



THE COMING END OF THE EARTH'S WATER WORLD – PART 2



We closed Part I of this series with the statement that Bible prophecy speaks of a future time where the world will be deeply preoccupied with trade and commercialism, and that the “trading ship” played an irreplaceable facilitating role.

By Wilfred Hahn

The world of ocean-going cargo ships may seem mundane ... so slow and ancient. Therefore, it may seem reasonable to assume that things were always as they are today, especially as it applies to trans-oceanic shipping—the second oldest form of transport in world history. That perception couldn't be farther from the truth.

Shipping has been a hotbed of activity and change. In fact, global shipping has been completely transformed over the last six decades. It represents another one of those fast-moving, exponential time pieces of the last days that mark the “season” of our times.

Endtime Shipping Trends

The volume of marine shipping has exploded over past decades, at least doubling every decade since 1945 (at least, up to the point that the Global Financial Crisis struck). Yes, this is a characteristic of a fast-globalizing world. But the globalization of the world's economies couldn't have happened so quickly, if it weren't for the ad-

vancements of the 20th century taking place in marine cargo shipping.

Here, several crucial developments have occurred. For one, the size and capacity of container of ships has become larger ... now more than 25 times the capacity of ships in the early 1950s. As well, computerization has greatly improved the efficiency of shipping. But by far the greatest development has been containerization. It is a trend that has revolutionized cargo shipping.

As recently as 60 years ago, docks would load ships with nets dangling from the end of a grapping hook, and lashing items one by one into the ship's hold. It was a sweaty business relying upon heavy labor (stevedores). It could take as much as two weeks to unload a ship. The shipping of merchandise around the world was slow, cumbersome and relatively expensive. But that world has disappeared.

The shirtless longshoremen of Singapore are long gone. Shipping rates are commoditized, quoted over exchanges. Shipping ports are characterized by high-rise gantry

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cranes that move containers between trucks and ship deck. These containers, for the most part, are standardized “boxes” that are 20 or 40 feet long (called TEUs, for “twenty-foot equivalent units”). You see them stacked on truck trailers, railcars and ships. This form of cargo shipping was invented only recently—in the 1950s.

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Over 200 million containers are now moved between ports each year. The world's container fleets have continued to increase despite slowing world economic growth. Over the past six decades, world shipping cargo volumes have boomed, growing two to three times faster than world economic growth. Nations are now more linked and unified through trade than ever before in world history.

Why are these trends significant? It aligns with the type of conditions that the Bible describes in the end times. More than ever before, conditions in world trade fit the description of the endtime events depicted in Revelation 18, where ship captains are shown as the cornerstone of a worldwide trading colossus.

Yes, despite the modernity of our age, over 90% of world trade is still carried in the hulls and on the decks of ships—the modern-day world equivalent of the “ships of Tarshish.” No matter the advancements of modern transportation (motorized



trucks, trains, and aircraft), ships are still the backbone of world commerce.

What's Shaping Up for the Future?

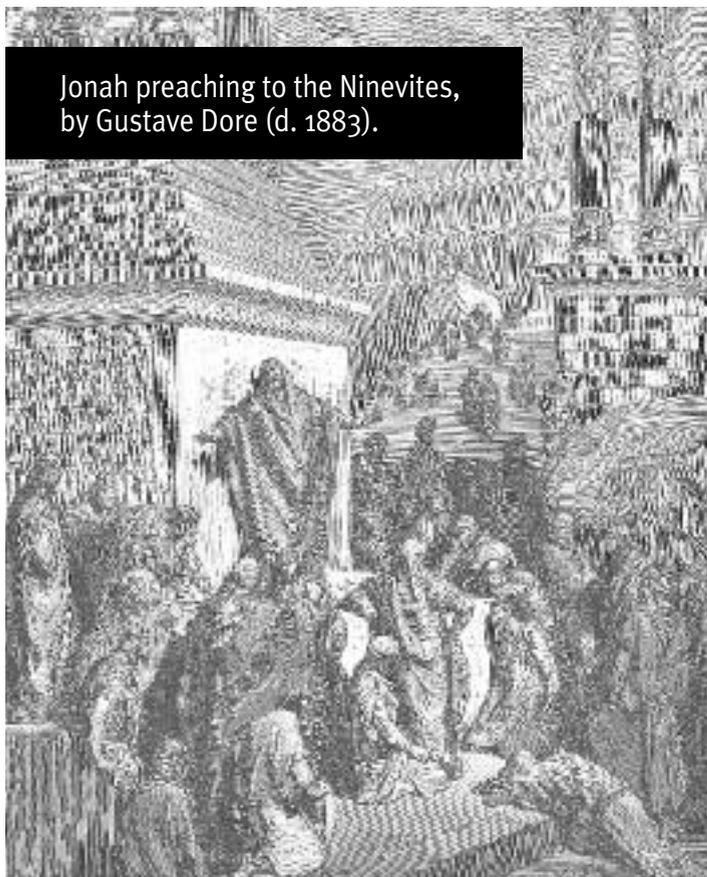
The Bible says that the spirit of Tyre, that ancient city whose name was synonymous with Tarshish, shipping, trade and idolatry, will again re-appear on the world stage. “At the end of seventy years, the LORD will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire as a prostitute and will ply her trade with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth” (Isaiah 23:17). Tyre has never re-emerged upon the world scene in any literal sense.

Likely, the Bible is referring to the spirit behind Tyre—a greed-infused emphasis upon materialism and commerce as the *raison d'être* for mankind's existence. In fact, Ezekiel identifies this very spirit as being Satan himself (see Ezekiel 28:12-19). Assuming that this interpretation is correct, we can anticipate that the “spirit of Tyre” will be a mark of the endtime world. The very same spirit is clearly identified in Reve-



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Jonah preaching to the Ninevites,
by Gustave Dore (d. 1883).



lation 18, which describes a worldwide colossus dependent upon trading ships.

Is that time in the near future? Based on the evidence of trends of just this past half century—even just the past few decades—we would be unwise to not recognize the signs of the times. Even shipping trends cry out their message.

It would not be sensationalist to conclude that the time described in Revelation 18 is already in clear view. As we have shown, world trading activity has literally boomed unlike any other period ever before in history. And, moreover, the world trading system is as dependent as ever upon ships,

despite the emergence of other advanced forms of transport.

Rocking the Boat

A large part—a third—of the world's trade network is destroyed at the time of the second trumpet (Revelations 8:9). Later, the entire trading system—at least its central hub, Babylon the Great—is destroyed in one hour.

That same time is depicted in this Old Testament prophecy:

“The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled), for all the cedars of Lebanon, tall and lofty, and all the oaks of Bashan, for all the towering mountains and all the high hills, for every lofty tower and every fortified wall, for every trading ship (ship of Tarshish) and every stately vessel. The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, and the idols will totally disappear” (Isaiah 2:12-18).

Clearly, “every trading ship” will be affected. But before all this can happen, a worldwide trading and shipping colossus must emerge. And, we see that happening before our very eyes today.

Points to Ponder

Why does the Bible prophesy that Babylon the Great—an entity that is identified as being intensely trade-oriented—will come to destruction? Is there something inherently sinful about engaging in trade or shipping? No. It is the spirit of Tyre behind it that God finds offensive. It speaks of an earthbound, materialistic, greedy, idola-

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trous, self-determined, manmade existence apart from God.

While ships are specifically identified as playing a role in endtime prophecy, they also provide some rich object lessons for Christians. As someone once wrote: “A Christian is to the world as is a ship to the water. Woe to the ship if the water should get inside of it.”

A similar lesson is found in the story of Jonah. Like him, we have all been given a mission greater or smaller. Yet, the call of the world can seem more alluring. We might then choose the ship that leads to the starry lights of Tarshish (and storms)—the commercial culture of our time that seems so prosperous and serves the world's elites.

Jonah jumped on a ship to Tarshish, traveling in the opposite direction from Nineveh. He chose personal indulgence over the path of obedience. However, his choice led to insecurity, volatility and danger. It is perhaps for a similar reason that many of our vessels face gale winds in our lives. Though children of God, we may be traveling in the wrong direction and on the wrong ship.

It is better to be about the Lord's business and to sail in the path He has set before us. Events in our lives may not transpire in the way that we might anticipate. We may be exposed to the sweltering heat of the desert, as was Jonah. But, at least we have the privilege of participating in God's cosmic plans and entering His eternal kingdom.

In Jonah's case, his mission couldn't have been more important. The world's second



great empire, Assyria, was being warned. As it turned out, Jonah's mission deferred God's final judgment upon this nation for some time. Why? They listened to Jonah's warnings, repented and received a reprieve.

Unfortunately, before long, Nineveh returned to its former ways ... and much worse. The result? This great kingdom disappeared from the world stage virtually overnight, the only one of the Old Testament nation powers that no longer exists today.

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Someday, there will be no more seas (Revelation 21:1). There will also be no more temptation and the entreaties and deceptions of Mammon, as the New Jerusalem will descend, and His servants will be present with Him forever. (MC)