

Joel 2:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining:

Analysis

The earth shall quake before them (Hebrew lephanav ra'ashah erets, לְפָנָיו רָעֵשָׁה אֶרֶץ)—ra'ash (רָעֵשׁ, "quake/shake/tremble") describes earthquakes and theophany. Erets (אֶרֶץ, "earth/land") shakes before the approaching army. This language echoes Sinai's theophany: "the whole mount quaked greatly" (Exodus 19:18). The earth quaking signifies divine presence and judgment—creation itself responds to God's army with trembling.

The heavens shall tremble (Hebrew ragashu shamayim, רָגַשׁ־שָׁמָיִם)—ragash (רָגַשׁ, "tremble/quake") intensifies the imagery. Shamayim (שָׁמָיִם, "heavens") refers to the sky, atmosphere, or celestial realm. Both earth and heaven—the entire created order—responds with trembling. This cosmic disturbance indicates that judgment affects not just humanity but all creation. Romans 8:19-22 describes creation groaning under sin's curse, awaiting redemption.

The sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining (Hebrew shemesh veoreach qadru vekokavim asephu nogham, שֶׁמֶשׁ וְעֹרֶךְ קָדָר וְקֹכָבִים אָסֶף וְנוּגָם—qadar (קָדָר, "be dark/mourn") describes the sun (shemesh) and moon (oreach) darkening. Asaph nogah literally means "gather/withdraw their brightness"—the stars (kokavim) cease shining. This imagery appears throughout prophetic literature describing the Day of the LORD (Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7-8, Amos 8:9). Jesus referenced this language in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:25-26). Revelation describes similar

cosmic disturbances during end-times judgment (Revelation 6:12-14, 8:12).

This cosmic imagery serves multiple purposes:

1. literally, massive locust swarms darken the sky, blocking sunlight
2. symbolically, it represents God's judgment as cosmic catastrophe
3. eschatologically, it points to the Day of the LORD's final judgment when creation itself convulses.

The progression from earth to heaven to celestial bodies demonstrates judgment's comprehensive scope—nothing remains unaffected.

Historical Context

Ancient cosmology understood sun, moon, and stars as fundamental to created order. Genesis 1:14-18 describes their creation "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." Their darkening represented cosmic disorder, reversal of creation. Prophets used this imagery to describe judgment's severity: Isaiah prophesied Babylon's fall using cosmic language (Isaiah 13:10), Ezekiel described Egypt's judgment similarly (Ezekiel 32:7-8), and Amos warned Israel that "the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light" (Amos 5:18-20).

Actual locust swarms create dramatic sky-darkening. Ancient and modern eyewitnesses describe swarms so dense they block sunlight, creating twilight conditions at midday. Exodus 10:21-23 describes the ninth plague on Egypt: "there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days." Joel's generation likely experienced similar darkness during the locust plague, making the imagery experientially vivid.

The cosmic disturbances also fulfill covenant curses. Deuteronomy 28:29 warns that disobedience will result in groping "at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness"—the sun's darkening fulfills this curse. Joel's prophecy demonstrates that God's threatened judgments aren't empty rhetoric but experiential realities. Peter's Pentecost sermon quotes Joel 2:28-32, applying the cosmic signs to the gospel age inaugurated at Pentecost and consummating at Christ's return (Acts

2:16-21). The Day of the LORD spans from first advent through second advent, with escalating manifestations culminating in final judgment.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the cosmic scope of judgment (earth quaking, heavens trembling, celestial bodies darkening) demonstrate that sin's consequences affect all creation, not just humanity?
2. What does the darkening of sun, moon, and stars teach about the seriousness and comprehensiveness of divine judgment?
3. How should awareness that the Day of the LORD involves cosmic upheaval shape your evangelistic urgency and personal holiness?

Interlinear Text

לִפְנֵי	בְּגִיה	אֶרֶץ	בְּנֵשׁ	שְׁמָם	שְׁמָם
before	shall quake	The earth	shall tremble	them the heavens	the sun
H6440	H7264	H776	H7493	H8064	H8121

בְּרֵקֶת	אֶלְכָבֵד	יְמִינָה	אֶלְכָבֵד	תְּנִקְבָּה:
and the moon	shall be dark	and the stars	shall withdraw	their shining
H3394	H6937	H3556	H622	H5051

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:10 (Darkness): For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Matthew 24:29 (Darkness): Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

Psalms 18:7 (Parallel theme): Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.

Acts 2:20 (Darkness): The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

Revelation 6:12 (Parallel theme): And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

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