

# A Prophecy Against Tyre

## Ezeki'el 26: 1-21

**DIG:** Tyre was about one hundred miles north of Jerusalem. How would Tyre prosper from Israel's destruction? How was Tyre's response like those of the nations back in Chapter 25? What will Tyre's punishment be? Who will inflict it? How long will it take? Will it be complete? If God knows disaster is coming, what's the point of warning Tyre? Why not just let it happen? The coastlands were the countries and islands of the Mediterranean Sea that Tyre engaged in trade. Why will they be so "shaken up?"

**REFLECT:** Is ADONAI "going overboard" in punishing those who rejoice in Israel's demise so harshly? What does this say about God's commitment to Israel? What does this chapter do to the ancient belief that gods only have power within territorial borders? Was YHVH "washed up" when Israel was destroyed? Do you rejoice or lament over the current political situation in this country? In Israel? Is the LORD working out a plan or wringing His hands?

**The prophecy was given February 3, 585 BC during the exile in Babylon**

**The sin and destruction of Tyre:** On the first day in the eleventh month of the twelfth year of Jehoiakim's exile. The Masoretic Text (the traditional Hebrew text) does not have month of the twelfth. Therefore, it reads eleventh year, which dates from April 23, 587 BC to April 13, 586 BC. If this is the correct text, the prophecy must date from the end of that year, in the eleventh (February 13, 586 BC) or the twelfth month (March 15, 586 BC). But there is a problem with these dates: This prophecy describes Tyre's gloating over the destruction of Jerusalem (verse 2), yet Yerushalayim did not fall until July/August on the ninth of Av (see Gc - The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC) several months after the date given here for Tyre's celebration of the fact that Tziyon is ruined. To solve the problem, I and many other interpreters believe that the reading of the original Hebrew text was: On the first day of the eleventh month of the twelfth year and that the words month of the twelfth must have been inadvertently omitted by a copyist somewhere along the line of history (Ezekiel 26:1 CJB).

The word of ADONAI came to me, saying: Son of man, since Tyre has said against Yerushalayim, "Ha! She is shattered, the gateway of the people's. Now that she is ruined her riches will be mine" (Ezeki'el 26:2 CJB). Jerusalem, which had attracted merchants from many countries, was no more. So Tyre thought that Judah's trade would then be diverted to them. Their selfish satisfaction over Tziyon's tragedy, and their desire to benefit from it financially, ultimately brought about their own ruin.

Therefore, Adonai ELOHIM says:

Look, Tyre! I am against you. Her destruction will come by means of invasion. Just as the sea churns up its waves, I will churn up many nations against you (Ezeki'el 26:3 CJB). Tyre was both a coastal city as well as an island city. All through these chapters Ezekiel seems to hear the waves beating upon the doomed city. And indeed after this prophecy many nations did invade Tyre: Babylon, Persia, Greece, the Ptolemies of Egypt, the Seleucids of Syria and Rome.

They will destroy the walls of Tyre and they will demolish her towers. For thirteen years Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the coastal part of the city and destroyed it in 572 BC. The island Tyre was built after the destruction of coastal Tyre and it fell in 332 BC. I will scrape its soil from her and reduce her to bare rock (Ezeki'el 26:4 CJB). Alexander the Great uniquely fulfilled this part of the prophecy when he used the rubble of the coastal city destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar to build a causeway out to island Tyre and obliterate it (see the commentary on Isaiah Eq - The Timeline for Tyre). After the destruction of Tyre by her invaders, all traces of her former glory were swept away as by a tidal wave. What was once a magnificent city had the appearance of a bare rock.

Tyre became a place for fishing, not for living. It was built upon an island or rock, hence her name *Tsor*, meaning rock. With the sea all around her, she will be a place for drying fishnets. And she would become a plunder for the nations. Instead of taking plunder, she would be plundered. The fishermen will find the dry, rocky island a suitable place for drying their nets. I have spoken, says Adonai ELOHIM. Her daughters on the mainland will be put to death with the sword. Her daughters were the towns and villages on the mainland of which Tyre was the capital. Not her alone, but the population of all the Phoenician cities would perish. Then they will know that I am ADONAI (Ezeki'el 26:5-6 CJB).<sup>374</sup>

**The means of Tyre's punishment:** For here is what Adonai ELOHIM says: I will bring upon Tyre, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon. His name was spelled Nebuchadrezzar instead of the usual form because Ezekiel evidently wanted to approximate the Babylonian spelling that has been found on bricks unearthed by archaeologists. The Babylonian *Nabukudurri-usur* means *Nabu protect my boundary*.<sup>375</sup> In verses 14, 29-31 the beginning of the end for the influential metropolis was set forth. At the time the citizens of Tyre were in open revolt against Babylon. Nebuchadrezzar was designated king of kings who had dominion over many vassal kings (Dani'el 2:37; Ezra 7:12). The invader is seen coming from the north, which was the direction of invasions from Babylon into Syria-Palestine, at that time Nebuchadrezzar was at Riblah on the Orontes (2 Kings 25:21; Jer 52:9). He came with horses, chariots, cavalry, and a great and powerful army (Ezeki'el 26:7 CJB).

The Babylonian military operations against coastal Tyre are described in chronological order and give the usual method followed in the siege of a city. The first to suffer were her daughters on the mainland, meaning the towns and villages on the mainland of which Tyre was capital, will be put to death with the sword. He will build siege-towers against you, he will build a ramp against you and raise a screen of shields against you. Then came the attack on the island city. He will pound your walls with his battering rams and break down your towers with his axes (Ezekiel 26:8-9 CJB). This siege of coastal Tyre took thirteen years for the Babylonians to achieve.

Then Ezekiel goes on to describe the actual destruction of coastal Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. His horses are so many that their dust will cover you. The thunder of cavalry, wagons and chariots will shake your walls, as he enters your gates, like men storming a city through a breach. With the hoofs of his horses he will trample your streets. He will put your people to the sword and pull down your two strong pillars, which Herodotus tells us were built in honor of their national deity Melkarth (Ezekiel 26:10-11 CJB). The national deity that the people of Tyre would have trusted for their security would be destroyed and toppled to the ground like so much rubble.

But Ha'Shem would also use other nations, over a long period of time, to bring an end to Tyre. They will seize your wealth, loot your wares, break down your walls, destroy your fine houses; then they will throw the rubble of the demolished buildings, your stones and timber and even your dust into the sea. Nebuchadnezzar razed coastal Tyre in 572 BC, and two hundred and forty years later Alexander the Great finally destroyed island Tyre by using much of that rubble to build a causeway to reach her shores. Then Ezekiel describes two key results. First, I will put an end to your singing; the sound of your lyres will be heard no more. Secondly, I will reduce you to bare rock, you will be a place for drying fish nets, you will never be built again (see timeline above), for I, ADONAI, have spoken, says Adonai ELOHIM (Ezekiel 26:12-14 CJB).<sup>376</sup>

**The effect of Tyre's doom upon the Gentile nations:** To Tyre Adonai ELOHIM says: How the coastlands, the coastal city-states along the Mediterranean with which Tyre did business, will shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when the slaughter takes place in you (Ezekiel 26:15 CJB)! The prophet pictures the crash of the city's downfall and the agonized moaning of the injured as being audible to the neighboring city-states. Tyre was the lifeline to their wealth. They traded with Tyre and were the wholesalers in the economic system that Tyre had created. When Tyre's wealth was shattered, their wealth was also shattered.

Then all the princes of the sea, or the chief merchants in the city-states above (Isaiah 23:8), will step down from their thrones, or go into mourning (Jonah 3:6), they will put aside their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, trembling all the time, appalled at your condition (Ezeki'el 26:16 CJB).

Then they will raise this lament for you: "How you have been destroyed, you who were peopled from the seas, city so renowned, once so strong at sea (Tyre was the most powerful of the coastal city-states), you and your inhabitants who used to spread terror over all [the mainland's] inhabitants! It was beyond their comprehension how Tyre, the mighty city, had fallen. It seemed impossible to them. Now the coastlands tremble on the day of your downfall, and the islands in the sea are in shock at your end" (Ezeki'el 26:16-18 CJB).<sup>377</sup>

**Tyre's descent to sh'ol:** For here is what Adonai ELOHIM says:

When I make you a ruined city from Alexander the Great's conquest in 332 BC, like other uninhabited cities. Ezekiel then ends his inspired poem with some symbolic language. When I bring the deep sea over you, and its mighty waters cover you. Then Ezekiel changes the imagery slightly. Instead of descending into the ocean depths, Tyre would be brought down with those who descend to Sh'ol, the pit, to the people of long ago, and make you live in underworld places like those who were ruined long ago, with those who descend to the pit, never able to return to the land of the living. The scene is like that of a naval funeral, where the body of the deceased is dropped into the ocean after the funeral words have been spoken. But here the entire island is dropped into the oceans depths, never again to see the light of this world. People would long for her, but she would never again be found (Ezeki'el 26:19-21). Consequently, with powerful poetry, the prophet announces the end of the island empire's era.

In a penetrating manner, the prophet brings home to us the temporal nature of mankind's most enduring symbols. Tyre, it seemed, had always been there. Its location made it impregnable. For generations of sailors along the Mediterranean coastline, Tyre had been a familiar and welcome sight. It was a port of call, a place of refuge, a market of goods, and a permanent place. But nothing in this world is permanent, and no city lives forever. The leaders of the city-states that traded with Tyre might well have trembled at her funeral, for in it, they saw the writing on the wall for themselves. For everyone, either wealthy ancients or the poor of today, there is something more permanent in life than the alluring cities of this world. It was Adonai ELOHIM that declared Tyre's fate, and the same sovereign God is the only One who offers a permanent and enduring City (see the commentary on Revelation Fs - The Eternal New Jerusalem).<sup>378</sup>