

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 hirgiz (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**—(צָה יְהִי אֶל-כְּנָעָן לְשִׁמְדָּן מַעֲזִים) 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/decree). 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

יְהֹוָה	מַמְלָכָה	וְתִּזְבְּנָה	הַרְגִּילָה	בְּיַם	עַל	נָטַתְּה	יְדָה	יְדָה
the LORD	the kingdoms	the building	the judgment	over the sea	on	gave	his hand	He stretched out
H3068	H4467	H4467	H7264	H3220	H5921	H3027	H5186	
מְצֻנִּים:	לְשָׁמָן ד	כִּי עַנְיָה	אֶל	צָוָה ה	הָיָה	אָל	צָוָה ה	hath given a commandment
holds	city to destroy	against the merchant	H413	H3667	H8045	H4581	H6680	

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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