

Nahum 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.

Analysis

The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. This majestic verse describes the overwhelming power of God's presence when He appears in judgment. The Hebrew verb ra'ashu (רָעַשׂ, "quake") depicts violent trembling and convulsions, while mugu (מָגוּ, "melt") suggests complete dissolution and collapse. Mountains, ancient symbols of permanence and stability, shake like leaves before the LORD. Hills, which normally endure for millennia, dissolve like wax before fire.

The escalating language moves from mountains to hills to earth to world to all inhabitants, creating a comprehensive portrait of universal upheaval before God's presence. The phrase "the earth is burned" (vattissa ha'arets, זָרַעַת הָאָרֶץ) can also mean "the earth is lifted up" or "heaved up," suggesting seismic activity. This theophanic imagery draws from Israel's memory of Sinai, where God's descent caused the mountain to quake violently (Exodus 19:18), and anticipates the final day when earth and sky will flee from His presence (Revelation 20:11).

Nahum deploys this cosmic imagery to assure Judah and warn Nineveh: **the God who shakes mountains will certainly overthrow empires.** If creation itself cannot stand before His presence, how can wicked nations? This revelation of God's power simultaneously comforts the oppressed (God is mighty to save) and terrifies the oppressor (God is mighty to judge). The same presence that causes mountains to melt will ultimately consume all wickedness.

Historical Context

Nahum prophesied between 663 BC (fall of Thebes, mentioned in 3:8) and 612 BC (fall of Nineveh, which he predicted). The Assyrian Empire had brutally dominated the ancient Near East for generations, conquering the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and threatening Judah repeatedly. **Nineveh, Assyria's capital, epitomized ancient imperial cruelty**—its kings boasted of piling skulls, impaling captives, and burning cities. Archaeological discoveries confirm Assyrian inscriptions describing their calculated terrorism.

A century earlier, Jonah's reluctant preaching had brought Nineveh to repentance (Jonah 3), but subsequent generations returned to violence and idolatry. Nahum's prophecy announces that God's patience has ended; judgment is imminent and irreversible. The violent imagery of mountains quaking and hills melting would resonate powerfully with Judahites who had witnessed or heard of Assyrian atrocities—**the same terrifying power Assyria wielded against others would now be turned against Assyria by the sovereign LORD.**

The prophecy was fulfilled precisely when Babylon and Media conquered Nineveh in 612 BC. The city's destruction was so complete that by the time of Greek historians, its location was forgotten. Nahum's theophanic vision proved true: no empire, regardless of military might, can withstand the presence of the living God.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does contemplating God's terrifying power in judgment deepen your appreciation for Christ bearing that judgment in your place?
2. In what ways have you functionally reduced God to a manageable deity rather than trembling before His awesome majesty?

3. How should the certainty of God's judgment against wickedness shape your prayers for justice in situations of oppression or abuse?
4. What comfort does this verse offer to those suffering under seemingly unstoppable evil powers (whether political, spiritual, or personal)?
5. How does this vision of cosmic upheaval at God's presence prepare you for the return of Christ and the final judgment?

Interlinear Text

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|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| וְתַחַז אַתְמָגֶן גַּז | וְבָגַע וְתַעֲשֵׂא בָּרִים | מְתַעַּם כְּאֵלֶּה | מְתַעַּם כְּאֵלֶּה | וְתַעֲשֵׂא בָּרִים |
| The mountains | quake | H4480 | at him and the hills | melt |
| H2022 | H7493 | | H1389 | H4127 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| בָּהּ: | וְשָׁבֵי | וְכָל | וְתַבְּלֵל | מִפְנֵן יְהָוָה | בָּאֵר |
| and the earth | at his presence | yea the world | H3605 | and all that dwell | H0 |
| H776 | H6440 | H8398 | | H3427 | |

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:24 (Parallel theme): I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly.

2 Samuel 22:8 (Parallel theme): Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wroth.

Micah 1:4 (Parallel theme): And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.

Psalms 68:8 (Parallel theme): The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

Habakkuk 3:10 (Parallel theme): The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.

Judges 5:5 (Parallel theme): The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

Psalms 98:7 (Parallel theme): Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Psalms 114:6 (Parallel theme): Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs?

Psalms 114:4 (Parallel theme): The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.

Psalms 46:6 (Parallel theme): The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

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