

Isaiah Chapter 23 Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

A Prophetic Utterance / Oracle for Tyre

The Mighty Commercial Power Will Be Destroyed

and Forgotten for Seventy Years,

but Afterwards She Will Return to Her Commerce,

in Service to YHWH, a Biblical Prediction that Failed^{1, 1}

¹**Chapter 23** has five end-notes: (1) Assyrian Attacks on Phoenicia; (2) Phoenicia and Its Colonies; (3) The Value of a “Talent” in the Ancient Near East; (4) Chaldea and the Chaldeans; and (5) The Gewazee Women / Belly Dancers of Egypt.

Slotki states that **chapter 23** is “a prophetic message on the destruction of Phoenicia and particularly its principal cities and harbors, Tyre and Zidon.” (P. 105)

Alexander states that the prophecy in **chapter 23** “consists of two parts. The first predicts the fall of Tyre (**verses 1-14**). The second promises its restoration and conversion (**verses 15-18**)...

“The fall of Tyre is predicted, not directly, but in the form of apostrophes [addresses to an imaginary character] addressed to her own people or her colonies (**verses 1-7**). The destruction is referred to God as its Author, and to the Chaldees as His instruments (**verses 8-14**)...

“The prediction in the latter part includes three events. Tyre shall be forsaken and forgotten for seventy years (**verse 15**). She shall then be restored to her former activity and wealth (**verses 16-17**). Thenceforth her gains shall be devoted to the Lord (**verse 18**).

“Tyre, one of the chief cities of Phoenicia, was situated partly on a rocky island near the coast, and partly in a wide and fertile plain upon the coast itself...Tyre is remarkable in history for two things: its maritime trade, and the many sieges it has undergone...

“The first of these on record was by Shalmaneser king of Assyria...

“The next was by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon who besieged it thirteen years...

“A third siege was by Alexander the Great, who after seven months and with the utmost difficulty, finally reduced it...

It was afterwards besieged by the Syrian king Antigonus, and more than once during the Crusades, both by Franks and Saracens. After this period it entirely

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decayed, and has not disappeared, its site being marked by the insulated [archaic-made into an island] rock, by the causeway between it and the mainland still existing as a bar of sand, and by columns and other architectural remains mostly lying under water.

“It has been much disputed which of these events is the subject of the prophecy before us...The great body of the older writers [prior to the mid-nineteenth century] refer it to...the siege by Nebuchadnezzar...The German writers of the new school are divided on this question...

While Ewald thinks the style unlike that of Isaiah...[and] Eichhorn and Hitzig see the clearest indications of a later age, Gesenius and Hendewerk are struck with the tokens of antiquity and with the characteristics of Isaiah. So, too, with the literary merit of the passage: Hitzig treats it almost with contempt, while Hendewerk extols it as a masterpiece of eloquence...

“The actual conquest of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, even leaving out of view the prophecy before us, and the more explicit one in **Ezekiel 26**, is much more probable than [the conquest by Shalmaneser]. But there is still another difficulty in the way of applying the prophecy to Nebuchadnezzar’s siege and conquest. Isaiah intimates and Ezekiel explicitly foretells an entire desolation of Tyre, which did not take place till the Middle Ages [the period of European history from the fall of the Roman Empire in the West (5th century) to the fall of Constantinople (1453), or, more narrowly, from about 1100 C.E. to 1453 C.E.]...

“Hengstenberg’s solution of this difficulty is, that the prophets constantly connect the immediate consequences of the events which they predict with their remoter and more gradual results. On the same general principle of interpretation, but with a difference of form, it may be said that the prophecy before us is generic, not specific, a panoramic [sweeping, extensive] picture of the downfall of Tyre, from the beginning to the end of the process, with particular allusion to particular sieges, as for instance to that of the Chaldees in **verse 13**, and perhaps to that of Alexander in **verse 6**...

“While the great majority of writers understand the passage as referring to the literal Tyre, a few prefer to take it in a mystical sense. Some of the older Jewish writers say that whenever the literal Tyre is meant, the name is fully written (צור), but then when it is defectively written, as it is here (צ) it signifies *Rome*. Abarbanel refutes this dictum by showing that both forms occur in the same context, but himself makes Tyre here mean *Venice*. But these hypotheses are modest in comparison with that of Cocceius, who understands by Tyre the Church of Rome.” (Pp. 391-93)

Gray entitles **chapter 23** “The Oracle of Tyre,” and comments that “This consists of a poem, **verses 1-14**, on the ruin of Phoenicia, and a prose appendix, **verses 15-18**, predicting the restoration of the commercial prosperity of Tyre.” (P. 383)

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He entitles **verses 1-14** “The Ruin of Phoenicia,” and comments that “the poem opens and closes with the same two lines, in which the Phoenician mariners are summoned to lament for the destruction of their ‘fortress’...

“The first strophe [**verses 1-5**] extends this appeal to the inhabitants of Phoenicia generally, especially the Phoenician merchants...

“In the second strophe [**verses 6-9**] the Phoenicians are bidden to pass over to Tarshish, and told that the humiliation of Tyre, the home of merchant princes and the city of ancient seafaring fame, has been decreed by Yahweh...

“The third strophe [**verses 10-14**] asserts that Yahweh has also given the word for the destruction of other Phoenician fortresses, and has rendered the Phoenician colonies insecure. In particular, Cyprus will be unable to give asylum to the Phoenicians retreating from their ruined homes...

“Opinions differ greatly as to the occasion and exact subject of the poem...We cannot...with any assurance attempt to date the poem by considering which of the many sieges of Tyre or Sidon most answers to the details here given; as a matter of fact, these details are too general or too uncertain to point decisively to any particular siege...

“The vocabulary, naturally enough, contains words and phrases used by Isaiah; and others that do not occur in his extant writings...But observe that the words and phrases cited as used by Isaiah are, with one or two insignificant exceptions, not peculiar to Isaiah, or even particularly characteristic of him; and they occur also in later writers.” (Pp. 385-86)

Oswalt entitles **23:1-18** “Judgment on Tyre.”

He comments that “With this pronouncement, Isaiah concludes his judgments upon the nations. It is a fitting conclusion. As Babylon, the great city at the eastern edge of the [known] world, opened the section, so Tyre, the great city at the western edge [but we ask, is Tyre the “western edge of the ancient known world? This chapter knows about the existence of Phoenician colonies as far west as Tarshish / Tartessus in Spain, on the Atlantic Ocean], closes it. Just as Babylon was described in general, universalistic terms, so is Tyre. Just as it was difficult to pin down the precise historical events to which **chapter 13** may have been referring, so also it is with this chapter. So much similar are the two chapters that the **Book of Revelation** uses the language here applied to Tyre to describe the great world-city Babylon (**Revelation 18:11-24**)...

“All these factors lead to the conclusion that Tyre here, like Babylon at the beginning, is being used in a representative way. If that is so, what does Tyre represent?...

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“Observation of the chapter must make it plain that the central focus is upon mercantile wealth...Like all the Phoenician cities, with the Lebanon Mountains at their backs and the Mediterranean Sea at their feet, Tyre faced westward. The Phoenicians colonized and developed wherever possible around the whole Mediterranean basin, with two results: they became the preeminent seafarers of the region, and, like Spain and then England more than two millennia later, they became fabulously wealthy. As seafarers, they circumnavigated Africa in 608 B.C.E. under the patronage of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. Their colony Carthage survived long enough to duel Rome in the titanic struggle from which Rome barely emerged victorious...

“So between the two of them, Babylon and Tyre summed up from east to west all that the world of that day—and this—thought was significant. Isaiah’s response was: ‘Do not trust the nations of this world. They are not preeminent. They do not hold your destiny in their hands. They, like you, are under the judgment of God—your God.’” (P. 427)

Oswalt adds that “Because of the general nature of the prophecy, it is very difficult to determine whether Isaiah had some specific event in mind. Tyre came under attack five different times from Isaiah’s time to 332 B.C.E. Sennacherib (705-701 B.C.E.)...Esarhaddon (679-671 B.C.E.)...Nebuchadnezzar (585-573 B.C.E.)... Artaxerxes III Ochus in 343 B.C.E....Alexander [the Great] (332 B.C.E.)...

“Only the last of these, Alexander’s, was entirely successful, because of the unique structure of the city. It was composed of the main city on the shore and a citadel on the larger of two islands just offshore. If the main city fell, the inhabitants merely withdrew to the citadel and out-waited the besieging army. Alexander succeeded by dismantling the onshore city and using its materials to build a causeway over which his siege machines could be drawn to break through the citadel wall. The inhabitants paid dearly for trying the great conqueror’s patience. It is said that he crucified two thousand of the leaders and sold thirty thousand into slavery...

“Whether Isaiah had this event or some earlier one in mind is not clear. At any rate, Tyre never regained her ancient status and is today a small town of about six thousand inhabitants. Isaiah knew whereof he spoke.

“The pronouncement is divided into two main segments: **verses 1-14**, the overthrow of Tyre; **verses 15-18**, the restoration of Tyre. The latter segment, like the prophecy concerning Egypt, has Tyre owning the sovereignty of Israel’s God.” (P. 427)

Motyer entitles **23:1-18** “Tyre: pride and holiness.”

He comments that ‘The world in the shadows’ has proved to be an apt title for this cycle of oracles [**chapters 21-23**]. The ‘twilight’ of Babylon (**21:4**), the lone voice out of Edom’s darkness (**21:11-12**), troubled Gentile tribes lodging overnight (**21:13-15**),

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the spiritual darkness of Jerusalem's unforgivable sin (**22:14**) and now, wailing over fallen Tyre (**23:1, 14**)...

"Yet there have been flickers of light too. The news of Babylon was brought, as if for comfort, to crushed Israel (**21:10**), the voice out of Seir was invited to return because day was bound to come (**21:11-12**) and now, a great surprise, the merchandise of Tyre will yet become 'holiness to the Lord' (**23:18**)." (P. 189)

We say, Perhaps...but wonder if summations of chapters like this are really accurate, and expressive of the real content of these chapters. See our comments at the end of this chapter, where we attempt to sum up the meaning of **chapters 13-23**.

Motyer goes on to state that "David and Solomon enjoyed warm relations with Tyre...But there was another side. Solomon took Phoenician wives and imported the cult of the Sidonian Ashtoreth (**1 Kings 11:1, 5**)..."

"Isaiah would have grown up with awareness of Tyre's corruption of Israel's most favored king. Phoenician influence was an evil genius to the northern kingdom also, even to the extent of almost replacing Yahweh with the Baal of Sidon (**1 Kings 16 and 18**)...In the prophets references [to Tyre] are for the most part hostile (**Jeremiah 47:4; Amos 1:9-11; Joel 3:4^{Heb} / 4:4^{Eng}; Zechariah 9:2-4**) and it is of Tyre alone that Ezekiel fails to say that they will yet 'know the Lord' (**Ezekiel 25:7, 11; 30:26**)..."

"Isaiah, however, looks forward to the dedication of Tyre's wealth to the Lord and His people (**23:18**), and he is thus living within the traditions to which he was heir, and indeed reaching back to the normative times of David.

"While the first cycle of oracles (**chapters 13-20**) placed the people of God amid the political upheavals of the world [when has that not been true?], the emphasis in the second cycle has been religious: the fall of the idols of Babylon (**21:9**) and the unforgivable sin (**22:14**). Suitably therefore, at the end we come to Tyre, the religious corruptor [where in this text is anything said about Tyre's being a 'religious corruptor'?]. But just as Egypt, the political oppressor [and Babylon], will yet come into a co-equal status in the Lord (**19:25**), so Tyre will yet come into a relationship of holiness. What Tyre gave of old for the temple was on a commercial basis (**1 Kings 5:6ff.**), but the **Old Testament** nourished the hope of something better..."

"Isaiah puts the matter in a nutshell: the corruptor will bring holy merchandise. The care of a Phoenician widow once extended to a prophet (**1 Kings 17:8-16**) will be the norm of coming relationships.

"The oracle on Tyre consists of a poem on Tyre's fall (**verses 1-14**) and an appendix predicting Tyre's revival and ultimate allegiance to the Lord and His people (**verses 15-18**)." (P. 189)

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Motyer entitles **verses 1-14** “Lament for Tyre,” and comments that “the divisions of the poem are marked off initially by their opening imperatives (**verses 1, 2, 4, 7 10, 12c**) and by the question at **verse 8**...Egypt is mentioned by name or in principle three times (**verses 3, 5, 10**), further establishing the link with the corresponding oracle in the first cycle (**19:1-20:6**). Egypt is the power that would have destroyed the life of Israel and Tyre the power that corrupted its spiritual life.” (P. 190)

Watts states that **chapter 23** is “divided in three parts...

Verses 1-7 present mourners regaling [entertaining? amusing?] Tyre, Sidon, and their dependencies with cries of grief concerning their losses [we do not see these verses as intended to entertain or amuse!].

Verses 8-13 shift to a different setting to reflect on Yahweh’s involvement and intention in doing this.

Verses 14-18 return to the first setting but present three prophecies of Tyre’s return to power and influence after an appropriate interval of time.” (Pp. 303-04)

He comments that “Tyre was an important city throughout antiquity...It was closely related to its neighboring Phoenician cities and hinterland, although its position on an island often made it possible to escape degradations that befell its land-based neighbors...

“Interpreters have had difficulty with the identification of Tyre in the chapter [i.e., whether it is Tyre or Sidon, or Phoenicia as a whole that the chapter is discussing. Watts suggests that] a better approach relates the whole chapter to Phoenicia and its cities. Tyre and Sidon are mentioned by name...The chapter is related to Phoenicia under the rich variety of terms which represented the whole area and its principal parts...

“Interpretation of the chapter has also been complicated by trying to distinguish whether this is a prophecy of future destruction or a taunt song recalling a recent destruction...Lindblom...makes a strong plea for the latter approach. From the perspective of drama, that viewpoint has much more contemporaneity with the event, which has just taken place and has all Tyre’s allies attempting to adjust to the news.

“A third problem for interpretation lies in fixing the historical occasion to which it refers. Assyrian kings attacked the region at least four times, each with devastating results—Shalmaneser V (722 B.C.E.) and Sennacherib (701 B.C.E.) in the eighth century [800-701 B.C.E.; see our endnote 1], and Esarhaddon (677 B.C.E.). Nebuchadnezzar [the Babylonian] besieged Tyre for thirteen years before defeating it in 572 B.C.E. Artaxerxes III put down a rebellion there in 351 B.C.E. But none of these actually destroyed Tyre until Alexander built a causeway to the island in 332 B.C.E...

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“Although Tarshish is mentioned in a number of biblical texts, it only existed as a colony of Phoenician (or Tyrian) power into the seventh century B.C.E. [700-601 B.C.E.] ...Cyprus had been colonized by Tyre about 800 B.C.E. or earlier...

“Arguments for dating the text have often concentrated on the picture of Tyre’s destruction (**verse 1**) but have ignored other considerations. Wildberger...insists that the chapter pictures the breakdown of Tyrian dominance in the Mediterranean area. This fits the time of Esarhaddon (677 B.C.E.). Such a date also fits the chronological sequence of the [**Book of Isaiah**], placing the destruction in the reign of Manasseh...

“The sequence of events is described in the Assyrian annals (compare Pritchard’s **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, p. 291). A rebellion by Tirhaka of Egypt was the occasion for a Phoenician uprising which was brutally put down in 677 B.C.E...The Assyrian inscriptions go on to speak of a new port city being founded, called Esarhaddon’s Port, and of Assyrian reorganization of the region into three provinces... At this time Esarhaddon claimed sovereignty over Cyprus and Greece, as far as Tarshish...This action effectively ended Phoenicia’s independence, her control of shipping in the eastern Mediterranean, and her control of Cyprus. Having conquered Egypt and taken over Phoenicia’s commercial power, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal had brought Assyria to the peak of her power and the Palestinian area to the lowest point in its history.” (Pp. 305-06)

Kaiser comments on **verses 1-14** that “The final oracle against a foreign nation in the collection of **chapters 13-23** has provoked the greatest disagreement about its meaning. Exegetes disagree about whether it is a prophecy of the future or a prophetic lament about something in the past, and also about whether it was originally addressed to Sidon and Tyre, or to only one of these two cities...

“We do not know of any occasion when both cities were conquered and destroyed at the same time. Thus there are many commentators who date it in the last third of the eighth century B.C.E. [800 to 701 B.C.E.] and attribute it to the prophet Isaiah, believing that in the light of the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib he foresaw the conquest of Sidon, from which king Luli later fled to Cyprus. The fact that an attempt was later made to relate the whole poem to Tyre suggests that it originally referred solely to the fall of Sidon, but was later reinterpreted following the impression made by the catastrophe that came upon Tyre. This disaster can be identified only with the conquest of the island fortress by Alexander the Great in the summer of the year 332 B.C.E. The immense impression this made upon contemporaries is reflected in the testimonies of ancient historians...

“However, a study of the linguistic usage of the poem against Sidon argues against any early dating. This makes it probable, as has often been suggested, that the song can be associated with the conquest of Sidon by Artaxerxes III Ochus in the year 343 B.C.E...

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“The fact that in **verses 8** and **9** the event is interpreted as the consequence of a Divine decree is in accordance with the understanding of the song as a prophetic comment on a past event. The song is formed of three stanzas, each consisting of seven couplets, **verses 1b-4; 6-9** and **10-14**...

“We can regard it as a taunt song upon the destruction of Sidon. The repetition of the first line at the conclusion gives the poem considerable formal unity...The fact that it has been placed after the oracle against Jerusalem in **chapter 22** may perhaps be a further indication that it was composed at a late period and inserted subsequently into the **Isaiah** roll.” (Pp. 162-63)

These differing views concerning **chapter 23** demonstrate again the lack of clarity, and the puzzling ambiguity that characterizes the prophetic message of Isaiah.

²Oswalt comments on **verses 1-7** that “This segment seems to follow the progress of the report of Tyre’s fall. It begins with the [announcement to the] homeward-bound Tyrian ships (**verse 1**), then to the Phoenician homeland (**verses 2-4**), then to Egypt (**verse 5**), and finally to the end of the world [meaning the farthest portions of the known world] (**verse 6**) before a concluding word to Tyre herself.” (P. 428)

Gray entitles **verses 1-5** “First strophe.”

He comments that “The meaning seems to be, that the news of the fall of Tyre has reached the Phoenician settlements in Cyprus, and through them the Tyrian mariners that touch there.” (P. 394)

Slotki comments that in **verse 1** “Tidings of the destruction of the Phoenician ports are brought to the ships of Tarshish while calling at Cyprus on their homeward journey.” (P. 105)

Translations of **verse 1** vary:

King James, “The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them.”

Tanakh, “The ‘Tyre’ Pronouncement. Howl, you ships of Tarshish! For havoc has been wrought, not a house is left; As they came from the land of Kittim, This was revealed to them.”

New Revised Standard, “The oracle concerning Tyre. Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for your fortress is destroyed. When they came in from Cyprus they learned of it.”

New International, “A prophecy against Tyre: Wail, you ships of Tarshish! For Tyre is destroyed and left without house or harbor. From the land of Cyprus word has

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הִלְלוּ אֲנִיֹּת תַרְשִׁישׁ

כִּי־שָׁדַד

מִבַּיִת מְבוּא

מֵאֶרֶץ כִּתִּים

נִגְלָה־לְמוֹ:

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come to them.”

New Jerusalem, “Proclamation about Tyre: Howl, ships of Tarshish, for all has been destroyed--no more houses, no way of getting in: the news has reached them from Kittim.”

Rahfs, τὸ ὄραμα Τύρου ὀλολύζετε πλοῖα Καρχηδόνος ὅτι ἀπώλετο καὶ οὐκέτι ἔρχονται ἐκ γῆς Κιτιαίων ἤκται αἰχμάλωτος, “The vision of Tyre. Howl Carthaginian ships, because it perished, and no longer are they coming out of Kitaion-land. It was led away captive.” (The word Kitaion is a transliteration from the Hebrew כִּתִּים, **kittiyim**, which means either “Cypriots,” people from Cyprus, or perhaps “Greeks,” or even people from the Mediterranean coast-lands.

Alexander, “The burden of Tyre. Howl, ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, no house, no entrance; from the land of Chittim it is revealed to thee.”

Motyer comments on **verse 1** that “This is the only oracle in the cycle contained in **chapters 13-27** which has a direct rather than a cryptic title...

“The occurrence of ‘Moab’ in **25:10** is another case in point. A probable explanation is that Isaiah wished to earth his predictions [plant them solidly in history?]. In **chapters 21-23** and even more in **chapters 24-27**, his gaze is probing farther and farther into the mists of the future and he may have wanted to maintain the awareness that eschatology happens to ‘real people.’ The proved strength of Tyre made it a good test of the sovereignty of the Lord over history; its transformation, in the light of experience, made it a startling example of the sovereignty of mercy.” (P. 190)

When Motyer says that Isaiah’s gaze “is probing farther and farther into the mists of the future,” we are reminded of Peter’s statement in **1 Peter 1:10-11** concerning the prophets of Israel’s “searching and inquiring” in their effort to understand what the Spirit of hope within them was pointing to, and when it would happen. The prophets of Israel were assured that YHWH was planning for a great future, not only for Israel, but for all the peoples of the world—but just exactly when and how that future would take place was a mystery to them, a mystery into which they devoted their efforts to probe. And that is quite different from thinking that they were given an exact time-table of the future, and a clear vision of what and when things would happen.

Utterance / oracle / burden of Tyre:³

Howl,⁴ ships of Tarshish!⁵

³Motyer comments that “This is the only oracle in the cycle contained in **chapters 13-27** which has a direct rather than a cryptic title.” (P. 190)

⁴Where our Hebrew text spells הַיְלִילִי, the hiphil imperative masculine plural, “howl!”, 1QIs^a spells with the beginning letter א instead of ה: אֵילִילִי, which Watts observes “occurs frequently in that text.” (P. 302)

⁵Where our Hebrew text has תַּרְשִׁישׁ, **tarshiysh**, “Tarshish,” **Rahfs** has Καρχηδόνος, “of Carthage” (so also in **verses 6, 10** and **14**). The Old Latin has “Carthage,” while the Latin Vulgate has *naves mari*, “ships of (the) sea.”

Slotki states that the ships of Tarshish were “the great merchant vessels of the time, or ships that traded with Tarshish (Tartessus) in Spain on the mouth of the river Guadalquivir.” (P. 105)

Kaiser states that *ships of Tarshish* means “merchant ships suitable for journeys across the open sea (compare **1 Kings 10:22**; **Isaiah 2:16**; **60:9** and **Ezekiel 27:25**).” (P. 163)

“The Guadalquivir is the fifth longest river in the Iberian peninsula and the second longest river with its entire length in Spain. It is the only great navigable river in Spain. Currently it is navigable to Seville, but in Roman times it was navigable to Córdoba. It begins at Cañada de las Fuentes (village of Quesada) in the Cazorla mountain range Jaén), passes through Córdoba and Seville and ends at the fishing village of Bonanza, in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, flowing into the Gulf of Cádiz, in the Atlantic Ocean.

“The Phoenicians established the first anchorage grounds and dealt in precious metals. The ancient city of Tartessos was said to have been located at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, although its site has not yet been found.” (**Wikipedia**, 10/29/2016)

Oswalt states that “Tarshish refers most likely to Tartessus on the Guadalquivir in Spain. Phoenician colonies in this area are reported to have existed as early as the twelfth century B.C.E. So these are long-range ships returning homeward after a perhaps arduous voyage, their crews looking forward to rest and leave in the home port.

“But at some point, either upon making an intermediate stop in Cyprus or upon meeting a ship outbound from Cyprus, they receive the news that Tyre is destroyed and there is no home port to which they can return.” (P. 429)

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Because it⁶ was destroyed,⁷
without house, without harbor!⁸

⁵(...continued)

Motyer comments that “Imaginatively, Isaiah thinks of the fleet (literally, ‘out from Cyprus’ or ‘off Cyprus’ making for Tyre only to be met with a message that ‘it’ (Tyre) was no more! No name is necessary. City (*house*) and *harbor* alike are gone.” (P. 190) It is interesting to see the ultra-conservative Motyer describing this verse as having come from Isaiah’s imagination, rather than describing it in his usual manner as a Divine word—and we wonder why.

Kaiser states that “After the destruction of Tartessos by the Carthaginians towards the end of the sixth century [the first day of 600 until the last day of 501 B.C.E.], the name of the city persisted as the designation of an area...South of Tartessos, Tyre seems to have found[ed] as early as the eleventh century the trading post of Gadir, the present-day Cadiz. Kition, the present-day Larnaka, was colonized by Tyre about 800 B.C.E...The city gave the inhabitants of Cyprus the name of Kittim, which the Jews also used later to refer to the Greeks and Romans.” (P. 164)

⁶Slotki states that “it” refers to “Tyre, or all of Phoenicia.” (P. 105)

⁷Oswalt omits the phrase “it was destroyed.”

⁸Translations of lines 3 and 4 vary:

King James, “for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in”;
Tanakh, “For havoc has been wrought, not a house is left; As they came...”;
New Revised Standard, “for your fortress is destroyed. When they came in...”;
New International, “For Tyre is destroyed and left without house or harbor.”
New Jerusalem, “for all has been destroyed- no more houses, no way of getting in”;
Rahlfs, ὅτι ἀπόλωτο καὶ οὐκέτι ἔρχονται, “because it was destroyed, and no longer do they come (from the land of the Kiteans).”
Alexander, “ for it is laid waste, no house, no entrance...”
Oswalt, “for there is neither home nor harbor.”

Alexander states that “the preposition [מִן, ‘from’] in [the phrases] מִבַּיִת and מִבּוֹא [literally ‘from house’ and ‘from coming / entry’] has a privative [privation or absence of something] effect [i.e., ‘no house, no entrance’]. The meaning strictly is, *away from house, away from entrance*.” He suggests that this may “refer particularly to the mariners returning from their long voyage and finding their homes destroyed.” (P. 394)

Verse 1 is almost repeated verbatim in **verse 14**. The main difference is that where **verse 1** has the phrase כִּי־שָׁדַד מִבַּיִת מִבּוֹא, literally, “because it was

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From (the) land of (the) Cypriots / Greeks / Mediterranean coast-lands,⁹
it was revealed to them.¹⁰

23:2¹¹ דָּמוּ יֹשְׁבֵי אֵי

⁸(...continued)

destroyed from house from coming,” **verse 14** has the phrase כִּי שָׂדֵד מְעֻזָּן ,
literally, because it was destroyed, your (feminine plural) place or means of safety.”

⁹Slotki claims that the “land of Kittim” means “Cyprus, so named from Kition or Kitium in the south of the island.” (P. 105)

Gray likewise states that the “land of Kittim” is “Cyprus,” and that the name “frequently mentioned in Phoenician inscriptions was strictly the name of a town in Cyprus...Cyprus would be the last stage on the way from Spain to Phoenicia; here, according to this line...the crews of the returning ships hear of the disaster.” (P. 387)

Oswalt also states that “*Kittim*...is almost certainly referring to the Mycenaean [the first people to speak Greek] population of at least the northeastern portions of the Mediterranean Sea.” (P. 429)

¹⁰Slotki states that this line means “(revealed) by the fugitives of Tyre who fled to Cyprus, that disaster had overtaken their homeland.” (P. 105)

Kaiser entitles **verses 1b-4** “The destruction of Sidon.”

He comments that “Instead of describing the destruction of Sidon in straightforward terms, the poet addresses in dramatic language the ships of Tarshish, or their crews, returning from their trading voyages. Apparently sharing their feelings, he calls upon them to raise the cry of lamentation, because on their return from Cyprus they have received the terrible news of the destruction of their home port.” (P. 163)

¹¹Translations of **verse 2** vary:

King James, “Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.”

Tanakh, “Moan, you coastland dwellers, You traders of Sidon, Once thronged by seafarers...”

New Revised Standard, “Be still, O inhabitants of the coast, O merchants of Sidon, your messengers crossed over the sea...”

New International, “Be silent, you people of the island and you merchants of Sidon, whom the seafarers have enriched.”

New Jerusalem, “Be struck dumb, inhabitants of the coast, you merchants of Sidon, whose messengers cross the sea...”

Rahlf's, τίνι ὅμοιοι γέγονασιν οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν τῇ νήσῳ μεταβόλοι Φοινίκης διαπερῶντες τὴν θάλασσαν, “to whom they have become similar / like, the one

(continued...)

סִתָּר צִידוֹן עִבְרַיִם מִלְּאִיִּךְ:

Be silent,¹² those inhabiting a coast / region!¹³

¹¹(...continued)

dwelling in the island, merchants of Phoenicia, crossing over the sea.”

Alexander, “Be silent, O inhabitants of the isle (or coast), the merchants of Sidon crossing the sea filled thee.”

1QIs^a omits the final verb of the Hebrew text, reading simply “her messengers crossed over a sea.”

Slotki comments that in **verse 2**, “the prophet addresses the inhabitants of Phoenicia.” (P. 106)

Alexander comments that “This may either be addressed to the coast and islands of the Mediterranean which had long been frequented by the Phoenician traders, or to Phoenicia itself, which foreign commerce had enriched...On either supposition, Sidon, the other great city of Phoenicia, is put for the whole country.” (Pp. 394-95)

Oswalt states that in **verse 2** “the scene changes from the sea to the Phoenician countryside. *Coast* is literally ‘island’ and may refer to the Tyrian citadel, but the term is used in a general sense elsewhere in the **Book** (e.g. **25:15**)...

“Mention of Sidon is not out of place in an oracle addressed to Tyre. For Tyre’s fate is not hers alone, but that of all Phoenicia, just as Jerusalem’s fate is Judah’s. Sidon here represents all Phoenicia in her response to Tyre’s overthrow.” (Pp. 429-30)

¹²Where our Hebrew text has the qal imperative masculine plural דָּמֹה, “be silent!”, **Rahfs** has the phrase τίλι ὅμοιοι γεγόνασιν, “to whom they have become similar.” Watts thinks that this is evidence that the Greek translator thought the root verb was דָּמָה, “be like / similar,” instead of דָּמָם, “groan / wail / lament.” He notes that M. Dahood has found Ugaritic דָּמָם to mean “to mourn.” (P. 302)

Slotki’s translation has “Be still,” and he suggests “(Be) ‘dumb,’ stunned by the overwhelming calamity.” (P. 106)

Gray translates by “Be astounded,’ literally ‘be dumb,’ with grief or astonishment; compare

(continued...)

¹²(...continued)

Lamentations 2:10,

They sat on the ground, they were silent,
Daughter of Zion's elders / officials;
they brought up dust upon their head(s);
they dressed (in) sack-cloth;
they brought their head(s) to the ground,
young women of Jerusalem!

Exodus 15:16a,

Terror and dread will fall upon them like the stone;
by the greatness of Your arm, they will be silent.

It is no doubt a formal inconsistency, but scarcely a rhetorical impossibility, to call on the same persons to be dumb and to howl (**verse 6**)." (P. 387)

Oswalt translates by "mourn." He states that "This rendering makes a much better parallel to 'wail' [our 'howl'] in **verse 1** and seems to fit the lament setting better, although silence in grief is not impossible as **Lamentations 2:10** and **Job 2:13** show." (P. 430)

Job 2:13,

And they [Job's three friends] sat with him on the earth
seven days, and seven nights;
and no one was speaking to him a word,
because they saw the pain was exceedingly great.

Motyer states that the verb used here, **שָׁבַט**, qal imperative, masculine plural, from the root **שָׁבַט**, "has both senses of 'still,' i.e. motionless and silent. This beginning of the stanza contrasts with the following impression of a bustling international port." (P. 190)

Kaiser comments on **verses 2-3** that "Instead of the former cheerful bustle in the trading metropolis there is now a lifeless silence. The inhabitants of the coast, by whom according to **verse 2b** the poet principally means the merchants of Sidon, have been silenced, that is, killed. The attributes listed in the lines that follow emphasize the difference between their former prosperity and their present misery: the agents and messengers of Sidon were for a long time familiar figures on every sea. The corn trade of Egypt passed through the hands of Sidon, which was also enriched by the products

(continued...)

A traveling merchant¹⁴ of Sidon¹⁵,² crossing over (the) sea,¹⁶ filled you.¹⁷

¹²(...continued)
of other nations. The city lived on what the efforts of other nations produced.” (Pp. 164-65)

¹³The phrase **אִי־יֹשְׁבֵי**, “inhabitants of a coast / region,” is given varying translations, from “ye inhabitants of the isle,” to “you coastland dwellers,” to “O inhabitants of the coast,” to “you people of the island,” to “inhabitants of the coast,” to οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν τῇ νήσῳ, “the ones dwelling in the island.”

Slotki states that this means the coastland “of Phoenicia.” (P. 106)

Gray likewise states that by “the coast” is meant “Phoenicia, rather than either *the island* on which Tyre stood, or collectively *the islands* or *coasts*...of the Mediterranean.” (P. 387)

Motyer, however, states that it means “the city and island of Tyre,” and “is referred to as (literally) ‘you whom the merchants of Sidon, the travelers by sea, filled.’” (P. 190)

¹⁴Slotki states that the Hebrew singular active participial phrase **סֹחֵר**, **socher**, “one going around,” “traveling about,” means “merchant,” but is “used in a collective sense,” that is, “merchants.” (P. 106) The Greek, Latin Vulgate and aramaic Targum all have the plural translation, evidently reading a Hebrew text with **סֹחְרֵי צִידוֹן**, “merchants of Sidon.”

¹⁵Slotki spells the Hebrew name **צִידוֹן**, **tsidhon** “Zidon,” and states that it was “the second of the two biggest harbors of Phoenicia and, according to some authorities, the most ancient of the Phoenician settlements.” (P. 106) See our end-note 1 for a **Wikipedia** article on Phoenicia and its colonies in pre-Christian centuries across the then-known world.

Gray comments on *Merchants of Sidon* that it means “merchants of the city of Sidon, or more widely Phoenician merchants; so Sidonians are Phoenicians...and later in Phoenicia itself Tyre is called...’metropolis of the Sidonians.’” (P. 387)

Rahfs has μεταβόλοι Φοινίκης, “merchants of Phoenicia.”

¹⁶Reading an unpointed Hebrew text—as all Hebrew texts prior to the Masoretes, Jewish scholars of the 6th–10th centuries C.E. who contributed to the establishment of a recognized text of the **Hebrew Bible**, supplying “vowel pointing” to a text that previously had almost no vowels—the phrase here **עבר ים**, could easily be read as

¹⁶(...continued)

עֲבָרִים, “ones crossing over,” especially if the space between the two words was very small.

¹⁷Slotki’s translation has “Thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.” He states that this means “enriched with the wealth of their commercial enterprise.” (P. 106)

Sidon’s merchants, as did Tyre’s, traveled by ship throughout the Mediterranean coast-lands, establishing colonies and delivering merchandise to the ports of the Mediterranean countries.

Oswalt translates the last line of **verse 2** by “your messengers have gone over the sea,” following the reading of 1QIs^a, where instead of our Hebrew text’s מְלֵאכֵיךָ, “they filled you,” has מְלֵאכֵיךָ, “your messengers.” Oswalt states that “the idea of commercial travelers fanning out across the sea from Phoenicia fits the facts very well.” (P. 430)

Compare **Psalm 107:23**,

Those going down to the sea in the ships--
those doing business / work on many waters--

Motyer comments that “This beginning of the stanza [‘be silent’] contrasts with the following impression of a bustling international port.” (P. 190)

¹⁸Translations of **verse 3** vary:

King James, “And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, *is* her revenue; and she is a mart of nations.”

Tanakh, “Over many waters Your revenue came: From the trade of nations, From the grain of Shihor, The harvest of the Nile.”

New Revised Standard, “and were on the mighty waters; your revenue was the grain of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile; you were the merchant of the nations.”

New International, “On the great waters came the grain of the Shihor; the harvest of the Nile was the revenue of Tyre, and she became the marketplace of the nations.”

New Jerusalem, “to the wide ocean. The grain of the Canal, the harvest of the Nile, formed her revenue. She was the market for the nations.”

Rahlfs, ἐν ὕδατι πολλῶ σπέρμα μεταβόλων ὡς ἀμητοῦ εἰσφερομένου οἱ μεταβόλοι τῶν ἐθνῶν, “on much water a seed of merchants like a harvest being brought in, the merchants of the nations.” NETS has “on much water, an offspring of merchants? The merchants of the nations are as when a harvest is being

(continued...)

זָרַע שְׂחֹר קִצִּיר יְאוֹר תְּבוּאָתָהּ

וַתְּהִי סִתְר גּוֹיִם:

And on many waters,¹⁹

¹⁸(...continued)
gathered in.”

Alexander, “*And in great waters (was) the seed of the Nile; the harvest of the river (was) her revenue; and she was a mart of nations.*”

Alexander comments that שְׂחֹר [shichor] and יְאוֹר [ye’or] are the Hebrew [shichor] and Egyptian [ye’or] names of the Nile...Of the whole verse there are three interpretations...

“The first supposes an allusion to the fact that the grain of Egypt was exported in Phoenician vessels *on the great waters*, i.e. over the sea...

“A second...understands what is said of Egypt figuratively...as if he had said that the wealth which Egypt derived from the Nile, Phoenicia derived from the great waters, i.e. by her maritime trade.

“The third [supposes] a distinct allusion to the insular situation of Tyre, which, though planted on a rock and girt [old English for ‘encircled,’ ‘surrounded’] by many waters, reaped as rich a harvest as the fertile land of Egypt...[Alexander thinks the last may be the best interpretation.]” (P. 395)

Oswalt comments on **verse 3** that “It is apparent that then, as in more recent times, the transporters became the brokers [those who buy and sell goods for others]. So the Phoenicians took the abundant grain of Egypt aboard their ships, not merely as carriers but also as buyers and sellers. As a result, Tyre, like Beirut until the recent disastrous war, was the financial and commercial capital of that part of the world, and those whose livelihood depended upon Tyre’s continued health could watch the accumulated labor of a lifetime destroyed in a day.” (P. 430)

Motyer states that “Shichor is a synonym for the Nile (**Joshua 13:3; 1 Chronicles 13:5; Jeremiah 2:18** [we say, **Shichor** is the Hebrew proper name for the Nile, which in Egyptian Arabic is en-Nīl, while יְאוֹר, יְאוֹר, **Ye)or** is a transliteration of the Egyptian *’iotr, ’io’r, watercourse*]). Egypt was proverbially fertile and was the granary of the ancient world.” (P. 191)

¹⁹The phrase בְּמַיִם רַבִּים, “on many waters,” is also the beginning phrase of **Ezekiel 27:26** in its depiction of the fate of Tyre. But whereas here it refers to a

(continued...)

seed of Shichor,²⁰ harvest of (the) Nile, (was) your income.

And she was / became commerce / gain²¹ of nations!²²

23:4²³ בּוֹשֵׁי צִידוֹן

¹⁹(...continued)

positive outcome, as being the source of Phoenicia's income as "merchant of nations," in Ezekiel it is the location of Tyre's destruction.

Ezekiel 27:26,

Into many waters they brought you, the ones rowing you;
the east wind broke / shattered you in (the) heart of (the) seas!

²⁰Slotki comments on "the seed of Shichor" that "the Nile or its Pelusiac branch is also named Shichor. [compare **Jeremiah 2:18**,

And now, what belongs to you, by (taking the) road (to) Egypt,
to drink waters of Shichor?

And what belongs to you, by (taking the) road (to) Assyria,
to drink waters of (the) Euphrates?);

and *the seed* is the grain or other produce which Egypt, as one of the most important granaries of the ancient world, supplied to the Mediterranean countries. The grain, as well as the other Nile products (*harvest of the Nile*), was shipped in Phoenician vessels which naturally called on their way at their own ports of Zidon and Tyre." (P. 106)

²¹The noun here is סַחַר, **sachar**, which means "traffic," "commerce," or "gain from traffic." Motyer's translation has "market-place," and he comments that "more exactly [it] means 'gain' and refers to profit from trade. Tyre was a source of international revenue." (P. 191)

²²Oswalt translates by "She became merchandise of nations." (P. 424) We doubt that סַחַר, **sachar**, means "merchandise."

²³Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: "*Be ashamed (or confounded), Zidon; for the sea saith, the strength of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, and I have not borne, and I have not reared young men (or) brought up virgins.*

"The prophet hears a voice from the sea, which he then describes more exactly as coming from the stronghold or fortress of the sea, i.e. insular Tyre as viewed from the mainland. The rest of the verse is intended to express the idea that the city thus personified was childless, was as if she had never borne children...The whole metaphor is intended to express the idea of depopulation." (P. 395)

(continued...)

כִּי־אָמַר יָם מֵעוֹז הַיָּם לֵאמֹר
 לֹא־תָלַתִּי וְלֹא־יִלְדָתִי
 וְלֹא גִדְלָתִי בַחֲוָרִים
 רוֹמְמָתִי בַתּוֹלוֹת:

Be ashamed, Sidon!

Because (the) sea spoke, (the) stronghold of the sea,²⁴ saying:

²³(...continued)

Slotki comments on **verse 4** that “The sea bordering on the Phoenician coast is now deserted and lonely like a long bereaved mother who forgot that she ever had any children.” (P. 106)

Motyer states that in this verse, “the silence of the busy port, described in the previous verse, is matched by the sense of blighted, disappointed hopes which prevails ...Once more Isaiah’s rich imagination takes over and he hears the sea mourning its loss...

“This verse has been the subject of much needless alteration of the Masoretic Text, including that of the **New International Version** [what a proud statement! The work of numerous scholars attempting to translate the text has all been needless!]...

“A literal translation would be, ‘for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying...’ We may imagine that the people often spoke of the sea as their strength, ‘a moat defensive to a house,’ the ever-open door of supply should they be besieged on land, the constant source of their wealth. But now the sea can only grimly recount the loss of its children...This is the first hint that Tyre has fallen to military attack with boundless losses.” (P. 191)

²⁴Oswalt translates this phrase by “for Yam has spoken, the Mighty One of the Sea,” and comments that the phrase “has been translated in some way similar to...’The sea...the stronghold of the sea,’ with commentators frequently striking out one or even both phrases as a gloss. Some assume Tyre is speaking, while others assume the sea is the speaker. [Oswalt’s translation] rests upon the recognition that the initial occurrence of יָם, **yam** has no article, suggesting that the term is being used as a proper noun, namely, the Canaanite God of the sea...

“If this interpretation is correct, then Sidon, who has been dependent upon Tyre, is told that his trust is misplaced because Yam, Tyre’s Father, is lamenting His loss, declaring that He is now bereft of children. The cry is that of parents, but especially

(continued...)

I did not have labor-pains, and I did not give birth,²⁵
and I did not raise young men;
I raised up virgins.²⁶

²⁴(...continued)

mothers, whose children precede them in death. All the anguish of birth, all the struggle of raising the child, seems to have been in vain." (Pp. 430-31)

²⁵Gray comments on the line "I have not travailed nor brought forth," that "a city robbed of its population is said by a rhetorical exaggeration not even to have had children. Compare **Isaiah 54:1** of Zion,

Give a ringing cry, barren woman—she (who) did not give birth;
break forth a ringing shout, and cry out, (you who) did not have labor-
pains!
Because more (are the) children of her who is desolate,
than the married woman's children!
YHWH said (it)!

Compare also **Isaiah 49:21**, which is spoken to Lady Zion:

And you will say in your heart,
Who gave birth for me to these?
And I—childless and barren, exiled and put away--
and these—who raised (them)?
Look—I was a remnant, by myself--
these—where did they come from?

But here, it seems that it is the sea that is speaking, not Sidon, not Tyre. What do you think?

²⁶It is a strange statement: "I have not given birth...but I raised up virgins." If the mother (whoever is meant) has not given birth, where did the virgins she raised come from? Were they her adopted orphan daughters?

Gray states that "It must remain doubtful whether Sidon, Tyre, or the Sea is the childless woman." (P. 388)

Kaiser comments on **verse 4** that "Adopting the common **Old Testament** personification of a city as a woman, the poet calls upon Sidon to be ashamed of itself...For the Israelites a woman's shame consisted either in her being violated or in her childlessness...Accordingly the poet reminds Sidon of her own lamentations at her childlessness, that is, at the loss of her sons and daughters in the conquest. There is no reference here to daughter cities." (P. 165)

²⁷Alexander translates / comments on **verse 5**: “When the report (comes) to Egypt, they are pained at the report of Tyre.”

He comments that “there are three distinct interpretations of this verse.

“The first refers יַחֲיִילוּ, **yachiyilu** [our ‘they will writhe / be in anguish’] to the Sidonians or Phoenicians generally, and understands the verse to mean that they would be as much grieved to hear of the fall of Tyre as if they should hear of that of Egypt.

“The second makes the verb indefinite, or understands it of the nations, who are then said to be as much astounded at the fall of Tyre, as they once were at the judgments of Jehovah upon Egypt.

“The third, which is the one now commonly adopted, makes Egypt itself or the Egyptians the subject of the verb.” (Pp. 395-96)

Oswalt comments on **verse 5** that “From the Phoenician countryside the poet moves his focus to Egypt, to whom the news of Tyre’s fall will come as a terrible shock for two reasons. Perhaps first would be the inevitable collapse of commerce. For all of her history Egypt had had a commercial alliance with the Phoenician cities, especially Byblos, which lay north of Tyre. The bulk of this trade was by sea. As soon as Tyre fell, all sea connections north of her would be cut off and Egypt’s commerce would dry up. But also, the Egyptians could not help but realize that with Tyre neutralized, they must be next on the list of Assyria’s victims.” (P. 431)

Kaiser entitles **verse 5** “A double interpolation.”

He comments that “The first glossator clearly had in mind the connection between the conquest of Sidon by Artaxerxes III at the beginning of the year 343 and his victorious attack upon Egypt in the autumn of the same year [is this clear to you from reading the passage? It is not to us!]....

“The second glossator connects the whole song with the conquest of Tyre by Alexander, the last stage but one upon his route into the kingdom of the Pharaohs.” (P. 165)

But if the verse is so clearly the work of two different glossators, scholars or scribes who write their notes in the margins or between the lines of a text—how is it that their words are now an integral part of the text, and not written in the margins, or between the lines? And how is it that other students of the text do not recognize these “glosses”? Are we to suppose they are not honestly reading the text? We say, of

(continued...)

יְחִילוּ כְּשִׁמְעַ עֵר:

Just as a report to Egypt,

they will writhe / be in anguish like Tyre's report.²⁸

²⁷(...continued)

course it is possible that the passage is the work of glossators, but there is no real indication of this.

²⁸Translations of **verse 5** vary:

King James, "As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre."

Tanakh, "When the Egyptians heard it, they quailed As when they heard about Tyre."

New Revised Standard, "When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre." **New International**, closely similar;

New Jerusalem, "When the news reaches Egypt, they will tremble to hear Tyre's fate."

Rahlf's, ὅταν δὲ ἀκουστὸν γένηται Αἰγύπτῳ λήμψεται αὐτοὺς ὀδύνη περὶ Τύρου, "But then when it becomes heard in Egypt, pain / grief over Tyre will take hold of them."

The phrase **יְחִילוּ כְּשִׁמְעַ עֵר**, **keshema' tsor** is literally "like a report of Tyre," and is translated by "at the report of Tyre," or "As when they heard about Tyre," or "over the report about Tyre," or περὶ Τύρου, "concerning Tyre."

Watts holds that the Greek phrase ἀκουστὸν γένηται should be translated "began to be heard." (P. 302) We translate the Greek by "(but then when) it becomes heard."

Slotki comments on **verse 5** that "Egypt, who was in fear of the Assyrian invader, trembles when she hears of the fall of Tyre." (P. 106)

Gray likewise states that "It is commonly supposed to mean that the fall of Tyre will be ominous for Egypt, who will be distressed when the news is received." (P. 389)

Oswalt notes that there is no verb in this line, and states that "This gives a sense of abruptness and immediacy." (P. 425)

Motyer states that "This verse begins (literally) 'When news comes to Egypt, they will writhe in pain like news of Tyre,' meaning 'When the news comes to Egypt they will writhe in pain as when the news came to Tyre. The sea is still speaking, envisaging how Egypt will be equally distraught as Tyre itself. The reference is intended to create the impression of the magnitude of the disaster.'" (P. 191)

23:6²⁹ עֲבְרוּ תַרְשִׁישָׁה

הַיְלִילוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי אֵי:

Cross over to Tarshish!³⁰

Howl, inhabitants of (the) coastland!³¹

23:7³² הַזֹּאת לָכֶם עֲלִיזָה

²⁹Gray entitles **verses 6-9** “Second strophe.”

He comments: “Now that Tyre, their ancient, proud, and famous capital, has fallen by the decree of Yahweh, let the Phoenicians of the Palestinian coast-land flee lamenting to Spain, taking passage in the ships that have come thence (**verse 1**)—yet only to be turned back again from the haven that is no more (**verse 10**).” (Pp. 389-90)

Kaiser entitles **verses 6-9** “The disaster to Sidon as an act of Yahweh.”

Oswalt comments on **verses 6-7**: “Now the word spreads around the Mediterranean, with the lament being carried as far as Tarshish itself. A part of the lament is the incredulous question, ‘Could this have actually happened to Tyre?’ Three aspects of Tyre’s existence made it hard to accept her destruction: her vitality, her antiquity, and her colonizing energy.” (P. 431)

Motyer states that “The silence of the shattered city (**verses 2-3**) gave way to grief over loss of life (**verses 4-5**) and now to evacuation of refugees, heading (as so often for profit but now in loss) for Tarshish. A fine image of reversal of fortune!” (P. 191)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “*Pass over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle (or coast).*” (P. 396)

Slotki comments on **verse 6** that “The Phoenicians are urged to escape from their doomed country to seek refuge in their distant colony in Spain.” (P. 106)

³⁰Where our Hebrew text has the qal imperative masculine plural עֲבְרוּ, “cross over!”, 1QIs^a has the plural participle, עוֹבְרֵי, “those crossing over.”

³¹Where our Hebrew text has הַיְלִילוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי אֵי, “Howl, inhabitants of (the) coastland!”, **Rahlfs** has ὀλολύξατε οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν τῇ νήσῳ ταύτῃ, “Wail / cry out, the ones dwelling in this island!”

³²Translations of **verse 7** vary:

(continued...)

³²(...continued)

King James, “/s this your joyous *city*, whose antiquity *is* of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.”

Tanakh, “Was such your merry city In former times, of yore? Did her feet carry her off To sojourn far away?”

New Revised Standard, “Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old, whose feet carried her to settle far away?”

New International, “Is this your city of revelry, the old, old city, whose feet have taken her to settle in far-off lands?”

New Jerusalem, “Is this your proud city founded far back in the past, whose steps led her far afield to found her colonies?”

Rahfs, οὐχ αὕτη ἦν ὑμῶν ἢ ὑβρις ἢ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς πρὶν ἢ παραδοθῆναι αὐτήν, “Was not this your arrogance, which from (the) first, before her being handed over?”

Alexander: “Is this your joyous city (literally, is this to you a joyous one)? From the days of old is her antiquity; her feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.”

Motyer: (literally) “Your exultant one, whose antiquity is from the days of antiquity.”

Slotki comments on **verse 7** that “The prophet recalls the former prosperity and ramifications of Tyre, either in sympathy or in irony.” (Pp. 106-07)

Gray comments that in **verse 7**, the question that is asked “rhetorically points the contrast between then and now.” (P. 390)

Kaiser comments on **verse 7** that “The renewed call to lament is emphasized by the question which follows, which, pointing to the former prosperity and commercial importance of the city, is meant to increase its sorrow at the blow it has suffered. Before the city’s destruction, its life was characterized by uninhibited rejoicing, for it claimed to be the oldest of the Phoenician cities (compare **Strabo**, XVI. 2.22) and controlled a far-flung network of trading depots.” (Pp. 165-66)

And we wonder, how would being the oldest of the Phoenician cities lead to uninhibited rejoicing?

Alexander comments on the last line of the verse that some understand it “as descriptive of the colonial and commercial activity of Tyre...Most writers understand the clause as applying, either to the flight of the Tyrians to their colonies, or to their being carried into exile.” He himself holds that “a city can no more cross the sea in ships than dry-shod...The verse contains a bold personification; and...having converted Tyre into a woman, the writer may naturally represent her as going anywhere on foot.” (P. 396)

Motyer comments that “There was an immense vitality in Tyre which made it expand from a small base to become a power of world significance, but never with imperialist ambitions, never with the intention fo settle in far-off lands. It was trade, not conquest, which drove the Tyrians; not lordship, but money.” (P. 191)

(continued...)

מִיַּמֵּי־קֶדֶם קְדַמְתָּהּ
 יְבִלְוָהּ רַגְלֶיהָ
 מִרְחֹק לְגִוְרָה:

Is this for you people, an exultant / jubilant (city),³³
 from days of old, its antiquity?³⁴
 Her feet bore her along,³⁵
 from afar to temporarily reside.³⁶

³²(...continued)

He goes on to state that “Tyre represents the ways of the world exerting their influence.” (P. 191) But is this what Tyre represents? We think it would be better to say that Tyre in this chapter represents the way God can use such economic centers for the fulfilment of His purposes. What do you think?

³³1QIs^a has the definite article, “the exultant / jubilant city.”

³⁴Slotki comments that “Tyre is said by Josephus to have been founded 240 years before Solomon built his temple in Jerusalem (**Antiquities**, VIII. lii. 1). Its antiquity is also attested by the classical historians, Herodotus and Strabo.” (P. 107)

Gray states that “the antiquity of Tyre was considerable, though, according to later testimony (**Strabo**, xvi.2, 22), reputed less than that of Sidon. The priests of Tyre told Herodotus (ii. 44 [he lived in the fifth century B.C.E., about 484–425 B.C.E., a contemporary of Socrates]) that ‘it was a period of 2300 years since their people began to live at Tyre.’ The actual age of Tyre may have been considerably less.” (P. 390)

³⁵Gray states that the expression “whose feet did carry her” is “curiously chosen for the sea-voyages of the Phoenicians.” (P. 390)

³⁶Slotki comments that the reference in **verse 7** “is to the colonies founded by the Phoenicians and to their long trade routes.” (P. 107)

Gray comments that “The term נָגַר, *to sojourn* [our ‘to be temporary residents’] corresponds well to the character of these settlements, and the connection of them with Tyre to the generally current [first half of twentieth century C.E.] theory: ‘All the Phoenician colonies were anciently regarded as having been founded from Tyre; and, so far as the towns of Cyprus and North Africa are concerned, this is confirmed by all our other information. It cannot be shown that any other of the Phoenician towns planted colonies’ (Meyer).” (P. 390) See our end-note 2.

(continued...)

³⁶(...continued)

Watts comments that “Tyre was certainly an ancient city (**verse 7**), known throughout the ancient world. It was built on a rocky island some six hundred yards offshore and some twenty-five miles south of Sidon...But the Phoenicians did not find the sea to be a limit or barrier. They turned it into a highway and an opening to trade, commerce, and colonization. Their mighty ships of Tarshish were apparently capable of carrying the mineral ores mined in northern Greece, Spain (?), or even on the shores of the Black Sea. They put in at ports in Egypt, Cyprus, Rhodes, Sicily, and north Africa. They were certainly skilled at transporting the purple cloth, timber, and glassware for which the Phoenicians were famous, as well as the grain of Egypt (**verse 3**).

“Phoenicia’s earliest ties were with Egypt, at least from the sixteenth century B.C.E. Carthage was founded as a colony in north Africa in the ninth century. Tyre’s great King Hiram supplied David and Solomon with timber and craftsmen in the tenth century...

“Phoenicia’s mainland *merchants* in *Sidon* served as middlemen for caravans from all Palestine (**verse 2**), helping them trade their products for the exotic imports from overseas. These ports of commerce undoubtedly provided unrestrained recreation for boisterous sailors and caravan drivers in ways known to seaports of all times (**verse 7**). Tyre was indeed the merchant of the nations of this period (**verse 3**), one whose feet took her to sojourn far away (**verse 7**).” (P. 306

³⁷Slotki comments on **verses 8-9** that “Tyre’s reversal of fortune is not accidental. It has been ordained and devised by God.” (P. 107)

Gray calls **verses 8-9** “Question and answer.” (P. 390)

Oswalt comments on these two verses: “Tyre’s fall is not merely an accident of history. Nor is it merely the result of Assyria’s overwhelming need to dominate. For Isaiah, there is one great consciousness: it is God’s consistent purposes which are being worked out in human affairs...

“It is true that the pagan Deities are reported as having an interest in history and as influencing the outcome of historical events. But what is unique to Israel is the dawning consciousness that human history is the only arena through which God can be definitely known.” [But, the *only* arena? Do not YHWH’s speeches in **Job 38-41** claim that YHWH can be known through observation of nature, specifically the many wild, exotic animals He has created and provides for—i.e., through zoology? What about God’s Self-revelation in the hearts and minds of worshipers? We sense that Oswalt’s statement is ‘putting God in a box’—a box too small for the God Who created the universe!]

(continued...)

³⁷(...continued)

Oswalt continues: “[God] has a greater purpose in that history than mere Self-aggrandizement.” (P. 432) [But YHWH’s ‘Self-aggrandizement’ is a prominent factor in the Divine purpose according to the **Book of Ezekiel!**]...

“In fact, He means to share His character with as much of humanity as will receive what He offers (**Isaiah 2:1-5** [but nothing is said about ‘sharing His character with humanity in these passages; they predict He will teach the nations the way in which to walk!]; **58:6-12** [nor does this passage say anything about ‘sharing His character with humanity—it only describes the kind of ‘righteousness’ that God wants from His people, a righteousness of loving service to others]...

“So Tyre’s destruction is not in order that Israel might rule, as the pagan view would suggest (**Isaiah 36:13-20** [but the Rabshakeh of Sennacherib only claims that YHWH is not able to stop Sennacherib’s conquering Jerusalem]). Rather, God’s purpose is to show the foolishness of human pride (**Isaiah 2:11; 37:26** [?]) [Yes, human pride is foolishness; but to demonstrate this fact is not by any means God’s only purpose!].” (P. 432)

Again we state our deep appreciation for Oswalt’s work on the **Book of Isaiah**, which is so often helpful and instructive. But when he makes generalizations like this, quoting passages to prove his point, he sometimes goes overboard, and refers to passages that do not actually prove his point.

Motyer comments on **verses 8-9** that “The topic changes from what happened (**verses 2-7**) to why it happened (**verses 8-13**), and first of all to the mind behind the change in Tyre’s fortunes: the Lord’s plan.” (P. 191)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: “*Who hath purposed this against Tyre the crowning (city), whose merchants (are) princes, her traffickers the honored of the earth?...*

“Hitzig makes [the ‘crowning’] mean *the crown-wearer*. Most writers seem to be agreed that it denotes the *crowner* or *crown-giver*, in allusion to the fact that crowned heads were among the tributaries of Phoenicia, according to the testimony of the Greek historians...The question in this verse implies that no ordinary power could have done it.” (P. 397)

Gray comments on **verse 8** that its language raises the question, “Is Tyre, the home of merchant princes, called the *crowning* city [so the Aramaic Targum], as one that founded small kingdoms, or as the city that sent a golden crown to the advancing Alexander [the Great]; or *the crowned* city [so the Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations], as the city which at the time was supreme over the Phoenician cities?” (P. 390) See the next footnote for this matter of “crowning.”

(continued...)

עַל-צָר הַמְעֵטִירָה
אֲשֶׁר סַחֲרִיהָ שָׂרִים
כְּנַעֲנִיָה נִכְבְּדֵי-אָרֶץ:

Who counseled / purposed this,

³⁷(...continued)

Watts comments on **verse 8** that “Phoenicia’s strategic importance to all the nations of the region gave pause to any power that threatened to destroy her altogether. Many would have liked to control her power or share her revenues. But all were too dependent upon the network of commercial contacts that she knew and controlled to risk destroying her. She was in fact the giver of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are honored of the land.” (P. 306)

But, in fact, Phoenicia was constantly attacked by Assyria and then by Babylon and her successors—despite the risk of destroying her commercial ties.

Watts goes on to say, “So the shocked question is justified: *Who planned this against Tyre?* Whose interests are served by this action? The question prepares for the central, most significant section of the chapter.” (P. 306)

Kaiser comments on **verse 8** that “Within the structure of the poem the second question is addressed to those spoken to previously, but in fact serves to enlighten and assure the poet’s Jewish audience that it was none other than their own God Who had brought about the fall of Sidon...

“This also makes it clear to whom the song is really addressed. The answer makes clear the rhetorical nature of the question as far as the Sidonians are concerned, for it could hardly have occurred to them that Yahweh was at work here. For the Jews, of course, it must have been a comforting assurance that in spite of His apparent passivity in the history of the nations during the past two hundred years [does the **Book of Isaiah** say or imply anything about YHWH’s being passive for two hundred years? We say, Absolutely not! The **Book of Isaiah** depicts YHWH as active in every time and place, universally—compare **14:26-27** and **19:12**]...

“Yahweh had not abdicated from His rule over the world. Thus at the very beginning of the question we find the decisive keyword יַעֲזֵר [‘purposed,’ ‘advised,’ ‘counseled,’ ‘planned’], which denotes not only plans but also decision and the carrying out of plans.” (P. 166)

against Tyre,³⁸ the crown-bestower,³⁹
whose traveling merchants⁴⁰ (are) princes,⁴¹

her Canaanites / traders / merchants⁴² honored ones of the earth?⁴³

³⁸Kaiser changes the text from Tyre to Sidon. We see no end to the changes that can be made in the biblical text in this arbitrary manner.

³⁹Slotki's translation of **הַמַּעֲטִירָה** is "the crowning city," but he holds it is better to translate by "the bestower of crowns." He states that Tyre was "the city which produced kings. Tarshish, Carthage and Kition were settled by Phoenicians and ruled by kings who owed allegiance to the mother city." (P. 107)

1QIs^a omits the *yodh*, resulting in what is apparently a piel or pual participle, i.e., "the crowning city" or "the crowned city." The Latin Vulgate has *coronata*, "crowned."

Oswalt translates by "the giver of crowns," and states that this, "along with the following two phrases, effectively depicts Tyre's impressive rank...Her representatives acted like crowned heads of state. When they arrived in an area they came with all the presence of great noblemen. Why? They were conscious of the sophistication, culture, and power which stood behind them and they reflected its glory." (Pp. 432-33)

Oswalt is right, as is seen in the rest of the verse, which describes the traveling merchants as "princes," and "honored ones."

Motyer comments that "When Tyre founded colonies, they were ruled by kings. Tyre appointed, hence the city could be called *the bestower of crowns*." (P. 191)

⁴⁰The Hebrew phrase here is **סוֹחְרֵיהָ**, **sochareyha**, literally "her goers about," usually translated by "merchants" or "traders." We translate by "traveling merchants." 1QIs^a originally read **shorim** (meaning unknown), but a later copyist has written in above the line **סוֹחְרֵיהָ**, correcting the original manuscript.

⁴¹Kaiser states that "before the answer is given in **verse 9**, the question emphasizes the former royal status of the city, reflected in the princely rank accorded to its merchants and purple sellers throughout the world. This was necessary in order to show the strength and power required to bring about the fall of such a city." (P. 166)

⁴²The Hebrew phrase here is **כַּנְעָנֵיהָ**, **kin'aneyha**, literally "her Canaanites," or "her traders." Slotki's translation has "whose traffickers." He explains that "they carried on an extensive trade throughout the Mediterranean lands and consequently 'Canaanite' and 'trafficker' become synonymous terms." (P. 107)

(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

We think the best translation is “her traders,” or “her merchants.”

⁴³For this line **Rahlfs** has οἱ ἔμποροι αὐτῆς ἔνδοξοι ἄρχοντες τῆς γῆς, “the merchants / traders of hers (are) honored / glorious, ones ruling the land / earth.” Our Hebrew text has אֶרֶץ, “land” or “earth,” without the definite article which is read both by the Greek translation and by 1QIs^a, but the Qumran copyist has placed dots both over and under the definite article, indicating doubt in its originality.

⁴⁴Alexander translates **verse 9**: “Jehovah of hosts hath purposed it, to profane the elevation of all beauty, to degrade all the honored of the earth.” He comments that “This is the answer to the question in **verse 8**.” (P. 397)

Motyer likewise states that “With all this array of worldly greatness, Tyre is at last faced with the ‘Disposer Supreme’—the Lord Almighty. Why He so planned, we are not told; He is ‘the Judge of all the earth’ and He does right (**Genesis 18:25**). He decrees to ‘demean the pride of every beauty, to treat with contempt all the honored of the earth.’”

But we ask, is this doing what is right? Is it right to “demean the pride of every beauty,” including the beauty of the rainbow, and the stars, and the sunsets, and the flowers of the earth? Is it right to ‘treat with contempt all the honored of the earth,’ including Jesus of Nazareth, or the many saints who have followed in his footsteps? Is it right to treat Deborah, or the woman described in **Proverbs 31:10-31**, or the mother of Jesus, with contempt?

We say, No—not at all! It is not right to demean true beauty, but rather, it is right to acknowledge beauty as beautiful, especially the beauty of God’s love, or of humble, loving servants of others. It is not right to treat earth’s honored people with contempt, but rather it is only right to honor those who are truly deserving of honor. Think, for example, of the “role of the faithful” who are honored in the “hall of fame” of **Hebrews 11**. Should all of them be demeaned, treated with contempt? Perhaps Samson, but what of all the others? What do you think? Do you agree with this statement in **Isaiah**?

My wife of 64 years, Sarah Kelly Darnell, has just died (November 4, 2016) at the age of 84. She was in my eyes a truly beautiful person, throughout her life. I cannot imagine that it is right to demean her beauty. Perhaps, if she was proud about her looks, such pride should be demeaned. But I sensed no pride in her about her looks. I think her long life as a wife, and mother, and grandmother, and as a Christian servant of so many others, should be honored, and not be demeaned. Am I wrong in this?

If Tyre was able to establish colonies throughout the known world, and enrich not only herself but also others, through bringing trade and commerce to the nations of her world, enhancing the lives of others, was this not something truly beautiful, rather than

(continued...)

לְחַלֵּל גְּאוֹן כָּל-צְבִי

לְהַקְל כָּל-נִכְבְּדֵי-אֶרֶץ:

YHWH of Armies counseled / purposed it,

to pollute / defile (the) exaltation of all beauty,⁴⁵

to make light of / dishonor all the earth's⁴⁶ honored ones.⁴⁷

⁴⁴(...continued)

being something to be demeaned? Should not those engaging in such arduous, dangerous, successful commerce, be honored, not treated with contempt? What do you think?

Of course if Tyre's ruler became proud and boastful, thinking of himself as a little God (see **Ezekiel 28**), that's another matter—it is something ugly, that should be treated with contempt. We say, the successful entrepreneur, who is a success in business, and uses his gains to serve others, is to be praised and honored, not someone to be treated with contempt.

Kaiser comments on **verse 9** that “In his answer the poet consciously uses the ancient throne name of his God, ‘Yahweh Sebaoth,’ for this emphasizes His universal power and authority [is this indeed the ‘ancient throne name of God’? We see no basis for this]. His decision to destroy Sidon (compare **Isaiah 14:27** and **19:12**) was directed against a pride to which only He had any right and a glory which was His alone, and against the proud arrogance and ostentation of its inhabitants...No charge is made against Sidon except its pride and ostentation.” (P. 166)

⁴⁵Where our Hebrew text has לְחַלֵּל גְּאוֹן כָּל-צְבִי, “to pollute / defile (the) exaltation / pride of all beauty,” 1QIs^a reads לְהַלֵּל כּוֹל גְּאוֹן צְבִי “to pollute / defile all exaltation / pride of beauty.” Perhaps the copyist at Qumran held a similar view to ours, expressed in the preceding footnote. What do you think?

⁴⁶Slotki claims that by “the earth” “Phoenicia is intended.” (P. 107) We say, Perhaps...but the phrase may also mean the known world's honored ones.

Watts states that “the word *the land*, אֶרֶץ which is brought into prominence in these verses is a key to the interpretation of all the **chapters [24 through 27]**. The reference is to Palestine-Lebanon, extending to the Euphrates in the northeast and to the ‘River of Egypt’ and beyond to Egypt in the south. All this ‘land’ was served by Tyre's commerce and, accordingly, it treated Tyre with deference. All the ‘land’ envied Tyre's wealth and imitated her styles.” (P. 307)

(continued...)

⁴⁶(...continued)

But we ask, where is this limitation of “the land” to Palestine-Lebanon made in the text? We think it much more probable to translate “the earth,” and consider Tyre and Phoenicia’s other cities of commerce as those who did trade with the entire known world of their day.

⁴⁷Oswalt comments that “God is attempting to show the transitory nature of human glory and the foolishness of dependence upon such glory (**Isaiah 2:11, 17; 4:2** [?]; **5:15-16; 13:19; 14:12-20; 28:1-6; 60:15** [?])...

“It is not that God is opposed to humanity’s being lifted up (**Isaiah 60:7** [?], **9, 13** [?], **15; Psalm 8:6**^{Heb} / **5**^{Eng} [lifted up, but lower than God]). What He opposes is that pride which seeks to make itself independent of Him. And He opposes it not merely because it denies His Own preeminence, but more importantly, because it is in fact false (**Isaiah 40:6-8**), and so long as it exists, it prevents men and women from finding their true glory in God through Christ (**Philippians 3:7-11; Colossians 1:21, 22** [?]).” (P. 433)

We agree with Oswalt’s comment, but observe that in its last sentence it becomes an explicitly Christian comment, which belongs in a commentary on **Philippians**, but goes far beyond what this text in **Isaiah 23** says.

Translations of lines 2 and 3 vary:

King James, “to stain the pride of all glory, *and* to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.”

Tanakh, “To defile all glorious beauty, To shame all the honored of the world.”

New Revised Standard, “to defile the pride of all glory, to shame all the honored of the earth.”

New International, “to bring down her pride in all her splendor and to humble all who are renowned on the earth.”

New Jerusalem, “to wither the pride of all beauty and humiliate those honoured in the city.”

Rahfs, παραλῦσαι πᾶσαν τὴν ὕβριν τῶν ἐνδόξων καὶ ἀτιμάσαι πᾶν ἔνδοξον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, “to weaken / paralyze all the insolence / arrogance of those honored / glorious ones, and to dishonor all honor / glory upon the earth.”

1QIs^a, “to pollute / defile all exaltation of beauty, to make light / dishonor all honored ones of the earth.”

English Standard, “to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth.”

We think Isaiah’s statement commits the “all fallacy.” What do you think?

⁴⁸Gray entitles verses **10-14** “Third strophe.”

(continued...)

⁴⁸(...continued)

He comments that in this strophe, the overall meaning is “Let the ships from Spain return home (?); the ruin of Phoenicia is irremediable, for it has come to pass by Yahweh’s decree. The ruin extends as far west as Cyprus.” (P. 391)

Slotki comments on **verses 10-14** that “the fugitives of Phoenicia will find no safety or rest even in Cyprus or Tarshish, the colonies which they themselves had founded. The natives, hitherto oppressed by the settlers, would take advantage of the weakness of the ruling class to break away.” (P. 107)

Kaiser entitles **verses 10-14** “The hopeless situation of the survivors.”

He comments that “In the third and final stanza the poet turns to the consequences of the fall of the great trading metropolis, in order to emphasize once again the greatness of its fall and the irresistible power of his God. For the trading partners of the city, represented by the most westerly, Tarshish, the only way of scraping a living left after the fall of their main customer is, as far as the poet can see, a return to agriculture, to self-sufficiency...

“After the destruction of the wharfs of Sidon the hope of setting up new merchant fleets would be as foolish as that of setting up other commercial relationships, since Yahweh had destroyed not only Sidon but the other Phoenician coastal fortresses [but are we to suppose that no one else in the ancient Near East knew how to build sea-going vessels, and engage in commerce? We say, Certainly not! While the Phoenicians were masters of commerce, they were not the originators of commerce, and not by any means its end with the fall of their seaports!]...

“That Tyre was the first to profit from the fall of Sidon, as Sidon was later to do from the fall of Tyre, lay far beyond [this poet’s] economic understanding, just as his geographical knowledge did not extend to the fact that it was Punic [Carthaginian] and Greek merchants who would gain from the fall of both Tyre and Sidon.” (P. 167)

Slotki comments on **verse 10** that “The natives of Tarshish are now free to travel and trade as freely as the Nile when it flows in all directions at the time of the annual inundations.” (P. 107)

Are we to understand the text as saying that prior to the fall of Tyre, the people living in Tyre’s colonies were enslaved to the colonizers? Perhaps—but is there genuine historical evidence of this?

Translations of **verse 10** vary:

King James, “Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: *there is no more strength.*”

Tanakh, “Traverse your land like the Nile, Fair Tarshish; This is a harbor no more.”

(continued...)

⁴⁸(...continued)

New Revised Standard, “Cross over to your own land, O ships of Tarshish; this is a harbor no more.”

New International, “Till your land as they do along the Nile, Daughter Tarshish, for you no longer have a harbor.”

New Jerusalem, “Cultivate your country like the Delta, daughter of Tarshish, for your marine docks are no more.”

Rahlfs, ἐργάζου τὴν γῆν σου καὶ γὰρ πλοῖα οὐκέτι ἔρχεται ἐκ Καρχηδόνας,
“Work your land, for also ships no longer are coming out of Carthage.”

Alexander, “*Pass through thy land like the river (Nile); Daughter of Tarshish, there is no girdle (any) longer.*”

Gray, “Pass through (or overflow, or pass over) to thy land, like the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more a girdle.”

Oswalt, “Pass over your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish, there is no waistband any more.”

Motyer, “Traverse your land like the Nile, Daughter of Tarshish; no longer is there restraint.”

Motyer comments that “Tarshish can move without restraint through her own land as the Nile [moves without restraint] through Egypt since the power of Tyre has been broken.” (P. 191)

Gray comments that the verse “has been explained as meaning that the harsh dominion of Tyre over her colonies, typically represented by distant and important Tarshish, has with the fall of Tyre come to an end, and the inhabitants of these colonies may now walk through the length and breadth of their land (compare **Genesis 13:17**) as the independent owners of it...

“But, not to mention other difficulties, the last clause cannot imply release from servitude; the girdle is no mark of bondage. But its removal is a mark of defenselessness (**Job 12:21**); so, freely but correctly, Symmachus rendered...*you will no longer be able to resist.*” (P. 391) See the Greek translation above.

Oswalt states that **verse 10** “is filled with difficulties, with the result that the meaning is largely unclear. Three possibilities have been put forward.

The oldest is the idea that with Tyre fallen, her colonies, represented by Tarshish, are set free from constraint...

A second interpretation would see Tarshish turning back from Tyre because she can no longer offer support or defense...

The third rests upon an emendation [correction of revision of text] prompted by the [Greek translation, ‘Till [work] your own land, for the ships of Tarshish no longer

(continued...)

בַּת־תַּרְשִׁישׁ

אֵין מִזַּח עוֹד:

Cross over⁴⁹ your land like the Nile,⁵⁰

daughter of Tarshish--⁵¹

there is no longer restraint!⁵²

⁴⁸(...continued)

come to you’]...According to this point of view, Tyre is encouraged to turn to farming since the ships of Tarshish no longer can come...

“The second [interpretation] seems to fit the context of the poem best without undertaking the massive emendation required to follow the [Greek translation]. However, *like the Nile* is difficult to understand in any case...Furthermore, if *waistband* (literally ‘loincloth’) is correct, its removal does not normally mean removal of restraint but defenselessness (**Job 12:21**). The possibility remains that ‘your land’ refers to Tyre and that the daughter cities are being invited to plunder the mother. This alternative seems to require the least slight of hand with the text.” (P. 433)

⁴⁹Where our Hebrew text reads the qal feminine singular imperative עֲבְרִי, “cross over!,” obviously spoken to a city, 1QIs^a reads עֲבְרִי (with *daleth* rather than *resh*), “work!” or “till!” The Qumran reading is supported by **Rahlfs**, which has ἐργάζου, “work (your land)!”

⁵⁰Where our Hebrew text has כִּי־אֶרֶץ, “like the Nile,” **Rahlfs** has nothing corresponding to this phrase.

Alexander comments that “Some read, *pass over to thy land*, and make the verse an exhortation to the strangers from Tartessus to go home. Others understand כִּי־אֶרֶץ [‘like the Nile’] to mean as (one would cross) the Nile or any other stream, i.e. naked or without a girdle, as in the other clause. It is commonly agreed, however, that the phrase means, as the Nile passes, i.e. quickly or without restraint.” (P. 397)

⁵¹Alexander comments that “*The daughter of Tarshish* is not Tyre, nor Phoenicia now considered as dependent on her colonies; nor the population of Tarshish; but Tarshish itself.” (P. 397) That is, we think, a strange conclusion to draw—that Tarshish is her own daughter! We think it must mean the population of Tarshish. What do you think?

⁵²The phrase here is אֵין מִזַּח עוֹד, “there is no **mezach** still / yet / again.” Translations of the phrase vary from “there is no more strength,” to “This is a harbor no

(continued...)

⁵²(...continued)

more,” to “for you no longer have a harbor,” to “for your marine docks are no more,” to καὶ γὰρ πλοῖα οὐκέτι ἔρχεται ἐκ Καρχηδόνας, “for also ships no longer come from Carthage,” to “there is no restraint any more.”

Alexander comments on the phrase which he translates by “*there is no more girdle*,” that it may be taken in opposite senses, as denoting the failure of strength and general dissolution, or the absence of restraint and freedom from oppression.” (P. 397)

What do you think? We think it is obvious that the phrase is enigmatic, puzzling, and that there is no certainty as to its meaning. Therefore, it is foolish to be dogmatic in interpretation of the phrase, as Motyer seems to be.

Motyer admits that “The **New International Version** understands the word **mezach** as *harbour*--but, if it has anything to do with shipping, it is ‘ship-building’ not anchorage [he refers to **Koehler-Baumgartner’s Aramaic and Hebrew Lexicon**; **Holladay’s** English translation has “wharf,” “dockyard,” but nothing concerning “ship-building.” Motyer adds that “The word is found in **Job 12:21** and **Psalms 109:19** as ‘belt’ and here it is used metaphorically of Tyre’s hold over Tarshish...

“The explanation of this new-found liberty [Motyer’s understanding of the ambiguous text] is that *the Lord has stretched out His hand*--an action sufficient to reduce the world to trembling--and, in particular, He has *given an order* (literally) ‘concerning Canaan, to destroy her fortresses’ and to bring Sidon’s joy to a final end.” (Pp. 191-92)

⁵³Slotki comments that in **verse 11** the subject is God. (P. 107)

Alexander translates **verse 11**: “*His hand he stretched out over the sea; he made kingdoms tremble; Jehovah commanded respecting Canaan to destroy her strongholds.*” He comments that “The stretching out of God’s hand, followed by the trembling of the earth or its inhabitants, is urged by Hendewerk as a favorite expression of Isaiah (see particularly **Isaiah 5:25**)...The feminine suffix at the end refers to Canaan as the name of a country.” (Pp. 397-98)

Oswalt comments on **verse 11**: “It is at the Lord’s command that Tyre falls... Again, we have Isaiah’s statement of faith that behind the apparent chaos of history, God is at work...The sea, which has seemed to be the Phoenicians’ province, in fact belongs to God. He, not Tyre, controls the nations around it.” (P. 434)

Motyer states that **verse 11** gives “the explanation of this new-found liberty [of Tarshish to move through its land with no restraint].” It is that “*the Lord has stretched out His hand*--an action sufficient to reduce the world to trembling--and, in particular, He

(continued...)

⁵³(...continued)

has *given an order* (literally) ‘concerning Canaan, to destroy her fortresses’ and to bring Sidon’s joy to a final end.” (P. 192)

For this use of Canaan as a synonym for Phoenicia or Philistia, compare:

Joshua 5:1,

And it happened, as (soon as) they heard--
all (the) kings of the Amorites
who were across the Jordan to the sea / west;
and all (the) kings of the Canaanites / traders,
who were beside / upon the (Mediterranean) Sea--
that YHWH dried up (the) waters of the Jordan
from before Israel’s children until our / their passing over--
and their heart melted,
and there was no longer spirit within them,
from before Israel’s children.

Zephaniah 2:5,

Alas / woe--(to) those inhabiting (the) territory / band of the Sea,
nation / people of **kerethim** / Kerethites / Cretans / Philistines!
YHWH’s word (is) against you (plural), Canaan / Trader(s)--
land of Philistines!
And I will destroy you (feminine singular)--
(literally) from not being an inhabitant!

Watts comments that “The second reason for Yahweh’s judgment of Tyre is contained in the term *Canaan* in **verse 11b**. *Yahweh issued a command concerning Canaan to destroy her fortresses...*

“The [**Book of Isaiah**] sees the Assyrian invasions as determined destruction of a political and economic way of life with the Canaanites exemplified, a feudalism that centered in its walled cities and small kingdoms. Yahweh had determined the end of this entire system. Thus the command to dismantle one of the last remnants of that system and that power in the fortresses of Canaan is the basis for Tyre’s collapse.” (P. 307)

“Feudalism” was the dominant social system in medieval Europe, in which the nobility held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service, and vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants (*villeins* [feudal tenants] or serfs) were obliged to live on their lord’s land and give him homage, labor, and a share of the produce, notionally in exchange for military protection.

(continued...)

וַיִּמַּס הַרְגִּיז מִמְּלָכוֹת
 יְהוָה צָוָה אֶל-כְּנָעַן
 לְשַׁמֵּד מֵעֲזָנֶיהָ:

His hand stretched out over the sea;⁵⁴
 He caused kingdoms⁵⁵ to quake.

⁵³(...continued)

In this way, Watts understands YHWH's purpose as political in nature. Assyria is YHWH's tool used to root out feudalism, in favor of another political system—which we must assume to be something like Israel with its king, ruling according to YHWH's **torah**, but which Watts thinks means the end of small city-states, to be replaced by much larger national powers. But would you ever have thought this to be the case, if you hadn't heard it from Watts? Were the cities that Assyria conquered returned to another political system, ending their former political arrangements?

We do not see the biblical documents as favoring one political system over another, but rather think it is YHWH's purpose for all governments / political systems to practice justice and righteousness, caring for the poor in their midst. What do you think?

⁵⁴Slotki states that “the sea” is “the Mediterranean which washes the shore of Phoenicia and its dependencies.” (P. 107)

Kaiser comments that here, the poet, “taking up again the metaphor of Yahweh's outstretched hand, stresses in general terms that the command of Yahweh which was fulfilled in the destruction of Sidon is irresistible. There is absolutely no escape from its grasp! This anthropomorphic image, which occurs in **Isaiah** and especially in **Ezekiel**, is derived from the ancient conception of Yahweh as a Warrior (compare **Isaiah 9:11, 16, 20; 5:25; 14:27-27; Ezekiel 6:14; 15:13; 17:27** and *passim* [to be found at various additional places]...

“The connection between this threatening gesture and the sea can be explained perhaps not only by the situation of the Phoenician cities, but also by the memory of the myth of Baal's battle against the Sea-God Yam, which in the **Old Testament** is transferred to Yahweh (compare **Psalms 29:3; 89:10-12; 93:3-4; Job 9:7; 38:11; Isaiah 13:13 and 14:16**).” (P. 167)

⁵⁵Slotki states that the “kingdoms” are “Phoenicia and its satellites.” (P. 108)

Gray states concerning “kingdoms” that “as the term is applied to parts of Egypt in **Isaiah 19:2**, so here to the various Phoenician city-states which were governed by

(continued...)

YHWH commanded to / concerning⁵⁶ Canaan,⁵⁷
to destroy its strongholds.⁵⁸

⁵⁵(...continued)

their own kings. Phoenician inscriptions speak of a king of Gebal...a king of Kition and Idalion...as well as of a king of Sidonites.” (P. 392)

⁵⁶The normal meaning of the preposition **אֶל** is “to” or “into,” or “towards.” However, many translations take it here as a synonym for **עַל**, “concerning,” and there can be little doubt that Hebrew prepositions are easily interchanged in the **Hebrew Bible**, especially in its later portions. Perhaps this is an example of this kind of interchange.

⁵⁷Slotki comments that “Canaan” is “synonymous in the context with Phoenicia whose inhabitants called their land ‘Canaan.’” (P. 108)

⁵⁸Where our Hebrew text reads **מִעֲזָנֶיהָ**, “her strongholds,” “her refuges,” 1QIs^a reads **מִעֲוִיָּהָ**, omitting the **נ**, “her places or means of safety.”

Watts holds that this reading from Qumran makes better sense than our Hebrew text. He translates by “her fortresses.” (P. 303) Kaiser agrees (p. 161).

Translations of these last two lines vary:

King James, “the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant *city*, to destroy the strong holds thereof.”

Tanakh, “It was He decreed destruction For Phoenicia's strongholds...”

New Revised Standard, “the LORD has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its fortresses.”

New International, “He has given an order concerning Phoenicia that her fortresses be destroyed.”

New Jerusalem, “Yahweh has ordained the destruction of the fortresses of Canaan.”

Rahlfs, κύριος σαβαωθ ἐνετείλατο περὶ Χανααν ἀπολέσαι αὐτῆς τὴν ἰσχύιν, “Lord Sabaoth commanded concerning Canaan to destroy her strength.”

The two lines can be understood as meaning YHWH has commanded Canaan to destroy its own strongholds.

Watts again comments that “The [**Book of Isaiah**] sees the Assyrian invasions as determined destruction of a political and economic way of life which the Canaanites exemplified, a feudalism that centered in its walled cities and small kingdoms. Yahweh had determined the end of this entire system. Thus the command to dismantle one of

(continued...)

⁵⁸(...continued)

the last remnants of that system and that power in the fortresses of Canaan is the basis for Tyre's collapse." (P. 307)

Watts insists on this understanding, but it seems to us far-fetched and mistaken. What he describes as "feudalism" did not end with Assyria's conquests. The Assyrian conquests only replaced a feudalism that centered in its walled cities and small kingdoms with a feudalism that centered in its walled city Nineveh with a world still filled with walled cities, but controlled by a large kingdom. Is that what YHWH wanted to accomplish?

The answer of the **Book of Isaiah**, we believe, is that YHWH wants His people to become a "servant people," who reach out to all others in self-giving love, in the practice of true self-sacrificial righteousness, regardless of the political systems in which they may live.

⁵⁹Kaiser comments on **verses 12-14** that "In the concluding verses the poet once again turns directly to Sidon in order to affirm to the crushed city that its former happiness can never return, and to make clear that there is no hope in the situation of the survivors. The irony of the call to flee to Cyprus is immediately revealed, for the poet is of the opinion—far exaggerating the actual situation—that Yahweh had also destroyed the cities of this island..."

"Repeating the call to lamentation from **verse 1**, made to the ships returning from a long journey, the poet brings his taunt song to an effective conclusion. There is a parallel between the hopeless flight from Sidon and the pointless return to Sidon." (Pp. 167-68)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 12**: "And he said, Thou shalt not add longer (or continue) to triumph, oppressed (or violated) virgin daughter of Zidon; to Chittim arise, pass over; there also there shall be no rest to thee."

He comments that "This exhortation corresponds exactly to the one in **verse 6**, Tarshish and Chittim being both Phoenician colonies. The last clause implies, either that the colonists would not receive them, or that the enemy would still pursue them, probably the latter." (P. 398)

Slotki comments that **verse 12** "defines the commandment spoken of in the preceding verse." (P. 108)

Oswalt comments on **verse 12**: "Since God has given the word for destruction, the Phoenicians' excitement (**verse 7**) is over. The young girl, fresh and untouched, laughing and dancing, is now beaten down and crushed (compare **Isaiah 47:1**, where

(continued...)

הַמְעֻשָׁקָה בְּתוֹלַת בֵּת-צִיּוֹן

(כְּתִיבִים) [כְּתִיבִים] קוֹמִי עֲבֹרִי

גַּם-שָׁם לֹא-יִנּוּחַ לְךָ:

And He said, You (feminine singular) will not again exult,
you / the crushed⁶⁰ virgin daughter of Sidon!⁶¹

⁵⁹(...continued)

Babylon is addressed in the same way.) Although the consummation of these things was to be years in the future, they were already done in the prophet's mind. When Isaiah looked at Tyre, he did not see a rich, exciting city to be envied by her country cousins. Instead, he saw a used-up old woman picking over her ruins. It is this long perspective which believers need to have as they look at the world. What now seems attractive cannot remain so if it flies in the face of the spiritual structures of the universe...

“Nor will there be any escape for the Phoenicians. They may go to Cyprus as Lulli, king of Sidon, did to escape Sennacherib (see Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, p. 288), but it would do no good. Assyria's rapacity was not going to stop at the coast, and even if it had, the hand of God would reach farther than any Assyrian kings' (**Isaiah 57:19-21** [which says nothing concerning the Assyrians]).” (P. 434)

Motyer states that “**Verse 12** is a fourfold edict against Sidon. The first three consequences are loss of joy (the end of revelling [see the roots עֲלִץ and עָלָז, both with the meaning ‘to exult’ as in **verse 7**], loss of peace [see the feminine singular pual participle הַמְעֻשָׁקָה, ‘the crushed / oppressed / wronged/ extorted one,’ who experiences violation as of a *virgin* raped]...and loss of tenure (they will be exiled and have to cross over to Cyprus)...The fourth consequence is loss of rest (the unending experience of a displaced person who can *find no rest*).” (P. 192)

⁶⁰Where our Hebrew text has the definite article, הַמְעֻשָׁקָה, “the crushed one,” 1QIs^a omits the definite article. Watts thinks the Qumran reading “is probably right.” (P. 303)

Slotki's translation has “oppressed.” But Slotki suggests the translation “outraged, ravished.” He states that “Zidon is described as a *virgin daughter* because it had not been previously conquered.” (P. 108)

⁶¹Slotki states that Sidon is “synonymous with the whole country.” (P. 108)

(continued...)

(To) Cyprus,⁶² arise, cross over--⁶³

also there you will have no rest!⁶⁴

23:13⁶⁵, 3 תֵּן אֶרֶץ כְּשָׂדִים זֶה

⁶¹(...continued)

Gray thinks that the description of the oppressed daughter of Sidon expresses an antithesis between “the exulting, domineering, wealthy city of the past, and the ruined people of the present, who must suffer the harsh treatment commonly measured out to the poor and helpless.” (P. 392)

⁶²The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” כְּתִיִּים, **kittiyyiym**, “Cypriotes”; second, the *qere*, “to be read,” כְּתִיִּם, **kittiym**, also meaning “Cypriotes”—only a question of the correct spelling of the name.

⁶³Slotki’s translation has “Arise, pass over to Kittim.” He comments that Kittim means Cyprus. (P. 108) Gray agrees.

⁶⁴Watts comments that “Even a retreat to *Cyprus* cannot cure the problem. Phoenicia’s strategic position as a mainland port where land and sea merchants and traders could meet has been the basis of her power. Without that she has no foundation; her ships have no homeport (**verse 10**).” (P. 307)

⁶⁵Watts comments on **verses 13-14** that “Babylonia, land of the Chaldeans, is held up to Tyre as an example of a country which had defied Assyria and felt its wrath. Tyre’s fate will be similar.” (P. 307)

Translations of **verse 13** vary:

King James, “Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, *till* the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; *and* he brought it to ruin.”

Tanakh, “Behold the land of Chaldea -- This is the people that has ceased to be. Assyria, which founded it for ships, Which raised its watchtowers, Erected its ramparts, Has turned it into a ruin.”

New Revised Standard, “Look at the land of the Chaldeans! This is the people; it was not Assyria. They destined Tyre for wild animals. They erected their siege towers, they tore down her palaces, they made her a ruin.”

New International, “Look at the land of the Babylonians, this people that is now of no account! The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures; they raised up their siege towers, they stripped its fortresses bare and turned it into a ruin.”

New Jerusalem, “Look at the land of the Chaldaeans, a people who used not to exist! Assyria assigned it to the creatures of the wilds; they raised their siege-towers against it, demolished its bastions, reduced it to ruin.”

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

Rahfs, καὶ εἰς γῆν Χαλδαίων καὶ αὕτη ἠρήμωται ἀπὸ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων οὐδὲ ἐκεῖ σοι ἀνάπαυσις ἔσται ὅτι ὁ τοῖχος αὐτῆς πέπτωκεν, “and into (the) land of Chaldeans, and this has been laid waste by the Assyrians. Not even there will there be rest, because its wall has fallen.”

Alexander, “Behold the land of the Chaldees; this people was not; Assyria founded it for dwellers in the wilderness; they have set up its towers; they have roused up her palaces; he has put it for (or rendered it) a ruin.”

Take your time, and re-read all of these translations, observing their many differences—in spite of being attempts to translate the same Hebrew text. Interpreters like Oswalt and Motyer are seemingly oblivious to these difficulties, failing to mention them, “riding rough-shod over them.” See their comments below.

Slotki comments on **verse 13** that “The place of this verse in the context is very difficult to explain. An allusion has been read into it by some commentators to Sennacherib’s defeat of Babylon in 702 B.C.E. which the prophet interpreted as an omen of the fate that was to befall Phoenicia.” (P. 108)

Alexander comments that “This difficult verse has been variously understood. Some apply it exclusively to the destruction of Tyre by the Assyrians...The great majority, both of the older and the later writers [in the mid-nineteenth century]... suppose that the prophet here brings the Chaldees into view as the instruments of Tyre’s destruction. The words from זֶה [‘this’] to לְצִיִּים [‘for wild animals’] will then be a parenthesis, containing an allusion to a historical fact not expressly mentioned elsewhere, but agreeing well with the facts of history, that is, that the Chaldees were not the aboriginal [indigenous, native] inhabitants of Babylonia, but were brought thither from the mountains of Armenia or Kurdistan by the Assyrians in the days of their supremacy...

“This incidental statement...is in strict accordance with the Assyrian policy of peopling their own provinces with conquered nations...[leading to the translation:] ‘Behold the land of the Chaldees; this people (the people now inhabiting it) was not (i.e. had no existence until lately); Assyria founded (or established) it (the country) for dwellers in the wilderness (i.e. for the Chaldees who before had led wild nomadic life’...

“When Isaiah wrote, Assyria was the ruling power of the world; whatever changes were expected, were expected from this quarter. But here the conquest of Phoenicia is ascribed to a people then but little known, if known at all. It was perfectly natural therefore to say negatively, that it was not to be effected by Assyria, as well as positively, that it was to be effected by Chaldea...The reference of the verse to the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar is far more natural than any other.” (Pp. 399-400)

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

Gray states that **verse 13**, “as a whole, and especially in its context, is quite unintelligible.” Consequently, he leaves the verse out of his translation of the chapter—see his page 385.

He states that “Attempts to interpret the verse fall into two classes:

- (1) those which read into the present awkward text meanings which are not there;
- (2) those which conjecturally correct the text, or omit parts of it, as glosses.” (P. 392)

But Oswalt and Motyer take little notice of these difficulties, and interpret **verse 13** straight-forwardly.

Oswalt states that “This verse is frequently referred to as a *crux interpretum* [a central difficulty; a point in a text that is fraught with difficulties]...Generally, modern interpreters take the verse to be a late gloss explaining that Babylon, not Assyria, fulfilled this prediction...The verse makes good sense as it stands if one’s preconceptions about what the **Bible** can or cannot say are dispensed with. The phrase ‘this is the people which is not’ relates well to a Babylon which was wont to say ‘I am’ (**Isaiah 47:8, 10**); so also the idea that Babylon would become the haunt of desert beasts (**Isaiah 13:21**).” (P. 426)

But of course, in the time of Isaiah Babylon was in existence, and awaited a powerful world-wide influence in later centuries.

Oswalt later comments that “If the Phoenicians believed they could escape, they were invited to contemplate their opposite number on the east, Babylon. Assyria, God’s instrument, had, speaking metaphorically, almost exterminated Babylon. They had built siege towers against her wall. In the lower parts of these towers battering rams smashed at the wall, while above, soldiers shot arrows down into the city and let down ramps over which they could rush to attack the defenders. (See Pritchard’s **Ancient Near Eastern Pictures**, pp. 128-29 for several types of siege machines. [For somewhat better pictures, see the Internet, ‘Ancient Siege-Engines’])...

“As a result the Assyrians had conquered the city, stripping the palaces and reducing it to a ruin. While Sargon’s attack in 710 B.C.E. may be the one referred to, it seems more likely that Sennacherib’s much more thorough overthrow of the city in 689 B.C.E. is the one in view. In any case, the prophet’s argument is that if Babylon cannot escape, neither can Tyre, no matter where they flee.” (Pp. 434-35)

But what leads Oswalt to hold that this text is “speaking metaphorically”? The Assyrians literally, not metaphorically, attacked Babylon again and again, but without destroying the city or making it the dwelling-place of wild animals. In the long run,

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

Babylon did indeed escape Assyria's attacks—and the argument could just as well be made that Tyre could likewise escape the attacks made against her.

Motyer comments on **verse 13** that in it “we are now to learn who received His command and why the displaced Sidonians will find no rest...

“Tiglath-pileser of Assyria began his bid for world dominion in 745 B.C.E. and by 738 B.C.E. he was able to impose a military governor on Tyre. Tyre, however, continued to be restive under Assyrian overlordship and in 729 B.C.E. was compelled to pay an indemnity of 150 gold talents [a tremendous amount--see our end-note 3]. Shalmaneser (727-722 B.C.E.) besieged Tyre unsuccessfully, and at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. Tyre was still in rebellion, negotiating with Egypt against Assyria...

“Sennacherib laid the mainland waste in 701 B.C.E. and did vast damage to Tyrian trade. According to Erlandsson ‘only with the decline of Assyria around 630 B.C.E. did Tyre regain complete independence and the capability of creating new riches’...

“But an inveterate [long established, unlikely to change] tendency to meddle in revolt meant continuing trouble with the great empires. Nebuchadnezzar opened a thirteen-year siege in 586 B.C.E., but without ultimate success. Likewise, the Persian Artaxerxes III besieged Tyre in 333 B.C.E., but the rock citadel withstood all assailants till it fell at last to Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E...

“Thus we see that it is needless to look outside Isaiah's period for justification for an oracle on Tyre. He would be lacking in a sense of the issues of the day if he failed to include Tyre in his purview [scope of concerns]...

“As far as Isaiah's forecast of the fall of Tyre is concerned, if seizure of the rock city is required, then it was not until Alexander that this was fulfilled. The thrust of the oracle, however, is that Tyre becomes unsafe for shipping and its commerce is brought to a standstill with large-scale loss of life and many refugees. In the light of this, a reference in **verse 13** to Assyria as the agent has the merit of simplicity...

“The devastations wrought by Sargon in southern Mesopotamia were notorious. Seven kings from Cyprus were present at his coronation in Babylon, and Sargon records that when they heard what he was doing in Chaldea ‘their hearts were rent, fear fell on them.’ If Isaiah were here looking forward to Sennacherib he could well say Look at the land of the Babylonians (literally Chaldeans) as a warning. This provides all the historical framing that **verse 13** needs. If the refugees wonder why they will not be received and allowed to ‘rest’ anywhere, they need only ask who would risk provoking Assyria by receiving them.” (P. 192)

(continued...)

הַעַם לֹא הָיָה
אֲשׁוּר יִסְדָּה לְצִיִּים
הַקִּימוּ (בְּחַיָּנוּ) [בְּחַוָּנוּ]
עָרְרוּ אֲרַמְנוֹתֶיהָ
שָׁמָּה לְמַפְלָה:

Look—a land of Chaldeans,^{66, 4} this;
the people was not--⁶⁷

⁶⁵(...continued)

We think both Oswalt's and Motyer's interpretations which either dismiss or explain away the difficulties in the text are examples of what Gray meant by those who "read into the present awkward text meanings which are not there." What do you think?

Among those difficulties we mention:

What is the phrase "Look—a land of Chaldeans, this" referring to?
What does the phrase "the people was not" mean?
Did Assyria found the land of Chaldeans?
And did they found it for wild animals?
Did Assyria destroy Babylon so that it no longer existed?

⁶⁶Watts notes that "The reference to far-away Chaldea [a Semitic nation between the late 10th and mid-6th centuries B.C.E., after which its peoples were absorbed into Babylonia] has struck many commentators as irrelevant...But the destruction of Babylon is a major theme in the [Book of Isaiah] (chapters 13 and 21) and may properly be the comparison drawn for Tyre." (P. 303)

But is the name Chaldeans simply a synonym for Babylonians? We think not. See our end-note 4.

⁶⁷Translations of the phrase הַעַם לֹא הָיָה [literally, "the Chaldeans, this the people was not"] vary, from "the Chaldeans, this people was not," to "Chaldea. This is the people that has ceased to be," to "the Chaldeans! This is the people; it was not Assyria," to "the Babylonians, this people that is now of no account!" to "the Chaldaeans, a people who used not to exist!" to γῆν Χαλδαίων καὶ αὕτη ἠρήμωται ἀπὸ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, "land of Chaldeans, and this was made desolate by the

(continued...)

Assyria founded it for wild animals.⁶⁸

⁶⁷(...continued)

Assyrians.” Motyer suggests ‘this non-existent people.’ These greatly varying translations reveal the difficulties inherent in the original text.

Motyer adds that “Thanks to Assyria’s savage attentions, Babylon has become a *place for desert creatures.*” (P. 193) But this is Motyer’s unfounded interpretation of the text--not what the text says. It says that the Assyrians founded the land of the Chaldeans ‘for wild animals.’ This certainly was not the case in the time of Isaiah. Babylon continued to be occupied in spite of the many Assyrian attacks, and had not become a place for desert creatures, i.e., without human inhabitants, in the time of Isaiah.

⁶⁸What does the phrase אֲשׁוּר יִסְדָּהָ לְצַיִּים, “Assyria founded / established it / her for wild animals / desert-dwellers” mean? Is this a claim that the city-state of Assyria established / founded the city of Babylon? Was that the case historically? Did Babylon come out of Assyria? And was the city of Babylon originally founded / established as a dwelling-place for wild animals, not for human beings? See the following statement from **Wikipedia**:

“Babylon was a major city of ancient Mesopotamia in the fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The city was built upon the Euphrates and divided in equal parts along its left [north] and right [south] banks, with steep embankments to contain the river's seasonal floods. Babylon was originally a small Semitic Akkadian city dating from the period of the Akkadian Empire about 2300 B.C.E.

“The town attained independence as part of a small city-state with the rise of the First Amorite Babylonian Dynasty in 1894 B.C.E. Claiming to be the successor of the more ancient Sumero-Akkadian city of Eridu, Babylon eclipsed Nippur as the ‘holy city’ of Mesopotamia around the time Amorite king Hammurabi created the first short lived Babylonian Empire in the 18th century B.C.E. Babylon grew and South Mesopotamia came to be known as Babylonia.

“The empire quickly dissolved after Hammurabi's death and Babylon spent long periods under Assyrian, Kassite and Elamite domination. After being destroyed and then rebuilt by the Assyrians, Babylon became the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from 609 to 539 B.C.E. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. After the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the city came under the rule of the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, Roman, and Sassanid empires.” (11/28/2016)

They raised up its siege-towers;⁶⁹
they laid bare its citadels.

He placed it for a ruin!

23:14⁷⁰ הִלְיִלוּ אֲנִיּוֹת תַּרְשִׁישׁ

כִּי שָׁדַד מְעֻזְכֶּן:

Howl, ships of Tarshish,

because your stronghold was destroyed!⁷¹

⁶⁹The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” בְּחִינֵיו, “his siege towers”; second, the *qere*, “to be read,” בְּחִוְנָיו, also meaning “his siege towers”—with only a difference in spelling. 1QIs^a has בְּחִינֵיהָ, with the 3rd person feminine singular suffix, “her siege towers,” which is more appropriate suffix for a city.

⁷⁰Alexander translates **verse 14**: “Howl, ships of Tarshish, for destroyed is your stronghold.”

He comments that “the first part of the prophecy here closes very much as it began. The description of Tyre is the same as in **verse 4**, except that it was there called the fortress of the sea, and here the fortress of the Tyrian ships.” (P. 400)

Motyer states that **verse 14** “is an *inclusio* [a literary device based on a concentric principle, also known as bracketing or an envelope structure, which consists of creating a frame by placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section]. The only alteration here is the mention of Tyre as a *fortress* or ‘stronghold’ for the ships of Tarshish. Tarshish itself may have a new-found liberty (**verse 10**) now the constraint of Tyre is gone, but Tyre’s trade was the financial bulwark for shipping. Without that, they are [the shippers] exposed and fragile. If **verse 1** says they have no place to go, then **verse 14** says they have no security of work.” (P. 193)

But even though having no security of work may have been one of the results of the fall of Tyre, this is not the obvious meaning of the statement. We think it is truly parallel to **verse 1's** “Tyre is laid waste, without house or harbor.”

⁷¹Compare the almost identical statement in **23:1**:

Howl, ships of Tarshish!

Because it was destroyed,
without house, without harbor!

⁷²Gray entitles **verses 15-18** “The Restoration of Tyre for the benefit of the Jews.” The text does not mention “the Jews,” but rather has “those who sit before YHWH.”

Motyer entitles these verses “Postscript: the rise and renewal of Tyre.”

He comments that “Isaiah offers another interim fulfilment in the recovery of Tyre from its time of eclipse after a gap of seventy years. Beyond that again there lies the renewed Tyre as ‘holiness to the Lord.’” (P. 193)

Of course, the **Book of Isaiah**, or for that matter, the entire **Bible**, says nothing about “interim fulfilment,” an idea introduced by students of biblical prophecy in the 20th century, and taken up by Motyer, in an unsuccessful attempt to harmonize the various biblical prophecies. It becomes clear to the serious student of biblical prophecy that there is in fact no one unified vision of the future or the time of fulfillment of Israel’s hopes and dreams given expression by her prophets. Rather, they all, in their own individual ways, filled with the Messianic Spirit, attempt to describe what the future is bringing, and the time of its coming—but with greatly varying results and dates. Attempts to unify their prophecies have to resort to all sorts of gimmicks to bring them all together in unity. The concept of “interim fulfilment” is, we think, one of those gimmicks.

Motyer comments that “This appendix was not necessarily, nor even probably, written by the author of the poem in **verses 1-14**. It is prose, not poetry; predictive, not descriptive.” (P. 394) This is a strange comment from Motyer, who holds to the unity of the **Book of Isaiah**, with the 8th century B.C.E. Isaiah as its author—but here suggests some other author for **verses 15-18** from the author of **verses 1-14**.

Slotki comments on **verses 15-18** that they depict “The restoration of the stricken country after the lapse of seventy years, when its regained wealth will be consecrated to God to be used by the righteous who dwell before Him.” (P. 108)

Oswalt comments on these four verses: “As in the pronouncement against Egypt (**chapter 19**), the prophet adds a further word to the announcement of destruction. It is a word of restoration and of submission to the Lord. Thus the word is clear: Judeans, do not envy Tyre for her great wealth. Ultimately, all that she possesses will come to our God and be enjoyed by His people (**2:2-3; 45:14; 49:22; 60:9-11**). In this way these verses make a fitting summation to the message of **chapters 13-23**. Judah need not, indeed must not, prostitute herself to the nations. Rather, she should be true to her Husband, the King of the nations, and in so doing she will find the nations coming to her. (P. 435)

Watts comments on **verses 15-18** that “Three prophecies speak of Tyre’s future, for she will have a future.” (P. 307)

(continued...)

⁷²(...continued)

Kaiser entitles **verses 15-18** "The Fall and Visitation of Tyre."

He comments that "About midsummer 332 B.C.E., Alexander the Great succeeded after a siege lasting seven months in conquering the island fortress. Its defenders had fought boldly and with ingenuity, and their courage had not failed them even when the Macedonians constructed a mole [actually two separate earth causeways ('moles') to transport their formidable siege machines to the very gates of Tyre], to join the island to the mainland..."

"After the city had been captured by an attack from the sea, those inhabitants of Tyre who were capable of bearing arms, in so far as they had not already been killed in battle, are said to have been crucified and their wives and children, not all of whom had been evacuated to Carthage, sold into slavery." (P. 169) See on the internet, Marc G. DeSantis' **Alexander the Great and the Siege of Tyre** (12/1/2016).

Kaiser comments on **verses 15-16** that "With the typical formula of introduction for later additions, 'in that day,' a redactor in the period of Alexander begins his appendix to the song against Sidon, which he had reinterpreted. By so doing he gave his own words the appearance of an ancient prophecy, a procedure which we find continued in the pseudepigraphic apocalypses..."

"In order still further to mock the city of Tyre, which a short time ago had been so powerful, he makes use of a street song such as might have been heard in a seaport town. It calls upon a prostitute, despised because of her age, to go out onto the street and draw attention to herself by singing, in order to attract new custom [business by customers]. He thereby created a simile to which there are previous parallels (compare **Hosea 2:4ff.**; **Jeremiah 3:6ff.**; **Ezekiel 16** and **Nahum 3-4**)...The comparison between commercial power and a prostitute (compare **Revelation 18:1ff.**). For commerce takes up any contact which it hopes will bring in money. The immediate concern of the author of this addition, however, was the sudden fall of the ancient trading metropolis. Its position was now of course taken over by Sidon." (Pp. 170-71)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 15**: "*And it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, as the days of one king; from the end of seventy years shall be (or happen) to Tyre like the harlot's song...*"

"The remainder of the chapter predicts the restoration of Tyre, not to its former dignity, but to its wealth and commercial activity, the fruits of which should thenceforth be consecrated to Jehovah..."

"There is no difference of opinion with respect to the meaning of the words or the grammatical construction of the sentence; but the utmost diversity of judgment in relation to the general sense and application of the whole." (P. 400)

(continued...)

וְנִשְׁכַּחַת צַר שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה
 כִּי־מִי מֶלֶךְ אַחֵר
 מִקֵּץ שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה
 יִהְיֶה לְצַר כְּשִׁירַת הַזֹּנָה:

And it will happen in that day,⁷³

⁷²(...continued)

Oswalt states that “As Judah was to be captive for seventy years, so too Tyre will lie in waste until a time will come when she will once again ply her trade [of prostitution]...”

“The seventy years need not be a reference to **Jeremiah** (compare **Jeremiah 29:10**). In fact, both **Jeremiah** and this passage may reflect an idiom of the day in which seventy years would stand for fullness, or completeness (so too Daniel’s seventy weeks of years, **Daniel 9:24**; note that the Judean captivity did not take exactly 70 years, even if it is calculated as beginning in 605 B.C.E. Thus we are dealing with an ideal number there as well...An inscription of Esarhaddon [states that] Marduk...condemned Babylon to 70 years of destruction. Thus, the prophet is saying again that Tyre’s fate is in the hands of the God of Israel.” (P. 435)

⁷³This exact phrase, וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, “And it will happen in the day, that one,” occurs some 32 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, at:

Isaiah 7:18, 21, 23; 10:20, 27; 11:10, 11; 17:4; 22:20; 23:15 (here); 24:21; 27:12, 13;
Jeremiah 4:9; 30:8;
Ezekiel 38:10, 18; 39:11;
Hosea 1:5; 2:18, 23;
Joel 4:18;
Amos 8:9;
Micah 5:9;
Zephaniah 1:10;
Zechariah 12:3, 9; 13:2, 4; 14:7, 8 and 13.

The time meant by “that day” in the **Book of Isaiah** varies. It refers to:

the day of Assyria’s coming to devastate Judah (**Isaiah 7:18, 21, 23**),

(continued...)

⁷³(...continued)

the time of the return of a remnant of Israel (**Isaiah 10:20, 27; 11:11**),
the time of the “root of Jesse,” to whom the nations will seek (**Isaiah 11:10**),

the time of the fall of Damascus and the glory of Jacob being brought low (**Isaiah 17:4**),

the time of Eliakim’s taking over the office of Shebna (**Isaiah 22:20**),

the time of Tyre’s being forgotten for seventy years (**Isaiah 23:15**),

the time of YHWH’s punishment of the host of heaven and the kings of earth
(**Isaiah 24:21**),

the time of YHWH’s threshing out the grain and gleaning the Israelites one by
one (**Isaiah 27:12**),

the blowing of a great trumpet summoning the Israelites driven out to Egypt to
come and worship on the holy mountain at Jerusalem (**Isaiah 27:13**).

In the **Book of Jeremiah**, the phrase refers to

the time of courage failing the king and officials of Jerusalem (**4:9**),

the time when the yoke of Babylon is broken from Judah’s neck (**30:8**).

In the **Book of Ezekiel**, the phrase refers to

the time of Gog’s devising an evil scheme to attack Israel (**38:10, 18**)

the time of Gog’s burial in Israel (**39:11**).

In the **Book of Hosea** the phrase refers:

the day when Israel’s bow is broken in the Valley of Jezreel (**1:5**);

the day when Israel will call YHWH “My Husband” and no longer “My Baal”

(**2:18^{Heb} / 16^{Eng}**);

the time of YHWH’s answering Israel’s cry (**2:23^{Heb} / 21^{Eng}**).

In the **Book of Amos** the phrase refers to

the time when the sun goes down at noon (**8:9**).

In the **Book of Micah** the phrase refers to

the time when YHWH cuts off horses and chariots from the remnant of Jacob
(**5:9**).

In the **Book of Zephaniah** the phrase refers to

the time of YHWH’s judgment on Judah (**1:10**).

(continued...)

and Tyre will be forgotten (for) seventy year(s),⁷⁴

⁷³(...continued)

In the **Book of Zechariah** the phrase refers to

- the time when Jerusalem becomes a “heavy stone” to all the peoples, who will get hurt by it (**12:3**);
- the time when YHWH seeks to destroy all the nations coming against Jerusalem (**12:9**);
- the time when YHWH cuts off the names of idols from the land (**13:2**);
- the time when prophets will be ashamed of their prophecies (**13:4**);
- the time when there will be no light, cold or frost (**14:7**);
- the time when living waters flow out of Jerusalem (**14:8**);
- the time when a great panic falls on those fighting against Jerusalem (**14:13**).

It is simply mistaken to think that all of these prophecies are referring to the same thing or time, or that some of them are “interim fulfillments” while others are depicting “the final fulfilment.”

We are reminded of the statement in **1 Peter 1:10-11** indicating that Israel’s prophets were engaged in searching and inquiring carefully concerning their Messianic hope and its nature—not as those who clearly foresaw the future with unified exactness. The Spirit of the Messiah moving in their hearts gave them a sure confidence of the “good times coming”—but the exact time and nature of those good times were matters concerning which they searched and inquired, giving many varying depictions of both its nature and its time. As we have insisted again and again, their prophetic message was based on visions and dreams, and was filled with enigma / puzzle—exactly what we should expect from the biblical statements in **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**. This is not a view of the prophets invented by “liberal scholars,” but rather is the Bible’s explicit view—which all too often has not been taken seriously.

1QIs^a omits the definite article in the phrase, reading **וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא**, “and it will happen in that day.”

⁷⁴Gray comments that this line means Tyre will “lose her trade [for seventy years].” (P. 395) **Verse 17** states that following the seventy years of Tyre’s being forgotten, her trade will resume.

Gray states that “seventy years” are:

- (1) the normal term of human life, **Psalm 90:10**;
- (2) the length, according to expectation or conventional reckoning, of the Jewish captivity in Babylon, **Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10; Zechariah 1:12; 7:5; Daniel 9:2; 2 Chronicles 36:21**.

(continued...)

like (the) days of one king.⁷⁵

⁷⁴(...continued)

Yes, but here the “seventy years” may not be related either to the length of human life or to the captivity in Babylon.

Motyer states that “The period referred to here can be identified as lying between the campaigns of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. and the decline of Assyria, with consequent recovery of Tyrian strength about 630 B.C.E.” (P. 193)

Watts states that “The round number [expressed in units divisible by ten, one hundred, etc., rather than exactly: 500 is a round number for 498, 503, etc.] is intended to indicate an extended period of time. Tyre did, in fact, recover enough to withstand Nebuchadnezzar’s siege for thirteen years—from 585 to 572 B.C.E. Although subject to the Persians, Tyre continued active, resisting Alexander for seven months before falling to him in 332 B.C.E...

“The prophecies proclaim that Tyre’s seductive influence on international trade will again be felt in the Levant before long. The distinctive thrust of the prophecy is the claim that her profits will be *dedicated to Yahweh*, that they will support the temple personnel, presumably in Jerusalem. Tyre’s restoration is motivated by the will to make her a contributor to the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem, as she was under Hiram in the days of David (**1 Kings 5-7; 1 Chronicles 14:1**). No such contribution is recorded for the rebuilding or maintenance of the second temple.” (P. 308)

But while we may agree that seventy years is a “round number,” it certainly ought to mean something close to seventy years—not hundreds of years in the future. And while Watts says Tyre’s seductive influence will be felt in the Levant, the prophecy is much larger than that, stating that she will ply her trade with “all the kingdoms of the world.” Also, the text says much more than simply being a contributor to the worship of YHWH in Jerusalem—it states that “her commercial gain, and her prostitute-wages will be set-apart to the YHWH”—not a portion of them, or a tithe of them, but their entirety! And, of course, such a thing never happened.

⁷⁵There is a large omission in the text of 1QIs^a. Its **verse 15** reads, “And it will happen in that day to Tyre like (the) song of the prostitute.” This omits the entirety of the words “and Tyre will be forgotten (for) seventy year(s), like (the) days of one king. At (the) end of seventy year(s).” Exactly how or why this omission occurred is difficult to explain, but copyists of the biblical text, while extremely careful in their work, were certainly not infallible.

Slotki states that “the days of one king” means “the usual span of life for a man, even a king (compare **Psalms 90:10**); or, the Hebrew may signify ‘a certain king,’ i.e. David who lived seventy years.” (Pp. 108-08) **Rahlfs** translates by ὥς χρόνος

(continued...)

At (the) end of seventy year(s),⁷⁶
it will be to Tyre like a song for the prostitute:^{77, 5}

⁷⁵(...continued)
βασιλέως ὡς χρόνος ἀνθρώπου, literally, “like time of a king, like time of a person.”

Gray states that “various explanations, none very satisfactory, have been offered of this phrase; it has been said to mean the full span of human life...or full years, measured liberally as befits a king, in contrast to the ‘years of a hireling’ (**Isaiah 16:14; 21:16**)...or a period free from change...or the duration of a dynasty...whether that of Nebuchadnezzar...or of Alexander and his Ptolemaic successors. On the last theory, allusion is made to the fact that Tyre was eclipsed by the foundation of Alexandria; Tyre’s prosperity returned when Phoenicia passed from the dominion of the Ptolemies to that of the Seleucids.” (Pp. 395-96)

Motyer holds that “*The span of a king’s life* / ‘as the days of one king’ is plainly intended to make the seventy years a precise rather than a symbolic time...Records of each reign were kept in what was called ‘the book of the deeds of the days’ (see **1 Kings 14:29**). So, every day of seventy years will be recorded and, as it were, crossed off until the stated time is fulfilled. The foremost thought here is the mercenary motive that was ever the mainspring of Tyre’s activity; all, as in prostitution, was done for money.” (P. 193)

Perhaps...but is this “plainly intended”?

⁷⁶Alexander comments, “That Tyre was a flourishing city in the time of Alexander the Great, is matter of history. When it again became so, is not. But since the fact is certain and the prophecy explicit, the most rational conclusion is that they chronologically coincide, or in other words, that Tyre did begin to recover from the effects of the Babylonian conquest about seventy years after the catastrophe itself.” (P. 401)

⁷⁷Slotki comments that this means the kind of song a neglected harlot sings as she seeks to attract attention. The song itself is contained in **verse 16**, which Slotki says is “a popular dancing song which comes to the mind of the prophet as he envisages Phoenicia’s vicissitudes [changes of circumstance].” (P. 109)

Alexander comments that “The last clause foretells the restoration of Tyre in a very peculiar and significant form. Instead of a queen reinstated on the throne, she now appears as a forgotten harlot, suing [appealing formally] once more for admiration and reward...

“The restoration here predicted was to be a restoration to commercial prosperity and wealth, but not to regal dignity or national importance. The *song of a harlot* (or *the harlot*) is now [mid-19th century C.E.] commonly agreed to mean a particular song well known to the contemporaries of the prophet. *It shall be to her like this song* can only

(continued...)

23:16⁷⁸ קְחִי כִנּוֹר

סְבִי עִיר זֹנָה נְשַׁכְחָה

הִיטִיבִי נֶגֶן

הַרְבִּי-שִׁיר

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרִיו:

Take up a harp!⁷⁹

⁷⁷(...continued)

mean that what the song presents as an ideal situation should be realized in the experience of Tyre.” (P. 401)

Oswalt likewise states that “The poem was probably part of the popular parlance, and like a modern preacher’s reference to the songs of the day, would make the prophet’s message the more vivid and comprehensible to the hearers.” (Pp. 435-36)

⁷⁸Alexander translates **verse 16**: “Take a harp, go about the city, O forgotten harlot; play well, sing much, that thou mayest be remembered.”

He comments that “These are now explained as the words of the song itself, describing the only way in which the harlot could recover her place in the memory of men, that is, by soliciting their notice and their favor. The application of the song to Tyre implies not only that she had lost her former position in the sight of the nations, but that exertion would be needed to recover it. The literal meaning of the words translated *play well, sing much, is make good playing, multiply song.*” (Pp. 401-02)

Gray states that “The song is...some popular ditty [short, simple song] cited by the writer rather than one specially composed by himself...The ditty is sarcastic, for obviously the worn-out and discarded harlot would not win much success by her wiles; Tyre is to be restored not by her own artifices, but (**verse 17**) by Yahweh’s favor...

“The conduct described...corresponds more to that of the Ghawazee of modern Egypt...than to what is elsewhere said of harlots in the **Old Testament.**” (P. 396) See our end-note 2 for a **Wikipedia** article on these Egyptian women.

⁷⁹Gray observes that “The כִּנּוֹר, **khinnor** [‘lyre,’ ‘stringed instrument’] appears elsewhere as an instrument of dissolute [intemperate, self-indulgent, wild] music.” (P. 396) See **Isaiah 5:12**, where the lyre is included with a number of other musical instruments being played at wine-drinking parties.

Go around⁸⁰ a city, forgotten prostitute!
Be good at playing stringed instruments!⁸¹
Make many a song--
so that you will be remembered!⁸²

23:17⁸³ וְהָיָה מִקֵּץ | שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה

⁸⁰The Greek translation is ῥέμβευσσον, 2nd person singular, aorist imperative, “roam!”, “wander!” Gray’s translation of the Hebrew סָבִי, **sobby**, is “walk with the throng,” literally “go about in.” (P. 396)

Compare **Song of Songs / Solomon 3:2**, where the young female lover says, “I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves...”

⁸¹Slotki’s translation has “Make sweet melody,” and he states that it can also be translated “Play skillfully,” and states that “a free rendering is: ‘touch the strings deftly.’” (P. 109)

Gray’s translation has “Play, play with fire,” but he states that it is “more literally “play skillfully, play your best.” (P. 396)

Compare **1 Samuel 16:17** [where Saul, depressed, asks for someone who can play well], **Ezekiel 33:32** [YHWH tells Ezekiel that he has become like someone who plays well on an instrument, i.e., has become an ‘entertainer’ rather than a prophet] and **Psalms 33:3** [the command is given to play well on stringed instruments to YHWH].

⁸²Oswalt states that “In a mild way [the poem] appears to deride the prostitute who, perhaps through age, is no longer popular, and challenges her to make music throughout the city in an attempt to build up a new clientele. The reference to music is an indication that like Japan’s Geisha girls, the prostitute in the ancient Near East was expected to be an entertainer with more than merely sexual skills.” (P. 436)

⁸³Kaiser comments on **verses 17-18** that “By contrast, the eschatological redactor prophesies that the city will return to prosperity for the benefit of his own religious community...”

“If we are correct in supposing that the redactor was working later than 274 B.C.E., then he provides valuable evidence of the intensified eschatological expectations to be found in Judaism during the third century. For the particular hope which he expresses, that the trade of Tyre with all the kingdoms of the earth will be protected by Yahweh, and carried out for the benefit of the people of Jerusalem, is comprehensible only in the framework of the much wider conception of the transformation of the fortunes of Jerusalem [Yes, *if*, but that’s a mighty big if, and very few students of **Isaiah** will agree with dating this passage in the third century. There is

(continued...)

⁸³(...continued)

nothing in these verses saying YHWH will protect Tyre's trade, nor is there anything said about 'for the benefit of the people of Jerusalem']...

"When Yahweh casts down the nations of the earth, the survivors will voluntarily make pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to hand over their treasures there (compare **Psalms 72:10** [nothing about pilgrimage to Jerusalem]; **96:8** [a depiction of all nations worshiping YHWH, bringing Him offerings; no mention of pilgrimage to Jerusalem]; **Isaiah 45:14** [wealth and people of foreign nations will belong to Israel; no mention of pilgrimage to Jerusalem]; **49:22-23** [nations will come with Israel's exiles in their arms; no mention of pilgrimage to Jerusalem]; **60:9-11** [similar; not only bringing Israel's exiles, but bringing their wealth as well; no mention of pilgrimage to Jerusalem]; **Haggai 2:7** [the treasures of all nations will come in, but no mention of pilgrimage to Jerusalem]; **Zechariah 14:21** [irrelevant], and particularly **Isaiah 18:7** [tribute will be brought to YHWH from Ethiopia; no mention of pilgrimage to Jerusalem])." (P. 171)

There can be no doubt that Israel's prophets looked forward to a time when Israel would be enriched with the wealth of earth's nations, combined with the return of Israel's exiles facilitated by those foreign nations and their leaders. But there is no one unified picture of that occurrence. Kaiser makes these varied passages speak of a universal "pilgrimage to Jerusalem," even though not one of these passages uses the word pilgrimage or mentions Jerusalem.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: "And it shall be (or come to pass), from (or at) the end of seventy years, Jehovah will visit Tyre, and she shall return to her hire (or gain), and shall play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the earth upon the face of the ground."

He comments that "Notwithstanding the apparent import of the figure, the conduct is not in itself unlawful. The figure indeed is now commonly agreed to denote nothing more than commercial intercourse without necessarily implying guilt. In ancient times, when international commerce was a strange thing and nearly monopolized by a single nation, and especially among the Jews, whose law discouraged it for wise but temporary purposes, there were probably ideas attached to such promiscuous intercourse entirely different from our own. Certain it is that the Scriptures more than once compare the mutual solicitations of commercial enterprise to illicit love. That the comparison does not necessarily involve the idea of unlawful or dishonest trade, is sufficiently apparent from the following verse." (P. 401)

Slotki states that **verse 17** is the "application of the song." (P. 109)

Oswalt comments: "In a figurative way Tyre's music will have its effect, because after the period of forgottenness, she will attain something of her former eminence as a trading city of the world..."

(continued...)

יִפְקֹד יְהוָה אֶת-צָר

וּשְׁבָה לְאִתְנָנָהּ

וּזְנָתָהּ אֶת-כָּל-מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ

עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:

And it will happen at the end of seventy⁸⁴ year(s),

YHWH will visit Tyre,⁸⁵

and she will return to her (prostitute) wages;⁸⁶

⁸³(...continued)

“The time frame here is as various as the commentators’ assumptions.” He mentions the views of Erlandsson (before 700 B.C.E.), Delitzsch (in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, 587 B.C.E.) and Kaiser (in the time of the Ptolemies, 305 to 30 B.C.E.). He states that “This diversity tells us that no definite explanation has yet been

given and that the modern Christian should focus on the theological intent of the assertions rather than upon the supposed fulfillment.” (P. 436)

⁸⁴1QIs^a has a strange reading at this point. Where our Hebrew text has שְׁנָה שְׁבַעִים, “seventy year(s),” the Qumran text has בַּעֵין שְׁנָה, perhaps meaning “in a spring / well of a year,” omitting the *shin* and spelling the plural with *iy*n instead of *iy*m, perhaps an old Aramaic plural ending. This was not the Qumran copyist’s best day!

⁸⁵Gray comments that “will visit” means “with favor.” Compare **Jeremiah 29:10**,

For in this way YHWH has spoken, that:

According to the measure of filling up seventy years for Babylon,
I will visit you, and I will cause to stand for you
my good words / promises to return you to this place.

Yahweh will restore the commercial prosperity of Tyre.” (P. 396)

Oswalt comments that “If Tyre is ever to regain her place, it will only be through God’s grace.” (P. 436)

⁸⁶Where our Hebrew text has לְאִתְנָנָהּ, “to her (prostitute) wages,” **Rahlfs** has (καὶ πάλιν ἀποκατασταθήσεται) εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον (καὶ ἔσται ἐμπόριον πάσαις ταῖς βασιλείαις τῆς οἰκουμένης, “(and again she will be restored) to the old [condition] (and she will be a market-center for all the kingdoms of the inhabited world,” thereby

(continued...)

and she will be a prostitute with all kingdoms of the earth,
upon (the) face of the ground!⁸⁷

23:18⁸⁸ וְהָיָה סְחָרָהּ וְאֶתְנָנָהּ קָדַשׁ לַיהוָה

⁸⁶(...continued)
avoiding mention of her “prostitute wages.”

Slotki comments that “She [Tyre] will again engage in her profitable activities and commerce. The noun used for ‘hire’ and the verb ‘shall have commerce’ are technical terms respectively used elsewhere for the fee and self-surrender of the harlot. The language is, of course, metaphorical.” (P. 109)

Oswalt comments that the phrase “she will prostitute herself” seems “to be strange language if God has delivered her from destruction. The [Greek translation] and the [Aramaic] targum seems to feel this problem as well since they read (respectively) ‘be a port of merchandise’ and ‘satisfy herself with merchandise.’” (P. 436)

Then Oswalt back-tracks, and states that “God’s grace does not guarantee positive response. Many persons have experienced God’s hand of judgment and promised to do differently, but when deliverance came, they very quickly reverted to the old ways. This may be being said of Tyre.” (Pp. 436-37)

We think the prostitution language here is being used metaphorically, as a description of Phoenicia’s commercial activity, and is not meant literally. What do you think?

⁸⁷Oswalt states that the phrase “on the face of the earth” “appears redundant and it is lacking in [the Greek translation]. However, scholars from as diverse points of view as Kaiser and Young agree that it may well be a means for stressing the universality of the trade involved.” (P. 437)

⁸⁸Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: “*And her gain and her hire shall be holiness (or holy, i.e. consecrated) to Jehovah; it shall not be stored and it shall not be hoarded; for her gain shall be for those who sit (or dwell) before Jehovah, to eat to satiety, and for substantial clothing...*”

“The general sense of the prediction evidently is, that the commercial gains of Tyre should redound to the advantage of the servants of Jehovah.” (P. 402)

Motyer states that “The new Tyre would be there to supply materials for the temple at the time of the return from Babylon (**Ezra 3:7**) but, like the return itself, this was only a token of the fulfilment yet to come (**Revelation 21:24-26**; compare **Isaiah 60:5**.)” (P. 193)

(continued...)

לֹא יֵאָצֵר וְלֹא יִחָסֵן
כִּי לְיֹשְׁבֵי־לְפָנַי יִהְיֶה יְהוָה סִחְרָהָ
לֹא־כֹל לְשִׁבְעָה וְלִמְכָסָה עֲתִיק:

And her commercial gain,⁸⁹ and her prostitute-wages will be set-apart to the YHWH;⁹⁰
it will not be stored up, and it will not be laid up,
Because for those dwelling before YHWH her commercial gain will belong,⁹¹

⁸⁸(...continued)

And as so often with Motyer's comments, we wonder where he gets the idea that Tyre's restoration is "only a token of the fulfilment yet to come." The biblical text certainly does not use such language, and it is not apparent that the passage from

Revelation and the one from **Isaiah 60** have anything to do with this matter of Tyre's restoration. We think Motyer's comment is bizarre at best.

⁸⁹Where our Hebrew text has the noun סִחְרָהָ, "her commerce / gain," 1QIs^a has ה. ס. Again we say, This was not the Qumran copyist's best day!

⁹⁰Slotki's translation has "And her gain and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord," and he comments that "The riches which accrue from the resumption of Phoenician trade will be disposed of by God in accordance with His wishes," that is, not for the benefit of the Phoenicians themselves, but rather for the righteous." (P. 109)

Gray comments that "Even in figure [symbolism] it is surprising to find the *harlot's price* (אֶתְנַן, 'ethnan) made a gift to Yahweh." Compare **Deuteronomy 23:19**^{Heb} / **18**^{Eng},

You shall not bring a prostitute's wages and a dog's price (into) YHWH your God's house / temple,
for (payment of) any vow;
because both of them are an abomination (to) YHWH your God!" (P. 396)

Oswalt agrees, stating that the phrase *her hire will be holy* "seems to fly directly in the face of **Deuteronomy 23:19**^{Heb} / **18**^{Eng}, which states that a prostitute's hire may not be given as an offering. However, it is necessary to remember that prostitution is a figure here and that there is nothing intrinsically immoral about trade or business." (P. 437)

⁹¹Gray comments that "The gains from trade will no longer be stored up...by Tyre for her own use, but will be paid into Yahweh's coffers, whence it will be given over by

(continued...)

⁹¹(...continued)

Him to them that sit before Him, i.e. the priestly nation of the Jews (**Isaiah 61:5-6**)...

“The thought that the wealth of the nations will flow into the restored Jewish state is frequent in exilic and post-exilic literature.” See:

Isaiah 45:14,

In this way YHWH spoke:

Produce of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia, and Sabians, men of size,
unto you will cross over, and they will belong to you;
they will come behind you; in the fetters / chains / manacles they will cross over.

And they will bow down to you, they will make intercession, (saying)
Surely God is with you, and there is no other besides God!

Isaiah 49:22-23,

22 In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

Look—I will lift up My hand to (the) nations,
and to peoples I will raise My signal;
and they will bring your sons in (their) embrace,
and your daughters they will carry upon (their) shoulder.

23 And kings will be your foster-fathers,
and their princesses / queens your nursing-mothers.
(With) faces (to) earth, they will worship you
and (the) dust of your feet they will lick.
And you will know that I (am) YHWH,
those waiting (for) Me will not be put to shame!

Isaiah 60:5-6,

5 Then you (feminine singular) will see and you will shine / be radiant;
and your heart will fear / be in awe and expand,
because (the) abundance of the sea will be turned over to you;
wealth of nations will come to you!

6 A multitude of camels will cover you,
young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all of them from Sheba will come.
Gold and frankincense they will carry,
and praises of YHWH they will announce as good news.

(continued...)

⁹¹(...continued)

Isaiah 60:9-11,

- 9 Because for Me coast-lands wait,
and the ships of Tarshish at the first,
to bring your children from afar,
their silver and their gold with them,
for YHWH your God's name, and for Israel's Set-apart One,
because He beautified you!
- 10 And children of foreignness, will build your walls,
and their kings will serve you.
Because in My wrath I struck you;
and in My favor, I had compassion on you!
- 11 And they will open your gates continually--
by day and night they will not be closed--
(in order) to bring to you (the) wealth of nations;
and their kings driven / led in procession.

Haggai 2:6-9,

- 6 Because in this way YHWH of Armies spoke:
Yet one (time), it is a little (time),
and I (will be) causing the heavens and the earth to shake,
and the sea and the dry land.
- 7 And I will cause all the nations to shake;
and they will come--(with the) delight of all the nations--
and I will fill this house / temple (with) glory / abundance!
YHWH of Armies spoke!
- 8 The silver / money is Mine, and the gold is Mine!
(It is) a saying of YHWH of Armies!
- 9 (The) glory / abundance of this house / temple will be great--
the later (house / temple greater than) the former (house / temple).
YHWH of Armies said (it)!
- And in this place, I will give peace.
(It is) a saying of YHWH of Armies!" (P. 396)

Oswalt quotes Young as pointing out that "Tyre now stands in relation to Jerusalem as her colonies once stood to Tyre. The wealth flows to the mother city. It is set apart for God's use and He chooses to give it to His Own, His royal priesthood...

"If the glory of the nations (**chapters 13 and 14**) is nothing; if the scheming of the nations (**chapters 14-18**) is nothing; if the wisdom of the nations (**chapters 19-20**) is nothing; if the vision of the nation (**chapters 21-22**) is nothing; if the wealth of the nations (**chapter 23**) is nothing, then the question is: Why trust the nations? The answer is clear: There is no reason to do so." (P. 437)

(continued...)

⁹¹(...continued)

This appears to be an over-simplification of the contents of **chapters 13-23**, in an attempt to make them speak with one voice, and lead into **chapters 24-27**, which he entitles “God’s Triumph Over the Nations.” But we doubt that such an overall evaluation is adequate or compelling.

Motyer comments on **verse 18** that **Deuteronomy 23:19^{Heb} / 18^{Eng}** specifically forbade the bringing of the earnings (נִסְחָאֵי; the same word as here [in **Isaiah 23:18**] of prostitution as an offering to the Lord. What a picture then Isaiah gives of transformation: the converted prostitute consecrating all that the old life, now past and gone [but the text depicts Tyre as returning to her prostitution!], had meant and gained (compare **Luke 7:44-46; John 12:3**).

Isaiah speaks first of a new status: Tyre’s earnings will be set apart for the Lord / ‘holiness to the Lord.’ This is the word which adorned the high priest (**Exodus 28:36**) and is used of what belongs to the Divine sphere of reality (**Leviticus 27:9-10** [where is anything said about ‘the Divine sphere of reality’? Is not God present universally, in every sphere of reality?]). Secondly, he speaks of a new spirit: these earnings will not be stored up or hoarded. The old mercenary spirit will be replaced by generosity. Thirdly, there will be a new allegiance and concern for those who live before the Lord, i.e. Zion’s people (**Psalms 27:43; 84:4, 7**.)” (Pp. 193-94)

Kaiser insists that “Those who dwell before Yahweh must be taken to mean not only the priests (compare **Psalms 134:1**,

[Look—they blessed YHWH, all YHWH’s servants,
the ones standing in YHWH’s house / temple in the nights.
(But this does not identify those standing in the temple by night as ‘priests’; they could just as well be lay people, not priests).]

but all the inhabitants of Jerusalem [**Isaiah 23:17-18** does not mention Jerusalem].” (P. 172)

Kaiser wants to make the language of these two verses far more specific than it actually is. The language can just as well be referring to people world-wide, who stand / dwell before YHWH.

Kaiser adds that “When the proceeds of the trade of Tyre are handed over, they [those receiving the proceeds] will enjoy in the future a life of luxury. They will thus be taking on the role of the priestly kingdom and holy people (compare **Exodus 19:6**) from whom the nations of the earth will receive instruction (compare **Isaiah 2:2ff.**).” (P. 172)

But these verses say nothing concerning those enriched from Tyre’s commerce

(continued...)

to eat to fullness / satiety, and for choice⁹² covering / clothing.⁹³

⁹¹(...continued)

as engaging in teaching—that can only be concluded by combining other statements in Isaiah with this statement. And we could just as well state that they will become “suffering servants of YHWH,” who bear the sins of others and willingly die on behalf of others, as depicted in **Isaiah 53**. It is far better to let the passage say what it says, and not attempt to read into it further ideas. Those who stand / dwell before YHWH will have plenty to eat, and will be well clothed.

⁹²Watts notes that this is the only occurrence of the word עֲתִיק in the **Hebrew Bible**.” (P. 303) Thus its meaning is difficult to determine. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggest that it is related to the adjective עֲתִיק, (**atheq** which is defined as “advanced,” “eminent,” “surpassing.”

⁹³And we ask, did this prophecy in **Isaiah 23** come to fulfillment after seventy years? Did Tyre return to her prostitution / commerce, and dedicate her profits to YHWH and His people? We say, No, that did not happen—and, in fact, the prophecy was mistaken.

We are greatly disappointed that many commentators on this chapter do not address this question directly and honestly.

Thomas Williamson, in his on-line commentary on **Isaiah 13-23** does seek to answer the question as follows:

”Can we put our finger on any specific fulfillment of this prophecy? In **Ezra 3:7** we read of the Jews trading with Tyre, specifically for the purpose of purchasing lumber from them. The Jews were rebuilding their nation at the same time that Tyre was being rebuilt, and as customers and neighbors of Tyre, the Jews benefitted from Tyre’s commercial activity. The lumber from Tyre was to be used to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. To the unregenerate merchants of Tyre, this sale of lumber was just another profitable business transaction, but in the providence of God, their money-making enterprise had become “Holiness to the Lord.”

But we insist that a sale of lumber to the Jews for rebuilding the temple is a far cry from devoting all of Tyre’s / Phoenicia’s profits to YHWH and His people!

Williamson adds that “More than 500 years later, the Apostle Paul was a beneficiary of the hospitality of the Christian converts in Tyre: “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

(continued...)

⁹³(...continued)

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. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again." (**Acts 21:3-6**)...

"There were Christians in Tyre, and they brought Paul and his companions on their way, which speaks of hospitality and financial support (**3 John 5-8**). The hire and the merchandise of the people of Tyre had become holiness unto the Lord.

"Meanwhile, the church historian Eusebius, writing in the early 4th Century C.E., said concerning the prophecy of **Isaiah 23**: "This prophecy is fulfilled in our times. For now that the Church of God is established at Tyre, as in other nations, a large portion of her merchandise is consecrated to the Lord and to His Church, according to the precept of the Lord, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

But again, we insist that this is a far-cry from the fulfillment of the prophecy in **Isaiah 23**, that all of Tyre's / Phoenicia's profits from her commerce will be dedicated to YHWH, not to mention that it is far too late for the "after seventy years" of the prophecy!

Watts explains **chapter 23** as follows: "The fall of Tyre with the attendant collapse of the other Phoenician cities of the coast and across the waters had widespread implications. These are noted by the references in the chapter to Egypt, Canaan, the Chaldeans, and Assyria, as well as to the cities themselves: Tyre, Sidon, Tarshish, and Cyprus. The fall of Tyre marked the completion of the Assyrian conquest of all West Asia [nothing is said in the text concerning the Assyrian conquest of all West Asia]. The [**Book of Isaiah**] has recorded the stages by which Assyria has pursued its goal for some eighty years. With the fall of Tyre it has reached its pinnacle. All the land and the trade routes of the sea are in its hands [but nothing to this effect is stated in the text].

"On another level the chapter marks the completion of Yahweh's plan to use Assyria as the 'rod of His anger' not only against Israel but also, on Yahweh's day, against 'all the proud and lofty, all that is exalted, all the cedars of Lebanon...every ship of Tarshish (**Isaiah 2:12-16**)...

[Yes, but following Assyria's fall, Babylon took her place as the rod of YHWH's anger, attacking and conquering Jerusalem].

Watts continues: "With the fall of Phoenician power, this part of God's goal has been achieved." But again, there is not a word in the text to this effect; and in fact, this

(continued...)

⁹³(...continued)

part of God's goal continued to be pursued through others...

“The potential for theological associations with the fall of Tyre is fully exploited here. To summarize, they include seeing the defeat and occupation of Phoenicia as the completion of God's conquest of Canaan begun with Joshua [The text says nothing concerning this; and does not depict Israel's occupation of Phoenicia, as would be the case if it was a continuation of Joshua's conquest], of His use of the Assyrian to bring an end to the era of city-states [but the Assyrian city-state was replaced by the Babylonian city-state, and city-states continued to exist throughout the known world; all of this political interpretation is being read into the text by Watts], and of His judgment against all human pride and arrogance which Tyre and Lebanon symbolized so well.

“The [**Book of Isaiah**] suggests that the fall of Tyre was another sign to Israel's leaders, in this case, Manasseh in Jerusalem, to guide them in their political decisions regarding Assyria (compare **chapters 7** and **20** [**chapter 23** does not mention Manasseh]). Seen religiously, the recognition of Yahweh's role in the disaster should have led to humble faith in Him, to dependence upon Him as Protector and Guide rather than upon any human power...

“In the larger context the [**Book of Isaiah**] suggests that, although Manasseh did make his policies conform to God's new order by submitting to the [Assyrian] Empire (**Isaiah chapters 24-27**), succeeding generations did not heed the sign by adjusting their goals politically or religiously. They were still blind and deaf, thus preparing the way for Jerusalem's final collapse before the Babylonians (**Isaiah 28-33**).” (Pp. 308-09)

We think Watts has made a valiant effort to interpret **chapter 23** in the light of other passages in the **Book of Isaiah**, but in order to do so has to read most of his ideas into the text, rather than deriving them from the text, for example his view of Manasseh as an obedient servant of YHWH as prominent in the interpretation of **chapter 23**.

1. Assyrian Attacks on Phoenicia

“During the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, what is today known as Lebanon, came under nominal Assyrian rule on several occasions. The approach of the devastating Assyrian armies would more often than not result in the vassalage of these states. Similarly, any long absence would result in rebellion, often sponsored by another of Assyria's numerous opponents. The result is that numerous Kings of Assyria launched campaigns to bring these economically important regions under Assyrian rule, many of them meeting short-term success. The rebellion after one King's offensive would result in his successor's next vengeful assault. When Tyre ceased to pay tribute to the Assyrian kings, rebellion broke out.

“Prior to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the late 10th century B.C.E. [1000-901 B.C.E.], much of the land known today as Syria and Lebanon was ruled by various independent cities. Trade established between these cities and those of the Mediterranean gave some of these cities great wealth.

“Following two centuries of weakness in which Assyria was governed by Kings incapable of improving her weak military situation, King Adad-nirari II (911-891 B.C.E.) ascended to the throne and immediately began consolidating the domains of Assyria and punishing rebellious vassals. After the death of Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884 B.C.E.) began expanding against Assyria's enemies to the north. The expansion into the north meant that the next Assyrian King, Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.E.) was in a position to greatly expand Assyria's political and military influence out of Mesopotamia. After crushing the revolt of the city of Suru, defeating the Aramaean King Bit Adini and mercilessly mutilating other rebels along the Upper Tigris river, Ashurnasirpal II turned his attention to the West, to the land of the Phoenicians.

“Campaigns of Ashurnasirpal II, 883-859 B.C.E.

“Ashurnasirpal II's brutal treatment of rebels ensured that the absence of his army would not incite more revolts. Taking his army, which was typically composed of infantry (including auxiliaries and foreigners), heavy & light cavalry and chariots, Ashurnasirpal surprised the Neo-Hittites and Aramaean states of northern Syria. Resistance was almost certainly encountered but many of the smaller cities immediately surrendered, often by rushing in advance of their settlement's location and offering tribute. Such tribute would naturally come with acts of humiliation, as Ashurnasirpal II proudly documents:

The tribute of the sea coast - from the inhabitants of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, Mahallata, Kaiza, Amurru and Arvad which is an Island in the sea, consisting of gold, silver, tin, copper, copper-containers, linen garments with multi-colored trimmings, large and small monkeys, ebony, boxwood, ivory from walrus tusk, a product of the sea--this their tribute I received and they embraced my feet.

In the previous text Ashurnasirpal II mentions an Island, Cyprus, demonstrating that Assyrian armies were not defeated by large bodies of water.

“Ashurnasirpal II did not annex the Phoenician cities but instead only aimed to establish them as a source of raw materials for the Assyrian war machine. Iron was needed for weapons, Lebanese cedar for construction, gold and silver for the payment of troops; in the end however, Ashurnasirpal's campaigns were only a short term success.

“Campaigns of Shalmaneser III, 858--824 B.C.E.

“Shalmaneser was the son of Ashurnasirpal II and like his father, expended much of his energies into fighting and expanding in the name of Ashur. However, while he did campaign for 31 years of his 35 years on the throne, his death was met with unrealized dreams and ultimately civil conflict and another period of weakness. The cities of Syria and Palestine once more began to rebel and in 853 B.C.E. Shalmaneser III led an army to cross the Euphrates and into northern Syria. After taking Aleppo, he encountered on the plains of central Syria a coalition of Syrian and Palestinian states, including forces sent by King Ahab of Israel. The outcome of the battle was most likely a strategic defeat for Shalmaneser III--although a few were brought back into line, he campaigned for three more occasions against his opponents in 849, 845 and 838 B.C.E. Unsuccessful drives into Syria coupled with his repeated inability to take Damascus resulted in the Phoenician cities receiving a century of respite from Assyrian attacks.

“For the next 80 years after Shalmaneser III's death, Lebanon would not be in any danger from Assyrian armies.

“Shalmaneser III was one of the more unsuccessful Kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, although tougher times for Assyria would come. Shalmaneser III certainly had the resources to implement such conquests; he boasts that his Syrian campaigns involved as many as 120,000 men under his control. His failure meant that the conquests of Lebanon and Syria would fall to Tiglath Pileser III.

“Campaigns of Tiglath Pileser III, 745-727 B.C.E.

“Tiglath Pileser III brought Assyria out of the period of weakness, much to the fear of Assyria's enemies. His reforms in administration and in the military included the introduction of a standing army (allowing for extensive campaigning and siege warfare), greater lines of communication and supply of horses, metal, arrows and other necessities of war. Upon conquering a new territory, an Assyrian official would be put in charge to supervise and ensure Assyrian interests and tribute were maintained.

“With these and with his energetic campaigning, Syria and many of the Phoenician cities were doomed to lose their independence once again to the brutal yet effective Assyrian armies.

“After taking care of the troublesome Chaldeans to the south and re-affirming Babylon's vassalage to Assyria, Tiglath led a campaign against the northern opponents of Urartu. Urartu had been extending their influence into the eastern Mediterranean by carving out a number of vassal states along the fertile crescent and into Palestine.

Consequently, Tiglath's moves against Syria and Palestine served to aid him in his war against Urartu.

“Upon hearing of the advancing armies of Assyria, the vassal states in northern Syria called for the forces of Urartu to protect them. In a crushing defeat in the Upper Euphrates Tiglath ensured that no troops would come to their aid; an unsuccessful siege of the capital of Urartu, Turushpa meant that Tiglath concentrated his efforts in the West. The Syrian city of Arpad was placed under siege in 747 B.C.E. While most armies of the time would not be able to lay siege for more than half a year (the seasonal change demanded the soldiers return to their farms and tend to their fields and livestock) the reforms of Tiglath mean that his standing army would take the city in the third year of the siege.

“In 738 B.C.E., Tiglath mirrored the moves of his predecessor, Ashurnasirpal II by accepting the tribute of many of cities in Palestine and Syria. The fruits of the conquests ensured once again a good supply of raw materials to feed the Assyrian war machine. When Tiglath placed a trade embargo on exporting Lebanese cedar to Egypt, Coptic-backed rebellions broke out throughout the region, all of which were crushed and all made to recognize the suzerainty of nation of Assur.

“Shalmaneser V, 726-722 B.C.E. and Sargon II, 721-705 B.C.E.]

“The succession of Sargon II to Tiglath is surrounded by mystery--his campaigns against Babylon mention a previous conquest of Jerusalem, the capital of the Israelites and the mass deportation of some 27,000+ inhabitants to the lands of Media. The most likely result is that another King before Sargon II, Shalmaneser V may have launched campaigns in the provinces of Syria and Palestine before being overthrown by Sargon II --whose rebellion would have encouraged others throughout the Empire, including the secession of Babylon from Assyria vassalage. Sargon II therefore claims the glory of his usurped predecessor's conquest of Israel.

“In any case, the Assyrians under Sargon II were once more forced to campaign in the immediate vicinity of Assyria, resulting in an outbreak of rebellion in Syria (no doubt in order to take advantage of the pre-occupied status of the Assyrian army). After defeating Assyria's opponents, Sargon II decided to head west rather than completely defeat Elam, being content with reducing her ability to campaign for some time.

“The Syrian rebellion was backed by the Egyptians (Hanuna of Gaza was encouraged by them and so rebelled) and led by the ruler of Hamath. The cities of Damascus, Samaria and a few other Phoenician cities also broke away and allied once again to face the threat of Assyria. The rebellion was ultimately doomed; the coalition lacked the military ability to stop Sargon's rapid advance south. After taking Arpad, Sargon II smashed the coalition army at Qarqar, thereby avenging the failures of Shalmaneser III. Hamath, followed by Damascus and then Samaria fell. Sargon then went on to take Gaza where he brushed aside an Egyptian expeditionary force. Hanuna was captured and flayed.

“Another attempt by the Egyptians in 712 B.C.E. to foment a rebellion failed when Ashdod, the prime mover of this rebellion was defeated by Sargon's pre-emptive action. Thereafter Palestine and much of the Phoenician cities were secure.

“Sargon's military expeditions against Urartu and Phrygia allowed him to exert greater influence in norther Syria and Lebanon.

“Sennacherib, 704-681 B.C.E.

“It is unknown how rebellious the cities of Tyre and other Phoenician cities were under the reign of Sennacherib. It is however known that in 701 BC, Sennacherib marched south down the Mediterranean coast to suppress the rebellions by their vassals, the Philistine, backed by the kingdom of Judah. After defeating yet another Egyptian expeditionary force, the Philistine cities surrendered and tribute once again offered, with records speaking of bringing many hostile ‘cities’ (some of which were much more like villages) ‘to embrace his [Sennacherib’s] feet’. This may well have included a number of Phoenician cities in Lebanon. Nonetheless, the vassals in the region would not stop rebelling while Babylon, Elam or Urartu attacked Assyria, and not while Egypt continued to provide aid to the rebels.

“Esarhaddon 680-669 B.C.E.

“Esarhaddon's reconstruction of Babylon ensured Assuria’s quiet in his reign, allowing him to turn his attention to the rebellious city of Tyre (which had rebelled with Egyptian aid). Esarhaddon's attempts at taking Egypt were not all successful, particularly his first and in any case his main aim was to take advantage of the political chaos resulting from the Ethiopian Pharaohs installed there and give them something to be busy about so that they would not have the ability to incite rebellion in the region. However, his efforts against Tyre appear to have been a success, since Tyre once again revolted later on, suggesting that they had no success against Esarhaddon.

“Ashurbanipal 668-627 B.C.E.

“Ashurbanipal would be the last Assyrian King to have the ability to campaign in Lebanon and much of Syria. Marching his army into Egypt (in order to safeguard Syria) he defeated the rebellious opponents there and installed puppet princes on the throne. Egyptian attempts at taking Memphis ended miserably with Ashurbanipal marching south into Upper Egypt and taking Thebes ‘like a floodstorm.’ His campaigning against Egypt coincided with another attempt to stop Tyre and Arvad from rebelling without being punished for it afterwards. With the death of Ashurbanipal, Syria fell from Assyrian rule. Ironically, it would be the Egyptians who would attempt to aid the Assyrians as they moved the capital of their collapsing kingdom to Haran and hence closer to Syria.

“The destruction of the Assyrian Empire meant that Babylon and then Persia would rule Lebanon, Palestine and Syria until Alexander the Great of Macedon would initiate the Hellenistic Age.” (Wikipedia, 11/29/2016)

2.

Phoenicia and Its Colonies

“Phoenicia was an ancient Semitic thalassocratic civilization [states with primarily maritime realms] of an unknown origin situated on the western, coastal part of the Fertile Crescent and centered on the coastline of what is now Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, though some colonies reached the Western Mediterranean and even the Atlantic Ocean. It was an enterprising sea-based civilization and spread across the Mediterranean from 1500 B.C.E. to 300 B.C.E.

“Phoenicia is really a Classical Greek term used to refer to the region of the major Canaanite port towns, and it does not correspond exactly to a cultural identity that would have been recognised by the Phoenicians themselves...Their civilization was organized in city-states, similar to Ancient Greece, perhaps the most notable of which was Carthage in North Africa. Each city-state was a politically independent unit, and it is uncertain to what extent the Phoenicians viewed themselves as a single ethnicity and nationality. In terms of archaeology, language, lifestyle, and religion there was little to set the Phoenicians apart as markedly different from other Semitic cultures of Canaan.

“The Phoenicians were the first state-level society to make extensive use of alphabets. The Phoenician alphabet is generally held to be one of the major ancestors of all modern alphabets. By their maritime trade, the Phoenicians spread the use of the alphabet to Anatolia, North Africa, and Europe, where it was adopted by the Greeks, who in turn transmitted it to the Romans.

“Fernand Braudel remarked in **The Perspective of the World** (1985) that Phoenicia was an early example of a ‘world-economy’ surrounded by empires. The high point of Phoenician culture and sea power is usually placed about 1200 to 800 B.C.E. Archaeological evidence consistent with this understanding has been difficult to identify. A unique concentration in Phoenicia of silver hoards dated between 1200 and 800 B.C.E., however, contains hacksilver with lead isotope ratios matching ores in Sardinia and Spain. This metallic evidence agrees with the biblical memory of a western Mediterranean Tarshish that supplied Solomon with silver via Phoenicia, during the latter’s heyday. The oldest finds in connection with the Phoenicians were made in the area of the modern port of Huelva, the ancient city of Onoba.

“Many of the most important Phoenician settlements had been established long before this: Byblos, Tyre in South Lebanon, Sidon, Simyra, Arwad, and Berytus, the capital of Lebanon, all appear in the Amarna tablets. Archeology has identified cultural elements of the Phoenician zenith as early as the 3rd millennium B.C.E.

“The league of independent city-state ports, with others on the islands and along other coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, was ideally suited for trade between the Levant area, rich in natural resources, and the rest of the ancient world. Around 1200 B.C.E., a series of poorly-understood events weakened and destroyed the adjacent Egyptian and Hittite empires. In the resulting power vacuum, a number of Phoenician cities rose as significant maritime powers.” (**Wikipedia**, 10/30/2016)

3. The Value of a “Talent” in the Ancient Near East

“The talent (Latin: talentum, from Ancient Greek: τάλαντον, talanton 'scale, balance, sum') was one of several ancient units of mass, a commercial weight, as well as corresponding units of value equivalent to these masses of a precious metal. The talent of gold was known to Homer, who described how Achilles gave a half-talent of gold to Antilochus as a prize. It was approximately the mass of water required to fill an amphora [a tall ancient Greek or Roman jar with two handles and a narrow neck. A Greek, or Attic talent, was 26 kilograms (57 pounds), a Roman talent was 32.3 kilograms (71 pounds), an Egyptian talent was 27 kilograms (60 pounds), and a Babylonian talent was 30.3 kilograms (67 pounds). Ancient Israel, and other Levantine [a region on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of the Arabian Peninsula and south of Turkey, usually including the area of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria] countries, adopted the Babylonian talent, but later revised the mass.

“The heavy common talent, used in **New Testament** times, was 58.9 kilograms (130 pounds). An Attic talent of silver was the value of nine man-years of skilled work. During the Peloponnesian War, an Attic talent was the amount of silver that would pay a month's wages of a trireme [a galley with three rows or tiers of oars on each side, one above another, used chiefly as a warship. The trireme, or ordinary war-ship, had its oars arranged in three banks, fifty men rowing at once] crew of 200 men. Hellenistic mercenaries were commonly paid one drachma per day of military service. There were 6,000 drachmae in an Attic talent.

“The Babylonians, Sumerians, and Hebrews divided a talent into 60 minas, each of which was subdivided into 60 shekels. The Greek also used the ratio of 60 minas to one talent. An Egyptian talent was 80 librae.

“The talent as a unit of value is mentioned in the **New Testament** in Jesus' parable of the talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**). This parable is the origin of the use of the word "talent" to mean "gift or skill" in English and other languages. **Luke** includes a different parable involving the mina. According to Epiphanius (about 310–320–403 C.E., bishop of Salamis, Cyprus, at the end of the 4th century), the talent is called mina among the Hebrews, and was the equivalent in weight to one-hundred denarii. The talent is found in another parable of Jesus where a servant who is forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents refuses to forgive another servant who owes him only one hundred silver denarii. The talent is also used elsewhere in the Bible, as when describing the material invested in the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon received 666 gold talents a year.” (**Wikipedia**, 11/26/2016)

4.

Chaldea and the Chaldeans

“Chaldea was a Semitic nation between the late 10th and mid-6th centuries B.C.E., after which its peoples were absorbed into Babylonia. It was located in the marshy land of the far southeastern corner of Mesopotamia and briefly came to rule Babylon.

“During a period of weakness in the East Semitic speaking kingdom of Babylonia, new tribes of West Semitic-speaking migrants arrived in the region from the Levant between the 11th and 9th centuries B.C.E. The earliest waves consisted of Suteans and Arameans, followed a century or so later by the Kaldu, a group who became known later as the Chaldeans or the Chaldees. The Hebrew Bible uses the term כַּשְׁדִּים (Kašdim) and this is translated as Chaldaeans in the Septuagint, although there is some dispute as to whether Kasdim in fact means Chaldean. These migrations did not affect the powerful kingdom of Assyria to the north, which repelled these incursions. The short-lived 11th dynasty of the Kings of Babylon (6th century B.C.E.) is conventionally known to historians as the Chaldean Dynasty, although the last rulers, Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar, were known to be from Assyria.

“These nomad Chaldeans settled in the far southeastern portion of Babylonia, chiefly on the right bank of the Euphrates. Though for a short time the name later commonly referred to the whole of southern Mesopotamia in Hebraic literature, this was a misnomer, as Chaldea proper was in fact only the plain in the far southeast formed by the deposits of the Euphrates and the Tigris, extending about four hundred miles along the course of these rivers, and averaging about a hundred miles in width.

“Chaldea describes two separate territories. In the early period, between the early 9th century and late 7th century B.C.E., it was the name of a small sporadically independent territory under the domination of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-605 B.C.E.) in southeastern Babylonia, extending to the western shores of the Persian Gulf. At some point after the Chaldean tribes settled in the region it eventually became called *mat Kaldi* ‘land of Chaldeans’ by the native Mesopotamian Assyrians and Babylonians. The expression *mat Bit Yakin* is also used, apparently synonymously. Yakin was likely the chief or capital city of the land. The king of Chaldea was also called the king of Bit Yakin, just as the kings of Babylonia and Assyria were regularly styled simply king of Babylon or Assur, the capital city in each case. In the same way, what is now known as the Persian Gulf was sometimes called ‘the Sea of Bit Yakin,’ and sometimes ‘the Sea of the Land of Chaldea.’

“The boundaries of the early lands settled by Chaldeans in the early 800s B.C.E. have not been identified with precision by historians. Chaldea generally referred to the low, marshy, alluvial land around the estuaries [] of the Tigris and Euphrates, which in ancient times discharged their waters through separate mouths into the sea. In a later time, between 608 and 557 B.C.E., when the Chaldean tribe had burst their narrow bonds and obtained their short lived period of ascendancy over all of Babylonia, they briefly gave their name to the whole land, which was then called Chaldea by some peoples, particularly the Jews, although this term eventually fell out of use. From the tenth to late seventh centuries B.C.E., Chaldea, like the rest of Mesopotamia and much

of the ancient Near East, Anatolia, Caucasus and North Africa came to be dominated by the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–608 B.C.E.), which was based in northern Mesopotamia. The **Old Testament book of the prophet Habakkuk** describes the Chaldeans as "a bitter and swift nation.

“Unlike the East Semitic Akkadian-speaking Akkadians, Assyrians and Babylonians, whose ancestors had been established in Mesopotamia since at least the 30th century B.C.E., the Chaldeans were not a native Mesopotamian people, but were late 10th or early 9th century B.C.E. West Semitic Levantine migrants to the south eastern corner of the region, who had played no part in the previous 3,000 years or so of Mesopotamian civilization and history. They are also not to be confused with the unrelated modern Chaldean Christians of northern Iraq, who are accepted to be a part of the Assyrian people, the indigenous people of Mesopotamia.

“The ancient Chaldeans seem to have migrated into Mesopotamia sometime between about 940–860 B.C.E., a century or so after other new Semitic arrivals, the Arameans and the Suteans, appeared in Babylonia, c. 1100 B.C.E. They first appear in written record in the annals of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III during the 850s B.C.E. This was a period of weakness in Babylonia, and its ineffectual native kings were unable to prevent new waves of semi-nomadic foreign peoples from invading and settling in the land.

“Though belonging to the same West Semitic ethnic group and migrating from the same Levantine regions as the earlier arriving Aramaeans, they are to be differentiated; the Assyrian king Sennacherib, for example, carefully distinguishes them in his inscriptions.

“The Chaldeans were rapidly and completely assimilated into the dominant Assyro-Babylonian culture, as was the case for the Amorites, Kassites, Suteans and Arameans before them. By the time Babylon fell in 539 B.C.E., the Chaldean tribes had already disappeared as a distinct race, becoming completely absorbed into the general population of southern Mesopotamia, and the term "Chaldean" was no longer used or relevant in describing a specific ethnicity or race of men. However, the term lingered until the Seleucid period, after which it disappeared, but this later term was used only in relation to a socio-economic class of astrologers, and not a race of people or land. The nation of Chaldea in southeast Mesopotamia seems to have disappeared even before the fall of Babylon, and the succeeding Achaemenid Empire (546-332 B.C.E.) did not retain a province or land called Chaldea, and made no mention of a Chaldean race in its annals.

“The Chaldeans originally spoke a West Semitic language similar to Aramaic. However, they eventually adopted the Akkadian language of the Assyrians and Babylonians. During the Assyrian Empire, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III introduced an Eastern Aramaic dialect as the lingua franca of his empire in the mid 8th century B.C.E. In late periods, both the Babylonian and Assyrian dialects of Akkadian became marginalized, and Mesopotamian Aramaic took its place across Mesopotamia, including among the Chaldeans. The language in the form of neo-Aramaic dialects remains the mother tongue of the Assyrian Christians of northern Iraq and its

surroundings to this day. One form of this widespread language is used in Daniel and Ezra, but the use of the name "Chaldee" to describe it, first introduced by Jerome, is linguistically incorrect and a misnomer.

“In the **Hebrew Bible**, the prophet Abraham is stated to have originally come from "Ur of the Chaldees" (Ur Kašdim). If this city is identified with the ancient Sumerian city state of Ur, it would be within what would many centuries later become the Chaldean homeland south of the Euphrates. However, it must be pointed out that no evidence has yet been discovered indicating that the Chaldeans existed in Mesopotamia (or anywhere else in historical record) at the time Abraham (around 1800–1700 B.C.E.) is believed to have existed, arriving some eight or nine hundred years later. The traditional identification with a site in Assyria (a nation in Upper Mesopotamia predating Chaldea by well over thirteen hundred years, and never recorded in historical annals as ever having been inhabited by the much later arriving Chaldeans) would then imply the much later sense of "Babylonia." Some interpreters have additionally identified Abraham's birthplace with Chaldia in Anatolia on the Black Sea, a distinct region utterly unrelated geographically, culturally and ethnically to the southeast Mesopotamian Chaldea. According to the **Book of Jubilees**, Ur Kašdim (and Chaldea) took their names from Ura and Kesed, descendants of Arpachshad. However, by the beginning of the 21st century, and despite sporadic attempts by more conservative theologically minded scholars such as Kenneth Kitchen to interpret these Biblical patriarchal narratives as actual true history, many modern archaeologists, orientalist and historians had "given up hope of recovering any context that would make Abraham, Isaac or Jacob credible or realistic 'historical figures.'" (**Wikipedia**, 12/1/2016)

5. The Gewazee Women / Belly Dancers of Egypt

“In 1834, the ghawazi were banished from Cairo to Upper Egypt by Muhammad Ali [1769–1849, an Ottoman Albanian commander in the Ottoman army, who rose to the rank of Pasha, and became Wāli, and self-declared Khedive of Egypt and Sudan with the Ottomans' temporary approval. Though not a modern nationalist, he is regarded as the founder of modern Egypt because of the dramatic reforms in the military, economic and cultural spheres that he instituted. He also ruled Levantine territories outside Egypt. The dynasty that he established would rule Egypt and Sudan until the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 led by Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser]. Typically, the Ghawazi are represented as Dom or Gypsies, with a particular attention to their music and dance styles, featuring mizmars [wind instruments] and heavy bass lines. Beginning in the first half of the 19th century, descriptions and depictions of ghawazi dancers became famous in European Orientalism, and the style was described as *danse de ventre* or belly-dance from the 1860s.

“The Ghawazi performed unveiled in the streets. Rapid hip movement and use of brass finger cymbals / hand castanets characterized their dance. Musicians of their tribe usually accompanied them in their dance. They usually wore kohl [black powder] around their eyes and henna [powdered leaves of a tropical plant, used as a dye] on their fingers, palms, toes and feet. According to Lane these women were ‘the most abandoned of the courtesans [prostitutes with upper class clients] of Egypt.’ He describes them as being very beautiful and richly dressed.

“The Ghawazi performed in the court of a house, or in the street, before the door, on certain occasions of festivity in the harem [the separate part of a Muslim household reserved for wives, concubines, and female servants]. They were never admitted into a respectable harem, but were frequently hired to entertain a party of men in the house of some rake [a man habituated to immoral conduct]. Both women and men enjoyed their entertainment. However, many people who were more religious, or of the higher classes, disapproved of them.

“Many people liked the dancing of the Ghawazi, but felt it was improper because of its being danced by women who should not expose themselves in this manner. Because of this, there was a small number of young male performers called Khawals. The Khawals were Egyptians who impersonated the women of the Ghawazi and their dance. They were known to impersonate every aspect of the women including their dance and use of castanets.” (Wikipedia, 11/1/2016)

