

Notes

The Judgment Against Tyre (23:1–18)

- This prophecy concerns Tyre, the great Phoenician seaport whose ships dominated Mediterranean trade. Through this oracle, God demonstrates that nations are accountable to Him not only for political conduct and military aggression, but also for attitudes toward wealth and prosperity.
- Tyre (together with Zidon/Sidon) was the foremost city of Phoenicia, an ancient maritime civilization along the eastern Mediterranean coast in modern-day Lebanon. It is famous for maritime trade, purple dye, timber from Lebanon, and luxury goods. The Phoenicians were renowned sailors, shipbuilders, merchants, and explorers who established trading colonies throughout the Mediterranean world. Because of its immense wealth, Tyre became intoxicated with its prosperity and apparent invincibility.
- Tyre consisted of a mainland city and a heavily fortified island fortress about half a mile offshore. While the mainland city suffered under Assyrian and Babylonian attacks, the island fortress remained unconquered for centuries until Alexander the Great captured it in 332 BC.
- During the reigns of David and Solomon, King Hiram of Tyre supplied cedar timber, skilled craftsmen, and building materials for David's palace and Solomon's Temple (2 Sam 5:11–12; 1 Kings 5:1–11). Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, married Ahab and promoted Baal worship in Israel (1 Kings 16:31–33).
- The ancient city of Tyre still exists today as a modest coastal city in southern Lebanon. Its present condition illustrates Isaiah's message that human wealth, commercial power, and worldly prestige are temporary, but God's sovereignty endures forever.

1. The Lament over Tyre's Fall (23:1–7)

- For centuries, Tyre prospered through maritime trade. Her ships sailed to distant ports, merchants accumulated wealth, and influence extended far beyond her small territory. Yet Isaiah announces that this seemingly invincible trading empire would be brought low by God's hand. The lament begins with a cry to the *"ships of Tarshish"* (Spain). Merchant vessels returning from voyages discover devastating news: Tyre has been laid waste. Isaiah adds that the report reaches them from Chittim (Cyprus).
- Verse 2 commands Phoenicia: *"Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle."* The expression conveys stunned silence and grief. Tyre and Sidon had long stood together as leading Phoenician cities. Now both are called to stand

in silent astonishment before the judgment of God. Tyre is described as a *"mart of nations"* (v3), an international marketplace where wealth and influence converged. The *"seed of Sihor"* refers to Egyptian grain, highlighting Tyre's extensive trade networks.

- Even the sea, source of Phoenician prosperity, is pictured as mourning (v4). God removes the very foundation in which Tyre trusted. Egypt and other trading partners also mourn over her collapse (v5). The bustling commercial center becomes a place of exile and sorrow (v6). Isaiah asks: *"Is this your joyous city?"* (v7), urging reflection on how quickly human glory fades under God's judgment.
- Tyre's downfall shows that no nation, however wealthy or influential, is exempt from God's scrutiny. Prosperity is a blessing, but it becomes dangerous when it replaces trust in the LORD (Prov 11:28; 1 Tim 6:17).

2. The Cause of Tyre's Fall (23:8–12)

- Tyre appeared secure and untouchable. Her merchants were called *"princes"* and traders as *"honourable of the earth."* Yet Isaiah declares: *"The LORD of hosts hath purposed it"* (v9). The collapse was not merely economic or political but divinely ordained. God's purpose was *"to stain the pride of all glory"* (v9). Tyre's sin was not commerce itself but pride produced by prosperity. Wealth fostered self-sufficiency and a false sense of security (Ezek 28:2; James 4:6).
- Verse 10 shows the collapse of Tyre's overseas influence. The daughter of Tarshish—likely representing Tyre's overseas colonies and trading partners—is called to turn from lucrative sea trade to laborious farming because the harbour that sustained her opulence is gone. Isaiah continues: *"He stretched out His hand over the sea"* (v11), showing God's supremacy over nature, nations, and global systems. At His command, kingdoms tremble, trade networks collapse, and economic systems are shaken. Judgment also extends to Sidon (v12), which shared in Phoenician prosperity. Even escape to Chittim (Cyprus) offers no lasting refuge.
- Wealth often fosters independence from God. True security is found only in humble dependence on the LORD of hosts (Prov 16:18).

3. The Seventy-Year Period of Obscurity (23:13–15a)

- Isaiah identifies the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as God's instrument of judgment. The God who declares *"the end from the beginning"* (46:10) had

already determined Babylon's rise as the means of humbling Tyre. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon replaced Assyria as the dominant power. Tyre endured a long siege by the Babylonians (c. 585–572 BC), and although not fully destroyed, its commercial dominance was greatly weakened. In verse 14, Isaiah repeats the lament first heard in verse 1. What men regarded as secure, prosperous, and permanent had been brought low by the sovereign hand of God.

- Isaiah declares Tyre would be *"forgotten seventy years"* (v15a), meaning a loss of prestige and influence among nations for 70 years. The phrase *"according to the days of one king"* is most naturally understood as referring to the lifespan of a kingdom or dynasty, emphasizing God's fixed timetable. Tyre's decline would last no longer or shorter than the LORD had ordained. Human empires rise and fall according to His sovereign purpose.

4. The Restoration of Tyre (23:15b–18)

- After seventy years, Isaiah foretells an unexpected restoration. Tyre would recover its commercial activity because God Himself determined the time. Isaiah portrays the city as a forgotten harlot seeking attention: *"Take an harp, go about the city"* (v16). Trade resumes and maritime commerce is restored, yet without inward renewal. Judgment may restrain pride, but only grace transforms the heart.
- Verse 17 declares: *"The LORD will visit Tyre."* The same God who humbled the city also ordained its renewal. Tyre again participates in global trade, but under divine sovereignty. The climax appears in verse 18: *"Her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD."* Wealth once used for pride will ultimately be consecrated to God's purposes. Partial historical fulfilment appear in Ezra 3:7, Matthew 15:21–28, and Acts 21:3–6. The prophecy also anticipates Isaiah 60:5–11, when the wealth of the nations will be brought to the Messiah's kingdom.
- Isaiah concludes the burdens against the nations on a note of both warning and hope. The LORD humbles human pride, whether expressed through military power, political influence, or commercial prosperity. Yet He is also able to redeem, redirect, and consecrate the wealth of the nations for His glory. The kingdoms of this world rise and fall, but the kingdom of the Messiah shall endure forever.