

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!" (Romans 3:23)

Remember last week's lesson on Isaiah 23 and the oracle concerning the "valley of vision" (referring to the nation of Judah), which describes (in Motyer's words) how Isaiah "endured a dark night of the soul," as he contemplated the inevitable judgment that would come upon the nation of Judah, and how the people of God, who failed to acknowledge the Lord of hosts, showed "a marked lack of vision in their oblivion to the destruction that was awaiting them"!

God had miraculously turned away Sennacherib and the Assyrians in the short-term, when Hezekiah was king--but Judah's dependence on its weapons of warfare, as well as its efforts to repair "breaches" in the walls of Jerusalem, and to create an adequate water supply (which was an engineering marvel in itself)--in the final analysis--had nothing to do with the saving of the city! Isaiah confirms, on the other hand, that it was their failure to acknowledge or trust in the Lord God of hosts that would result in the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away of the people into Babylonian captivity!

Isaiah's oracle further describes how two stewards who were put in charge of the royal household in Jerusalem would demonstrate, individually, by their self-reliance, and by peoples' inappropriate trust in them, what the nation demonstrated collectively! First it was Shebna who, it turned out, would be "deposed" from his office after proving to be more concerned about his own prestige and heritage than attending to the needs and affairs of the nation and its people! Then his successor, Eliahim, who started out well and became a kind of "father-figure" for the people, causing them to look to him in place of God! And, as a result, when he faltered and fell, as men ultimately do, so would they!

MacArthur notes that this oracle shows again the folly of a nation and a people who "trust in the arm of the flesh to protect themselves from their enemies, when they need to trust in their sovereign, almighty Lord"!

And that brings us to Isaiah 23, the last of a series of oracles concerning God's judgment on the nations surrounding Judah--this one concerning the city of Tyre!

In a nutshell, Tyre was a "jubilant" maritime city and "sister seaport" of Sidon, situated on the coast of Phoenicia by the Mediterranean Sea, which flourished as the center of world trade, serving all the "inhabitants of the coastlands" of the Mediterranean! The great "ships of Tarshish" were the carriers for her merchandise and (Ezekiel 27:12 says) were "filled and very glorious in the heart of the seas"! And the ambitions of Tyre were not political, or to rule others (says Constable) but totally materialistically-oriented--to "grow rich"! And as "the merchant of nations" it appeared they were doing just that!

Then came catastrophe! And Isaiah 23:1 says that Tyre was "destroyed and without house or harbor...and "silenced"! Out of business! Causing great "wailing" among the "inhabitants" of the nations (who depended so heavily on her for their own prosperity) when it was first "reported to them from the land of Cyprus"!

Who caused this travesty? The Lord God of hosts planned it all (verse 9 says)--"to defile the pride of all beauty, to despise all the honored of the earth...stretching His hand out over the sea, making the kingdoms tremble, giving a command (to the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, and even the Alexander the Great) concerning Canaan, to destroy its stronghold"!

And yet, after "70 years of silence," Isaiah prophesies that God "would visit Tyre" and her prosperity would return and--at some point (perhaps in "that day" of the Millennial reign)--her gains would be "set apart to the Lord"!

So what else do we know about Tyre (from a wider view of Scripture) that might help explain God's severe judgment--yet His ultimate compassion, and saving grace--for this city, "whose origin is from antiquity"? (Turns out that the Bible has a lot more to say about Tyre, in both the Old and New Testament!)

First mentioned in Joshua 19, when Tyre was part of the land given (by God!) to the tribe of Asher, when the land of Canaan was divided among the tribes of Israel--but never totally conquered, as God had commanded! And so, as predictable, "the sons of Israel would end up being influenced by, and serving Baal and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Sidon"!

Next we read (in II Samuel 5) how Hiram, the king of Tyre, "sent messengers to David with cedar trees and carpenters and stonemasons to build a house (palace) for David" and, in the process, struck up a close relationship with him! And later (in I Kings 5 and II Chronicles 2) how he supplied Solomon "with as much as he desired of cedars and cypress trees" (from Lebanon), as well as "skilled workers who knew how to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone and wood, and in purple, violet, linen, and crimson fabrics...to make all kinds of engravings and to execute any design which was assigned..."! To build the temple of God in Jerusalem!

And yet the downside (according to I Kings 11) was that Solomon "loved (and married) many foreign women, including women from Sidon...who turned his heart away from God, and caused him to go after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians who was worshiped at Tyre and Sidon"! King Ahaz (in I Kings 16) would follow suit by marrying the notorious Phoenician princess Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and their union led to the infiltration of pagan worship and idolatry in Israel--and all kinds of chaos for Israel and God's people!

Then the connection with Tarshish! It was the same Tarshish where the prophet Jonah had wanted to go, when he was running from God's call to go to Nineveh (in Jonah 1). So it's not surprising that he would go to Joppa (another seaport, like Tyre and Sidon, on the coast of Phoenicia), to board a ship! Then how the Lord "hurled a great wind on the sea so that the ship was about to break down..." and how, after being thrown into the sea, God "would appoint a great fish to swallow Jonah...! And you know the rest of the story!

Is God in control over the nations? And even the seas? Does He make it clear that He--not Tyre, nor Tarshish--is in charge of the seas? And that He has a plan for what happens in the world?

Interesting that Ezekiel would devote three full chapters to the "judgment" (and salvation!) of Tyre! (God must have something important to tell us!) To cite a few references:

- Ezekiel 26:1-6 says that "because the people of Tyre gloated over Israel's fall and scorned in saying that Israel was like all other people and had no privileged position with God, God would bring many nations against them, as the sea brings up its waves"!
- Ezekiel 27:32-34--"Who is like Tyre, like her is silent in the midst of the sea? When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your

merchandise you enriched the kings of the earth. Now you are broken by the seas in the midst of the waters, your merchandise and all your company have fallen in the midst of you!"

- Ezekiel 28:1-8 says, "The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord God: because your heart is lifted up and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the heart of the seas; yet you are a man and not God, although you make your heart like the heart of God...Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you, the most ruthless of nations. And they will draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor! They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die the death of those who are slain in the heart of the sea!' Wow!

So, is God through with Tyre?

We pick it up in the New Testament where Matthew 15:21-28 says that Jesus withdrew from Galilee and went into the district of Tyre and Sidon, where a Canaanite woman approached him about her daughter who was demon-possessed--and that Jesus noted that "her faith was great and that it would be done for her what she wished"! Her daughter was instantly healed!

In Luke 10:13-14, Jesus expressed "woe to Chorazin and Bethsaida," noting that if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in them, they would have repented long ago..!"

Acts 11:19 indicates that a church was established in Phoenicia "after persecution in Jerusalem caused Christians to scatter!" And Acts 21:2-4 says that after Paul "landed (by ship) in Tyre (upon returning from his third missionary trip), he "looked up the disciples there and, after seven days, "knelt down" and prayed on the beach before boarding a ship (a ship of Tarshish?) and returned home!"

All this to establish (without doubt) that God is not finished with Tyre! Just as He is not finished with any nation or people--as long as it is called "today"! And, that we "all are sinner," and how, as II Peter 3:9 notes, the Lord "is patient toward us, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"!

In this regard, Constable observes that both Egypt, the political oppressor of Israel, and Tyre, the materialistic oppressor of Israel, will be restored in a relationship with Israel--and with the God of Israel! One day! (Tho perhaps not until the millennial reign of Christ!)

What we know for sure, and what this lessons affirms, is that our sovereign God is in control of the nations! And of what's happening in our world today! And even of the seas and the oceans! And that He wants us to trust Him, and make Him first in our lives!

Lowell