

Jeremiah 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid,
be ye very desolate, saith the LORD.

Analysis

God summons creation itself as witness to Israel's unprecedented apostasy: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD." This poetic personification of heavens invokes cosmic witness to the covenant lawsuit (similar to Deuteronomy 32:1, Isaiah 1:2). Three verbs intensify the response: "be astonished" (shommu, שִׁמְמוּ, from shamem, שָׁמַם—be appalled, devastated), "be horribly afraid" (sa'aru, שִׁעְרוּ, from sa'ar, שָׁעַר—shudder with horror, have hair stand on end), and "be very desolate" (charvu meod, חָרְבוּ מְאֹד, from charev, חָרַב—be utterly dried up or ruined). This triple command emphasizes the horror of Israel's sin—even inanimate creation should recoil in shock. The rhetorical device establishes that Israel's apostasy defies natural order itself. When God's covenant people abandon Him, it represents cosmic-level violation of created order—as unnatural as stars falling or seasons reversing. The phrase "saith the LORD" authenticates this as divine perspective, not mere human hyperbole.

Historical Context

Prophetic literature frequently invokes heaven and earth as witnesses to covenant violations (Deuteronomy 32:1, Isaiah 1:2, Micah 6:1-2). This literary device recalls ancient Near Eastern treaty forms where gods and natural elements served as witnesses to covenant oaths. In Israel's case, since Yahweh is the only true God, He calls creation itself to testify. The theological significance is profound: Israel's apostasy isn't merely human failure but cosmic-level rebellion against the Creator. When humanity—especially God's covenant people—rebels, all creation groans

(Romans 8:20-22). Historical context reveals why such extreme language fits: Israel had experienced unparalleled divine revelation and redemption, yet betrayed their covenant with calculated persistence despite repeated warnings through prophets. No other nation possessed such privilege or committed such betrayal. Church fathers applied this cosmic witness concept to Christ's crucifixion—when Creator was murdered by His creatures, nature itself responded (darkness, earthquake, torn veil).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does invoking heaven and earth as witnesses teach about the cosmic significance of covenant faithfulness versus apostasy?
2. How does Israel's sin being called unnatural help us understand sin's fundamental nature as rebellion against created order itself?

Interlinear Text

שׁ מוֹ	יְשֵׁמַיִם	עַל	זֶה אֵת	וְשֹׁעֵר וְ	חֲרָב וְ
Be astonished	O ye heavens	H5921	H2063	at this and be horribly afraid	desolate
H8074	H8064			H8175	H2717
מֵאֵד	נֹאֵם	יְהוָה:			
be ye very	saith	the LORD			
H3966	H5002	H3068			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:2 (References Lord): Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

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