

# **Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Destruction of Tyre**

## **Ezekiel 26**

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## Introduction

Critics of the Bible frequently cite Ezekiel's prophecy of the destruction of Tyre from Ezekiel 26 as an example of unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy<sup>1</sup>. The Internet Infidels<sup>2</sup> website has 66 articles, at the time of this writing, showcasing the destruction of Tyre as one of their best examples of unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Prominent atheist, Farrell Til, uses the passage as part of his critical attack on the authority of the Bible<sup>3</sup>.

In Christian circles, the passage is frequently cited in the battle over Biblical inerrancy that rages in many parts of the church. Defenders of the inerrancy of the Bible point to it as an example of fulfilled prophecy<sup>4</sup>. Those that oppose Biblical inerrancy trumpet the passage as concrete evidence that the Bible has errors<sup>5</sup>. To these critics, the conservative defenders of the passage seem to jump through exegetical hoops in their attempts to salvage Ezekiel's prophecy and save inerrancy<sup>6</sup>.

## Thesis

This paper examines the prophecy of the destruction of Tyre as found in Ezekiel 26. It is the thesis of this paper that the passage in Ezekiel 26 can be honestly defended as

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Kyle Williams, *Ezekiel was a False Prophet*, on the Internet at <http://www.hotcom.net/users/shagbark/ezekiel.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Found on the Internet at <http://www.infidels.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Found on the Internet at: <http://www.infidels.org/library/magazines/tsr/1999/2/992tyre.html>

<sup>4</sup> McDowell, pp. 275-276, uses the passage as an example of the accuracy of Biblical Prophecy.

<sup>5</sup> Beegle, pp. 49-50, uses the passage as an example of errancy of the Prophets and writes, "it is a futile effort to claim that Ezekiel's original prediction finally came true." See also, Bratcher, Dennis. *Ezekiel and the Oracles Against Tyre*, on the Internet at: <http://www.cresourcei.org/ezekiel.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, p. 100. Thompson argues that some interpreters start with a dogmatic concern for the accuracy of Scripture and proceed to defend the passage from that perspective.

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completely fulfilled from a grammatical, historical, contextual, and exegetical basis<sup>7</sup>. The author of this paper does not have training in Hebrew so detailed analysis of the Hebrew text will not be performed.

### The Passage

Ezek 26:1-21 And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. And her daughters which are in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I am the LORD. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee. And he shall set engines of war against thy walls, and with his axes he shall break down thy towers. By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover thee: thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates, as men enter into a city wherein is made a breach. With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground. And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise: and they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses: and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water. And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard. And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the LORD have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD. Thus saith the Lord GOD to Tyrus; Shall not the isles shake at the sound of thy fall, when the wounded cry, when the slaughter is made in the midst of thee? Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and put off their broidered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit upon the ground, and shall tremble at every moment, and be astonished at thee. And they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and say to thee, How art thou destroyed, that wast inhabited of seafaring men, the renowned city, which wast strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, which cause their terror to be on all that haunt it! Now shall the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure. For thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall make thee a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep upon thee, and great waters shall cover thee; When I shall bring thee down with them that descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old, with them that go down to the pit, that thou be not inhabited; and I shall set glory in the land of the living; I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord GOD. (KJV).

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to demonstrate that the passage conforms to the falsification test of Deut. 18:21-22.

## Outline of Ezekiel 26 – 28

Ezekiel 26-28 contains prophecies<sup>8</sup> against Tyre. An outline of the three chapters is:

- 26:1-21 Proclamation against Tyre
  - 1 Stereotypical prophetic introduction
  - 2 Reason for Prophecy
    - 2a Tyre is object of prophecy
  - 3-14 Judgment against Tyre
    - 3-6 Many nations will come against Tyre
    - 7-11 Nebuchadnezzar will come against Tyre
    - 12 Fall of Tyre and spoiling of the riches of Tyre
    - 13-14 "Internal" result of the judgment of Tyre
  - 15-18 Reaction of the other nations to the fall of Tyre
    - 17-18 Lamentation of the nations over the destruction
  - 19-21 Judgment of God will be final
- 27:1-36 Lamentation against Tyre
  - 1-2 Stereotypical prophetic introduction
    - 2 Tyre is object of lamentation
  - 3-36 Lamentation against Tyre
    - 3-24 Boasting of Tyre's great past
      - 3-7 Beauty of Tyre itself
      - 8-9 Tyre hired merchant marines from other nations
      - 10-11 Tyre hired mercenary armies to protect Tyre
      - 12-24 Tyre had many merchants and trading partners
    - 25-36 Reaction of the nations at the destruction of Tyre
- 28:1-19 Proclamation against the Prince and King of Tyre
  - 1-2 Stereotypical prophetic introduction
    - 2 Prince of Tyre is object of proclamation
  - 3-5 Boasting of prince of Tyre
    - 6a Declaration of God's judgment against Prince of Tyre
    - 6b-10 Contrasts between current state and judgment state
  - 11-12 Stereotypical prophetic introduction
    - 12a King of Tyre is object of proclamation
  - 13-19 Prophecy of the Destruction of Lucifer
- 28:20-24 Prophecy of the destruction of Sidon
- 28:25-26 Contrast to the future blessing of Israel

## Important Features of the Outline of the Passage

Exactly where the outline divisions of this section of Ezekiel are drawn is particularly important. The subdivision of Ezekiel chapter 26 into verses 3 through 14 defines the time-frame of the prophecy. The issues of when the city would be destroyed and who would perform the destruction, are key to determining whether this passage was a failed

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<sup>8</sup> Provisionally defined as being in the genre of prophecy. The subject of genre will be dealt with later in this paper.

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or successful prophecy. For instance, one such “problem” verse is 12, where the spoils of Tyre are described as being taken by the victor. If verse 12 refers to Nebuchadnezzar, then the fact that the island portion of Tyre escaped total conquest by Nebuchadnezzar is problematic. If verse 12 refers to the “many nations” of verse 3, then fulfillment could be found in Alexander who did finally conquer the island portion, albeit hundreds of years later<sup>9</sup>.

### Greater Context of the Passage

This section will examine the context of the passage inside Ezekiel and within the greater context of the Prophetic writings.

#### Oracles Against the Foreign Nations

The passage fits into the “Oracles Against Foreign Nations” which are contained in Ezekiel chapters 25 through 32<sup>10</sup>. These oracles list the sins of the surrounding nations and pronounce the judgment of God on those nations for their sins. The general principle is that if God judged His children in Judah and Jerusalem for their disobedience, how much more would God judge the idolatrous nations that surrounded Jerusalem for their sins.

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<sup>9</sup> Archer, pp. 276-277, takes this a step further where he claims that the “island city.... sank below the surface of the Mediterranean” and that “all that remains of it is a series of black reefs offshore from Tyre.” Archer writes, “The promontory that now juts out from the coastline probably was washed up along the barrier of Alexander’s causeway, but the island itself broke off and sank away when the subsidence took place and we have no evidence that it ever was built up again....”

<sup>10</sup> Renz, pp. 94-96 deals with the oracles of Ezekiel 25-32. Seven nations are addressed. All of the nations are condemned for their malice against Judah.

## Other Prophetic References to the Destruction of Tyre

Jeremiah also referred to the upcoming destruction of Tyre<sup>11</sup>, although his language was more general than that of Ezekiel. God was to judge the nations for their sins.

## The Dating of the Historical Situation of Ezekiel 26-28

Ezekiel chapters 26 through 28 were oracles against Tyre that were given in 586 BCE.

The dating of the historical situation of Ezekiel 26 through 28 is unique in that, unlike most prophecies given by individuals in Scripture, it can be very precisely dated. This precise dating is possible due to two external events.

### Written After the fall of Jerusalem

Ezekiel must have given the oracles against Tyre after the fall of Jerusalem, which happened in 586 BCE, since Ezekiel listed the boasting of the citizens of Tyre at the fall of Jerusalem as the reason for the impending judgment on Tyre.

### Written Before the Siege of Tyre by Nebuchadrezzar

The prophecy was given before the actual siege of Tyre, which lasted from 585-572 BCE. This was apparent since the prophecy was future tense. The residents of Tyre would be repaid for their boasting. Similarly, Ezekiel chapter 29 must be dated after the time of the siege since it described the long siege.

### An Internal Time Marker

Finally, a fairly conclusive internal time marker is the phrase “eleventh year, in the first

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<sup>11</sup> Jer 25:17 Then took I the cup at the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the

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day of the month.<sup>12</sup>” According to the same book, the destruction of Jerusalem happened in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day<sup>13</sup> and this date was 586 BCE.

### Historical Records of the Siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar

There are no surviving, contemporary Assyrian records of the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. The earliest surviving references are many hundreds of years later. Josephus references the no longer extant historians Diocles and Philostrates as to the length of the siege and provides some of the details of the siege from their writings:

Diocles also, in the second book of his Accounts of Persia, mentions this king [Nebuchadnezzar] ; as does Philostrates in his Accounts both of India and of Phoenicia, say, that this king besieged Tyre thirteen years, while at the same time Ethbaal reigned at Tyre<sup>14</sup>.

Nabuchodonosor besieged Tyre for thirteen years in the days of Ithobal, their king; after him reigned Baal, ten years; after him were judges appointed, who judged the people: Ecnibalus, the son of Baslacus, two months; Chelbes, the son of Abdeus, ten months; Abbar, the high priest, three months; Mitgonus and Gerastratus, the sons of Abdelemus, were judges six years; after whom Balatorus reigned one year; after his death they sent and fetched Merbalus from Babylon, who reigned four years; after his death they sent for his brother Hirom, who reigned twenty years. Under his reign Cyrus became king of Persia." So that the whole interval is fifty-four years besides three months; for in the seventh year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar he began to besiege Tyre, and Cyrus the

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LORD had sent me ... 22 And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea ...

<sup>12</sup> Ezek. 26:1

<sup>13</sup> Ezek 24:1-2 Again in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this same day: the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day.



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Persian took the kingdom in the fourteenth year of Hirom.<sup>15</sup>

Nabuchodonosor joined battle with him, and conquered him, and reduced the country under his dominion again. Now it so fell out that his father Nabolassar fell into a distemper at this time, and died in the city of Babylon, after he had reigned twenty-nine years. But as he understood, in a little time, that his father Nabolassar was dead, he set the affairs of Egypt and the other countries in order, and committed the captives he had taken from the Jews, and Phoenicians, and Syrians, and of the nations belonging to Egypt, to some of his friends, that they might conduct that part of the forces that had on heavy armor, with the rest of his baggage, to Babylonia<sup>16</sup>;

Berosus, a Phoenician priest of Bel, is also given as a source by Josephus, along with the corresponding witnesses of Philostratus and Megasthenes:

Moreover, we meet with a confirmation of what Berosus says in the archives of the Phoenicians, concerning this king Nabuchodonosor, that he conquered all Syria and Phoenicia; in which case Philostratus agrees with the others in that history which he composed, where he mentions the siege of Tyre; as does Megasthenes also, in the fourth book of his Indian History, wherein he pretends to prove that the forementioned king of the Babylonians was superior to Hercules in strength and the greatness of his exploits; for he says that he conquered a great part of Libya, and conquered Iberia also.<sup>17</sup>

Nebuchadrezzar was unable to take the island part of the city by force since he didn't have a naval fleet<sup>18</sup>. At the end of the siege, Tyre made terms and acknowledged the the suzerainty of Nebuchadrezzar. This signaled the loss of sovereignty of Tyre<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Josephus. *Antiquities*, X, 11, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Jidejian, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> The loss of trade during the siege meant that the trade partners no longer viewed Tyre as a dependable trade partner. See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15109a.htm> for additional details.

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Keil and Delitzsch defend Jerome's<sup>20</sup> assertion that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the island portion of the city of Tyre by building a causeway between the mainland and the island<sup>21</sup>.

K-D offer as evidence for their interpretation the passage from Ezekiel 28 which describes the siege of Tyre as having been hard work and the promise of the conquest of Egypt as a reward for completing the task assigned to Nebuchadnezzar by God. Their argument seems to rest on the silence of the original sources<sup>22</sup> more than any actual evidence<sup>23</sup>. Additionally, Jerome appears to have most likely conflated the account of Alexander with that of Nebuchadnezzar<sup>24</sup>.

### Merbaal and the Captives

After the surrender of Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar took the members of the royal household of Tyre back to Babylonia as captives<sup>25</sup>. One of them, Merbaal, was later sent back to Tyre to reign over the Tyrians at their own request. After his death, the Tyrians requested that

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<sup>20</sup> Jerome himself acknowledged that some sources said that it was Alexander who destroyed the island of Tyre.

<sup>21</sup> Keil-Delitzsch, vol. 9, p. 421.

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Thompson, P. 95. draws the exact opposite conclusion from the silence of the classical sources as evidence that the event predicted by Ezekiel did not happen. This would not be the first time that classical sources have not validated the Bible, but eventually someone with a spade validated the text.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson's criticism that the interpretation of the passage as referring to both Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander (pp. 97-98) is a product of Enlightenment rationalistic approach is unwarranted on this point since the criticism that Tyre was not actually completely destroyed wasn't unveiled until the rationalists sought to tear down the Bible during the Enlightenment. Arguments developed on both sides often in response to the opponent's position. This is an easily reversible argument since, it is equally true that no one saw the passage as not being fulfilled until the time of the Enlightenment and yet that has not stopped the critical argument. Should the defenders of Biblical Orthodoxy be limited to pre-Enlightenment commentaries and thought?

<sup>24</sup> Jerome himself admits this in his Commentaries on Ezekiel where he notes that many other interpreters viewed the mole as being constructed during the time of the siege of Tyre by Alexander.

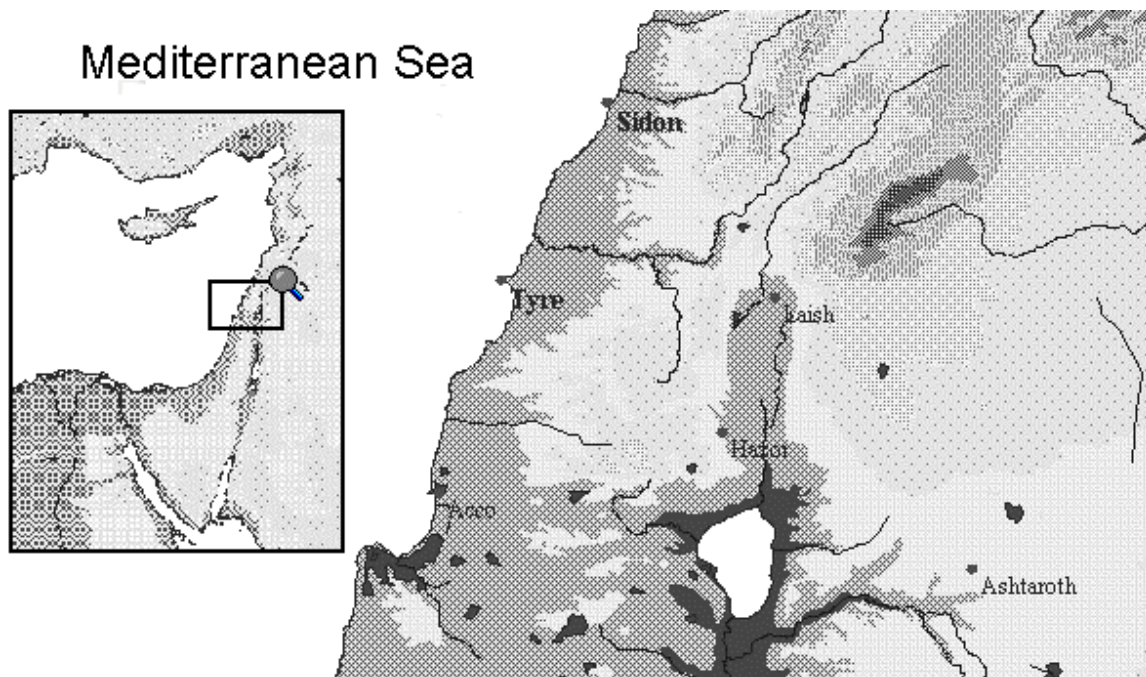
<sup>25</sup> ANET, p. 308. An administrative document lists the king of Tyre among the pensioners of the royal Babylonian household.

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his brother Hiram be allowed to return and rule Tyre, which he did for twenty years<sup>26</sup>.

### Geographical Location

At the time of Ezekiel, Tyre was a Phoenician city-state located directly to the north of Judah/Israel/Samaria. Tyre plays a prominent role in the Bible due to its proximity to the Prophets of Israel. Present-day Tyre is 12 miles north of the current Israel/Lebanon border<sup>27</sup>.



(Map of Tyre)

### Mainland/Island Portions of the City

At the time of the writing of Ezekiel, Tyre was located in two parts separated by the water of the Mediterranean Sea. One of the parts was on the island<sup>28</sup> where the ports were

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<sup>26</sup> This indicates the loss of sovereignty over Tyre over her own affairs.

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/middle\\_east/lebanon/attractions.htm](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/middle_east/lebanon/attractions.htm) gives the distance as 11 miles.

<sup>28</sup> According to <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15109a.htm> the island was 1968 feet away from the sea

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located, and the other part was on the mainland. The main attraction of Tyre for trade was its two ports, one to the north and one to the south. The two ports were located on the island part of the city. Tyre was a key city for trade with the Middle East due to its strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, by this time, Tyre had become quite wealthy through extensive trade.

The exact location of the original mainland portion of Tyre from the time of the Phoenicians is unknown at present. The Lonely Planet Guide describes what is known:

The old [island] part of Tyre is on the peninsula, while the modern town is slightly inland.

Further south, you come to the ruins of Roman-era Tyre.

Was the Phoenician town of Tyre located where the present day Roman ruins are, or was it located where the modern town is located, or was it located somewhere between the peninsula (formerly island) part and the further inland mainland part? Archeologists have not yet adequately answered the question. Ezekiel had predicted that [mainland] Tyre would never be found<sup>29</sup>, although his reference was more likely to refer to the end of the existence of Tyre as a power rather than the inability of future archeologists to locate the Phoenician-era city.

### Scale Mockup of Tyre at the time of Alexander

The following is a picture of a scale mockup of the city of Tyre as it existed at the time of Alexander. The northern, or Sidonian, harbor is to the left in the picture. The southern, or

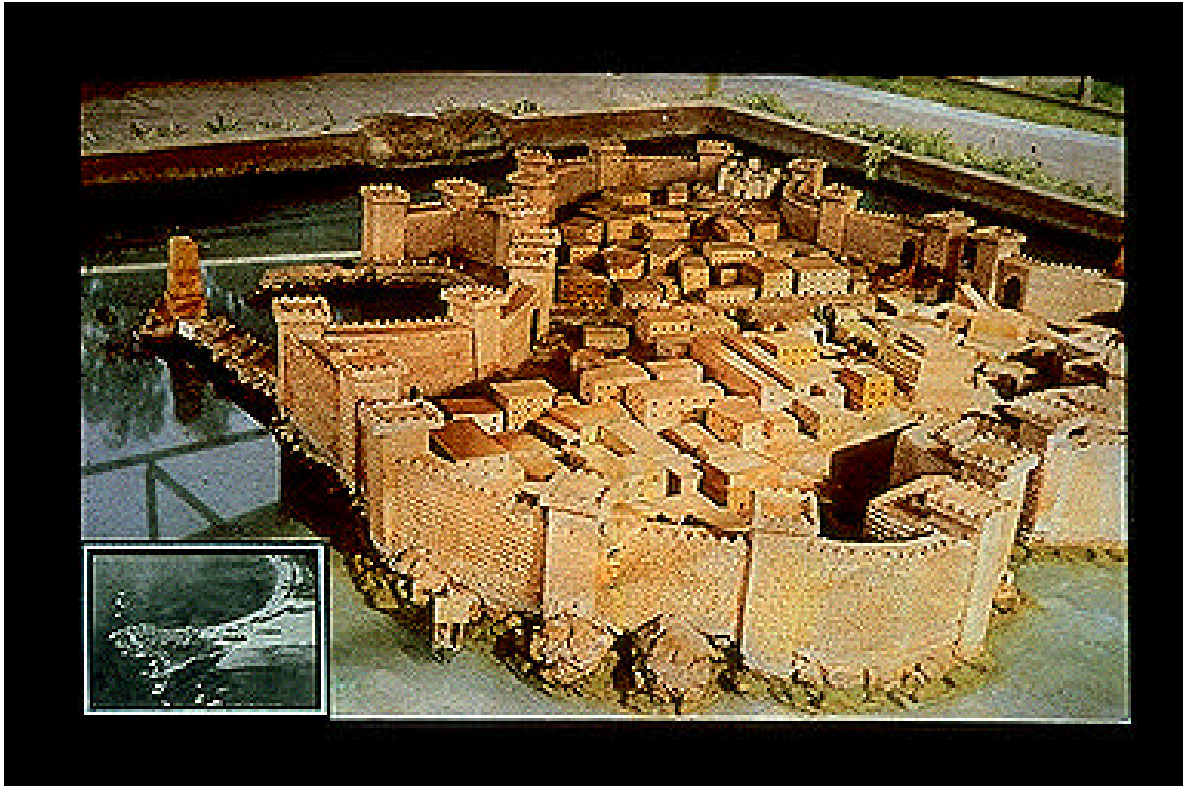
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level.

<sup>29</sup> Ezek 26:21 I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord GOD.

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Egyptian, harbor is to the right in the picture. The city was completely fortified against attack and was considered to be invulnerable due to it's distance from the land. This was shown by the inability of previous conquerors to land their siege engines from ships or to build conventional siege ramps from land in order to scale the walls of the island part of the city.



(Scale Model of the City of Tyre with modern Tyre on left inset)

## Archaeological Evidence

Archaeologists have done contains extensive excavations of the Roman era settlement at mainland Tyre. So far, the only excavations that have been made at the Tyre site of the Phoenician era settlement are of a cemetery, although some soundings have been made of

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what is believed to be the Phoenician location of mainland Tyre<sup>30</sup>. Pottery that dates to the eighth century BCE was found in the tombs<sup>31</sup>.

### Textual Evidence

#### Genre of the Material

Another solution to the issue may be found in the question of whether the text contains prophetic or apocalyptic language. Most of the commentators treat the passage as a prophetic text. However, the greater context of the passage may be apocalyptic<sup>32</sup>.

The plain sense of the text of Ezekiel 26 is that it is referring to Nebuchadrezzar since he is the only king referred to by name. However, when chapter 26 is read in the broader context of chapters 26 through 28, a different picture emerges. The passage goes well beyond a contemporary historical description of the ruler of Tyre that existed in the time of Nebuchadrezzar in chapter 28. The description given is that of the past history and final judgment of Satan rather than a description of the contemporary king of Tyre. The key section for this identification is:

Ezek 28:11-19 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in

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<sup>30</sup> Jidejan, p. 57. The cemetery is located in the locality of Tell el-Rashidiyeh (Palaetyrus – Old Tyrus).

<sup>31</sup> Jidejan, p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> This was the time when prophetic was becoming apocalyptic.

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thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.

This passage is frequently understood by Christian exegetes to be referring to the fall of Lucifer. Some of the language from chapter 28 is shared with chapter 26. In particular, the phrases “I will cast thee to the ground” from verse 17 and “never shalt thou be any more” from verse 19 are parallels to the phrases in chapter 26:

Ezek 26:20 When I shall bring thee down with them that descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old, with them that go down to the pit, that thou be not inhabited; and I shall set glory in the land of the living;

It's quite possible that much of the language of chapter 26 was also intended to be apocalyptic. At the very least, it's an open question. This approach has the appeal of removing the need for direct fulfillment in the time of Ezekiel. The part of the text that most unsettlingly resists this hypothesis is the identification of Nebuchadrezzar by name.

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However, the ruler of Tyre is identified and understood by most exegetes to not refer to the actual ruler of Tyre, but to Satan. In the text, Nebuchadrezzar may simply be representative of the first of many instruments of God's judgment against Tyre. However, this approach has the force of weakening the use of the passage for apologetic purposes since it moves the passage from being a fulfilled prophecy to being a future prediction that has not yet be completely fulfilled.

### Ironies in the Text

The material in Ezekiel 26-28 contains a number of ironies, including:

1. Tyre had boasted against Jerusalem due to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar<sup>33</sup>. Yet, Tyre would soon suffer the same fate as Israel at the hands not only of Nebuchadrezzar, but multiplied by many nations<sup>34</sup>.
2. Just as the waves of the sea continually come to the shores of Tyre (one after another) in bringing trade to the island, the waves of nations would continually come against Tyre to bring war<sup>35</sup>.
3. When the Israelites went astray, they made golden calves<sup>36</sup>, representative of Baal, the God of Tyre. The trust in other Gods had led to the destruction of Israel, and the trust in Baal would lead to the destruction of Tyre.

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<sup>33</sup> Ezek. 26:2.

<sup>34</sup> Ezek. 26:3.

<sup>35</sup> This is an apt metaphor for a sea faring city.

<sup>36</sup> Exo 32:23 For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 24 And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.

2 Ki 10:29 Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan.

2 Chr 13:8 And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves, which Jeroboam made you for gods.



## Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Destruction of Tyre: Ezekiel 26

4. Tyre would be destroyed forever<sup>37</sup>, but Israel would return to their land<sup>38</sup>.
5. Tyre means “rock<sup>39</sup>”, but the city would sink below the seas.

### Ezekiel's Own Reaction to the Event

This section of the book of Ezekiel contains a specimen of something that is extremely rare in the field of interpretation of prophecy. That is, the prophet Ezekiel provided commentary on his own prophecy:

Ezek 29:18 Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: (KJV)

In this passage, Ezekiel acknowledges that the city was not completely destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar<sup>40</sup>. Chronologically, this places the Ezekiel 29 passage at least thirteen years after the events of chapter 26. Additionally, it shows that Ezekiel was aware of the actual situation as it happened and didn't make any effort to rationalize away his previous prophecy<sup>41</sup>. The connection between Tyre and Egypt is important since Tyre had put its

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<sup>37</sup> Ezek 26:19 For thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall make thee a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited;

<sup>38</sup> Ezek 28:25 Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. 26 And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God.

<sup>39</sup> Feinberg, p. 148.

<sup>40</sup> Keil and Delitzsch dispute this interpretation. They hold that Tyre was completely destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar and that the Ezekiel 29 passage describes the reward that God would give Nebuchadrezzar for his obedience would be the conquest of Egypt.

<sup>41</sup> Carroll, Robert P., pp. 174- 175, deals with the issue of the failure of Ezekiel as an example of adaptive prophecy. According to Carroll, when the prophecy failed, Ezekiel simply modified the prophecy to apply to Egypt. Carroll contends that “awareness that a prediction had not been realized completely did not so much cause dissonance as permitted a switch of position on the subject. If the first expectation did not measure up fully to the prediction then a further oracle could be produced to incorporate the failure into it.”

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hopes in Egypt, and the hopes of Tyre were disappointed when Egypt didn't come to her defense. In this interpretation, Egypt was given to Nebuchadnezzar as a "consolation prize" for his failure to completely spoil Tyre.

### Detailed Exegetical Analysis

The following sections will deal with the detailed exegesis of the passage looking particularly at the "problem areas" in the passage. There are several "hinge phrases" in the passage, which help in determining the scope of the passage.

#### Many Nations

One of the first questions to be answered is whether the phrase "many nations" in verse 3 refers to the multinational forces of Nebuchadnezzar<sup>42</sup> or to the succession of nations that would attack Tyre over the following centuries<sup>43</sup>. The passage in question is:

Ezekiel 26:3 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up.

It is true that Nebuchadnezzar's army was made up of people from many different conquered peoples. However, neither Ezekiel, nor any other Old Testament book, uses the phrase "many nations" to refer to multinational forces<sup>44</sup>. Verse 7 of the same chapter uses the phrase "many people" (NKJV) to describe the force that Nebuchadnezzar

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<sup>42</sup> Williams, Kyle, *Ezekiel was a False Prophet*, <http://www.hotcom.net/users/shagbark/ezekiel.html>, states that "the 'many nations' or verse 3 probably refer(s) to Nebuchadnezzar's 'great army' of verse 7."

<sup>43</sup> Feinberg, p. 148 presents this position. "Wave after wave of invaders were to beat against her to bring about her doom. The prophet could have well had in mind the successive invaders of the city through the coming centuries until it fell at the hands of the Saracens in the fourteenth century AD."

<sup>44</sup> The complete list of references to the phrase "many nations" is; Gen 17:4,5, Deu 7:1, 15:6, 28:12, Neh 13:26, Isa 52:15, Jer 22:8, 25:14, Jer 27:7, Ezek 38:23, 39:27, Micah 4:2, Micah 4:11, Hab 2:8, Zec 2:11. In

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brought against Tyre<sup>45</sup> denoting the size rather than the multi-national makeup of the army<sup>46</sup>.

Additionally, the attack on Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar signaled the beginning of a long series of attacks by foreign powers against Tyre<sup>47</sup> and the beginning of the decline of the importance of Tyre as a Middle East trade center. Tyre would be conquered over the next several hundred years by a series of rulers and empires<sup>48</sup>.

The strongest argument that the “many nations” refers not to the multinational forces of Nebuchadnezzar, but to the successions of rulers that would come against Tyre, is the internal evidence of the rest of verse 3. In the rest of verse 3, the comparison is made between “many nations” and the way that “the sea causeth his waves to come up.”<sup>49</sup> The plural “waves” and the plural “nations” are parallel words. The analogy of the repetition of waves does not fit nearly as well with the idea of a single attack by a multinational force as it does with the succession of conquerors that would come against Tyre. If the prophet Ezekiel intended to refer to a single attack by Nebuchadnezzar, the better analogy would have been to a very large single wave, perhaps a tidal or Tsunami wave.

### Role of Alexander

Alexander the Great played a pivotal role since he was the first to completely conquer the

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each and every one of these examples, “many nations” refers to separate nations or people groups.

<sup>45</sup> Ezek 26:7 For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. Refers to the size of the army that was arrayed against Tyre.

<sup>46</sup> The LXX does not preserve this distinction between the phrases.

<sup>47</sup> Jidejian, Nina. pp 59-141 describe the history of Tyre after the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>48</sup> Nebuchadnezzar, Darius and Alexander to name but a few.

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island portion of the city of Tyre<sup>50</sup>. Josephus refers to the taking of Tyre by Alexander:

So Alexander came into Syria, and took Damascus; and when he had obtained Sidon, he besieged Tyre<sup>51</sup>.

Josephus comments on the great amount of effort it required for Alexander to defeat Tyre.

So when he had, with a good deal of pains during the siege, taken Tyre<sup>52</sup>.

The siege of Tyre by Alexander lasted seven long months. Still, this was far shorter than the thirteen year long siege of Nebuchadrezzar.

Seven months of the siege of Tyre were over<sup>53</sup>.

Historian Diodorus<sup>54</sup> describes how Alexander managed to do what no other conqueror up to that time had been able to do. Alexander used the leftover materials from the ruins of mainland Tyre to build the mole between the mainland and the remaining island portion of Tyre. This allowed Alexander to finally take the island:

[2] At Tyre, however, when the king wished to sacrifice to the Tyrian Heracles the people overhastily barred him from entering the city; [3] Alexander became angry and threatened to resort to force, but the Tyrians cheerfully faced the prospect of a siege. They wanted to gratify Darius and keep unimpaired their loyalty to him, and thought also that they would receive great gifts from the king in return for such a favor. They would draw Alexander into a protracted and difficult siege and give Darius time for his military preparations, and at the same time they had confidence in the strength of their island and the military forces in it. They also hoped for help from their colonists, the Carthaginians. [4] The king saw

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<sup>49</sup> The use of "as" shows that the comparison is intended.

<sup>50</sup> McDowell, pp. 275-276, presents the thesis that Alexander fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel 26.

<sup>51</sup> Josephus. *Antiquities* XI, 8, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Josephus. *Antiquities* XI, 8, 3.

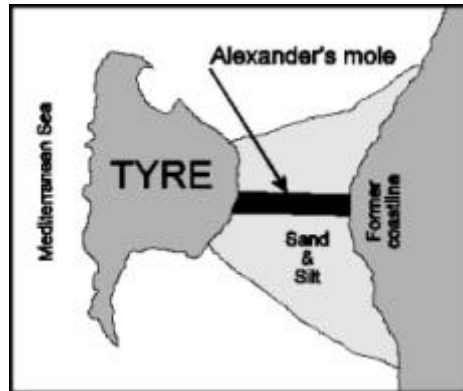
<sup>53</sup> Josephus. *Antiquities* XI, 8, 4.

<sup>54</sup> "Diodorus Siculus was the author of the *Bibliotheca*, a "universal history" in forty books. It covers the story of the human race from Creation to the times of Diodorus in the late Roman Republic. His biography is found on the Internet at:

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that the city could hardly be taken by sea because of the engines mounted along its walls and the fleet that it possessed, while from the land it was almost unassailable because it lay four furlongs away from the coast. Nevertheless he determined to run every risk and make every effort to save the Macedonian army from being held in contempt by a single undistinguished city. [5] Immediately he demolished what was called Old Tyre and set many tens of thousands of men to work carrying stones to construct a mole two plethra in width. He drafted into service the entire population of the neighboring cities and the project advanced rapidly because the workers were numerous<sup>55</sup>.

Once the mole was finished the island was no longer safe and it quickly fell to Alexander and his army. The mole Alexander had built is illustrated as follows<sup>56</sup>:



Sand and silt have since covered the sides of the mole and it has turned the former island part of Tyre into a peninsula of the mainland. Ever since then, this has left Tyre vulnerable to attack.

### Mainland/Island as Target?

Another phrase determining scope, the “daughters which are in the field”, from chapter 26 verses 6 and 8, is frequently understood to limit the passage to the mainland portion of

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<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0004:id%3Ddiodorus-siculus>

<sup>55</sup> Diodorus 17.40.2-5. Source materials can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>

<sup>56</sup> According to <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15109a.htm>, the mole was 1968 feet long by 197 feet

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the city of Tyre. If the phrase “daughters of the field” limits the scope of the prophecy, then the complete fulfillment certainly did happen under Nebuchadnezzar. This is the approach of Archer<sup>57</sup> and others<sup>58</sup>. The NIV translates the phrase “daughters which are in the field” as “settlements which are on the mainland.”

As previously noted, the Roman Historian Diodorus referred to the mainland portion of Tyre as “old Tyre<sup>59</sup>.” After being defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, the mainland portion of Tyre was abandoned since it was not defensible in an age of siege mounds and engines. The island portion of Tyre resisted attack since it was separated by a distance from the mainland and was well fortified. It was impossible for Nebuchadnezzar to defeat the island part of the city since he didn't have the technology to attack an island city, nor a navy. Alexander's attack was low tech, but ingenious. By using human labor to create the mole between the mainland and island he could then use the conventional warfare techniques of siege engines and ramps to destroy the remaining island part of the city. In the process Alexander used the materials from Old Tyre to make the mole. Thus, the prophecy about [Old] Tyre being at the bottom of the sea was fulfilled in the process.

Other ancient texts are equally ambiguous on the identification of Tyre as an island or a mainland city. In one text, Esarhaddon (680 – 669 BCE) laid siege against Tyre and the distinction between the island and mainland portions is not clear in the text<sup>60</sup>.

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wide. The mole is now 1-1/2 miles wide.

<sup>57</sup> Archer, Gleason. pp. 276-278.

<sup>58</sup> Geilser, Norman. p. 287.

<sup>59</sup> Diodorus 17.40.5.

<sup>60</sup> ANET, pp. 291-292.

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Ashurbanipal (668 – 633 BCE) also attacked Tyre. The text describing that attack is also similarly obscure in determining which portion of the description of the siege refers to the mainland portion and which portion refers to the island portion<sup>61</sup>. In this sense, the Biblical text is not unique in the problem of identification of precisely which portions of Tyre were sieged and which were destroyed. Generally, the ancient texts also portray a mainland part of the city that was fairly easy to siege and an island part of the island that was much more difficult to defeat.

### The Shift from “he” to “they” v 11-12

There is a shift in number from the singular pronoun “he” in verse 11 to the plural pronoun “they” in verse 12<sup>62</sup>. Although, the “he” of verse 11 is best connected to Nebuchadrezzar from verse 7, does the “they” of verse 12 and onwards refer to the “many nations” from verse 3 and not to the immediate threat of Nebuchadrezzar? If verse 12 signals a shift of object for fulfillment of the prophecy, then some of the “heat” is off Nebuchadrezzar in terms of scope of required fulfillment.

### Utterly Destroyed / Never Rebuilt

When Ezekiel said that Tyre would be “utterly destroyed,” was he referring to the destruction of the mainland portion of the city, to the island portion of the city, or to both portions of the city<sup>63</sup>? The mainland portion of the city of Tyre was utterly destroyed under Nebuchadrezzar. Apparently, the Phoenicians never even attempted to rebuild the

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<sup>61</sup> ANET pp. 294-297.

<sup>62</sup> Lawhead, p. 15, notes that the LXX does not have this shift. It's only found in the MT. This is an area for further inquiry.

<sup>63</sup> Payne. pp. 362-363, differentiates between the destruction caused by Nebuchadrezzar (vv 7-11) and the destruction caused by Alexander (vv 12-20).

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mainland portion of the city after Nebuchadnezzar. The island portion of the city of Tyre was utterly destroyed under Alexander. The island part of the city was rebuilt and is presently inhabited<sup>64</sup>. The mainland part of the city was never rebuilt<sup>65</sup>.

### Conclusions

The target audience of the prophecy was the Phoenicians who boasted at the fall of Israel. They were confident in their fortifications and military might. The purpose of Ezekiel was to shake that confidence. The destruction of Old [mainland] Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, as well as the thirteen year siege of the island portion of the city, must have greatly shaken their confidence. The inhabitants of the mainland city were carried off as prisoners by Nebuchadnezzar. A puppet government was placed over Tyre and the rulers were taken as prisoners by Nebuchadnezzar. But, this was only to be the beginning of the end for Tyre and the once mighty Phoenicians.

It should be remembered that the critics have no particular vested interest in this passage. If it could be conclusively proven that the passage was completely fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar they would simply then claim that the prophecy was written post facto.

**In the end, Ezekiel was right. The Phoenicians are no more and Israel remains.**

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<sup>64</sup> As noted this point is disputed by Archer who contends that the island portion has sunk below the ocean.

<sup>65</sup> Feinberg, p. 148. "Mainland Tyre has been so thoroughly devastated that the ancient site can no longer be identified with exactness."



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## Historical Images of Tyre

The following pages contain some historical images of Tyre. These images were found for sale on the Internet site ebay.com.

### Medieval Tyre from Munster Woodcarving c. 1571

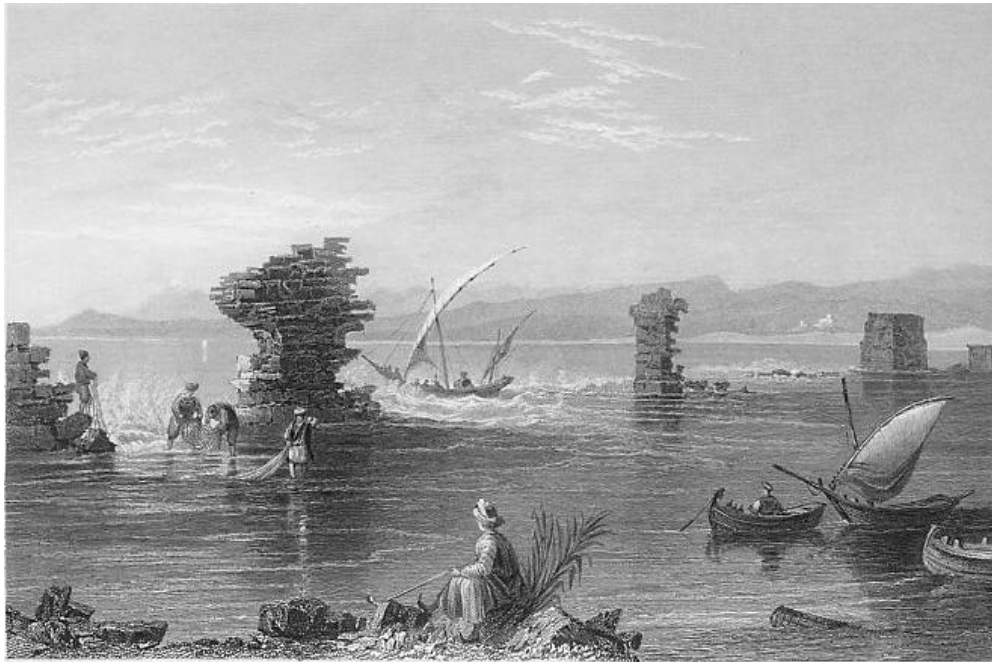


Sebastian Münster probably had the greatest effect in spreading geographical knowledge in the middle years of the 16th century. His "Cosmographia," first issued in 1544, went through forty editions in six languages. This woodcut engraving is from a circa 1571 French edition published by his step-son, Henri Petri, after Münster's death. It depicts the eastern Mediterranean port/city of Tyre which was the capital of Phoenicia and the base from which that trading nation established routes to the western Mediterranean<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> <http://cgi.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=552162925>

## Ruins of Tyre from 1837 Lithograph



From the inscription:

All that now remains of ancient Tyre is the old wall of the port, of which this is a view, looking towards the main land. The causeway of Alexander is now covered with a vast accumulation of sand: it is situated on the right, and beyond it are the remains of the aqueduct, of considerable extent, but poor character; and still farther, a hill crowned with a mosque. Fishermen were dragging their nets on the ancient walls; a visible fulfillment of the prophetic words, "they shall break down the towers of Tyrus, and make her like the top of a rock; it shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: they shall lay thy pleasant houses, thy stones, and thy timber in the midst of the water; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> <http://cgi.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=557656880>

## Ruins of Tyre from 1838 Steel Engraving



Tyre, View From Mainland - Lebanon

Artist: Bartlett; Engraver: Capone<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> <http://cgi.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=1411950873>

Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Destruction of Tyre: Ezekiel 26

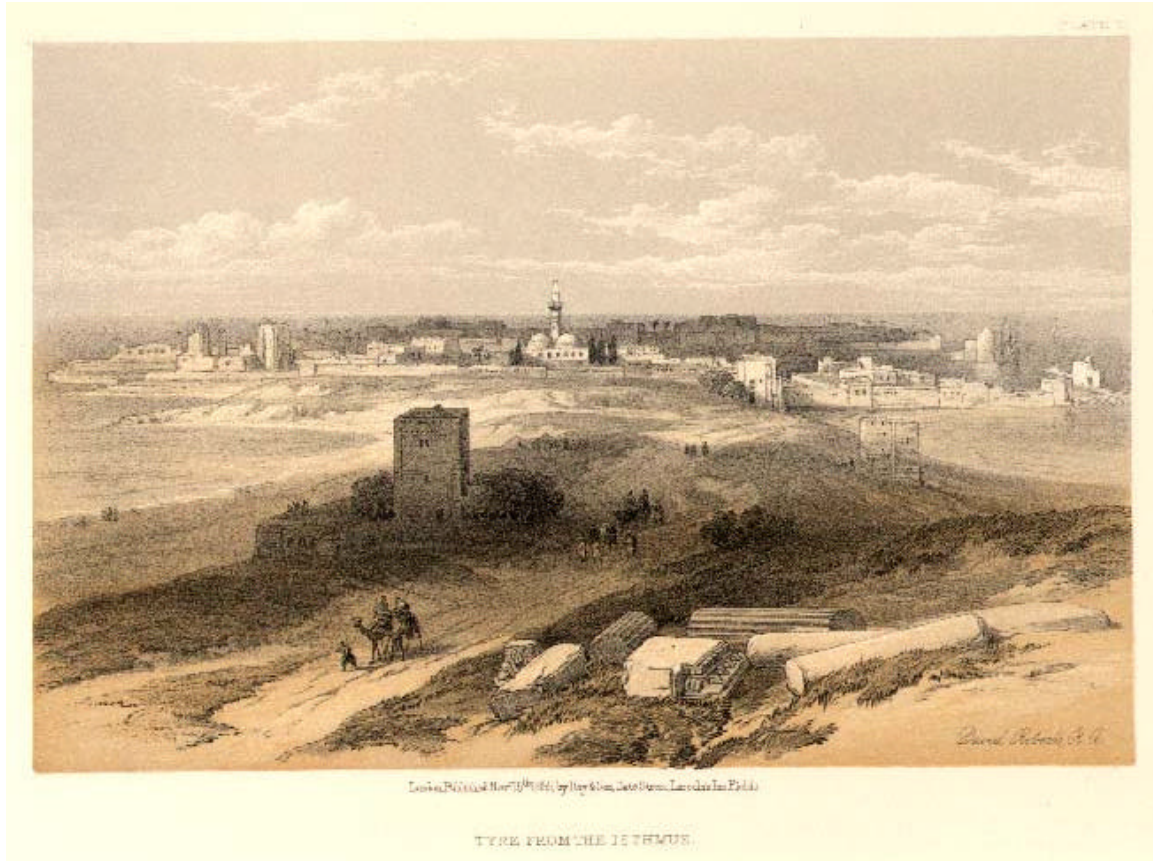
Ruins of Tyre from an 1849 Lithograph





## Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Destruction of Tyre: Ezekiel 26

### Ruins of Tyre from 1855 Lithograph



A lightly tinted view of the Port of Tyre in Lebanon from the Isthmus, as it was in the 1840's. Artist is David Roberts R.A. Roberts was commissioned by Queen Victoria under a patronage appointment to go to the Holy Land and do a series of paintings stretching from Syria in the North to Egypt and the Nubia in the South. He did so from 1839 to 1845. His monumental works "Syria and the Holy Land, and Nubia and the Nile" was the result. This lithograph is dated 1855, and is from the edition published by Day & Son in London, England<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://cgi.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=554426256>

Ruins of Tyre from 1877 Woodcarving



ORIGINAL 1877 BOOK PLATE<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> <http://cgi.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=559191292>

### Arial Photograph of Tyre (Sour) from 1934



This photo of Tyre was taken in 1934<sup>71</sup>. The mainland portion of Tyre is to the right and is utterly abandoned. The island portion of Tyre has been built on.

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<sup>71</sup> Illustrations from A. POIDEBARD, UN GRAND PORT DISPARU, T Y R, RECHERCHES AÉRIENNES ET SOUS-MARINES, 1934- 1936. Photo can be found on the Internet at: <http://almashriq.hiof.no/general/900/930/933/tyr-poidebard/tyr-1934.jpg>.