

Luke 23:30

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.

Analysis

Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. This verse quotes Hosea 10:8, applying its prophetic judgment to Jerusalem's coming destruction. The desperation expressed—calling for mountains to crush and hills to bury—indicates terror so extreme that instant death by earthquake seems preferable to facing inevitable calamity. The Greek *arxontai legein* (ἀρξονται λέγειν, "begin to say") suggests the onset of prolonged anguish, not momentary panic.

The dual address to "mountains" (*tois oresin*, τοῖς ὄρεσιν) and "hills" (*tois bounois*, τοῖς βουνοῖς) employs Hebrew poetic parallelism, intensifying the plea for annihilation. In Scripture, mountains represent strength and permanence (Psalm 125:2); calling for them to fall acknowledges that no human refuge remains. The imperative "Fall on us" (*pesete eph' hēmas*, πέσετε ἐφ' ἡμᾶς) and "Cover us" (*kalýpsate hēmas*, καλύψατε ἡμᾶς) express desperation for oblivion.

Revelation 6:16 applies this language to end-times judgment when people "said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." The connection is deliberate—Jerusalem's AD 70 judgment foreshadows final judgment when all who reject Christ will find no escape from divine wrath. Both judgments fulfill the principle: those who refuse the shelter Christ offers will desperately seek shelter elsewhere when judgment comes, but find none.

Historical Context

Hosea 10:8 prophesied judgment on Israel's idolatrous high places, declaring that people would call on mountains to cover them from divine wrath. Jesus applies this prophecy to Jerusalem, which like ancient Israel had rejected God's covenant. The AD 70 siege fulfilled His words literally—Josephus describes people trapped in Jerusalem crying out for death as Roman armies systematically destroyed the city.

The image would resonate with Jesus' audience familiar with earthquakes in the region. Josephus records that many Jews, cornered by Roman forces, leaped from Jerusalem's walls or into fire, choosing suicide over capture. Others hid in underground tunnels and cisterns, effectively calling for the earth to cover them. Archaeological excavations have uncovered remains of those who perished hiding underground during the siege. The historical record confirms that people indeed preferred death to facing the horrors of Jerusalem's judgment.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does the desperation for mountains to fall rather than face judgment teach about the terror of God's wrath against sin?
2. How does this prophecy's fulfillment in AD 70 serve as a warning of the greater final judgment described in Revelation?
3. Why do people who reject Christ's offered refuge seek futile shelter elsewhere when judgment comes, and how should this urgency shape evangelism?

Interlinear Text

τότε	ἄρξονται	λέγειν	τοῖς	ὄρεσιν	Πέσετε	ἐφ'
Then	shall they begin	to say	^{G3588}	to the mountains	Fall	on
G5119	G756	G3004		G3735	G4098	G1909
ἡμᾶς·	καὶ	τοῖς	βουνοῖς	Καλύψατε	ἡμᾶς·	
us	and	^{G3588}	to the hills	Cover	us	
G2248	G2532		G1015	G2572	G2248	

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 6:16 (Parallel theme): And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

Hosea 10:8 (Parallel theme): The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.

Isaiah 2:19 (Parallel theme): And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

Revelation 9:6 (Parallel theme): And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.