

Isaiah 23:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle.

Analysis

Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle—Tarshish (תַּרְשִׁישׁ), probably located in southern Spain, represented the western extent of Phoenician colonization. The command to 'pass over' (ivru) means flee, evacuate, seek refuge. **Howl** (yeililu) is the sustained wailing of mourning, the opposite of the stunned silence commanded in verse 2. As reality sets in, silent shock gives way to vocal grief.

The refugees flee from the great trading capital to its farthest colony—a reversal of fortune that strips away pride. Those who ruled Mediterranean commerce now run as displaced persons seeking shelter in distant outposts. This prophetic image finds echo in Revelation 18:15-19, where merchants weep over fallen Babylon's smoke from a safe distance. The passage warns that earthly kingdoms, however geographically extensive, offer no ultimate refuge. When God's judgment falls on the center, the periphery cannot provide security. Only the kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28) offers true refuge.

Historical Context

Tarshish was likely Tartessos in Spain, where Phoenicians mined silver and established western trading posts. It represented the extreme edge of the known world. The image of Tyrians fleeing to their most distant colony captures the totality of their catastrophe—even the empire's edges could not escape judgment's reach.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Where do people flee for refuge when their secure world collapses—and why are these refuges ultimately inadequate?
2. How does this verse expose the futility of geographic escape from spiritual or moral consequences?
3. What is the difference between seeking refuge in distant places versus seeking refuge in God?

Interlinear Text

עָבַר וְ	תָּרַשׁ יִשָּׁה	הִיל יִלּוּ	יֹשְׁבֵי	אֵי:
Pass ye over	to Tarshish	howl	ye inhabitants	of the isle
H5674	H8659	H3213	H3427	H339

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 23:12 (Parallel theme): And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest.