EZEKIEL

Chapter 26

*A Prophecy Against Tyre*

**In the eleventh 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 sea 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. 15 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Tyre: Will not the coastlands tremble at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan and the slaughter takes place in you?  16 Then all the princes of the coast will step down from their thrones and lay aside their robes and take off their embroidered garments. Clothed with terror, they will sit on the ground, trembling every moment, appalled at you.  17 Then they will take up a lament concerning you and say to you: ”‘How you are destroyed, O city of renown, peopled by men of the sea! You were a power on the seas, you and your citizens; you put your terror on all who lived there. 18 Now the coastlands tremble on the day of your fall; the islands in the sea are terrified at your collapse.’ 19 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When I make you a desolate city, like cities no longer inhabited, and when I bring the ocean depths over you and its vast waters cover you,  20 then I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of long ago. I will make you dwell in the earth below, as in ancient ruins, with those who go down to the pit, and you will not return or take your place in the land of the living.  21 I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found, declares the Sovereign LORD.”**

A certain similarity between 26:1–6 and the oracle against Ammon in the previous chapter (25:1–7) has often been noted. Only these two of the oracles against other nations formulate the charge as a direct quotation. Both also contain the gloating “aha!” over Jerusalem’s misery (הֶאָח, 25:3; 26:2; also 36:2). (CC)

However, the connection of 26:1–6 with what follows in its present context should not be overlooked. Ezek 26:7–14 will expound on the judgment pronounced in 26:3–6 and shift the focus from Yahweh to his agent, Nebuchadnezzar. Finally, 26:15–21 will describe the reaction to that judgment by the nations that witness it. Chapters 27 and 28 are entirely independent oracles, as evidenced partly by the word-event formula introducing each. (CC)

Tyre stands out from the other subjects of Ezekiel’s Gentile oracles in a number of ways. First of all, whereas all the states targeted in chapter 25 were populated to a large extent by relative newcomers (arriving more or less the same time as the Israelites, who, after the exodus from Egypt, entered Canaan ca. 1400 b.c.), Tyre, like other Phoenician states, represented the remnants of the autochthonous Canaanite population before the Israelite arrival. (CC)

Even more striking was Tyre’s geographical situation. Its name (צוֹר or צֹר, a synonym of צוּר), literally means “rock,” after the island on which it was situated, some six hundred yards off the coast and some thirty-five miles north of Mount Carmel. Its location “in the middle of the sea” (26:5; 27:32; cf. 27:4) kept its defenses from being penetrated until 332 b.c., when Alexander the Great built a mole out to the “rock” and could bring his normal war machines to bear against it. In the meantime, would-be conquerors had to content themselves with overcoming Ushu on the mainland opposite Tyre, as well as Sidon and other coastal communities. Over the centuries, alluvial deposits have so broadened Alexander’s causeway that today Tyre simply sits at the end of a peninsula. (CC)

In the era of friendly relations between Hiram I and David and Solomon, Hiram is always called “the king of Tyre” (e.g., 2 Sam 5:11; 1 Ki 5:1). In the ninth century, Ethbaal I is identified as “the king of the Sidonians” (1 Ki 16:31), and the latter seems to be the common designation throughout the ancient Near East. “Sidonian” was apparently the common equivalent of our “Phoenician.” Sidon had been the dominant power earlier and would again be later, but “the king of Tyre” accurately reflects the city’s political preeminence at the time of David and Solomon. (CC)

Although never actually conquered by Assyrian kings, by cutting Tyre’s supply lines, they had forced the city into some sort of accommodation with Assyria, and this tie to Assyria continued after Nebuchadnezzar came to power in Babylon. Josephus reports that Nebuchadnezzar engaged in a thirteen-year siege of Tyre, which probably began shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. There is evidence of Nebuchadnezzar’s personal presence during at least part of the siege. The ruler of Tyre at the time, Ethbaal III, even seems to have been taken captive to Babylon and a more favorably disposed monarch was placed on his throne, with a “keeper of the seal” installed to keep him in line. Thus, Ezekiel’s prophecy, suggesting a breaching of Tyre’s walls as was usual with cities, never came to pass literalistically in that era, but the difference was quite nominal. (CC)

The fact that Ezekiel devotes three entire chapters to Tyre (chapters 26–28)—more than any other prophet—invites an explanation. A partial answer is suggested by the gleeful “aha!” we hear in 26:2. Jerusalem’s fall would enable the Tyrians to expand their commercial interests still further, especially with Transjordanian areas to the east. But this is hardly the main reason. Ezekiel understood clearly that Babylon was God’s appointed agent to carry out judgment upon Israel, and any attempt to thwart that role was intrinsically at odds with the irrevocable divine decree. When Jerusalem fell in 586, the only states still resisting Babylon were Tyre and Egypt. So it is no accident that when Ezekiel is finished with Tyre, he will devote four chapters to Egypt (Ezekiel 29–32). (CC)

**26:1** *eleventh year … first day.* The number of the month is missing. The entire year dates from Apr. 23, 587, to Apr. 13, 586 b.c. The oracle must date from the end of that year, in the 11th (Feb. 13, 586) or the 12th month (Mar. 15, 586). See note on 33:21. This is the fifth date in the book (see 1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1). (CSB)

**26:2** *Tyre.* The island capital of Phoenicia, present-day Lebanon. It was involved in an anti-Assyrian coalition in 594 b.c. (see Jer 27:3). Ezekiel, more than any other prophet, prophesied against Tyre (see chs. 27–28; but see Isa 23; Jer 25:22; 47:4; Joel 3:4–5; Am 1:9–10; Zec 9:2–4). (CSB)

 *Aha!* See note on 25:3. (CSB)

A series of four barely connected exclamations after the initial “aha!” express Tyre’s glee at the fall of its competitor and its expectation to profit handsomely as a result. “Gateway to the peoples” summarizes Tyre’s perception of Jerusalem’s position as a commercial power. The expression with (literally) “doors” may indicate either an entranceway or a barrier; trade tends to move in both directions. In 27:17 Ezekiel will mention “wheat from Minnith,” east of the Jordan, among Judah’s exports to Tyre, indicating its role as a middleman in at least that commodity. The fact that Tyre and Sidon often sent envoys to Jerusalem in plots against Babylon indicates its importance as a trade emporium. If my interpretation of the chronological problem in 26:1 is correct, Tyre’s expectations are anticipatory (see the textual note on 26:1). This prophecy is delivered in spring 586, when Tyre expects Jerusalem to fall soon (as it will in summer 586, after an eighteen-month siege). Tyre can hardly wait until an old competitor has been eliminated, and her coffers will be filled to overflowing. (CC)

 *gate to the nations.* Because of its geographical location, its political importance and the central role it played in international trade. The anti-Assyrian summit meeting was held there (see Jer 27). (CSB)

While Tyre may not have realized it, “gateway to the peoples” (26:2) can apply to the central role of Jerusalem not just in commerce, but also for the spread of the Gospel to all peoples throughout the world (cf. Acts 1:8). Already in the OT era, God intended for his people Israel to carry out an evangelistic mission, though it was not until the NT era that Christians, as citizens of the new Jerusalem (Gal 4:26), began to fulfill that mission on a large scale. (cc)

**26:3** *I am against you.* See note on 5:8. (CSB)

This verse, like the text through 26:5a, depicts the judgment as Yahweh’s direct personal intervention. Even the surf is no mere act of nature, but evidence of Yahweh at work. In the realm of history, Yahweh’s agents are “many nations” (again in 31:6; 38:23; 39:27). (CC)

 *like the sea casting up its waves.* For invading armies likened to waves of the sea cf. Isa 17:12–13. Since Tyre was an island, the metaphor is especially appropriate here. (CSB)

**26:4** This verse contains an obvious play on the city’s name. The fortified city wall literally became what it once was and what its name proclaims, nothing but a rock jutting up from the sea. Again Yahweh is described as personally involved in the demolition. (CC)

**26:5** *plunder for the nations.* Cf. 25:7; 34:28. (CSB)

The contrast continues. The once-bustling trade center will be so desolate that only fishermen will use it as a place to dry their nets. A similar picture will recur in the eschatological vision of 47:10, where the general picture, however, will be one of the fructification of a previously desolate area. (CC)

The final clause of the verse (which really connects with 26:6) describes a turning of the tables. The punishment will fit the offense—a common biblical motif (e.g., Lk 12:47). The city that once exploited other nations for her own enrichment will now, as she is plundered, become a source of their enrichment. (CC)

**26:7** *north.* The direction from which Nebuchadnezzar would descend on Tyre after first marching his army up the Euphrates River valley rather than across the Arabian Desert (cf. Jer 1:13). (CSB)

 *I am going to bring.* A clear indication of God’s sovereignty over the nations (cf. 28:7; 29:8). (CSB)

 *Nebuchadnezzar.* The first of four references to him in Ezekiel (see 29:18–19; 30:10). He ruled from 605 to 562 b.c., and his name means “O (god) Nabu, protect my son” or “O (god) Nabu, protect my boundary.” Jeremiah and Ezekiel both proclaimed that this pagan king would be used by God to do his work (see Jer 25:9; 27:6). (CSB)

Yahweh’s long address directly to Tyre (26:7–14) begins with an announcement of Yahweh’s fearsome agent accompanied by his formidable war machine with all its components, more of which will be added in the following verse. Throughout the section, one notices many echoes and expansions of what has already been threatened in the previous speech (26:3–6). (CC)

**26:8** *siege.* Nebuchadnezzar’s 15-year siege of Tyre began shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. There is no record that Tyre fell at this time (see note on 29:18). (CSB)

The style changes to that of second person (direct address: “you”), which has the effect of sounding as if Ezekiel is proclaiming the oracle to Tyre, but this usage probably accords with Yahweh’s command for Ezekiel (in Babylon) to “set” his “face toward/against” the enemy (25:2; 28:21; and often elsewhere; see the second textual note on 6:2). (CC)

The attack on Tyre’s “daughters,” her satellite cities, is repeated almost verbatim from 26:6, where they were added at the end of the address, almost as an appendage. Here they are mentioned first, undoubtedly following the natural course of events, since these villages on the mainland would need to be conquered before the assault on the offshore city of Tyre itself. Ezek 26:3 had moved immediately into the result of the attack, while details of the attack were omitted. Ezek 26:8b–11a will fill in that omission and will not speak of results until 26:11b. (CC)

**26:8b-12** After a brief preview of the siege and destruction of the city in 26:3–4, these verses expand on the scene and offer about as detailed and vivid a picture of standard siege and assault practices on a walled city in ancient times as we find in Ezekiel—and all of the OT, for that matter. There is only one tiny problem: as far as we know, Nebuchadnezzar never carried out these actions. In fact, these procedures, which could be and often were implemented in the conquests of mainland cities, could not happen to an island city like Tyre, where instruments like battering rams could not approach. It seems that nothing of the sort happened to Tyre until Alexander the Great built his massive mole out to the island, so that his war machines could be brought to bear (see the commentary on 26:1). Nebuchadnezzar, like Assyrian armies before him, subdued, blockaded, and exercised some political control over Tyre, but an investment of the type Ezekiel describes was not possible. In fact, in 29:17–20 Ezekiel himself acknowledges that Nebuchadnezzar’s efforts against Tyre were less than fully successful and that Yahweh would give him Egypt in compensation (a prophecy with its own problems; see the commentary there). It appears, at least, as if Ezekiel had a sort of stock, stereotyped repertory of idioms to describe the fall of cities. (CC)

Obviously, this raises problems of unfulfilled prophecy, or possibly even false prophecy. For those who regard the Bible just as another piece of human religious literature, that is no problem. But for those with the true and high view of Scripture as God’s inspired and inerrant Word, it certainly does. (CC)

Perhaps the problem is not as great with a prophet like Ezekiel, who is so given to hyperbole in general. It does remind us that prophecy, even in its predictive mode, is not the simplistic “history written in advance” that it can easily be described as being. If God himself often “relents” or “changes his verdict” (usually the Niphal of נָחַם, e.g., Ex 32:14), it surely is no problem if he inspires his prophet to utter oracles that cannot always be milked dry. A more relaxed attitude toward “fulfillment” can easily get out of hand, of course, and lead in thoroughly agnostic directions. But it need not, if the rest of Scripture and the hermeneutical circle it engenders and empowers remain operative. In any event, the prophecy certainly was fulfilled in that the people of Tyre did eventually all die and face God’s judgment. (CC)

**26:14** *never be rebuilt.* Eventually fulfilled by Alexander’s devastating siege in 332 b.c. (see note on Isa 23:1). (CSB)

This verse is a repetition and summary of earlier threats (26:4–5), emphasized by Yahweh’s own signature, that Tyre’s demise as the great city she now is will be permanent. (CC)

**26:15** If the fate just described could befall mighty Tyre, what will happen to far less defensible coasts and islands with which Tyre traded? The reactions of the other nations will heap shame upon proud Tyre. Similar expressions occur frequently in Gentile oracles, and evidently this was one of the standard idioms of the genre. (CC)

**26:16** *princes of the coast.* Called kings in 27:35, they were probably trading partners with Tyre. (CSB)

The gestures of the neighbors were apparently the conventional ones for such situations. Many parallels can be cited. The description is very similar to that of the king of Nineveh, who repented at Jonah’s preaching (Jonah 3:6). Such actions may be taken as representative of the great debasement of human pretensions whenever they challenge him who alone “will be exalted in that day” (Is 2:11). (CC)

 *lay aside their robes.* Usually mourners tore their clothes (Job 2:12) and put on sackcloth, but cf. the king of Nineveh (Jn 3:6). (CSB)

 *Clothed with terror.* Because of political shock waves from the fall of such a powerful city (cf. 7:27; Ps 35:26; 109:29). (CSB)

**26:17-18** This lament continues the direct address to Tyre, begun by Yahweh in 26:15 as indicated by the citation formula there (“thus says the Lord Yahweh to Tyre”). A new citation formula in 26:19 will signal the beginning of a new unit. (CC)

**26:17** *lament.* See note on 19:1. (CSB)

**29:19-21** In contrast to 26:15–18, and like 26:3–4, 13–14, in this final section Yahweh clearly and repeatedly specifies that he is the actor (“I make … I bring …”). Stereotyped and exmythological themes (see the textual notes) are freely used to describe a judgment of unparalleled horror and severity in “the land of no return” (an ancient Mesopotamian description of the realm of the dead), for which there is no adequate analogical language of human experience in “the land of the living” (26:20). (CC)

**26:19** *ocean depths.* The primeval, chaotic mass—the “deep” of Ge 1:2. Tyre’s collapse into the sea is described in almost cosmic terms. (CSB)

**26:20** *pit.* The grave, “the earth below” (cf. Ps 69:15). (CSB)

 *people of long ago.* Those long dead (Ps 143:3; La 3:6). (CSB)

 *not return or take your place in the land of the living.* As Israel would (see 37:1–14). (CSB)

**26:21** See 27:36; 28:19. (CSB)