

## A PROBLEM OF UNFULFILLED PROPHECY IN EZEKIEL: THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE (EZEKIEL 26:1-14 and 29:18-20)

by

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The Old Testament prophets were forth-tellers of God's word. They were also foretellers. In the course of declaring Yahweh's word to their generations, they made many predictions, long-range and short, general and very specific. Bible students of widely divergent points of view are showing renewed interest in this predictive feature of old Testament prophecy and the related question of fulfillment. The emergence of previously predicted events continues to be cited in both popular and scholarly works in support of the divine inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible. 1 More recently provocative studies of nonfulfillment in prophetic predictions have appeared, notably Dewey Beegle's *Prophecy and Prediction* (Ann Arbor: Pryon Pettengill (1980), and Robert Carroll's study, *When Prophecy Failed* (New York: Seabury, 1979).

Dr. Beegle treats a number of prophetic passages which deserve fresh study by theologically conservative interpreters. Unfortunately, in the opinion of this reader, Dr. Beegle's message will be largely lost on evangelical students because of the polemic tone of the presentation, in spite of his best intentions to the contrary. 2 Carroll's application of the theory of cognitive dissonance to problems of non-fulfillment is creative and tremendously stimulating. Still his inability to appreciate orthodox understandings of God and of the process of prophetic revelation raises questions to which we will later address ourselves.

There are of course several different types of prophetic predictions in the Old Testament and with them differing sorts of realizations expected. An adequate survey of these categories would be a paper in itself and will not concern us here. 3 We will consider the type of prediction which appears to have expected literal fulfillment, thereby excluding those pronouncements where the conditional nature of prophetic utterance as usually understood is obviously a factor or where some sort of symbolic interpretation may have been expected. We will further narrow our focus to a single

set of passages in Ezekiel, his prediction of the destruction of Tyre at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (26:1-14) and his subsequent promise of booty from Egypt as payment to Nebuchadnezzar for his arduous labor against the island stronghold (29:17-20).

At least two features of these passages commend them to us for consideration. First, we have in them either "perhaps the most impressive case of fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy of this type" (prediction regarding a nation of antiquity) 4 or an example of a "prediction which did not come to pass and will never come to pass." 5 Such a passage should certainly repay study, from the perspective of the history of interpretation if from no other. And it may provide a specimen for the study of clear non-fulfillment. Second, these companion passages allow one to study the prophet's own response to the course of events related to his pronouncements and perhaps his response to non-fulfillment.

### I. The Role of Nebuchadnezzar in Ezekiel 26:1-14

Ezekiel 26:1-14 is part of a single "word of Yahweh" (26:1-21, see v. 1), divided into four separate oracles, the first two of which are found in verses 3-6 and 7-14, (the latter two, vv. 15-18, vv. 19-21). The oracles are introduced by the standard formula, "thus says Adonai Yahweh" vv. 3 and 7), and conclude with the repeated substantiation, "For I [Yahweh, v. 14] have spoken, the word of Adonai Yahweh" (vv. 5 and 14).

The first oracle, verses 3-6, is preceded by a statement of the cause of the word here delivered (v.2): Tyre's words against Jerusalem, words which in view of

the surrounding passages (26:15-28:19) and other prophetic denunciations of this wealthy merchant city apparently reflect Tyre's arrogance, selfishness and callous disregard for the people of God. Verses 3-6 draw explicit results: (1) Yahweh's adversary stance against Tyre (v. 3a); (2) His decision to bring many nations against her (v. 3b); (3) what they and Yahweh will do to Tyre (v. 4): destroy her walls, tear down her towers, wipe her dust from her, making her a bare rock; and (4) what that will mean for Tyre (vv. 5-6): she will become a place for spreading nets, become plunder for the nations, and her dependent cities ("daughters who are in the field / plain") will be slain. 6

In the second section, verses 7-14, Ezekiel explains and supports the opening, general prediction with the specific prediction of a victorious siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar II whom Yahweh is bringing against the city which had withstood repeated assault in the preceding centuries. 7 Yahweh is bringing Nebuchadnezzar along with his cavalry, chariotry, horsemen, and a great host (v. 7). The prediction proceeds with a string of third person singular references as to what Nebuchadnezzar or his forces will do: slay the dependent cities with the sword (v.8), lay siege works against the city (v.8), assault the walls with battering rams (v. 9), tear down her towers with his weaponry (v. 9), cover her with dust raised by his cavalry (v. 10), shake her walls with the noise of his chariotry entering her gates (v. 10), trample her streets with the hooves of his horses (v. 11), and slay her people (v. 11). In verse 12 prediction continues with third person plural references: they will plunder her, trample her walls and tear down her fine houses, throw her stones, timber and dust into the sea (v. 12).

The prophecy continues with statements of what Yahweh himself will

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do: bring her music to a halt (v. 13) and make her a bare rock, a place for spreading nets (v. 14a). The oracle concludes with the pronouncement that Tyre will "never again be built" and the formula, "For I Yahweh have spoken, says *Adonai Yahweh*" (v. 14b).

What actually happened to Tyre? About the time of the sack of Jerusalem, perhaps just before or just after, during the reign of Itto Ba'al II, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre. Quoting classical sources, Josephus informs us that the marathon siege lasted thirteen years. (Cuneiform tablets from Tyre, dated from Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-fifth year and following, assume that the siege was over no later than 570 B. C. 9 and that a Babylonian official had been installed in Tyre, apparently governing in conjunction with the king of Tyre, who was chosen and reigned with the approval of the Babylonian court. 10 Ittoba'al was dethroned and Babylonian suzerainty was acknowledged by Tyre.

If, however, the island stronghold was taken with anything approximating the fierceness and finality Ezekiel predicted, the classical sources are strangely silent concerning the unprecedented feat. The continuation of Tyre's royal line resident in the city as well as Nebuchadnezzar's known response to stubbornly rebellious cities elsewhere (e.g., Jerusalem) argue for a negotiated surrender under terms and for the survival of the island city as a "semi-independent state."<sup>11</sup>

The question as to whether or not Ezekiel actually envisioned

Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument of all the devastation announced in 26:3-14 has naturally been raised by interpreters. The earliest formal exegetical treatment of the passage that I have been able to locate is that of St. Jerome of around A.D. 400-410. His Commentaries on Ezekiel are the only extensive interpretive work on this book to survive from the early fathers, so far as I know. He appears to view the entire "word" as referring to Nebuchadnezzar, expounding at length on the Babylonian king's assaults on the city in exposition of verse 3, "*Ascendere faciam ad te gentes multas sicut ascendit mare fluctuans, et erit Tyrus in direptionem gentibus,*" concluding with a reference to verse 13 that "either Nebuchadnezzar or the Lord himself" had quieted the city. 12 Commenting on 26:15-18 he suggests that since the time of Nebuchadnezzar the city had been a peninsula, not an island, which also indicates that he saw the entire passage as related to Nebuchadnezzar. 13 (He adds

parenthetically that “some affirm since Alexander,” indicating that not all were of his opinion that Nebuchadnezzar had been the one to connect Tyre to the mainland by a mole.) Although Luther’s works do not include extended comment on Ezekiel, his lectures on Habakkuk show that he shared Jerome’s opinion that Nebuchadnezzar had constructed the mole, tying the island to the mainland. Such a judgment would indicate that he apparently took the whole of 26:3-14 as referring to Nebuchadnezzar. Among the other reformers, the fact that Calvin expired in the midst of his lecture on Ezekiel, having completed work on only the first twenty chapters, is small encouragement to aspiring students of this major prophet. Matthew Poole, the seventeenth-century exegete upon whom Wesley depended heavily for his notes on the Old Testament, read the entire passage as referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s siege. Whatever settlements

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followed on the site he considered sufficiently different or inferior as to raise no question about the prediction that Tyre would be “built no more.”<sup>16</sup> That Wesley shared Poole’s viewpoint in this case is shown by his comment on 26:19, where he explains “the deep” which will overwhelm Tyre as referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s army, an especially important equation since the same imagery appears in the general oracle (v. 3), supported in verses 7ff, by the details of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege.<sup>17</sup>

Writing in the last century, C. F. Keil, of the Keil and Delitzsch team, seems also to treat the whole passage as referring to Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>17</sup> Among more recent interpreters, Walter Eichrodt, in the *Old Testament Library* series, (E. L. Allen in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 19 and D. M. G. Stalker in the *Torch Bible Commentaries*, 20 along with Beegle and Carroll<sup>21</sup> interpret the passage to be a prediction of the total destruction of Tyre at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, though not all of these men regard the passage as entirely from the hand of Ezekiel. Not all interpreters have concurred in the judgment that Ezekiel saw only Nebuchadnezzar as God’s agent of destruction for Tyre. Adam Clarke, for example, reasoning from what he knew of the subsequent history of Tyre, felt the prediction in 26:4 that Tyre would become a bare rock, its dust swept into the sea, could not “refer to the capture of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. It flourished long after his time.” Then treating verses 12-14, he expressed “doubt whether the whole of this prophecy does not refer to the taking of Tyre by Alexander, three hundred years after its capture by Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed it may include more recent conquests of this important city.”<sup>22</sup> The prophecy referred to Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of the mainland city and Alexander’s conquest of the island, with the “many nations” of 26:3 encompassing invaders through the sixteenth century of the Christian era,<sup>23</sup> he thought.

Although I cannot claim to have made an exhaustive survey of the literature, and would therefore not be surprised to find others, Clarke was the earliest I uncovered who introduced Alexander the Great as fulfilling the prophecy more adequately than Nebuchadnezzar. This opinion has in our time become commonplace among evangelical commentators and students of prophecy, particularly among persons who wish to use fulfilled prophecy for apologetic purposes, e.g., Robert D. Culver in the Moody publication, *Can I Trust the Bible?*<sup>24</sup>

To the historical data noted by Adam Clarke, Charles Feinberg adds two significant bases for carrying the references on to Alexander the Great and even to the Saracens of the Middle Ages. First he understands the transition from third person singulars in verses 7-11, which clearly refer to Nebuchadnezzar, to third plurals in verse 12 as a clue that “Ezekiel was carrying the picture beyond Nebuchadnezzar.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, he relates the necessity of fulfillment to the fact of divine utterance: “Because the Lord Himself spoke the Word, His counsel came to pass.”<sup>26</sup> This approach to the passage is found as well in J. Barton Payne’s *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. The encyclopedia seeks to list every biblical prophecy with its specific fulfillment and appears based on the conviction that inspired prophecy is of necessity fulfilled.<sup>27</sup> Payne sees 26:1-4a and 6-11 as

fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year siege of Tyre, with 4b-5 and 12-21, which describe the complete destruction of insular Tyre, as "a further stage to the

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collapse of Tyre" fulfilled by Alexander the Great and succeeding conquerors. 28 With Feinberg, Payne views the shift to third plurals in verse 12 as significant and sees in them an example of the "interpretive principle of „prophetic telescoping.““ 29 Printed opinions from recent Wesleyan commentators are not abundant. Professor Grider's treatment of this particular passage in the *Beacon Bible Commentary* is not sufficiently detailed to discern his viewpoint on the question. 30 In the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, Bert Hall took verses 7-11 and 12-14 as describing two stages in the destruction of Tyre, the latter "probably that of Alexander the Great in 332 B. C." and saw the pronominal shift as a clue to this progression, observing that Nebuchadnezzar "did not succeed in taking the city." 31 In this writer's opinion, the subsequent history of Tyre and affirmations one might wish to make concerning the necessity or dependability of biblical prophecy are secondary considerations. They are subordinate to information from the passage itself and its context regarding the question as to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar alone or Alexander the Great and others are in view in the destruction of Tyre. Several features of the passage and its textual transmission lead, in my judgment, to the conclusion that Ezekiel did indeed predict that Nebuchadnezzar would utterly annihilate the arrogant island fortress of Tyre, i.e., that the whole of verses 3-14 has him in mind.

For one thing the prediction of utter destruction is not easily separated from Nebuchadnezzar. Towers and standing columns (*massebot*) portrayed in the highly schematized art of Assyrian reliefs of insular Tyre make it quite probable that such "towers" and "columns" were distinctive features of the island city. 32 Their appearance in verses 4, 9, and 11 make it difficult to separate the description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege from the opening general prediction of Tyre's complete destruction. This overlap between the opening announcement of Tyre's destruction and the description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege in reference to an apparently distinctive feature of island Tyre make it further probable that Nebuchadnezzar's siege here is seen by Ezekiel as at very least including a thoroughly destructive conquest of the island, not just mainland Tyre.

The separation of Nebuchadnezzar from Tyre's utter destruction requires success at two points. One must clearly distinguish between the conquest of Old Tyre on the mainland and the sack of island Tyre. One must also show that Nebuchadnezzar was seen as related only or mainly to the conquest of the mainland. That is precisely where the effort leads J. Barton Payne. For him, verse 4 must be divided, one half referring to Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year siege (4a) and the other half referring with verse 5 to a later destruction. In the text itself in my view, there is no clue to such a division. The division rests rather on a historical observation, that Nebuchadnezzar does not appear to have accomplished the feats cited in 4b-5: sweeping Tyre's dust into the sea, making her a bare rock, a place for spreading of nets. Similarly with verses 12ff. and their separation from 7-11.

Such a treatment requires a fragmentation of the text and an overly technical reading of it which Ezekiel's first hearers / readers would likely not have understood or perhaps even thought of. Indeed it appears to be a

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reading of the material not widely encountered, if at all, prior to the Renaissance and rationalistic attacks upon the Scripture. Beegle's criticism of such interpretations at this point is justified. 33

Turning to syntax, what is the significance of the switch to third person plurals in verse 12? Is a new subject now in view, with Ezekiel's vision moving beyond Nebuchadnezzar to later conquerors such as Alexander and the Saracens? It is not possible absolutely to refute the contention. But it is certainly possible to raise

serious doubt as to the validity of the claim.

First, one may recall, as we have already seen, that skilled interpreters since at least the time of Jerome have seen the plurals as a coherent part of the description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of the city. The elaborate catalogue of participants in the siege—horses, horsemen, chariotry, cohort, and a large troop (vv. 7b, 10, 11) make the change to third person plurals quite understandable, if indeed that is the best reading of the text.

Although the reading of the plural does not in itself necessarily pose sufficient difficulties as to be a clue to subjects beyond the host of Nebuchadnezzar, one may inquire regarding the genuineness of the reading. The LXX at 26:12 reads singulars and thus carries the string of third person singular references begun with the mention of Nebuchadnezzar in verse 7 on through the end of the oracle. The entirety of verses 7-14 therefore is seen in the LXX as an exposition of the introductory oracle announcing Tyre's complete destruction, an exposition involving only Nebuchadnezzar and his forces.

This means one of two things: either (1) the translators had a Hebrew *Vorlage* which read singular and they are simply transmitting a variant Hebrew tradition, or (2) they had a *Vorlage* with plurals as we do in the MT and for some reason altered it.

The second alternative, that they have changed an original plural to singular seems unlikely. Judging from the sources cited by Josephus, by the time of the LXX it was common scholarly knowledge in the Hellenistic world that Tyre had survived the attack by Nebuchadnezzar. The singular by their time would have been the decidedly more difficult reading and an unlikely interpretive change for them to make. On the other hand the other major ancient versions (Targum, Vulgate, Peshitta) follow the MT and show the widespread acceptance of that reading. Neither the Qumran texts nor the Hexapla provide additional textual information on the question. The rather lamentable state of the Hebrew text of Ezekiel in general may make one wonder whether it is not simply a matter of textual corruption at this point that accounts for the plurals. It could also be that the MT itself carries an early alteration of the text for theological reasons, opening the passage at least to the possibility of other actors beyond Nebuchadnezzar; though, as we have noted, the plurals did not seem to pose a problem to the ancients.

The tentative nature of OT textual criticism makes it difficult in my judgment to decide confidently which of these various possibilities actually is best. The net result still is that the LXX either gives the original reading in which the question is textually settled (Nebuchadnezzar is read throughout) or provides the earliest extra-biblical witness to the interpretive tradition which surfaces again in Jerome, six to seven centuries later.

These considerations taken together: (1) the difficulty of separating the description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege from the utter destruction of island Tyre in view of the overlap of terminology apparently distinctive to that fortress, (2) the rather artificial and fragmentary reading of the text necessitated by the introduction of referents beyond Nebuchadnezzar, and (3) the LXX's witness either to the text or the interpretive tradition which excludes later actors—these considerations lead, it would seem, to the conclusion that Ezekiel envisioned the complete destruction of Tyre at the hands of the Babylonian "King of kings," not at the hands of other invaders such as Alexander the Great.

## **II. Responses to the Unfulfilled Prophecy Regarding Nebuchadnezzar and Tyre**

In 570 B.C., Ezekiel received a second word involving Nebuchadnezzar and the siege of Tyre:

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. Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am going to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will carry off its

wealth. (Ezekiel 29:18-19a, NIV)

Commentators as early as Jerome have claimed that the disappointing booty was due to a naval evacuation of all valuables just prior to the surrender of the city on terms.

34 If Sidney Smith is correct, Ezekiel 27:27 (and the context) may indicate that Ezekiel himself was aware of such an evacuation. 35 I have been unable to find other objective bases beyond that possible data in chapter 27 for the opinion.

If Ezekiel's earlier prediction had reference to many conquerors of Tyre, then this word from the Lord is simply a comment upon the fact that Nebuchadnezzar's arduous labors were ill repaid. If, however, as this paper has sought to show, the prophet earlier saw the Babylonian himself as conquering Tyre, looting her costly wares and valuable real estate, and sweeping her remains into the sea, this word is a response to a course of events unexpected by the prophet. In that case the passage holds potential for study of a prophet's own response to non-fulfillment of his prediction and for comparison of that response with those of his interpreters.

Ezekiel offers no admission of error, nor does he seek to support the truthfulness of his previous prediction, to guarantee that his followers trust his word. The response seems rather to be a straight-forward acknowledgement that the course of events had not conformed to his inspired expectations; that for reasons not pursued, the predictions regarding Nebuchadnezzar had not and most likely would not be realized. With this we may at least begin.

The prophet in *this* passage at least does not seem to share the concern of some of his interpreters that he be exonerated and demonstrated to have been correct. Interpreters such as Culver, Feinberg and Payne appear to outrun the prophet himself in their concern to demonstrate the absolute accuracy of prophetic utterances. The falsification formula from Deuteron-

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omy 18:21-22 might appear to support their concern: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come to pass, that is a word the Lord has not spoken." But this feature of the biblical material appears to be laid on the entirety of prophetic experience by the above interpreters with a rigidity and precision beyond that actually anticipated by the prophet himself.

This is true in spite of the fact that the Deuteronomic test was obviously known by Jeremiah, a contemporary of Ezekiel (Jer. 28.9, and that Jeremiah and perhaps even Ezekiel struggled at times with facing the possibility of unfulfilled predictions (Jer. 17:15; Ezek. 12:21-25). But these well-known facts do not adequately account for all prophetic response to the question of non-fulfillment. Those who do interpret appear to me to prove, in spite of themselves, problematic concerns for Scripture actually will. lead to an applicability to contain certain exegetical possibilities which do not conform to that doctrinal expectation. As a result options which would otherwise seem inappropriate are introduced into the interpretive process.

In my opinion much of contemporary conservative interpretation of prophecy which transposes significant portions of Old Testament prophecies from their explicit historical contexts to a literal millennial or end-time fulfillment suffers from this same weakness. The interpretations proceed from the observation that certain prophecies have not been fulfilled. They further proceed on the premise that they are therefore necessarily yet to be fulfilled with precision more than from clear indications in either testament that they must be fulfilled, at least in any way resembling what one might expect from a common sense reading of passages involved.

Regarding our passage specifically, Alexander the Great is introduced in the interpretation more, one suspects, from a reading of later history and a concern for the accuracy of Ezekiel than from information actually in the passage itself. In this case G. A. Cooke's judgment on 29:18-20 in the *ICC* is preferable: "Ezekiel's confident expectation of the fall of Tyre (26:3-18); 27:26-36; 28:14ff.) had not been fulfilled; he admits as much in v. 18, but he allowed his word to stand, because at this later date he looked for a further development. 36

Bert Hall, in the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, follows H. L. Ellison in

rejecting the notion that Ezekiel was mistaken and in attributing the unexpected developments to the “conditional nature of Hebrew prophecy.”<sup>37</sup> Although the conditional nature of prophetic pronouncements is a factor in many passages, especially pronouncements of doom whose very intent was to elicit repentance and thus to avert judgment, it does not really fit here. There is little indication that Ezekiel anticipated or even desired the repentance of Tyre. Nor is there indication that such matters figured in the course of events.

If the conditional nature of prophecy is a factor, it is with reference to divine sovereignty, not human response to the pronouncement which is usually meant. That is, the fulfillment of any prediction uttered in the name of the Lord is surely conditioned upon the sovereign will of God. One might say then, as Eichrodt does, that

The predictions of the prophets . . . are always associated with . . . a direct awareness of the whole control of providence, so

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they subordinate each single historical event to its context in the activity of God which makes the whole development of history serve his kingdom.... So prediction demands humble obedience to the mystery of the divine work of realization and like the rest of what prophets preach, it confronts the hearer with the question of a faith which refuses to let itself be led astray by unexpected delays, changes of front, or reconstructions.<sup>38</sup>

Eichrodt’s view is a valuable corrective to approaches which reason from the sovereignty and truthfulness of God in the opposite direction to an almost magical approach to prophetic prediction. On the other hand there is a point of diminishing returns, as Robert Carroll points out. Carroll rejects Eichrodt’s appeal to “the transcendental dimension of prophecy” as equal to saying “whatever turned out to be the case was the will of God.”<sup>39</sup> The prophets could not be continually wrong without eventually undermining confidence in the whole prophetic enterprise. And yet, the fact that the Old Testament believing community passed on inspired prophetic hopes which had obviously not been realized precisely as predicted, indicates a faith precisely along the lines Eichrodt describes.

Eichrodt’s approach is at this point superior to Beegle’s. Professor Beegle uses examples of unfulfilled prophecy to prove that the prophets were not inerrant. In chapter 5 of his work, *Prophecy and Prediction*, “Were the Prophets Inerrant?”, he cites Ezekiel’s change of mind as a fact which “should warn against trying to make him inerrant.”<sup>40</sup> While Beegle has helpfully gathered together texts to which evangelicals need to return with new categories, his emphasis in thus describing them is, in my judgment, misplaced. Proving that the prophets were errant comes no closer to Ezekiel’s own response to the situation than do attempts to prove him inerrant. Ezekiel simply does not bring categories of truth and error to the problem. He does not critique his previous oracle as false, nor does he call in question the truthfulness of other statements he has made. Beegle sees this, but unlike the prophet himself proceeds to insist that the question must be discussed in these terms. If the prophet does not bring categories of truth/error to the question, we ought at least to ask why we must and why we do.

Robert Carroll is much closer to suggesting a potentially fruitful path of inquiry when he says “The important task of interpretation is not demonstrating that the predictions were wrong [one might say “right or wrong?”] but showing how they were treated by the later communities as ongoing possibilities for their future.”<sup>41</sup> Carroll’s own application of the theory of cognitive dissonance to problems of

unfulfilled prophecy is an interesting experiment. But it is not as enlightening as his study of the interpretation of the prophetic traditions to be found within Scripture itself. 42

Carroll sees historic formulations of God's knowledge of the future as unnecessary in light of process theology. According to him:

The hermeneutical gymnastics required to give any coherence to the notion of God knowing and revealing the future in the form of predictions to the prophets does no religious community

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any credit. Furthermore the account of prophecy produced in such circles is banal beyond belief and on a footing with astrological charts and other such diversions of irrationalism. 43

One may well agree with Carroll's dissatisfaction with the "astrological chart" approach to prophecy-fulfillment and the "hermeneutical gymnastics" involved. But I am by no means prepared to conclude that the alternative is a scuttling of the prophetic vision of God for process theology. One wonders if it is not possible to pursue the matter of prediction and fulfillment with the creativity and candor Carroll has attempted but from entirely different theological and critical foundations. One wonders if it is not possible to move beyond the question of errancy — inerrancy which preoccupies Beegle on the one hand and Payne on the other to a more adequate appreciation of the meaning and truthfulness of prophecy — fulfillment.

In spite of Carroll's unacceptable assumptions, I suspect that his method, analysis of the interpretation of the prophetic traditions to be found within Scripture itself, holds promise. It would appear to have potential for expanding our understanding of the Old Testament community's own faith in prophecy and for taking our appreciation of prophecy beyond the true/false categories which do not appear to cover all the prophetic experience.

To be fruitful for evangelical interpreters, such a path of inquiry will have to rise above the mere humanism in much traditionalism. The prophetic traditions are a statement of the community's pragmatic response to events in the light of previous prophecy, more than the community's growing faith or merely the community's own formulation. The succeeding treatments of previous prophetic utterances are themselves presented as born of God, as inspired words from the Lord himself. This is true in our set of passages from Ezekiel and elsewhere in the prophets as well. Recognition of the interpretation of previous prophecy within the flow of the prophetic literature itself will expand our appreciation for the meaning of prophetic revelation. But the awareness that the whole process is indeed revelation must also inform the interpreter, leading him beyond talk about Israel's faith as though that faith as now recorded in Scripture were somehow different from the Word of God itself.

Further, an acceptable treatment will need a breadth with which modern rationalists, evangelical and otherwise, are uncomfortable. The Old Testament presents the student with data too diverse to bring together easily. The Deuteronomic test of the true and false prophet (18:21) stands balanced by materials showing an open response to obvious nonfulfillment, a dynamic which cautions against pressing the Deuteronomic paradigm with precision and rigidity one might otherwise expect possible.

The Old Testament believing community's response here is instructive.

They passed on the word they received, problems and all, without judging unfulfilled predictions false. Their response was primarily kerygmatic and hopeful. It was the non-believing sectors in Israel that were primarily rationalistic and historically analytical, and that insisted on pressing the prophetic pronouncements into a rigid prediction — fulfillment scheme, using the delays and surprises to support their skepticism (Zeph. 1:12; cf. similar responses to covenant promises, Mal. 3:13-14).

The New Testament offers parallel phenomena. On the one hand Jesus affirms that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35) and proceeds with the apostles to interpret His life in light of the details of the text trusted without question. On the other hand, major passages which simply beg for comment in light of the New Covenant events, such as Ezekiel 40-48, either go completely untouched, as though their fulfillment or the lack of it is of little consequence, or are completely redone in a way that expands the idea of fulfillment far beyond the limits of the Deuteronomic test. And the whole thing is passed on, with New Testament persons confident in the truth of it all.

This paper has sought to investigate afresh a famous problem passage and to use it as a basis for calling for a renewed effort to fashion **UNREADABLE**. ( If such a hermeneutic can be fashioned, it will not be done quickly or easily and certainly not in this paper, which has been long on diagnosis and short on cure. Commenting on the present need to forge “an adequate theology of revelation” commensurate with the trinitarian and Christological definitions the Church hammered out over centuries, Clark Pinnock recently prayed: May God grant us a team of godly, evangelical thinkers who will give themselves to this task and who will view their work not as the definitive statement, but as building blocks in a great cathedral to whose building they will have contributed, even though most of them will be forgotten. 44

In the spirit of Pinnock’s prayer, these meager efforts are offered as a small building block.

### Notes

1 For example, Robert D. Culver, “Were the Old Testament Prophecies Really Prophetic?” *Can I Trust the Bible?* Howard F. Vos, editor (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), pp. 91-119, and Bernard Ramm, “The Evidence of Prophecy and Miracle,” *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* Carl F. H. Henry, editor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 251-64.

2 See, e.g., *The Asbury Seminarian*, 25 (April 1980): 32-33.

3 For an interesting survey, see J. J. M. Roberts, “A Christian Perspective on Prophetic Prediction,” *Interpretation*, 33 (July 1979): 240-53.

4 Culver, “Were the Old Testament Prophecies,” p. 110.

5 Roberts, “A Christian Perspective,” p. 242.

6 Usually taken to refer to Old Tyre, the mainland dependencies which, together with the island stronghold, were regarded as a single state. Recently H. J. Van Dijk has proposed, unconvincingly in my opinion, that

these are women taken in surprise outside the city walls, imagery for sudden attack, in Ezekiel’s Prophecy on Tyre (Ezekiel 26.1-28.19): *A Ne(v) Approach* (No. 20 of *Biblica et Orientalia*, Rome PBI, 1968) p. 13.

Although the last two of these results, those concerning Tyre’s becoming plunder and the demise of the “daughters in the field,” follow the formula, “For I have spoken, says Adonai Yahweh,” sense demands their connection with the preceding section. This division from sense is supported by the traditional Masoretic paragraph division as well as the observation of the clear start of a new phase of the pronouncement in verse 7, a new oracle.

7. Assyrian assaults on insular Tyre climaxed in those of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. In spite of Esarhaddon’s monuments at Sam’al Assyrian terms were rejected and the siege successfully withstood. A treaty was finally concluded by Ashurbanipal with “more generous terms” than those offered by Esarhaddon, but the city remained. See Sidney Smith, *The Assyrian Empire*, Vol. III of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, eds. J. B. Bury, S. A. Cook, and F. E. Adcock (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), pp. 85-86 and 115.

8 Josephus, *Antiquities*, X.xi.228; *Against Apion*, I.21, 156ff. Cf. Herodotus, II, 161, on Egyptian involvement in the siege.

9 E. Unger, “Nebukadnezar II and sein Sandabakku (Oberkommissar) in Tyrus,” *ZAW* n.f., 3 (1926):316.

10 Unger, “Nebukadnezar II,” p. 314; and Josephus, *Against Apion*, I.21, 156ff., which indicate a continuing line of Tyrian kings, some recalled from Babylon itself.

11 John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd revised edition (Philadelphia:

Westminster, 1972), p. 352.

12 Jerome, in S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera, Pars I, Opera Exegetica 4, Commentariorum in Hiezechielem, Libri XIV, Vol. LXXV of Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1964), pp. 349-50.

13 Jerome, in S. Hieronymi P 353.

14 Martin Luther, Lectures on the Minor Prophets, II: Jonah, Habakkuk, Vol. 19 of Luther's Works, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), p. 114.

15 Matthew Poole, Psalms-Malachi, Vol. II of A Commentary on the Holy Bible (London: The Banner of Truth, 1962; first edition, 1685), pp. 742-43.

16 John Wesley, Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament (Bristol: William Pine, 1765; reprint by Schmul Publishers, 1975), 3:2356. Mr. Wesley also shares Poole's opinion on 26:14.

17 C. F. Keil, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel, tr. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 1:372-77.

18 Walter Eichrodt, Ezekiel. A Commentary in The Old Testament Library, eds. G. Ernest Wright, et al. (London: SCM Press, 1970), pp. 370-72, 407-11.

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19 E. L. Allen, "The Book of Ezekiel" (Exposition), The Interpreter's Bible, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 4:228.

20 D. M. G. Stalker, Ezekiel: Introduction and Commentary in The Torch Bible Commentaries, eds. John Marsh and Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 209.

21 Dewey Beegle, Prophecy and Prediction, p. 49, and Robert Carroll, When Prophecy Failed, p. 174.

22 Adam Clarke, Isaiah to Malachi, in The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments . . . With a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: Abingdon, n.d.; Introduction to Isaiah dated 1823), 4: 494.

23 Clarke, Commentary, 4: 493.

24 Culver, "Were the Old Testament Prophecies," pp. 110-12. Culver almost seems to give the written words a validity quite apart from the intent of the writers, whoever they may be: ". . . even if the contention of certain critics were true that Ezekiel's words were spoken, or enlarged by interpolation after Nebuchadnezzar's siege came to a particularly successful conclusion in the following years, some of the most striking details waited more than two centuries for fulfillment," p. 114.

25 Charles Lee Feinberg, The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of God (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p. 149.

26 Feinberg, The Prophecy of Ezekiel, p. 149.

27 J Barton Payne, Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 59: "Whether achieved by intent . . . or by the most extraordinary of coincidences . . . every inspired prophecy does come to pass."

28 Payne, Encyclopedia, p. 362.

29 Payne, Encyclopedia, p. 362, n.59.

30 J. Kenneth Grider, "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel," The Minor Prophets, in The Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966), 4:585.

31 Bert Hall, "The Book of Ezekiel," in The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), 3:437.

32 R. D. Barnett, "Ezekiel and Tyre," Eretz-Israel, 9 (1969): 6-13. See especially pages 6-7 and plates 1 and 2.

33 Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, LXXV, p. 415, in Jerome's commentary on this paragraph where an evacuation to "the islands" is posited. Aprhahat the Persian, Metropolitan of Nineveh in the early fourth century, held the same opinion. "Select Demonstrations," A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, second series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956 reprint), 13, pt. 2, 355.

35 Sidney Smith, "The Ship Tyre," PEQ, 85 (1953): 104-09, without other ancient documentation for such an evacuation.

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36 A. Cooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel in The International Critical Commentary, eds. S. R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), p. 329.

- 37 Hall, "The Book of Ezekiel, WBC, p. 437, referring to H. L. Ellison, Ezekiel: The Man and His Message, p. 103.
- 38 Eichrodt, Commentary, pp. 410-11; similarly D. M. G. Stalker, Ezekiel, pp. 224-25.
- 39 Robert Carroll, When Prophecy Failed (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 76
- 40 Beegle, Prophecy and Prediction, p. 50.
- 41 Carroll, When Prophecy Failed, p. 58; see page 57 as well.
- 42 Carroll, When Prophecy Failed, in Part III, "The Hermeneutic of the Traditions.
- 43 Carroll, When Prophecy Failed, pp. (34-)35.
- 44 Clark Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," Biblical Authority, Jack Rogers, editor (Waco: Word, 1977), p. 106.
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