	one act
28:25–26	Promise: God will gather Israel from the peoples and demonstrate His holiness in them; they will dwell securely in the land; they will build houses and plant vineyards when God executes judgments on all who treat them with contempt; “they shall know that I am the LORD their God”	The chapter ends not in judgment but in covenant promise; security, settlement, fruitfulness — the vocabulary of Deuteronomic blessing

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	28:1–10	The Prince Who Called Himself God — Prose Oracle of Judgment
2	28:11–19	The King Who Was Given Everything and Corrupted It — Lament
3	28:20–23	Sidon — A Word to the Neighbor, a Declaration of Holiness
4	28:24–26	Israel — The Promise That Outlasts Every False Throne

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The self-enthroned heart is the most ancient rebellion — and the most certainly doomed.

Primary Claim: God dismantles every throne the human heart builds for itself — exposing self-deification as the root of all pride-driven destruction — so that His people will stop trusting in human glory and rest their weight on the only One whose holiness is unshakeable.

Applications (Five)

1. Diagnose the deity-claim beneath ordinary pride. (*Mind/Belief*) The prince of Tyre did not simply have high self-esteem — he believed his success proved his divinity. Most contemporary pride does not look that explicit, but the underlying logic is identical: “I built this; therefore I answer to no one.” Every person who has used their professional success, intelligence, or social standing as evidence that they can set their own moral terms is making the Tyrian claim. The application is not merely “be more humble” — it is to see clearly that pride is not a personality flaw but a theological statement, a usurpation of the throne that belongs to God alone. The sermon should press listeners to identify where they have used their “wisdom and understanding” (v. 4) as grounds for self-governance.

2. Recognize the specific vulnerability of gifted, successful people. (*Mind/Belief*) The text is precise: it was not Tyre’s poverty that destroyed it but its beauty, its wisdom, and its commercial brilliance. “Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor” (v. 17). This is a direct warning to capable, accomplished, and gifted people — the very things that should produce gratitude become the mechanism of corruption when they are received as self-generated rather than God-given. Congregations should be pressed: the more talented you are, the more dangerous your talent is if you mistake it for evidence of your own sufficiency. Gifting is the most potent kindling for self-deification.

3. Grieve the beauty that was meant for worship and was stolen by pride.

(*Affections/Worship*) The lament genre of verses 11–19 is not incidental — it is intentional. God is not merely pronouncing judgment; He is *mourning*. The description of the king’s original state — perfection, beauty, wisdom, precious stones, the garden of God — is the vocabulary of created glory designed to reflect and worship the Creator. When the text says “you were blameless... until unrighteousness was found in you” (v. 15), there is a note of genuine loss. Listeners should be moved to grieve not just the consequences of pride but the *waste* of it — the corruption of something genuinely beautiful in service of the self. Repentance from pride should carry this affective weight, not just moral resolution.

4. Stop expecting your own throne to hold. (*Affections/Worship*) The chapter’s closing promise to Israel (vv. 24–26) is given *in contrast* to the destruction of the surrounding nations’ false thrones. God’s people are promised security not because they are strong but because every competing power has been shown to be exactly as stable as Tyre: not at all. The application is a call to transfer the weight of trust — to stop placing it on the things that look like thrones (financial stability, reputation, networks of influence, self-constructed security) and to rest it on the only One whose holiness makes the final declaration in every situation. The question for each listener is: what am I treating as the foundation of my security that will not hold?

5. Live as a creature — which means live in gratitude, not grasping. (*Will/Behavior*) The Tyrian king’s downfall is rooted in a specific failure: he treated gifted beauty and wisdom as

self-generated, as evidence of his own deity. The antidote is not self-deprecation but creaturely gratitude — the habitual practice of receiving every capacity and accomplishment as gift. Concretely, this means changing the inner narration from “I have made wealth for myself” (v. 4) to “God has entrusted this to me and I steward it for His purposes.” This is not a feeling but a practice: it shows up in how money is held, how credit is given or withheld, how professional territory is defended or surrendered, how beauty and talent are used — for display or for service. The Philippians 2:5–11 counter-pattern is the model: the One who had the most to grasp grasped nothing and gave everything.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 28 provides one of Scripture’s most penetrating analyses of the theological root of human sin: not merely rule-breaking but throne-usurpation — the creature claiming the prerogatives of the Creator. God’s response to Tyre’s prince is not irritation at arrogance but the solemn dismantling of a false claim: “you are a man, not a god” (v. 9). This matters enormously for a theology of sin — sin is not primarily a behavioral category but a relational-ontological one, a claim about who has the right to govern. The lament over the king (vv. 11–19) deepens this by locating pride’s origin not in external temptation alone but in the corruption of gifted beauty — the creature’s capacity for worship turned toward the self. And the chapter’s close (vv. 24–26) reveals that God’s purpose in dismantling false thrones is not merely punitive but restorative: the removal of Tyre and Sidon makes room for Israel to dwell securely, which is God’s ultimate purpose for His people in the world.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 28 grounds the Reformed understanding of *total depravity* not in a catalog of behaviors but in a root diagnosis: the human heart, left to itself, gravitates toward self-deification — claiming autonomy, receiving gifts as self-generated, and building thrones it cannot maintain. This is precisely what Calvin called the “idol factory” of the heart, now visible in full historical display. The typological dimension of the passage — the Tyrian king as an enactment of the most ancient pattern of creaturely self-exaltation — shows that sin is not an innovation of individuals but a participation in an archetypal rebellion. Reformed soteriology finds its gospel contrast here in Philippians 2: where every self-enthroning creature grasps, Christ — who alone had *legitimate* claim to equality with God — did not count it something to grasp. The closing promise to Israel (vv. 24–26) is a covenant-fidelity declaration: when every false throne has been dismantled, God’s people will be gathered, secured, and blessed — not on the basis of their own worthiness but because YHWH is holy and His covenant purposes cannot be thwarted. God’s glory, not human achievement, is the ultimate foundation.

Main Takeaway

Every throne you build for yourself out of your own brilliance, beauty, or success will come down — not because success is wrong, but because it was never yours to rule from. You are a man, not a god. But here is the gospel buried in the chapter's final verses: the One who *is* God has not left you to scramble for thrones that won't hold — He is gathering His people, securing them, and building them a dwelling that endures. Stop grasping. Stop enthroning yourself. Come under the only holiness that is actually unshakeable.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating verses 11–19 primarily as Satan's biography.** This is the most common mishandling of the passage. Preachers who lead with “this is where we learn about Satan's fall” functionally disconnect the oracle from its address (the king of Tyre), evacuate its applicational force (the passage becomes cosmic history rather than a word for this congregation), and spend the sermon doing systematic angelology instead of confronting the pride dynamic the text is actually addressing. Use the background dimension to illuminate the *depth* of the pattern, not to redirect the sermon's subject. The primary referent remains the Tyrian king — and through him, every human heart that builds its own throne.
- **Preaching only judgment without the chapter's closing promise.** Ezekiel 28 does not end in verses 11–19. It ends in verses 24–26 with a covenant promise to Israel — security, gathering, fruitfulness, dwelling safely. A sermon that closes with the king's destruction has cut the chapter's final word. God's purpose in dismantling false thrones is to make room for His people to dwell securely under His provision. The judgment and the promise are two sides of one act, and both must be preached.
- **Reducing the application to “don't be arrogant.”** Behavioral moralism misses the diagnosis entirely. The text is not primarily about interpersonal rudeness or excessive self-confidence — it is about throne-usurpation at the root of human existence. An application that lands at “be more humble in how you talk about your achievements” has not engaged the passage's actual claim. The application must reach the level of *who governs your life* and *where you have placed the weight of your trust* — not merely how you present yourself to others.
- **Ignoring the Sidon oracle (vv. 20–23).** The brief oracle against Sidon is structurally and theologically crucial because it carries the refrain “they shall know that I am the LORD” — which is the driving purpose of the entire nations-cycle. Without this, the transition to the Israel-promise in verses 24–26 lacks its theological hinge. Judgment exists so that God's holiness is publicly vindicated and acknowledged. Preaching that skips verses 20–23 loses the *telos* of the chapter's judgment sections.

- **Using the passage to endorse economic anxiety or condemn prosperity.** Tyre's commercial success is not itself condemned — it is the *pride* that treated success as proof of self-sufficiency that is condemned. A sermon that leaves the impression that wealth or professional success is inherently spiritually dangerous misses the text's actual diagnosis. The problem was not that Tyre traded well; the problem was that the prince used his trading success to conclude "I am a god." Gifted people and successful people are not the target — self-enthroning gifted people are.
- **Failing to provide the gospel counter-movement.** Ezekiel 28 exposes the problem with devastating precision, but a Christian congregation requires more than exposure — it requires the alternative. The lament's Eden imagery and the cherub's corruption point forward to the One who entered the garden at Gethsemane and did not grasp His way out of it. Philippians 2:5–11 is the necessary canonical companion: the anti-Tyre, the One who had every right to the divine throne and chose the servant's form. Preaching that diagnoses self-deification without presenting the alternative Lord who modeled creaturely obedience perfectly has left the congregation with the wound but not the remedy.