

Isaiah Lesson 23

Isaiah Chapter 23

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Introduction: The Last week we got started on chapter 22 where we saw it dealing with a 'burden' against Jerusalem itself. The chapter also contains a prophecy about the removal of Shebna, an officer in Hezekiah's court, and the placing of Eliakim in his stead.

This is the last of the burdens against the neighboring kingdoms. The prophecy is about Tyre which was a city-state in Lebanon to the north. In this chapter, the prophet describes the desolation and restoration of Tyre.

I. An Oracle Concerning Tyre and Sidon

Isa 23:1 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.

Isa 23:2 Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.

Isa 23:3 And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations.

Tyre was a Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast in what today is Lebanon. It was a port city whose principal commerce was the transshipment of commodities through its harbor. Tarshish was a city or region which to this day is uncertain. It is thought to have been in or near Cyprus. It evidently was also a port used for sea-borne commerce.

Tyre, evidently, was a principal partner in marine commerce with Tarshish. The prophet warned the merchants of Tarshish to wail because their trading partner, Tyre, was about to be destroyed. Chittim consisted of islands in the Mediterranean—possibly those of the Aegean Sea. Tarshish would learn of the destruction from the mariners of Chittim. Zidon (or Sidon) was another port city of Lebanon just north of Tyre. It well may be that Sidon was a part of the small kingdom of Tyre. In any event, the two names are essentially used interchangeably here.

While crying and carrying on over the loss of their business, the prophet instructs the collective islands of Chittim and Tarshish to stop. Another business partner of Tyre was Egypt. Sihor was a branch of the Nile delta. The crops of Egypt were traded through Tyre. Great revenue from Egypt passed through Tyre. In short, Tyre was a chief merchant of the nations.

Isa 23:4 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.

Isa 23:5 As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre.

Isa 23:6 Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle.

Sidon and Tyre were shamed, as the sea was given a voice to repeat the lamentation of Tyre. The thought is how she mourned as wishing she had not given birth to children or raised them knowing that her destruction would be complete. Tyre wished she had never brought forth children to meet such destruction.

Even as the prophet had already foretold the coming destruction of Egypt (Isaiah 19), so other nations would be dismayed at the report of the impending destruction of Tyre. The merchants of the Mediterranean were directed to sail to Tarshish and mourn the loss of their trade with Tyre.

Isa 23:7 Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.

Isa 23:8 Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?

Isa 23:9 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.

The prophet asks, Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? Tyre was an ancient city. The thought is that though the Tyrians had lived very elegantly with great affluence, but now they would be common and treated as such. They would no longer would ride on horses or be drawn in carriages. Rather, they would be forced to march on foot as prisoners of war to a foreign country—Assyria.

Who would be responsible for such destruction to this arrogant and powerful city? It was Jehovah God who will utterly abase the “honourable” (i.e., rich and

famous) “of the earth.” Though they may be in power for the moment, their day was coming and it was coming soon for Tyre.

II. No More Strength for those in Tarshish

Isa 23:10 Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength.

Isa 23:11 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.

Isa 23:12 And 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.

With eloquent metaphor, the prophet further foretells the impending judgment upon Tyre and its business partners—Tarshish and Chittim.

Isa 23:13 Behold 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.

Isa 23:14 Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.

The source of the impending judgment is identified. With intended sarcasm, the prophet notes that even Babylon could trace its root to Assyria. (Chaldea is another name for Babylon.) Even as Babylon arose from ancient Nineveh, it would be destroyed by Assyria. The same fate awaited Tyre.

Therefore, the prophecy is uttered again, “Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.” If Babylon could not avoid destruction by Assyria. Neither would Tyre. Therefore, the merchants of Tarshish would mourn the demise of their trade.

Isa 23:15 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.

Isa 23:16 Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.

In time, similar to the captivity of Judah, Tyre would lay desolate for seventy years though there is no other parallel. Insight into why God's judgment was impending is noted. Tyre not only was a commercial center; it also was a city of immorality and sin. In ancient times, prostitutes would seek to lure customers by singing worldly 'love' songs. The vice and sinfulness of Tyre was typified as the music of harlots.

With that metaphor, the prophet urged, "Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered." Though destroyed and forgotten for seventy years, Tyre would again rise to prominence. Their old sinful ways and their immorality would evidently return as well.

Isa 23:17 And 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.

Isa 23:18 And 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.

God would eventually allow Tyre to be rebuilt. The great city would quickly resume its place in commercial traffic. Though prostitution no doubt took place in this city as it does in all seaports, the greater thought is how that Tyre would again crawl in the bed with all nations thru commercial trade and they would again profit from it.

What takes place in verse 18 is unclear. Apparently, the business gains of restored Tyre would be set apart to the Lord and the service of the Temple. Nothing is said specifically about how when this would come to pass.

It wasn't long after the seventy years of judgment upon Tyre that Jerusalem itself was taken into captivity by Babylon. Jerusalem lay in waste to include the temple. It may be that the fulfillment of this prophecy began to take place during the time of the return and restoration of Jerusalem under Ezra, Nehemiah, and thereafter.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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