

A Lament Over the Ruin of Tyre

Ezeki'el 27: 1-36

DIG: To what is Tyre likened in this poem (Ezeki'el 27:4-9)? Do you find the image fitting? What parts of it are mentioned? From where did the supplies come from? What words reveal the elegance of its construction? Where did this ship travel? Can you find the limits of its trade in each direction on a map? What were some of the goods it exchanged? Do you think Tyre had good reasons to be proud? What will happen to this great luxury ship (Ezeki'el 27:25-36)? What will cause the accident? What will happen to the ship and crew? What different groups will hear of the mishap (Ezeki'el 27:30-36)? Who is most upset at her demise? Why?

REFLECT: Is it wrong to feel pride in your accomplishments or attributes? What's wrong with a realistic appraisal? Do you find a lot of "humility" rings falsely? Who would be upset if you were "broke?" Friends? Family? Church members? Members of your messianic synagogue? Creditors? Would anyone even know? What is the mood of this lament: (a) Joy over a fallen foe? (b) Regret over something lovely that has been destroyed? (c) Sorrow over a people crushed? What does this lament tell you about God's feelings? About God's regard for beauty? If you were writing a lament for your city, what items might appear in the verses? Would people in other nations lament the destruction of your country? Who might not?

The prophecy was given in 585 BC during the exile in Babylon

In this chapter Ezekiel pictures Tyre as a magnificent ship constructed from the best material, furnished with the choicest equipment and manned by the most skillful sailors. He then describes in graphic imagery, and in a remarkably detailed style, the various types of merchandise that made up the ship's cargo. Sailing proudly on the high seas, it was overtaken by a storm and was shipwrecked. Everything on board was lost. The disaster caused intense anxiety among the neighboring cities, seamen, merchants and kings as they lamented over the catastrophe.

The Glory of Tyre: The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, take up a lament concerning Tyre. Say to Tyre, 'you are situated at the gateway to the sea; because the city-state of Tyre was located in a very strategic spot that made it easily defensible. You are the merchant of peoples on many coasts, or the entrance of commerce and economy, trading with many countries around the Mediterranean Sea,' this is what Adonai ELOHIM says' (Ezk 27:1-3a)." She was the Wall Street of the ancient world.

You say, Tyre, "I am perfect in beauty" Ezekiel 28:12b God says the same thing about Satan. The same description is made of Jerusalem in Lamentations 2:15, and shows that it was Tyre's desire to take the preeminence away from Tziyon now that the City of David was destroyed. Your domain, commerce, was on the high seas. Your builders brought your beauty to perfection (Ezeki'el 27:3b-4). She was the center of commerce and economy. Built on a rocky island, Tyre was the Venice of antiquity. Hence, the simile of a ship was most appropriately applied to her. Unlike a small boat that has to cling to the shore, the ship, to which Tyre is likened, sails over the high seas.

First, Ezekiel points out how well the symbolic ship of state was built. Your builders made all your boards from pine trees on Mount Hermon. This timber was also used for building the Temple (First Kings 5:24). They took cedar trees from Lebanon to make a mast for you. Lebanon was famous for its cedars. Of oaks from Bashan they made your oars; of cypress wood from the coasts of Cyprus they made your deck, adorned with ivory. Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail and served as your banner; your awnings were of blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah (Ezeki'el 27:5-7).

Men of Tzidon and Arvad were your oarsmen; your skilled men, Tyre, were aboard as your sailors. Veteran craftsmen of Byblos were on board as shipmates to caulk your seams. All the ships of the sea and their sailors came alongside to trade for your wares (Ezeki'el 27:8-9).

Men of Persia, Lydia and Put served as mercenary soldiers in your army. They hung their shields and helmets on your walls, bringing you splendor. It was the practice in ancient time to hang weapons on towers and fortresses. And the native guard, the men of Arvad and Helek guarded your walls on every side; men of Gammad were in your towers. They hung their shields around your walls; making your beauty perfect (Ezeki'el 27:10-11).

The Commerce of Tyre: Tarshish of Spain did business with you because of the quantity and variety of your resources; they exchanged silver, iron, tin and lead for your goods. Greece, Tubal and Meshek did business with you; they traded slaves and articles of copper for your wares. Men of Beth Togarmah exchanged chariot horses and mules for your merchandise. The men of Rhodes traded with you, and many coastlands were your customers; they paid you with ivory tusks and ebony. Syria did business with you because of your many products; they exchanged turquoise, purple fabric, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies for your merchandise. Judah and Isra'el traded with you; they exchanged wheat from Minnith, millet, honey, olive oil and resin for healing. Damascus did business with you because of your many products and great

wealth of goods. They offered wine from Helbon, wool from Zahar and casks of wine from Izal in exchange for your wares; wrought iron, cassia and calamus. Dedan traded in saddle blankets with you. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your customers; they did business with you in lambs, rams and goats. The merchants of Sheba and Raamah traded with you; for your merchandise they exchanged the finest of all kinds of spices and precious stones, and gold. Harran, Kanneh and Eden and merchants of Sheba, Ashur and Kilmad traded with you. In your marketplace they traded with you beautiful garments, blue fabric, embroidered work and multicolored rugs with cords twisted and tightly knotted. The ships of Tarshish, a technical term, a brand name for the ships of Tyre, serve as carriers for your wares. Her merchant navy made her the envy of the ancient world. You are filled with heavy cargo as you sail the sea (Ezeki'el 27:12-25). Tyre was made rich at the expense of Judah's fall, just exactly as she had hoped (Ezeki'el 26:2). Tyre was the center of commerce before the fall of Jerusalem; however, afterwards her influence became even greater. But what initially looked like a victory over Zion will ultimately cause her collapse.

The Doom of Tyre: The figure of the mighty and overladen ship, proudly venturing out into the waters that were to be her ruin, is the most striking example in the Bible of the thought familiar to Jews and Gentiles alike - the pride that prepares the way for its own downfall. Your oarsmen take you out into stormy waters, to the high seas. But the east wind will break you to pieces far out at sea. The fact that the east wind probably means that Ezekiel points to the destruction of coastal Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar because the king of Babylon came from the east. Alexander the Great would eventually come from the west. Your wealth, merchandise and wares, your mariners, sailors and shipwright, your merchants and all your soldiers, and everyone else on board will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of your shipwreck (Ezeki'el 27:26-27). Earlier in this chapter, these were the people who helped build this great ship-of-state, but now they inadvertently brought her into stormy waters that brought about her destruction. Both crew and cargo will be completely lost in the shipwreck.

The shorelands, the cities around coastal Tyre that depended upon her for their economic welfare, will quake with terror when your sailors cry out. All who handle the oars will abandon their ships; the mariners and all the sailors will stand on the shore. They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you; they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in ashes. They would be in deep, deep mourning over Tyre's ruin. They will shave their heads because of you and will put on sackcloth. They will weep over you with anguish of soul and with bitter mourning. As they wail and mourn over you, they will take up a lament concerning you: "Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea" (Ezeki'el 27:28-32).

Then **Ezekiel** states the results of Tyre's fall. **When your merchandise went out on the seas, you satisfied many nations; with your great wealth and your wares you enriched the kings of the earth.** Not only did Tyre become wealthy, but she made other nations wealthy as well. **But now you are shattered by the sea in the depths of the waters; your wares and all your company have gone down with you.** Therefore, Tyre sank because of the great weight of her wealth, and the east wind of Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon wanted what she had. **Her success ultimately caused her doom (Ezeki'el 27:33-34).**

What were the reactions to her fall? **All who live in the coastlands, the coastal city-states along the Mediterranean with which Tyre did business, are appalled at you; their kings shudder with horror and their faces are distorted with fear. They dreaded that a similar fate would overtake them.** The merchants among the nations hiss at you, **expressing amazement and dismay; you have come to a horrible end and you will cease to exist** as the center of world commerce **(Ezeki'el 27:35-36).** Once again, with powerful poetry, **the prophet** announces the end of the island empire's era.

And as we perceive the shipwrecks of life, they should never be a source of ridicule or delight. Nor should they evoke self-confidence or arrogance. For in all of life's experiences, there are storms that are greater than our capacity to survive. Recognizing and lamenting over tragedy should keep us in touch with our own vulnerability, and as a result, we can learn that faith in **ADONAI** alone, and in **the Jewish Messiah** whom he sent can still the violent raging of the sea in our own lives (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ff - Jesus Calms the Storm**).³⁷⁹