

Isaiah 23:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength.

Analysis

Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength—The imagery shifts: Tarshish, once a constrained colony controlled by Tyre, now flows freely like a river (ye'or, the Nile). The Hebrew mezach (strength/restraint/girdle) indicates the binding control that once constrained colonial expansion. **There is no more strength** can also read 'there is no more girdle'—the metaphorical belt or restraint has broken. Colonies are free but orphaned.

This captures colonialism's paradox: subject peoples desire freedom from imperial control, yet imperial collapse often brings chaos rather than prosperity. Tarshish and other Phoenician colonies depended on Tyre's trading network, naval protection, and economic coordination. Freedom from oppression does not automatically produce flourishing. The verse hints at a deeper truth: created beings need proper authority. Throwing off tyrannical control often leads not to liberty but to different bondage. True freedom comes not from autonomy but from submission to righteous authority—ultimately, God's loving rule.

Historical Context

Phoenician colonies from Tarshish (Spain) to Carthage (North Africa) initially gained independence when Tyre fell, but many struggled economically. Carthage eventually rose to power but others declined. The breakup of the Phoenician trading network disrupted Mediterranean commerce for generations, illustrating that empires' collapse affects subjects ambiguously.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the collapse of controlling authority sometimes bring not freedom but chaos and vulnerability?
2. What is the difference between tyrannical control that oppresses versus legitimate authority that protects and orders?
3. How does this verse illustrate that true freedom is not mere autonomy but exists within proper relationship to righteous authority?

Interlinear Text

עָבַר י	אַרְצֶךָ	כִּי־אֶר	בֵּת	תַּרְשִׁשׁ יִשׁ	אֵין
Pass	through thy land	as a river	O daughter	of Tarshish	H369
H5674	H776	H2975	H1323	H8659	
יְהִי כֹחַ	עוֹד:				
there is no more strength	H5750				
H4206					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 23:14 (Parallel theme): Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.

Psalms 18:32 (Parallel theme): It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.

Job 12:21 (Parallel theme): He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty.

1 Samuel 28:20 (Parallel theme): Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org