

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Third Week - Third Day

OLD TYRE

"And it came to pass in the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me [Ezekiel], saying, Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.' Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for spreading nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' says the Lord GOD; 'it shall become plunder for the nations'" (Ezekiel 26:1-5).

Tyre, so renowned in the history of commerce and navigation, occupies a large place in sacred prophecy. As Beldam notes in *Italy and the East*, "The prophecies respecting Tyre do not, however, appear to have been always discreetly or faithfully explained. The traveler, having read these explanations, expects to find nothing more than a bare rock, washed by the sea, and covered with nets; and is surprised to see a city, and to learn that the spot has never been wholly deserted." The truth is, that the island on which the present Tyre stands was the subject of a part only, and that the smallest part, of the prophecies respecting Tyre.

The Tyrian colony seems always to have consisted of an island with a territory on the shore. As a maritime state, a port was essential to it; and from the mention of it by Joshua, where it is described as "the strong city Tyre," it may be inferred that the capital was first on the coast. But from Hiram's letter to Solomon, as given by Josephus (and which we have no reason to suppose apocryphal), we may gather that the island was even then inhabited. The language of Isaiah shows that in his day the Tyrians were known to the rest of the world as the "inhabitants of the isle." The Tyrian state may thus be regarded as consisting of a city and small territory on the mainland, and a port or maritime city on the island. It is possible that the two may have been connected by fortified lines along the shore or by a causeway over the channel. And we are indeed expressly told by Josephus that in the days of Hiram a causeway did unite the city and the island. Thus the old city, the island, and the adjacent territory formed together the state of Tyre and the subject of the prophecies.

If we look attentively at these prophecies, we shall perceive they have a fourfold operation.

They predict the irretrievable ruin of the then existing city, the final loss of maritime supremacy, the subversion of the royal dynasty, and a subsequent consecration to the true faith.¹ These all came to pass in their season; but not precisely in the way that some have imagined. It is indeed obvious that the whole of the predictions could not refer to the same spot. The question is how to apply them. Time and history may help us through the difficulty.

The first class of predictions foretold the destruction of the city. This was to be complete and irretrievable. Not only were walls, towers, edifices to be demolished, but they were also *to disappear*; the very dust was to be scraped away. It was to be built no more, and though sought after was never to be found (Isa. 23; Ezek. 26). To what city do these predictions apply? Certainly not to Insular Tyre, for that was never totally destroyed. Its edifices have never totally disappeared, and the dust has accumulated on instead of being scraped away from the rock on which it stands. It has been often rebuilt, and that with great magnificence. It has never ceased to be inhabited, and its place has always been well known.

But these predictions do apply with a singular and astonishing accuracy to Old Tyre; and the incidents of the siege confirm their application to that city. There was to be a fort and mount raised against it. The city was to be covered with the dust of cavalry and the walls to be shaken at the noise of horses and chariot wheels. The historical particulars of the siege are not extant, but enough remains in the statement of Josephus to show that the city fell, as predicted, beneath the arms of Nebuchadnezzar. It was dismantled if not entirely destroyed.

Yet the most remarkable part of the prophecy was suspended. It was foretold that this same city should become a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; that the stones, the timber, and the dust should be laid in the midst of the water; that the deep should be brought up over it; that great waters should cover it; and that it should be set in the low part of the earth (Ezek. 26). A portion of this prophecy may indeed apply to Insular Tyre, but the most striking reference is to the old city. But how was so unlikely a thing to be accomplished except by an influx of the sea, which some have supposed but of which there are no geological or historical proofs?

The imagination of man could scarcely have conceived the *mode* of its accomplishment, much less have foreseen it and made it the subject of a confident and authoritative prediction. It is this particularity that gives the most commanding interest to this and other prophecies and renders them so powerful for the conviction of critics. It would be a small matter to predict in a general way one or two of the possible circumstances; but it would be phenomenal to foretell a circumstance the like of which had never before occurred, and that could not occur at any other place!

It happened in this way. From the days of Nebuchadnezzar to those of Alexander the Great, the old city had lain in a dismantled condition. During all this time the prophecy had been but half accomplished. The Tyrians meanwhile fortified themselves in their island-city, regained their

¹ Isa. 23; Jer. 27:3, 47:4; Ezek. 26, 27, 28.

maritime supremacy, and resumed their former arrogance and pride. Two centuries before, their ruin had been effected by a people of recent origin and previously almost unknown. And again it was to be effected by a nation from beyond the sea, and one still less to be expected or feared. The old city became, in fact, the means of destroying the new.

When Alexander appeared against Tyre, he found its insular position a serious obstacle to one who had no fleet. But a plan occurred to him, worthy of his genius--a plan that in God's providence accomplished His own purpose as well without Alexander being aware of it. The abundant ruins of the old city suggested to Alexander the feasibility of employing them for the construction of a breakwater connecting the mainland with the island, over which his troops might march up to the walls of the beleaguered town. It was an immense work, two hundred feet wide, and the vast quantity of materials it required may easily be conceived. In constructing it the Old Tyre was removed bodily into the sea--stone, timber, earth, even the very dust. All was removed. And there it still lies in that immense causeway and forms a place for the spreading of nets as the prophet foretold.

What eye but that of Omniscience could have foreseen this strange result at a time when Old Tyre stood in all her pride and glory? The utter disappearance *of all trace* of an important ancient city is one of the rarest things that can happen. Yet it is true here, as predicted. Not only has the town never been built again, but it is wholly extinct. Travelers look in vain for any vestige of it. Of no city that history records has there perhaps been so complete an obliteration--sand now covering the greater part of the space within which it must have stood.