

# The covering cherub and the fall of Tyre (Ezekiel 28) \*

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*The prophecy against Tyre in Ezekiel 28 has some very unusual language, leading some to use it in support of orthodox teachings about Satan. This article looks at the Scriptural connections of this language and applies the prophecy to the history of Tyre.*

**I**N EZEKIEL 27 the fall of the mercantile city of Tyre is likened to a richly laden merchant ship, driven by the east wind and sinking in a great storm (vv. 26,27). In the following chapter, two very different metaphors are used to describe the downfall of the king of Tyre. It has been said of this prophecy, "there is no other passage in Scripture where there is such detailed and peculiar irony".<sup>1</sup> In studying chapter 28 we will pay special attention to these metaphors and seek to explain the rather puzzling references to the anointed covering cherub, which are used by some to support the doctrine of a fallen angel, Satan.<sup>2</sup> The study will start with a brief outline of the history of Tyre, especially in relation to Judah and Israel, as this will be helpful to an understanding of chapter 28.

## Tyre and the kingdom of David and Solomon

Early Bible references to Tyre describe it as "the strong city" (Josh. 19:29, AV) and a fortress (2 Sam. 24:7). This fits in with its Hebrew name *Tsor*, meaning 'Rock'.<sup>3</sup> The city had two harbours, one on the mainland and the other on an offshore island. Mainland Tyre and the island city were first linked by a causeway built by the Hiram king of Tyre mentioned in the Bible.

Scripture informs us that this Hiram (Hiram I) had always been "on friendly terms" with King David (1 Kgs. 5:1). When David was established as king in Jerusalem, Hiram provided both workers and materials to build him a palace, probably as a gift (2 Sam. 5:11). Then, after David's death, he was happy to supply Solomon with cedar and pine logs to be used in the construction of the temple (1 Kgs. 5:8,9).

It is clear that Hiram recognised the greatness of the God of Israel. Note the language that he

used when he heard Solomon's message concerning his intention to build the temple: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, That made heaven and earth, Who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding" (2 Chron. 2:12, AV; cf. 1 Kgs. 5:7). It would be nice to think that Hiram was a worshipper of the God of Israel, but profane history supplies the information that he built a temple dedicated to the gods Melqart and Astarte. It may be that he became converted to the religion of the one true God at a later date. The friendship of Hiram with David and Solomon would have resulted in blessings from God for him and his people, on the basis that "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen. 12:3, AV). Perhaps these blessings contributed to the increasing wealth of the merchants of Tyre.

## Judgements on Tyre

A number of factors contributed to the down-fall of Tyre. Mercantile success made her "the marketplace of the nations" (Isa. 23:3). Her increase of wealth and power made her merchants and princes proud, and human pride is something that God will punish in due course: "Who planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are renowned in the earth? The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth" (vv. 8,9).

Another factor bringing upon Tyre the judgements of the Almighty was the reverse of that which brought blessings in the days of Hiram. Tyre cursed the descendants of Abraham by rejoicing at and participating in their distress. For example, they had carried off plunder of silver and gold, and sold the children of Judah and Jerusalem into slavery (Joel 3:4-6). This was probably at the time of the Babylonian invasions in the days of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (2 Chron.

\* Quotations are from the NIV unless stated otherwise.

1. Ellicott's commentary on Ezekiel 28.
2. For example, the Seventh Day Adventists.
3. The English name comes from the Greek name Tyros.

36:5-10). And then they rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the days of Zedekiah: "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,' therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Tyre" (Ezek. 26:2,3).

It was King Nebuchadnezzar that first brought God's judgements on Tyre; see the prophecy in Ezekiel 26:7-11.<sup>4</sup> During his thirteen-year-long siege of the mainland city, the Tyrians must have removed all their valuables by ship. It is not known whether or not Nebuchadnezzar captured the island fortress. When the Babylonians gained entrance to the mainland city they completely demolished all the buildings that remained, but gained nothing by way of payment for doing God's work: "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon drove his army in a hard campaign against Tyre; every head was rubbed bare and every shoulder made raw. Yet he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre" (29:18).

In less than a century, Tyre recovered from its devastation at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and his army, and once again increased in prosper-

ity. Then, just over two hundred and forty years after Nebuchadnezzar's campaign, Alexander the Great attacked and destroyed the island city by building a military road out to the island using the rubble left by Nebuchadnezzar (26:4,12-14). It took Alexander's men seven months to complete this causeway, which was about sixty metres wide and more than half a kilometre in length.

The island city was eventually rebuilt and then attacked and besieged a number of times until its final destruction by the Saracens at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

#### The garden of God

God, speaking through Ezekiel, uses an allegory based on the Garden of Eden, saying of the king of Tyre, "You were in Eden, the garden of God" (28:13). It is interesting to note that chapter 31 also uses the same setting, for there the nations around the land of Judah are pictured as trees growing in Eden, the garden of God. For example, of Assyria it is said, "I made it beautiful with abundant branches, the envy of all the trees of

4. The prophecy in Ezekiel 26 distinguishes the work of Nebuchadnezzar from later invaders by the use of 'he' and 'his' in verses 7-11. Elsewhere 'they' is used, as in verses 4 and 12.

Table 1 Ezekiel 28 and Genesis 1-3	
Ezekiel 28	Genesis 1-3
The prince (king) of Tyre was the representative of Tyre and its people. He was placed in his position of rulership by God (Dan. 4:17). So in this metaphor he is spoken of as being created by God (v. 13).	God created the man Adam (1:27).
Perfect in his ways from the day he was 'created' (v. 15).	Adam created "very good" (1:31).
"In Eden, the garden of God" (v. 13).	Adam placed in the garden of Eden (2:8).
A man (Heb. <i>adam</i> ) claiming to be a god (v. 2).	"Ye shall be as gods" (3:5, AV).
Thinks he is as wise as a god (vv. 2,6)	"A tree to be desired to make one wise" (3:6, AV).
Driven out in disgrace and expelled when iniquity was found in him (vv. 15,16).	Because of disobedience Adam was driven out from the garden (3:24).
"Guardian cherub" (vv. 14,16),	Adam set to "keep [take care of, NIV]" the garden of Eden (2:15, AV). Cherubim set to "keep [guard, NIV] the way of the tree of life" (3:24, AV).
Cast to the ground and burnt to ashes (Heb. <i>'epher</i> ) on the earth (vv. 17,18).	Adam to return to the dust (Heb. <i>'aphar</i> ) of the ground (3:19).
Brought down to the pit (v. 8).	Adam brought down to the grave.

<b>Ezekiel 28</b>	<b>The worship of Yahweh</b>
“Perfect in beauty” (v. 12).	Garments “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28:2, AV).
Nine precious stones, together with gold (v. 13).	Four rows containing twelve precious stones set in gold and fixed on the breastplate (28:17-20).
“The stones of fire” (vv. 14,16, AV).	The brightly shining precious stones on the breastplate.
“The anointed cherub that covereth” (v. 14, AV).	The cherubim with outstretched wings covered the mercy seat (37:9). Also, in Solomon’s temple the large cherubim of olive wood covered the ark (1 Kgs. 6:23-28; 8:6,7). Everything in the tabernacle was anointed with oil, including the ark (Ex. 40:9; 30:26).
“Upon the holy mountain of God” (v. 14, AV).	“The holy mountain of my God” (Dan. 9:20, AV). See also Isaiah 56:7 and Ezekiel 20:40.

Eden in the garden of God” (v. 9; cf. v. 8). Likewise the downfall of Egypt is prophesied in the following terms: “Which of the trees of Eden can be compared with you in splendour and majesty? Yet you, too, will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth below” (v. 18; cf. v. 16). It is not clear from these verses whether Assyria and Egypt are merely to be compared with the nation trees in Eden or should themselves be counted as trees in Eden.

Since the nation of Tyre would be one of these trees in Eden, it is not surprising that the language used of the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 echoes the events that took place in Eden, as recorded in Genesis 3. These similarities are shown in [Table 1](#). The fall of the king of Tyre from his eminent and prideful position is likened to the fall of Adam and his expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

**The holy mountain**

In addition to the echoes relating to Adam and the Garden of Eden there is another set of allusions that need to be explored. These occur in the lamentation for the king of Tyre (vv. 11-19) and relate to the worship of Yahweh by the nation of Israel. It is fitting that Ezekiel should use this kind of language since he was a priest of Yahweh (1:3). These allusions are set out in [Table 2](#).

**The anointed covering cherub**

We now need to look more closely at the two verses that refer to the anointed covering cherub (28:14,16, AV). Do they refer to the king of Tyre or to the nation of Israel? There appears to be some uncertainty about the translation of the relevant verses, as can be seen from the selection of versions in [Table 3](#).

	<b>Verse 14</b>	<b>Verse 16</b>
<b>AV</b>	Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth.	I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.
<b>NKJV</b>	You were the anointed cherub who covers.	I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones.
<b>NIV</b>	You were anointed as a guardian cherub.	I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.
<b>Septuagint</b>	Thou wast with the cherub.	The cherub has brought thee out of the midst of the stones of fire.
<b>RSV</b>	With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you.	The guardian cherub drove you out from the midst of the stones of fire.
<b>NEB</b>	I set you with a towering cherub as guardian.	The guardian cherub banished you from among the stones that flashed like fire.

Anointed (v. 14)	The king of Tyre had been anointed as ruler, just as the cherubim attached to the mercy seat were anointed, and perhaps also the cherubim made for Solomon's Temple.
Covers (guards) (v. 14)	He would protect and guard the surrounding minor states and cities, just as the cherubim covered the ark of God.
On God's holy mountain (v. 14)	After mainland Tyre was destroyed, the king was secluded in his city or his palace on the Mediterranean island, just as the cherubim were secluded in the temple on God's holy mountain of Zion. The island was the king of Tyre's holy sanctuary rising up out of the sea.
The stones of fire (vv. 13,14,16, AV)	The prince of Tyre was decked in jewels and gold, just as the high priest was decked in garments of glory and beauty that included the breastplate with its stones.
Expelled (v. 16)	The king of Tyre would lose both position and wealth when Alexander the Great destroyed his island city in 332 B.C. In a strange twist of metaphor, it is the guardian cherub that is expelled from the metaphorical garden of Eden, rather than the man of verse 2.

#### The king of Tyre and the covering cherub

Some versions, including the AV, describe the king of Tyre as the cherub who covers or guards. This translation appears to be derived from the Massoretic Hebrew text. Based upon this view, a feasible interpretation of the prophecy is that the king of Tyre is ironically compared with the cherubim and the high priest of the temple worship in Jerusalem. The main details of this interpretation are set out in [Table 4](#).

As has been shown in [Table 3](#), a number of other versions<sup>5</sup> translate the difficult verses 14 and 16 rather differently, making a clear distinc-

tion between the king of Tyre and the covering cherub. These versions appear to follow the Septuagint Greek text. In this case, the use of aspects of Israelitish worship in the metaphor implies the privileged relationship with Israel held by Tyre in the days of David and Solomon. Tyre would come under the angelic protection provided by God for the nation of Israel. This would be symbolised by the covering cherub. The details of this alternative interpretation are set out in [Table 5](#).

5. See also the Jerusalem Bible.

"In Eden, the garden of God" (v. 13)	Tyre was in the Land of Promise, in the territory allocated to Asher (Josh. 19:29).
On God's holy mountain (v. 14)	Associated with Mount Zion (Joel 3:17) in providing construction materials for the temple, and perhaps also in the worship of the God of Israel.
Among the stones of fire (vv. 14,16)	Associated with the twelve tribes of Israel, symbolised by the stones on the breastplate (Ex. 28:21).
With an anointed covering cherub (v. 14)	Benefiting from the angelic protection provided for the nation of Israel in the days of David and Solomon.
Driven out by the guardian cherub (v. 16)	The work of the angels in manipulating the various events that brought about the destruction of Tyre.