

# Isaiah 23

## A Prophecy concerning Tyre and Sidon

Another city, more bad news!

This time the focus of God’s disfavor falls upon the city of Tyre. This Phoenician port city’s livelihood came from shipping. Like most popular port cities, Tyre and her sister port, Sidon ( I have no idea why I called it a “her”), were the major connection between the great shipping centers of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. They would receive considerable trade from Egypt as well. The focus on shipping made these cities a “party haven” for those on the ships. A great deal of money changed hands and when you have financial exuberance and a lot of free time, it’s a recipe for immoral activity. That was Tyre’s profile pic.

When these port cities fall under the hand of Yahweh and it would be devastating for the whole region. God was looking for a people who would love him and find the strength in his provision alone. What can we learn from this study that will cause us to grow deeper in our relationship with the Lord?

| English Standard (ESV)  | Passion Notes   | Passion Translation (TPT)   |
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| <p>Isaiah 23:1 The oracle concerning Tyre. Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for Tyre is laid waste, without house or harbor! From the land of Cyprus it is revealed to them. <sup>2</sup> Be still, O inhabitants of the coast; the merchants of Sidon, who cross the sea, have filled you. <sup>3</sup> And on many waters your revenue was the grain of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile; you were the merchant of the nations. <sup>4</sup> Be ashamed, O Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying: “I have neither labored nor given birth, I have neither reared young men nor brought up young women.”</p> | <p><b>a</b> 23:1 Tarshish refers most likely to the city of Tartessus, Spain, on the Guadalquivir River. Archaeological evidence suggests it may have been near present-day Sevilla.</p> <p><b>b</b> 23:1 Tyre means “rock, compressed, pressed together.” Tyre, a Phoenician port on the Mediterranean, was once a symbol of power on the sea and a world capital of commerce. It was known as wealthy, influential, and evil. Now it is a small village known as Sur. Isaiah used it as a metaphor for commerce and trafficking.</p> <p><b>c</b> 23:2 Sidon, a coastal town in Lebanon, means “one who lies in wait, to hunt, to trap.”</p> <p><b>d</b> 23:3 Or “Sihor,” a tributary of the Nile, which means “to wipe out, uproot.”</p> <p><b>e</b> 23:4 In this cryptic verse, it appears that Tyre is given the name “sea, the stronghold of the sea.” With poetic impact, the sea is personified and speaks of being childless. There are churches today that are “childless” (without evangelism outreach) and don’t “raise up sons and daughters” (training and equipping them for ministry).</p> | <p><b>A Prophecy concerning Tyre and Sidon</b></p> <p>Isaiah 23:1 A prophecy for Tyre and Sidon: Wail, you cargo ships of Tarshish! <b>a</b> For Tyre, <b>b</b> your port city, has fallen without a house or a harbor! Word has come to them from the land of Cyprus. <sup>2</sup> Be silent, you inhabitants of the coast and you merchants of Sidon, <b>c</b> once thronged by seafarers. <sup>3</sup> On the great waters your revenue was the grain from the Nile basin. <b>d</b> The harvest of the Nile was your revenue. You were merchants who traded with the nations. <sup>4</sup> Sidon, be ashamed, for the sea, the stronghold of the sea, declares, “I have never gone into labor to give birth to children, nor have I raised up sons or daughters.” <b>e</b></p> |

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| <p><sup>5</sup> When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre. <sup>6</sup> Cross over to Tarshish; wail, O inhabitants of the coast!</p> <p><sup>7</sup> Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old, whose feet carried her to settle far away? <sup>8</sup> Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? <sup>9</sup> The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth. <sup>10</sup> Cross over your land like the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish; there is no restraint anymore. <sup>11</sup> He has stretched out his hand over the sea; he has shaken the kingdoms; the LORD has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its strongholds. <sup>12</sup> And he said: “You will no more exult, O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon; arise, cross over to Cyprus, even there you will have no rest.”</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Behold the land of the Chaldeans! 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. <sup>14</sup> Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold is laid waste. <sup>15</sup> 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:</p> <p><sup>16</sup> “Take a harp; go about the city, O forgotten prostitute! Make sweet melody; sing many songs, that you may be remembered.”<sup>17</sup> At the end of seventy years, the LORD 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. <sup>18</sup> Her merchandise and her wages will be holy to the LORD. It will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who dwell before the LORD.</p> | <p><b>f</b> 23:9 Or “pollute, defile.”</p> <p><b>g</b> 23:10 Or “farm your land.”</p> <p><b>h</b> 23:10 Or “waistband.” The Hebrew of this verse is uncertain.</p> <p><b>i</b> 23:11 Or “He has given his command to Canaan to destroy its fortresses.”</p> <p><b>j</b> 23:18 See John 10:10; 3 John 2.</p> <p><b>k</b> 23.18 Or “for those on whom Yahweh’s face shines.” Or “for those who live before Yahweh’s face.”</p> | <p><sup>5</sup> When the Egyptians hear it, they will be stunned over the destruction of Tyre. <sup>6</sup> Cross over to Tarshish. Wail, you inhabitants of the coast.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> Is this your once boisterous city, founded so long ago? Is this the city that once sent settlers over the sea? <sup>8</sup> Who has planned this for imperial Tyre, who once wore her crown? Your merchants were nobles, and your traders were honored by the world. <sup>9</sup> Yahweh, the Commander of Angel Armies, has planned it! His plan is to eliminate <b>f</b> the pride of your presumed splendor and to humiliate the honored of the world. <sup>10</sup> Daughter Tarshish, cross over <b>g</b> your land as one crosses the Nile, for there is no more harbor marketplace. <b>h</b> <sup>11</sup> Yahweh has stretched out his hand over the sea of humanity and has shaken the kingdoms of this world. He has given his command to destroy Phoenicia’s <b>i</b> fortresses <sup>12</sup> He said, “Fair Sidon, the oppressed one, your celebrating is over. Rise and cross over to Cyprus; even there you will find no rest.”</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Behold the land of the Babylonians. They are a people who have lost their identity. The Assyrians have made it a home for wild animals. They erected siege towers against it, demolished her palaces, and made it a heap of ruins. <sup>14</sup> Wail, you merchant ships of Tarshish, for your fortress is destroyed. <sup>15</sup> In that day, Tyre will remain forgotten for seventy years, equal to the life span of a king. After seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song about the prostitute:</p> <p><sup>16</sup> Take a harp and go about the city, you prostitute long forgotten. Make your sweet melody and sing many songs so that you will be remembered again. <sup>17</sup> At the end of seventy years, the Lord Yahweh will restore Tyre, but she will return to her trade. She will prostitute herself again with every kingdom of the world. <sup>18</sup> But her merchandise and earnings will be set apart as holy to the Lord Yahweh. They will neither be stored nor hoarded, but they will supply abundant <b>j</b> food and splendid garments for those who live in the presence of the Lord Yahweh! <b>k</b></p> |

## BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY

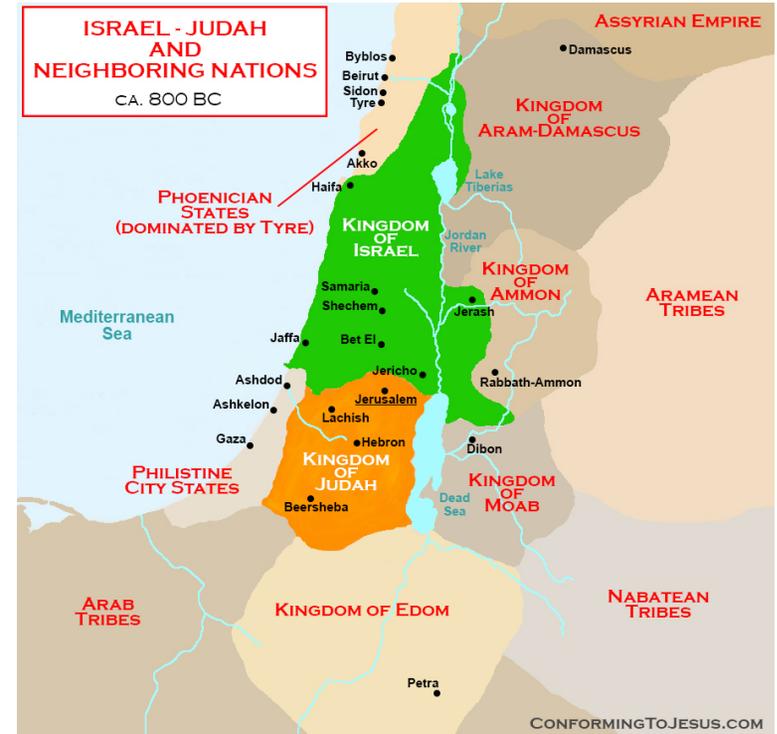
John A. Martin

### TYRE (CHAP. 23)

#### - A prophecy of Tyre's fall (23:1-14)

As in the other prophecies (chaps. 13-22) this one about Tyre also pertains [Vol. 1, p. 1071] to the Assyrian aggression at the end of the eighth century B.C. Though Tyre was not destroyed until some 200 years later, the trade of this great city was cut off between about 700 and 630 B.C.

- 23:1.** This oracle (see comments on 13:1) begins with a call to a fleet of merchant ships to wail (cf. 23:14) in distress during their trading voyages on the Mediterranean Sea. On ships of Tarshish see comments on Ezekiel 27:25 (cf. Isa. 23:14; 60:9). Those ships were docked at the island of Cyprus, about 150 miles northwest of Tyre, when the news of Tyre's destruction reached them.
- 23:2-5.** 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, "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).
- 23:6-9.** 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.



- **23:10-14.** 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).

**- A prophecy of Tyre's future (23:15-18)**

- **23:15-18.** The 70 years mentioned by Isaiah (v. 15) were probably from about 700 to 630 B.C. when Phoenicia's trading was greatly restricted by the Assyrians. In 701 Assyria installed Tubu'alu (Ethbaal III) over Tyre. But around 630 Assyria declined in power, enabling Tyre to regain its autonomy and restore its trade.
  - This 70-year span is called the span of a king's life (cf. Ps. 90:10). But after 70 years ... Tyre would again become a trading center, like a prostitute (Isa. 23:15-17) who was forgotten but who returned to her illicit practice, singing to attract lovers to her again. Tyre would again ply her trade with various nations. But this time the profits from her trading would somehow benefit those who feared the LORD (v. 18). It is difficult to know exactly what Isaiah was referring to. Some have suggested that the 70 years referred not to the time from about 700 to 630 but to the coming Babylonian Captivity of Judah (605-536 B.C.) and that at the end of those years materials from Tyre were used in construction of the temple complex in Jerusalem which was built by the postexilic community. But Tyre's trading was not restricted during [Vol. 1, p. 1072] those years (except for Nebuchadnezzar's 13-year siege of the city from 587 to 574)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. As you look at the Lower Columbia region, do you see any similarities with Tyre and Sidon that might shine a little light on our economic struggles? How could the Lord show favor to our region by opening up our port to blessing? What might that favor look like?
2. Part of the destiny of Evangel is to participate in encouraging and restoring relationships between different groups. Do you see evidence of that being manifested in **your** life? How? What could we do to possibly attract the Lord's favor in this area?
3. Many people believe that our region is on the verge of spiritual breakthrough. Is that something you feel like the Lord has been revealing to you, personally? What have you heard from him?
4. How would you define a "cultural awakening?" If Longview/Kelso were to experience a cultural awakening, what evidence might you see manifested?