

# ISAIAH

## Chapter 23

### *A Prophecy About Tyre*

**An oracle concerning Tyre: Wail, O ships of Tarshish! For Tyre is destroyed and left without house or harbor. From the land of Cyprus word has come to them. <sup>2</sup> Be silent, you people of the island and you merchants of Sidon, whom the seafarers have enriched. <sup>3</sup> On the great waters came the grain of the Shihor; the harvest of the Nile was the revenue of Tyre, and she became the marketplace of the nations. <sup>4</sup> Be ashamed, O Sidon, and you, O fortress of the sea, for the sea has spoken: “I have neither been in labor nor given birth; I have neither reared sons nor brought up daughters.” <sup>5</sup> When word comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish at the report from Tyre. <sup>6</sup> Cross over to Tarshish; wail, you people of the island. <sup>7</sup> Is this your city of revelry, the old, old city, whose feet have taken her to settle in far-off lands? <sup>8</sup> Who planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are renowned in the earth? <sup>9</sup> The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth. <sup>10</sup> Till your land as along the Nile, O Daughter of Tarshish, for you no longer have a harbor. <sup>11</sup> The LORD has stretched out his hand over the sea and made its kingdoms tremble. He has given an order concerning Phoenicia that her fortresses be destroyed. <sup>12</sup> He said, “No more of your reveling, O Virgin Daughter of Sidon, now crushed! “Up, cross over to Cyprus even there you will find no rest.” <sup>13</sup> Look at the land of the Babylonians, this people that is now of no account! The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures; they raised up their siege towers, they stripped its fortresses bare and turned it into a ruin. <sup>14</sup> Wail, you ships of Tarshish; your fortress is destroyed! <sup>15</sup> At that time Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the span of a king’s life. But at the end of these seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute: <sup>16</sup> “Take up a harp, walk through the city, O prostitute forgotten; play the harp well, sing many a song, so that you will be remembered.” <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Yet her profit and her earnings will be set apart for the LORD; they will not be stored up or hoarded. Her profits will go to those who live before the LORD, for abundant food and fine clothes.**

**23:1–18** See Eze 26:1–28:19; Am 1:9–10. (CSB)

**23:1, 4** Isaiah uses personification to dramatize the suffering of the people in these regions. (TLSB)

**23:1** oracle. See note on 13:1. (CSB)

Isaiah uses personification to dramatize the suffering of the people in these regions. (TLSB)

The Lord directed the tenth and final oracle in this series against Tyre. With this final oracle, the cycle is complete. The series began with an oracle against Babylon, which represented the military and governmental power of the world. Tyre, the capital of ancient Phoenicia, represented the commercial and economic power of the world. The two oracles act as appropriate bookends for these oracles announcing God's judgment upon the powers of the world. In addition, the other oracles concentrated on the neighbors of God's people. But this oracle stretches our attention beyond the nation's surrounding Judah. Tyre certainly was a neighbor to the north and west, but together with Sidon and the other Phoenician colonies, it was a commercial giant that dominated the Mediterranean world before the time of the Greeks and Romans. The Lord's agenda includes people far beyond the small strip of land we call Palestine. (PBC)

The oracle takes on additional meaning if we briefly consider Tyre and the Phoenicians. Tyre was an ancient Mediterranean coastal city northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Sidon, also a Phoenician city, was further north on the coast of the Mediterranean. Both cities had excellent harbors from which to launch their ships. Their trading ventures took their ships throughout the Mediterranean to the coasts of Africa, India and even Britain. They established colonies, perhaps the most notable of which was Carthage in northern Africa. Their influence stretched to Egypt, Cyprus, and Tarrhish, which we commonly believe to be modern Spain. (PBC)

Tyre was built on an island and therefore was difficult for any land-based army to conquer. Yet after a 13 year siege by Nebuchadnezzar, the city at least recognized the authority of the Babylonians. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great laid siege to the island fortress for seven months and captured it by building a mole, a massive stone extension, from the mainland to the fortress. Yet Alexander did not destroy the city, and it remained a significant commercial center through the Crusades. The Crusaders conquered it in AD 1125, but the city was not destroyed until about 150 years later when the fortifications were demolished. Today, Tyre is nothing but a small village. (PBC)

Remember that Isaiah wrote about seven hundred years before Christ, which means these words were written over one hundred years before the siege of Nebuchadnezzar and almost four hundred years before Alexander's conquest. (PBC)

*Tyre.* The main seaport along the Phoenician coast, about 35 miles north of Mount Carmel. Part of the city was built on two rocky islands about half a mile

from the shore. King Hiram of Tyre supplied cedars and craftsmen for the temple (see 1Ki 5:8–9) and sailors for Solomon’s commercial fleet (1Ki 9:27). (CSB)

TYRE and Sidon are famous in the Scriptures and are outstanding cities. Tyre was twice taken: first by Nebuchadnezzar, and then by Alexander the Great, concerning whom Isaiah is speaking here. (Luther)

*Wail, O ships.* See v. 14. (CSB)

*ships of Tarshish.* Trading ships (see note on 2:16). (CSB)

Tarsus in Cilicia, c 5 mi from the coast, on the river Cadnos, a river that was navigable in antiquity. Tarsus played a strategic role, as its control assured the control of the Cilician ports. It lies at the opening of the passage from the central mountains, known for their mineral content. (TLSB)

Tarshish is the ocean sea. The prophet summons to wailing, as if the devastation had already been accomplished, as is his custom. The “Chittim” are the Macedonians. (Luther)

*destroyed.* Fulfilled through Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander. Nebuchadnezzar captured the mainland city in 572 B.C. (see Eze 26:7–11), but the island fortress was not taken until Alexander the Great destroyed it in 332 (cf. Eze 26:3–5). (CSB)

*Cyprus.* An island that had close ties with Tyre (see Eze 27:6). (CSB)

Designates either the island of Cyprus or the city of Kition (Roman Citium) on the southeast coast of the island. (TLSB)

**23:2, 4, 12** *Sidon.* See Eze 28:20–26, the other prominent Phoenician city, about 25 miles north of Tyre. (CSB)

C 23 mi N of Tyre on the coast of the Great Sea. According to Gn 10:15, considered the firstborn of Canaan. By the ninth century BC, due to increased Assyrian power, Sidon began to lose much of her power and prestige. By the eighth century BC, the city was clearly under the rule of the king of Tyre. This relationship continued up to Sennacherib’s campaign in 701 BC. (TLSB)

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*filled you.* Coastal cities have, in effect, been taken over by merchants from Sidon. (TLSB)

**23:2** BE SILENT – That is, they are nothing. There is no business there, and there is no noise of workers there. Tyre was an island which Alexander joined to the mainland and made into a peninsula. (Luther)

*merchants ... seafarers.* Tyre's commercial ventures affected the entire Mediterranean world (see vv. 3, 8). (CSB)

Wealthy through international commerce. (TLSB)

River or body of water in the northeast Nile Delta region; precise identification is uncertain. (TLSB)

**23:3** *Shihor.* Probably the easternmost branch of the Nile (see Jer 2:18). (CSB)

Shihor was the mouth of the Nile in Egypt adjacent to Judea. (Luther)

*harvest of the Nile.* See 19:7 and note. (CSB)

MARKETPLACE OF THE NATIONS – Trade center, market. Here the prophet reproves the greed and pride in good times, which are often followed by many other kinds of vices. Tyre is here called the sea and the strength of the sea; for it was a thoroughly fortified city on the seacoast, and its commerce was on the sea. (Luther)

Wealthy through international commerce. (TLSB)

**23:4** *fortress of the sea.* Tyre (see note on v. 1). (CSB)

The sea, personified mother of Sidon, laments the disappearance of ships as though she had never given birth to them. (TLSB)

*labor ... birth.* Contrast 54:1. (CSB)

A city is called woman and mother because she has many children, that is, citizens, and daily increases their number. But Tyre complains that she is without people and bereft of citizens. (Luther)

I HAVE NEITHER REARED SONS – That is, “I will no longer be a city, and therefore you, O Sidon, will not be able to be enriched by me. And you and Egypt, who rejoiced with me, will grieve with me.” (Luther)

ANGUISH – Relationship between Egypt and Tyre goes back at least to 1699 BC. Their close relationship was shown during the reign of Ethbaal (940-

908 BC), when the artificial southern port was built and named the Egyptian Port. (TLSB)

**23:6** *Tarshish*. Perhaps Tartessus in Spain (see Jnh 1:3 and note), or an island in the western Mediterranean, or a site on the coast of North Africa. (CSB)

Summary statement of vv 1-5. The focus shifts to traveling west and north for security. The verse is addressed to the inhabitants of Tyre. The annals of Sennacherib refer to the flight of King Luli from Sidon to Cyrus (701 BC). (TLSB)

When Isaiah encouraged them to cross over to Tarshish, he was telling them to flee as far away as they could – to Spain. Centuries later, when Alexander the Great laid siege to Tyre, the Phoenicians sent their children and elderly to Carthage in north Africa for safety. Tyre, an old, old city once rich and proud and which established colonies in far-off lands. Falls and leaves her citizens without safe harbor to flee the destruction. At the news of Tyre's fall, Egypt trembles. Will she be next? (PBC)

**23:7** IS THIS YOUR CITY – Isaiah mocks at the confidence of the people of Tyre, who are proud and contemptuous of the prophets and esteemed the prophets as dregs in comparison with themselves. But, he says, when you have been deprived of kingdom and people, then they will ridicule you and say: "Is this your exultant city? Where is now your pomp?" The cause of Tyre's arrogance was its great age and the fact that it was so strongly fortified and so very rich. Trust in the flesh and pride against God in God's house are the worst. (Luther)

*revelry*. See note on 22:2. (CSB)

How contemptuously the prophet speaks of Tyre, which now sails in royal ships and whose citizens are the equal of kings and princes in wealth. This supreme wealth, he says, will be changed into extreme poverty. They will not remain nearby but will go far away to be able to find a home. Africa has inhabitants from Tyre and Sidon, and there is the same language. (Luther)

*old, old city*. Tyre was founded before 2000 B.C. (CSB)

Tyre, a most ancient and fortified city, exposed to capture, here makes her boast against the admonishing prophet and is never penitent. It is, however, the nature of the Word of God to place before us all things beyond our grasp, things impossible and clearly desperate, so that we might cast all things aside and believe in God. Is not this beyond the grasp of nature that so great and so powerful and wealthy a city should be taken? Thus by Scripture we are led to believe things that are absurd, impossible, and contrary to our reason. For this is the work of God to humble the proud and exalt the humbled, to make something great of the least and vice versa. Just so he does here with the wealthy city of Tyre. (Luther)

*feet carried her.* Commerce once allowed Tyre to have a strong international influence. (TLSB)

*settle in far-off lands.* Carthage in north Africa was a colony of Tyre. Tarshish may have been another. (CSB)

That is, those who once were like the most exalted princes are now rustics and settlers. (Luther)

**23:8–9** *planned.* See 14:24, 26–27; 25:1. (CSB)

All those things are designed to befall you by God Himself, who earlier had set similar evils in motion against His enemies, who is so powerful that He stretches His hands over the sea and confounds kingdoms. Him you should justly fear. (Luther)

**23:8** *bestower of crowns.* Tyre crowned kings in her colonies. (CSB)

Tyre's economic power gave her tremendous political influence in other nations. (TLSB)

*traders are renowned.* See Eze 28:4–5. (CSB)

**23:9** *pride of all glory.* See Eze 27:3–4. (CSB)

Tyre is an example of the Lord's worldwide plan to debase all human pride. (TLSB)

*dishonor all the honored.* The Lord will disgrace those whose honor is only from worldly things (Lk 1:52). (TLSB)

**23:10** **TILL YOUR LAND** – By reason of exceedingly great certainty he mocks at unbelieving Tyre, as if to say, “Sail on, sail on, run over your land, naked and plundered by enemies, just as the river overflows and bears nothing of the bridge or of the land with it.” (Luther)

Destruction of Tyre and Sidon set their colonies free. Tarshish, bound to being one of Tyre's trade partners, will soon be free to roam like the Nile. (TLSB)

*Daughter of Tarshish.* A personification of Tarshish and its inhabitants. (CSB)

**23:11** *stretched out his hand.* See note on 14:26–27. (CSB)

*Phoenicia.* Roughly the same as modern Lebanon. (CSB)

The region of Tyre and Sidon. (TLSB)

**23:12** *Virgin Daughter of Sidon*. See note on v. 10. (CSB)

*now crushed*. Sidon was captured by Esarhaddon in the seventh century B.C. and later by Nebuchadnezzar c. 587 (cf. Jer 25:22). (CSB)

When the Assyrians attacked Tyre, her king fled to Cyprus. (TLSB)

**23:13** *Assyrians*. Sennacherib destroyed the city of Babylon in 689 B.C. Phoenicia would look like the Babylon of that time. (CSB)

The Babylonian ruling class, which brought on the destruction of their capital as the result of rebellion against Assyrian domination. The same kind of disaster awaits Tyre. (TLSB)

The king of Assyria founded the city of Babylon and governed it. The Tigris and Euphrates watered its site, its towers and fortifications were built on the banks of streams and were accessible to ships, and yet it fell into ruin. This will happen also to you unless you repent. (Luther)

*people that was not*. Their future disappeared when the Assyrians conquered them. (TLSB)

*desert creatures*. Cf. 13:21. (CSB)

*siege towers*. See note on 2Ki 25:1. (CSB)

**23:14** See v. 1 and note. (CSB)

**23:15** *seventy years*. Also the length of the Babylonian captivity (see Jer 25:11; 29:10), and the length of time Sennacherib decreed that Babylon should remain devastated. (CSB)

Sometimes a round figure for a lifetime (Ps. 90:10). Refers to the years following Phoenicia's surrender to Sennacherib (second half of the seventh century BC). (TLSB)

SPAN OF A KING'S LIFE – The simplest explanation is that the 70 years represent a time that is uniform, like the policies established and carried out during one king's lifetime. Once the king dies, changes occur as a new ruler initiates different policies and adopts a different direction for the nation. The 70 years will be a period of time that has a minimum of changes. (PBC)

SONG OF THE PROSTITUTE – Tyre is compared to a prostitute who sings alluring songs to attract attention to herself. (TLSB)

**23:16** Cf. Pr 7:10–15. (CSB)

FORGOTTEN PROSTITUTE – Other nations had forgotten about Tyre. Now she seeks their business. (TLSB)

YOU WILL BE REMEMBERED – In the Scriptures remembrance is high praise. To be recalled is to be commended. “This do in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24–25) means “to My praise.” (Luther)

**23:17** *her hire as a prostitute.* A “prostitute” nation was one that sought to make the highest profits, regardless of the means. Self-gratification was the key (cf. Rev 17:5). (CSB)

Tyre’s commerce is compared to prostitution. She sells for pleasure with no regard to the consequences. (TLSB)

**23:18** *her wages will be holy.* God’s people will receive and use the profits of her trade. (TLSB)

*set apart for the LORD.* The earnings of a prostitute could not be given to the Lord (Dt 23:18), but the silver and gold of a city “devoted to destruction” (see note on Dt 2:34) were placed in the Lord’s treasury (see Jos 6:17, 19; cf. Mic 4:13). (CSB)

*to those.*† See note on 18:7; cf. 60:5–11; 61:6. (CSB)

Israel. (TLSB)

FOR ABUNDANT FOOD AND FINE CLOTHES – He is describing the true nature of the food and clothing of wealthy Tyre. The people of Tyre are to have food to the point of satiety and a constant supply of clothing. Now that the kingdom of Christ has come, they have made efforts to allocate and distribute all their goods for the use of the poor. They allow themselves not huge outlays and sumptuous meals but moderate ones in keeping with the needs of the body, and they distribute the rest to the poor. But this is a disease common to all the ungodly, who are unworthy to come to the aid of the needs of the poor with their goods, because a good work above all requires the initiative and dignity of a person. For not all are worthy to share with the poor; meanwhile they abuse their gifts in a spiritual and a physical way. The godly indeed, satisfied with food and clothing and their lot, bless God and come to the aid of the other brethren. Note the example in the early church, and here the prophet says that they eat to satiety and are clothed “even to old age.” In Hebrew old age is that which endures a long time, longlasting. (Luther)

**Ch 23** The Lord will lay waste Tyre and Sidon because of their pride. Lively commerce and fair trade are blessings from the Lord. But the wealth and prosperity they generate must never be treated as a source of security. With repentant faith in Jesus, who for our salvation became poor (2Co 8:9), our trade and commerce can be carried out fairly and with honor. Our heavenly Father will deal generously with us by His surpassing grace. • Lord God, grant that the wealth and prosperity You have given us might never separate us from Your love. May it be a source of blessing for all the inhabitants of the earth. Amen. (TLSB)