

The Inscrutable Question: The Effect of Tyre's Fall; Utter Destruction by Alexander the Great, Ezk 26:16-21; Hebrew Poetry

- 9) The lamentation for Tyre is prophesied by the Lord through Ezekiel in:

Ezekiel 26:16 - "Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robe, 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.

- 10) These Mediterranean leaders are horrified at the calamity that strikes Tyre. Fear rather than sympathy motivate their mourning. The custom in the case of the death of a prominent person is to come down off one's throne, remove all vestments that speak of royal authority, and enter into a lamentation.
- 11) Beginning in verse 17 Ezekiel writes of the fear-induced lamentations of the leaders whose economic domains and political positions are threatened by the fall of Tyre. Their mourning is motivated by fear of what would happen should Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, or others next turn their attention toward them.
- 12) When Ezekiel writes he employs the meter used by the Hebrews when they compose lamentation verse. It is called *kinah*, which means "elegy," "dirge," or "lament for the dead."

Ezekiel 26:17 - "And 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 their terror on all her inhabitants!

v 18 - '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.'

- 13) This dirge brings out the tremendous influence and impact Tyre had on what is referred to as the "coastlands." These are the various political entities that fell under the sway of Tyrian power: Cyprus, Rhodes, Malta, Spain, Sicily, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and North Africa.
- 14) Three areas of fear motivate the lamentation:
1. Economic: Tyre is the economic engine that has overwhelming impact on the economies of these various states.
 2. Political: If Tyre's fortified defenses of both its coastal and island cities can be breached and overthrown, so can theirs.
 3. Religious: If Baal and the gods of the Phoenician pantheon cannot protect Tyre how can it protect them.
- 15) The historical fulfillment of the utter destruction of the city transpired over the next 250 years. There was an immediate fulfillment under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and complete fulfillment under Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.

II. Utter Destruction, Ezekiel 26:19-21

Ezekiel 26:19 - For thus says the Lord God, "When I shall make you a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I shall bring up the deep over you, and the great waters will cover you,

v 20 - then I shall bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I shall 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 shall set glory in the land of the living.

v 21 - "I shall bring terrors on you and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again," declares the Lord God.

- 1) The utter destruction of Tyre is an historical fact. The coastal city was decimated by Alexander the Great and its debris was used to construct a causeway out to the island city. It took awhile but the end result was that the island's buildings and structures were torn down and cast into the sea.

Hanson, Victor Davis. *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks: And Their Invention of Western Military Culture*. General editor John Keegan. (London: Cassell, 1999), 166, 178-180:

Within two years of his ascension to the Macedonian kingship in the autumn of 336 B.C., Alexander the Great, through murder and military force, eliminated all dynastic rivals and secessionary monarchs. To understand the warmaking of Alexander, we must first appreciate the 21-year-old's decision in September 335 B.C. to erase from the collective memory of Greece the entire city of Thebes—in many ways the most illustrious city in Hellenic history. The people of Thebes had rebelled against Philip's league of Greek states in the hope that the young Alexander was either dead himself or too inexperienced to stop them.

The destruction of Thebes was no aberration, but simply a foretaste of the entire Alexandrian approach to military practice so successful later in Asia. The ultimatum of surrender, the preference of lethal force to negotiation, the subsequent obliteration of the enemy, the inevitable murder of women and children and razing of house and home, the dire warning to do the same to other would-be insurrectionists, and always the dramatic and mythic flair to mask the barbarity: in the case of Thebes the sparing of the poet Pindar's house to emphasize his Hellenism—all were part of the feigned reluctance to murder the innocent.

Very conservative figures suggest that in the space of just eight years Alexander the Great had slain well over 200,000 men in pitched battle alone. It is also a conservative estimate that a quarter of a million urban residents were massacred outright between 334 and 324 B.C., most of them civilian defenders who unfortunately lived in the path of Alexander's trek east.

The most notorious and well-documented carnage, however, was at Tyre. After months of heroic defense, Tyre fell on 29 July 332 B.C. Most military historians emphasize only the brilliance and tenacity of the Macedonian besiegers, forgetting that their engines and science were simply the means to an end—in this case, the murder of innocents. We have no exact record of how many were lost in the city's defense, but our ancient sources more or less agree that on the city's final day of existence nearly 7,000 to 8,000 residents were butchered in the streets.

Two thousand surviving males were then crucified as a lesson of the futility of resistance to Alexander the Great and his quest for a Brotherhood of Man. Perhaps anywhere from 20,000 to 30,000 women and children were enslaved. Tyre, like Thebes before, thus ceased to exist as a community.

- 2) The prophecy indicated that the city would cease to exist, never to rise again. Its fall was characterized as a burial, therefore the use of the *kinah* dirge meter in verses 17-18.
- 3) Being cast into the "pit" or, in the Hebrew, the *bor*, makes reference to *Sheol*, the Hebrew word for **ᾗδης / haides** /, with emphasis on the Torments compartment reserved for unbelievers until the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20.
- 4) The complete fulfillment of this prophecy down to the fact it would "never be found again" is emphasized by this comment from:

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v. "Tyre":

The silted up harbour on the south side of the peninsula has been excavated by the *Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth*, but most of the remains of the Phoenician period still lie beneath the present town.

III. Lamentations for Tyre: Her Glory, Ezekiel 27:1-11

- 1) At the beginning of this chapter the Lord directs Ezekiel to return to the Hebrew language's *kinah* meter which is used in writing the verse for dirges called lamentations.
- 2) The meter in Hebrew poetry includes an accented syllable plus the unaccented syllable that either precedes or succeeds it (×´ or ´×). Three of these meters make up a verse, called a "stitch." There are sixteen verses, or stitches, to a stanza, which is called a "strophe." A Hebrew poem is thus made up of *x*-number of strophes. We recently studied a strophe in Psalm 119, verses 41-48.
- 3) Generally speaking there is no consistent difference in Hebrew literature between prose and poetry since Hebrew poetry has no firmly established rhyme or meter. Most expositors of Scripture agree that there are no hard and fast rules of poetic meter for the various poems that are in the Bible. We find this very dogmatic statement by Dr. Witton Davies in:

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, s.v., "Poetry, Hebrew":

Those who think Old Testament poets had in their minds objective rules of meter have to make innumerable changes in the text. It can be fearlessly said that there is not a single poem in the Old Testament with the same number of syllables, or feet, or accents in the several [verses], unless we introduce violent changes into the [text], such as would be resented in classical and other ancient literature. It is important, before coming to any definite conclusion, to take into consideration the fact that the poetry of the Old Testament belongs to periods separated by many centuries. In the oldest specimens of Hebrew poetry there is a naïve simplicity which excludes the idea of conscious art. Bound up in one volume called the Bible there is a literature differing widely in age, aim, and authorship. If there were among the ancient Hebrews, as there were among the ancient Greeks, a code of prosody, it is strange that the Mishna and Gemara' should be wholly silent about it. It should be remembered too that the oldest poetry of every people is non-metrical.

- 4) However, the Hebrew Bible does contain poetry and there is one specific meter that can be consistently identified with a lamentation. The Hebrew word for lamentation is *kinah*, which gives its name to this particular meter. It consists of a longer line of three or four meters followed by a shorter line of two or three meters. Jeremiah utilizes this meter throughout his Book of Lamentations. (See Lamentations 3:21-23)