

## Tyre

Tyre was an ancient Phoenician city-state located on the Mediterranean coast 20 miles (32.2 kilometers) south of Sidon and 23 miles (37 kilometers) north of Acre. Tyre consisted of two major parts: an older port city on the mainland and an island city a half mile (.8 kilometer) from the coast where the majority of the population lived. According to Herodotus, Tyre was founded around 2700 BC. Its earliest historical attestations, however, are references in a 15th-century Ugaritic document and an Egyptian citation from the same period. Tyre first appears in the Bible in the list of cities that comprised Asher's inheritance (Joshua 19:29). At that time, it was described as a "strong city" and was evidently never conquered by the Israelites (2 Sam. 24:7). Tyre was most significant as a mercantile center, with maritime contacts throughout the Mediterranean region and overland traffic with Mesopotamia and Arabia.

During David's and Solomon's monarchies, Tyre was a strong commercial ally of Israel. Both David and Solomon contracted with Hiram of Tyre for timber, building materials, and skilled laborers, for which they provided Tyre with agriculture produce (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1-11; 1 Chr 14:1; 2 Chr 2:3-16). After the division of the kingdom, Tyre evidently maintained friendly relations with Israel for some time. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was the daughter of "Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians," a king who is known elsewhere as Ithobal of Tyre (1 Kings 16:31; cf. Menander). At some point, however, the pressure of Assyrian and Babylonian aggression dissolved the alliance, so that by the time of Samaria's fall, Tyre and Israel were no longer aligned and shortly thereafter became enemies.

During the later kingdom period, Tyre was the focus for some of the strongest prophetic denunciations recorded in Scripture (Is 23:1-18; Jer 25:22; 27:1-11; Ez 26:1-19; Jl 3:4-8; Am 1:9-10). Tyre's condemnation was justified for several reasons. Because of its commercial significance, Tyre was the focal point of

Assyrian and Egyptian rivalries. Tyre managed, however, to play these rivals against each other while building its wealth and exploiting its neighbors. Additionally, the city of Tyre was not only a city of unscrupulous merchants but also a center of religious idolatry and sexual immorality.

Foremost among Tyre's sins was pride induced by its great wealth and strategic location. Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre offers a detailed picture of the city, its commercial empire, its sin, and its eventual demise (Ez 26:1-28; 29:18-20). The final destruction of Tyre did not come for almost 1,900 years (AD 1291), though it was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar for 13 years (587-574 BC), and conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BC after a seven-month siege, during which he built a causeway out to the island. Ezekiel's description of Tyre's arrogance can be compared to that of Satan's, with Tyre's words "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (KJV) being the expression that led to the fall of both Satan and Tyre (Ezek. 28:2).

Despite Alexander's destruction of the city, Tyre had regained prominence by the NT period, being equal to or greater than Jerusalem in terms of population and commercial power. Jesus visited the region surrounding Tyre during his early ministry, healing the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-31). Jesus also compared the Galilean towns that had rejected him to Tyre and Sidon, suggesting that the Galileans would bear greater responsibility for their rejection because of the number of miracles he had performed among them (Lk 10:13-14).

In Acts, the name *Tyre* occurs twice in this context (21:3, 7) and once in 12:20. The city was located in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon); Jewish believers who were scattered after the death of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia (Acts 11:19) and acquainted the people with Christ's gospel. When Paul and Barnabas traveled from Antioch to Jerusalem, they went through Phoenicia to tell the believers how God had brought Gentiles to faith (Acts 15:3). These believers were very happy to hear about the

growth of the church among the Gentiles. The city of Tyre, which enjoyed colonial status in Roman times, may have had a Jewish-Gentile congregation when Paul came to visit. We know little about this church, but in post-apostolic times Tyre became a major center of the Christian faith (the fulfillment of Ps. 87:4).

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