

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 48

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Roman Ruins of Tyre Photographer unknown

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The Book of Isaiah
Message Forty-Eight
JUDGMENT ON TYRE
December 8, 2019
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Isaiah 23:1–18

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⁸Who hath purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honorable of the earth? ⁹Jehovah of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth. ¹⁰Pass through thy land as the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish; there is no restraint any more. ¹¹He hath stretched out his hand over the sea, he hath shaken the kingdoms: Jehovah hath given commandment concerning Canaan, to destroy the strongholds thereof. ¹²And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon: arise, pass over to Kittim; even there shalt thou have no rest.

¹³Behold, the land of the Chaldeans: this people was not; the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness; they set up their towers; they overthrew the palaces thereof; they made it a ruin. ¹⁴Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for your stronghold is laid waste. ¹⁵And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years it shall be unto Tyre as in the song of the harlot. ¹⁶Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. ¹⁷And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that Jehovah will visit Tyre, and she shall return to her hire, and shall play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. ¹⁸And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to Jehovah: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before Jehovah, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing (ASV, 1901).

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah's prophecy looks to the distant future as he foretells the destruction of the wealthy Phoenician port city of Tyre. Isaiah's prophecy is identified with the more detailed description of Tyre's destruction foretold by Ezekiel (Ezekiel Chs. 26-28). Accordingly, after his campaign against

Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar moved northward and besieged Tyre until she was captured and destroyed. These events occurred more than 110 years after the death of Isaiah.

The first time Tyre (Tyros, in the KJV) is mentioned in the Bible is in Joshua 19:29 in reference to the land allocation to the Tribe of Asher. It is mentioned many times in the prophets, but in no other book does God give it as much space as He does in Ezekiel. God has given Ezekiel enough text to fill chapters 26–28 regarding His plans for Tyre, and reasons for His prophecies against it. There are three reasons Tyre is in God’s crosshairs. *First*, they rejoiced at the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylonia. *Second*, they loved money and commerce more than God. *Third*, they were steeped in occult and evil practices.

Tyre was an ancient city of the Phoenicians, which is modern day southern Lebanon. According to Herodotus, the “father of history,” it was founded about 2750 B.C. (Herodotus, 1954, Book Two, 71.) It was located about twenty-three miles north of Acre. It consisted of two-parts, an older port city on the mainland, and an island city about a half-mile off the coast where most of the population lived. About 1400 B.C. Joshua describes it as a “fortified city” (Joshua 19:29). It was never conquered by the Israelites (II Samuel 24:7). It was a hugely successful commercial region conducting trade with the many Mediterranean cities, and reaching in regions such as Mesopotamia and Arabia. In fact, during both David and Solomon’s reigns during the united monarchy, it was a significant trade ally for Israel. Both of these kings had trade exchanges with Hiram of Tyre for timber, skilled labor and other building materials in exchange for food produce (II Samuel 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1–11; 1 Chronicles 14:1; 2 Chronicles 2:3–16). They desired, in abundance, the material goods of this world instead of the Creator who brought them to the world. This is one of the most visible problems of life without God since the fall. Man wants something other than God, and frequently it is money that replaces Him. All the godless economic activity that the world lusted after will reach its culmination in the Great Tribulation.

Tyrian merchants were the first to navigate the Mediterranean. They founded colonies on the coasts and neighboring islands of the Aegean Sea, in Greece, on the northern coast of Africa, at Carthage, in Sicily and Corsica, and in Spain at Tarshish.

Tyre grew wealthy from these far-reaching colonies, and from her industries of purple-dyed textiles. By 1200 B.C. the nomadic Canaanite communities shifted to a city-state way of life and government. Seaborne commerce, especially near the coasts of modern-day Syria and Lebanon, became the central economic source of wealth. King Hiram (about 1000 B.C.) led Tyre’s rise to prominence. The city-state of Tyre gained influence through access to silver, food, and trade routes to the east and south. Their entire economic system was centered on seaborne trade and commerce. They dominated the entire Mediterranean with a network of ports. They could best be described as a large, commercial, maritime monopoly. Their culture was heavily occultic, as evidenced by the influence of Jezebel, the daughter of Ithobal I of Sidon, who married the Israeli King Ahab (about 890–850 B.C.). By 500 B.C. the religious practice of sacrificing of children was common in the general population.

Following the civil war and the splitting of Israel into north and south kingdoms (931 B.C.), positive relations continued. One example is the marriage of Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (who was also known as “Ithobal of Tyre”), to Ahab, the king of Israel. (I Kings 16:31).

After the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 723 B.C., the two nations became enemies. Tyre became the object of God's strongest denunciations in Scripture (here in Isaiah 23:1–18; Jeremiah 25:22; 27:1–11; Joel 3:4–8; Amos 1:9–10). Nowhere in Scripture is the denunciation stronger than in the three chapters of Ezekiel. Tyre became an extremely wealthy city through unscrupulous means, and a city of strong religious idolatry and sexual immorality fueled by its pride. Nations, like Tyre, who are what the Bible describes as “places of evil and ungodliness” which are the objects of God's judgment. These nations historically received special attention in the Word of God. Tyre, Egypt, and Babylon all are in this category. Egypt was used as a byword for the slavery of sin, immorality, and idolatry. Babylon is a byword for godless government. Tyre is a byword for pride and self-sufficiency.

THE BURDEN OF TYRE

Isaiah 23:1–3

¹The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Kittim it is revealed to them. ²Be still, ye inhabitants of the coast, thou whom the merchants of Sidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. ³And on great waters the seed of the Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue; and she was the mart of nations (ASV, 1901).

The city of Tyre included both a village on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea as well as a city on an island about five hundred yards off the coast. This commercial city had an outstanding harbor and boats brought goods from as far away as Tarshish in Spain. It was also a godless, materialistic civilization that exemplified the Babylonian model of “high secularism.” As a result, God said that He will completely destroy them, “like the cities that are not inhabited.” The lament begins with an imperative exhortation for the sailors coming to Tyre in large ships from Tarshish to wail. These sailors from Tyre heard the news about the fall of Tyre when they stop to deliver goods at Cyprus or some other nearby port. The second half of the verse literally says, “*it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Kittim, it is revealed to them.*” This will be terrible news to the sailors when they learn that their homes, families, and their city no longer exists. They will naturally wail in agony about what has happened. These cities were wealthy because Phoenician ships were paid richly to carry Egyptian grain to markets in many foreign nations. Isaiah is prophesying that the coming destruction will soon bring all this prosperity to an end.

The Lord also made His plan to destroy Tyre and Sidon known to the prophet Zechariah:

Zechariah 9:2b–4

^{2b}Tyre and Sidon, because they are very wise, ³And Tyre did build herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. ⁴Behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. (ASV, 1901)

Tyre and Sidon are two cities in the kingdom of Phoenicia, and were about 800 miles from the city of Babylon. Tyre was originally a colony of Sidon, but because of its growth, rose to be the capital of all Phoenicia, and then Sidon was regarded an “annex” of Tyre. Tyre was a great seafaring, naval, and financial power, the “Wall Street” of its time. Its core was on a highly fortified island, which

made it practically impervious to attack. It is for this reason that Tyre became the dominant object of this prophecy. Tyre and Sidon demonstrated their worldly wisdom by amassing great material wealth. Verse 3 of Zechariah 9 says, “And Tyre built herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the street.” Isaiah and Ezekiel both give prophecies about Sidon that were tightly connected to those concerning Tyre, and they both would suffer the same fate (Isaiah 23:4, 12; Ezekiel 28:21). It is in these verses in Ezekiel though that God spends the most text describing the Babylonian “world system” of material prosperity that rejects God as the provider.

SHAME TO SIDON

Isaiah 23:4–7

⁴Be thou ashamed, O Sidon; for the sea hath spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, nor brought forth, neither have I nourished young men, nor brought up virgins. ⁵When the report cometh to Egypt, they shall be sorely pained at the report of Tyre. ⁶Pass ye over to Tarshish; wail, ye inhabitants of the coast. ⁷Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her afar off to sojourn (ASV, 1901)?

Since the economy of the population was so dependent with the sea, Scripture refers to Tyre as the sea and the fortress on the sea. Sidon, which depended on Tyre, will be ashamed when it hears the lament of the vanquished city. Isaiah as an illustration compares Tyre to a woman whose children have all died, and she laments that she is worse than one who has never given birth or raised children.

Sidon, which should have realized that its children might suffer for its sins, should surely have been obedient to God. Just as Tyre trembled when she heard that the forces of Nebuchadnezzar were on their way to destroy her, so will Egypt tremble when it hears that Tyre has been destroyed, for fear that Nebuchadnezzar will soon invade them, as indeed he did. Isaiah is addressing the merchants who had previously traded with Tyre. Now that Tyre has been destroyed they must move their business to Tarshish. Also, the inhabitants of the Mediterranean islands, lament and wail over the destruction of their source of commerce. Isaiah laments over Tyre and asks, “*Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her afar off to sojourn*” whose inhabitants enjoyed prosperity and glory? Look at her now! Tyre’s inhabitants have been exiled. They were marched off to faraway places.

PRIDE CAUSED THEIR FALL

Isaiah 23:8–12

⁸Who hath purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honorable of the earth? ⁹Jehovah of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth. ¹⁰Pass through thy land as the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish; there is no restraint any more. ¹¹He hath stretched out his hand over the sea, he hath shaken the kingdoms: Jehovah hath given commandment concerning Canaan, to destroy the strongholds thereof. ¹²And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon: arise, pass over to Kittim; even there shalt thou have no rest.

Tyre's commercial trading had caused many others to be wealthy. The nations who profited the most from Tyre's monopolistic trading in the Mediterranean would be appalled at her destruction. The kings of the nations who benefited the most would become afraid of what might happen to them too if mighty Tyre could be taken down so easily and swiftly. Only God could have planned the destruction of this great and wealthy city and decreed that its inhabitants should flee into exile. It is He Who caused their destruction. They were a haughty, arrogant, and greedy people who had come to believe that the world was theirs. Let them be humbled and let others like them learn a lesson as well. Isaiah instructs the Tyrians to leave their home and go into exile. God stretched out His hand and decreed that the merchant ships carrying their lucrative cargo should not reach Tyre. The powerful city will be destroyed by foreign kingdoms that God aroused to attack her. Scripture refers to Tyre as *the sea*, because it was situated on the coast and its enormous wealth came from sea." Sidon is called oppressed because the defeat and destruction of Tyre left Sidon without its commercial partner and so was deprived of its livelihood. She is a virgin because she herself had never been conquered. The inhabitants of Tyre will not rejoice for seventy years (see v. 17), which is a very long time, but not forever. Ultimately however, they will again become powerful and will then rejoice. The remainder of this passage is directed to Sidon.

SEVENTY YEARS OF DESOLATION

Isaiah 23:13–18

¹³Behold, the land of the Chaldeans: this people was not; the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness; they set up their towers; they overthrew the palaces thereof; they made it a ruin. ¹⁴Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for your stronghold is laid waste. ¹⁵And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years it shall be unto Tyre as in the song of the harlot. ¹⁶Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. ¹⁷And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that Jehovah will visit Tyre, and she shall return to her hire, and shall play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. ¹⁸And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to Jehovah: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before Jehovah, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing (ASV, 1901).

Tyre was known originally as the land of the Chaldeans, but it had actually been founded by the Assyrians as a place to station their battleships. The Phoenicians (Canaanites) who now populated the area arrived only afterward. They should not be surprised when they will be driven from the land, for that is the way of the world: one nation rises and the other falls, so that all may realize that God is the Master of the world. Isaiah concludes this section of his prophecy with an exclamation similar to the one he used to introduce this prophecy, "*Howl, ye ships of Tarshish,*" who would come to Tyre to trade their merchandise, wail and lament because your source of income has been destroyed.

Although there were other trade centers on the Mediterranean coast, Tyre was the most important, and the source of strength of them all. Isaiah foresees that on the day that Tyre will be destroyed, a Heavenly decree will be issued stating that the city will be forgotten and will lie in ruins for seventy Years. The unique king is King David, whose life span was seventy years who was chosen as the symbol of Tyre's decline. David is mentioned as a reminder to the Tyrians that they deserve to be punished for violating the covenant of friendship that their king, Hiram, had established with King

David in friendlier times with more honest people. After being desolate and forgotten for seventy years, Tyre will emerge again as the chief commercial city of the region and will appeal to her former customers to return to her. Scripture metaphorically describes Tyre as a harlot past her prime, who sings a seductive song to call attention to herself. The merchants of all the nations who had traded her previously are compared to her former patrons. This renewed prosperity will only last until Alexander conquered them in 332 B.C.

The prophet continues the metaphor of Tyre as a forgotten harlot. Tyre will entice her former trading partners to return. Isaiah says that they like an old forgotten and ignored harlot will take up a harp and sing as she attempts to retrieve her former patrons. At the end of the seventy years foretold by the prophet God will revive Tyre and she will again become a great commercial center and prosperous trader. However, the prophet describes her commercial activity in a negative manner as a harlot's hire because Tyre will no longer be considered an honorable place of business, for it will now attract thieves, swindlers, pirates, and all kinds of shady characters. Like a harlot's services, Tyre's disreputable business practices will be available to all who wish to deal with her.

In the Messianic kingdom Tyre will voluntarily help in the construction of the Temple. They will provide fine wood for the Temple's construction. Tyre's regained wealth will not be hers to keep. It will not be stored as a treasure for her kings nor will the Tyrians pass it to their children as an inheritance. The Tyrians will use their profits to help reestablish life support, to the operation of the Temple in Messianic times

NEXT MESSAGE: THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE PART I

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