

# Isaiah 23:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.

## Analysis

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**Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten**—This verse extends the prostitute metaphor with bitter irony. The aged prostitute, once popular but now forgotten (nishkachah), must actively solicit business. **Make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered** (הִיטִיבִי בָגֵן) (הַרְבֵּי־שִׁיר לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרִי)—The imperatives pile up: heytibi (play skillfully), naggen (make music), harbi-shiyr (multiply songs). The purpose: lema'an tizzakeri (so that you will be remembered).

The pathos is intentional: former glory reduced to desperate self-promotion. Tyre, once the center of international trade where merchants sought her out, now must peddle her wares like a streetwalker chasing clients. This devastating image critiques not just Tyre but all who trust in past reputation. Yesterday's glory doesn't guarantee tomorrow's relevance. More profoundly, it exposes the humiliation built into sin: what begins as power and pleasure ends in degradation and desperation. The aging prostitute is tragedy personified—once desired, now pathetic; once sought, now seeking; once honored, now forgotten. Without repentance, judgment's end is always greater humiliation than its beginning.

## Historical Context

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The metaphor reflects ancient reality: aging prostitutes without patrons faced destitution. Similarly, cities whose glory days ended faced economic collapse

unless they could attract new trade. Tyre's attempts to rebuild after multiple destructions demonstrated this desperation—trading with anyone, compromising values for profit, selling to the highest bidder without moral principle.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. What does the 'forgotten harlot' image reveal about the trajectory of sin—how it promises glory but delivers degradation?
2. How do people, institutions, or nations try to recapture past glory through desperate 'self-promotion' rather than genuine repentance?
3. What is the difference between legitimate rebuilding after failure versus returning to the same sins that caused the fall?

## Interlinear Text

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קַח י	כֵּן וְ	סָבִי	עִיר	זֹנֶה	נִשְׁכַּחַתָּהּ
Take	an harp	go about	the city	thou harlot	that hast been forgotten
H3947	H3658	H5437	H5892	H2181	H7911
הֵיטֵיבִי	נִגֵּן	הַרְבֵּי	שִׁיר	לִמְעַן	תִּזְכָּרִי:
make sweet	melody	sing many	songs	H4616	that thou mayest be remembered
H3190	H5059	H7235	H7892		H2142

## Additional Cross-References

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**Jeremiah 30:14** (Sin): All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.

