

ISAIAH 23

THE BURDEN OF TYRE

Tyre was the chief city of the kingdom of Phoenicia, which lay on the Mediterranean seacoast to the north of the land of Canaan. Its inhabitants were generally heathens; although King Hiram of Tyre, the friend of David and Solomon, seems to have been a believer in the God of Israel (1 Kings 5:1, 7). It was to this city that the prophecy in this chapter relates. The city of Tyre was comprised of two parts: the ancient section of the city, which was built on the seacoast; as well as a part of the city which was constructed sometime later on an island not far from the shoreline. The older part of the city, on the mainland, was undoubtedly where most of the magnificent edifices were built; and it would have been where the principal business was transacted, earlier in the city's history. The island or rock upon which the rest of the city was built was only about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2 km) from Old Tyre on the mainland. It is probable that at first, the only way to get from one to the other was by boats, until Alexander the Great built a giant causeway from the old city to the island during his process of besieging the latter. This land bridge was no less than 200 feet in width; and from then on, it formed a permanent connection between the island and the mainland.

Tyre was a great merchant-city – distinguished for its enterprise, its commercial importance, its luxury, and its magnificence. Few, if any, of the other cities of antiquity were more favorably situated for commerce than she was. She was the natural seaport for Canaan and Syria, and it was in the best possible location for business with all the cities and states bordering upon the Mediterranean – and indeed, with all the known world! It is no wonder, then, that Tyre rose to a state of great opulence; and consequently, to a state of luxury and sin. No doubt, in those days of grandeur, it was (as Isaiah calls it) “a joyous city”; and as Ezekiel 27:4 describes it, “perfect in beauty.” But where is it now? It has been swept clean from the face of the earth. The spot where it once stood is occupied by the huts of a few poor fishermen – thus literally fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy (26:4-6): “I will scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea.”

Tyre, in old times, was very much like what one of our modern-day metropolises is now. It is good for us to give heed to her fate, and to especially notice the sins which caused that fate. Ezekiel mentions some of them in his prophecy (28:5-18). Pride, covetousness, and dishonesty were evidently among the sins of the Tyrians; and they also seem to have felt contempt and hatred against God's chosen people. The result of these offences was that the Lord gave a commandment against this merchant-city to destroy the strongholds there (verse

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The prophet predicts the lamentable desolation of the grand city of Tyre, which would be performed by King Nebuchadnezzar – verses 1-14*
- ❖ *He foretells the restoration of Tyre after 70 years – verses 15-18*



11). Let us listen to Jehovah's solemn warnings against her, and bear in mind the resemblance that may exist between our own nation and that of Tyre; but let us also pray for grace to humble ourselves in repentance and reformation before the Lord brings His righteous judgments upon us.

The prophecy here in this chapter is comprised of two main parts, the first of which (verses 1-13) is occupied with the judicial sentence which the Lord passed in regard to Tyre. This is not done in a direct and formal manner; but rather, by addressing the various people with whom the Tyrians had commercial interactions, and who would be affected chiefly by its destruction. The prophet describes the sources of the wealth of Tyre; and he gives an assurance that her great luxury and splendor would be destroyed. Then he says that this would be done by the Chaldeans, and that serves to fix the time of the fulfillment of Isaiah's words to the siege of Tyre by King Nebuchadnezzar. In the remainder of the prophecy (verses 14-18), the prophet declares that this calamity would only continue for 70 years. After that, Tyre would be restored to her former splendor, magnificence, and successful commerce; and then her wealth would be consecrated to the service of Jehovah. So we see that the purpose of this prophecy was to foretell the calamities that would come upon a rich, proud, and luxurious city; and also to show that the Lord Jehovah is the Governor and Ruler over the nations of the earth.

The chapter does close with a promise of great mercy – a beam of light on the horizon! (verse 18) “Her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.” It is worthy of observation that Tyre's captivity was appointed by the Lord to be of the same length as Israel's, and under the same Babylonian government. Might this not have been so that the children of Tyre, by mingling with God's people in captivity, would become acquainted with Israel's God? It is certain that when Tyre began to recover from her ruin, and commenced trade again, there was a friendly interaction between Israel and Tyre. And after Christ had finished His work of redemption and returned to glory, Paul and his friends found disciples in that city (Acts 21:4). Perhaps the reason why Tyre was destroyed was so that its inhabitants would be intermingled with the Lord's heritage, and converted to the knowledge of Jesus! Who shall tell to what extent – even in the present hour – the Lord may be accomplishing His purposes by the commotions of the earth among kingdoms and people, in order to gather His dispersed people to Himself, from all the ends of the earth? What a subject of praise this will open in heaven, when the Lord shall have brought home His whole Church!

Lord, we pray for You to help us keep ourselves pure and separate from the Tyres of our present day, as we wait for the return of our Savior! Amen.