

The Lord Will Visit Tyre

We remember that the purpose of Isaiah's prophecy was to comfort the Lord's people and encourage them during difficult times when God seemed far away and the power and prosperity of their enemies seemed unassailable. The prophecy was designed to remind the Lord's faithful remnant that despite appearances God is still on His throne and the promise of a coming Messiah was in no way hindered or compromised. It is the Old Testament equivalent of Christ's words, 'these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them'.

Tyre's long history

The ancient Phoenician city of Tyre, originally part built on an island, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. In scripture it is often linked with its sister-city Sidon or Zidon. These were coastal cities in Canaan allocated by Joshua to the tribe of Asher when Israel returned to the promised land from Egypt. However, they were never completely dominated. Tyre is situated in modern day Lebanon.

Great wealth and wickedness

As a coastal port Tyre enjoyed great prosperity from trading and over many centuries its wealth was a target for would-be conquerors. Hiram, king of Tyre, supplied materials and craftsmen to David for the building of the first temple in Jerusalem. Tyre and Sidon were centres of Baal and Ashtoreth worship and adversely influenced Israel and Judah during the days of Solomon. Ahab married Jezebel, an idolatrous Phoenician princess in the days of Elijah. The wickedness of Tyre is frequently denounced by the prophets and its destruction predicted.

The Lord reigns

Here, Isaiah's 'burden of Tyre' speaks of a time when the city is overrun and ruined. The significance of Tyre's destruction is as great as that of Assyria and Babylon. While the glory of these nations was seen in their military conquests Tyre's glory was its trade routes, colonising and wealth generation. Just as the Lord breaks armies and the pride of might so He can sink the ship of commerce and humble the power of trade.

God humbles the proud

The prophet calls on the peoples of Tarshish and Egypt to witness the fall of Tyre. These were Tyre's trading partners. Tyre's fall would be costly for them economically and presage their own demise. The prophet's design is to ensure they know the fall of Tyre is God's doing. God will 'stain the pride of all glory to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth' (v. 9). The tool in God's hand will be the Chaldeans; a lowly desert people will bring down the might of seafaring Tyre.

Tyre's fall and rise

The final few verses of this chapter will take our attention in Sunday's service. We are told Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years. The great sea-merchants will have no significance for a long time. Yet, just as the Lord brought Tyre low the Lord will allow the city to return to its merchant-trade and rise again to prosperity. The city is likened to a harlot, and commerce to prostitution, because for the love of money anything can be bought and sold.

A surprise at the end

But there is a twist. Isaiah tells us the Lord will visit Tyre, not in judgment but in saving mercy. When this happens the profit of trade will be dedicated to the service of God and the support of His servants. Tyre's 'hire shall be holiness to the LORD'. What an intriguing prospect it must have been for the poor remnant believers in Judah and Israel to be told the prosperity of this wicked city would someday feed and clothe the Lord's ministers.

Tyre in the time of Christ

This is precisely what happened during the time of Christ. We are told the Lord visited the coasts of Tyre and Sidon and here he met and blessed the Syrophenician woman and her daughter. Luke tells us of a great number 'from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases'. Paul met believers in Tyre and spent a week with them, in a literal fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Sanctified and holy to the Lord

From this we learn the offerings of the Lord's people, even the proceeds of worldly trade, the fruit of corrupt commercial systems and all such gifts as are dedicated to God, are sanctified in the giving and usable for the work of the gospel and the extension of Christ's kingdom. When the Lord visits Tyre the wealth of its inhabitants 'shall not be treasured nor laid up', but employed for the glory of Christ, the work of the gospel, and the support of the Lord's people.

Amen

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