

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

3. TYRE

a. SPLENDOR

TEXT: 23:1-7

- 1 The 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.
- 2 Be still, ye inhabitants of the coast, thou whom the merchants of Sidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.
- 3 And on great waters the seed of the Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue; and she was the mart of nations.
- 4 Be 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.
- 5 When the report cometh to Egypt, they shall be sorely pained at the report of Tyre.
- 6 Pass ye over to Tarshish; wail, ye inhabitants of the coast.
- 7 Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her afar off to sojourn?

QUERIES

- a. Why is Jehovah about to bring about Tyre's downfall?
- b. What is the "seed of Shihor"?
- c. Why was Egypt pained at the report of Tyre?

PARAPHRASE

This is God's message to Tyre: Weep, O merchant-ships of Tyre, returning home from distant lands! Weep for your harbor,

for it is gone! The news that you heard in the islands of the Aegean are all true! A shocked silence is everywhere! Stillness reigns where once your bustling port was full of ships from Phoenicia, bringing merchandise from far across the great sea, grain from the fertile Nile delta. You were the market place of the world. So, hang your head in shame, Phoenicia, for formerly Phoenician traders and merchants were children of the great sea and were strewn all over the Mediterranean, but now they are so few, the sea claims she never had any such children. There will be great distress in Egypt, also, when the news of Tyre's downfall reaches there. You may flee as refugees to one of your colonies such as Tarshish, but you will find the whole world of coastal trade wailing Tyre's demise. Is this silent ruin all that is left of your once proud, wealthy and historical city? Think of all the great colonies your merchantmen have founded!

COMMENT

V. 1-3 **WORLD'S MARKET PLACE:** Tyre was a city on the coast of Phoenicia. The oldest part of the city lay on the mainland; but the main seaport part of the city was located on two rocky islands about a mile off the coast of Phoenicia. Herodotus claims that Tyre was founded about 2740 B.C. The Tell-el-Amarna tablets contain an appeal from the ruler of Tyre, dated 1430 B.C. (just after the Exodus), imploring help from Amenhotep IV against the invading Habiri (Hebrews). Joshua assigned Tyre to the tribe of Asher, but in all probability the city was not occupied by the Hebrews (Cf. Josh. 19:29). II Samuel 24:7 shows that the border of the Israelite kingdom extended to Tyre; and David's palace was constructed with the help of Hiram, king of Tyre (II Sam. 5:11; I Chron. 14:1). Hiram also furnished Solomon with cedar and cypress wood in exchange for wheat and oil (I Ki. 5:1; I Chron. 22:4; II Chron. 2:3-18). Later, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre, and priest of Astarte, married Ahab, king of Israel (I Ki. 16:31), and sought to introduce the Baal worship into Israel. Tyre grew in wealth and power through international

trade. It exploited the cedar forests of the Lebanon mountain range. Tyrian purple, the product of the murex shellfish, was also a famous export. The cedar forests provided material for the famous Phoenician galleys, and, accepting the challenge of the sea became her way to wealth and fame. She exported her pagan religion along with trading her commerce. In 876 B.C. Tyre began to pay tribute to the king of Assyria and suffered some plundering in the battle of Qarqar, 853 B.C. But she still was able to assert independence. Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser both laid siege to the city. For five years she was under siege, but in 722 B.C. she made a treaty with the Assyrians. Finally her king was deposed by Sennacherib and she began to lose more of her independence. We shall continue with the history of Tyre's demise at the end of this chapter.

Whether Isaiah's prophecy of Tyre's downfall is intended to be in the distant future or whether it will be some immediate downfall is not easy to determine. Historically speaking her complete downfall did not come until Alexander the Great was able to conquer it in about 332 B.C. Her glory began to fade, however, with the Assyrian invasion of Phoenicia and Syria and northern Palestine in 722 B.C. We assume then that Isaiah is predicting Tyre's demise not intending that it is to happen immediately but gradually.

The message of the prophet is that Tyre's merchantmen and seamen who travel as far away as Tarshish (probably on the eastern coast of Spain) should look forward to a time of mourning over her. The time is coming when her famous ports will not be available for them to enter and sell their cargoes. Tyre's final downfall is going to be international news! Men on her ships will be hearing it, when it happens, as far away as Kittim (islands in the Aegean sea). An old, established, international institution which no one thought would ever disappear, will fail. It will cause consternation throughout the world. There will be a shocked silence. People will be struck dumb momentarily by the news. Her fame was world-wide. She traded in an immense grain supply from the ancient granary of the world, Egypt. The grain "of Shihor" (Shihor literally means "black") came from

the fertile, black-dirt, fields of the Nile delta. Tyre was the "middleman" between the Egyptian grain resources and the nations much in need of grain. Tyre was actually the market place of the world.

V. 4-7 WASTED MEMORY: Sidon is here used metaphorically to represent the whole region of Phoenician coast to be affected by the coming destruction. The Phoenicians were "sons of the sea." They were great seafaring men. The sea is metaphorically their father. But after the future desolation of Phoenicia, the sea will have no more "sons" from that area. The great fleet of ships and navy of mariners which was once Tyre's pride and joy will only be a matter for dejected shame. Tyre's death will affect the whole world! Egypt, who depended on Tyre for trading, will suffer distress at the news. The citizens of Tyre are told that should they even flee to Tarshish they would find much mourning among the coastal cities of the Mediterranean at the downfall of Tyre. The whole Mediterranean and Aegean coast felt the blow. So the question comes—Is this the great wealthy and proud Tyre? Tyre had exerted profound influence on the world. The great city of Carthage, on the coast of north Africa, was one of Tyre's colonies. The feet of her merchantmen traversed the whole known world. Now, what is she to be? Only a wasted memory!

Why was this judgment to come upon Tyre? Isaiah does not give us much light on the reason for judgment here. If we turn to Ezekiel chapters 26, 27, and 28, however, we find statements of the causes for her judgment. Tyre evidently took advantage of some calamity that befell Jerusalem and exploited Jerusalem's affliction for her own advance (Ezek. 26:1-2). She was also proud and self-exalting (Ezek. 27:1-3). Tyre's king uttered blasphemies against Jehovah (Ezek. 28:1-10).

QUIZ

1. About how old was the city of Tyre?
2. What relationships had Tyre with Israel in the past?

3. What was Tyre's great influence on the world of that day?
4. Give three reasons for God's judgment upon Tyre.

b. SHAKEN

TEXT: 23:8-14

- 8 Who hath purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honorable of the earth?
- 9 Jehovah of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.
- 10 Pass through thy land as the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish; there is no restraint any more.
- 11 He hath stretched out his hand over the sea, he hath shaken the kingdoms: Jehovah hath given commandment concerning Canaan, to destroy the strongholds thereof.
- 12 And 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.
- 13 Behold, the land of the Chaldeans: this people was not; the Assyrians founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness; they set up their towers; they overthrew the palaces thereof; they made it a ruin.
- 14 Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for your stronghold is laid waste.

QUERIES

- a. Why the question about the author of Tyre's judgment?
- b. Who were the people who "were not" (v. 13)?
- c. Where is Kittim?

PARAPHRASE

Who has the power to plan such a thing against Tyre, the founder of so many colonies and crowner of so many kings, whose merchants were equal in influence to princes, and whose traders were honored throughout the world. The Lord God Jehovah has planned it to desecrate the most magnificent pride and show His contempt for all the haughty greatness of proud men everywhere. Now, O people of Tarshish, you may flow over the world and trade as you like for there is no longer a restraining force in Tyre. The Lord God Jehovah stretches out His hand over the seas; He shakes the kingdoms of the earth; He is not a provincial God—He is God of all creation and judge of all men. Therefore, He has spoken out against Phoenicia and her strongholds will be destroyed. Furthermore, He says, You will never again rejoice, O Tyre, you raped virgin, daughter of Sidon. Even if you flee to Cyprus you will find no rest. It will be the Babylonians, not the Assyrians, who will make the territory of Tyre a habitation for wild beasts! They will besiege it, tear down its palaces and make it a heap of ruins. Wail, you ships that take trade to Tarshish, your home port is destroyed!

COMMENTS

v. 8-11 **AUTHOR OF JUDGMENT:** How shall the great fall of Tyre be explained? It will be of such magnitude and so far-reaching in its consequences something beyond what the eye can see must be the cause. Tyre, market place of the world, hub of the world's commerce, builder of colonies, destined to be reduced to almost nothing? Impossible as it appears to the human eye! Tyre became a "bestower of crowns," through founding of other city-colonies such as Carthage, etc. She also built up quite an "aristocracy of merchants" known throughout the world as princes-of-all-traders. It would appear nothing human or natural could so completely erase Tyre's hold on the commerce of the world. The answer comes from the prophet who asked the

question. The answer is—"Jehovah of hosts hath purposed it!" The Lord God of Israel is the God of all nations. He is King of all kings. He "purposed" it. Tyre's destiny is controlled not by chance, fortune, accident, coincidence, but by the will of the Omnipotent Creator of all mankind. It is one of the main emphases of the prophets that Almighty God enthrones and dethrones earth's rulers in all ages. Jehovah, in His own good time and according to His eternal wisdom and purposes, permits nations and races to flourish and diminish. He governs the ups and downs of potentates and populations according to certain standards of justice, righteousness, morality and truth. In other words, His governing principles are not capricious or frivolous. Any ruler or people or nation who will make their main concern human dignity, freedom and justice will find God's approval. But of course, human dignity, freedom and justice cannot be built on any foundation other than truth—truth about God, His identity, His nature, His revealed will. Any nation accepting falsehood about God as a national policy will find all other national structures crumbling into ruin upon such a ruinous foundation. This was the cause for the judgment of God upon one pagan ruler and nation after another. This was the cause for the judgment of God upon Israel and Judah. They did not govern themselves according to divine principles because they denied the Divine Author of those principles. Jehovah brought Tyre down for her pride. When the successful grow proud, they grow contemptuous and corrupt. Inevitably the exploitation of human beings by one another follows pride. So God has chosen to govern the world by bringing the proud down—by humiliating those who exalt themselves.

Tyre's colonies (such as Tarshish) would be hampered in their own freedom by the mother city as long as she maintained such a "strangle-hold" on their economy. But when Tyre is defeated, Tarshish will be free of her restraint and will be able to expand its trade. Tarshish will be able to flow through her own territory as the Nile inundates the valley of Egypt. Isaiah emphasizes again in verse 11 that this great, world-shaking upheaval was from the "hand of the Lord." God creates both weal and woe

(Isa. 45:7). Evil does not befall a city unless the Lord does it (Amos 3:6).

v. 12-14 **AGENT OF JUDGE:** Jehovah is the author of Tyre's destiny but He usually employs human agents in carrying out both His deliverances and His judgments. When Tyre's great devastation comes it will be as shocking and traumatic as a virgin ravished (raped). Even if she flees to Cyprus (Kittim) she will find no relief from the pain of her experience. But who shall ravish her? It will be the Chaldeans! The Babylonians are predicted to be Tyre's assailants. When Isaiah first made the prediction of Tyre's downfall the Assyrians would seem to be the most likely agents of God's judgment but the prophet makes it clear the Chaldeans are to execute His punishment. So it was in 585 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, emperor of Babylon, laid siege to Tyre. The siege lasted 13 years and in 572 the city was overrun. From that time her stranglehold on the world's trade was broken. However, her citizens escaped Nebuchadnezzar and fled to the islands a mile or more off shore and formed a new colony. The Babylonians, without much of a navy, could not conquer that stronghold. So Tyre remained at least a fortress protecting any advance of conquering armies down through Phoenicia enroute to Egypt and other points south. Alexander the Great, on his way to conquer the world in 322 B.C., conquered Tyre once and for all. His conquest fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26-28, and Zechariah 9, in minute detail, as follows:

1. He used the captured fleets of other cities and attacked the new island city by taking the ruins of the old city "Its timbers and stones" and casting them into the sea and building a causeway out to the island.
2. Other neighboring cities were so frightened they opened their gates to Alexander without opposition.
3. The old city site was scraped flat "like the top of a rock" and today you may go there and find fishermen spreading their nets on its ruins.
4. There are great artesian wells there that would supply a city with water (10 million gallons daily) yet the city has never been rebuilt on the old location. Sidon, a city just

a few miles from Tyre, has been destroyed and rebuilt many times over!

There remains a small city of no international significance (not on the original site) on the island. Travelers today may walk over the very causeway Alexander's armies constructed to give them access to the once proud and internationally powerful Tyre. God said it, and it was so! The mills of God's justice may grind slowly but they grind exceedingly fine! God oft-times uses human agents to execute His judgments (Cf. Isa. 10:5-19; Isa. 44:23—45:7; Jer. 27:1-11).

The English translation of our text makes it appear almost as if Isaiah were looking back on an event that has already transpired. However, the use of the past tense in the Hebrew language often is what we call the "prophetic perfect"—a past that is the equivalent of a very assured future. Tyre's destiny is certain—so certain it may be looked upon as having already happened. So, though the past tense is used, this whole passage should be regarded as a prophecy which tells of the future overthrow of Tyre.

QUIZ

1. Who is the author of Tyre's destiny?
2. What are God's principles of governing rulers and peoples?
3. What means does God usually employ in executing His principles of human government?
4. Tell some of the subsequent history of Tyre.
5. What do we mean by the "prophetic perfect"?

c. SUBMISSION

TEXT: 23:15-18

15 And 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.

- 16 Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.
- 17 And 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.
- 18 And 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.

QUERIES

- a. How are the "days of one king" related to Tyre's 70 years?
- b. Why does Tyre return to harlotry after 70 years?
- c. When does Tyre's merchandise become holiness to Jehovah?

PARAPHRASE

And it will come to pass in the day of Tyre's downfall, she shall lie waste till her devastation has achieved its purpose in the divine disposition of things. This state of affairs will remain constant with her, like the affairs of one king's tenure, for a long period of years symbolized by the number seventy. After this "seventy" years of forgottenness she will resume her former life just like the story told in the lyrics of the Song of The Harlot. So, Tyre, you have been forgotten. Take up the harp and play sweet melodies, sing many songs, perhaps you may bring yourself to the attention of your former customers and be remembered. Yes, after your long time of forgottenness the Lord will allow you to be restored but you will be no different than you were before; you will return again to prostituting yourself with the

nations of the world for money. Yet, the time will come when she shall make contributions to the kingdom of Jehovah. Tyre's greatest treasures will not be hoarded silver and gold but will be the food and clothing of righteousness for those who dwell in the presence of Jehovah.

COMMENTS

v. 15-16 **SUBJECTION:** Alexander the Great took the city killing 8000 and selling 30,000 into slavery. He imported many foreigners into the ruined city to colonize it and left it after spending seven months to subdue it. After Alexander's death, Tyre passed into the hands of Ptolemy Lagi, and when Antigonus, in 314 B.C. took Phoenicia from him, Tyre resisted and he had to blockade it 15 months before it would yield, showing how quickly it had recovered from its previous disaster.

The period "seventy years" might refer to the 70 years of the Babylonian empire when Nebuchadnezzar had subdued Tyre. However, we think the number "seventy" is being used to denote a period of time whose completeness is determined by the divine purposes and known only to the divine Person. Seven is the Divine, Perfect, Complete number of the Bible. Ten signifies also a measure of completion. Seven multiplied by ten then means a period during which God will have achieved His purpose in a given direction. Tyre will be "forgotten" or lie devastated until God is ready for her to be remembered again. It is too difficult to pinpoint an exact 70 years.

"Like the days of one king" probably refers to the idea that while one king reigns there usually is no major changes in policy, things remain static. Tyre's God-destined period of forgottenness will remain static for as long as God wishes it to be so.

The "Song of the Harlot" suggests a song whose lyrics tell the story of how a forgotten, derelict, old harlot might seek to rehabilitate herself in her old occupation. She might take up a harp and start strumming an accompaniment to her little

piece. She might wander up and down the streets advertising her wares. Perhaps she could bring herself to the attention of her former customers.

V. 17-18 SALVATION: Tyre became a part of the Seleucid kingdom when Antiochus III drove the Ptolemies from Syria (198 B.C.), and the Seleucid kings regarded the city of importance and gave it the right of asylum, and it was allowed the status of a free city by the Romans, Antony recognizing the magistrates and council of Tyre as allies. When the Parthians attacked and took Syria, in 40 B.C., Tyre would not submit and was left untouched, being too strong for them. Tyre is mentioned in the New Testament several times; Christ visited its territory (Matt. 15:21; Mk. 7:24), and people from there came to hear Him (Lk. 6:17). Herod Agrippa I had trouble with Tyre, and a deputation came to visit him at Caesarea (Acts 12:20). Paul visited Tyre on his journey from Asia to Jerusalem (Acts 21:3-7). Christianity was accepted by the people of Tyre, so that the 2nd century A.D. saw a bishopric established there, and in the 4th century a council was held there to consider charges against Athanasius, by the party of Arius; he was condemned, a decision which brought the Tyrian church into disrepute. Tyre was already obnoxious to Christians because the anti-Christian philosopher Porphyry was from there. Tyre continued to be a commercial center, and Jerome says that it was the noblest and most beautiful of the Phoenician cities and an emporium of commerce for almost the whole world. It was of considerable importance during the Crusades and continued so until toward the end of the 13th century, when its trade declined, and it is now a small city of approximately 5000.

Verses 17 and 18 seem to indicate a two-fold result of God's permitting Tyre to be restored after a period of forgottenness. First, a part of her will return to her former ways of prostituting herself before the world for commercial purposes. Second, a part of her will become a treasure, not selfishly hoarded, but put to use as holiness (dedicated) to Jehovah. This second has its beginning, no doubt, in Ezra 3:7 when she supplies goods to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple after the captivities.

But we believe the ultimate fulfillment is in those people converted by the gospel and become precious jewels, the wealth, of the kingdom of God. The conversion of Gentiles and their incorporation in the kingdom of Jehovah through the preaching of the gospel is symbolized and prefigured in just this manner in Isa. 60:1-14; 61:1-9; Hag. 2:7-9, etc. In spite of what should happen to Tyre's physical glory or her commercial prowess, her greatest remembrance for all eternity will be those precious saints (like the Syro-Phoenician woman who believed Jesus, Matt. 15; Mk. 7) who are the jewels of the kingdom of God, and who have supplied "food" and "clothing" to many hungry and naked sinners through the ages.

QUIZ

1. What do the 70 years of Tyre's history most likely refer to?
2. What is the Song of the Harlot?
3. What two-fold consequence comes as a result of God's "visiting" Tyre again?
4. How does Tyre's merchandise become "holiness" to Jehovah?
5. How does it "feed" and "clothe" those who dwell before Jehovah?

EXAMINATION

1	2
Medes	Spain
Day Star	Hezekiah
Philistia	Jotham
Nebo	Phoenicia
Damascus	Nathan
Hivites	Elam
Ethiopia	Armenia
Nile	coast of Palestine
Pharaoh	king of Babylon

EXAMINATION

Memphis	mountain of Moab
Negeb	Canaanite
Seir	capital of Syria
Shebna	land of whirling wings
Kir	river
Tyre	mountain of Edom
Tarshish	desert region
	steward over the king's palace
	king of Egypt
	city in Egypt
	sea

MEMORIZATION

How are thou fallen from _____, O day-_____, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the _____, that didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into _____, I will exalt my _____ above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the _____; I will make myself like the _____ _____. Isa. 14:12-15.

In that day shall _____ be the third with _____ and with _____, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them saying, Blessed be _____, my people, and _____ the work of my hands, and _____ mine inheritance. Isa. 19:24-25

EXPLANATION

1. Explain how the Lord would eventually make Himself known among the Egyptians. Isa. 19:19-22
2. Explain how Israel would be able to take up a taunt against Babylon and cry "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star," etc. Isa. 14:1-32
3. Explain why Tyre's downfall was so significant for the world

ISAIAH

of that day. Isa. 23

APPLICATION

1. How may we apply the predicted inter-relationships between Israel, Egypt and Assyria, in Isaiah chapter 19:16-25?
2. What application may be made for the Christian today of the account of Sargon's exploits in Isaiah, chapter 20?
3. What application may be made for Christians of Isaiah's denouncement of Shebna in Isaiah 22:15-25?

SPECIAL STUDY

PROPHECY OF THE GRACE THAT WAS TO BE . . .

A Series of Four Outline-studies on Christ, the Church
and Salvation From the Old Testament Prophets

by Paul T. Butler

O.T. PROPHECY — A PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

I. O.T. PROPHETS — A UNIQUE PART OF GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF TO MAN

- A. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets . . ." Heb. 1:1
1. Actually, a prophet was anyone who spoke God's message to God's people.
 2. Moses was a prophet.
 3. In the Hebrew way of classifying their Bible, the books