

The Book of the Prophet ISAIAH

Chapter 23

Theme: God would judge Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, restore it to former greatness, and then convert some.

Outline:

- 1-7 God Indicted and Mocked Tyre
- 8-14 God Purposed to Destroy Tyre
- 15-18 Tyre Restored After 70 Years

Preparatory Reading: Jeremiah 25; Jeremiah 27; Ezekiel chapters 26-28.

Related Links:

- A. *Exposition of Isaiah 13 (example of Babylon)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/isaiah-13.pdf>.
- B. *Exposition of Isaiah 14 (example of Belshazzar)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/isaiah-14.pdf>.
- C. *Exposition of Isaiah 19 (example of Egypt)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruerue.com/pdf/isaiah-19.pdf>.
- D. *General Information about Phoenicia* ... <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicia>.
- E. *Simple Map of Phoenician Trade Routes* ... <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Phoenicia/353622>.

Introduction:

- A. Our God is the King of nations (Jer 10:7), and it should be our great pleasure to learn of His mastery.
 - 1. Tyre was one of the most influential cities in the world of the time by a superior trading business.
 - 2. When God crushed the impregnable cities (onshore had walls and offshore sea), the world reeled.
 - 3. We are specifically told in the prophecy that God had a purpose and a commandment against her.
 - 4. We are specifically told His intent was to ruin her pride and glory and cause others to despise her.
- B. Consider how much of the Bible will become clearer and loose ends tied by learning about this city.
 - 1. Tyre is in the Bible 36 times and Tyrus is in the Bible 20 times. Both uses are the Phoenician city.
 - 2. Hiram is in the Bible 20 times and Hiram 11, David and Solomon used this king and his builder.
 - 3. Hiram the craftsman was the son of a man of Tyre and a woman of Israel (I Kgs 7:14; II Chr 2:14).
 - 4. There are whole chapters about this city that you read in ignorance without knowing a little history.
 - 5. Sidon is in the Bible 14 times, Sidonians 5 times, Zidon 21 times, and Zidonians 9 times for 49.
 - 6. Tyre and Sidon are in the N.T. with several uses (Matt 11:21-22; 15:21; Mark 3:8; Ac 12:20; etc.).
 - 7. There are references to Phenice (3) and Phenicia (1), which were near Samaria, Cyprus, Antioch.
 - 8. Tarshish is in the Bible 21 times and 3 more as Tharshish. It is not Tarsus of Cilicia (Paul's birth).
 - 9. Chittim is in the Bible 6 times as Chittim and 2 times as Kittim, as a world founding father (Javan).
 - 10. Javan, grandson of Noah and father of these glorious and mighty mariners, is in the Bible 7 times.
 - 11. If you add this chapter's references (ignoring Nile, Egypt, Chaldeans, Assyrians), there are 179!
 - 12. There are also many references to Lebanon (64), which can relate more or less to the Phoenicians.
- C. Tyre (and Sidon) were the two main cities of a land called Phoenicia and a people called Phoenicians.
 - 1. They were Canaanites; their name for themselves was basically Canaan and a word for lowlands.
 - 2. They spoke a Semitic dialect very close to the languages Hebrew, Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite.
 - 3. Like the Philistines, to whom they are connected at times in the Bible, they were a seacoast people.
 - 4. This ideal property ranged from 30 miles to 120 miles in length only a few miles wide on the Sea.
 - 5. The two cities had natural harbors for shipping and a supply of Lebanon timber just miles away.
 - 6. They developed the best ships and sailors and had large fleets for commerce and naval protection.
 - 7. The Phoenicians (Tyre) extended their ports and trading partners throughout the Mediterranean.

8. Its extensive trading ports included Carthage on the northern tip of Africa and Cadiz in Spain.
 9. Tyre became the one of the richest, most beautiful cities of the world by its maritime successes.
 10. Tyre proper was two cities – one on the mainland and the other on an island a half mile offshore.
 11. Some nations build their might and wealth by conquest and capture, some by trading and policy.
 12. Tyre thought itself impregnable in its island fortress, protected by water and their superior ships.
 13. Nebuchadnezzar's 13-year siege ruined the onshore city, but rulers and wealth went to the island.
 14. Persia used them for shipbuilding, trading, and naval purposes; they prospered under Persian rule.
 15. They rebuffed Alexander by killing his diplomats, so he built a causeway and destroyed the island.
 16. Some escaped and expanded one of their colonies, Carthage, as a major world power (Punic Wars).
 17. The Romans rebuilt it, but later the Muslims destroyed it. Today it is ruins for a tourist destination.
- D. The Bible knows quite a bit about Tyre (and Sidon) and lists businesses, products, and trading partners.
1. It was a strong city in 1400 B.C. when Joshua divided the land (Josh 19:29; II Sa 24:7; Hos 9:13).
 2. Though very different from Israel in religion, Hiram loved David and Solomon and helped them.
 3. Materials, craftsmen, and navy were best (II Sam 5:11; I Kgs 5:6,18; 7:40,45; 9:26-28; 10:11,22).
 4. Ezekiel's description includes a perfect port, builders, shipbuilding, mariners, caulkers, pilots, mercenaries, trading partners, fairs, specialized products, slave trade, etc. (Ezekiel 27:1-25).
 5. Some nations build their might and wealth by conquest and capture, some by trading and policy.
 6. But they took the wrong side against God's nation Israel (Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:9-10; Ezek 26:2-3).
 7. After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city and the island city capitulated, God restored it.
 8. But 250 years later they offended Alexander the Great, and he destroyed both (Zechariah 9:1-5).
 9. The king of Tyre, Ithobaal III, is singled out by God for his arrogance and personal ruin (Ezek 28).
- E. The timing, players, and events of this prophecy is Nebuchadnezzar (Is 23:13; Jeremiah and Ezekiel).
- F. The similitude of a prostitute and her hire as holiness to the LORD is creative and Christ-glorifying!
- G. Consider the corroborating material in the chapters above (Jeremiah 25; Jeremiah 27; Ezekiel 26-28).

***** *God Indicted and Mocked Tyre – Verses 1-7* *****

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.

- A. The *burden of Tyre* = God's judgment prophesied against the Tyrians, a common use.
1. Ezekiel used other words – *Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus.*
 2. Note Babylon (Is 13:1), Philistia (Is 14:28-32), Moab (Is 15:1), Damascus (Is 17:1), Egypt (Is 19:1), Babylon (Is 21:1), Edom (Is 21:11), Arabia (Is 21:13), valley of vision (Is 22:1), and beasts of the south (Is 30:6,27).
 3. And Nineveh (Nah 1:1), Phoenicia (Zech 9:1), Israel (Zech 12:1), Israel (Mal 1:1).
 4. God hated the Jews for mocking prophecies (*burdens*) of judgment (Jer 23:33-40).
 5. They were a *burden* to the prophets to deliver but especially to those being judged.
 6. God indicted Tyre for mistreating His church (Ezek 26:2-3; Joel 3:4-8; Am 1:9-10).
 7. Every reader should humble Himself before the warnings of scripture and repent.
- B. Tarshish was a major port and trading partner with Tyre and Phoenician sailors/traders.
1. It is in the Bible 21 times and 3 more as Tharshish. It is not Tarsus of Cilicia (Paul).
 2. Spain, the Iberian peninsula, was at opposite end of the Mediterranean (2500 miles).

3. The city and commerce center was where the Guadalquivir River drains into the Sea.
 4. It emptied at Cadiz; the River in Bible times was navigable to Cordoba (150 miles).
 5. It is 50 miles on the Atlantic side of the Straits of Gibraltar (Jonah was very bad).
 6. The minerals in this area were and are very valuable and were traded with the world.
 7. The rich city of Tyre, a capital of Phoenicians, was indebted to Tarshish (Is 23:10).
 8. Tyre's routes to Tarshish (Gadir, Cadiz) ... <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/assembly/view/163955>.
- C. Chittim, or Kittim, was the island of Cyprus but extended to Aegean islands (Greece).
1. It is in the Bible 6 times as Chittim and 2 times as Kittim, as a world founding father.
 2. Japheth's son Javan had sons Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim (Gen 10:4).
 3. They divided the islands of the Gentiles in their lands, especially coastal and Aegean.
 4. Elishah is mentioned by Ezekiel (Ezek 27:7). Dodanim is nowhere else in the Bible.
 5. Chittim later included a wide area of the Mediterranean, even of Italy (Dan 11:30).
- D. The prophet tells the ships of Tarshish to howl! For their trading center was laid waste!
1. The houses and gates of Tyre were laid waste. This is the onshore city, not the island.
 2. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the place for 13 years, but did not destroy the island city.
 3. By so long a siege and Tyre's claim to ships, there was little to plunder for the king.
 4. God gave him Egypt as wages for his long siege of the wicked city (Ezek 29:18-20).
 5. It is believed the island surrendered due to difficulties surviving after so long a time.
 6. Nebuchadnezzar disgracefully killed king Ithobaal III, and left Baal II a puppet king.
 7. We know these things by comparing the account of Ithobaal III in Ezekiel (Ezek 28).
 8. God gave Tyre to Nebuchadnezzar like surrounding nations (Jer 25:22; 27:3; 47:4).
- E. The news of Tyre's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar was carried by traders of Chittim.
1. Chittim included Cyprus for sure and included much of the eastern Mediterranean.
 2. The news of the overthrow of Tyre would have shocked the Mediterranean world.
 3. As we will read shortly in this chapter, many workers would need to get new jobs.
- F. Another burden was on Tyre after Nebuchadnezzar – Alexander the Great (Zec 9:1-4).

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

- A. Isaiah told Tyrians to be quiet, who lived on the island of Tyre before Nebuchadnezzar.
- B. The close relationship of these maritime cities meant that Zidon had been a supplier.
1. Zidon is 20 miles north of Tyre on the Phoenician coast, 50 miles from Nazareth.
 2. Zidon was greater than Tyre at times and lesser at other times, but closely connected.
 3. Zidon rebelled against Persia and 40,000 burned themselves alive when the city fell.

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

- A. Sihor's great waters is the River Nile (Jer 2:18), which had a fertile delta of 20,000 km².
- B. Tyre made much money by transporting the grain of Egypt around the Mediterranean.

- C. Tyre was a mart of nations, in that she by her ships transported goods back and forth.
- D. What a tremendous view into the history of the world at that time we get from the Bible.

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.

- A. Zidon, only 20 miles north, should be ashamed for the terrible fate of her daughter city.
- B. Tyre, the mercantile strength of the sea for revenue and safety, is now quite impotent.
 - 1. She had birthed many cities, colonies, and trade routes, but now such growth ended.
 - 2. Count among children, young men, or virgins the great city and empire of Carthage.

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

- A. Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Egypt, as Isaiah had declared (Isaiah 19; Ezek 29-32).
 - 1. The overthrow of Egypt would severely impact Zidon in particular and other nations.
 - 2. There is no reason to get spiritual here and reach all the way back to Moses' plagues.
- B. The overthrow of Tyre was a significant event in world commerce and national affairs.

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

- A. Isaiah's advice for the inhabitants of Tyre was to take their own shipping very far away.
- B. Their secure and luxurious lives at Tyre were turned upside down by God's judgment.
- C. Joppa, only 100 miles south, was where Jonah bought tickets for his 2500-mile trip.

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

- A. Tyre had been an incredible city of business, wealth, peace, and great joy (Is 23:15).
- B. It had been an old and famous city for many years, even in Joshua's time (Josh 19:29).
- C. The prophecy foretold them walking, not sailing or taking chariots, far away for safety.

***** *God Purposed to Destroy Tyre – Verses 8-14* *****

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

- A. Isaiah asked in the midst of his prophecy, Who has this plan against such a great city?
- B. Tyre was a very great and influential city, and her small population highly esteemed.

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.*

- A. It is the LORD God of Israel – the LORD of hosts – Jehovah of Moses and His church.
- B. Almighty God had purposed to ruin her pride in her glory and to disgrace her noblemen.
- C. Recall what Isaiah had already taught – God’s purpose with Sennacherib (Is 14:24-27).

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

- A. Many think Tyre is *the daughter of Tarshish* for trade reasons, but it does not fit here.
 - 1. Tyre had no land, and there was no river, so there could be no passage through it.
 - 2. However, if Tarshish the city and land were considered, then the words are very true.
 - 3. Agreeing with opening and closing the prophecy, Tarshish was the loser (Is 23:1,14).
 - 4. The end of strength – business and trading prosperity – was reduced for Tarshish.
- B. The people of Tarshish needed to look for other work – Tyre would not be feeding them.
- C. God, by judging Tyre, greatly affected other cities, nations, and economies (Is 23:11).

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.*

- A. Returning to the Almighty God of Judah, Isaiah declared it His great work of judgment.
 - 1. The pronoun *he* could be Nebuchadnezzar, for he was the instrument of God’s work.
 - 2. But we look back to verse nine and forward to the rest of the verse for God Himself.
 - 3. Isaiah used this language before for the LORD (Isaiah 2:19; 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4).
- B. Nebuchadnezzar by great effort eventually destroyed the onshore and got the offshore.
 - 1. Because Tyre was a merchant city, its overthrow affected kingdoms (Isaiah 23:10).
 - 2. When God gives a commandment against a nation, their strongholds are not strong.

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.*

- A. God said more to Tyre/Sidon, *Party is over; travel to your friends; it will not get better.*
- B. Chittim is primarily Cyprus, a large island near, but there would be no prosperity there.
- C. These people of Tyre had long known peace and prosperity, but they were troubled now.

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.

- A. Our glorious God and Father told us here that His rod is Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean.
- B. God by His prophet gave an illustration of how His chosen rod could/would beat them.
 - 1. God used illustrations like this to confirm the possibility of His lesson (Nah 3:8-10).
 - 2. He had warned Pharaoh this very way by reminding him of Assyria (Ezek 31:2-18).
- C. The Chaldeans were nothing until the Assyrians got them set up as a nation in Babylon.
- D. Who is the *he* and the *it* that is brought to ruin in this verse? We trust the Bible alone.
 - 1. The Chaldeans, the rod against Tyre by the prophecy and history, must be the *he*.
 - 2. What did the Chaldeans, a collective pronoun or for Nebuchadnezzar, actually ruin?
 - 3. What is within the verse, since there is no other reference, that the Chaldean ruined?
 - 4. Chaldeans, Nabopolassar and/or Nebuchadnezzar, defeated and overthrew Assyria!
 - 5. This would create the strongest argument for Tyre to be terrified of this new power.
 - 6. There was an ancient Babylon, but these kings began the New-Babylonian Empire.
 - 7. If Tyre thought Babylon needed their trading, treatment of Assyria proved different!
 - 8. God would ruin Babylon eventually (Is 13), but it had not happened yet for a lesson.
 - 9. It was stated God had purposed against Tyre (Is 23:9,11), but the agent is given here.
 - 10. Nahum (Babylon over Assyria) ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/exposition/nahum/sermon.php>.

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

- A. Here is a repetition of the opening of the prophecy – the commerce of Tarshish hurt.
- B. When Tyre the mart of nations and Mediterranean business fell, many hurt (Is 23:11).
- C. Ezekiel also described this ripple effect on its distant trading partners (Ezek 26:15-18).

***** Tyre Restored After 70 Years – Verses 15-18 *****

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.

- A. Be careful and wise when encountering the phrase, *in that day*, for it is a future period.
 - 1. The day under consideration is Nebuchadnezzar marauding the earth and this city.
 - 2. It is hardly ever a 24-hour period we call a day but rather a coming new situation.
- B. God's prophecy for Tyre was that her ruin by Nebuchadnezzar would last for 70 years.
 - 1. The length of time – 70 years – were the days of one king – of the Chaldean kingdom.
 - 2. God gave Nebuchadnezzar His servant rule over the nations for 70 years (Jer 25:11).
 - 3. Nebuchadnezzar did not defeat all kings his first year, so learn Bible generalizations.
 - 4. If you try to find the date of Tyre capitulating until Cyrus the Great, it is not 70 years.

- C. After God's time for the Babylonians ended, He foretold Tyre's return to greatness.
1. The prostitute of the seas caught a bad disease – Babylon's war engines (Ezek 26:9).
 2. But once healed by God sending His next servant – Cyrus – she would solicit again.
 3. She would use her best wiles to restore her clients by the practice of whores then.

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.

- A. God encouraged and mocked the prostitute of the Mediterranean to get back to work.
B. He suggested an instrument and a sweet melody and many songs to get her clients back.
C. Seventy years is a long time for this whore to have been sick; her clients forgot her!

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.

- A. God promised to restore the prostitute of the Mediterranean and get her paid well again.
B. She would get back to work on the streets of the world – the trade routes of all nations.
C. She would seduce by her policies and products all nations to engage in trade once again.

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.

- A. Tyre's income by prostitution (the similitude for trading here) would be used by God.
B. Tyre's restoration to the streets of the world would be as Zerubbabel rebuilt Jerusalem.
 1. This pagan city would not simply heap up her hire but would share it with the Jews.
 2. Cyrus not only ordered the temple to be built but paid for it as well (Ezra 3:7; 6:4,9).
 3. Tyrian merchants were quickly busy in Jerusalem (Ne 13:16). Overlook the Sabbath.
- C. Tyre's restoration to trading queen of the seas would also benefit the apostolic gospel.
 1. Money flowing from Tyre to Christ was foretold (Ps 45:12; 72:10; 87:4; Is 60:9-14).
 2. Jesus visited Tyre and Sidon about 40 miles from Nazareth (Matt 15:21; 11:21-22).
 3. The people of Tyre and Sidon came to hear Jesus of Nazareth as well (Mark 3:7-8).
 4. Paul visited Tyre (Acts 21:3-6); the gospel had been preached there (Acts 11:19-20).
 5. This transfer shown in example and principle (Luke 8:3; Rom 15:25-27; I Cor 16:1).
 6. Isaiah will prophesy about this transfer of wealth again (Isaiah 49:22-23). Glory!