

Isaiah 23:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins.

Analysis

Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken—The sea itself (yam), source of Phoenicia's wealth and power, becomes witness against her. The personified ocean declares: **I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins.** The Hebrew verbs chalti (travail), yaladti (give birth), gaddalti (bring up) describe maternal nurture—all negated.

This metaphor is devastating: Sidon's maritime empire produced wealth but not life. Ships brought gold, not children. Their strength (ma'oz hayyam, 'the strength of the sea') generated commerce but not community. The sea's testimony condemns civilizations that sacrifice family, fertility, and future generations for economic gain. Phoenician culture, focused on trade and profit, apparently neglected demographic and cultural reproduction. The prophetic indictment anticipates modern societies choosing affluence over children, career over family—exchanging future hope for present prosperity. A nation that ceases bearing and raising children has chosen slow suicide, however economically successful.

Historical Context

Phoenician society was intensely commercial, with merchant families dominating culture. Archaeological evidence suggests smaller family sizes among elite trading

classes compared to agricultural societies. The focus on maritime commerce may have disrupted traditional family structures, with men away for extended voyages and cultural emphasis on wealth accumulation over child-rearing.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does it mean for a society to be economically prosperous but culturally barren, producing wealth but not children?
2. How do modern cultures make Tyre's mistake of valuing commercial success over investment in the next generation?
3. What is the relationship between a society's fertility and its ultimate survival, regardless of economic strength?

Interlinear Text

בָּאֵשׁ	בְּזִידּוֹן	לְאָמָר	בְּהַיִם	מֵעַזְעַזְעַן
Be thou ashamed	O Zidon	H3588	hath spoken	for the sea even the strength
H954	H6721		H559	H3220
				H4581
אַל אַלְכְּתִי	לֹא לֹא	לְאָמָר	בְּהַיִם	אַל אַלְכְּתִי
for the sea	hath spoken	H3808	I travail	not nor bring forth children
H3220	H559	H2342	H3808	H3205
				H3808
בְּתֹלְלֹת:	רֹום מְתִי	בְּחֹרֶם	גְּדַלְתִּי	
neither do I nourish up	young men	nor bring up	virgins	
H1431	H970	H7311	H1330	

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 18:23 (Parallel theme): And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

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