

Luke 21:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

Analysis

Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Jesus describes universal terror—apopsychontōn anthrōpōn apo phobou (ἀποψυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ φόβου, "men fainting from fear"). The verb apopsychō (ἀποψύχω) means to faint, swoon, expire—literally "breathe out the soul." People will collapse from sheer terror, hearts failing not from physical disease but overwhelming dread. This isn't localized panic but global fear.

The cause is prosdokias tōn eperchomenōn tē oikoumenē (προσδοκίας τῶν ἐπερχομένων τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, "expectation of things coming upon the inhabited world"). The noun prosdokia (προσδοκία) means anxious expectation, anticipation of disaster. The participle eperchomenōn (ἐπερχομένων, "coming upon") suggests approaching, unavoidable catastrophe. The scope is oikoumenē (οἰκουμένη, "inhabited earth")—not one nation but the whole world gripped by fear.

The reason: hai gar dynameis tōn ouranōn saleuthēsontai (αἱ γὰρ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται, "for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken"). The term dynameis (δυνάμεις, "powers") may refer to celestial bodies, angelic beings, or the fundamental forces governing creation. The passive verb saleuthēsontai (σαλευθήσονται, "shall be shaken") indicates God actively destabilizing the cosmos. Hebrews 12:26-27 interprets this as God removing the shakeable to reveal the unshakeable kingdom.

Historical Context

This prophecy contrasts sharply with human confidence in the universe's stability. Since the Enlightenment, Western civilization has assumed naturalistic regularity—the 'laws of nature' operate independently of divine intervention. Jesus predicts the shattering of this assumption. When the heavens themselves shake, human systems built on naturalistic foundations collapse. The terror Jesus describes isn't merely fear of disaster but existential dread—the realization that the universe itself is unstable, that a sovereign God is intervening in judgment. This fulfills prophecies like Isaiah 24:18-20 ("foundations of the earth do shake") and Haggai 2:6 ("I will shake the heavens and the earth"). Early church endured persecution confident that God would vindicate them by shaking the world order.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does humanity's heart-failing terror at cosmic instability reveal about the false security of trusting in the created order rather than the Creator?
2. How should the certainty of God shaking the heavens affect Christian priorities and investments in temporal versus eternal realities?
3. What is the contrast between the fear of unbelievers and the response of believers (v. 28) to the same events?

Interlinear Text

ἀποψυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ φόβου καὶ προσδοκίας τῶν
hearts failing them Men's for fear and for looking after G3588
G674 G444 G575 G5401 G2532 G4329

ἐπερχομένων τῇ οἰκουμένῃ αἱ γὰρ δυνάμεις
those things which are coming on G3588 the earth G3588 for the powers
G1904 G3625 G1063 G1411

τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται
G3588 of heaven shall be shaken
G3772 G4531

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 24:29 (Parallel theme): 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:

Leviticus 26:36 (Parallel theme): And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth.