

For My Own Sake

So far little has been said in terms of prayer specifically. But it is important that we proceed methodically so that we understand fully what we should be praying for. If the purpose of prayer is to ask that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (a point to which we will return later), then we must make sure that we grasp what exactly the divine will is. In other words, we must seek to pinpoint precisely what are God's greatest desires—his ultimate purpose, his “chief end,” to borrow Edwards' phrase—and then pray that he would accomplish them. To this task we now turn, drawing especially on the oracles of the prophet Ezekiel.

The Life and Ministry of Ezekiel

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, was born in 623 B.C. to a priestly family. Along with King Jehoiachin, he was carried into exile by the Babylonians in 597 B.C., apparently to the city of Nippur on the banks of the Kebar River. In the fifth year of exile—in July 593 B.C.—he received his prophetic call to ministry (1:1-3). Like most of the prophets, Ezekiel was given a dual message to preach, one of destruction and reconciliation. Thus, the first thirty-two chapters of the book announce God's judgment, both on Israel (1-24) and the surrounding nations (25-32). Contrarily, chapters 33-48 declare the future restoration of God's people, when he would bring them back from exile and reconcile them to himself.

After receiving his call to ministry, Ezekiel sets about depicting the siege of Jerusalem for his audience. He draws the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet and then constructs siege works around it to symbolize the coming siege (4:1-2). Next he places an iron pan between himself and the city, and then turns his face toward the city (verse 3). The iron pan represents the wall between God and Israel; the fixed gaze, the Lord's resolve to bring judgment upon the city. For 430 days Ezekiel lies beside his model city, living on the meager diet of siege conditions, prophesying against the city (verses 4-17).

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

Having completed this first “sign” of judgment against Jerusalem, he is quickly given his second. Shaving his head and beard, he is to divide the hair into three even piles. The first pile he is to burn; the second, to strike with a sword; the last, to scatter to the wind (5:1-2). These actions depict what will happen to the inhabitants of the city: a third will die by plague and famine, a third will fall by the sword, and a third will be scattered into exile (verse 12). Not a happy message, to be sure.

Why does God judge his people so harshly? His concern is his reputation. God had placed Jerusalem in the center of the nations (5:5), presumably to be that “city on the hill” to the surrounding pagan peoples. But instead of being a light in the darkness, the Israelites descend into wickedness and idolatry themselves (verses 6-7). In a later oracle, Ezekiel enumerates the sins in some detail. The Israelites are guilty of idolatry, shedding blood, oppressing the alien, mistreating society’s marginalized, desecrating the Sabbath, adultery, bribery, and a host of other trespasses (22:1-12). The Lord himself diagnoses the underlying problem with precision: “And you have forgotten me” (verse 12). The nation had turned from God to wickedness. Destruction and exile, then, are their just deserts.

The certainty of God’s judgment is transparent. In his famous vision of the wheels, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord depart from the temple (10:18-19). At this point, as one scholar puts it, “the Lord leaves town.”¹ Ezekiel himself leaves town a short while later, giving a prophetic object lesson to the watching crowds. He packs his bags, as the exiled would later do, walks through the streets, digs a hole in the city wall, and slips through—covering his face so that he cannot see the land. When those who see him ask why he does this, he is to assure them of the coming devastation (12:1-14). So certain is the desolation of the land, that not even the righteous presence of Noah, Daniel, and Job could save the city (14:12-16)! Judgment is inescapable.

Why does God punish the nation so mercilessly?

¹ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002): 239.

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

Perhaps this is what the elders of the exilic community come to inquire of God in the seventh year of exile (20:1)—or perhaps as to when they would return to their homeland. In any case, when the word of the Lord comes to Ezekiel at this moment, our answer arrives too. Throughout the history of Israel, their past, present, and future, God’s glory—his name—has been his primary concern. In his lengthy oracle (20:1-44), Ezekiel takes his audience through the three epochs to show as much.

For the Sake of My Name: The Past

The Lord refuses to dialogue with the elders, and instead directs Ezekiel to confront them with the horrid sinfulness of their history (20:2-4). Tracing the theme through three successive generations—Israel in Egypt (verses 5-9), the first wilderness generation (10-17), and the second wilderness generation (18-26)—Ezekiel depicts clearly the weight God places on the glory of his name.

The Lord, to accomplish his purposes in redemption, elects the nation Israel to occupy a special place in history. Thus, God swears to the descendants of Jacob that he would rescue them out of the land of Egypt. Importantly, he reveals himself to Israel—including the revelation of his name—so that he “became known to them” (verses 5-6).²

The knowledge of God, not so much revelatory as covenantal in context, proves an important theme in the oracle. More pressing for our purposes, it connects to the notion of God’s name, as he establishes a reputation for himself when he makes himself known to Israel. By attaching himself to (wayward) Israel, God binds his fame, in some sense, to his people. If Israel fails, the surrounding nations will ridicule her impotent God.

Immediately Israel learns this lesson—and so experiences his mercy not for their sake, but for his. He commands the exodus generation to put away their detestable idols because he has established

² This translation, rendered as “revealed myself to them” in the NIV, better captures the force of *wā’wwāda’ lāhem*, a Hebrew passive. So Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997): 624.

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

his covenant with them; he is “the LORD your God” (verse 7). They refuse, persisting in idolatry, so that God should pour out his wrath upon them even while they were in Egypt.³ But he does not. God explains his reasons: “But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations they lived among and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt” (verse 9). God acts for the sake of his name, to keep the nations from slandering him, precisely because those nations had seen him reveal himself to Israel. Now that he is known, he must work to preserve his honor.⁴ Thus, he exercises restraint, withholding judgment.

The story repeats itself twice. God sets a moral standard for his people, which they soon transgress. As a result, God resolves to destroy them in his fierce anger (20:10-13, 18-21). But then, as we have come to expect, God relents from the calamity he had intended for Israel in order to preserve the honor of his name among the watching nations.

“For the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.” (20:14)

“But I withheld my hand, and for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.” (20:22)

Though his people merit wrath, he distributes grace instead—not for the sake of his people, but for the sake of his name, his honor, his glory.

Interestingly, to the history of the second and third generations Ezekiel appends some punishment as well. Thus, God swears to the first wilderness generation that they will not enter the land flowing with milk and honey, though he does not exterminate them in the desert at least (20:15-17; cf.

³ The Pentateuch records no mention of idolatry in Egypt, though Joshua 24:14 confirms that it happened.

⁴ *The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 5th printing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson: 2000; originally published Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906) takes the phrase “for the sake of my name” (Heb. *lʾmaʿan šʾmī*) to mean “to act acc. to his character” (1028). However, Block correctly notes, “. . . the present context confirms that it is better understood as ‘to act for the sake of his reputation’” (*Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p. 629). Of course, if we understand the name-glory complex as in the previous chapter, we can affirm both simultaneously. Thus, his name *is* his revealed character—the emanation of his inner worth—according to which he acts. However, it is also his concern for his praise or glory, and (as Block suggests) this is surely the primary significance in this context. Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

Numbers 14:1-39). To the second wilderness generation God promises the exile (20:23). The exile does not come for centuries after the conquest of Canaan, with Judah not exiled until Ezekiel's lifetime in the sixth century B.C. Still, Israel experiences God's punishment in the intervening time. As God says, "Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD" (verses 25-26, ESV).⁵ These are difficult verses, not least because the identification of the bad rules proves enormously challenging, and because God's culpability in Israel's sinful child sacrifice (under Ahaz and Manasseh, see 2 Kings 16:3 and 21:6) is difficult to establish.⁶

Fortunately we may sidestep some of these issues to focus on the *reason* God defiles Israel: "I did it *that they might know that I am the LORD.*" God punishes Israel, augments their sin, so that—paradoxically—they will know him. At every step in Israel's past, God has been working to reveal his glory, his name, to all people. Thus, he restrains his wrath, showing mercy instead, so that the watching gentile nations will not profane his name. Likewise, he punishes the wickedness of his people so that they will acknowledge him for who he is—the Lord their God. This has immediate relevance for Israel's present circumstances during the prophetic ministry of Ezekiel.

⁵ The NIV translates "I gave them over to statutes" and "I let them become defiled" in place of "I gave them statutes" and "I defiled them," attempting to soften the blow of this difficult passage. However, the Hebrew is much more direct.

⁶ Scholars have historically seen the "bad laws" as a reference to the command that Israel consecrate every firstborn male to God (Exodus 13:2), which later Israelites—like Ahaz and Manasseh—later sinfully misinterpreted (though there are contextual reasons to doubt this identification). This would seem to make God a passive or merely permissive agent in their sin, then, an understanding that the NIV translation seems to support. However, another interpretation is possible, one that better maintains the active sense of the Hebrew. Whatever the laws in question (Ezekiel is more concerned with rhetoric than history at this point, see Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, pp. 613-614, 640), it makes good sense to read this as the direct judgment of God. The Bible frequently depicts God as punishing sin by causing the sinner to continue sinning. Thus, God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh will stubbornly refuse to let Israel leave (cf. Exodus 4:21). Likewise, God punishes sinful Israel by inciting David to take a census of the army, leading to further punishment (2 Samuel 24:1-15). For further discussion, see Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 257-258.

For the Sake of My Name: The Present

In the final section of the oracle, Ezekiel addresses his contemporaries (20:27-44). To those in exile he preaches a message of judgment and restoration. At last we learn precisely why God will not answer the inquiries of the elders: the sins of the past, for which God judged his people and thus sent them into exile, are in fact the sins of the present as well. God strikes at the heart of sinful Israel, saying, “When you offer your gifts—the sacrifice of your sons in the fire—you continue to defile yourselves with all your idols to this day” (verse 31). The exiled community cannot hide behind the sins of their fathers, for they have not reformed their ways.

Indeed, they wish to be like the pagan nations who surround them, worshiping idols of wood and stone (verse 32). But God will not let this happen. He will gather his people “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath,” and bring them to the “desert of the nations” that they might face judgment (verses 32-36). Amazingly, though, God does this to bring them into “the bond of the covenant” (verse 37), to reestablish his relationship with them. “Then you will know that I am the LORD,” he says (verse 38)—and his people will no longer desecrate his holy name by their idolatry (verse 39). He will gather his people to himself, purifying them, accepting their renewed worship on his holy mountain (verses 38, 40-41a). Why does he do this? “I will show myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the land I had sworn with uplifted hand to give to your fathers” (verses 41b-42). God will exercise both his wrath and his mercy, both judgment and restoration, so that his people will know him and the nations will revere him. God acts in the present for the sake of his name.

Ezekiel concludes the oracle by uniting these two strands, his revealing himself to Israel and his preserving the glory of his name among the nations. Through his prophet the Lord declares, “You will know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name’s sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, O house of Israel” (20:44). When God shows grace, he does it not for the

sake of his people but for the glory of his name. When God inflicts punishment, he does it not for the sake of his people but for the glory of his name. God desires that the world know who he is, and in every action he will reveal himself—in all his glory.

For the Sake of My Name: The Future

In turning to the future we must turn a few chapters as well. In their past and present the Israelites have seen much of judgment, but in their future they will experience restoration. To this wondrous theme Ezekiel turns in the last third of the book that bears his name. In a famous oracle (36:16-38), Ezekiel prophesies the time when God will give his people a new heart and spirit, and will put his Spirit within them that they might obey his decrees. Though familiar promises to many, that God does this for the sake of his name fewer will have recognized.

Ezekiel opens the oracle by describing the sins of Israel, who have defiled the Promised Land by their wicked conduct. Because of their iniquity God disperses them among the nations, exiling them to Assyria and Babylon (36:17-19). As a result of Israel's sin, however, God faces a crisis: "And wherever they went among the nation they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land'" (verse 20). God's glory joins inextricably to the fate of his people, such that now his fame is in peril. God is not unaware of what has happened: "I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone" (verse 21). God cares for his glory. Thus, he must act in the future to reassert his glory, that both Israel and the world would know his name, his glorious character.

How will the Lord recover his glory? He lays out his plan in the heart of the oracle (36:17-32). God makes it clear that he acts for the honor of his name—and not for his people: "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone" (verse 22). The implications are clear.

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

Ultimately, at least, God redeems his people for his own sake, not for theirs. In fact, God seems to regard Israel as a vehicle for his glory among the nations. He continues, “I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes” (verse 23). Israel desecrated the holiness of God’s name, but he will use them to reestablish its worth throughout the world. Note especially that God says, “Then the nations will know that I am *Yahweh* [the LORD]”—revealing his covenantal name to them, with all the attendant entailments of his character and glory. God’s goal in his coming activities is his honor.

The coming activities that will restore his glory are four: bringing Israel back from exile (verse 24), cleansing them from their sin (verse 25), providing them with new hearts and spirits (verse 26), and giving them his Spirit that they might follow his decrees (verse 27). Of course, these activities find their final fulfillment at Pentecost, when God pours out his Spirit on his people, enabling them to live sanctified lives to his glory.⁷ Thus, Israel’s future is our present. And in their future, all God does for them he does for his sake. Lest we miss this point, Ezekiel repeats it once more—driving home the fact that God cares more for his glory than he does for his people⁸: “I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!” (verse 32). Israel merits naught but destruction, death, and damnation; yet God has showed forth his mercy. But he does so for the sake of his name.

As a result of God’s redemptive activities, rescuing his people from exile and establishing a new covenant with them, he will receive his due glory. God restores his people to the Promised Land—cleansing them from all their sin, resettling the towns, rebuilding the ruins (verse 33) *so that the nations*

⁷ See Acts 2:1-21, where Peter identifies God’s work at that moment as a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. Notably, Jeremiah 31:31-34 also lists an understanding of God’s laws and the ability to follow them as a hallmark of the new covenant. Writing the law on their hearts (verse 33) might well describe something similar to Ezekiel’s new hearts and new spirits. See also Galatians 5:16-25.

⁸ The two are undoubtedly linked. Still, I do not think this statement is too strong in light of the biblical evidence. See Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, chapter 2, sections 3 and 4.

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

will see what he has done. He emphasizes this point by saying, “The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate *in the sight of all who pass through it*” (verse 34). Men and women from every nation will see the great change that has happened in Israel. As a result, God notes, “Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate” (verse 36). Yahweh has rescued his people. How will the nations keep from glorifying him?

Nor will God recover his glory only among the gentiles. Israel too will acknowledge what he has done, once he repopulates the land, making his people “as numerous as sheep, as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts.” “Then,” as God announces, “they will know that I am the LORD” (verses 37-38). He is Yahweh—gracious and compassionate, abounding in love, forgiving wickedness and rebellion—and his people will recognize him as such. In the future, when God works to redeem his people, he will do so for his glory.

In Israel’s past, present, and future—from the perspective of the prophet Ezekiel—God has always, is now, and will act for the praise of his name. In punishment and forgiveness, judgment and mercy, exile and gathering, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Israel—God makes his glory known to all people. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8)—and who was, and is, and will be exalting himself in the eyes of his creatures.

In Creation, Fall and Redemption

Ezekiel is not the only author of Scripture who describes God thus. It is the uniform witness of all the holy writings. At the risk of repetition, I want to show that in the three great theological epochs—in the creation, fall, and redemption of his people—God acts for the sake of his name. I will quote liberally from various biblical authors to demonstrate how pervasive this theme is in God’s Word.

Creation: The Place and the People

God creates that he might display his splendor—and that he might have creatures who will see and recognize it. Both the place and the people he calls into being exist for his glory. The universe proclaims the infinite wonder and majesty of God’s creative ability. A single summer meadow would be sufficient to captivate even the most jaded cynic, overwhelming us with burgeoning sights and sounds and scents. Even a lone flower paints upon the canvas of the mind with a more precise palette than any Kandinsky or Matisse. But to such exquisite beauty God adds the full wonder of the plant and animal kingdoms; the natural architecture of plain and plateau, glen and glacier, coast and cliff and canyon; the mellifluous trickle of stream and rainfall, the roaring torrent of oceans and rivers. And all this lit by the dalliance of capricious stars or the simple stare of the sun! Truly, then,

“The heavens declare the glory of God;

the stars proclaim the work of his hands.” (Psalm 19:1)

God’s creation displays the glory of his name—and exists for it as well. As Paul reminds us, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and *for him*” (Colossians 1:16). All that he brought forth by his mighty hand exists for him, to his everlasting praise.

Moreover, God does not just create the universe for his glory, but a people for his name as well. In a shocking denunciation of sinful Israel, Isaiah notes that creation has often proved more apt to glorify God than the people he chose! “The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise” (43:20-21). Jackals and owls honor God because they recognize his hand in sustaining life—theirs and ours. However, though Israel should proclaim his praise as a result, too often they have neglected their high calling, bringing him sin instead of sacrifice! (verses 22-24). Nevertheless, God formed these people, “everyone who is called by my

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

name, *whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made*" (verse 7). What qualifies Israel for redemption? That they were called by his name. Why did he choose them, form them as his people? For his glory. For they will be his witnesses, that he is God and there is no other, among all nations (verse 10). God creates both the place and the people for his name.

Fall: Restraint and Wrath

God forms and calls his people, but we quickly turn from him. Adam and Eve usurped his place and broke fellowship with him, and so sin and death began their reign of terror. God destroyed evil humanity by the flood, preserving righteous Noah alone, only to see him soon stumble into drunken lewdness—and to see his descendants seek to make a name for themselves, rather than glorifying his, at Babel. To the father of Israel he gives the promise of future redemption, but for impatience Abraham almost thwarts God's plan to give him the child of the promise, Isaac. And the nation that springs from Abraham proved faithless, idolatrous, time and time again, provoking God to fierce anger.

Sometimes God restrains his fury, conferring grace instead. When he does, he does so for his glory. Ezekiel has already provided us with examples of God's restraint, as he keeps from destroying three successive generations of Israelites for the honor of his name. An earlier prophet, Isaiah, ministering a short time before God handed the northern kingdom over to exile in Assyria, asserts the same theological truth incisively:

For my own name's sake I delay my wrath;
for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you,
so as not to cut you off.

See, I have refined you, though not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of your affliction.

For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this.
How can I let myself be defamed?

Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and do not make more than 1000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Brandon Cooper. ©Follow After Ministries. Website: www.followafter.net. E-mail: brandon@followafter.net.

I will not yield my glory to another. (48:9-11)

God should—perhaps even would like to—destroy Israel completely. But because his honor is bound up with the history of his people (formed for his glory), he cannot. He delays his wrath, holding it back from Israel for his name’s sake. He will discipline them—exiling them to Assyria and Babylon, allowing the sack of Jerusalem—but he has not cut them off completely. How could he? To do so would defame his name. Other gods would receive his rightful glory. So he acts for his own sake—repeated in emphatic fashion. He calls his servant Cyrus to wage war against Babylon (verses 14-15), providing for the release of the captives and their eventual return to Jerusalem under men like Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. He alone is God. In restraining his fury, he proves as much and wins our praise.

At other times, however, God gives full vent to his wrath. But here too does he act for his glory. In Israel’s history, this occurs most evidently in the life of Pharaoh, whose heart God hardened (an act of judgment) that he might pour out his wrath upon Egypt. Why does God decide to harden Pharaoh’s heart? Why does he want to destroy the Egyptians in his rage? “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them [to the Red Sea]. But *I will gain glory for myself* through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD” (Exodus 14:4). Indeed, God had declared earlier that he had raised Pharaoh up for this very purpose, “that I might show you my power and that *my name might be proclaimed* in all the earth” (9:16). God hardens Pharaoh’s heart and brings his signs of judgment upon Egypt that the world might glorify his name.

This is not simply the vengeful God of the Old Testament, however, now allegedly replaced by the kindly, forgiving Christ of the New. No, God continues to dispense judgment, to display his wrath, that he might be glorified—especially in the damnation of the wicked. Paul, in defending God’s sovereignty from hypothetical attack, asks, “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the *objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction*? What if he did this *to make the riches of his glory known* to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance

for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:22-24). Though unpopular in much of our sentimental theology today, we must remember that God is glorified both in the destruction of the wicked and the redemption of his people.

Redemption: In Captivity and in Christ

Israel’s history has been marked by a yearning for redemption. As slaves in Egypt, they cried out to God for freedom from the oppressive Egyptian yoke. God heard their groaning (Exodus 2:24) and sent them a savior, Moses, to lead them into freedom (3:7-10). Though the Israelites give no thought to God’s goodness, though they rebel against him at the Red Sea (14:11-12), he rescues them still. He does so for his renown:

Yet he saved them *for his name’s sake*,

to make his mighty power known.

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up;

he led them through the depths as through a desert.

He saved them from the hand of the foe;

from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.

The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.

Then they believed his promises and *sang his praise.*” (Psalm 106:8-12)

By revealing his mighty power, those who had neglected his glory quickly turn to him and sing his praise.

God leads his people into the Promised Land through his servants Moses and Joshua, but they soon descend into idolatry and faithlessness. As punishment he exiles them to Assyria and Babylon, though he assures them that one day he will gather his people in the Beautiful Land again. He has plans for his chosen nation, plans to give them a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). When God redeems his people from the Babylonian captivity, he does for his renown. The prophet Jeremiah, preaching during the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah, announces as much. God calls his people to return to the

land because he is merciful (3:12) and their husband (verse 14). After returning to and repopulating the land, “At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem *to honor the name of the LORD*. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts” (verse 17). In another oracle God declares that, after bringing his people back to Jerusalem and cleansing them from their sin, “Then *this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor* before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it” (33:9). God redeems his people from their captivity that they might praise his name.

Turning briefly to the New Testament, we see Paul—praising God for blessing us in Christ Jesus—affirming the same truth in his letter to the church in Ephesus. Three times in his lengthy, magnificent opening, Paul remarks that God has redeemed us for his praise.

“In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to *the praise of his glorious grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” (1:4-6)

“In him we were also chosen . . . in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*.” (1:11-12)

“[The Spirit] is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to *the praise of his glory*.” (1:14)

Surely God predestines, adopts, chooses, and redeems us for the praise of his glory. Our redemption in Christ is not for our sake, but for his—that he might receive glory and honor from his saints eternally.

The psalmist has it right:

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory,

because of your love and faithfulness.” (Psalm 115:1)