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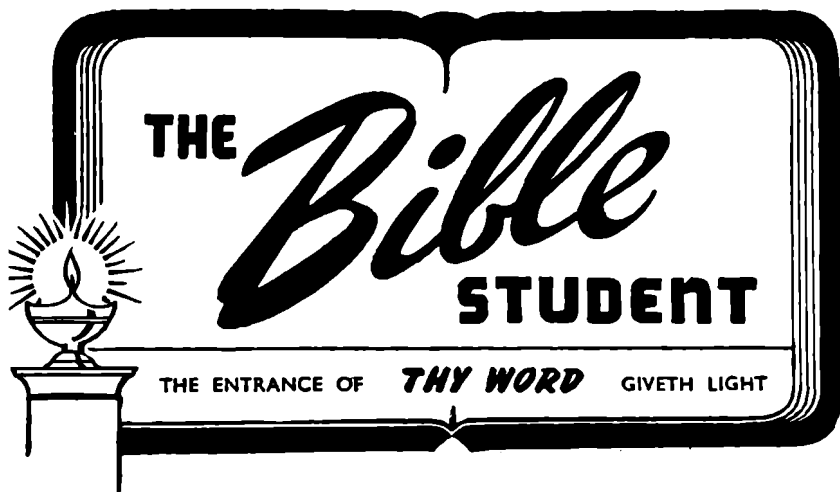
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New Series  
Vol. XXVI. No. 3

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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# The Bible Student

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NEW SERIES

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## THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL

H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

### The Doom of Tyre (ch. 26)

In our study of Scripture we must beware of two contrasted errors. The expositor must never yield to the temptation of constantly striving for the new and the novel. On the other hand he must not allow himself to be unduly impressed by apparent unanimity of opinion on any one passage. It is generally agreed that *Aha, she is broken that was the gate of the peoples* (v. 2 RV) represents Tyre's rejoicing over the fall of a commercial rival, for 'Caravan traffic from north to south would have been subject to taxation by the Jews'.\*

Such an interpretation is doubly unacceptable. Even if we take Jerusalem as a personification of the kingdom of Judah, which is far from certain, it is very doubtful whether at any time after Solomon the southern kingdom had exercised any influence on the trade routes that were Tyre's concern. Josiah may possibly have had this power, but it will have been far too short a time to create the impression that Judah might become in any sense Tyre's rival. What is far more important is that Tyre's trade would be far more seriously threatened by Jerusalem's fall than by her continued existence. Once Babylon controlled the whole of the Mediterranean coast from the Taurus range to the frontier of Egypt it could exercise a stranglehold on Tyre's trade.

The fundamental sin of Egypt was pride (29:3, 9) that rendered it insensible to the needs of others (29:6f); the neighbours of Israel

\* *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 658.

had been condemned for essentially spiritual sins (ch. 25), and at least in the case of Ammon (25:3) and Moab (25:8) it involved hatred of Israel's position and religion. It is reasonable to assume that the sin of Tyre was of the same type.

From whatever direction one approaches Jerusalem there is even today something about one's first view of it that stirs one's pulse. Partly it is due to the very unexpectedness of the city among the bare hills of Judaea. Though it is easy to exaggerate the unsuitability of its site for a capital, Jerusalem could never be a natural commercial centre. Even if the frontiers of the State of Israel were pushed to the Jordan or beyond it, Tel Aviv would remain its commercial and industrial centre. The very reverse is true of Tyre. For the conditions of the time its position was ideal for world commerce. So too under very different surroundings was that of Babylon.

Both Isaiah (2:2-4) and Micah (4:1-5) had prophesied the day, when Jerusalem would be the magnet for all peoples. Jerusalem and Tyre stood for two goals, two ideals, two loyalties that could never be reconciled. It may well be, however, that the choice of the epithet 'gate' is a cryptic pointer to the deeper meaning of the prophecy I suggested in Vol. XXVI, p. 73. Babylon is really Babel, or Bab-ili, the gate of god. It was not merely political or commercial supremacy that Babylon claimed, but religious too, as is reflected in Nebuchadnezzar's demand for the worship of the image of Marduk (Dan. 3:1-6). The destruction of Jerusalem was a matter of joy to all forms of natural religion, especially those that glorified man's physical achievements.

C. S. Lewis in his *The Screwtape Letters* (p. 45) makes Screwtape say, 'One must face . . . an appalling truth. He really *does* want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over.' Here is the difference between Tyre (or Babylon) and Jerusalem. But the

many nations that Tyre looked to to replenish her shall be her doom (v. 3). Note in this connection the rejoicing of the nations over the king of Babylon (Is. 14:9-17), and Jer. 50:9.

Tyre's daughters (v. 6, 8) are the suburbs of Tyre on the mainland. The isles (v. 15, 18) are the more distant coast-lands (so RSV in v. 15, but not v. 18), not necessarily islands, though they are included.

### The Lament over Tyre (ch. 27).

Ezekiel now compares Tyre to a gallant ship manned by sailors from the other Phoenician cities. It is caught in a storm and lost with all hands. It is lamented by sailors everywhere (vv. 3b-9a, 25b-36). Into this fine poem he has inserted a catalogue of Tyre's commerce in prose (vs. 9b-25a). This division is well seen in RSV though it erroneously reckons v. 9b as part of the poem.

The picture of Tyre as a ship was probably suggested by the fact that the city proper was an island; this explains v. 4a also. Senir = Hermon (Dt. 3:9). Render v. 6b with RSV, 'They made your deck of pines from the coasts of Cyprus, inlaid with ivory'. Elishah (v. 7) has not been identified with certainty. Arvad (v. 8) was built on an island north of modern Tripoli. Since the ship is Tyre, there is much to be said for the conjecture that we should read Zemer in v. 8b (RSV, ICC, cf. Gen. 10:18), a town near Arvad. Gebal or Byblos = Jebeil between Beirut and Tripoli. Lud (v. 10) = Lydia; Put = Egyptian Punt, i.e., the African coast of Red Sea. 'With thine army' (v. 11) should probably be 'and Helech' = Cilicia (RSV, Moffatt); Gammadim—Gammad has not been identified with certainty. Tarshish (v. 12), here by virtue of the metals mentioned probably a Spanish town or district. Javan (v. 13) = Ionians; Tubal and Meshech, tribes from Asia Minor (see comment on 39:1). Togarmah probably = Armenia. Dedan (v. 15) is mentioned again in v. 20 and so RSV, Moffatt, Cam. B., etc., follow LXX and render 'the men of Rhodes'; ICC gives good reasons against and we may assume two branches of the Arab tribe, one in Edom, the other in Arabia. RSV, Moffatt, ICC follow 25 Hebrew MSS, Aquila and the implication

of LXX and render Edom in v. 16; the difference is minimal, and the confusion has frequently been made in the Hebrew text. 'Minnith . . . pannag' (v. 17) have had no certain explanation; the renderings of Moffatt and RSV are guesses. Helbon (v. 18) a famous vine-growing district N.E. of Damascus. The names in v. 19 have been corrupted, but no certain emendation has been offered. Though Canneh and Chilmad (v. 23) are presumably in Northern Mesopotamia, they have not been identified. Neither AV or RV of v. 25 can be said to be particularly intelligent; render with RSV, Moffatt, Cam. B., ICC, ' . . . travelled for you with your merchandise'.

'Suburbs' (v. 28) is misleading; 'countryside' (RSV), or 'coast' (Moffatt) is better. Similarly replace 'astonished' (v. 35) by 'appalled' (RSV, Moffatt). 'Hiss' (v. 36): not a sound of disgust but of astonishment, cf. 1 Kings 9:8.

### The Downfall of the King of Tyre (28:1-19)

This section contains a prophecy of the punishment of the king of Tyre (vv. 1-10) and a prophetic dirge over his fall (vv. 11-19). Many, contrasting *prince* (v. 2) with *King* (v. 12), think that two persons are intended, but this view is based on a misunderstanding. Prince = *nagid*, which with varying English translation is a regular title for the Israelite kings, see especially 1 Sa. 9:16; 10:1, even though it is used for lesser men as well, for it means 'leader'. It is deliberately used of the king of Tyre to stress that he only held his office at God's appointment. King (*melek*) stresses the popular concept of kingship in the Fertile Crescent, which regarded the ruler as the representative of the gods and as more than human, though actual divinity was apparently only ascribed to him in Egypt. In our exposition we shall see that the two titles are deliberately chosen to fit the contents of the two portions.

### An Alleged Portrait of Satan

For many vv. 11-19 are primarily a picture of Satan, before his fall in a pre-Adamic Eden, looking forward to the Antichrist\*.

\* The most careful exposition of this view known to me is in Pember: *Earth's Earliest Ages*, p. 47-54 (15th edit.).

Those who implicitly hold this view have generally little idea of how unknown it is in wider Christian circles, or of how little basis there is for it in fact.

The Jews 'were intrusted with the oracles of God' (Rom. 3:2). There were deeper meanings in the Old Testament that could not be grasped until the Messiah came, but that is not the case here. There were prophecies of Christ they refused to see once they had rejected Him, but that has no relevance here. Except in the two cases just mentioned it seems very hazardous to give to an Old Testament passage a meaning that Jewish exegesis knows nothing of. In one very fanciful Rabbinic passage\* it is said that the king of Tyre, falsely called Hiram, actually entered Paradise; otherwise they see the first man described in the passage\*\*.

The application of the passage to Satan was common among leading Church fathers in the second half of the 4th century A.D. It is, however, striking that though it was held by Jerome, when he came to write his commentary on *Ezekiel* he omitted it.

Most cogent of all, however, is that any such interpretation detaches vv. 11-19 from their setting. A striking feature of the book is its very real unity, but here we are asked to believe that without giving any warning Ezekiel's gaze wanders first back to a period before man, and then on to almost the end of time though apparently speaking of the contemporary scene. The argument that much of the language could not be used of a mere man is really based on ignorance of the implications of Ezekiel's language.

It is worth mentioning that exactly the same arguments are valid against the efforts to interpret Is. 14:4-23 of the fall of Satan. But this does not mean that there is no truth in the view. All men who go the way of Satan mirror him and his sin in some measure. There is a real parallel between the fall of proud man and proud tempter, but Scripture does not give a picture of the fall of Satan mirroring the fall of men, but the fall of men mirroring the yet greater fall of the evil one.

\* *Derek Eretz Zuta* 1 at end.

\*\* *Pesiqtha* 36b, 73b and six parallels in other works, *Wayyiqra Rabba* 20.

### The Pride of the King of Tyre (28:1-10)

Ithobal II, king of Tyre, in spite of his pride, was merely Jehovah's *nagid*, the ruler He had appointed to lead Tyre, 'for there is no power but of God' (Rom. 13:1). But in his own eyes he was a god ('*el*'). The use of '*el*' rather than '*elohim*' shows that he was not claiming deity, but rather that as representative of the gods he had been granted divine strength and power. Ezekiel tells him he is only '*adam*' (v. 2), i.e., he is a man like all other men, linked with mankind for he is taken from one common soil ('*adamah*'), to which, like all others, he will return.

Jeremiah had proclaimed to Ithobal among others (Jer. 27:3) that Jehovah had set Nebuchadnezzar as king over him. His defiance of the king of Babylon, based on the strength of Tyre (v. 2), was a defiance of Jehovah as well. For Daniel see Vol. XXV, p. 61. The heart of God (vv. 2, 6) is, of course, unchangeable. The plural 'deaths' (vv. 8, 10) should be rendered 'violent death'. The Phoenicians practised circumcision, while the Babylonians did not (v. 10), so not only would his vaunted power fail him, but he would fall by those he despised religiously.

### The Dirge over the King of Tyre (28:11-19)

Lamentation (v. 12) is a false translation of *qinah*, which means in itself a funeral dirge, the connotation of sorrow, which is inherent in lamentation, being secondary and indeed unnecessary. Both here, and in 27:2; 32:2, 16; Amos 5:1 sorrow is not implied but rather the opposite. In the very similar passage, Is. 14:4-23, it is called a *mashal* (v. 4), i.e., a taunt-song. It has largely been this failure to realize the formal nature of *qinah*, the indubitable lack of sympathy in Ezekiel, and the traditional element of exaggeration in the average funeral dirge, that has prevented so many from recognizing the mockery in the prophet's words, which have then been taken literally.

In our justifiable rejection of the modern view that the early stories of Genesis are merely pagan myths purified of their polytheism we tend to forget the far truer view of our fathers that the pagan myths represent a polytheistic corruption of the truths of the Bible. We do not know enough about Canaanite myth to be



certain what form their corruption of the Eden story may have taken, but it is more than probable that we have it reflected here. Many will find it distasteful to find it suggested that we may have heathen myth in the Bible, but they forget that, if I am right, we have here a mocking funeral dirge over a heathen king, in which a mocking use of the king's own beliefs is to be expected.

Adam was the first king; that is why the Messiah is 'the second man' and 'the last Adam'. In Israel the offices of king, priest and prophet were separated to show that human sin had brought in a dislocation in God's order that only the Messiah could heal. But elsewhere the king was the re-embodiment of the first man, the perfect representative and vice-regent of the gods\*. It is this false proud view of the king of Tyre that Ezekiel is using. If Ithobal is the re-embodiment of the first man, Ezekiel can speak of him as being in Eden—the different picture of Eden can be explained by supposing that it was so described in Canaanite myth.

Our detailed exposition of the dirge must cope with the difficulties of the Hebrew, which, as LXX suggests, are in large part due to an imperfectly transmitted text. Though the force of v. 12 is clear enough, it is likely that the renderings of RSV or Moffatt are nearer what Ezekiel said. The nine precious stones of v. 13 re-appear on the high priest's breastplate, so there is little doubt that LXX is correct in reading all twelve.

The crux in our understanding depends on the rendering of vv. 14, 16. The Hebrew is exceptionally difficult. When RSV renders, basing itself largely on LXX:

With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you . . .

I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,

and the guardian cherub drove you out

from the midst of the stones of fire

it takes substantially the same course as Moffatt, ICC, Cam. B. and New Bible Commentary. Ithobal-Adam is pictured all wise, the prototype priest, in Eden, which in the Canaanite myth was evidently placed on the mountain of the gods (v. 16). The first

\* See my *The Centrality of the Messianic Idea for the Old Testament*, p. 9-14, and Bentzen: *King and Messiah*, ch. 5.

sin is transformed into Tyre's sin: 'In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned' (v. 16a, RSV).

Commentators find difficulty in 'thy sanctuaries' in v. 18, for they do not see why Ezekiel should be concerned with heathen holy places. The difficulty was felt as early as LXX, which translated, 'I have profaned'. Equally unnecessary is Moffatt's 'you have profaned your sacred position'. The Hebrew prophets were fully aware that though the religion of their neighbours was false it yet contained broken elements of the truth. For them it was a grievous thing that any man should deliberately fall below what little of the truth might have been preserved for him.

(To be continued)

## 'TILL I COME'

A. MCD. REDWOOD

The Christian's horizon is not bounded by death, but by the 'Glorious Appearing' of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*Erratum*: On page 110, Article: 'Till I Come'; line 5 — for Millennial), read *Tribulation*),

g the time and the accom-  
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a at hand'.

ve when it takes place, but  
rticipation in it, for, as the  
e church in Thessalonica

—'the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive, that are left, shall together with Him be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. 4:14 ff. RV.). Such is the glorious prospect of every believer, and this 'Hope', as John calls it (1 Jn. 3:3), must fill our vision as well as motivate and inspire all our service with increasing expectancy in these perilous days.

But it is just on the one central feature that we would now fix attention, viz., that this coming One is the Lord Christ Himself; the Jesus of Nazareth; the crucified, risen and glorified Saviour. There will be, of course, many related events which are to take place in fulfilment of the great purposes of God in and for this