

## Isaiah 23 Handout

Last week in Isaiah 22, we saw Jerusalem in a time of crisis respond with self-reliance and denial rather than repentance. The city strengthened its defenses but ignored God, turning a call to humility into careless celebration. God announced unavoidable judgement. He also exposed corrupt leadership and removed Shebna, a proud official from office and replaced him with Eliakim, a faithful steward. However, we saw that even the best human leadership is temporary.

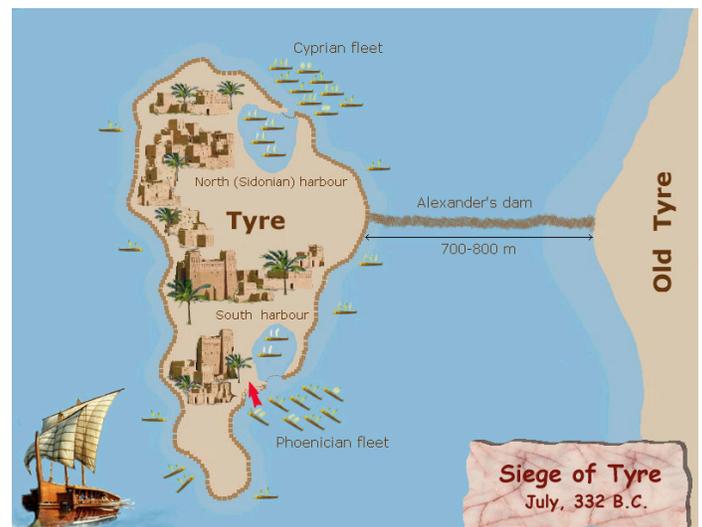
Today's chapter, Isaiah 23, contains the tenth and final oracle to the nations that we started back in chapter 13. This oracle delivers a message of judgment against the wealthy Phonician city of Tyre and concludes with a series of prophecies against various Near Eastern powers and once again shows that God is sovereign over all nations.

### Verse 1

#### Who is this prophecy against? \_\_\_\_\_

A little bit about Tyre:

- It was a major seaport of worldwide importance in its day, located on the Mediterranean coast about 100 miles NW of Jerusalem.
- It had a heavily fortified mainland city and an island city half mile off shore.
- Its island position made Tyre seem invincible and reinforced its pride.
- It was a major economic empire that dominated the Mediterranean trade routes.
- They were sea-going people with a large fleet that colonized many other cities around the Mediterranean and beyond.
- Famous for its purple dye, glass, metalworks and luxury goods.
- Religion was polytheistic. Their wealth and religion were tightly linked because their gods were believed to be the source, protector and legitimizer of its commercial success.
- They survived by adapting to empires rather than fighting them.



It seems the ships of Tyre are docked in Cypress when they get news about their home.

#### What news do they get? \_\_\_\_\_

In the Old Testament, "ships of Tarshish" did not usually mean ships going to one exact place on a map. Instead, it referred to large, impressive merchant ships. It was a symbol of long-distance trade, wealth, and human accomplishment. It would have meant the biggest,

most impressive ships money could buy. This phrase represented confidence that life would keep working because the system is so strong.

### **Verses 2-3**

“You people of the island” would have been referring to the island city that was a part of Tyre.

**Who else is told to be silent?** \_\_\_\_\_

Sidon was Tyre’s sister city and was another important port a few miles north of Tyre. Together they dominated Mediterranean trade.

What is happening here is stunned silence. The collapse of Tyre is so unexpected, it leaves everyone speechless.

Verse 3 mentions the grain of Shihor that came on the great waters. This is referring to the grain that was shipped from Egypt on the Nile River. Tyre was the place where the grain from Egypt would leave for sale to other ports, thereby bringing revenue back to Egypt. Much of Tyre’s power came from controlling the supply chains, especially food.

**What is Tyre described as at the end of verse 3?** \_\_\_\_\_

Tyre functioned as the middleman for the world. Even though Tyre’s influence was economic rather than military, they were no less powerful.

### **Verses 4-5**

Verse 4 speaks with Sidon as the “mother city” who is called to feel shame because its powerful daughter Tyre will fall, which will bring disgrace to the whole region. We see the imagery of labor, birth and the rearing of children to show how Tyre’s former fruitfulness in trade and population would now cease. The sea would be unwilling to even admit that Tyre ever existed.

**What will Egypt feel when the news of Tyre’s destruction reaches them?** \_\_\_\_\_

They were major trading partners; the collapse of Tyre will have a huge international impact.

### **Verses 6-7**

When they mention “Tarshish” here, it seems to represent the farthest reach of the Phoenician trade, which was likely western Mediterranean. We see that trade routes become escape routes when destruction hits. What once represented success, now turns into survival.

Verse 7 seems to be referring to how Tyre was a place known for wealth and pleasure. This wealth created in them a sense of invincibility and arrogance. Tyre was an ancient, stable, nation that over time developed into complacency. They founded many colonies across the Mediterranean, which they saw as a mark of strength.

### **Verses 8-9 READ**

**What question do we see at the beginning of verse 8?** \_\_\_\_\_

It seems unimaginable that Tyre has fallen.

Tyre had influence over kings through their wealth and trade, allowing them to shape rulers without actually ruling directly.

**Who do we see planned all of this (vs9)?** \_\_\_\_\_

This again shows God's authority over nations.

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

Tyre becomes an example and a universal warning—God will humble every system that exalts itself.

### **Verses 10-12**

Daughter Tarshish seems to be referring to Tyre's western colonies and trading partners. Without control and direction from Tyre, those who depended on her are now cut loose. There is no more order or protection.

**What two things does it say the Lord has done in verse 11?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

The imagery of God stretching out His hand is a biblical image of decisive action by the Lord. The sea was Tyre's source of power. When Tyre falls it will destabilize the surrounding nations. God's judgment here has international consequences.

**Who has the Lord given an order concerning at the end of verse 11?** \_\_\_\_\_

Some translations say Canaan instead of Phoenicia, because they were a part of the broader Canaanite region.

Cyprus was a nearby refuge and trade outpost that was normally a place of safety. However, even there they would not find rest.

### **Verses 13-14**

**Who is being referenced at the beginning of verse 13?** \_\_\_\_\_

They are referred to as "this people that is now of no account".

This verse is seen in a couple of ways:

- Some see this as referring to the fact that at the time this prophecy against Tyre was being given, Babylon had not yet become a dominant power, and how the Assyrians had destroyed Babylon at one time.
- Others see this verse as referring to the assaults of Tyre itself by the Assyrians, using what they did to the Babylonians as an example at the beginning of the verse.

Either way, all three of these nations will eventually be judged by God and collapse. The Assyrians, Babylonians and eventually the Greeks under Alexander the Great are all used by God to bring Tyre down.

### **Verses 15-18**

**How long does it say Tyre will be forgotten? \_\_\_\_\_**

They say this is the span of a king's life.

This seems to be saying that Tyre will be humbled, stripped and laid bare for 70 years.

**What does it say will happen at the end of those 70 years? \_\_\_\_\_**

It seems that Tyre will rebuild and rise again in prosperity. It says, *"She will return to her lucrative prostitution and will ply her trade with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth."* So they will basically return to their immoral commercial practices. She again sells herself for gain, trusts in wealth rather than God and uses influence without moral restraint. No where do we see that Tyre repents.

**Where does verse 18 say Tyre's profit and earnings will go? \_\_\_\_\_**

Tyre's success will no longer glorify itself. Instead of hoarding their wealth it will end up serving God's plans and purposes. Isaiah is saying here that the system that at one time enriched Tyre will now sustain those who dwell with the Lord. We need to make sure we understand that this is economic reversal, nor moral approval.

We see that:

- Tyre revives
- Tyre resumes the same kind of trade— she returns to what she knows
- BUT the outcome is different

Isaiah isn't saying that Tyre is suddenly righteous, but rather that God's sovereignty governs the outcome. So before, Tyre's wealth exalted themselves. After judgment, their wealth will serve God's purposes. God doesn't need Tyre to repent in order to redirect their wealth. Even nations that are working from mixed or selfish motives can be used by God.

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When it comes to the details regarding the destruction of Tyre, here's what happened:

- Ezekiel 26:7-12 predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would bring in a massive army and destroy the mainland city. He laid siege to the city for 13 years (~586BC to 573BC). The 70 years of silence Tyre went through seems to be referring to the period after this destruction.
- While Nebuchadnezzar took the mainland, the people escaped and moved their wealth and population to their fortified island fortress.
- In 332BC (~240 years later) Alexander the Great destroyed the island city by building a causeway to reach it.

Just a quick history/science lesson:

Alexander's conquest of Tyre was something that archaeologists for years struggled to understand. They couldn't figure out how he was about to build a viable overwater passage to the island that was about a half mile long.

Researchers actually discovered how he did it— they found that he was able to utilize a shallow natural, submerged sand spit that extended from the mainland. His engineers were able to reinforce it with massive rubble most likely taken from the destruction of the mainland city by Nebuchadnezzar centuries earlier.

I learned that the causeway actually still exists today although it has evolved significantly. From years of sediment accumulation, the island has been transformed into a permanent peninsula. It has become a part of modern day Lebanon and this area is heavily inhabited with residential buildings and infrastructure covering the site.

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/sBB3y1xWeTc>

This chapter is a deliberate ending to this section of the book because:

- Tyre represents global commerce, not just a local nation
- Its fall has a huge ripple effect across the entire world
- Its restoration shows that even wealth must be reclaimed by God

### **What has Isaiah 13-23 accomplished?**

In these chapters, God has addressed every major source of human security – military power, political strategy, economic wealth and even religious confidence. He has shown that none of them can stand apart from Him. These chapters aren't just random judgments; they are a systematic dismantling of false trust.

We see a repeated pattern in these 11 chapters:

1. A nation rises in pride
2. It trusts in something other than God
3. God brings judgment — often using another nation
4. The pride is exposed
5. Sometimes restoration comes – but only under God's rule.

The nations that the oracles are about form a “map” that surrounds Judah, starting with Babylon (the rising threat to the east) and ending with Tyre (the economic power to the west). These two nations represent the two greatest symbols of human pride: military might (Babylon) and economic wealth (Tyre). Isaiah seems to have bracketed these two around the rest to show the world in a state of rebellion.

As we wrap up this section of the Oracles to the Nations, we can see some important points that Isaiah was trying to get them to see:

- ❖ The doctrine of Universal Sovereignty
  - In the ancient world, people believed that gods had “territories”. By issuing the oracles to these nations, Isaiah is showing that God is sovereign over every inch of the earth and kings are instruments in His hands to accomplish His purposes.
- ❖ The Futility of Foreign Alliances
  - This was one of the biggest points Isaiah was making throughout these chapters.
  - The point Isaiah was making was “why lean on a broken reed (Egypt) or a sinking ship (Tyre)?”
  - These oracles are used to strip away Judah's options until they are forced to lift their eyes up rather than across the border.

- ❖ The “Remnant” Principle Applied Globally
  - Usually the “remnant” referred to a few faithful left in Israel. These oracles, however, introduced a radical idea: there will be a remnant among the nations.
  - Remember, God’s judgment is not vindictive; it’s about transformation and restoration. God’s ultimate plan is not the extinction of the nations, but rather to incorporate them into His kingdom.
- ❖ The Preparation for Cosmic Judgment
  - The oracles served as a small version of what is coming in chapter 24.
  - God goes from dealing with individual nations to dealing with the entire world at the end of history.

These oracles serve to clear the stage of all these earthly powers so that only the Lord is standing. We are going to see in Isaiah 24 the camera zoom out until the specific names of the cities can no longer be seen and only the earth remains.

We know that many of the ancient empires that were mentioned in Isaiah 13-23 have long since vanished as sovereign political entities, however, several locations and peoples can be directly traced to modern day nations.

Nations and Their Modern Descendants:

- Egypt (Isaiah 19) - one of the few nations from the oracles that still exists today under the same name and is in the same geographic location.
- Damascus/Syria (Isaiah 17) - Cited as the capital city of modern day Syria. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.
- Cush/Ethiopia - corresponds to modern day Sudan and Ethiopia.
- Arabia (Isaiah 21) - The nomadic tribes and regions that were mentioned in this chapter now make up the modern nations of the Arabian Peninsula, primarily Saudi Arabia.
- Jerusalem (Isaiah 22) - It is the center of modern day Israel.

Fallen Empires and Their Modern Territories:

- Babylon (Isaiah 13-14) - Located in modern day Iraq, roughly from Baghdad southward.
- Assyria (Isaiah 14) - occupied what is now northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey and northwestern Iran.
- Moab and Edom (Isaiah 15-16, 21) - These territories are part of modern day Jordan.
- Philistia (Isaiah 14) - this ancient coastal region is part of modern Israel and the Gaza Strip, including cities like Gaza and Ashdod.
- Tyre and Sidon (Isaiah 23) - These major Phoenician ports are located in modern day Lebanon.

All of this matters because the fact that some of these nations are still standing, while others are archaeological ruins highlights divine accuracy. Isaiah predicted that Babylon would be “overthrown by God” and never be inhabited again (Isaiah 13:19-20), whereas Egypt was promised a future of healing and worship (Isaiah 19:22-25).