

CHAPTER 23

This chapter is concerning Tyre, an ancient wealthy city, situated upon the sea, and for many ages one of the most celebrated cities for trade and merchandise in those parts of the world. The lot of the tribe of Asher bordered upon it. See ~~699~~ Joshua 19:29, where it is called “the strong city Tyre.” We seldom find it a dangerous enemy to Israel, but sometimes their faithful ally, as in the reigns of David and Solomon; for trading cities maintain their grandeur, not by the conquest of their neighbours, but by commerce with them. In this chapter is foretold,

I. The lamentable desolation of Tyre, which was performed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army, about the time that they destroyed Jerusalem; and a hard task they had of it, as appears ~~398~~ Ezekiel 29:18, where they are said to have “served a hard service against Tyre,” and yet to have no wages (v. 1-14).

II. The restoration of Tyre after seventy years, and the return of the Tyrians out of their captivity to their trade again (v. 15-18).

~~2301~~ ISAIAH 23:1-14

THE DOOM OF TYRE

Tyre being a sea-port town, this prophecy of its overthrow fitly begins and ends with, *Howl, you ships of Tarshish*; for all its business, wealth, and honour, depended upon its shipping; if that be ruined, they will be all undone. Observe,

I. Tyre flourishing. This is taken notice of that her fall may appear the more dismal.

1. *The merchants of Zidon*, who traded at sea, had at first *replenished her*, v. 2. Zidon was the more ancient city, situated upon the same sea-cost, a few leagues more to the north, and Tyre was at first only a colony of that; but the daughter had outgrown the mother, and become much more considerable. It may be a mortification to great cities to think how they were at first replenished.

2. Egypt had helped very much to raise her, v. 3. Sihor was the river of Egypt: by that river, and the ocean into which it ran, the Egyptians traded with Tyre; and the harvest of that river was her revenue. The riches of the sea, and the gains by goods exported and imported, are as much the harvest to trading towns as that of hay and corn is to the country; and sometimes *the harvest of the river* proves a better revenue than the harvest of the land. Or it may be meant of all the products of the Egyptian soil, which the men of Tyre traded in, and which were the harvest of the river Nile, owing themselves to the overflowing of that river.

3. She had become the mart of the nations, the great emporium of that part of the world. Some of every known nation might be found there, especially at certain times of the year, when there was a general rendezvous of merchants. This is enlarged upon by another prophet, ³²⁷⁰Ezekiel 27:2, 3, etc. See how the hand of the diligent, by the blessing of God upon it, makes rich. Tyre became rich and great by industry, though she had no other ploughs going than those that plough the waters.

4. She was a *joyous city*, noted for mirth and jollity, v. 7. Those that were so disposed might find there all manner of sports and diversions, all the delights of the sons and daughters of men, balls, and plays, and operas, and every thing of that kind that a man had a fancy to. This made them secure and proud, and they despised the country people, who neither knew nor relished any joys of that nature. This also made them very loth to believe and consider what warnings God gave them by his servants; they were too merry to mind them. Her *antiquity* likewise was *of ancient days*, and she was proud of that, and that helped to make her secure; as if because she had been a city time out of mind, and her antiquity had been of ancient days, therefore she must continue a city time without end, and her continuance must be to the days of eternity.

5. She was a *crowning city* (v. 8), that crowned herself. Such were the power and pomp of her magistrates that they crowned those who had dependence on her and dealings with her. It is explained in the following words: *Her merchants are princes*, and live like princes for the ease and state they take; and *her traffickers*, whatever country they go to, *are the honourable of the earth*, who are respected by all. How slightly soever some now speak of tradesmen, it seems formerly, and among the wisest nations, there were merchants, and traders, and men of business, that were the honourable of the earth.

II. Here is Tyre falling. It does not appear that she brought trouble upon herself by provoking her neighbours with her quarrels, but rather by tempting them with her wealth; but, if it was this that induced Nebuchadnezzar to fall upon Tyre, he was disappointed; for after it had stood out a siege of thirteen years, and could hold out no longer, the inhabitants got away by sea, with their families and goods, to other places where they had an interest, and left Nebuchadnezzar nothing but the bare city. See a history of Tyre in Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World, *lib. 2. cap. 7. sect. 3, 43. page. 283*, which will give much light to this prophecy and that in Ezekiel concerning Tyre.

1. See how the destruction of Tyre is here foretold.

(1.) The haven shall be no convenient harbour for the reception of the ships of Tarshish, but all *laid waste*

(1.), so that there shall be no house, no dock for the ships to ride in, no inns, or public houses for the seamen, no entering into the port. Perhaps it was choked with sand or blocked up by the enemy. Or, Tyre being destroyed and laid waste, the ships that used to come from Tarshish and Chittim into that port shall now no more enter in; for *it is revealed* or made known *to them*, they have received the dismal news, that Tyre is destroyed and laid waste; so that there is now no more business for them there. See how it is in this world; those that are spoiled by their enemies are commonly slighted by their old friends.

(2.) The inhabitants are struck with astonishment. Tyre was an island. The inhabitants of it, who had made a mighty noise and bustle in the world, and revelled with loud huzzas, shall now be still and silent (v. 2); they shall sit down as mourners, so overwhelmed with grief that they shall not be able to express it. Their proud boasts of themselves, and defiances of their neighbours, shall be silenced. God can soon quiet those, and strike them dumb, that are the noisy busy people of the world. Be still; for God will do his work (^{<960>}Psalm 46:10; ^{<323>}Zechariah 2:13), and you cannot resist him.

(3.) The neighbours are amazed, blush, and are in pain for them: *Zidon is ashamed* (v. 4), by whom Tyre was at first replenished; for the rolling waves of the sea brought to Zidon this news from Tyre; and there *the strength of the sea*, a high spring-tide, proclaimed saying, "*I travail not, nor bring forth children* now, as I have done. I do not now, as I used to do,

bring ship-loads of young people to Tyre, to be bred up there in trade and business,” which was the thing that had made Tyre so rich and populous. Or the sea, that used to be loaded with fleets of ships about Tyre, shall not be as desolate as a sorrowful widow that is bereaved of all her children, and has none about her to nourish and bring up. Egypt indeed was a much larger and more considerable kingdom than Tyre was; and yet Tyre had so large a correspondence, upon the account of trade, that all the nations about shall be as much in pain, upon the report of the ruin of that one city, as they would have been, and not long after were, upon the report of the ruin of all Egypt, v. 5. Or, as some read it, *When the report shall reach to the Egyptians they shall be sorely pained to hear it of Tyre*, both because of the loss of their trade with that city and because it was a threatening step towards their own ruin; when their neighbour's house was on fire their own was in danger.

(4.) The merchants, as many as could, should transmit their effects to other places, and abandon Tyre, where they had raised their estates, and thought they had made them sure (v. 6): “*You that have long been inhabitants of this isle*” (for it lay off in the sea about half a mile from the continent); “It is time to howl now, for you must pass over to Tarshish. The best course you can take is to make the best of your way to Tarshish, to the sea” (to Taressus, a city in Spain; so some), “or to some other of your plantations.” Those that think their mountain stands strong, and cannot be moved, will find that here they have no continuing city. *The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed.*

(5.) Those that could not make their escape must expect no other than to be carried into captivity; for it was the way of conquerors, in those times, to take those they conquered to be bondmen in their own country, and send of their own to be freemen in theirs (v. 7): *Her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn*; they shall be hurried away on foot into captivity, and many a weary step they shall take towards their own misery. Those that have lived in the greatest pomp and splendour know not what hardships they may be reduced to before they die.

(6.) Many of those that attempted to escape should be pursued and fall into the hands of the enemy. Tyre shall *pass through her land as a river* (v. 10), running down, one company after another, into the ocean or abyss of misery. Or, though they hasten away as a river, with the greatest swiftness, hoping to outrun the danger, yet *there is no more strength*; they are

quickly tired, and cannot get forward, but fall an easy prey into the hands of the enemy. And, as Tyre has no more strength, so her sister Zidon has no more comfort (v. 12): “*Thou shalt no more rejoice, O oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon, that art now ready to be overpowered by the victorious Chaldeans! Thy turn is next; therefore arise; pass over to Chittim; flee to Greece, to Italy, any where to shift for thy own safety; yet there also shalt thou have no rest; thy enemies shall disturb thee, and thy own fears shall disquiet thee, where thou hopedst to find some repose.*” Note, We deceive ourselves if we promise ourselves rest any where in this world. Those that are uneasy in one place will be so in another; and, when God’s judgments pursue sinners, they will overtake them.

2. But whence shall all this trouble come?

(1.) God will be the author of it; it is a *destruction from the Almighty*. It will be asked (v. 8), “*Who has taken this counsel against Tyre? Who has contrived it? Who has resolved it? Who can find in his heart to lay such a stately lovely city in ruins? And how is it possible that its ruin should be effected?*” To this it will be answered,

[1.] God has designed it, who is infinitely wise and just, and never did, nor ever will do, any wrong to any of his creatures (v. 9). *The Lord of hosts*, that has all things at his disposal and gives not account of any of his matters, he *has purposed it*. It shall be done according to the counsel of his will; and that which he aims at herein is *to stain the pride of all glory, to pollute it, profane it, and throw it to be trodden upon; and to bring into contempt and make despicable all the honourable ones of the earth*, that they may not admire themselves and be admired by others as usual. God did not bring those calamities upon Tyre in a way of sovereignty, to show an arbitrary and irresistible power; but he did it to punish the Tyrians for their pride. Many other sins, no doubt, reigned among them — idolatry, sensuality, and oppression; but the sin of pride is fastened upon as that which was the particular ground of God’s controversy with Tyre; for he resists the proud. All the world observing and being surprised at the desolation of Tyre, we have here an exposition of it. God tells the world what he meant by it. *First*, He designed to convince men of the vanity and uncertainty of all earthly glory, to show them what a withering, fading, perishing thing it is even when it seems most substantial. It were well if men would be thoroughly taught this lesson, though it were at the expense of so great a destruction. Are men’s learning and wealth, their pomp and

power, their interest in, and influence upon, all about them, their glory? Are their stately houses, rich furniture, and splendid appearances, their glory? Look upon the ruins of Tyre, and see all this glory stained, and sullied, and buried in the dust. The honourable ones of heaven will be for ever such; but see the grandees of Tyre, some fled into banishment, others forced into captivity, and all impoverished, and you will conclude that the honourable of the earth, even the most honourable, know not how soon they may be brought into contempt. *Secondly*, He designed hereby to prevent their being proud of that glory, their being puffed up, and confident of the continuance of it. Let the ruin of Tyre be a warning to all places and persons to take heed of pride; for it proclaims to all the world that he who exalts himself shall be abased.

[2.] God will do it, who has all power in his hand and can do it effectually (v. 11): *He stretched out his hand over the sea*. He has done so many a time, witness the dividing of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh in it. He has often shaken the kingdoms that were most secure; and he has now given commandment concerning this merchant-city, to destroy the strongholds thereof. As its beauty shall not intercede for it, but that shall be stained, so its strength shall not protect it, but that shall be broken. If any think it strange that a city so well fortified, and that has so many powerful allies, should be so totally ruined, let them know that it is the Lord of hosts that has given a commandment to destroy the strongholds thereof: and who can gainsay his orders or hinder the execution of them?

(2.) The Chaldeans shall be the instruments of it (v. 13): *Behold the land of the Chaldeans*; how easily they and their land were destroyed by the Assyrians. Though their own hands *founded it, set up the towers* of Babylon, and *raised up its palaces*, yet the Assyrians brought it to ruin, whence the Tyrians might infer that as easily as the old Chaldeans were subdued by the Assyrians so easily shall Tyre be vanquished by those new Chaldeans. Babel was built by the Assyrians for *those that dwelt in the wilderness*. It may be rendered *for the ships* (the Assyrians founded it for ships and shipmen that traffic upon those vast rivers Tigris and Euphrates to the Persian and Indian seas), *for men of the desert*, for Babylon is called the *desert of the sea*, ²³¹¹ Isaiah 21:1. Thus Tyrus was built upon the sea for the like purpose. But the Assyrians (says Dr. Lightfoot) brought that to ruin, now lately, in Hezekiah's time, and so shall Tyre hereafter be brought to ruin by Nebuchadnezzar. If we looked more upon the falling and

withering of others, we should not be so confident as we commonly are of the continuance of our own flourishing and standing.

ISAIAH 23:15-18

THE RESTORATION OF TYRE

Here is,

I. The time fixed for the continuance of the desolations of Tyre, which were not to be perpetual desolations: *Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years*, v. 15. So long it shall lie neglected and buried in obscurity. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar much about the time that Jerusalem was, and lay as long as it did in its ruins. See the folly of that proud ambitious conqueror. What the richer, what the stronger, was he for making himself master of Tyre, when all the inhabitants were driven out of it and he had none of his own subjects to spare for the replenishing and fortifying of it? It is surprising to see what pleasure men could take in destroying cities and making *their memorial perish with them*, ^{<1906>}Psalm 9:6. He trampled on the pride of Tyre, and therein served God's purpose; but with greater pride, for which God soon after humbled him.

II. A prophecy of the restoration of Tyre to its glory again: *After the end of seventy years, according to the years of one king*, or one dynasty or family of kings, that of Nebuchadnezzar; when that expired, the desolations of Tyre came to an end. And we may presume that Cyrus at the same time when he released the Jews, and encouraged them to rebuild Jerusalem, released the Tyrians also, and encouraged them to rebuild Tyre. Thus the prosperity and adversity of places, as well as persons, are *set the one over against the other*, that the most glorious cities may not be secure nor the most ruinous despair. It is foretold,

1. That God's providence shall gain smile upon this ruined city (v. 17): *The Lord will visit Tyre* in mercy; for, though he contend, he will not contend for ever. It is not said, Her old acquaintance shall visit her, the colonies she has planted, and the trading cities she has had correspondence with (they have forgotten her); but, The Lord shall visit her by some unthought-of turn; he shall cause his indignation towards her to cease, and then things will run of course in their former channel.

2. That she shall use her best endeavours to recover her trade again. She shall sing as a harlot, that has been some time under correction for her lewdness; but, when she is set at liberty (so violent is the bent of corruption), she will use her old arts of temptation. The Tyrians having returned from their captivity, and those that remained recovering new spirits thereupon, they shall contrive how to force a trade, shall procure the best choice of goods, under-sell their neighbours, and be obliging to all customers; as a harlot that has been forgotten, when she comes to be spoken of again, recommends herself to company by singing and playing, *takes a harp, goes about the city*, perhaps in the night, serenading, *makes sweet melody, and sings many songs*. These are innocent and allowable diversions, if soberly, and moderately, and modestly used; but those that value themselves upon their virtue should not be over-fond of them, nor ambitious to excel in them, because, whatever they are now, anciently they were some of the baits with which harlots used to entice fools. Tyre shall now by degrees come to be the mart of nations again; she shall *return to her hire*, to her traffic, *and shall commit fornication* (that is, she shall have dealings in trade, for the prophet carries on the similitude of a harlot) *with all the kingdoms of the world* that she had formerly traded with in her prosperity. The love of worldly wealth is a spiritual whoredom, and therefore covetous people are called *adulterers and adulteresses* (⁵⁰⁰⁶James 4:4), and covetousness is spiritual idolatry.

3. That, having recovered her trade again, she shall make a better use of it than she had done formerly; and this good she should get by her calamities (v. 18): *Her merchandise, and her hire, shall be holiness to the Lord*. The trade of Tyre, and all the gains of her trade, shall be devoted to God and to his honour and employed in his service. It shall not be treasured and hoarded up, as formerly, to be the matter of their pride and the support of their carnal confidence; but it shall be laid out in acts of piety and charity. What they can spare from the maintenance of themselves and their families *shall be for those that dwell before the Lord*, for the priests, the Lord's ministers, that attend in his temple at Jerusalem; not to maintain them in pomp and grandeur, but that they and theirs may *eat sufficiently*, may have food convenient for them, with as little as may be of that care which would divert them from their ministrations, and that they may have, not rich and fine clothing, but *durable clothing*, that which is strong and lasting, *clothing for old men* (so some read it), as if the priests, though

they were young, must wear such plain grave clothing as old men used to wear. Now,

(1.) This supposes that religion should be set up in New Tyre, that they should come to the knowledge of the true God and into communion with the Israel of God. Perhaps their being fellow-captives with the Jews in Babylon (who had prophets with them there) disposed them to join with them in their worship there, and turned them from idols, as it cured the Jews of their idolatry: and when they were released with them, and as they had reason to believe for their sakes, when they were settled again in Tyre, they would send gifts and offerings to the temple, and presents to the priests. We find men of Tyre then dwelling in the land of Judah, ^{<436>}Nehemiah 13:16. Tyre and Sidon were better disposed to religion in Christ's time than the cities of Israel; for, if Christ had gone among them, *they would have repented*, ^{<412>}Matthew 11:21. And we meet with Christians at Tyre (^{<413>}Acts 21:3, 4), and, many years after, did Christianity flourish there. Some of the rabbin refer this prophecy of the conversion of Tyre to the days of the Messiah.

(2.) It directs those that have estates to make use of them in the service of God and religion, and to reckon that best laid up which is so laid out. Both the merchandise of the tradesmen and the hire of the day-labourers shall be devoted to God. Both the merchandise (the employment we follow) and the hire (the gain of our employments) must *be holiness to the Lord*, alluding to the motto engraven on the frontlet of the high priest (^{<438>}Exodus 39:30), and to the separation of the tithe under the law, ^{<423>}Leviticus 27:30. See a promise like this referring to gospel times, ^{<344>}Zechariah 14:20, 21. We must first give up ourselves to be holiness to the Lord before what we do, or have, or get, can be so. When we abide with God in our particular callings, and do common actions after a godly sort — when we abound in works of piety and charity, are liberal in relieving the poor, and supporting the ministry, and encouraging the gospel — then our merchandise and our hire are holiness to the Lord, if we sincerely look at his glory in them. And our wealth need not be treasured and laid up on earth; for it is treasured and laid up in heaven, in *bags that wax not old*, ^{<423>}Luke 12:33.