

Tyre

Isaiah 23

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Isaiah 23:1-18 – Proclamation Against Tyre

*The burden against Tyre. Wail, you ships of Tarshish!
For it is laid waste, So that there is no house, no harbor;
From the land of Cyprus it is revealed to them.*

² *Be still, you inhabitants of the coastland,
You merchants of Sidon, whom those who cross the sea
have filled.*

³ *And on great waters the grain of Shihor,
The harvest of the River, is her revenue;
And she is a marketplace for the nations.*

⁴ *Be ashamed, O Sidon;
For the sea has spoken,
The strength of the sea, saying,
“I do not labor, nor bring forth children;
Neither do I rear young men,
Nor bring up virgins.”*

⁵ *When the report reaches Egypt,
They also will be in agony at the report of Tyre.*

v1 – What do we know about Tyre?

To the north of Israel, Tyre was the leading city of Phoenicia, the great maritime power of the ancient world. Because it was such an important harbor and center for shipping, Tyre was synonymous with commerce and materialism.

- Tyre was the “Babylon of the Sea.” Because of their excellent harbor and seamanship, they established a commercial empire far greater than one would expect given their size and military power.
- Tyre was a city in two parts — an inland city, and an island city. The inland city was conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, just as Isaiah prophesied. The island city was conquered later by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.

The influence of Tyre was both good and bad for Israel. King Hiram of Tyre supplied David and Solomon great timbers for the building of the temple and other projects (2 Samuel 5:11, 1 Kings 5:1-11). Hiram also gave Solomon sailors, so Israel could build their commerce by sea (2 Chronicles 8:17-18). But later, Tyre gave Israel one of the worst rulers Israel ever had: Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 16:31).

Why would the *ships of Tarshish* wail?

There is no house, no harbor: Isaiah pictures sailors from Tyre in the land of Cyprus and in Egypt hearing of the destruction of the harbor of Tyre. When they hear the news, they wail and are in agony at the report of Tyre.

Why were the ships of Tarshish singled out here?

Tarshish is the name of a Phoenician port in Spain and was the farthest western harbor of Tyrian sailors. It abounded in gold and silver mines.

- It appears that this name also is used without reference to any locality. “Ships of Tarshish” is an expression sometimes denoting simply ships intended for a long voyage, ships of a large size (sea-going ships), whatever might be the port to which they sailed.

What prophetic event do the ships of Tarshish wailing bring to mind?

Revelation 18:17-18 – *For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’*

The destruction of Tyre would foreshadow the destruction of the commercial empire of Mystery Babylon, the government of the Antichrist. This is a fitting foreshadowing because of the idol of commercialism that characterized both.

Isaiah 23:6-9 – Tyre Humbled

⁶ *Cross over to Tarshish;
Wail, you inhabitants of the coastland!*

⁷ *Is this your joyous city,
Whose antiquity is from ancient days,
Whose feet carried her far off to dwell?*

⁸ *Who has taken this counsel against Tyre, the
crowning city,
Whose merchants are princes,*

Whose traders are the honorable of the earth?

⁹ *The Lord of hosts has purposed it,
To bring to dishonor the pride of all glory,
To bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.*

v6 – Who were the *inhabitants of the coastland*?

Tyre was on the coast and they traded with others on the coasts of faraway places. Thus, Tyre was a city where money ruled.

- They wailed lamenting the judgment of God.

v7 – Why would Tyre have been a joyous city?

Tyre had all manner of sports and cultural diversions which comes with great wealth. This made them secure and proud, and they despised the inland country people, who neither knew nor relished any joys of that nature.

What is the problem with amassing wealth?

Proverbs 30:8-9 – *Give me neither poverty nor riches— Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.*

The wealthy rationalize that they don’t need God because they see their wealth as their deliverance. As Jesus said:

Matthew 19:23 – *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

The “prosperity gospel” was even a problem mindset back in Jesus’ day (and before, see Job’s friends). It is human reasoning to think you are good with God because you are wealthy.

How would such distractions make them deaf to the warnings God gave them by his servants?

Lack of belief; they rationalize they had done just fine without God so far so why did that have to change?

How might the fact that they were so well traveled impact their attitude toward God?

They had seen more of the world than your average person and most people they saw were pretty much like them, doing just fine without the God of Israel.

Why doesn’t God do more to make people more aware of Him?

God seems hidden due to willful, unrepentant sin. *“Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done”* (Micah 3:4; cf. Deut 31:18; 32:20).

- without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6)
- people miss evidence of God because of a refusal to believe (see Mark 6:1-6)—it’s hard to see when you refuse to open your eyes.

Another reason for the “hidden” state of God is: *“The just shall live by his faith”* (Habakkuk 2:4). God does not give us a continual chain of miraculous signs. Rather, He expects them to trust what He has already done, living by faith, not by sight (Matthew 16:4; John 20:29; 2

Corinthians 5:7). Life is a test: who will trust in Christ & to what extent will believers apply their belief.

What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 – *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Why is justification by faith such an important doctrine?

It separates Christianity from all other religions which are based on justification by works.

- It is the essence of belief; believers have faith in Christ, unbelievers do not.

What about the argument that, if God is real, He would make Himself so clearly known that everyone who wants to know the truth would believe?

There are three assumptions behind this argument that are all false...

- There is such a thing as an objective, sincere, and willing non-believer.
- The idea that God has failed to provide “enough” evidence to lead to the truth.
- The idea that God is obligated to meet some minimum standard for revelation.

v8 – How was Tyre a crowning city?

Tyre crowned herself above all others. The power and pomp of her magistrates were explained in the following words: *whose merchants are princes, whose traders are the honorable of the earth?*

How were the merchants of Tyre princes?

The merchants are princes, and the traders are the honorable of the earth. To be a leader or honorable, one didn’t need to be of royal heritage, a good or an honest man. The only thing needed was success in business.

Who are the merchant-princes today?

Wealthy business people like Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg...

What would be the crowning city today?

As Tyre was caught up in the idol of commercialism back then, The USA is certainly seeped in commercialism today. Money is seen as the solution to all our problems. But the problems only get worse... war on poverty, drugs, etc... Why? Because the godless always do the exact opposite of what they should be doing to solve problems.

What is the problem with commercialism?

The definition is: “an emphasis on the maximizing of profit” (I can’t shake the image of the Star Trek Ferengi after reading that definition.) But the drive to maximize profit over all other considerations is sin...

Hebrews 13:5 – *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

Often the drive to store up money is rooted in self-deliverance exclusive from needing God’s involvement.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 – *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

An overwhelming drive for profits leads to cutting quality corners or cheating and harms others with a zero-sum win-lose mentality.

Luke 12:15 – *And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*

At its core, the love of money is covetousness which is offensive to God.

Matthew 6:24 – *No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

The love of money distracts us from God. We should regard money as a tool, not an end goal.

What is the solution for the love of money?

James 4:8 – *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

God desires His followers’ wholehearted loyalty and devotion (Exodus 34:14; Mark 12:29–31). Believers who stray from the Lord must submit themselves to God and draw near to Him again through repentance.

v9 – What had the Lord of hosts purposed?

to bring to dishonor the pride of all glory: Because of its great success, Tyre had become proud and full of self-glory. But the LORD of hosts has purposed to judge and humble Tyre, and Isaiah announces it.

- Pride is that basic sin to which God is ever opposed, and man is ever expressing.

Why is pride such a problem?

Pride is giving ourselves the credit for something that God has accomplished. Pride is essentially self-worship.

1 Corinthians 4:7 – *What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

Anything we accomplish in this world would not have been possible were it not for God enabling and sustaining us.

Isaiah 23:10-14 – Tyre Destroyed

¹⁰ *Overflow through your land like the River, O daughter of Tarshish;*

There is no more strength.

¹¹ *He stretched out His hand over the sea, He shook the kingdoms;*

The Lord has given a commandment against Canaan To destroy its strongholds.

¹² *And He said, “You will rejoice no more, O you oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon.*

Arise, cross over to Cyprus;

There also you will have no rest.”

¹³ *Behold, the land of the Chaldeans,*

This people which was not;

Assyria founded it for wild beasts of the desert.

They set up its towers,

They raised up its palaces,

And brought it to ruin.

¹⁴ *Wail, you ships of Tarshish!*

For your strength is laid waste.

v10 – What should the daughter of Tarshish do?

The daughter of Tarshish refers to far-off places that would rush in to fill the void left by the demise of Tyre. They would take advantage of the land like the flooding Nile in Egypt.

v11 – What would cause other kingdoms to be shaken?

God would stretch out *His hand over the sea* to impact other kingdoms. News of the conquests of those God raise up to replace established nations reaches far and wide shaking up others who fear they could have the same fate.

v12 – Why would Tyre be referred to as an *oppressed daughter of Sidon*?

Sidon was the older city that “gave birth” to Tyre. They were oppressed because they were suffering under the judgment of God.

- You could make the case that Tyre was oppressed because they were enslaved by their idol of commercialism.
- Those in sin are enslaved because they have no choice but to sin; whereas those who know the Lord may chose instead to glorify Him

To where would Tyre seek refuge?

The inhabitants of Tyre would seek to start again in Cyprus but they too would be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.

v13 – Why was the Assyrians and Chaldeans mentioned here?

The Chaldeans is another term for the Babylonians. The mainland city of Tyre was defeated by both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The Assyrians did not consider the Babylonians to be much of a threat but were the source of their own demise.

v14 – How would the destruction of Tyre impact the ships of Tarshish?

The far-off merchants' strength would be laid waste. Certainly, they'd lose Tyre as a trading partner but also their business in general would suffer as others reduced their trade not wanting to bring attention to themselves and thus suffer the same fate as Tyre.

Isaiah 23:15-16 – Tyre Restored

¹⁵ *Now it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the harlot:*

¹⁶ *“Take a harp, go about the city,
You forgotten harlot;
Make sweet melody, sing many songs,
That you may be remembered.”*

v15 – What else did God reveal about the judgment of Tyre?

Tyre will be forgotten seventy years: God's judgments are so precise that He decrees the exact number of years Tyre will be forgotten. It would take that long before Tyre would again become an economic power.

v16 – How would songs help Tyre to be remembered?

Songs are memorable and tell a story... we are counseled to make a positive impact with our songs do to the cultural influence they have.

Isaiah 23:17-18 – God's Purpose in Restoring Tyre

¹⁷ *And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the Lord will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.* ¹⁸ *Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the Lord; it will not be treasured nor laid up, for her gain will be for those who dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for fine clothing.*

v17-18 – What would happen after the seventy years?

She will return to her hire: God will allow Tyre, symbolized by a prostitute, to continue her gross materialism with all the kingdoms of the world. But Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the LORD (v18); ultimately, the riches Tyre so desperately sought will be given to the LORD anyway.

How would the LORD will deal with Tyre?

Many commentators think this refers to the presence of Christianity in Tyre in the days of the early church.

What do we know about Tyre in history?

Tyre, after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, recovered its ancient trade, wealth, and grandeur; as it did likewise after a second destruction by Alexander.

Tyre became Christian early with the rest of the neighboring countries. The Apostle Paul himself found many Christians there, Acts 21:4. It suffered much in the Diocletian persecution.

- It was in association with the Church in Jerusalem, with fourteen bishops under its jurisdiction.
- It continued Christian till it was taken by the Saracens in 639; was recovered by the Christians in 1124; but in 1280 was conquered by the Mamelukes and afterwards taken from them by the Turks in 1517.
- Since that time, it has sunk into utter decay; is now a mere ruin, a bare rock, 'a place to spread nets upon,' as the Prophet Ezekiel foretold in 26:14.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Wealth can distract us from God, don't fall into that trap.
- The prosperity gospel is deadly, embrace a biblical worldview instead.
- God is not more visible to us today because our mortal life is a test, *the just shall live by faith*.
- Commercialism is the love of money, don't be double-minded.
- Pride is deadly, give God the glory!