

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 23

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 23

Theme: "Naval Power is no power
before God!"

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 23:9 (KJV) "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."

INTRODUCTION

Tyre (means "rock") was a Phoenician port city cum island. It was a formidable city of great influence and long history. Half of the city was on the coast and the other half was on an island making Tyre one of the most enviable cities of the ancient world. Her strategic location east of the Mediterranean Sea made her a sea port that could reach all of coastal northern Africa including Egypt, as well as all the southern cities and nations of modern day Europe. Merchant city was how the Bible described her in verse 11. Indeed she was a city of merchants with her port so strategically located for all kinds of trade and commerce. Inland cities were only reached by sea in those days through sea ports and Tyre was

one of the major sea ports used by many nations to reach into the hinterland of Syria, Assyria, Babylon and other parts of the known world at that time.

Her reputation as a great seaport was well known to all. Fausset described Tyre as "In Phoenicia, E. of the Mediterranean, 20 miles S. of Sidon. Justin says the Sidonians founded Tyre after having been defeated by the king of Ascalon, 1209 B.C. according to the Parian marble. A double city, part on the mainland, part on an island nearly one mile long, and separated from the continent by a strait half a mile broad. Justin (xi. 10) records the tradition of the inhabitants that there was a city on the mainland before there was one on the island." [Fausset's Bible Dictionary, Swordsearcher 6.1]. Naval power has always been seen in the olden days as a specialised power because not many countries had it, and many countries depended on it for trade and dominance of the Mediterranean Sea as well as the rest of the known world since two thirds of the world are covered by water.

Tyre was a nation of pride and distinction in the eyes of man and in her own eyes. As early as the days of Joshua, she was already known as a strong city when the city was first mentioned in Joshua 19:29. This chapter teaches that no power is greater than God's power no matter how unique and special man might think or say in his pride and arrogance. The God of Israel will bring them down and put them in their proper place as

he determines in His absolute sovereignty.

OUTLINE

1. The Glory Of A City Is Not Glory! (vv. 1-8);
2. The LORD Is In Absolute Control (vv. 9-12);
3. New Superpowers Replace The Old (vv. 13-16);
4. Tyre Will Be Given To God's People (vv. 17-18).

COMMENTARY

The Glory Of A City Is Not Glory!

Glory that does not last for eternity is not real glory. This was the glory of Tyre for hundreds of years. The city prided herself in her existence as a naval power in the Mediterranean Sea. The first word in the burden of the LORD to Tyre is "Howl." This word literally has a wailing tone and it is very vocal where the person yells out loud in crying. There is nothing to boast or be proud of when man praises you. It will fade away and worse still you are lulled into a false sense of superiority that is more fleeting than the morning dew that fades away before the noon day sun rises overhead. The right response is to cry and not to laugh or be puffed up in pride. The target audience were the ships of Tarshish, a seaport in Spain. The phrase "ships of Tarshish" probably means ships that sailed to Tarshish which would refer to merchant ships from or ships heading to Tarshish for trade. The LORD would lay waste to them all. It has a strong

message of destruction and ravaging. Not a house would be left standing. Every house would be in ruins so that there would be nothing to enter into even if there is a door. This also indicates that these houses would be beyond repair.

This message of her ruin would come from the land of Chittim and be revealed to them. Where is Chittim? Albert Barnes rightly explained, "In regard to the meaning of the word "Chittim," the following is the note of Gesenius on this verse: 'Among the three different opinions of ancient and modern interpreters, according to which they sought for the land of Chittim in Italy, Macedonia, and Cyprus, I decidedly prefer the latter, which is also the opinion of Josephus ("Ant." i. 6, 1). According to this, Chittim is the island Cyprus, so called from the Phoenician colony, Kition, (Citium), in the southern part of the island, but still in such a sense, that this name Chittim was, at a later period, employed also in a wider sense, to designate other islands and countries adjacent to the coasts of the Mediterranean, as, e.g., Macedonia (Daniel 11:30; 1 Macc. 1:1; 8:5). This is also mentioned by Josephus. That *Κίτιον Kition* (Citium) was sometimes used for the whole island of Cyprus, and also in a wider sense for other islands, is expressly asserted by Epiphanius, who himself lived in Cyprus, as a well-known fact ("Adv. Haeres." xxx. 25); where he says, "it is manifest to all that the island of Cyprus is called *Κίτιον Kition* (Citium), for the Cyprians and "Rhodians" (*Ροῦδιοι Rodioi*) are called "Kitians" *Κίτιοι*

Kitioi.” The Bible verse that supports this interpretation that Chittim most likely refers to Cyprus is Ezekiel 27:6 “Of the oaks of Bashan have they made thine oars; the company of the Ashurites have made thy benches of ivory, *brought* out of the isles of Chittim.” Chittim i.e. Cyprus was the island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea where ships were built. It would be in this place where ships were constructed that news would be revealed that Tyre a great maritime port city would be ruined.

“Be still ye inhabitants of the isle” was the instruction from God. The use of the imperative in the verb, “be still” points to a strong command to take note of your impending doom. The isle here has to refer to Tyre rather than Chittim, as the isle of Tyre was not joined to her city by the shore until Alexander the Great built a causeway to link the two parts of the city. The inhabitants of Tyre were told by God to be still. To not boast and take pride in their present fame and fortune as a great seaport, for one day it would all be gone forever though today many merchants of Zidon or Sidon (also a coastal city on the western banks of Israel) passed over the sea and arrived in their ships with their goods and replenished Tyre. Sidon was also a Phoenician city but more ancient than Tyre. In fact Tyre was a colony of the Sidonians and therefore like a mother or big sister they would obviously replenish her. But a time was coming that even the Sidonians whom Tyre had depended upon for help all these years would no longer be able to help.

Trade with Egypt had been the honour of Tyre. By great waters, the seed of Sihor (referring to the River Nile – see Joshua 13:3), the harvest of the river was Tyre’s revenue as she is a mart of nations. The crops and produce and all kinds of wares and precious metals and stones from the Great River Nile were brought to Tyre to be sold. Tyre was a great meeting place for trading by other nations. Her strategic location made her a very accessible trade hub for many nations.

Verse 4 describes Sidon as the mother of Tyre and Tyre as the daughter. Sidon was commanded by the LORD to be ashamed and not to be proud of the many cities that she had founded. The reason is that the sea hath spoken which means that Tyre being an island appeared as if she has grown out of the sea. The message comes from the sea that gave “birth” to Tyre. Tyre is described here as the strength of the sea because of her past might and glory and the fact that she was perched on a Rock as her name Tyre, implies. The message was that Sidon shall travail not nor bring forth children neither do I nourish up young men nor bring up virgin. Sidon had taken pride in her colonization and founding of cities and in particular a city like Tyre. There would come a time when this would cease. Barnes correctly interpreted this verse to mean, “that the city which had been the mistress of the commercial world, and distinguished for founding other cities and colonies, was about to lose her importance, and to cease to extend her colonies and her influence over other countries.

Over this fact, Sidon, the mother and founder of Tyre herself, would be humbled and grieved that her daughter, so proud, so rich, and so magnificent, was brought so low.”

Verse 5 describes the reaction of Egypt. The Egyptians would lose their trade hub and would be sorely pained by the destruction of Tyre. Verse 6 and 7 are self explanatory. Tyre shall flee to Tarshish from whom she had been receiving her trade and ships. They will howl i.e. cry loudly in their agony. There will be no more joy in Tyre because of her long history of trade, fame and fortune that would soon be lost forever. Her inhabitants shall leave as she is destroyed and will sojourn in a far country.

Who dares to make this counsel against a great and ancient city like Tyre, the crowning city? Princes trade there like merchants and the most honourable of men from all over the earth travelled there to trade! Who dares to prophesy that such a great and ancient city could cease to exist! It is unthinkable. The city has been there longer than many generations of kings and princes! Many had come and gone but Tyre remained!

The LORD Is In Absolute Control

The identity of the one who dares to prophesy this counsel against Tyre is the LORD of hosts. Not only did He prophesy it, the Bible said that He purposed it; in other words, He determined it. It is more than just predicting the future unlike a fortune teller who guesses the future but can do nothing about it. The LORD here is declaring to all that I am the One who

is bringing the destruction upon Tyre! The purpose is made very clear by the LORD that it is to stain i.e. to pollute or defile “the pride of all glory and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.” Man’s glory in its essence is defilement but he refuses to admit it. The LORD did it to wake the sinful up out of their drunken stupor of false pride in things temporal. As long as men do not humble themselves and think that they are great and have done greatness, they will not turn to God in repentance. The LORD did this for man’s own good. He has no choice but to pollute man’s glory because that is the only way sinful man learns!

The figure of the flight of the inhabitants of Tyre is captured in verse 10. They are described by the LORD passing through their own and like a river. The river flows through rapidly and completely. Nothing can stop its flow nor does it slow down but flows right through anything that stands in its path. The inhabitants will flee in rapid haste and it will affect the entire city not just parts. There will be no more strength in Tyre. She will be thoroughly destroyed.

The LORD stretched out i.e. to overturn or to judge with His omnipotent hand over the sea and He shook the kingdoms. The mighty sea is nothing to the LORD. The sea was a place that Tyre depended upon for her existence and yet it is nothing to the LORD. He merely stretches forth His hand and it happens. Kingdoms are shaken i.e. to quiver. The LORD gives His commandments and they are obeyed. It is not an option. There is no

maybe or a doubt about what the LORD wanted and will bring to pass. This time He gave a commandment against Tyre called the merchant city here. He stretched out His hand to destroy the strong holds i.e. their mighty bulwarks are destroyed. No matter what wall they build or what kind of armies or naval powers a city might possess, they will all be destroyed by the LORD if He so wills.

The end result is that Tyre will no more rejoice in her revelry due to her trading, wealth and fame as a merchant city for princes and honourable men. The LORD calls her oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon. There is nothing more oppressive than a virgin as every virgin was expected to be married in her virginity. But Tyre is depicted here like a virgin oppressed i.e. violated and has lost her virginity. Arise and pass over i.e. flee to Chittim i.e. Cyprus from where her ships were built. Even there Tyre will have no rest i.e. settle down rather than Sabbath rest. They will not be able to make their homes there and they perhaps hope to return to Tyre one day as Cyprus is an island very near to Tyre. This will not be possible at all. Tyre may run and hide from her destruction but they will remain refugees and would not be able to settle down in Cyprus.

New Superpowers Replace The Old

The people that the LORD will use to bring about Tyre's destruction are the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans were barbarous in their disposition. They lived like wild beasts in the wilderness until the Assyrians

conquered them and from then brought them into prominence. The life as conquered probably awakens the Chaldeans to the realisation that unity is strength. The Chaldeans were not a united people under one rule as most nations in those days were. They lived in the wilderness more in tribes than under one king. But after the Assyrians conquered them and used them as weapons of war in assisting them to conquer other nations, they probably realized the might and splendour that conquest brings. From skins of animals as garments of war they were given proper armament. They realized the importance of living in cities so they build cities with modernistic amenities like water and proper sanitation. They raised up palaces one of which was the famous hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world before it was captured by the Persians.

The Babylonians will bring Tyre to ruin, not the Greeks. This verse makes it abundantly clear. Therefore the ships of Tarshish are again called by the LORD to howl as in verse 1. The power and might of Tyre in her ships will come to nought. When that day of destruction occurs, Tyre will be forgotten i.e. forsaken and neglected for 70 years. This period is the same as the Jewish captivity as prophesied by Jeremiah for Judah. Jeremiah 27:3, 8; and Ezekiel 26:7 describe how Tyre and other surrounding nations were taken by Nebuchadnezzar when he came down during the first captivity to take away Daniel and his three friends and other Jewish boys. The phrase "according to the days of one king"

means “according to the period of the kingdom of one king i.e. dynasty.” The end of the Babylonians came when the Medes and Persians defeated the king of Babylon. After the end of 70 years, Tyre will be restored back to her former glory where she will once again become a seaport for princes and honourable men. They will come to her like men go to a harlot singing her songs.

Tyre Will Be Given To God’s People

At the end of 70 years, the LORD will visit Tyre again. The LORD will find Tyre in her former glory doing much trade with many nations. She shall turn to her hire i.e. her naval trade to do business to regain her pride and riches. Tyre shall commit fornication i.e. figuratively speaking do business with all the nations of the earth regardless of their relationship with God. As long as money could be made, Tyre became a stopping point or all kinds of businesses. There was no stopping Tyre.

However, the LORD said that when He visits something will happen. Tyre will turn into a nation where there will be holiness. Her merchandise and hire will be holiness to the LORD. This means that Tyre’s wealth would be used for the blessing of Gods people and promotion of God’s kingdom. That day came in the future when sinners were converted. This passage from Acts 21:3-5 captures this teaching very well. “Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we

tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.” The material things that once were used purely for carnal satisfaction and purposes would be used by God’s people for God’s people. This was the thrust of the last part of verse 18.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There Is No Superpower On Earth That Lasts Forever

Regardless of the present invincibility of the atomic powers of today, sinful men have lulled themselves into a false sense of superiority. They think that they are invincible and the captain of their own destiny. They talk as if they are like God! This foolish notion will bring upon sinful man the wrath of God one day.

This happened to Tyre for Tyre’s own good. This is a lesson for all of us today. We must not think that just because we have a little power we are greater than God. Tyre’s unique naval power was rendered useless by God according to His will and timing. There was nothing Tyre could do to stop what the LORD said would surely come to pass. Today’s nations and people are like Tyre and her inhabitants. But will sinful man ever learn?

Why Can't Sinful Man See That It Is The LORD?

When calamities occur to nations like what happened to Tyre, nations tend to explain their calamities away and refuse to acknowledge that it is the LORD who has done it! Sinful man ascribe them to chance or to some inexplicable natural forces but never to the God of Israel. They will blame it on a warring nation but not the LORD.

In the case of Tyre, the LORD hid His identity until verse 9 where the LORD deliberately states that He was the One who purposed it. He made the destruction happen and not any man, not even the Chaldeans even though they were the actual nation that destroyed Tyre. God's people have to be very sensitive to see the hand of God in today's calamities and world events. These are not mere carnal events but spiritual ones.

Salvation Soon Comes!

Salvation came upon a city like Tyre. If it can come to Tyre, it can come to any nation. There is no exception. The power of the gospel is greater than any resistance or sin committed by man. The blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse us of all sins. When that happens, lives are transformed.

The city of Tyre experienced such a transformation. The materialism that once flooded the city for carnal purposes was turned around by God. God's people used the material blessings to feed one another and God's servants. The wealth was used for the extension of God's kingdom. Carnal things took on spiritual

significance when used for spiritual purposes. This is also true today when true salvation takes place in the believer's life. AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 23:1-12

TUESDAY: Isaiah 23:13-18

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 23:1-18

THURSDAY: Isaiah 23:1-18

FRIDAY: Isaiah 23:1-18

Discussion Questions

- 1. Are you trusting in material things to feel safe and secure? Please explain your answer.

- 2. What does it mean when Jesus says that we cannot serve God and mammon?

3. Do you see the hand of God in the tsunami on Boxing Day 2004 and the destruction of the Twin Towers in 2001 September 11 that killed thousands? What about the millions gassed by Hitler during the Second World War?

6. Do you think that the conquest of Canaan in the days of Joshua could be compared with the conquest of Tyre by the Babylonians? Please explain your answer.

4. What gives you the greatest joy on earth? Please share and explain your answer.

7. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?

5. Will there come a time when nations will cease to conquer other nations on this earth? If your answer is yes, when will that day be?
