

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Prophecy denouncing the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, delivered upwards of one hundred and twenty years before its accomplishment, at a period when the Tyrians were in great prosperity, and the Babylonians in abject subjection to the Assyrian empire; and, consequently, when an event of so great magnitude was improbable in the highest degree, Isaiah 23:1-14. Tyre shall recover its splendor at the termination of seventy years, the days of One king, or kingdom, by which must be meant the time allotted for the duration of the Babylonish empire, as otherwise the prophecy cannot be accommodated to the event, Isaiah 23:15-17. Supposed reference to the early conversion of Tyre to Christianity, Isaiah 23:18.

Verse 1

The burden of Tyre - Tyre, a city on the coast of Syria, about lat. 32N. was built two thousand seven hundred and sixty years before Christ. There were two cities of this name; one on the continent, and the other on an island, about half a mile from the shore; the city on the island was about four miles in circumference. Old Tyre resisted Nebuchadnezzar for thirteen years; then the inhabitants carried, so to speak, the city to the forementioned island, Isaiah 23:4. This new city held out against Alexander the Great for seven months; who, in order to take it, was obliged to fill up the channel which separated it from the main land. In a.d. 1289 it was totally destroyed by the sultan of Egypt; and now contains only a few huts, in which about fifty or sixty wretched families exist. This desolation was foretold by this prophet and by Ezekiel, one thousand nine hundred years before it took place!

Howl, ye ships of Tarshish - This prophecy denounces the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. It opens with an address to the Tyrian negotiators and sailors at Tarshish, (Tartessus, in Spain), a place which, in the course of their trade, they greatly frequented. The news of the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar is said to be brought to them from Chittim, the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean; "for the Tyrians," says Jerome on Isaiah 23:6, "when they saw they had no other means of escaping, fled in their ships, and took refuge in Carthage and in the islands of the Ionian and Aegean sea." From whence the news would spread and reach Tarshish; so also Jarchi on the same place. This seems to be the most probable interpretation of this verse.

Verse 2

Be still "Be silent" - Silence is a mark of grief and consternation. See Isaiah 47:5. Jeremiah has finely expressed this image: -

"The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground, they are silent:

They have cast up dust on their heads, they have girded themselves with sackcloth.

The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground."

Lamentations 2:10.

Verse 3

The seed of Sihor "The seed of the Nile" - The Nile is called here Shichor, as it is Jeremiah 2:18, and 1 Chronicles 13:5. It had this name from the blackness of its waters, charged with the mud which it brings down from Ethiopia when it overflows, Et viridem Aegyptum nigra fecundat arena; as it was called by the Greeks (Melas), and by the Latins Melo, for the same reason. See Servius on the above line of Virgil, Georg. 4:291. It was called (Siris) by the Ethiopians, by some supposed to be the same with Shichor. Egypt by its extraordinary fertility, caused by the overflowing of the Nile supplied the neighboring nations with corn, by which branch of trade the Tyrians gained great wealth.

Verse 4

Be thou ashamed, O Zidon - Tyre is called Isaiah 23:12, the daughter of Sidon. "The Sidonians," says Justin, 18:3, "when their city was taken by the king of Ascalon, betook themselves to their ships, and landed, and built by Tyre." Sidon, as the mother city is supposed to be deeply affected with the calamity of her daughter.

Nor bring up virgins "Nor educated virgins" - x"x"x"x"x"x^axTM (veromamti); so an ancient MS. Of Dr. Kennicott's prefixing the x (vau), which refers to the negative preceding, and is equivalent to x"x"x (velo). See Deuteronomy 23:6; Proverbs 30:3. Two of my own MSS. have x (vau) in the margin.

Verse 7

Whose antiquity is of ancient days "Whose antiquity is of the earliest date" - Justin, in the passage above

quoted, had dated the building of Tyre at a certain number of years before the taking of Troy; but the number is lost in the present copies. Tyre, though not so old as Sidon, was yet of very high antiquity: it was a strong city even in the time of Joshua. It is called $\text{מִבְּצָרֶיךָ} \text{ מִבְּצָרֶיךָ} \text{ מִבְּצָרֶיךָ}$ (ir mibtsar tsor), "the city of the fortress of Sor," Joshua 19:29. Interpreters raise difficulties in regard to this passage, and will not allow it to have been so ancient; with what good reason I do not see, for it is called by the same name, "the fortress of Sor," in the history of David, 2 Samuel 24:7, and the circumstances of the history determine the place to be the very same. See on Isaiah 23:1 (note).

Whose antiquity is of ancient days, may refer to Palaetyrus, or Old Tyre.

Her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn - This may belong to the new or insular Tyre; her own feet, that is, her own inhabitants, shall carry her - shall transport the city, from the continent to the island. But the text says it shall be carried far off, and the new city was founded only half a mile distant from the other. I answer, $\text{מִרְחֹק} \text{ מִרְחֹק}$ (merachok) does not always signify a great distance, but distance or interval in general; for in Joshua 3:4 $\text{מִרְחֹק} \text{ מִרְחֹק}$ (rachok) is used to express the space between the camp and the ark, which we know to have been only two thousand cubits. Some refer the sojourning afar off to the extent of the commercial voyages undertaken by the Tyrians and their foreign connections.

Verse 10

O daughter of Tarshish - Tyre is called the daughter of Tarshish; perhaps because, Tyre being ruined, Tarshish was become the superior city, and might be considered as the metropolis of the Tyrian people; or rather because of the close connection and perpetual intercourse between them, according to that latitude of signification in which the Hebrews use the words son and daughter to express any sort of conjunction and dependence whatever. $\text{מִזְחָךְ} \text{ מִזְחָךְ}$ (mezach), a girdle, which collects, binds, and keeps together the loose raiment, when applied to a river, may mean a mound, mole, or artificial dam, which contains the waters and prevents them from spreading abroad. A city taken by siege and destroyed, whose walls are demolished, whose policy is dissolved, whose wealth is dissipated, whose people is scattered over the wide country, is compared to a river whose banks are broken down, and whose waters, let loose and overflowing all the neighboring plains, are wasted and lost. This may possibly be the meaning of this very obscure verse, of which I can find no other interpretation that is at all satisfactory. - L.

Verse 13

Behold the land of the Chaldeans - This verse is extremely obscure; the obscurity arises from the ambiguity of the agents, which belong to the verbs, and of the objects expressed by the pronouns; from the change of number of the verbs, and of gender in the pronouns. The MSS. give us no assistance, and the ancient Versions very little. The Chaldee and Vulgate read $\text{סַמּוּאָה} \text{ סַמּוּאָה}$ (samoah), in the plural number. I have followed the interpretation which, among many different ones, seemed to be most probable, that of Perizonius and Vitranga. The Chaldeans, (Chasdim), are supposed to have had their origin, and to have taken their name, from Chesed, the son of Nachor, the brother of Abraham. They were known by that name in the time of Moses, who calls Ur in Mesopotamia, from whence Abraham came, to distinguish it from other places of the same name, Ur of the Chaldeans. And Jeremiah calls them an ancient nation. This is not inconsistent with what Isaiah here says of them: "This people was not," that is, they were of no account, (see Deuteronomy 32:21); they were not reckoned among the great and potent nations of the world till of later times; they were a rude, uncivilized, barbarous people, without laws, without settled habitations; wandering in a wide desert country ($\text{צִיִּים} \text{ צִיִּים}$ (tsiyim)) and addicted to rapine like the wild Arabians. Such they are represented to have been in the time of Job, Job 1:17, and such they continued to be till Assur, some powerful king of Assyria, gathered them together, and settled them in Babylon in the neighboring country. This probably was Ninus, whom I suppose to have lived in the time of the Judges. In this, with many eminent chronologers, I follow the authority of Herodotus, who says that the Assyrian monarchy lasted but five hundred and twenty years. Ninus got possession of Babylon from the Cuthean Arabians; the successors of Nimrod in that empire collected the Chaldeans, and settled a colony of them there to secure the possession of the city, which he and his successors greatly enlarged and ornamented. They had perhaps been useful to him in his wars, and might be likely to be farther useful in keeping under the old inhabitants of that city, and of the country belonging to it; according to the policy of the Assyrian kings, who generally brought new people into the conquered countries; see Isaiah 36:17; 2 Kings 17:6, 2 Kings 17:24. The testimony of Dicaearchus, a Greek historian contemporary with Alexander, (apud. Steph. de Urbibus, in voc. $\text{Ἰσὶαί} \text{ Ἰσὶαί}$), in regard to the fact is remarkable, though he is mistaken in the name of the king he speaks of. He says that "a certain king of Assyria, the fourteenth in succession from Ninus, (as he might be, if Ninus is placed, as in the common chronology, eight hundred years higher than we have above set him), named, as it is said, Chaldaeus, having gathered together and united all the people called Chaldeans, built the famous city, Babylon, upon the Euphrates." - L.

Verse 14

Howl, ye shops - The Prophet Ezekiel hath enlarged upon this part of the same subject with great force and elegance: -

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah concerning Tyre: -

At the sound of thy fall, at the cry of the wounded,

At the great slaughter in the midst of thee, shall not the islands tremble?

And shall not all the princes of the sea descend from their thrones,

And lay aside their robes, and strip off their embroidered garments?

They shall clothe themselves with trembling, they shall sit on the ground;

They shall tremble every moment, they shall be astonished at thee.

And they shall utter a lamentation over thee, and shall say unto thee:

How art thou lost, thou that wast inhabited from the seas!

The renowned city, that was strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants!

That struck with terror all her neighbors!

Now shall the coasts tremble in the day of thy fall,

And the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure.”

Ezekiel 26:15-18.

Verse 15

According to the days of one king - What is, of one kingdom; see Daniel 7:17, Daniel 8:20. Nebuchadnezzar began his conquests in the first year of his reign; from thence to the taking of Babylon by Cyrus are seventy years, at which time the nations subdued by Nebuchadnezzar were to be restored to liberty. These seventy years limit the duration of the Babylonish monarchy. Tyre was taken by him towards the middle of that period; so did not serve the king of Babylon during the whole period, but only for the remaining part of it. This seems to be the meaning of Isaiah; the days allotted to the one king or kingdom, are seventy years; Tyre, with the rest of the conquered nations, shall continue in a state of subjection and desolation to the end of that period. Not from the beginning and through the whole of the period; for, by being one of the latest conquests, the duration of that state of subjection in regard to her, was not much more than half of it. “All these nations,” saith Jeremiah, Jeremiah 25:11, “shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” Some of them were conquered sooner, some later; but the end of this period was the common term for the deliverance of them all.

There is another way of computing the seventy years, from the year in which Tyre was actually taken to the nineteenth of Darius Hystaspis; whom the Phoenicians, or Tyrians, assisted against the Ionians, and probably on that account might then be restored to their former liberties and privileges. But I think the former the more probable interpretation. - L.

Sing as a harlot - *Fidicinam esse meretricum est.* says Donatus in Terent. Eunuch. 3:2, 4.

Nec meretrix tibicina, cujus Ad strepitum salias.

Hor. 1:Epist. 14:25.

“Nor harlot minstrel sings, when the rude sound

Tempts you with heavy heels to thump the ground.”

Francis.

Sir John Chardin, in his MS. note on this place, says: -

Câ€™est que les vieilles prostituees, -

ne font que chanter quand les jeunes dancent, et les animer par lâ€™instrument et par la voix.

“The old prostitutes do nothing but sing, while the young ones dance; and animate them both by vocal and instrumental music.”

Verse 17

After the end of seventy years - Tyre, after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, recovered, as it is here foretold, its ancient trade, wealth, and grandeur; as it did likewise after a second destruction by Alexander. It became Christian early with the rest of the neighboring countries. St. Paul himself found many Christians there, Acts 21:4. It suffered much in the Diocletian persecution. It was an archbishopric under the patriarchate of Jerusalem, with fourteen bishoprics under its jurisdiction. It continued Christian till it was taken by the Saracens in 639; was recovered by the Christians in 1124; but in 1280 was conquered by the Mamelukes, and afterwards taken from them by the Turks in 1517. Since that time it has sunk into utter decay; is now a mere ruin, a bare rock, “a place to spread nets upon,” as the Prophet Ezekiel foretold it should be, Ezekiel 26:14. See Sandy’s Travels; Vitringa on the place; Bp. Newton on the Prophecies, Dissert. xi.