



Ezekiel 26:1-14: A Proof Text For Inerrancy or Fallibility of The Old Testament?

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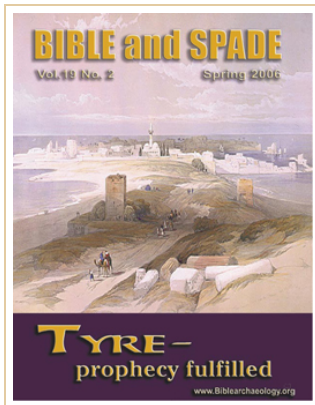
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Tyre was a major Phoenician commercial center famous for its wealth and beauty. It was located on two sandstone reefs about 1.2 mi (2 km) off the coast of Lebanon. According to Herodotus, King Hiram (ca. 969–936 BC) joined the two reefs with land fill, enlarging the city to about 40 acres (16 ha). In succeeding reigns, further enlargement allowed the creation of ports on the northern and southern sides of the island. The island city was essentially a commercial and religious center dependent on food and water supplies from its sister city, “Old Tyre,” which stood amid rich and well-watered agricultural land on the mainland.

From his exile in Babylon, Ezekiel prophesied against Tyre in the early sixth century BC. At this time, Tyre had reached the zenith of its commercial prosperity and was the cosmopolitan center of the ancient Near East. Ezekiel 26 and 28 contain predictions of God’s coming judgment against the city and its king, while chapter 27 is a lament in which Ezekiel graphically describes the commercial activities and great prosperity of the city.¹

This article seeks to give Ezekiel 26:1–14 a close reading. Special emphasis will be given to its literary structure and the use of metaphors. The history of Tyre will be examined in the light of archaeology and ancient records. It is our contention that when the passage is exegeted carefully and properly, these verses are excellent witnesses to the divine inspiration of the Bible. More liberal Biblical scholars, however, have seized upon these verses as a parade example of the fallibility of Biblical prophecy. Robert P. Carroll has even written an entire book on failed prophecies in the OT (1979).

Liberals are virtually unanimous on the following interpretation:

1. Ezekiel 26:1–14 predict that Nebuchadnezzar would capture Tyre and get rich from it.
2. Ezekiel 29:17–20 is an apology by the prophet for being wrong. Nebuchadnezzar is offered the land of Egypt as a consolation prize for this “disappointing, false prophecy.” Ezekiel was, they say, not in the slightest bit bothered by being wrong.

If it is assumed the 30th year in Ezekiel 1:1 refers to Ezekiel's age,² then perhaps most of his ministry took place when he was between 30 and 50 years of age, since he was a priest (Ez 1:3; Nu 4:3). Interestingly, Ezekiel 29:17-20 is the last oracle in the book, dated "the 27th year, in the first month on the first day" (29:17), i.e., April 26, 571 BC (NIV Study Bible: 1267). It is dated two years after the rest of the document was completed.³ This would have made the prophet 52 years old. So the last thing the poor prophet did, according to liberals, was to come out of retirement and try to patch up a false prophecy he had made. Needless to say, as a young, impressionable college student in 1957, all this was very perplexing to me. The following is how I first read it from Edwin Burt's *Types of Religious Philosophy*, used as a text in my Philosophy of Religion class

Moreover at least one pair of passages in the Bible indicates that **the traditional theory of divine inspiration**, with its claim of infallibility...**is not intended by Scripture itself**. [He then presents the above interpretation of Ezekiel 26 and 29]...**These inconsistencies challenge explanation**. Any attempt to explain them while adhering to the orthodox view of supernatural revelation plunges us into **an almost intolerable dilemma** (1951: 310-11), emphasis added.



Map of Tyre before 332 BC. Prior to Alexander the Great's construction of the causeway, Tyre was an island 1/3 mi (600 m) offshore (Tyre-the-Port). The mainland city was located several miles to the south.

Most liberals are forced to accept the dating given to these passages in the book of Ezekiel. If they do not, they lose their golden textual sequence for refuting verbal inspiration. Both Ezekiel 26:1-14 and Ezekiel 29:17-20 would have to come from Ezekiel's time; no later forger using Ezekiel's name to enhance his religious agenda would attribute a false prophecy to him. Keith Carley, for example, says,

The date cannot be later than [571 BC] for in 29:17ff it is acknowledged that things prophesied against Tyre had not been fulfilled at that time (1974: 178).

The View of Secular Historians

Secular historians have no religious agenda to promote. Thus they clarify and even defend Ezekiel, rather than condemn him. It is indeed ironic that Ezekiel is regarded as a false prophet by a large group of Biblical scholars, yet deemed generally correct by secular historians. After finishing my Ph.D. at Chicago Theological Seminary, I went across the street to the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago and took Phoenician Inscriptions as part of my postdoctoral studies. I found

no effort in their Near Eastern Studies department to tear down any Scriptural statements. It is instructive to observe how specialists in Phoenician history speak of the events in Ezekiel 26, as compared to Burt and company. Following are a few examples.

Maria Aubet, Professor of History at Barcelona, Explains That There Were Two Tyres

Tyre was originally an island "surrounded by the sea" (Ez 27:32). "Today," Aubet says, "Tyre is a peninsula joined to the mainland." The peninsula was created by the silting up of a mole or causeway built by Alexander the Great in 332 BC (Aubet 1993: 27). Aubet notes that there was a city on the mainland known as "ancient Tyre" to Roman historians, also referred to as "Palaeo-Tyre." The Egyptian and Assyrian texts call it Uzu/Ushu. The scribe in Papyrus Anastasi I (1290-1186 BC), for example, says,

What is Uzu like? They say another town is in the sea named Tyre-the-Port. Water is taken to it by boats (Wilson 1969: 477). Aubet adds:

It was considered to be a second Tyre on the mainland and lasted as a satellite city until it was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (1993: 30, emphasis added).

can still be seen on the north and south sides of the former island.

After his defeat of Jerusalem in 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar turned his attention to Tyre. Although he defeated mainland Tyre, a 13-year siege of the island city proved fruitless. The historian Diodorus attested that Alexander used the stones from the Old Tyre destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar to build his mole (*Diodorus*, 17.40; Wells 1936). The causeway was a half-mile (0.8 km) long and 200 ft (60 m) wide, and was built so Alexander could move his siege equipment over to the island. The rubble from Old Tyre was so thoroughly cleaned out by Alexander's engineers that no trace of the ancient city can be found today. Thus, according to H. J. Katzenstein, the precise location of mainland Tyre is a point of controversy. According to this specialist on the history of Tyre, it was "totally dismantled by Alexander the Great in his famous siege...and disappeared totally" (1997: 15).

H. J. Katzenstein Claims Archaeology Shattered Any Doubts About Nebuchadnezzar's Siege of Tyre

Katzenstein's monumental study on the history of Tyre grew out of his doctoral dissertation at Hebrew University. Some critics had doubts that Nebuchadnezzar even had a siege at Tyre. Katzenstein claimed that these doubts were shattered after a German scholar, E. Unger, published a tablet that was an official receipt for provisions "for the king and his soldiers who went with him against the land of Tyre" (1926: 314-17; cf. Katzenstein 1997: 324).

Many critics feel that Nebuchadnezzar never conquered Tyre. Katzenstein, on the other hand, believed that the king of Tyre was exiled to Babylon in the same way King Jehoiachin of Jerusalem was exiled. He cited a list of foreign kings at Babylon two years after the siege ended. The king of Tyre is at the head of the list (1997: 326). E. Unger cites tablets showing that after the siege Babylonian governors were in charge at Tyre rather than the king (1926: 314-17).

Katzenstein's study is full of data about the two Tyres. He cites the Greek historian Menander who said

Sidon and Akko and **Old Tyre** and many other cities also revolted from **Tyre** and surrendered to the king of Assyria (i.e., Shalmaneser V, 726-722; Katzenstein 1997: 225-36, emphasis added).

The point is, Nebuchadnezzar conquered the mainland city of Tyre, but failed to conquer the island city.

When Alexander the Great came through in 332 BC, he desired to sacrifice in the temple of Hercules in the island city of Tyre. The citizens of Tyre did not allow him to enter the city. Rather, they invited him to sacrifice in Old Tyre on the mainland. He of course refused, and took the island city after a seven-month siege. This invitation, however, indicated the two cities could clearly be identified with each other (Bury and Meiggs 1975: 460).



View along the causeway, looking west. Past the modern high-rises can be seen the columns of the colonnaded main street, gymnasium and market place of the Roman period commercial district. The street, famous for its mosaic paving, led to the "Egyptian Port," now submerged, beyond the commercial district on the south side of the city.
Michael Luddeni

Antonio Ciasca of Rome Calls the City Destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar "The Mainland Sector of the City of Tyre"

Ciasca makes the following statement:

The **mainland sector of the city of Tyre** (called Ushu in Egyptian and Assyrian texts and Palai-Tyros in classical sources) was situated 6 km [3.7 mi] further south...The causeway built by Alexander the Great to reach the besieged city, and the gradual silting up around this line, contributed towards extending the artificial area which emerged...that of a peninsula jutting into the sea (Ciasca 1988: 147, 148, emphasis added).

Notice that Ciasca calls the "Old Tyre" destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar "the mainland sector of the city of Tyre." If conservatives had tried to explain the passage in Ezekiel 26 by saying there were two parts to Tyre, it would have elicited great mockery. Critics would have said, "This is special pleading for an unsupportable position." However, this statement was made under the supervision of Sabatino Moscati, president of the Institution for Phoenician and Punic Civilizations, an academic body specializing in Phoenician research.

The Text of Ezekiel 26:1–14

1 In the 11th year, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, because Tyre has said of Jerusalem, ‘Aha! The gate to the nations is broken, and its doors have swung open to me; now that she lies in ruins I will prosper,’ 3 therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the seas casting up its waves. 4 They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. 5 Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord. She will become plunder for the nations, 6 and her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

7 “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, with horsemen and a great army. 8 He will ravage your settlements on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up to your walls and raise his shields against you. 9 He will direct the blows of his battering rams against your walls and demolish your towers with his weapons. 10 His horses will be so many that they will cover you with dust. Your walls will tremble at the noise of the war horses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through. 11 The hoofs of his horses will trample all your streets; he will kill your people with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground. 12 They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea. 13 I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more. 14 I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

The Literary Structure of Ezekiel 26:1–14

A close reading of Ezekiel 26:1–14 reveals a three-part structure in the passage. Two “many nations” (“they”) sections are placed before and after a “Nebuchadnezzar” (“he,” “many people”) centerpiece. An outline of this passage makes it clear what the prophet was really saying. It will be seen that Ezekiel 26:1–14 actually agrees with 29:17–20. The structure of this passage shows the “many nations” who will come, one after another like waves of the sea, are the ones who get the spoil—not Nebuchadnezzar.

The Metaphor of the Waves in Ezekiel 26:3 Shows One Nation After Another is Involved

Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves (Ez 26:3).

Carol Newsom of Emory University has grasped the significance of this metaphor very nicely in the following remarks:

It is the utter restlessness of the ocean. **No one wave may bring full destruction...** It is the unending succession of waves that destroys even the strongest rock...Equally, the Babylonian

opponents of Tyre, **included as the "many nations,"** are imaged in such a way that they appear not as independent powers, **but merely as episodes** in *Yahweh's* patient, powerful sovereignty (1987:192, emphasis added).

Thus, by taking a close look at Ezekiel's literary artistry, Newsom has reached the conclusion that Nebuchadnezzar's campaign is simply **one episode** out of a continuous succession of nation after nation. She has correctly discerned that Ezekiel is describing a gradual process of one nation after another slowly wearing down Tyre, rather than Nebuchadnezzar doing it all at once. Her insight into this metaphor of waves shows the changes from singular to plural in this passage are not merely random variations, but are intentional and significant to grasping the meaning of the prophecy. It is of note that she is not interested in defending a conservative position for this passage, but is simply showing how the prophet used his metaphors.

Author Nina Jidejian summarizes the history of Tyre after Nebuchadnezzar:

Looking down into the water one can see a mass of granite columns and stone blocks strewn over the sea bottom. Until recently the ruins of Tyre above water were few. How was the ancient metropolis of Phoenicia so utterly demolished? Devastated by drawn-out sieges and earthquakes throughout her long history, Tyre from the 18th century onward has served as a "quarry" for the whole coast. Her stones may be found as far away as Acre and Beirut (1996: 13-14).

Each wave of aggressors took its toll, and little by little Tyre was gradually reduced to matching the observations made by travelers in the 1800s. Their descriptions stunningly and exactly match the prediction of Ezekiel. These travelers themselves were awed as they compared what they saw with Ezekiel's prophecy (see below).

The Literary Structure of Ezekiel 26:1-14 Shows That Both Nebuchadnezzar and Many Nations Destroy Tyre

The diagram below makes it clear how the two "THEY" sections parallel each other. Verses 3-6 say pretty much the same thing as verses 12-14, except the if nal section includes references to the stopping of music and perpetual ruin. The "THEY" sections, referring to "many nations" (plural), are set off from the "HE" section that refers to Nebuchadnezzar and "many people" (singular; i.e., "a great army") with him. **Just as in Ezekiel 29:17-20, Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers obtain nothing but a lot of hard work for their efforts.** They kill people and destroy some defense structures, but neither completely destroyed Tyre nor got anything of value out of it. Rather, **the plunder goes to the "many nations."** They are the ones who will obliterate the site and make it a bare rock, not the king of Babylon and his army.

Literary Structure of Ezekiel 26:1-14

FIRST "THEY" SECTION - "MANY NATIONS" (vs. 3-6)

- (v.3) Yahweh to bring up many nations like sea waves.
- (v. 4) THEY will destroy walls and towers, rubble to be scraped away and Tyre to be made a bare rock.
- (v.5) Tyre to be a place to spread fishnets. "I Lord Yahweh have spoken." "She will become plunder for the nations"
- (v. 6) Her settlements will be ravaged by the sword. THEY will know I am Yahweh.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR ("HE") CENTERPIECE (VS. 7-11)

- (v. 7) Yahweh will bring Nebuchadnezzar with many people (singular).
- (vs. 8,9) HE will ravage settlements with the sword. HE will set up siege works. Battering rams will destroy defenses.
- (v. 10) Mass of horses and chariots enter the gates of the city.
- (v. 11) Horses trample. HE will kill your people and bring down pillars.

SECOND "THEY" SECTION (VS. 12-14)

- (v. 12) THEY will plunder and loot your wealth, destroy walls and houses. THEY will put stones, timbers and rubble in the sea.
- (v. 13) I (God) will put an end to songs and music.
- (v. 14) I will make you a bare rock, a place to spread fishnets. Tyre will never be rebuilt. "I the Lord have spoken."

History of Tyre from the Conquest of Alexander***Ezekiel 26 Predicted, 250 Years in Advance, How Alexander Would Conquer Tyre***

Notice there are no time markers as to when Tyre would be destroyed. Ezekiel did not say "soon," or anything like that. Nothing in Ezekiel 26 implies it would all be done by the 27th year of Jehoiachin's captivity. This is the date set down in Ezekiel 29:17-20 where, say the critics, Ezekiel apologized for being wrong. The fact that rubble would be put in the sea implies greater care and purpose than when invaders do it in a frenzied victory celebration (v. 12). It is of interest to note

that the historian Arrian stated that Tyrians of Alexander's day threw their own stones into the sea as a barrier to Alexander's attack. All descriptions of Alexander's conquest of Tyre go back to this account that is based on the memory of Alexander's general Ptolemy (Hamilton 1971: 133–42).

In verses 4 and 12 of Ezekiel 26 it mentions that the stones, timbers and rubble would be put in the sea. Under normal circumstance this would be a waste of time and energy. It is puzzling to those not acquainted with the history of Tyre. What happened? In Nebuchadnezzar's campaign the mainland city of "Old Tyre" was captured. The Tyrians, however, removed their wealth to the island fortress, and simply laughed at him.

The "they" passage refers to Alexander the Great (332 BC) and the nations that followed him. Up until Alexander's time no one had been able to take the island fortress, because Tyre had the only navy capable of doing it. Alexander did what no one else had thought of. He took the rubble of the Old City of Tyre and dumped it into the sea (just as verses 4 and 12 said). Within six months he built an artificial causeway between the mainland and the island. When it was finished, he quickly brought in his siege equipment and took the city (Olmstead 1948: 506–506).

Tyre Became Rich and Prominent Under Greeks and Romans

Ezekiel saw one nation after another coming against Tyre like one ocean wave after another on the beach. Many nations came against it—the Persians, Macedonians, Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Romans occupied it in turn. This fits perfectly the metaphorical description of waves in Ezekiel 26:3. The passage does not say, as some critics want it to, that one nation (Babylon) will do it all at once! To affirm this in order to deny inerrancy is to practice flagrant EISAGESIS—reading into a passage what one is looking for.

Alexander did not completely destroy Tyre. It later regained a place of prominence in the world (cf. Acts 21:3, 7). Isaiah prophesied that after 70 years of devastation, Tyre would be restored to worldwide economic prominence (23:15–18). Her trading profit, however, would be set aside for *Yahweh*. This may refer to the fact that by New Testament times, only Tyrian coinage was allowed for the temple tax. It went to "those who live (sit) before the Lord" to give them food and fine clothes (high priest's vestments?) (Is 23:18). Interestingly, the phrase "before the Lord" often refers to acts done with a solemn sense of *Yahweh's* presence, many times at a sanctuary (*Brown, Driver Briggs* 1979: 817).

In 274 BC, some 58 years after Tyre's demolition by Alexander, the city was given independent status by Ptolemy II. After that she generally received favorable treatment from Greeks and Romans and prospered, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The archaeology of the Roman era revealed arches, roads, buildings, etc. associated with this period.

Tyre seemed to always rebound from each empire that ruled over it. It became almost a showpiece in the Greco-Roman world. As late as around 400 AD, Jerome wrote in his commentary on Ezekiel that it was "the noblest and most beautiful of the Phoenician cities and an emporium of commerce for almost the whole world" (Porter 1956: 3032).

After the Arab Conquest in AD 638, Deterioration Continued Until Total Destruction in AD 1291

In AD 638 the Arabs conquered the city and her fate began to change. In 1124 it was taken by Crusaders. In AD 1291 the Mameluke Muslims took it and reduced it to ashes. It was the policy of these invaders to make their destruction so severe that Crusaders would not be tempted to ever reoccupy it (Hitti 1997). Tyre for a period of time was all but destitute of inhabitants (Davis and Gehman 1944: 616). In 1517 it became part of the Ottoman (Turkish) empire and fell sway to its incompetent government.

The country of Lebanon has been developing Tyre as a tourist attraction in recent years. However, visitors during the 19th century reported only a tiny village with a few miserable hovels. Patricia Bikai, the only legal excavator in recent times, observes that little of the splendor remained at this time. Ships in the 1800s usually bypassed it, except to occasionally stop and gloat over it (Bikai 1990: 22-23).

In 1838, the year following a devastating earthquake, Edward Robinson visited the area and made the following remarks:

I continued my walk along the shore of the peninsula, part of which is now unoccupied except as "a place to spread nets upon" [Ez 26:5, 14] musing upon the pride and fall of ancient Tyre. Here was the little isle, once covered by her palaces and surrounded by her fleets: but alas! Thy riches and thy fame...Where are they? Tyre has indeed become like "the top of a rock" [Ez 26:4, 14]. [Seeing only broken pillars beneath the waves, he remarked:] The hovels that now nestle upon a portion of her site present no contradiction of the dread decree, "You will never be rebuilt" [Ez 26:14] (1852: 395).

The lithographs of David Roberts (see front cover and pages 48-49) show the utter devastation there in 1839. In 1894 D. L. Miller wrote the following about Tyre:

When Volney visited the place some years ago he wrote, "The whole village of Tyre contains only 50 or 60 poor families who live obscurely on the produce of their little and trifling fishery" (587).

A traveler visiting Tyre over a century ago made this observation:

The island, as such, is not more than a mile in length. The part which projects south beyond the isthmus is perhaps a quarter of a mile broad, and is rocky and uneven. It is now unoccupied except by fishermen, as a "place to spread nets on" (Thompson 1969: 190-91).

In the early 20th century, only 500 impoverished Persian schismatics lived there in miserable hovels (M. Unger: 1966:1121-22). In 1911, Hastings' *A Dictionary of the Bible* called Tyre "a stagnant village in a stagnant Turkey." It was avoided by steamers, being considered too insignificant for a visit (Mackie 1911: 825).

Difficulties in Unearthing Remains from the Tyre of Ezekiel's Day

Katzenstein describes some of the marine archaeological research of the massive harbor installations that are now under water (1997: 11-17). Aubet mentions that Tyre lay at the center of a line of reefs that made up the harbor, which are now under water. This has been due to erosion, human intervention and a rise in the sea level over the past 300 years. Alexander's mole also interrupted water currents, and some of the structures from that mole are now under water (Aubet 1993: 153). When excavations are undertaken, it is as if the Tyre of Ezekiel's day never existed (Gibson and Negev 2001: 519, 520).

Archaeologists have not unearthed the great buildings of Ezekiel's day. Such great structures as the palace and temple of Hercules are yet to be found. James Pritchard, University of Pennsylvania archaeology director at Sarepta in Lebanon (1971), made the following observation:

Tyre, to be sure, is a principal showplace of archaeological treasures from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Yet so spectacular are its public buildings that they cannot be removed to get at the remains that lie beneath (1978: 11).

Not only obstructing Roman remains, but also the modern town of Tyre itself, prohibit going down to the Phoenician levels. In addition, builders in the Roman period removed Phoenician remains (Ward 1994: 75, Muhly 1985:179). Bikai found remains from 1600 to 2700 BC. Some remains were found from ca. 700 BC, but the rest is late Roman, after the New Testament period. This is a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy that Tyre would be destroyed down to the bare rock (26:3-6).

Upon studying approximately 100 inscriptions found in Lebanon, one is impressed that Phoenician inscriptions from Tyre are virtually absent. There are royal, temple and funeral inscriptions from Sidon, Byblos and other areas, but none from Tyre. The only engraving from Tyre is some names on a waterspout from the Greek period (third century BC). The name Tyre is found on only a couple of inscriptions found elsewhere (Vance 1994: 31-32; Gibson 1982: 118-21). It is interesting to observe that even the phrase "king of Tyre" is not found on any inscription from this area (Aubet 1993: 20). The very memory of Tyrian kings has perished.

"You will never be rebuilt"

Literary Artistry of Ezekiel 26:3-14

The Hebrew poetry of this oracle is not static, but is progressive and climactic. The original ideas are gradually magnified, enlarged, and developed into a climactic crescendo. One must also take note of the technique of personification used in this passage. The oracle does not relate to Tyre merely as an inanimate conglomerate of building materials; Tyre is introduced as a person using pronouns like "I" and "me" in Ezekiel 26:2. At the end of the oracle (v. 14), God himself addressed Tyre as "you." Throughout the oracle feminine singular pronouns like "your," "her" and "she" are

used of the city. Tyre is addressed with personal pronouns over 30 times in only 12 verses. This emphasis presents Tyre as a vibrant, prosperous, influential, living organism, rather than just a pile of stones.

The portrayal of Tyre becomes more and more personal as the oracle progresses. In verses 3 to 6, seven personal pronouns are used. In verses 12 and 13 there are 17 such pronouns. As the oracle continues, the allusions to destruction become more and more personal and "grass roots." In the first ten verses towers, gates, walls and suburbs are the objects of destruction. In verses 11 to 14, people, wealth, houses, business profit, music and merchandise are focused upon. This culminates with God addressing her as a "you" in the phrase, "You will not be built anymore" (author's translation).

If one considers the poetic progression, the statement that Tyre "will not be rebuilt" pertains to the final state of the city after the succession of waves has fully destroyed it. Also, if the elements in verses 12-14 are considered, the rebuilding would include personal, commercial and national features. The context of how Tyre was built when the oracle was written must also be considered. Its original builders made it "perfect in beauty" with the most extravagant, opulent trappings (Ez 27: 3, 4-11). She was an exquisite, richly adorned world ship in chapter 27. Any potential rebuilding would have to include all these features.

Use of the Hebrew Root bnh with Persons in the Old Testament

In defining the verb "build," it is instructive to observe how it is used of feminine singular personifications. The best parallel for this is "Virgin Israel" in Jeremiah 31:4. Israel is also the collective personification of a nation. There is almost identical wording here as in 26:14 except for the "not." God says, "I will build you up again and **you will be rebuilt**, O Virgin Israel" (Jer 31:4). The rebuilding would include musical instruments, dancing and joyous celebration. According to verses 5 and 12, agricultural prosperity is also included. Verse 28 includes the rebuilding of waste places.

The following are some of the Biblical elements inherent in the word "build" when used with the building of a nation considered as a collective single person:

1. **Flourishing population.** Genesis 16:2, 30:3 and Ruth 4:11 use the verb for "build" as building up the House of Israel by her matriarchs.
2. **National prominence and influence.** Amos 9:14 speaks of rebuilding the fallen tent into some form of the old Davidic empire. Psalm 89:5 included the building of David's throne. His dynasty is to be built in Samuel 7:11, 16, 27.
3. **National Strength and Security.** A righteous nation will be built and planted by God (Jer 18:9).
4. **Prosperity.** Both wicked and repentant may be built up (Mal 3:15; Job 22:23; Prv 24:3).

The statement that Tyre will never be rebuilt means more than the restructuring of stones, wood and mortar. Tyre will never regain international prominence as a world trader and colonizer. She will never be a rich, prosperous, flourishing, world power as she was in Ezekiel's day. The denial of rebuilding goes far beyond a mere architectural project. It must include making Tyre into the **person** she was in the early sixth century BC. It must be kept in mind that the meaning is "**you** will never be rebuilt," not "**the city** will never be rebuilt."

The statement in 26:14 does not deny there would be buildings on the island. It means that Tyre would never be rebuilt into the commercial superpower she was in Ezekiel's day. It means that the palaces and temples of Ezekiel's day would forever lie deep underneath the ground (and the water!), never to be revived. It would in no way be rebuilt into the prosperous, powerful living entity she was at the time the oracle was given.

The Ambiguous Verb Form in 26:14

The verb for "be built" can either be "you shall [never] be rebuilt" or "she shall [never] be rebuilt." The form is identical for second person masculine singular and third person feminine singular. Each translation has its problems.

a. "You (masc. sing.) shall never be rebuilt" (NIV, NEB, NRSV, KJV, NASB, JPS, LXX). Is it talking about the prince of Tyre whose dynasty and throne will never be rebuilt? (28:1ff). Is it a loose use of form? Is it a scribal error? (The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* Hebrew Bible conjectures changing the form to a second feminine singular. Other passages that mix gender forms are full of textual problems.) Is it a strange historical anomaly for which we have no data?

b. "She shall never be rebuilt." (Block 1997) Why, after so many "you/your" pronouns (ten times in vss. 12-14!), does the passage suddenly switch to "she"? Such abrupt changes are not unheard of in the Hebrew Bible.

In any case, the address is to a collective person, and must be interpreted in the way the OT describes the building up of persons.



Sidonian (northern) Port of Tyre. Local fishermen still ply their ancient trade from this port today. Here we see their boats, with nets drying in fulfillment of Ezekiel's prediction that Tyre would "become a place to spread fishnets" (26:5, 14).

Conclusions

A close reading of the text of Ezekiel 26:1-14 reveals the following facts:

1. The rubble from Tyre would be put into the sea. This was fulfilled in 332 BC by Alexander the Great's army, 250 years after Ezekiel was written.
2. The passage does not state that Nebuchadnezzar would capture the island city and get its wealth. On the other hand, it does not say Nebuchadnezzar would not conquer Tyre at all—he conquered "Old Tyre." It simply states he did not get anything of value from it. This is exactly what Ezekiel 29:17ff states. There is no contradiction.
3. The total destruction of Tyre would be accomplished gradually by one nation after another.
4. In the end Tyre would be destroyed down to the bare rock and never rebuilt. The final destruction took place in AD 1291, almost 2,000 years after Ezekiel was written.

Thus it turns out that, with a close investigation of the text and history, Ezekiel 26 is actually a proof text for the inerrancy and supernatural origin of the Bible!

Notes

1. In addition to being mentioned frequently by the prophets, Tyre is referred to a number of other times in the Bible. Hiram, king of Tyre, sent cedar, along with carpenters and masons, to assist David in the construction of his palace in Jerusalem (2 Sm 5:11). When Solomon built the Temple, Hiram provided cedar and workmen in exchange for wheat and olive oil (1 Kgs 5). Ahab, ninth century king of Israel, began to worship Baal after he married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king-priest of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus visited the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon where he healed a girl of demon-possession (Mt 15:21-28=Mk 7:24-30). Paul spent a week at Tyre visiting a small Christian community there on his return from his third missionary journey (Acts 21:3-6). For more information on Tyre, see the Fall 2002 issue of *Bible and Spade*.

2. The date of the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecy is given in 1:2: "On the fifth of the month [the fourth month, vs. 1]—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin," i.e., July 31, 593 BC. Thus, "the 30th year" in vs. 1 is assumed to be Ezekiel's age when he began his prophetic ministry (NIV Study Bible: 1227, 1231).

3. "In the 25th year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the 14th year after the fall of the city" (Ez 40:1), i.e., April 28, 573 BC (NIV Study Bible: 1283).

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