

Isaiah 23:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof.

Analysis

He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms—The pronoun 'He' refers to Yahweh, whose hand (yad) extended over the sea (yam) that gave Phoenicia her power. The verb hirciz (shook/made tremble) appears in earthquake contexts—God's touch destabilizes entire political orders. **The LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof** (צַהּ יְהוָה אֶל־כְּנָעַן לְשָׂמֹד מְעֻזָּהּ)—The term Kena'an (Canaan/merchant) puns on Phoenicia's identity as archetypal traders. The ma'uzzim (strongholds/fortresses) includes both military defenses and commercial infrastructure.

This verse emphasizes divine agency in geopolitical events. Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander were God's instruments, executing His tsivvah (command/decreed). The prophet refuses to view Tyre's fall as merely political or military happenstance. Behind Babylonian siege engines and Macedonian tactics stood the sovereign Lord orchestrating judgment. This theological interpretation of history challenges naturalistic views that explain events purely through human causes. Biblical faith confesses: wars, economic collapses, and political upheavals occur within God's providential government, often as His judgment on pride and injustice.

Historical Context

Tyre's island fortress, with double walls 150 feet high and naval supremacy, seemed impregnable. Nebuchadnezzar's 13-year siege (585-572 BC) destroyed mainland Tyre but couldn't take the island. Alexander's conquest (332 BC) required building a half-mile causeway from mainland debris, turning the island into a peninsula—literally reshaping geography to execute divine judgment.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing God's sovereignty over historical events change our understanding of current geopolitical crises?
2. What is the relationship between human agency (armies, leaders) and divine purpose in historical events?
3. How should believers respond to economic or political collapse if we believe God orchestrates even judgment?

Interlinear Text

יְדוֹ	נָטָה	עַל	הַיָּם	הִרְגֵּיז	מַמְלָכֹת וְ	יְהוָה
his hand	He stretched out	H5921	over the sea	he shook	the kingdoms	the LORD
H3027	H5186		H3220	H7264	H4467	H3068
צִוָּה	אֶל	כַּן עַן	לְשַׂמְד	מִצְוֵיָהּ		
hath given a commandment	H413	against the merchant	city to destroy	holds		
H6680		H3667	H8045	H4581		

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 14:21 (References Lord): And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

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