

Joel 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

Analysis

The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining—this verse describes cosmic upheaval accompanying the Day of the LORD. The Hebrew shemesh veyare'ach qadarî vekokavim asefu nogham (שֶׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרֶא אֲחֵךְ קָדָר וְכָכָבִים אָסָף נָגָה) depicts the luminaries going dark. The verb qadar (קָדָר) means to be dark, grow dim, mourn—the sun and moon lose their light. The phrase "stars shall withdraw their shining" uses asaph nogah (gather/withdraw brightness)—the stars pull back their light, plunging creation into darkness.

This cosmic darkening appears repeatedly in Day of the LORD prophecies: Isaiah 13:10 ("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"); Ezekiel 32:7-8; Amos 8:9 ("I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day"); Jesus's Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:25); and Revelation 6:12-13 (sixth seal judgment). The consistent pattern: God's judgment brings darkness, reversing creation itself.

Theologically, this signifies several realities:

1. God who created the lights (Genesis 1:14-18) sovereignly commands them, even to cease functioning
2. The removal of light symbolizes the removal of God's common grace and blessing—just as darkness preceded creation's light (Genesis 1:2), so darkness precedes new creation

3. Cosmic darkness terrifies humanity, stripping away false security in nature's regularity and forcing recognition of total dependence on God's sustaining power
4. Darkness symbolizes judgment and the presence of God's wrath (Exodus 10:21-23

Matthew 27:45). The Day of the LORD reverses the created order, demonstrating that the God who made all things can unmake them. Only after this judgment and cosmic shaking can the new heavens and new earth emerge (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1).

Historical Context

Ancient peoples oriented their lives around celestial bodies—sun for day, moon and stars for night, all governing agriculture, festivals, and timekeeping (Genesis 1:14). The prospect of these reliable constants failing would terrify them. Darkness at Christ's crucifixion (Matthew 27:45) previewed this cosmic judgment. Ancient Near Eastern literature sometimes described military defeats and national catastrophes using cosmic imagery—sun darkening, stars falling—as metaphors for political upheaval. However, Joel and other biblical prophets use this language both metaphorically (for immediate historical judgments) and literally (for final eschatological judgment). Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 (including cosmic signs) at Pentecost, showing these prophecies span from the church age through Christ's return.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the darkening of sun, moon, and stars demonstrate God's absolute sovereignty over creation?

2. What does cosmic upheaval reveal about the magnitude and seriousness of the Day of the LORD?
3. How should these prophecies of cosmic signs shape Christian understanding of environmental concerns and earth's ultimate fate?

Interlinear Text

שׁׁמֶשׁ	וְיַהֲיֵה	יְהִי רֹא	וְיִתְהַלֵּל	וְיִתְאַלֵּף
The sun	and the moon	shall be darkened	and the stars	shall withdraw
H8121	H3394	H6937	H3556	H622

תְּנַפְּשׁוּ:
their shining
H5051

Additional Cross-References

Joel 2:10 (Darkness): 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:

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:

Joel 2:31 (Darkness): The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.