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CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

THE KING OF TYRE
IN EZEKIEL 28

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THE KING OF TYRE IN EZEKIEL 28

INTRODUCTION

Early in the transmission of the Hebrew text a number of passages became disjointed, with either individual verses or whole paragraphs becoming disconnected, resulting in a loss of unity and coherence in the narratives as they now read. For example, Zech 4:1–6a and 4:10b–14 make up the following literary unit:

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, like a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, “what do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” Then the angel who talked with me answered me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said to me, * “These seven are the eyes of Yahweh, which range through the whole earth.” Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” And a second time I said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the oil is poured out?” He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said, “These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

But as the Hebrew text now stands, verses 4:6b–4:10 insinuated themselves right in the middle of the narrative where an asterisk has been placed. Verses 4:6b–10 actually conclude

the narrative beginning with Zech 3:6–10. The unity of this narrative becomes transparent once the two disparate sections speaking of Joshua and Zerubbabel are rejoined:

And the angel of the Yahweh enjoined Joshua, “Thus says Yahweh of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says Yahweh of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. In that day, says Yahweh of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.” * “This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says Yahweh of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that Yahweh of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.”

Another example of the obvious dislocation of verses involves Isa 66:24, which is totally unrelated to the preceding verses dealing with the new heavens and the new earth, which make a fitting conclusion to the book of Isaiah—whereas 66:24 is a very awkward ending for the chapter and for the book. However, Isa 66:24 can be joined to Isa 65:1–7 and 66:17 to form a literary unit which speaks of the weird cultic activities of the rebellious people, including:

65:3b–5 sacrificing in gardens and burning incense upon bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine’s flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; who say, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am set apart from you.” These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. 66:17–18a Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating swine’s flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, says Yahweh. For I know their works and their thoughts. 66:24 And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

In a similar manner the sequence of lines in Ezekiel 28, involving verses 2, 7, 12, 16, and 17, need to be rearranged to recover the literary unity and probable transitions in Ezekiel’s pronouncements against the king of Tyre. As revised, the text has the king boldly asserting his divinity, only to have it denied—though it is acknowledged by Ezekiel that the king of Tyre had a unique status with reference to wealth and wisdom.¹

The MT and traditional readings of the text, which place the king in the garden of Eden with his own personal cherub, have led many critics to speculate about pre-Israelite mythological motifs underlying Ezekiel’s oracle.² Cook (1936: 315) noted

The story [in Ezekiel 28] belonged, no doubt, to the common stock of Semitic myths, some of them preserved in the Babylonian epics, some in Phoenician traditions. A select few are to be found in Genesis, purged by the genius of Hebrew religion; in Ez. the purifying process has not gone so far. Certain features of the story as given here, the mountain of God, the stones of fire, the gemmed robe, can hardly be of Hebrew origin; they came from Babylonia; not that Ez.

borrowed them directly, but the folk-lore upon which he drew had been steeped in Babylonian mythology from early times. It may be implied, but it is nowhere stated, that the chief character in the story was the first man.

Zimmerli (1983: 90–91), in a very similar way, interpreted Ezekiel 28 as follows:

It can scarcely be overlooked that from a traditio-historical point of view this account has close connections with Genesis 2f, the Yahwistic paradise narrative, and that it reveals an independent form of the tradition which is at the basis of that narrative. . . . Instead of a human couple, Ezekiel 28 speaks only of a single figure and this preserves the older form of the tradition. That Ezekiel 28 is also concerned with primeval man is strengthened by the two-fold emphatic reference to the creation of this figure (vv 13, 15). . . . With its element of the “mountain of the gods” and of this “warding off” (סוכך) cherub, this tradition of the expulsion of the primeval man from the seat of the god points clearly back to pre-Israelite contexts.

However, the “garden of Eden” and the “sacred mountain of God” motifs are better read as part of the king of Tyre’s fanciful self assertion of his divinity, rather than part of Ezekiel’s declaration about the king of Tyre—which would have him using motifs from an otherwise unknown tradition about the “primeval” man. It seems unnecessary to postulate with Zimmerli (1983: 90) that “this account has close connections with Genesis 2f. . . and that it reveals an independent form of the tradition which is at the basis of the narrative.” A simple confusion הָיִיתִי “I was” and הָיִיתָ “you were” could well account for the difference between the self assertion “I was in Eden,” as proposed below, instead of the “you were in Eden,” as found in texts and tradition. It would not be surprising to have the king of Tyre using mythological motifs in making his own claim of divinity and for Ezekiel to report

those assertions made by the king of Tyre, whether real or imaginary. But it is most unlikely that Ezekiel, given his rigorous disdain for anything hinting of a foreign religion, would have employed such motifs on his own.

THE RESTORED LAMENT

28:2^a Thus says my Lord Yahweh: “*Because* your heart is proud you have said:
‘I am a god.

28:13^a ‘I was³ in Eden, the garden of God,⁴

28:14^b ‘I was on the holy mountain of God,⁵

28:2^b ‘I sit on the seat of the God in the heart of the seas.’

28:2^c-5 “Yet you are but a man, and no god, though you consider yourself as wise as a god. You are indeed wiser than Daniel. No secret has been hidden from you. By your wisdom and your understanding you have gotten wealth for yourself; and you have gathered gold and silver into your treasures. By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth.”

28:6 Therefore thus says my Lord Yahweh:

“*Because* you consider yourself as wise as a god,

28:16^b I—from the mountain of God—will defile you.⁶

28:7ff. Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you, the most terrible of the nations, and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. They will thrust you down into the Pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. Will you still

say ‘I am a god’ in the presence of those who slay you—though you are but a man, and no god—in the hands of those who wound you? You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken,” says the Lord Yahweh.

Moreover the word of the Yahweh came to me:

28:12^a “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him:

28:12^b ‘Thus says my Lord Yahweh:

“You were the signet of erudition,⁷ full of wisdom and crowned with beauty.⁸

28:13^b Your canopy was of gold leaf⁹ and precious stones: carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, beryl, and onyx, lapis lazuli, garnet, and emerald. Your (gem) settings¹⁰ were filled with (lustrous) antimony.¹¹

28:14^c You walked in the midst of fiery (gem) stones.

28:13^c For the day you were perfected¹² they were prepared.

28:14^a (As for) you,¹³ I treated you as the chief statesman¹⁴ of (all) those anointed!¹⁵

28:15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were perfected,¹² until iniquity was found in you.

28:16^a In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned.

28:17^a Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.

28:16^c Therefore I remove you¹⁶ as chief statesman, from the midst of the fiery stones.

28:17^b I have cast you to the ground; I have exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. By the multitude of your iniquities (and) in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries. So I brought forth fire from the midst of you; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you. You have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more for ever.”””

CONCLUSION

The difficulties of Ezekiel 28, which have exasperated many commentators, can be minimized once several well attested scribal errors are identified (like the original *scriptio defectiva* הַיְיִת [= הַיְיִתָּי “I was”] being misread as הַיְיִתָּי “you were”; an original תְּבוּנָה “understanding, erudition” becoming תְּכֻנִית “measurement”; and an original כָּרַב mispointed as כָּרַיִב or misread as מָרַב).

Once the scribal errors are in focus it is possible to reconstruct the oracle from its current disjointed sequence of phrases and sentences. The king of Tyre appealed to mythological traditions when asserting his divine nature, stating—as reported by Ezekiel—“I am a god! I was in Eden! I was on the holy mountain of God! I sit on the seat of God!” Ezekiel quotes the king only to refute his claims. To insist that Ezekiel himself employed mythological motifs or a variant tradition about Eden’s “primeval” man when addressing the king of Tyre reflects a failure to appreciate the use of direct quotations in Ezekiel’s oracle, especially quotations which were literary devices rather than verbatim quotations of fact.

Far from a mythological component in Ezekiel’s personal expressions, there was a Deuteronomic element with which he

wrestled. The power, wisdom, and wealth of the king of Tyre was attributed to God's favor (28:14a, 15), like the blessings of prosperity promised to Israel in Deu 28:1–14. The king's abuse and misuse of his wisdom and wealth—culminating in his claim of divinity—actually culminated in Ezekiel's delivery of his death notice.

NOTES

1. In light of the Arabic cognates *صیور* (*ṣayyûr* = צַיִר) “judgment, opinion, understanding, intellect, intelligence” and *تصور* (*taṣawur* = תַצְוֹר) “the forming of an idea; conception, perception or apprehension” (Lane 1872: 1744c, 1755), the reputed ‘wisdom of the king/ruler of Tyre’ (צֹר מֶלֶךְ/נְגִיד צֹר) may reflect a word-play on the name צֹר.

2. Note McKenzie 1959: 265–282; Habel 1967: 515–524; Margulis 1974: 1–23; van Seters 1989: 333–342; Muller 1990: 167–178; Jeppesen 1991: 83–94.

3. Reading קָרַבְתִּי for MT קָרַבְתִּי. Compare Ezek 22:4 where the MT קָרַבְתִּי “you [masc. sg.] came” should be read as קָרַבְתִּי or קָרַבְתִּי [fem. sg.], which is in agreement with the preceding קָרַבְתִּי, “you [fem. sg.] have made to draw near.” Numerous other examples of problematic verbal suffixes in Ezekiel can be cited, including (1) 23:49, where the Syriac read קָרַבְתִּי for MT קָרַבְתִּי; (2) 24:14, קָרַבְתִּי in some manuscripts for MT קָרַבְתִּי; (3) 24:19, where numerous manuscripts have קָרַבְתִּי for the MT קָרַבְתִּי; and (4) 26:14, reading with the Septuagint קָרַבְתִּי for MT קָרַבְתִּי.

4. Possible Arabic cognates of עֵדֵן “Eden” are *عدان* (*‘adân*) “the shore of the sea, the side of a river” and *عیدان* (*‘aydân*) “tall palm-trees” (Lane 1874: 1976, and 2191), which are synonyms of *صو*

(*ṣawr* = צור) “the bank, or side, of a river” and صور (*ṣawr* = צור) “small palm-trees or a collection of small palm-trees” (Lane 1872: 1744, 1755), suggesting a wordplay with עדן “Eden” and צור “Tyre,” like the צר (= צור or צור) and סלע “rock” in 26: 4, 14.

5. Reading הָיִיתִי “I was” here also for MT הָיִיתָ “you were.”

6. Compare Ps 89:40, נִאֲרַתָּה בְרִית עַבְדְּךָ חִלְלָתָ לְאָרֶץ גְּזֵרוּ, “thou hast renounced the covenant with thy servant; thou hast defiled his crown in the dust.” The Septuagint’s ἐτραυματίσθησ ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ θεοῦ “you were wounded from the mountain of God,” reflects a *Vorlage* having וְהַחֲלִיל for the MT וְאֶחָלְלָהּ (see BHS), reflecting problems with the consonantal tradition.

7. Reading תבונה “understanding, discernment” for תכנית “measurement.” For other examples of the confusion of the ו / ו and the כ / ב see Delitzsch (1920) 103–105, §103; 110, §107^{a,b,c}.

8. Here כלל has the meaning of the Syriac cognate כַּלִּיל (*kēlīl*) “a crown” and its denominative “to crown” (BDB 480; Payne Smith 216).

9. Reading זהב מלאכת תפוך from the MT זהב מלאכת תפוך, moving the מלא to follow the בתת, with מְסַכְּתָהּ being the subject.

10. Reading ונקביך בהם “and your settings for them [i.e., for the enumerated gems]” for MT ונקביך בכך, reflecting a confusion of כ and מ in the older script of Ezekiel’s day. For other examples of the confusion of כ and מ see Delitzsch (1920) 114, §115^{a,b} and note 15, below.

11. Reading פוּךְ for the פִּיךָ of the MT הַפִּיךָ. A dittography of the ת changed the original מלאכת פוּךְ to מלאכת תפוך.

12. The MT **הָבַרְתָּ** is ordinarily rendered “you were created,” (BDB 135), but can be translated “perfected” in light of the Arabic cognate **بَرَّ** (*baraʿ*) “he was or became clear, or free of, or from, a thing, he became in a state of freedom or immunity, secure or safe [from sickness, imperfection, fault, defect, or blemish” and **بَرِيءٌ** (*bariʿ*) “clear of evil qualities or dispositions, shunning what is vain and false . . . sound in body and intellect” (Lane 1863: 178–179). The implication is that the king of Tyre owed no obligation or debt for the precious gems he acquired. They were perhaps his coronation gifts.

13. Reading the masculine pronoun **אַתָּה** or **אַתְּ** for the feminine **אַתְּ** of the MT. This is another example of the *casus obliquus* of the independent pronoun, found elsewhere in Prov 22:19 and Gen 49:8 (see GKC 135^e).

14. Reading **בְּרַב מְשִׁיחִים הַסּוֹבֵן** for the MT **אַתְּ־כְרוּב**. **הַסּוֹבֵן** with its problematic feminine suffix. This requires (1) reading a final **ן** for the MT **ך**, (2) moving the **ו** of MT **כְרוּב** to the next word as a **ו**, and (3) transposing the initial **מ** of **מְשִׁיחַ** to become the final **ח** of **מְשִׁיחִים**. (The second change removes questions about the absence of the anticipated definite article **הַ** on the MT **כְרוּב** since its apparent modifier, **הַסּוֹבֵן**, has the article.) For other examples of the confusion the **ן** and **ך** see Delitzsch (1920): 116 §120^b. Hebrew **סֹבֵן**, to be read here for MT **סֹבֵךְ**, is a cognate of Ugaritic *skn* “governor, mayor, high official,” used in parallelism with “king” (Gordon 450, #1754). Gen 42:30 **וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָנוּ** “and he treated us as spies,” is a parallel example of **נָתַן** followed by the preposition **כִּי** and a direct object. The LXX^{AB} **τὰ τοῦ χερουβῆθ** “I set you with the cherub” omits all but the **הַ** of the MT **מְשִׁיחַ**. The **רֹב־סוֹבֵן** “chief statesman,” as suggested here, would be a title like **רַב־שָׂקָה** (II Kings 18:17–37

and Isa 36:2–22), רַב־טָרִיס (Dan 1:3), and רַב־מֶגֶן (Jer 39:3, 13).

15. Reading מְשַׁח [scriptio defectiva for מְשַׁחִים] for the problematic MT מְשַׁח, which occurs only here. The MT has been variously rendered: KJV “anointed” (following Theodotian and LXX^O, but not the LXX^{AB} which have nothing for these words); Vulgate *extentus* “far-reaching”; and Σ καταμετρημένος “measurement.” The Targum (Sperber 3: 1996) lends support to the proposal made here. It reads מַרְבָּא לַמַּלְכוֹת אֵת מַלְךְ מַרְבּ (= preposition מ + רב) rather than כְּרוּב “cherub” and (2) to have read סִכֵּן rather than the MT סִכָּךְ, with both the סִכֵּן and the מְשַׁח being translated as מַלְךְ “king.” For other examples of the confusion the כ and מ, see Delitzsch (1920): 114 §115^{a,b} and note 10, above. See also BDB 603, *sub* מְשַׁח.

16. See GKC 68^k for reading אֲנַבְּדֶךָ as a 1cs verb rather than as a 3ms. The verb is בָּדַד “to separate, to isolate” (BDB 94; Jastrow 138) rather than אָבַד.