

# Book of Isaiah



## Chapter 23

*Theme: The burden of Tyre*

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## Chapter 23

In this chapter we come to the eleventh and last burden against the nations. A burden, as we have seen, is a judgment, and these judgments were leveled against the nations around Israel. Each one of these great nations represents or sets before us some principle, philosophy, or system which God must judge. Let me give a recapitulation of these eleven nations and what they represent.

1. Babylon represents false religions and idolatry. Idolatry in our land is covetousness, which is the overwhelming desire to have more and to give ourselves to the accumulation of the material things of the world.

2. Palestine represents true religion which has become apostate. Today you find that the same thing has happened in many churches. They go through rituals, they even repeat the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. From all outward appearances they seem to be resting upon the Bible, but in reality they deny everything that is in it. They are apostate, which means they are standing away from what they once believed.

3. Moab represents formal religion; that is, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

Many of us today could be identified with one of these three. Some of us are giving our lives to the accumulation of material things, and our eyes are filled with the things we want. We are covetous.

Some of us have been brought up in Bible-believing churches but have turned away from their teachings. Others of us go to church and follow forms, ceremonies, and rituals which are beautiful but dead as a dodo bird.

4. Damascus represents compromise. That is the position that most churches (even fundamental churches) are in today. Thank God for those churches that are standing true!

5. Ethiopia represents missions. How we need to be involved in getting out the Word of God!

6. Egypt represents the world. Israel was told to stay out of Egypt -- that is where Abraham got into trouble. And we are admonished, "Love not the world." Many of us are having trouble with the world.

7. Persia (Babylon) represents luxury. My, how most of us love luxury in our affluent society.

8. Edom represents the flesh. Many people serve the flesh today.

9. Arabia represents war. There are two groups of people in our contemporary society: the hawks and the doves. Both are of the world, and the only difference I see in them is that the peace group tells us they are for peace, but they are willing to fight for it!

10. Valley of vision, which is Jerusalem, represents not religion but politics. Some think that in politics will be found the solutions to the problems of the world.

11. Tyre represents commercialism (big business). I would say that the great sin of America today is commercialism, believing that the almighty dollar can solve all our problems. When a problem comes up, Congress votes for a little money, and people for whom it is intended never get it, of course. Every poverty program has hurt rather than helped the poor. Why? Because godless men just don't have the right solutions. The poor haven't learned that yet, because they

are also far from God. It is only the Lord Jesus Christ who has any love for the poor and really knows how to help them.

Now let us look at the burden of Tyre. Tyre and Sidon were the two great cities of the Phoenicians. Sidon was the mother city, and she was soon surpassed by her proud and rich daughter, Tyre.

The ships of the Phoenicians entered all ports of the Mediterranean Sea and even penetrated the uncharted ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules. The vessels of Phoenicia brought tin from Great Britain -- in fact, the meaning of Britannia is "the land of tin." The Phoenicians were aggressive and progressive people. Carthage, in North Africa, was settled by them. Carthage, the great enemy of Rome, was a Phoenician city, and Cyprus owed its prosperity to trading with Tyre. There were also other centers that the Phoenicians founded -- Tarshish for instance. You remember that when Jonah tried to flee from the Lord, he bought a ticket for Tarshish. Tarshish was on the southern coast of Spain. Who founded it? The Phoenicians did. It is also of interest that the Phoenicians invented the alphabet.

Hiram, king of Tyre, was one of the great friends of King David. When we get to Ezekiel 26, we are going to see a remarkable prophecy concerning Tyre, which had an exact fulfillment. God said that Tyre would be destroyed by Babylon and would be taken into captivity for seventy years just as Judah went into captivity for seventy years. The people of Tyre returned to their land, as did Israel, after the captivity and rebuilt their city on an island in the Mediterranean Sea about half a mile from the old city. God said that the ruins of the old city would be scraped (see Ezek. 26:4), and, later, Alexander the Great scraped the ancient site of Tyre to make a causeway to the island city. He was wise enough not to attempt a battle by sea, because the Phoenicians were experts with ships; so he built a causeway from the old city on the mainland to the new city on the island. I've walked down that causeway and it is filled with pieces of broken pottery. I could have filled tubs with pieces of pottery, but, of course, no one is allowed to do that. I put one little piece in my pocket, because it looked as if there was plenty to spare. Where did all the pottery and pillars and rubble come from? It came from the ruins of ancient Tyre. Alexander the Great literally scraped the surface of the old city to build his causeway, and you cannot tell where the site of the old Tyre used to be -- it's all out there in the causeway. When Alexander took the city, the prophecy of Ezekiel was fulfilled exactly as God said it would be: "And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 26:14). My friend, today there is a little Turkish town near there, but the site of ancient Tyre is still in ruins. If an atheist wants to disprove the Word of God, I suggest that he do more than stand on a street corner and blab about the fact that he doesn't believe in God. I challenge him to go over to the ancient site of Tyre and rebuild the city. However, I warn him that others have tried to do it and have failed.

In fact, there is a ready-made city, the rock-hewn city of Petra, that is all ready to be moved into. The only problem is that God said it would not be inhabited. Anyone can try to start a colony there, but he won't succeed. A German unbeliever took a group of people to Petra and tried to start a colony, but it didn't last long. You won't succeed either, friend. God said that Tyre won't be rebuilt and that Petra won't be inhabited.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Chapter 23: Isaiah sees a Panorama: Or more accurately he saw a collage of future events. Some commentators get lost trying to decide whether Isaiah sees the Assyrians' subjugation of Tyre and the rest of Phoenicia or the destruction of Tyre by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar. The former was accomplished under Sargon II beginning about 720 BC and the latter about 120 years later close to 600 BC. Actually Isaiah mentions conditions and events that can only be described as a panorama or collage of the whole of the future history of Tyre. This has caused some skeptics to assume interpolations and spurious additions which satisfy the offended minds of these critics. That kind of solution is always easy as it requires zero scholarship. All that is needed is confusion fed by doubt. For the critic it does clear up the contradictions easily so that route is taken by not a few. The reason for the confusion is that Isaiah not only mentions events in the future history of Tyre that are contemporary with his life time; (for instance the futile flight of the rulers of Tyre to Cyprus in the face of the Assyrian invasion) but he also cites events that are in the Chaldean and Persian periods as well. Tyre did not become an island city until after the destruction by the Chaldeans. Isaiah calls Tyre an isle. Alexander destroyed an island city. The Chaldeans are mentioned in this chapter as the instruments of her first destruction. Her colonies assisted in her rebuilding during the Persian Period when the second commonwealth of Judah was helped by the economic revival brought to the region by Tyre's being restored as an international trade center. Isaiah sees and records a panorama of all these events. Seeing this more correctly removes the confusion. Dismissing the skeptics and their cynical approach and placing confidence in the integrity of the text of Isaiah is not only more reasonable it makes the section meaningful.<sup>2</sup>

The first cycle of oracles closed by revealing that Egypt, the political oppressor of the Israelites, would come into equal status with Israel in the future (19:25). The second cycle similarly closes by disclosing that Tyre, the materialistic corrupter of God's people in the past, would come into a relationship of holiness (v. 18). Thus the climax of both revelations of judgment was the divine blessing of the Gentiles.

There are also parallels between Babylon, the first oracle in the first series, and Tyre, the last oracle in the second series. Babylon was the great land power of the ancient world, and Tyre was the great sea power. Babylon gained her power through warfare, whereas Tyre gained hers through peaceful trading. The descriptions of both cities meld into the view of future Babylon presented in Revelation 17—18. There the religious and commercial aspects of future Babylon are strongly reminiscent of Tyre. Note also the reference to a prostitute in both passages.

"Babylon's greatness lay in her glory, the list of her achievements and accomplishments, her sophistication and culture. Tyre did not have all of that, but she did have her wealth and her vast maritime contacts. So between the two of them, Babylon and Tyre summed up from east to west all that the world of that day—and this—thought was significant."

This oracle consists of two parts: a poem describing Tyre's fall (vv. 1-14) and a prediction of Tyre's ultimate commitment to the Lord and His people. Tyre was the major city of Phoenicia at this time, and undoubtedly represents the other towns allied with it in the region, in some of the references in this chapter.<sup>249</sup> Similarly, Jerusalem represented all of Judah when used in a collective sense.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

**<sup>1</sup>The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them.**

Tyre = Sidon = Phoenicia; Sea commerce; invented first alphabet, etc.

Tarshish may refer to Spain (Isa. 2:16).

Tarshish: source of tin; some think Britannia. (Archeological discoveries confirm world trade about 1500 B.C.). Solomon's ships brought gold, silver, ivory, apes, peacocks, etc., from all over the world in ships of Tyre, belonging to Solomon.<sup>4</sup>

[laid waste] Completely destroyed. This was true when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Tyre after thirteen years of siege.<sup>5</sup>

[no entering in] No harbor or port where ships would remain or continue to trade with Tyre which used to have the best port on the Mediterranean; but no more, due to natural causes -- being filled with sand and fallen city columns that obstructed large ships.<sup>6</sup>

[Chittim] The Isle of Cyprus (Num. 24:24).

The picture here is that of ships coming home to Tyre from Tarshish where there is a colony of the Phoenicians. Word is brought to them that Tyre has been destroyed. As they sail near, they see the smoke of the city. Then they see that the city has been leveled and the harbor blocked. It will no longer be a great commercial center.<sup>7</sup>

Isaiah's prophecies against other nations began in the east with Babylon (chapter 13) and ended in the west with Tyre in Phoenicia. Tyre was one of the most famous cities of the ancient world. A major trading center with a large seaport, Tyre was very wealthy and very evil. Tyre was rebuked by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:22, 27; 47:4), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 26-28), Joel (Joel 3:4-8), Amos (Amos 1:9, 10), and Zechariah (Zechariah 9:3, 4). This is another warning against political alliances with unstable neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

"It is laid waste:" The history of Tyre before the Christian Era would include two major destructions. One under Nebuchadnezzar about 100 years after Isaiah's time (about 600 BC) and the other during the conquest of Alexander the Great around the year 330 BC. During the life of Isaiah Tyre and the whole of Phoenicia was occupied by Assyrians. This was contemporary with the fulfillment of Isaiah's predictions of the Assyrian punishment of Israel and Judah in the early eighth century BC. The flight of many Tyrians to Cyprus here called Chittim brought about the occupation of that island also by Sargon II and his Assyrian successors. Tyre was located on the sea coast when it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar which is predicted in verse 13 and is elaborately predicted in Ezek 26. When the city was later restored it was rebuilt on a shoal reef about a mile off shore with some of the remains of the original city being used for fill. It's walls

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<sup>4</sup> Chuck Missler Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>5</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>6</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>7</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>8</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

were thick to the point of being impenetrable and they were of an extreme height, reported by Arrian (classical biographer of Alexander) to have been 150 feet above high tide. Alexander razed the city to the ground after building a causeway with the remains of the city destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The ruined city and the causeway have collected silt through the centuries and the site is now a peninsula that for many years has been a place where fishermen dry their nets, predicted in Ezekiel 26:5. The destruction of the island fortress of Tyre by Alexander was predicted by Zechariah about 515 BC. (Zec. 9:3,4) After being destroyed by Alexander Tyre was rebuilt again but never regained the prominence described by Isaiah and Ezekiel as the center of old world mercantile activity. It is currently a small town of about 20,000 inhabitants. It was not an island when Isaiah wrote nor when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it but is described in verses 2 and 6 in the island form in which it was restored. Tyre is called "daughter of Carthage" in verse 10 which could not be true until after her restoration helped by the Carthaginians. Thus Isaiah's prediction of Tyre's future includes a broad sweeping scope while Ezekiel and Zechariah have different specific events in view. Ezekiel sees the city of Tyre destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar as a place to spread nets while Zechariah sees Tyre as an island city overthrown by Alexander "in the midst of the sea." Thus to Isaiah the future of Tyre includes the Assyrian occupation of Phoenicia and its territories in the eastern Mediterranean and then this was followed in a little over 100 years by the overthrow of Tyre by the Chaldeans and a 70 year lapse after which it was rebuilt on an island as a prosperous trade center. He further sees that during this time it was a blessing to the Jewish nation for almost 300 years. Then the island city was destroyed by Alexander and it was never rebuilt again on the same site. The city that would be called Tyre after this would be of small consequence and be at a considerable distance on the mainland. This total outline is in Isaiah's vision. No wonder skeptics are confused.<sup>9</sup>

The burden against Tyre: To the north of Israel, Tyre was the leading city of Phoenicia, the great maritime power of the ancient world. Because it was such an important harbor and center for shipping, Tyre was synonymous with commerce and materialism.

Tyre was the "Babylon of the Sea." Because of their excellent harbor and seamanship, they established a commercial empire far greater than one would expect given their size and military power.

Tyre was a city in two parts - an inland city, and an island city. The inland city was conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, just as Isaiah prophesied. The island city was conquered later by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.

Tyre was a mixed bag for Israel. King Hiram of Tyre supplied David and Solomon great timbers for the building of the temple and other projects. Hiram gave Solomon sailors so Israel could build their commerce by sea. But later, Tyre gave Israel one of the worst rulers Israel ever had: Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

The prophet described news of Tyre's total destruction reaching sailors on ships of Tarshish moored in Cyprus. The Tarshish (lit. refinery) in view here was probably in Spain, but "ships of Tarshish" was a term that described the largest ships of the day capable of the longest voyages (cf. 2:16). Tyre was a very important Mediterranean seaport north of Israel, and its destruction would impact maritime trade everywhere.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-23.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

**<sup>2</sup>Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.**

[Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle] Indicating a destroyed city.

[the merchants of Zidon] Tyre was a colony of Zidon (Isa. 23:2,4).

[replenished] Replenished with merchandise and riches (Ezek. 27:8-23).

Isle: When Isaiah wrote, Tyre was located on the coast. It did not become an island until after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the original city.

"Zidon," or Sidon, was about thirty miles up the coast from Tyre. Tyre and Sidon go together like pork and beans go together. They were the two leading cities of the Phoenicians. The prominent sea merchants of Sidon had made Tyre the great city it was. It is interesting that the prophecy concerning the destruction of Tyre was literally fulfilled. But destruction was not predicted for Sidon, and Sidon continues as a city today. Currently, Sidon is the place to which oil is brought to be loaded on shipboard and taken to other parts of the world.<sup>12</sup>

Isaiah also directed the residents of the Phoenician coast, including Sidon, another important port, to be silent and motionless, since Tyre had collapsed. Tyre had been the marketplace for the large wheat crops that came from Egypt and were distributed to other Mediterranean lands.<sup>13</sup>

**<sup>3</sup>And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations.**

[great waters] Referring to the overflowing of the Nile. Tyre was the market to which the productions of Egypt were taken.<sup>14</sup>

[Sihor] Sihor is another name for the Nile river (Josh. 13:3; Jer. 3:18).

Sihor means "black" and refers to the Upper Nile, the silt of which flooded Egypt and made it fertile. The wealth of Egypt had flowed through the port of Tyre, and now that is ended, and there is going to be a depression -- a real one!<sup>15</sup>

**<sup>4</sup>Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken, *even* the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, *nor* bring up virgins.**

There is a suggestion here that Tyre is the daughter of Sidon. Historically this is accurate.

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<sup>12</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>13</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>15</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Isaiah also gave voice to the sea, the mother of Tyre, which bewailed its loss at Tyre's demise. Its children were the ships that plied its waters because of Tyre's commercial activity, or perhaps its colonies. This loss would be a source of embarrassment to Sidon since it was a sister city in Phoenicia.

Four things Zidon said:

1. I travail not.
2. I do not bring forth children.
3. I do not nourish young men.
4. I do not bring up virgins.

Zidon helped in the founding of Tyre and was considered Tyre's mother; but in the destruction of Tyre, Zidon was so weakened that she declared here that she would not found or start any other city.<sup>16</sup>

**<sup>5</sup>As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre.**

Why would Egypt experience "great sorrow" when Tyre fell? Egypt depended on Tyre's shipping expertise to promote and carry their products around the world. Egypt would lose an important trading partner with the fall of Tyre.<sup>17</sup>

Phoenicia, with its chief city ports of Tyre (vv. 1, 3, 8, 15, 17) and Sidon (vv. 2, 4, 12), depended on seafaring trade for its economy. The Phoenicians greatly benefited by the wares she received in international commerce, and in turn those other countries, including the island of Cyprus, were enriched by Phoenician trade. Grain from Egypt was one of the staples channeled through the Phoenician trading centers of Tyre and Sidon. Shihor (cf. Josh. 13:3; 1 Chron. 13:5; Jer. 2:18) was in eastern Egypt and may be a branch of the Nile River. The grain of the Shihor referred to grain grown in the fertile land watered by that part of the Nile. The wealth of Sidon and Tyre (the fortress, mā'ōz, trans. "stronghold" in Pss. 27:1; 37:39; 43:2; 52:7 and "refuge" in Nahum 1:7) did not come from their own efforts. It came by trading with the Mediterranean nations. Thus the sea, personified, could say that it had not gone through the birth experience; it had produced quick wealth without going through the pain (Isa. 23:4; cf. 66:7-8). But the demise of Tyre was bad not only for Phoenicia; it was also bad for the places from which the trade came, such as Egypt (23:5).<sup>18</sup>

Just as the report of Egypt: The "report" is to be considered as either like or just as the shock waves which accompany the news of the tragedy which is to prophetically strike Egypt. Or, as some say: it was disconcerting to those in Egypt who heard of the fall of Tyre. A Hebrew form [Ka-asher...K] () which can be translated "as when ... so" a comparative (like "either or,") is placed before both the words Tyre and Egypt in this verse. The use of the comparative makes the meaning more likely that the news report of the fall of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar (mentioned in verse 13 below) is compared with the shock waves which accompany a similar report of a tragedy involving Egypt. Such an event concerning Egypt did just precede the fall of Tyre. One

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<sup>16</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>17</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>18</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

of the greatest history changing battles of the western world had just been fought at Carchemish which marked the decisive end of Egyptian power. The Chaldeans overthrew the Egyptians under Pharaoh Necho as a result of which Egypt lost self rule not to be regained until 1955, having been ruled successively by foreign powers from 600 BC. Thus the "shock waves" accompanying the news of the fall of Tyre would be compared to the Egyptian "report." .<sup>19</sup>

**6Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle.**

[Pass ye over to Tarshish] This refers to some of Tyre's inhabitants fleeing in ships after hearing that Nebuchadnezzar was about to take the city. They took the wealth with them so he found nothing of value in the city when it was taken. This and the thirteen years of siege so enraged him that he destroyed the place completely.<sup>20</sup>

The fall of Tyre caused universal mourning, even to a colony that was way over on the southern coast of Spain. Some of the inhabitants of Tyre escaped in ships to Tarshish when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city.<sup>21</sup>

**7Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.**

Any great commercial center is a city which is also a fun center because there will be many things in that city that are pleasing to the flesh. Now the Tyrians are urged to flee as far as possible because this city which was formerly a "joyous city" has come to an end.<sup>22</sup>

Antiquity: Already spoken of above this verse confirms the antiquity of Tyre whose founding is unrecorded. Joshua 19:29 mentions Tyre as a border city in the inheritance of Asher. This confirms that Tyre was a "strong city" as described in Joshua already at the time of the Exodus. Other historical references make Tyre an old ancient city before the fall of Troy which was 1200 to 1400 BC. The NIV correctly assumes this verse refers to Tyre's colonial activity from her earliest periods in unrecorded history.<sup>23</sup>

Isaiah advised refugees to flee from Tyre to Tarshish. How the course of Tyre's fate would change! She had for centuries been a world power, not as an empire but as a broker of international trade. Her ambitions were not political, to rule others, but commercial, to grow rich. As such, Tyre symbolizes one aspect of worldly endeavor.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>21</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>22</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>24</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

**<sup>8</sup>Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?**

[crowning city] Tyre had started several colonies -- Tarshish in Spain, as well as Citium in Cyprus, Carthage in Africa, and others; so her merchants were true princes and honorable men in the earth.<sup>25</sup>

"The crowning city" means the giver of crowns. You see, Tyre established crown colonies. Great Britain has done the same thing in more recent times. A crown colony is under the legislation and administration of the crown rather than having its own constitution and representative government.<sup>26</sup>

People in Tarshish were to wail too (cf. vv. 1, 5, 14) because of their economic losses. Tarshish was rich in silver (Jer. 10:9), iron, tin, and lead (Ezek. 27:12). Therefore Tarshish was probably in the West Mediterranean where mineral deposits were plentiful. Many scholars identify Tarshish with Tartessus in southwest Spain. The people of that region would be in despair because of the fall of that great trading center, Tyre, which was a city of revelry (cf. Isa. 23:12) and an ancient city. According to Herodotus Tyre was founded around 2700 b.c. However, the people of Tarshish needed to realize that their difficulty came directly from the God of Israel. The Lord Almighty (v. 9) planned the humbling of this great and wealthy city (the bestower of crowns), proud of its glory and renowned for its commercial enterprise.<sup>27</sup>

Tyre was a city where money ruled. The merchants are princes, and the traders are the honorable of the earth. To be a leader or honorable, one didn't need to be of royal heritage, a good or a honest man. The only thing needed was success in business!<sup>28</sup>

**<sup>9</sup>The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.**

It was the Lord of hosts who had determined the destruction of Tyre. He offers no apologies for making the arrangement.<sup>29</sup>

God would destroy Tyre because he hated its people's pride. Pride separates people from God, and he will not tolerate it. As we examine our life, we must remember that all true accomplishment comes as a result of our Creator's help. We have no reason to take pride in ourselves.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>26</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>27</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>30</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to bring dishonor the pride of all glory: Because of its great success, Tyre had become proud and full of self-glory. But the LORD of hosts has purposed to judge and humble Tyre, and Isaiah announces it.

“Pride, pride, pride, is that basic sin to which God is ever opposed, and man is ever expressing.” (Jennings)<sup>31</sup>

The Lord Purposed it: This verse is one of many in the scriptures that answer the question of why a merciful God allows tragic events to happen. Why do the innocent suffer with the guilty? Why do great events of horror erupt? Who is ultimately responsible? This verse makes it plain again that God allows such events to happen to bring us to see where real and eternal values lie. The pursuit of happiness in material things or in human achievement. or pride of station is empty in the day of calamity when eternal values are forced into focus. Then we are brought low so we can see what is truly high. God used the destruction of Tyre to force men of every nation to consider what is important in life,<sup>32</sup>

Why had Tyre perished? When Tyre founded colonies, she set up rulers over them—bestowed crowns. Princes and the honored of the earth ended up serving Tyre's ends. Thus this ancient city had tremendous power and influence.

"The reference [to the earth, or land, Heb. ha'eres] is to Palestine-Lebanon, extending to the Euphrates in the northeast and to the 'River of Egypt' and beyond to Egypt in the south. All this 'land' was served by Tyre's commerce and, accordingly, it treated Tyre with deference. All the 'land' envied Tyre's wealth and imitated her styles."

The reason for Tyre's death was the plan of the Lord Almighty. He desired to humble the proud and to humiliate the admired. He wanted to show the transitory nature of human glory and the folly of depending on such glory. God does not object when worthy people receive the credit due them. What He opposes is pride that seeks to live independent of Himself.<sup>33</sup>

**<sup>10</sup>Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: *there is no more strength.***

Daughter of Tyre: Tartessus in Spain? Cartagena? Carthage (N. Africa)?  
Cittim? (Cyprus).

The "river" is the Nile. As the Nile has overflowed her banks, the colony of Tarshish is now free to do as she pleases since Tyre has fallen and is no longer able to control her.

"There is no more strength" means that there is no girdle that holds her up or binds her.<sup>34</sup>

"Daughter of Carthage." Josephus says that Carthage was built by the Phoenicians "143 years after Solomon built the Temple." (Against Apion I:17) The Roman tradition is that a sister or daughter of Pygmalion king of Tyre about 815 BC fled from Tyre and established Carthage.

Virgil, who lived just at the time of Julius and Augustus Caesar wrote an epic poem, the Aeneid, about the founding of the Roman race derived according to him from the fusion of Latin and

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-23.html>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>33</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Trojan ancestors. In the introduction of the Aeneid he notes that the Phoenicians of Tyre founded Carthage:

Against the Tiber's mouth, but far away,  
An ancient town was seated on the sea;  
A Tyrian colony; the people made  
Stout for the war, and studious of their trade:  
Carthage the name; belov'd by Juno more  
Than her own Argos,

Virgil makes Aeneas the beloved of Dido, the above mentioned daughter-founder of Carthage. Aeneas had fled from the fall of Troy. However, the Trojan extinction is more likely closer to 1200 B.C than 800. The exact date of the founding of Carthage is therefore lost in the shades of antiquity but is acknowledged as ancient. The coast of Spain beyond the straits of Gibraltar was colonized 700 to 800 BC and settled long before the events were recorded historically. Jonah's flight to Carthage which some confuse with Tartessus, a colony of Carthage on the coast of Spain is before the Fall of Nineveh. Very early Carthage had become the leading city of the Phoenician peoples and after the first and second destructions of Tyre would have played an important part in the restoration of Tyre. It is in this sense, because the Carthaginians rebuilt her, that Isaiah calls Tyre (the city which is actually the "mother" of Carthage) the "daughter of Carthage."<sup>35</sup>

**<sup>11</sup>He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof.**

Have you noticed this threefold description of Tyre? In verse 7 Tyre is called a "joyous city." In verse 8 Tyre is called a "crowning city." In verse 11 Tyre is called a "merchant city." All three of these are apt descriptions of Tyre.<sup>36</sup>

Palestine: The KJV has "merchant city" while the NIV offers the interpretive translation of "Phoenicia," which is probably a correct conclusion but is not the reading in Hebrew. The Hebrew Masoretic text has "Canaan" which is assumed to mean the Phoenician portion of the land of Canaan. This is evidence of the Canaanite and therefore Hamitic origin of Phoenicia. The Qumran text has some minor variations in this verse but also reads Canaan. Canaanite origins for Phoenicia were still recognized in New Testament times. Mt. 15:22 calls the woman who besought Jesus who resided in the region of Tyre and Sidon a "woman of Canaan."<sup>37</sup>

The Lord had stretched His hand over the sea in judgment, as He had over Egypt long ago (cf. Exod. 14:16; 15:4-6, 12). The sea was His province, not Tyre's (cf. Jon. 1:3-4). He had made all kingdoms tremble by condemning the whole Gentile Canaan region to judgment. The Phoenician coastal cities would have no more joy, peace, or security. Their residents would flee to Cyprus, Tarshish, and elsewhere but would not be able to find rest.

"Phoenicia called itself Kena'an (Canaan); but this is the only passage in the Old Testament in which the name occurs in this most restricted sense."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>38</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

**12And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest.**

What is suggested in verse 4 is plainly declared here. Tyre is the daughter of Sidon. Sidon was the older city, and rich merchants from there had founded Tyre and given her prestige. The joy of prosperity was to disappear. Both Tyre and Sidon would suffer.

"Pass over to Chittim" -- probably some thought that by fleeing to Cyprus they might make a fresh beginning. In this, too, they were to be disappointed. God was responsible for what happened to them, although He used human instruments.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the entire Mediterranean region—from Tarshish in the northwest to the Nile River in the southeast, and to Cyprus in the northeast (vv. 10, 12)—people would mourn and weep for the fall of Phoenicia (v. 11). The Phoenicians would have no more protection than did the Babylonians who were defeated by the Assyrians (v. 13; cf. 21:1-10). Reveling would end in Sidon, probably along with the revelry in Tyre (cf. 23:7). (On the words Virgin Daughter see the comments on 47:1.) To escape to Cyprus would not help. The trading ships of Tarshish were advised by Isaiah to wail because the Mediterranean world's great trading center would be gone (v. 14; cf. v. 1).<sup>40</sup>

**13Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; and he brought it to ruin.**

[the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it] This verse states the source of Tyre's destruction -- the Chaldeans or Babylonians. These were wild, barbaric people with no government until they became a part of Assyria. They were under the Assyrians for centuries, then rose to greatness and overthrew the Assyrian empire. The names Babylon and Chaldea are used interchangeably in Scripture (Isa. 48:14,20; Jer. 50:1; 51:24; Ezek. 12:13).<sup>41</sup>

[he brought it to ruin] The Babylonian or Chaldean brought Tyre to ruin.

When Assyria was a great nation, Chaldea (Babylon) was just a hick town. Now Babylon is the ruler of the world.<sup>42</sup>

13-18: Chaldeans: The Chaldean kingdom owes its founding to the Assyrians who set Babylon as the center of Chaldean government but tributary to Nineveh. Here Isaiah predicts that the Chaldeans over 100 years later would be the agents in the destruction of Tyre. Isaiah accurately states that Tyre would be overthrown by the Chaldeans and suffer a 70 year hiatus (verse 15 below) after which she would return to be a great mercantile center again. After the fall of Assyrian power (the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC) Nebuchadnezzar led the Chaldeans to the status of world empire and Tyre was reduced to rubble (a place to spread nets Ezek 26:5) after which it

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<sup>39</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>40</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>41</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>42</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

was rebuilt with the help of her colonials and was again a mercantile center. Carthage was still subject to Tyre during the Persian period which followed the Chaldeans and was the major link to a far flung system of trading colonies. The restoration of Tyre as a major center would have been of great benefit to the restored nation of Judah during the Persian period which is probably what is meant in verse 18. That is, that after the 70 years of Chaldean exile for Tyre she would be restored and through her trade be a blessing for God's people in Judea. That is what happened. The seventy years correspond to the same seventy years of Jewish captivity under the same king Nebuchadnezzar and the return is consistent with the policy of Cyrus to return the captive nations to their own lands.<sup>43</sup>

The Tyrians would not find rest because the Assyrians would take revenge on any nation that gave them sanctuary.

God's agent in the destruction of Tyre was first Assyria, then Babylonia, and finally Greece. Tiglath-pileser of Assyria set up a military governor in Tyre in 738 B.C., and his successors imposed escalating restraints on the city because it stubbornly resisted foreign control. Alexander the Great finally wiped the city into the sea in 332 B.C., leaving it uninhabitable.

Here Isaiah pointed to Assyria as the power God would use to cut back the influence of Tyre. Tyre came under attack at least five times from Isaiah's day until its end. Its invaders were Sennacherib (705-701 B.C.), Esarhaddon (679-671 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar (585-573 B.C.), Artaxerxes III Ochus (343 B.C.), and Alexander (332 B.C.). Assyria had already done to the Chaldeans what the prophet foretold it would do to Tyre. Sargon II attacked Babylon in 710 B.C., and Sennacherib destroyed it in 689 B.C.<sup>44</sup>

#### **<sup>14</sup>Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.**

This repeated call to the ships of Tarshish, to wail, concludes Isaiah's announcement of Tyre's destruction, forming an inclusio with verse 1. Even though Tyre's demise would give Tarshish more control, Tarshish would suffer because Tyre determined the prosperity of the Mediterranean world. The ships of Tarshish would have no port to enter at Tyre (v. 1), and they would have no security for their enterprise (v. 14). How foolish it would be, then, for the Jerusalemites to pin their hopes on Tyre.

As in the previous chapter, Isaiah gave a sign that what he had predicted about Tyre's destruction would indeed happen (cf. 22:15-25). It would experience a brief revival in the near future. Looking into the far distant future, the prophet also announced the conversion of Tyre into a place of holiness to the Lord (cf. 19:16-25).<sup>45</sup>

#### **<sup>15</sup>And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot.**

[shall be forgotten] Shall cease to be a place of importance and commerce, and shall be unheard of in the distant places where her ships used to be seen.

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/isa23.htm>

<sup>44</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

[seventy years] This was the seventy years Judah was to be in captivity (Jer. 25:9-14), the length of the Babylonian monarchy (Isa. 23:15-17; Dan. 7:17; 8:20; 9:2). Nebuchadnezzar began his siege of Tyre in the first year of his reign. From then to the taking of Babylon by Darius and Cyrus was seventy years. At that time the nations which had been taken captive to Babylon were to be released. Jeremiah spoke of all these nations serving the king of Babylon. Some were conquered sooner than others, but all were to be set free at the end of the seventy years which were to be during the life of "him" (Nebuchadnezzar), and his son (Evil-Merodach), and his son's son (Belshazzar, Jer. 27:7; Dan. 5).<sup>46</sup>

[one king] One dynasty or succession of kings, as the word "king" means in Dan. 7:17.

[after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot] After the seventy years Tyre will be restored and sing as a harlot (Isa. 23:15-17).<sup>47</sup>

Tyre was to go into captivity for seventy years.<sup>48</sup>

Some scholars believe this is a literal 70 years; some say it is symbolic of a long period of time. If it is literal, this may have occurred between 700 and 630 B.C. during the Assyrian captivity of Israel, or it may have been during the 70-year captivity of the Jews in Babylon (605-536 B.C.). During the 70 years, the Jews would forget about Tyre. But when they returned from captivity, they would once again trade with Tyre.<sup>49</sup>

Tyre will be forgotten seventy years: God's judgments are so precise that He decrees the exact number of years Tyre will be forgotten.

That you may be remembered: Quoting what may have been a well-known song in his day, Isaiah makes the point that at the end of the seventy years appointed by God, Tyre will be remembered again.

A prophecy of restoration. After a period of subjugation, Tyre will be both religiously purified and politically restored. Its fate closely resembles that of Egypt and Assyria in 19.18-25, as well as that of Israel throughout the Bible. God treats the Phoenicians precisely as God treats the Israelites: They are severely punished, then saved.<sup>50</sup>

**<sup>16</sup>Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.**

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<sup>46</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>47</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>48</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>49</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>50</sup> Jewish Study Bible

**17And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth.**

Here and Ps 45:12; new city raised on ruins of Tyre.

[the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth] The Lord will permit Tyre to be restored after the 70 years and she shall enjoy all her riches and glory as before. She shall be made rich again by her international commerce. Tyre was rebuilt on the island and soon rivalled the former Tyre in glory and wealth. The new city was taken by Alexander the Great about 255 years after the former one had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of seventy years Tyre was to return and begin once again her world commerce. Once more she would become a great commercial center, and she would commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. The prophet compares Tyre to a harlot plying her unholy trade. That is the way God speaks of these great commercial centers. Now we move down the ages to the last days, the time of the Great Tribulation. Here we find that Tyre will again be a great nation and will enter the Millennium.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>53</sup>“Tyre, after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, recovered, as it is here foretold, its ancient trade, wealth, and grandeur; as it did likewise after a second destruction by Alexander. It became Christian early with the rest of the neighboring countries. St. Paul himself found many Christian there, Acts 21:4. It suffered much in the Diocletian persecution. It was an archbishopric under the patriarchate of Jerusalem, with fourteen bishoprics under its jurisdiction. It continued Christian till it was taken by the Saracens in 639; was recovered by the Christians in 1124; but in 1280 was conquered by the Mamelukes and afterwards taken from them by the Turks in 1517. Since that time it has sunk into utter decay; is now a mere ruin, a bare rock, ‘a place to spread nets upon,’ as the Prophet Ezekiel foretold it should be, Ezekiel 26:14.” (Clarke)

**18And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.**

[her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing] This verse evidently looks forward to the last days when Tyre will be blessed under the Messiah in the Millennium and New Earth periods. Her commerce shall be "holiness to the Lord"; and her wealth shall not be treasured or hoarded to make men rich at the expense of the poor, but it will be used for those who dwell before the Lord, so that they can have enough food and clothing. This has never yet been fulfilled, so it must refer to the Millennium when

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<sup>51</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>52</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-23.html>

there shall be HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD upon the bells of the horses and upon every pot and pan in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-5,9,16-21).<sup>54</sup>

"Her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord." Now it is all dedicated to the Lord. "And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour" (Ps. 45:12).<sup>55</sup>

Unlike a selfish prostitute, however, Tyre would set aside her income to the Lord, and it would benefit those who dwell in the Lord's presence. The wages of a prostitute were unacceptable offerings to the Lord under the Old Covenant (Deut. 23:18). When the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon, the merchants of Tyre sold them building materials for the second temple (Ezra 3:7), as they had done for the first temple during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 5:1-12). But the change in the Tyrians' attitude that this verse promises did not mark them then; they still engaged in commerce for selfish ends. Thus this verse looks beyond the history of ancient Tyre to a time yet future when God will transform hearts and cause Gentiles worldwide to come and worship Him (cf. 60:5-9; Rev. 21:24-26). In the future Tyre will have a new status, a new spirit, and a new allegiance (cf. Ps. 87:4). She will join the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Assyrians (18:7; 19:18-25), and many other Gentiles in uniting to fulfill God's glorification of Israel.

"The care of a Phoenician widow once extended to a prophet (1 Ki. 17:8-16) will be the norm of coming relationships."

The Judeans should not envy the Tyrians, nor should God's people of any era envy materialistic idolaters. Ultimately God's people will enjoy all the wealth of Tyre that will come to her God.

". . . chs. 13—23 seem to be saying that since the glory of the nations (chs. 13, 14) equals nothing, and since the scheming of the nations (chs. 14—18) equals nothing, and since the vision of this nation (chs. 21, 22) equals nothing, and since the wealth of the nations (ch. 23) equals nothing, don't trust the nations! The same is true today. If we believe that a system of alliances can save us, we have failed to learn the lessons of Isaiah and of history. God alone is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46:2 [Eng. 1])."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>55</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>56</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>