

ISAIAH 23 | Tyre Oracle

News of Tyre' Destruction

1 The oracle concerning Tyre.

Wail, ships of Tarshish [Tartessus in southwest Spain], for Tyre¹ is laid waste, without house or harbor! From the land of Cyprus it is revealed to them. 2 Be still, inhabitants of the coast. The merchants of Sidon, who cross the sea, have filled you. 3 And on many waters your revenue was the grain of Shihor [in eastern Egypt], the harvest of the Nile. You were the merchant of the nations. 4 Be ashamed, Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying:

I have neither laboured nor given birth. I have neither reared young men nor brought up young women.

5 When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre. 6 Cross over to Tarshish. Wail, inhabitants of the coast! 7 Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old,² whose feet carried her to settle far away? 8 Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honoured of the earth? 9 Yahweh of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonour all the honoured of the earth. 10 Cross over your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish. There is no restraint anymore. 11 He has stretched out his hand over the sea. He has shaken the kingdoms. Yahweh has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its strongholds. 12 And he said:

You will no more exult, oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, cross over to Cyprus, even there you will have no rest.

13 Behold the land of the Chaldeans [Babylonians]³ This is the people that was not. Assyria destined it for wild beasts. They erected their siege towers. They stripped her palaces bare. They made her a ruin. 14 Wail, ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold is [likewise] laid waste.⁴

Tyre Restored after 70 Years

15 In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute:

¹ Tyre was built on reclaimed land, like Venice, Amsterdam, and China's islands in the S. China Sea.

² According to Herodotus, Tyre was founded in 2700 bc.

³ Tyre was the Chaldeans' link to Mediterranean trade.

⁴ Assyria will do to Tyre what it has already done to Babylon.

16 Take a harp. Go about the city, forgotten prostitute! Make sweet melody. Sing many songs, that you may be remembered.

17 At the end of seventy⁵ years, Yahweh will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. 18 Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to Yahweh (קִדְּשׁ לַיהוָה). It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who it down/dwell (ישב) before Yahweh.

⁵ This is the same length of period during which Israel will be disciplined in Babylon.

Commentary

1. Overview

- a. The message of Is 23: The end result of autonomous man's world economic system is destruction, dirtiness, and dishonour.
- b. The message of Is 13-23: Given (1) the glory of the nations (chs. 13-14) equals nothing; (2) the scheming of the nations (chs. 14-18) equals nothing; (3) the wisdom of the nations (chs. 19-20) equals nothing; (4) the vision of *this* nation (chs. 21-22) equals nothing; and (5) the wealth of the nations (ch. 23) equals nothing, we are not to trust at all in the nations.⁶
- c. The ten oracles (Is 13-23) began with Babylon, the great city of the east, and they end with Tyre, the great city of the west.
(1) Re 17 on political/religious Babylon matches the first oracle, Babylon (Is 13-14).
(2) Re 18 on economic Babylon matches the tenth oracle, Tyre (Is 23).
- d. Geography is important in this chapter: Tyre, Sidon, Canaan; Cyprus, Tarshish; Egypt, Nile, Shihor; and Assyria, Chaldea.

2. News of Tyre's Destruction (Is 23:1-14).

- a. **Is 23:1-14** 1 The oracle concerning Tyre. Wail, ships of Tarshish [Tartessus in southwest Spain], for Tyre⁷ is laid waste, without house or harbor! From the land of Cyprus it is revealed to them. 2 Be still, inhabitants of the coast. The merchants of Sidon, who cross the sea, have filled you. 3 And on many waters your revenue was the grain of Shihor [in eastern Egypt], the harvest of the Nile. You were the merchant of the nations. 4 Be ashamed, Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying: I have neither laboured nor given birth. I have neither reared young men nor brought up young women. 5 When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre. 6 Cross over to Tarshish. Wail, inhabitants of the coast! 7 Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old,⁸ whose feet carried her to settle far away? 8 Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honoured of the earth? 9 Yahweh of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonour all the honoured of the earth. 10 Cross over your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish. There is no restraint anymore. 11 He has stretched out his hand over the sea. He has shaken the kingdoms. Yahweh has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its strongholds. 12 And he said: You will no more exult, oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, cross over to Cyprus, even there you will have no rest. 13 Behold the land of the Chaldeans [Babylonians]!⁹ This is the people that was not. Assyria destined it for wild beasts. They erected their siege towers. They stripped her palaces

⁶ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:427-28.

⁷ Tyre was built on reclaimed land, like Venice, Amsterdam, and China's islands in the S. China Sea.

⁸ According to Herodotus, Tyre was founded in 2700 bc.

⁹ Tyre was the Chaldeans' link to Mediterranean trade.

- bare. They made her a ruin. 14 Wail, ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold is [likewise] laid waste.¹⁰
- b. About Tyre we learn:
 - (1) She exults (v. 7).
 - (2) She prides herself on her ancient pedigree (v. 7).
 - (3) She establishes colonies (v. 7), such as Carthage (see Virgil's *Aeneas*).
 - (4) She bestows crowns (v. 8).
 - (5) Her merchants are princes (v. 8).
 - (6) Her traders are honoured all over the earth (v. 8).
 - (7) She is pompous in her pride (v. 9).
 - c. Tyre typifies the power, pride, and self-sufficiency that arises out of world trade.
 - (1) Tyre was the New York/London/Dubai/Hong Kong/Shanghai/Tokyo of its day.
 - (2) Based from Tyre and Sidon, the Phoenicians colonised the entire Mediterranean region. They were the greatest seafarers in the world and fabulously rich.¹¹
 - (3) The Phoenicians were like the Portuguese in the 15th century, the Spanish in the 16th century, the Dutch in the 17th century, the British in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Americans in the 20th century, and the Chinese in the 21st century.
 - d. Economic self-sufficiency due to world trade always leads to forgetting God.
 - (1) By all accounts the Tyrians were a rich but spiritual bankrupt people.
 - e. Our world trade system impacts us very much, but it very difficult to understand.
 - (1) World trade is a prime force in human affairs. We have the G7, G20, World Bank, World Trade Organization, World Economic Forum, etc..
 - (2) How many of us understand what these organizations do or how they work? Who has the knowledge or power to hold them accountable?
 - (3) There is also the issue of national debt. The US national debt is currently 82% of GDP. New Zealand's is only 32% of GDP. Japan has the highest per capita national debt in the world (224% of GDP).
 - (4) We have almost no control over the international economic policies that impact us every day. But ultimately that's okay, because we've got a relationship with God.
 - f. As discipline, Yahweh dismantles the Tyre-based world economic system.
 - (1) Regarding Tyre and her associate kingdoms:
 - (a) God will stretch out his hand (v. 11).
 - (b) He will shake the kingdoms (v. 11).
 - (c) He will destroy their strongholds (v. 12).
 - (d) Her palaces will be stripped bare (v. 13).
 - (e) She will be made a ruin (v. 13).
 - (f) She will be laid waste (v. 14).
 - g. God sends the Assyrians to discipline Tyre.
 - (1) The Tyrians flee to Cyprus, where they hear of the destruction of their city (vv. 1-2, 12).

3. Tyre Restored after 70 Years (Is 23:15-18).

¹⁰ Assyria will do to Tyre what it has already done to Babylon.

¹¹ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:427).

- a. **Is 23:15-18** 15 In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute: 16 Take a harp. Go about the city, forgotten prostitute! Make sweet melody. Sing many songs, that you may be remembered. 17 At the end of seventy¹² years, Yahweh will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. 18 Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to Yahweh (קִדְּשׁ לַיהוָה). It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who it down/dwell (ישב) before Yahweh.
- b. In accordance with Isaiah's prophecy, Tyre's trade was cut off between 700-630 bc.
 - (1) Sennacherib laid waste Tyre's mainland in 701 bc, vastly damaging Tyre's trade. Only with Assyria's decline in 630 bc was Tyre able to rebound.¹³
- c. Tyre was ultimately destroyed by Alexander the Great.
 - (1) Nebuchadnezzar unsuccessfully besieged Tyre for 13 years from 587 to 574 bc.
 - (2) The Persian emperor Artaxerxes III unsuccessfully besieged Tyre in 333 bc.
 - (3) Finally, Alexander the Great conquered and destroyed the city in 332 bc.
 - (4) The last Phoenician colony, Carthage, was razed by the Romans in 146 bc.
- d. From Re 18:11-24, we learn the anti-God world trade system will be destroyed.
 - (1) As believers with a biblical view of history, we are not to be surprised when the current man-centered economic system collapses.
 - (2) "If something cannot go on forever, it will stop."¹⁴
 - (3) This doesn't mean we are to live in fear, store up tanks of petrol, and clear out all the canned goods in Pak N Save. But it does mean we keep a safe distance from the man-centered international commerce.
- e. One day international commerce will bless redeemed humanity (v. 18).
 - (1) There is a big shift in v. 18.
 - (2) "[H]er hire will be holy" seems to fly directly in the face of Dt 23:18, which states that a prostitute's hire may not be given as an offering.¹⁵
 - (3) **Dt 23:18** 18 You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your Go
- f. Jesus allowed a prostitute to anoint his head and feet. Where did she get the money?
 - (1) **Lk 7:44-46** 44 Then turning toward the woman [a prostitute] [Jesus] said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.
- g. Tyre and Sidon assisted in building the Second Temple.

¹² This is the same length of period during which Israel will be disciplined in Babylon.

¹³ J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, 192.

¹⁴ American economist Herbert Stein, 1976.

¹⁵ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:437.

- (1) **Ez 3:7** 7 So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.
- h. Very possibly, Tyre will become Israel's major port in the Messianic kingdom.

4. Application of Isaiah 23.

- a. Spend your waking hours on God's interests and not the pursuit of economic self-sufficiency, represented by Tyre.
- b. Avoid over-fascination with world economic news.
- c. Be careful what economic activities you engage in.
- d. Refrain from watching your investment portfolio every day. Don't be a day-trader.
- e. Give to God's work generously and cheerfully. Giving is the best way to counter the Tyre mindset.

5. Application of Isaiah 13-23.

- a. Remember God is active in world events. Study Scripture to understand what God is doing and why. Remember he is purposeful. He is goal-oriented and outcome-focused. He has a plan.
- b. We are to remember God, not Satan or man, is in charge. Remembering this daily builds our faith and rescues us from fear.
- c. God had a plan in Isaiah's day, and he has a plan today.