

Prophecy About the Catastrophic Destruction of Tyre

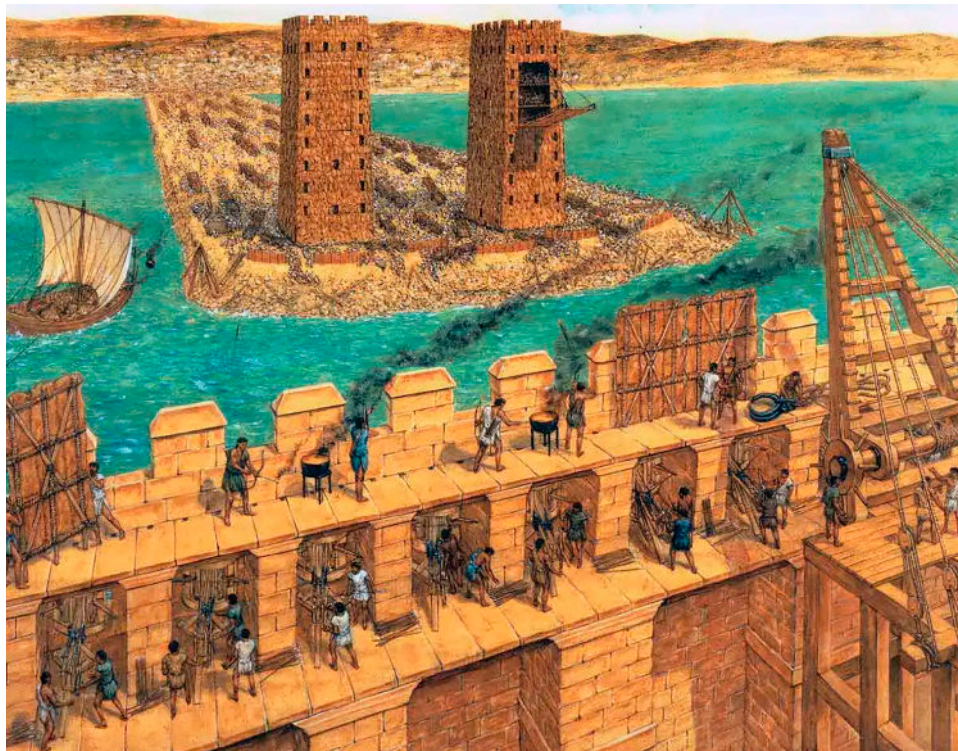
In the previous study, we learned an important divine principle that occurs again in this study. The principle was that if God is punishing our enemy and we rejoice that our enemy is suffering, God will stop punishing our enemy and punish us. The principle is given to us in two proverbs. The first proverb is Proverbs 24:17-18 and it says,

*Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
Or the LORD will see it and be displeased,
And turn His anger away from him.
Proverbs 24:17-18 (NASB)*

The second proverb is Proverbs 17:5.

*... He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.
Proverbs 17:5b (NASB)*

How often have we read these verses and did not think about their implication? But it is a principle that is in operation day after day. In the last study we saw two examples of this principle. The first was the Ammonites who rejoiced that Israel was destroyed. The

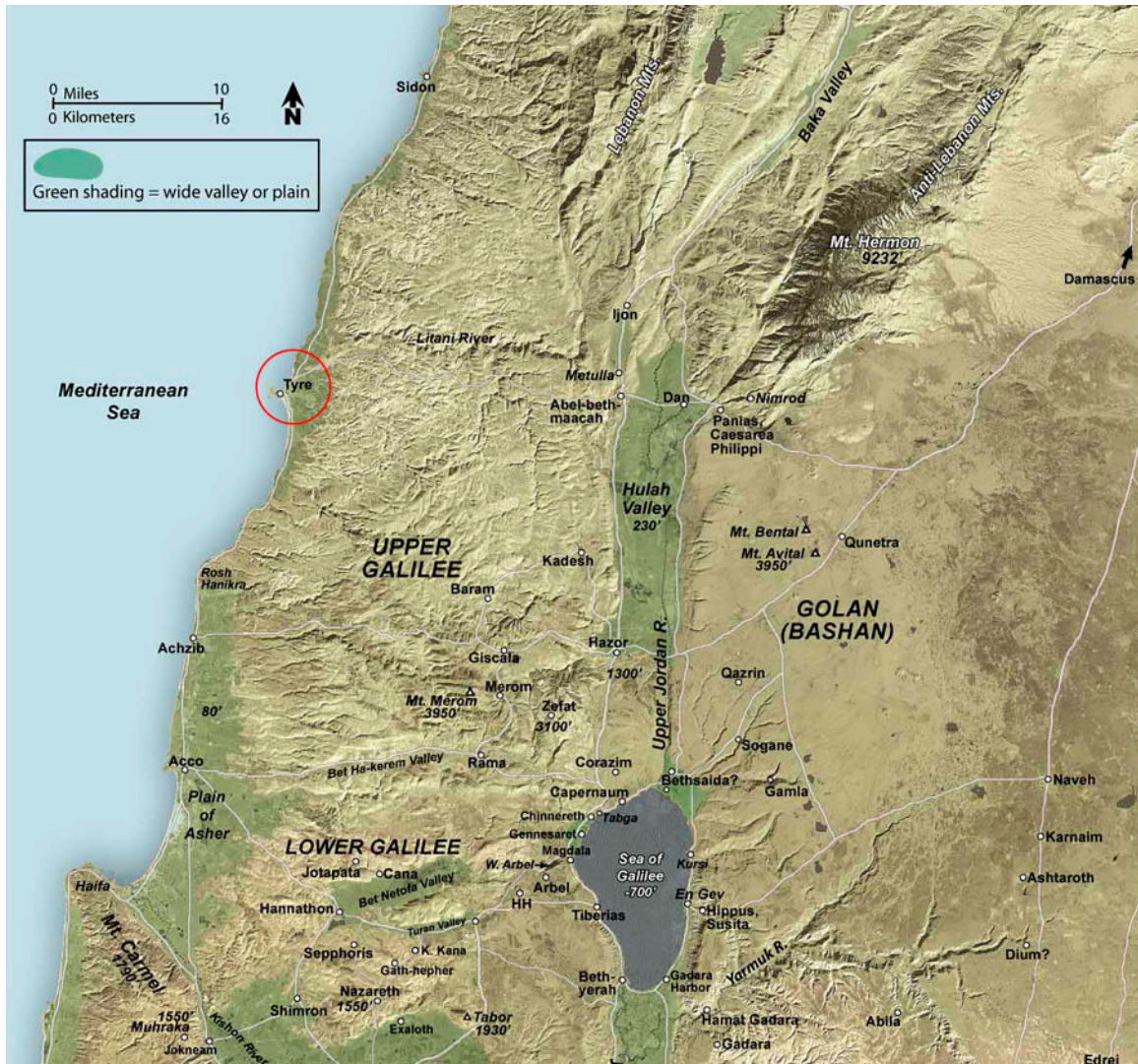


second example was the Edomites. This study is a third example of this principle. We will learn that the city of Tyre rejoiced while the Babylonian army was attacking the nation of Israel.

SIN OF TYRE AND YAHWEH'S PLAN (v 1-6). This study is about a prophecy directed at Tyre. It begins with Ezekiel 26 and ends with Ezekiel 28. This study will be limited to the first chapter, chapter 26. Chapter 26 describes the sin of the city of Tyre and her destruction. Chapter 27 is a lament about her destruction, and chapter 28 is about the king of Tyre and his incredible power. The prophecy is a very significant one as you will soon discover. So, like a swimmer, let's jump in and read the first verse of chapter 26.

Now in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying. Ezekiel 26:1 (NASB)

Immediately, we are given a time marker. We are told that this prophecy was given in the eleventh year. We learned from Ezekiel 1:2 that the time markers are relative to the first year Jehoiachin was taken into exile in Babylon. Since he was exiled in the year 597 B.C., that means the eleventh year of his exile was eleven years later or 586 B.C. Then



verse 1 adds that the prophecy was given in the first day of the month, but the month is not mentioned. According to Jewish custom, when the month is not specified, the month was usually Nisan. So the date of the prophecy is believed to be March 7, 586 B.C. in our calendar. Also, Jeremiah 52:12 tells us that the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army occurred five months later on or about August 11, 586 B.C. So, this prophecy is given while the attack on Judah was still in process.

Verses 2-3 describe a sin that Tyre committed and the consequences.

“Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, ‘Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,’ therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up

many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers . . .” Ezekiel 26:2-4a (NASB)

Yahweh told the prophet Ezekiel that he was to speak against Tyre. The reason is that they had said, “Aha” because the Babylonian army was destroying the temple, Jerusalem, and Judah. They were rejoicing that Israel was being attacked. They rejoiced just as the Ammonites and Edomites did. Another reason Tyre was rejoicing was that they believed they would become even more wealthy. Historical records reveal that Tyre was the capital city of the Phoenician nation and the commercial center of the Mediterranean region. Isaiah 23:8 says that Tyre was called “the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth.” They dominated and controlled the commercial sea routes,

while Judah controlled the commercial trade routes on the land. So, if Israel was destroyed they would gain control of the caravans from Africa, Egypt, and the Middle East. Dr. J. Vernon McGee states,

We know today that they [Tyre] went around the Pillars of Hercules and the Rock of Gibraltar, and into Great Britain, where they obtained tin. They established a colony in North Africa. Tarshish in Spain was founded by these people. They were great colonizers and went a lot farther than we used to think they did in their explorations.¹

So just as Tyre controlled the commercial sea routes, the people of Tyre believed they would also gain a monopoly of the commercial land trade routes. But Yahweh had plans for them. He said, "Behold, I am against you, O Tyre." It is always bad news when Yahweh is against you.

Notice that Yahweh said in the last part of verse 3 that He would "bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves." The imagery of the waves on a sea constantly hitting a boat or the coastline sends a picture of eventual destruction. For a single wave, unless it is enormous, does not destroy anything. But waves constantly hitting, pounding a boat, a pier, a wall, or a building will eventually weaken and destroy it.

So, when Yahweh said, "They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers," we understand the illustration. He used an illustration that the city of Tyre, which depended upon the sea, would understand. Yahweh would use multiple nations to destroy her - first one nation, then another nation, and then another one.

Then in verses 4-6 Yahweh explained what He would do next,

"... and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken," declares the Lord GOD, 'and she will become spoil for the nations. Also her daughters who are on the mainland will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the LORD.'" Ezekiel 26:4-6 (NASB)

Notice in verse 4 Yahweh said, "I will scrape her debris," and I will "make her a bare rock." Yahweh has told us in verse 3 that He will use nations to destroy Tyre. Now He says He will make her a bare rock. We will wait to explain that statement and the statement "make her a place for the spreading of nets" until verses 12-14 since these statements occur there again. "Her daughters" in verse 6 refers to satellite communities which were connected with the city, and the island that was off the coast. So, that is the sin of Tyre and an overview of Yahweh's plan to destroy the city of Tyre and her "daughters." She rejoiced because Jerusalem was attacked.

DETAILS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE (v 7-14).

Verses 7-14 now give us some incredible details about the destruction of the city of Tyre. Remember that we have been told nations would come against her "as the sea brings up its waves." So the prophecy says that the first nation that came against her was the Babylonian army. Verses 7-11 describe the military might of Babylon as it destroyed Tyre.

For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army. He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you. The blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground. Ezekiel 26:7-11 (NASB)

After King Nebuchadnezzar defeated Jerusalem in 586 B.C., he attacked Tyre the next year in 585 B.C. That was Yahweh's plan. We are told Yahweh called King Nebuchadnezzar the king of kings in verse 7. Why did Yahweh do that? The answer is that Yahweh had given him unprecedented dominion and authority. He was the first king in the "times of the Gentiles" that is mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:24. We will

1. J. Vernon McGee, Book of Ezekiel. Thru the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1982. p. 487

learn more about it in Ezekiel 34. He was the head of gold on the statue in the dream that Yahweh gave to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. Daniel told the king that he was the king of kings, and the sons of men had been given to him by Yahweh. So Nebuchadnezzar represented the first empire to defeat Judah.

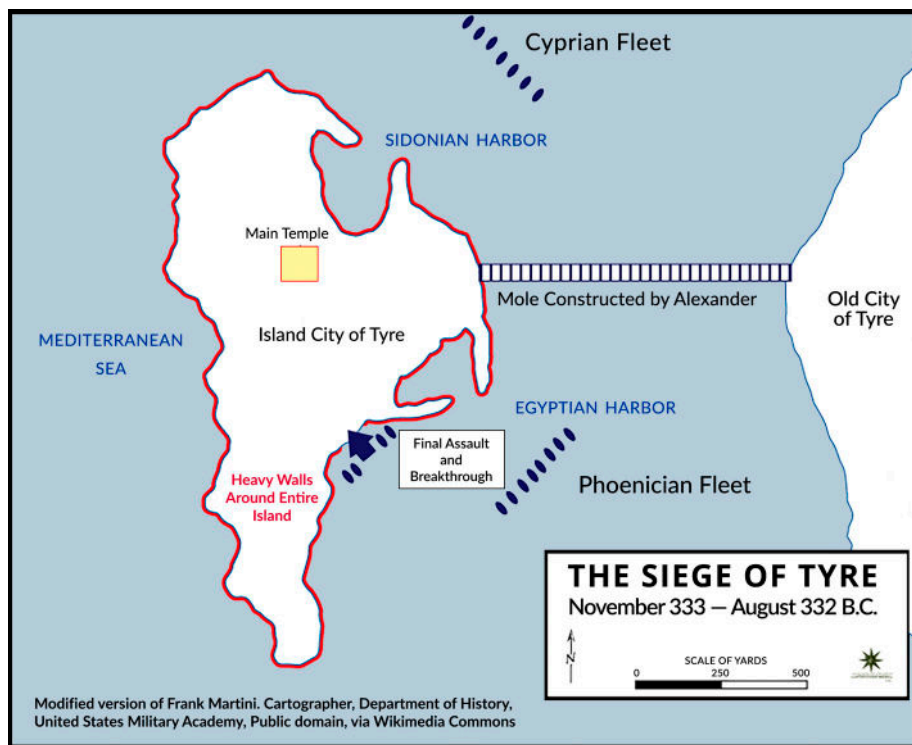
Verse 8 says Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the satellite communities on the mainland that were part of Tyre’s commercial enterprise, and he did. During the siege, historical records indicate the inhabitants of mainland Tyre fled to the island for safety. We are also told from an early Egyptian papyrus dated from the fourteenth century B.C. that Tyre was already a city

on the mainland and on an island.² So the island was considered a second Tyre before Nebuchadnezzar attacked the city.³ Historical records state it took the army 13 years to defeat Tyre on the mainland. But Nebuchadnezzar abandoned his siege on the island. So, the prophecy in verses 7-11 describes the destruction of Tyre on the mainland.

When we arrive at verse 12, there is a change from the singular “he” to the plural “they.” The “they” is another “wave.” The “they” includes Alexander the Great who attacked Tyre on the mainland and the island two hundred and forty years later in 332 B.C. Here is the rest of the prophecy,

merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water. So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken,” declares the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 26:12-14 (NASB)

The prophecy refers to the army of Alexander the Great. Historical records indicate that Tyre revived under the Medo-Persian rule which began in 539 B.C. until the time of Alexander the Great. The reason this occurred is that Isaiah 23:15-17 tells us that Yahweh would allow Tyre to rebuild to some degree. So when Alexander arrived, the city was partially rebuilt. He destroyed what was rebuilt and scraped all of the rubble including that created by Nebuchadnezzar off the mainland



Modified version of Frank Martini, Cartographer, Department of History, United States Military Academy, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

into the sea. He created what is called a mole or a causeway from the mainland to the island. Then his army was able to attack and defeat the island. The Associates of Biblical Archaeology provide this helpful description about Alexander the Great’s destruction of the city of Tyre in its Fall 1906 edition of the “Bible and Spade”,

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

“Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your

2. Merril Unger. R. K. Harrison (editor). The New Unger Bible Dictionary. Moody Publishers. 2005. p. 1311.

3. Bible and Spade. Associates of Biblical Archaeology. Fall 1906.

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).⁴

Author Nina Jidejian states,

Looking down into the water one can see a mass of granite columns and stone blocks strewn over the sea bottom.⁵

Charles Feinberg in his commentary titled, "The Prophecy of Ezekiel" also adds,

The American archaeologist Edward Robinson saw forty or fifty marble columns beneath the water along the shores of Tyre.⁶

The message is that the beautiful and wealthy city of Tyre in the ancient world disappeared and its ruins lay in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea just as Ezekiel had prophesied.

It is very interesting to notice how God works. Since the name of Tyre means "rock," Yahweh made Tyre like a rock. After Alexander the Great was finished, verse 14 says fishermen could spread their nets. This seemingly unimportant comment must not be missed. For in ancient times, fishermen would spread their nets out to dry over a flat place that was free of debris. The picture that is painted for us is that Alexander would make Tyre to look like a rock. All of the dirt and debris would be removed. Then Yahweh added, "You will be built no more."

That prophecy has been fulfilled. Even though there is a city called Tyre in Lebanon today, the ancient ruins of Tyre have not been found by archaeological excavation.^{7,8}

EFFECT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE (v 15-21).
Verses 15-18 now prophesies about the mourning that would and did occur in the ancient world over Phoenicia's glorious Tyre.

Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre, "Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst? Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment and be appalled at you.

They will take up a lamentation over you and say to you,

'How you have perished, O inhabited one,

From the seas, O renowned city,

Which was mighty on the sea,

She and her inhabitants,

Who imposed her terror

On all her inhabitants!

Now the coastlands will tremble

On the day of your fall;

Yes, the coastlands which are by the sea

Will be terrified at your passing."

Ezekiel 26:15-18 (NASB)

The lament occurred because Tyre was the commercial center of the Mediterranean Sea and also had a strong religious influence. The colonies of Tyre will be described in the next chapter.

Verses 19-21 now record a promise from Yahweh that the ancient city would be desolate.

For thus says the Lord GOD, "When I make you a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you and the great waters cover you, then I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I will set glory in the land of the living. I will bring terrors on you and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again,"

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Charles Lee Feinberg. The Prophecy of Ezekiel. Moody Press. 1969. p. 150.

7. Tyre. Britannica Dictionary. (www.britannica.com/place/Tyre).

8. Joshua J. Mark. Tyre. World History Encyclopedia. 23 November 2021 (www.worldhistory.org/Tyre/).

declares the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 26:19-21 (NASB)

These verses reinforce Yahweh's statement that the ancient Tyre would not be built again. That is true, the ancient city has not been found. In verse 20, the word "pit," *bor*, is another name for the grave or Sheol. That means the people would be killed.

CONCLUSION. This prophecy against Tyre is one of the most significant in the Bible. In the fall 1906 edition of the Bible and the Spade, an article was written in which it was stated,

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.⁹

But later in the 1930s, secularists and liberal theologians both began to argue for a third century date for the book of Ezekiel.¹⁰ They did this for two reasons. First, they did not believe the book of Ezekiel was inspired. Second, if the book was inspired, then they would have to admit that God wrote the book for God had said "then they will know that I am the LORD."

But we know the book of Ezekiel was written before the third century for it is contained in the Septuagint which was compiled in 270 B.C. But more importantly the Jewish Great Assembly, a group of 120 scribes, sages, and prophets, knew about the book of Ezekiel between the time of 516 B.C. and before Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre on the island in 332 B.C.¹¹ The message is that the book of Ezekiel existed before the prophecy was fulfilled. That is, the book of Ezekiel is inspired by God. We know that Yahweh is our God and He punishes those who do not bless Israel.

9. Bible and Spade. Ibid.

10. George Ricker Berry. The Composition of the Book of Ezekiel. Journal of Biblical Literature. The Society of Biblical Literature. Vol. 58, No. 2 (Jun., 1939), pp. 163-175.

11. Tava Ganzel. The Rabbis Sought to Withdraw the Book of Ezekiel?: The Rabbinic Re-Authorization of the Book of Ezekiel. Journal of Ancient Judaism. II. 2020, p. 3. Note: author states, "its composition to the Great Assembly, which they dated to the first half of the Second Temple period." That is, it existed between 516 B.C. to 332. B.C.