

If you want to understand the Oracle Concerning Tyre,
then we must start at the end.

Notice Isaiah’s 70 years are about Tyre.

In Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah will speak of the 70 years captivity
that are coming upon Jerusalem.

Where did Jeremiah get the idea of 70 years of judgment?

(From God, obviously! –

but the proximate reference was Isaiah).

2 Chronicles 36 reflects on the fact that the land lay fallow 70 years
in order to fulfill all the Sabbath years that the land was abused.

The Law of Moses required that the land remain fallow every 7th year,
and every 50th year

Humanity was given dominion over the earth,
in order to make it fruitful.

The earth ought to flourish when humanity is stewarding/governing well!

But according to the prophets, Israel did not use the land well.

In Jeremiah 25, after speaking of the 70 years of captivity,

Jeremiah says (25:17):

“¹⁷ So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: ¹⁸ Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day; ¹⁹ Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, all his people, ²⁰ and all the mixed tribes among them; all the kings of the land of Uz and all the kings of the land of the Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod); ²¹ Edom, Moab, and the sons of Ammon; ²² all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea; ²³ Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who cut the corners of their hair; ²⁴ all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed tribes who dwell in the desert; ²⁵ all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media; ²⁶ all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them the king of Babylon^[a] shall drink.”

In other words, Jerusalem’s 70 years are paradigmatic for all nations.

Or, to put it another way,

Isaiah’s 70 years judgment on Tyre will come first upon Jerusalem.

Because just as Jerusalem has become Babylon,
so also Jerusalem will become Tyre.

Babylon represents the City of Man in all its political and military might.
Tyre represents the City of Man in all its naval and economic might.

Listen again to Augustine:

"Two cities have been formed by two loves:
the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God;
the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self."
St. Augustine, DE CIVITATE DEI, Book XIV, Chapter 28

Augustine borrowed this from Isaiah.

And as we go through the oracles concerning the nations,
we are beginning to see more and more clearly the distinction
between the city of God
and the city of man.

Over the last few weeks
we have been looking at the oracles concerning the nations in Isaiah 13-23.
There are ten oracles in two groups of five.

And tonight we hear the final oracle, concerning Tyre.

1. The Lament Over Tyre (v1-14)

It starts with the destruction of Tyre and Sidon.

The Phoenicians were the great traders of the day.
"You were the merchant of the nations"

The ships of Tarshish refer to a distant trading port, possibly in Spain or North Africa.
And they are called to wail and mourn over the loss of one of their favorite ports.
(This call to wail both opens and closes the lament in verses 1-14)

But as verses 8-9 make clear, this judgment was according to God's purpose.
Yahweh of Hosts has defiled "the pompous pride of all glory,
to dishonor all the honored of the earth."

A. The Lament of the Ships of Tarshish: the Port Destroyed (v1)

The oracle concerning Tyre.

Wail, O ships of Tarshish,

for Tyre is laid waste, without house or harbor!

From the land of Cyprus^[c]

it is revealed to them.

Verse 1 speaks of Tyre as laid waste “without house or harbor.”

The ships of Tarshish – the great merchant fleet of the Mediterranean –
wail because their favorite port is now closed for business!

Tyre was famous for its purple dye – made from a local shellfish.

Other powers established their military dominance.

Tyre knew that it couldn’t compete with Egypt and Assyria on land –
so it built a maritime empire of trade.

This emphasis on trade also sparked the importance of written communication –
and the Phoenician alphabet was the foundation of all western alphabets.

But Tyre was also famous for its early support of Israel!

Hiram, king of Tyre, had supported David and Solomon in their glory.

Perhaps that is why Tyre now receives the honor of the final place.

And as the fifth oracle in part 2 of these oracles –
just like the fifth oracle in the first sequence (the oracle concerning Egypt),
this oracle also speaks of the conversion of the nations.

Tyre had a great location!

The city of Tyre is just off the coast of Lebanon –
on an island just a few hundred yards from the mainland.

This makes it close enough to go back and forth easily in times of peace,
while far enough off the coast to make it invulnerable to an attack from land.

Really, you need to control the land *and* the sea in order to conquer Tyre.

And since Tyre had the best fleet in the Mediterranean –
they could always resupply.

Shalmaneser V besieged the city in the 720s, but could not take it –
and Sennacherib also failed to conquer it in his campaigns of the 700s and 690s.

Later, Nebuchadnezzar would besiege Tyre for thirteen years –
but without a Babylonian navy to worry about, Tyre was able to resupply by sea.

Tyre was able to withstand the siege for thirteen years,
but eventually capitulated and agreed to pay tribute.

But if you look at how Tyre is spoken of in Scripture, you start to see more of the picture.

In the story of David and Solomon, Hiram of Tyre is their greatest ally and protector.

He helps David with the preparations for the temple –
and then helps Solomon with the actual building of the temple.

(For this reason Ezekiel will speak of the King of Tyre as the “guardian cherub”
in the garden of God).

Psalms 45 speaks of Tyre as seeking the favor of the bride of the Son of David.

Psalms 87 will speak of Tyre along with Babylon and Cush
as those who are “born in Zion.”

But there is a darker part of the story:

because as Solomon marries foreign women (spoken of somewhat favorably in Ps 45),
these foreign entanglements result in a drifting away from the LORD.

It is one thing if the nations are coming to Jerusalem in order to worship Yahweh at his temple.

It is quite another thing if the nations are coming to Jerusalem in order to get *you*
to worship their gods...

And of course the most famous example of this in the book of Kings was Jezebel,
the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre.

She and her husband, Ahab, established Baal worship in Israel,
and Ahab built a temple to Baal in Samaria.

But of all of these texts, only Psalm 45 was likely written before the time of Isaiah.

Isaiah 23 is probably one of the earliest references to Tyre in all of Scripture.

All of the later prophets are reflecting back on this.

And Isaiah focuses on the economic power of Tyre and Sidon.

You can see in the structure of Isaiah’s prophecy
a back and forth between Tyre and Sidon
(Sidon was the second leading city of the Phoenicians).

B. The Downfall of Tyre and Sidon (v2-7)

1. Tyre Silenced (v2-3)

² *Be still, O inhabitants of the coast;
the merchants of Sidon, who cross the sea, have filled you.*

³ *And on many waters
your revenue was the grain of Shihor,
the harvest of the Nile;
you were the merchant of the nations.*

Tyre is called “the merchant of the nations.”

The harvest of the Nile was transported across the Mediterranean
by the merchant fleet of Tyre –

and so the wealth of Egypt enriched the Phoenicians.

Verses 4-5 then speak particularly to Sidon:

2. Sidon Shamed (v4-5)

⁴ *Be ashamed, O Sidon, for the sea has spoken,
the stronghold of the sea, saying:
“I have neither labored nor given birth,
I have neither reared young men
nor brought up young women.”*
⁵ *When the report comes to Egypt,
they will be in anguish^[d] over the report about Tyre.*

Shame comes upon Sidon.

We need to distinguish between guilt and shame.

When you have done wrong, you are guilty.

Guilt, in that respect, does not depend on your “feelings.”

You may not *feel* guilty – but you *are* guilty.

Shame, on the other hand, does not require you to do anything wrong.

In this case, Sidon is shamed because of the fall of Tyre.

They have been humiliated by their enemies.

Think of it this way:

if you are walking down the street with some friends,
and your neighbor says something mean,
you are not guilty of anything –
but you have been shamed.

In this case, it is not neighbors who speak of the shame of Sidon –
but the sea itself!

The sea was the source of the Phoenician’s wealth.

But now the sea has claimed a large population.

No, the sea has not labored nor given birth –
but now the sea is where many of the Phoenicians dwell! –
as the waves suck many down into the depths.

And so Isaiah says:

3. Tyre Exiled (v6-7)

⁶ *Cross over to Tarshish;
wail, O inhabitants of the coast!*
⁷ *Is this your exultant city
whose origin is from days of old,*

*whose feet carried her
to settle far away?*

Tarshish is *probably* a distant port in Spain –
so far away in the Hebrew imagination,
that it seems to be used as a general term for a “distant port.”

But now as the coasts wail and mourn,
Tyre is fallen and banished.

Indeed, the Phoenicians had established various colonies around the Mediterranean,
most famously Carthage (Roman historians spoke of the founding of Carthage by Dido,
Jezebel’s great-niece, about a century before Isaiah’s day).

But why has all this happened? (v8)

C. Agencies: Ultimate and Proximate (v8-13)

1. Tyre: The LORD of Hosts Has Purposed It (v8-9)

⁸ *Who has purposed this
against Tyre, the bestower of crowns,
whose merchants were princes,
whose traders were the honored of the earth?*

⁹ *The LORD of hosts has purposed it,
to defile the pompous pride of all glory,^[e]
to dishonor all the honored of the earth.*

Isaiah is very clear,
While Babylon may be the proximate cause –
the LORD of hosts is the ultimate cause of Tyre’s humiliation.

And notice what the LORD’s purpose is:
“to defile the pompous pride of all glory,
to dishonor all the honored of the earth.”

God does not approve of the “pompous pride of all glory.”
When the city of man seeks its own glory – its own honor –
God will bring it down.

On Friday night we were talking about the influence of Karl Marx.
Marx saw clearly that there was problem in his day.
Bankers and merchants and lawyers had overthrown the old landed gentry,
and established a new economic system.
And particularly because they had the lawyers on their side,
the laws were all set up to allow them to make a lot of money!

It's not enough to ask "is it legal?"
You also have to ask "is it *just*?"

When you stand before God,
he will not be asking how carefully you observed the laws of the land!
He will ask how well you sought to love your neighbor as yourself!

The LORD of hosts will dishonor all the honored of the earth.

And so the LORD speaks to "Daughter Tarshish":

2. Sidon: The LORD's Command (v10-12)

¹⁰ *Cross over your land like the Nile,
O daughter of Tarshish;
there is no restraint anymore.*
¹¹ *He has stretched out his hand over the sea;
he has shaken the kingdoms;
the LORD has given command concerning Canaan
to destroy its strongholds.*
¹² *And he said:
"You will no more exult,
O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon;
arise, cross over to Cyprus,
even there you will have no rest."*

The strongholds of Canaan will be cast down.
Even if they flee to Cyprus, the Phoenicians will have no rest.

Why?
Because Assyria is coming:

3. Tyre: The LORD's Agent – Assyria (v13)

¹³ *Behold the land of the Chaldeans! This is the people that was not;^[1] Assyria destined it for
wild beasts. They erected their siege towers, they stripped her palaces bare, they made her a
ruin.*

There are two ways you could take verse 13.
"Behold the land of the Chaldeans!" could be using Babylon as a case study.
In this reading, the Assyrians erected their siege towers *against* Babylon –
and made her a ruin – as an example to Tyre.

Or "Behold the land of the Chaldeans!" could be warning Tyre
that Babylon will return from "death" and erect their siege towers *against* Tyre.

Here's the best part.

Both readings work very well!

Assyria besieged Tyre several times.

The constant threat of Assyrian invasion severely weakened Tyre and Sidon –
so in one sense the Assyrians were the initial agent of God's judgment.

But 100 years after Isaiah's day, Nebuchadnezzar would besiege Tyre
for thirteen years.

And the way that the prophets speak of the future,

it is entirely likely that Isaiah would see both as fulfilling the word of the LORD.

Part 1 of the chapter concludes:

A' The Lament of the Ships of Tarshish: Their Fortress Destroyed (v14)

¹⁴ *Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your stronghold is laid waste.*

The book of Revelation will use similar language to speak of the merchants of the earth.

Chapter 23 concludes, however with *hope* for Tyre:

2. The Restoration of Tyre, the Prostitute (v15-18)

¹⁵ *In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days^[g] of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute:*

¹⁶ *"Take a harp;
go about the city,
O forgotten prostitute!
Make sweet melody;
sing many songs,
that you may be remembered."*

¹⁷ *At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.* ¹⁸ *Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to the LORD. It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who dwell before the LORD.*

At the end of seventy years, God will restore Tyre to her wages.

Once again she will prostitute herself to the nations.

But now her wealth will be holy to Yahweh.

He will use her wealth for the furtherance of his kingdom.

And those who dwell before him will prosper because of Tyre.

There is an initial fulfillment of this when Tyre provided some of the supplies for the new temple (Ezra 3:7)

but it points even further into the future to speak of the day

when Tyre and Sidon would be brought into the kingdom of God.

What is the point of these oracles?

We will see this more next week,

but there is a contrast between two cities.

The city of man and the city of God.

The City of God is not to be confused with Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, after all, is one of the condemned cities!

But one by one the military powers of the day were condemned in the first section,
and the religious and economic powers of the day are condemned in the second.

In the Book of Revelation Babylon will be the Great Prostitute –
but here it is Tyre.

Isaiah is showing us that there is a tendency for the great merchant cities of the world
to prostitute themselves to the powers of the age.

Wealth and power – after all – frequently go hand in hand!

But you don't *have* to do that!

And by the mercy of God – that is not where the story ends:

¹⁷ At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. ¹⁸ Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to the LORD. It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who dwell before the LORD.

There is a particular oddity in verse 17.

Dt 23:18-19 specifically forbids the bringing of the wages of a prostitute
into the house of the LORD in payment for a vow

How can the prostitute Tyre bring its wages to Yahweh?

The prostitution in view in Isaiah 23 is trade.

And the point Isaiah is making is that the prostitute will be reformed.

No longer will Tyre hoard its wealth,

but she will use her wages in the service of Yahweh.

It is not too late!

You can still repent!