

## The Biblical Cities Of Tyre And Sidon

Gary A. Byers

The names Tyre and Sidon were famous in the ancient Near East. They are also important cities in the Old and New Testaments. Both are now located in Lebanon, with Tyre 20 mi south of Sidon and only 12 mi north of the Israel-Lebanon border. Today each is just a shadow of their former selves.

Sidon, called Saida today (Arabic for "fishing"), was named after the firstborn son of Canaan (Gn 10:15) and probably settled by his descendants. The northern border of ancient Canaan extended to Sidon (Gn 10:19). Later, Jacob spoke of it as the boundary of Zebulun (Gn 49:13) and Joshua included it as part of the land promised to Israel (Jos 13:6). Sidon was included in the inheritance of Asher, on its northern boundary (Jos 19:28), but it was not taken by that tribe in conquest (Jgs 1:31, 3:3). Settled from the beginning as a port city, Sidon was built on a promontory with a nearby offshore island that sheltered the harbor from storms.

Twenty mi south of Sidon, in the middle of a coastal plain, Tyre (called Sour in Arabic today) was constructed on a rock island a few hundred yards out into the Mediterranean (Ward 1997:247). In fact, the city took its name from this rock island. Tyre comes from the Semetic *sr* (Hebrew *Sor*, Arabic *Sur*, Babylonian *Surru*, Egyptian

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,) meaning rock.

Located at the foot of some of the Lebanese mountain's southwestern ridges and near the gorge of the ancient Leontes River (the modern Litani), the rich and well-watered plain became the fortified island's primary source of food, water, wood and other living essentials. Apparently the island was fortified first and called Tyre, while the coastal city directly opposite was settled later. It was originally called Ushu in cuneiform texts (Ward 1997:247) and later Palaetyrus ("old Tyre") in Greek texts (Jidejian 1996:19).

### The Canaanites

Historical and archaeological evidence indicate both cities were settled by the early second millennium BC and were important seaports long before the Israelites settled in Canaan. Yet, while Sidon was mentioned many times during the Canaanite and early Israelite periods in the Bible, Tyre first appeared as part of Asher's western boundary (Jos 19:29). Specifically called a "fortified city" in this passage, it was noted as a significant landmark. Tyre doe...

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