

## A Prophecy against Tyre - Ezekiel 26:

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### Preface:

To have definite foreknowledge is to be God or God's agent, and to embody a power only God can have. In an effort to deny Islam's superior prophecies Christians allege that 'spiritual beings' or Satan can have a degree of foreknowledge in a mystical manner. Notwithstanding the fact that this has yet to be demonstrated, we may surmise that if a malignant force was behind a prophetic claimant it would not be perfect and its claims of foreknowledge would contain discernible falsehoods. As the Lord God says in Deuteronomy 18:21-22 "You may say to yourself, 'How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?' If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it". Thus, through our rational faculties, and proposed revelations we come to the unavoidable conclusion that a false prophecy is an immediate disqualifier for a prophetic claimant<sup>1</sup>. It is well accepted in scholarly circles that Ezekiel 26 is a false prophecy [and I would extend this to Ezekiel 29] although as to ensure that I am not simply appealing to authority I have written this paper to show the Christians and Jews why a holistic reading of the text paints Ezekiel as a false prophet. I will primarily discuss Ez. 26:1-14 but will occasionally draw on other related passages

### Main Passage in Question: Ezekiel 26:1-14

26 In the eleventh month of the twelfth 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, 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 warhorses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through. 11 The hooves 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.

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<sup>1</sup> While I am arguing that Ezekiel 26-29 is a false prophecy, I do not believe the prophet himself is behind this. I will tackle authorship in another paper Insha Allah.

## Historical context and Exegesis:

Tyre during the times of biblical Ezekiel was a bustling trade center located north of Israel. As noted by Ezekiel 27:32, Tyre was situated ‘in the midst of the sea’; a description attested by Egyptian, Assyrian, Hebrew, and Greek sources of antiquity<sup>2</sup>. The prophecy begins with the city of Tyre being judged for gloating over the fall of Jerusalem; a commercial rival, excited to take over the city’s trade. Tyre is judged for its arrogance and God declares its imminent destruction. In response to its arrogance and it incurring the wrath of God, the LORD promises to bring about its destruction from verses 7-14:

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 warhorses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through.** 11 **The hooves 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.

It is now important to contextualize this. Nebuchadnezzar is clearly God’s agent and is said to come and destroy the mainland settlements which would include the daughter villages such as Ushu, Burj, Rachidiyeh, and Cana<sup>3</sup>. His warhorses, wagons, chariots and horses would be used as he would slay the people of Tyre, break down their walls, destroy their houses, and toss their stones, timber, and rubble in the sea. The prophecy entails a complete destruction of Tyre. as it would “put an end to [their] noisy songs” and render Tyre “a bare rock” which would [among other evidence present in the text] essentially lead to this conclusion. Josephus describes a siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar that lasted 13 years<sup>4</sup> while ending inconclusively. Tyre survived, and became a Babylonian Vassal and later some of the royal family was recalled to become kings of Tyre again<sup>5</sup>. Josephus also records that Baal II ruled as king of Tyre for another decade and was succeeded by multiple judges and kings<sup>6</sup> which may have an interesting relationship with Ezekiel 26:15-16 which states:

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.**

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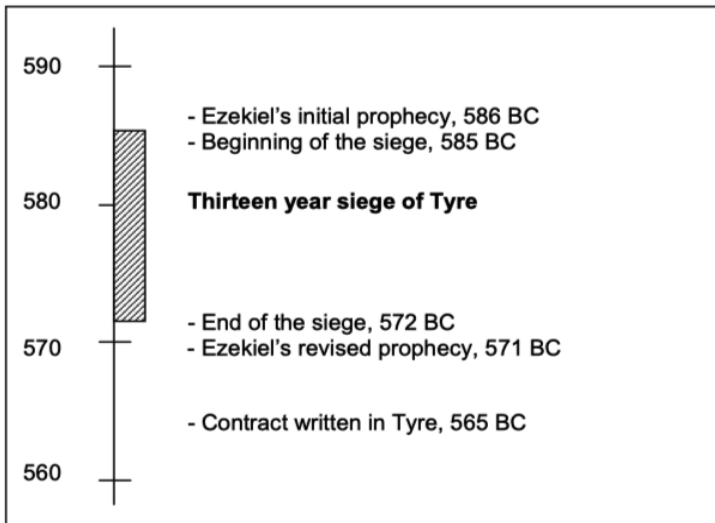
<sup>2</sup> Katzenstein, History of Tyre: 9.

<sup>3</sup> Aubet, The Phoenicians and the West: 31.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, Against Apion: 1.21.

<sup>5</sup> Katzenstein, History of Tyre: 342-44.

<sup>6</sup> Josephus, Against Apion: 1.21.



*Diagram 1: Historical timeline of Nebuchadnezzar's siege and relevant surrounding events.*

2 ancient sources attest to Tyre's existence immediately after the siege. The first is dated December 570 BCE and deals with grain sales whilst the other is an official contract written in Tyre<sup>7</sup> and placed in sequence in *Diagram 1*. **Therefore, this siege could not have destroyed Tyre and was evidently unsuccessful.** Ezra 3:7, 1 Chronicles 22:4, and Zechariah 9:3 all attest to a continued existence of the city of Tyre not only in part but even as a bustling trade center seemingly contradicts “the bare rock” and “a place to spread fishnets” verses. Furthermore, if we simply skip a couple chapters ahead to Ezekiel 29:17-20 the LORD says in response to this:

17 In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me:  
 18 Mortal, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare; **yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had expended against it.** 19 **Therefore thus says the Lord God: I will give the land of Egypt to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; and he shall carry off its wealth and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army.** 20 I have given him the land of Egypt as his payment for which he labored, because they worked for me, says the Lord God.

Whereas chs. 26-28 had consistently envisaged a total and permanent destruction of Tyre at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, delivered some fifteen years later, this prophecy seems to admit the failure of that campaign. Verse 18 states the failure of the destruction of Tyre and aims to explain it away. As “he [Nebuchadnezzar] nor his army got anything from Tyre” they will be given the land of Egypt. **In antiquity, the spoil of a city was considered payment for those who conquered it. In this case payment evaded Nebuchadnezzar and his army, for the city withstood his attack.** Therefore, God promises the Israelites Egypt instead of Tyre. This causes two major issues. Firstly, the prophecy appears to have been amended after it has failed meaning that God did not have foreknowledge and is either limited, or Ezekiel must be a false prophet assuming authenticity of the Tanakh. Secondly, this amendment to a conquering of Egypt is still a false prophecy as Nebuchadnezzar attacked Egypt with the help of Apries in 567 BCE but was defeated. As far as we can surmise, Amasis, who became king of Egypt in 570 BCE, enjoyed a relatively peaceful and prosperous reign of over four decades<sup>8</sup>. This is even more problematic considering Ezekiel 29:11 which states:

<sup>7</sup> Katzenstein, History of Tyre: 339.

<sup>8</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 100–101

“No human foot shall pass through it, and no animal foot shall pass through it; **it shall be uninhabited forty years. 12 I will make the land of Egypt a desolation among desolated countries; and her cities shall be a desolation forty years** among cities that are laid waste. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries.”

Thus, Ezekiel 26 both by history and by scripture [Ezekiel 29] must be regarded as a false prophecy. Going further, even Ezekiel 29 cannot be said to be fulfilled. It is thus a double-unfulfilled prophecy at worst and a singular failed prophecy at best.

### Common objections to Ezekiel 26 answered:

1. The complete destruction would be completed by Alexander the Great rather than Nebuchadnezzar.

It is often suggested that Ezekiel mixes the near future characterized through the “he” pronouns and Nebuchadnezzar with the distant future characterized by the “they” pronouns and Alexander’s army in 332 BCE. **In defense of this proposal** one could point to the reference to “many nations” coming in waves against the city (v. 3) and the switch from singular verb forms referring to Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 7–11) to plural verb forms in verse 12. **However this seems untenable for 2 reasons.** Firstly, the **subject of the plural verbs in verse 12 is most naturally understood as the collective**, “people, army,” used in verse 7 (see also “nations” in v. 5 and “many nations” in v. 3; cf. Joel 2:2–10, which uses both singular and plural forms to describe the Lord’s great army). Secondly, the verses with “they” pronouns [v. 12-14] are **depicted as direct consequences of Nebuchadnezzar’s army rather than a separate army**. Furthermore, the discourse structure of this prophecy (vv. 1–14) suggests that the switch to the first person in verses 13–14 forms an *inclusio* with the judgment announcement in verses 3–6, where the focus is upon God’s work in raising up an enemy against Tyre (note the first person forms in vv. 3–4). Note also the references to Tyre becoming a “bare rock” (vv. 4 and 14) and to fishing nets (vv. 5 and 14). Within the ring formed by the *inclusio*, the Lord focuses on his instrument of judgment, Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 7–12). Thus **these cannot be understood as a prophetic separation**. Second, the “they” pronouns and the reference to “many nations” [v.3-4] would seem to more naturally reflect Nebuchadnezzar’s status as “king of kings” (v. 7) and the **fact that his army consisted of troops from “the kingdoms and peoples in the empire he ruled”** (Jer 34:1 niv). One may also look at Ezekiel 29 as a prophetic apology; one that recognizes Nebuchadnezzar as the complete subject of the prophecy.

2. It’s about the glory of Tyre.

Reading the verse in its context it is quite clear Ezekiel expected Nebuchadnezzar to eradicate Tyre. It was meant to “put an end to your noisy songs” and the city would become “a bare rock” and “a place to spread fishnets” while its “strong pillars will fall to the ground” and “the hooves of his horses will trample all [the] streets”. As we have proven above [See 1.] this is all in reference to Nebuchadnezzar. To then say it's merely about the glory of Tyre is to take it out of its proper linguistic, and historical context. Furthermore, granting it meant a desolate Tyre, it would still have to be explained how it was fulfilled as Tyre clearly continued being a

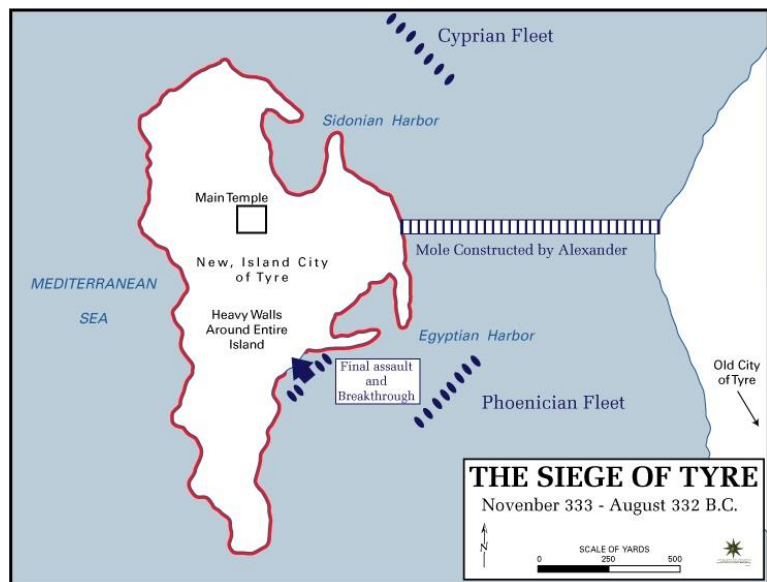
prominent trading center after the siege as shown by Josephus above, and by the trading contracts in 570, and 565 BCE as well as other books of the Tanakh as detailed above. Even if Tyre had taken a hit due to war, Ezekiel 29 does not interpret it in this light and the city evidently continued as a bustling center of commerce.

3. It's about the mainland, not the island-city.

A number of commentators in the past sought to relate the verses to Ushu (mainland Tyre) which was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar as it had been often before, **yet 26:6, 8 make a clear distinction between Tyre itself and its daughter cities and there can be no doubt that the prophets had the island-city in mind when they spoke of 'Tyre'**. Furthermore, it is apparent from verses 10-12 that “the prophet envisions complete success for the invader. The scene of enemy forces rushing through the breach in the wall and stampeding through the city, destroying everything in sight, is painted in bold but realistic strokes. **The last line in v.10 is the key: the enemy will take the sea fortress by storm as if it were an ordinary walled city on the mainland.** The dust raised by stampeding horses and racing chariots will darken the sky like a cloud. The din of neighing and snorting horses, the clatter of wheels on rocks, the noise of charioteers beating the sides of their vehicles, and the shouts of the invaders will cause the ground to tremble and the walls to shake. The scene of general devastation continues in v. 11 with the entire city crushed under the trampling horses' hooves, its population fallen to the sword, and the pillars of support toppled to the ground. Involved in the razing of the city are also the plundering of its wealth, the smashing of its walls, and the demolition of its magnificent homes. **The final act is to dump all the rubble, reduced here to stones, timbers, and debris, into the sea”**.

**An additional point can be made on this:**

Within the island Tyre, as seen in *Diagram 2*, there was a temple named the Temple of Melqart known for its pillars on the island. “Melqart's temple was famously visited by Herodotus in the 5th century BCE who described its impressive entrance as having two columns, one of gold and one of emerald (Bk. 2:44).” - Heradotus, Book of Histories<sup>9</sup>. This temple was **not destroyed by either Nebuchadnezzar or Alexander the Great**<sup>10</sup> so in any case the “pillars of support” in v.11 still stand and the prophecy still fails.



<sup>9</sup> <https://www.worldhistory.org/Melqart/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amusingplanet.com/2020/11/how-alexander-turned-island-of-tyre.html>