

God Reigns
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Isaiah 23:8-17

Illustration (on a small scale): I discovered they tore down my first house. Let's think more globally. Name some companies you thought would never go away. What devices or technology went away in our lifetime? What about governmental regimes; which ones thought they were invincible and are now gone?

What in the world is going on in our world? Have you asked that lately?

What in the world is going to happen to our world? How about that one?

When I first read this assigned passage in our curriculum I thought it was a bit obscure. However, the more I reflected on it in the context of our current world situation, I found its message to be very appropriate. Global pandemic, recession, racial strife, bitter political divisions, a major election, a sudden Supreme Court opening just weeks before that election – what in the world is going on in our world?

This passage reminds us that God is sovereign. Institutions and inventions come and go, nations and leaders come and go, but God reigns over it all. That word “reigns” means God doesn't just survive in the midst of great change; God **CONTROLS** the changes.

Big Idea: God controls the rise and fall of nations and powers. No matter how shocking world events may seem, we can have peace because God reigns.

- That's a truth any Bible-believing follower of Christ should cling to.
- We know that the world at large doesn't think God is in charge.
- Why would we expect pagans to think otherwise? What about believers?

- Unfortunately, many who claim God as Father and Christ as Lord may not act like we really believe God is sovereignly in control of our world.
- Some subconsciously think God is just in charge of the church.
- R.C. Sproul said, *“Most Christians salute the sovereignty of God but believe in the sovereignty of man.”ⁱ*
- Nations believing arrogantly that they were invincible has been going on since the beginning. It was certainly the problem in Isaiah’s day.
- Isaiah chapters 13-23 revealed God’s judgment on pagan nations around Israel and Judah. In this chapter the focus is on the city of Tyre.
- “Tyre [was] a major port for trade. As a result, it became an extremely wealthy place with a great deal of influence, and its people became known as skilled seafarers. The cities of Tyre and Sidon were also known for the worship of the ancient near eastern god Baal.”ⁱⁱ
- “In 23:1-7, Isaiah predicted the fall of Tyre and the loss of its wealth. This would have been astounding to Isaiah’s audience. Tyre had been inhabited and wealthy for a long period of time. Its particular placement on an island with large fortifications, a sizable population, and a fleet of ships made it appear to be a permanent fixture.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- In 21st century America we might compare it to New York City.
- Imagine a prophet predicting that New York City would soon be in ruins.
- Imagine the impact that would cause beyond just NYC. The implications for international trade and the world economy would be huge.
- Are you familiar with the term “too big to fail?” We heard it a lot during the banking collapse of 2008-2009. The concept is that some financial institutions are so intertwined with the world economy, the government can’t allow them to fail for fear of bringing down the whole thing.
- In that time Tyre was a center of trade, wealth, and power of that magnitude and no one could imagine it ever being destroyed. They thought they were “too big to fail” yet, that’s just what Isaiah prophesied.

- History would prove Isaiah's words to be true. Tyre was besieged several times in its history and finally Alexander the Great reduced it to rubble.
- In verse eight, Isaiah posed the question: *"Who has brought this disaster on Tyre, that great creator of kingdoms?"*^{iv} Then in verse nine he not only answered his rhetorical question of "who" but gave the reason "why:" *"The Lord of Heaven's Armies has done it to destroy your pride and bring low all earth's nobility."*^v
- Let's read the rest of Isaiah's prophecy of what would happen to Tyre.

Isaiah 23:11–18 (NLT)

¹¹ The Lord held out his hand over the sea and shook the kingdoms of the earth. He has spoken out against Phoenicia, ordering that her fortresses be destroyed. ¹² He says, "Never again will you rejoice, O daughter of Sidon, for you have been crushed. Even if you flee to Cyprus, you will find no rest." ¹³ Look at the land of Babylonia—the people of that land are gone! The Assyrians have handed Babylon over to the wild animals of the desert. They have built siege ramps against its walls, torn down its palaces, and turned it to a heap of rubble. ¹⁴ Wail, you ships of Tarshish, for your harbor is destroyed! ¹⁵ For seventy years, the length of a king's life, Tyre will be forgotten.

- The words of verse eleven remind us of the creation account in Genesis 1 and God's parting the Red Sea in Exodus 14. The Phoenicians thought they were masters of the sea. God is the REAL Master of the sea.
- The reference to Babylonia and the Assyrians wasn't a history lesson but a prophecy and prediction. "Assyria invaded Tyre in 705 B.C. and again in 681–669 B.C. This message is astounding, however, because it prophesies that the Chaldeans (Babylonians), not yet a world power, would destroy Tyre. They did so in 572 B.C., a century after Isaiah made this prophecy."^{vi}
- We don't know if Tyre was forgotten for seventy actual years or if that was symbolic "of a perfect period of time." Either way, they were forgotten.
- This prophecy portrayed Tyre as a young virgin who was once beautiful and pure but would one day be defiled and ruined.

After the judgment ended she (Tyre) would be like a prostitute that had lost her attractiveness and had so sing songs to try to get attention. (Look at verse 15)

But then the city will come back to life as in the song about the prostitute: ¹⁶ Take a harp and walk the streets, you forgotten harlot. Make sweet melody and sing your songs so you will be remembered again. ¹⁷ Yes, after seventy years the Lord will revive Tyre. But she will be no different than she was before. She will again be a prostitute to all kingdoms around the world. ¹⁸ But in the end her profits will be given to the Lord. Her wealth will not be hoarded but will provide good food and fine clothing for the Lord's priests.

- After God's judgment, Tyre would struggle for any attention.
- Tyre would do business again but not like it once did. When the city reopened for business, her profits would be "given to the Lord."
- Let's circle back to the real point of this prophecy.
- The problem with Tyre was the problem of pride. The Phoenicians failed to recognize the source of their success was the LORD of hosts (Yahweh.)
- In Tom Wolfe's book, "The Bonfire of the Vanities," the primary character Wall Street bond trader Sherman McCoy dubbed himself as a "Master of The Universe." He believed he controlled "his" Wall Street universe.^{vii}
- If you read the book or saw the movie you know how that worked out!
- No doubt the business leaders in Tyre thought they were "masters" of their universe. They thought they created it and no one could take them down!
- They worshipped false idols, but their real idol was in the mirror.
- We live in a society that is fueled by that kind of pride and arrogance.
- God will deal with ungodly nations and He sent Isaiah to remind Tyre that HE is the real Creator and King – the true "Master of the universe."

So, What's the Takeaway?

- God controls the rise and fall of nations and powers.

- No matter how shocking world events may seem, we can have peace because God reigns.
- How do we know God is in control of the nations? History proves it. Where are Nero, Hitler, and Stalin? They're all dust while the church of Jesus Christ marches on "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."^{viii}
- What about our country? Do we tend to think our nation is "too big to fail" or that God won't judge the United States? God not only judged the pagan nations in the Old Testament, He also brought judgment on Israel for her rebellion. We all need to pray daily for God to have mercy on our country for its pride and arrogance in ignoring Him as the Sovereign Lord.
- As we said, most people totally disregard God's control of the universe.
- Pagans will be pagans and we should pray for their salvation.
- What about those of us who trust in Christ as Savior and Lord?
- We look at the chaos in our world, smile at each other, and say, "*God is still on His throne.*" The words are true but do we really believe them?
- We say we believe God is in control of everything, but do we catch ourselves doubting that when the world seems to be out of control?
- Are we relying on the government, the economists, or the scientists to fix things? Do we think the right outcome of the election or a majority on the Supreme Court will make things better?
- Even worse, in the back of our minds do we think we can be clever enough, earn enough, or invest enough to assure our security?
- Maybe we secretly think we are "masters" of our own little universe.
- Last week we asked: Do we say we trust God then start working on our backup plans because we don't really believe He will keep His promises?
- I'm not saying we shouldn't do our part. We SHOULD be wise and informed citizens that participate in the process of democracy. We SHOULD work hard and be wise stewards of what God has provided.

- What we MUST NOT do is give into the fear that God won't come through.
- As we said last week, we know God keeps His promises because of our own experience. He's been with us through "fire and flood." (Is. 43:2)
- Warren Wiersbe gives us great encouragement with these words: "...no matter how frightening the national or international situation may become, God's children can have peace because they know Almighty God is on His throne. The nations may rage and plot against God, but "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh" (Ps. 2:4, NKJV). When the Lord of heaven and earth is your Father, and you gladly wear Christ's yoke, you have nothing to fear (Matt. 11:25–30). Therefore, be comforted!^{ix}
- God reigns! Let's don't just say it, let's really believe it and thank Him for it.

ⁱ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/sovereignty-of-god>

ⁱⁱ Explore The Bible Leaders Guide – Lifeway 2020

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Is 23:8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Is 23:9). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{vi} Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 151863-151865). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

^{vii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bonfire_of_the_Vanities

^{viii} The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). (Mt 16:18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{ix} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Comforted* (p. 58). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.