

Who were the Zidonians in the Bible?

Zidon, also called Sidon, was the capital city of Phoenicia, located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea approximately 20 miles north of its sister city, Tyre. Today, Zidon is called Saida (or Sayda) and remains a port city in Lebanon. Tyre and Sidon (Zidon) are often mentioned together in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament (Isaiah 23; Jeremiah 27:3; 47:4; Matthew 11:22; 15:21). Although Tyre appears to have been the more prominent city, the term Zidonians was sometimes used to refer to all Phoenicians (Joshua 13:6; Judges 18:7).

The city of Zidon or Sidon is thought to have been founded by Canaan's son Sidon (Genesis 10:15); at any rate, Sidon's descendants settled in that area, and the city of Zidon is quite ancient. Zidon was well-known as a center of commerce and for its artisans. Solomon made arrangements with King Hiram of Tyre to procure lumber for the building of the temple, saying, "Give orders that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me. My men will work with yours, and I will pay you for your men whatever wages you set. You know that we have no one so skilled in felling timber as the Sidonians" (1 Kings 5:6; cf. 1 Chronicles 22:4). The Zidonians were also renowned as men of the sea and capable sailors (see 1 Kings 9:27 and Ezekiel 27:8).

The land containing the city of Zidon was given to the tribe of Asher as their inheritance from the Lord (Joshua 19:24-31). Zidon was thus a part of Canaan that the Israelites were commanded to overthrow, but they did not (Judges 1:31-32). Soon, the Zidonians were oppressing the Israelites in the Promised Land (see Judges 10:12).

The ancient Zidonians were wicked idolators. Their god was Baal, and their goddess was Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:33), and because Israel failed to completely cast the Zidonians

out of the land God gave them, the idol worship continued and became a problem for the Israelites. King Solomon unwisely married Zidonians (1 Kings 11:1), and his reign was corrupted by Zidonian idolatry (1 Kings 11:5). Later, the infamous King Ahab of Israel married Jezebel, a daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians (1 Kings 16:31). Soon, Baal worship was rampant in Israel.

Although the Bible does not give us many details about Zidon, other historical documents tell us that Zidon seems to have flourished during the Persian domination, even surpassing Tyre in prominence. However, around 351 BC, Zidon's King Tennes betrayed the city to the king of the Persians, Ochus. When the Zidonians realized destruction was imminent, they shut themselves and their families into their own homes and set fire to them. It is thought that forty thousand Zidonians died in those fires.

Eventually, Zidon emerged from the ashes and once again began to flourish. Zidon appears to have been the northernmost city to which Christ traveled during His time on earth (Matthew 15:21). On Paul's voyage to Rome as a prisoner, the ship made a stop at Zidon, where Paul had friends (Acts 27:3). Jesus mentioned Zidon in reference to its reputation of wickedness. Jesus pronounced woe on unrepentant Jewish cities in which He'd done most of His miracles, saying that, had He done those works in Tyre and Zidon, the people there would have repented. Judgment would be more bearable for the wicked towns of Tyre and Zidon, who did not know Christ, than for the people who rejected Jesus outright (Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 10:12-16).

Many Old Testament prophecies record God's pronouncement of judgment on Tyre and Zidon (Isaiah 23; Jeremiah 25; 27; 47; Ezekiel 26-28; Joel 3; Amos 1:9-10; Zechariah 9:1-4). God's judgment is righteous (Psalm 9:4; 50:6). Even though God is the Judge, He brings

redemption for those who repent and put their faith in Him. The prophet Elijah was fed by a widow woman in the area of Zidon (1 Kings 17:9), a fact that Jesus points out to the Jews in Nazareth (Luke 4:26). Inhabitants of Zidon were some of the early followers of Jesus (Mark 3:8; Luke 6:17), and Jesus interacted with a Canaanite woman from the region of Zidon, healing her daughter and commending her faith (Matthew 15:21-28). Sinners were drawn to Jesus then, and they are still drawn to Him by the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit today (John 6:44; 16:8-11). Though God's righteous judgment is coming (Romans 1:18-32; 2 Peter 3:8-10), God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is still available to all (John 3:16-18; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).