

Isaiah 23-24:1-23

“The Devastation Of The Great Tribulation”

*Life & liberty aren't privileges extended to us by our government. They're rights graciously granted to us by God. – & It's important that we not be confused on this issue. For 10 straight chapters, as God declares judgment upon nation after nation, if one thing comes into focus for us, it's the fact that, He's the One we're to look *to* & trust *in* exclusively if (as a nation) we want to experience security, prosperity & liberty.

Those things aren't granted to a nation as the result of advanced *technology*, a brilliant economic *strategy*, having the planets greatest *military* or making tactical alliances *politically*. They're granted as the result of God's gracious sovereignty & acknowledging in humility our dependence upon Him for everything. *

The prideful/self-reliant nations, God humbles & brings low. The humble who want to honor God, He will (in due time) raise up. God, not man, is in control.

Here in Ch 23 God addresses the ancient Phoenician empire (of which, the city of Tyre was its capital). (If you look at it on a map today, it's the country of Lebanon). Let's turn our attention to Vs 1.

Vs 1-5

To kind of help you gather the thought here, the Phoenicians were famous as a sea faring people. They established colonies all throughout the Mediterranean. Tyre was basically the “epicenter” of the known world's trading all throughout the Mediterranean region. They were the “eBay” & “Amazon” (of the ancient world) all rolled into one.

In 2nd Sam 5, king David had dealings w/the king of Tyre (he built David a house out of cedar trees that he provided, along w/the contract labor, the masons, the whole thing). In 1st Kings 5, after David had died, he floated cedars in rafts by the sea to Solomon to aid in the building of the temple... So, there were some good things that came out of Tyre. But there was also plenty of bad. In fact, later Tyre would give to king Ahab one of the worst things that could've ever happened to Israel, a wife by the name of ... Jezebel.

But ultimately what we need to see is that Tyre represents big business, commercialism, materialism. (Vs 3 “*The harvest of the River, is her revenue; And she is a marketplace for the nations.*”) & Again, in many ways we can't help but see the parallels to our own nation. *If materialism/commercialism isn't prevalent in the U.S., I don't know what is! The dollar says, “In God we trust” but truth be told, it's more accurate to say, “In the dollar we trust”.

People have come to place their security in technology, in their prosperity, all we need to solve our problems is a little more money! But God will teach Tyre what we do well to realize as well. You can place your trust in money, but money won't deliver you on the day of wrath... Proverbs 11:4 *"Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death."*¹

& The funny thing about money is that it can be here today & gone tomorrow. You can be taken from prosperity to poverty... & then where will you be? Look at how far our nation has fallen in just 2 yrs. Inflation is spiraling out of control, interest rates are up, gas prices are up. Food prices are up. A recent June 2022 poll showed that 61% of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck. As of August, of this year, 20 million households in America (about 1 in 6 homes) have fallen behind on their utility bills, & the amount they owe has *doubled* since before the pandemic... which will trigger (what the article I was reading termed as) a "tsunami of shutoffs," – What's my point? Don't place your trust in money... The Bible says, *"Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven."*² Keep confidence, in the Lord.*

God would judge the city of Tyre, *not* because of their prosperity, but (as we'll see) because of the *pride* that festered in them as the result... God says here that it would be totally, completely, annihilated. Vs1, "It is laid waste, there is no house, no harbor..." & Then Isaiah mentions various harbors, or port cities hearing of its destruction all over the ancient world & wailing as the result... Tarshish (in Spain), Shihor (down around Egypt), the island of Cyprus. Phoenician colonies trying to process the annihilation of their homeland, the merchants taking a crippling blow economically...

Vs 6-9

You see, it wasn't nobility, honor, honesty, or integrity that established you as a leader in Tyre. You just needed money. "The merchants are princes; the traders are the honorable..." If you did well in business, if you made a lot of money, you were a person of power & influence. You were someone important. What's the quick take home here? It's not that making a lot of money is bad.

It's when you allow the fact that you have more than others make you think that you're somehow *above* others or *better* than others, you let success inflate pride in your heart...

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 11:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 23:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*There is nothing that will set God against us faster than our pride. Why? Because all sin (at its core) is rooted in some element of pride. Even if it's simply to say, "I don't have to do what God would have me do, I'm going to do what *I* wanna do." — I'm elevating my wants, my ways against God's, that's pride.

So we read in the book of Proverbs, *"These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look..."*³ It's 1st on the list, chief among them all. (If you want to know the other 6, you'll need to look them up on your own. 😊 I'm not doing all the work for ya!) But again 1 Pet 5, *"...and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists (or sets Himself against) the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,"*⁴ Think about it like this. Do you feel like you deserve to be 1st in line, or are you ok if you're last? Do you kind of feel like you should *be* served, or are you one who serves? God isn't impressed w/how much money we make, how much clout it brings us, the platform it gives us... Man looks to the outward appearance, the Lord searches the heart. — * God was going to humble the self-imposed glory of Tyre.

Vs 10-14

Quick history lesson. The Chaldeans (Babylonians) would be used of God to defeat the mainland city of Tyre. The Assyrians took a whack at it, but it would ultimately be the Babylonians who truly brought the mainland city down after a 13-year siege. But during that time the Phoenicians in the city of Tyre relocated primarily (by ship) to an offshore island. So when the city fell, it was kind of a hollow victory because Nebuchadnezzar had no naval military branch so he really couldn't reach them.

Now, if you read Ezekiel 26, he goes into detail about the downfall of Tyre. Ezekiel says, *"They will plunder your riches and pillage your merchandise; they will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses; they will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water. I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more."*⁵ In other words, Tyre would slip through the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, but not through the hands of God.

In 332 B.C. in his determination to conquer the world, Alexander the Great, literally tore the city apart & had the debris pushed into the sea, built a causeway out to the offshore island & destroyed the city, just as God said it would happen.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 6:16–17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 5:5–6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eze 26:12–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 15-16

The city would lay desolate for 70 yrs, then it would begin to do business again (like an old harlot), engaging w/the kingdoms of the world once more.

Vs 17-18

God speaks of the day when the wealth of the region will be used for the purposes & plans of the Lord... It seems to me (though there is some rich Christian history in that region) that ultimately (like we learned w/Assyria, Israel & Egypt) this will be fulfilled when Jesus rules the earth. (Now, I could be wrong w/that, this could certainly find it's fulfillment historically, but it will definitely take place prophetically in the millennial kingdom). We serve a God who redeems; Who takes what the enemy means for evil & uses it for good. Where sin abounds, grace abounds still more.

Having said that, there's only so much time that God's grace is available & when the age of grace has come to a close, His wrath will be poured out upon a Christ rejecting, Christ *refusing* world...

That's Ch 24. Isaiah moves us on out now, from *this* nation or *that* nation & speaks of the day when the Lord will pour out His wrath upon *every* nation during what Jesus called the Great Tribulation. The final 7 yr period of human history (we deduce from the book of Daniel) in which God will turn His attention back to the nation of Israel just prior to the return & reign of Christ upon the earth. The 1st 3 ½ yrs of this time will seem incredible. A pseudo peace in the middle east, a time of global prosperity under the leadership of one man. But 3 ½ yrs into his reign, he will go into the temple that's to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. He will declare himself to *be* God, demand to be worshiped *as* God & that will trigger a series of events leading to devastation & tribulation upon the earth such as the world (Jesus said) has *never* seen, nor will *ever* see again.

Chapter 24

Vs 1-3

One of the 1st things Isaiah draws our attention to w/regard to the outpouring of God's wrath upon the earth is the universal, inescapable nature of it. "Behold, the Lord makes *the earth* empty & makes it waste." & Isaiah makes it clear, in no uncertain terms that position, power, wealth... none of these things will offer any protection against the wrath of God. The people, the priests, the master, the servant, the maid, the mistress, the creditor the debtor, the buyer the seller, there are no exceptions...

God is going to devastate the earth! When the Great Tribulation is taking place on the earth, when 40, 50, 60lb hailstones are pummeling the planet, no one is going to care who makes the most money, who lives in the biggest house or who has the nicest car, everyone will be equally distressed...

They'll eventually come to a place where they're praying for death rather than be subjected to what's happening & death will flee from them! God won't allow them to die on their terms, only on His. John tells us in the book of Rev Ch 9, *"In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them."*⁶

But that's a little way into the Tribulation. Initially, death will come to mankind in a manner this world has never seen. Billions will die. War will break out, rioting, looting & shooting will break out, famine, pestilence & disease will sweep through various regions killing millions... *By the time the 4th seal is broken in the book of Rev, ¼ of the earth's population is destroyed. You're looking at the death of approximately 2 billion people if it were to happen today! – A little later when the 6th trumpet sounds, God releases the 4 angels bound at the great river Euphrates & they kill another 1/3 of mankind...* Which brings the death count to over ½ the earth's population already! Over 4 billion people will die & we haven't even included the bowl judgments, the cataclysmic upheavals & cosmic disturbances...

That's why Isaiah says, "The Lord makes the earth empty! Makes it waste & distorts its surface!" Man will be scattered, they'll become like an endangered species...

& (Quick side note). *This is another reason we hold to a pretribulation rapture position. Because the bible is clear that God hasn't appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord J.C. (1 Thessalonica 5:9).*

Some think that God will preserve the church *through* the tribulation. But Isaiah makes it clear, there are *no* exceptions, these judgments are universal in their scope. So, it makes more sense that God would remove His redeemed prior to the outpouring of His wrath. As Jesus said, *Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape (not endure) *all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*"⁷*

Who might that be who will be found worthy & escape? Those who are found in Christ. Those whom God has redeemed & covered in His righteousness. (& We could develop the reality of the rapture further, but for time's sake, we'll leave it at that).

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Re 9:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 21:36]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 4-6

*This is the “why” behind what’s going to happen. Why does the earth mourn? Why does the world languish? Why has the curse devoured the earth & left so few people to inhabit it? – Because they (that is the inhabitants of the earth) have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances (the rules/regulations) & broken the everlasting covenant.

Translation? Because people refuse to submit *to* God & insist on rebelling *against* God... Listen, even apart from the law, people sinned w/out the law. Meaning that man has always known it’s wrong to lie, it’s wrong to steal, it’s wrong to murder. But people do these things anyway. They “defile” the earth & its inhabitants. They “transgress” the laws. That is, they cross the line that God has established. People don’t respect the word of God, the principles/precepts that He’s established for His creation. They want to live by the code: “If it feels good, do it!”

If you want to have premarital or extra marital sex, go for it! If you want to be w/someone of the same gender, have at it! If it’s inconvenient to have a child, get an abortion! **If you need to lie or sleep your way to the top, the end will justify the means! Feel free to get yourself drunk or high if it’ll make you feel better or help you cope w/whatever your situation may be. There’s simply no regard for the word of God!**

In fact (God says) they have “changed” the ordinance. It’s not even that we no longer respect them, we’ve changed them altogether. There was a time when all the things I just mentioned were essentially universally recognized as wrong. People just knew, homosexuality is wrong, promiscuity is wrong, drug abuse is wrong lying/cheating, wrong. Now, not only do people refuse to concede that these things are wrong, they’re *celebrated!* – **The Bible is clear that God hates divorce, but people have convinced themselves that they’re the exception. “No, my spouse hasn’t cheated on me, I can’t really create a genuine case biblically, but I’m out...” We’ve changed the ordinances, made things lighter than they are. It ripens the earth for judgment.** – But even beyond that, every time a pastor or preacher soft-peddles the gospel or the truth of God’s word for fear of offense. Every time a politician twists the Scriptures to rise in the opinion polls, every time a counselor wrenches the context of God’s word to make it fit some weird psychological theory, that’s changing the ordinance. & God is in the business of holding people accountable for what they say/do. *

The breaking of the covenant is bringing the curse... So all these people who preach that we’re destroying the earth, the best thing they could do for the earth is give their life to J.C. It’s the sin/wickedness of man that will bring destruction upon the earth...

“The inhabitants of the earth are burned, & few men are left.” Remember the promise that God made to Noah? God told Noah He would never flood the earth again. What’s the coming judgment? Fire. You might write it down so you can look it up later, 2 Pet 3:6-7.

The continuity of scripture is incredible. I’d remind you that the Bible isn’t a book that some guy just sat down and penned out. It’s 66 separate writings, penned by 40 different human instruments over the course of about 1500 yrs by men, some of whom spoke different languages, lived in different places... Yet through the revelation & inspiration of the Holy Spirit all speak in agreement. There’s no other writing like the one you hold in your hands anywhere on the face of the earth...

Vs 7-13

Joy will be gone, only judgment will remain. **Again, I remind of the urgency of the message of the gospel. “Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand.” Believe on the Lord J.C. & be saved... Jesus gave His life on the cross of Calvary to spare you this brutality, to give you life eternally. God’s judgment upon the earth will be like the shaking of an olive tree.** When the olives are ripe, they shake the tree violently to bring down all the berries, only a very few remain. Like grapevines stripped of everything. That’s what the earth will be like at the end of the Tribulation, very few people left... most will die in their sin. (Matt 24:21-22)

Some people have deceived themselves into thinking that if what guys like me say is really true, then when it comes they’ll get serious about Jesus. Listen, if you can’t live for Christ *now* (when it’s comparatively easy), you certainly won’t be able to *then* when it’ll cost you everything...

Vs 14-16

Of those who do come to know the Lord during this time, they’ll recognize the righteousness of God’s judgment & praise Him, even in the midst of it as His majesty & glory is displayed in dealing w/the wicked in righteousness.

Vs 17-18

To keep it short & simple; this is the inescapable nature of God’s judgment. If you flee from the fear, you’ll fall into the pit, if you come out of the pit, you’ll be caught in the snare.

We might say that the judgment of God has plenty of “contingencies” (if you’ll allow me) to catch everyone... The only escape from the judgment of God is to satisfy it. – The only place God’s judgment can be (& has been) satisfied was at the cross.

So, God is after you. Right now, He pursues you because He wants you to receive His grace/mercy. But if you don't stop running & receive it, His judgment will catch up to you. You can't outrun Him, it's not a matter of "if" He catches you, only when... & that's up to you.

Vs 19-20

People have experience major localized earthquakes (they're devastating). But Rev 16:18 tells us that an earthquake is coming unlike this world has ever seen. Isaiah says the entire earth will reel to & fro... unparalleled cataclysmic upheavals.

Vs 21-23

Vs 21 brings into focus the judgment that takes place just prior to the millennial reign. The "host of exalted ones" is a reference to fallen angels/Satan himself. Notice he distinguishes the kings of the earth from them... They'll all be gathered & thrown into the pit, shut up in prison for 1,000 yrs.

At the end of the 1,000 yrs, Satan & his demons will be released once more. Why? Because those born during the millennial kingdom won't really have had the opportunity to exercise their free will in serving the Lord.

So God will release them, they will go about deceiving the nations, they will set out to destroy the Lord surrounding the city of Jerusalem, fire will fall from heaven & they'll all be devoured. Then the devil will be cast into the lake of fire & the Great White throne judgment will ensue & all whose names aren't found written in the book will be cast into the lake of fire (Vs 22 "...they will be punished").

Then a new heaven, a new earth... a new Jerusalem. No need for the sun or the moon, for the glory God will illuminate it. This is what awaits you who believe in J.C. Judgment for those who refuse Him, mercy to those who receive Him... so if you haven't, receive Him today.

Prayer Points:

God, we need now more than ever the power of Your Holy Spirit. God, You've called us to a time such as this. Wake us up, strengthen us to sound the alarm, to call others to repentance, to share the truth in love, that many might be saved...

If that's you, don't delay, don't put it off another day. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. If God's knocking on the door of your heart, open it, don't reject Jesus, receive Him, bow in humility before Him & surrender.