

Psalms 77:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled.

Analysis

The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid (בָּאוּגַת פְּנֵיכֶם). The repetition "the waters saw thee... saw thee" emphasizes intensity. Ra'ah (רָאָה) is visual perception—the waters literally beheld God's presence. Chil (חִיל) means to writhe, tremble, or be in anguish—personifying the waters as sentient creatures terrified by divine presence. This recalls the Red Sea crossing and perhaps also creation itself (Genesis 1:2, Job 38:8-11).

The depths also were troubled (תְּהוּמָת). Tehom (תְּהוּמָת) is the primordial deep, the chaotic waters of pre-creation (Genesis 1:2). Ragaz (רָגָז) means to quake, shake, or be disturbed. God's presence causes even primal chaos to convulse in terror. This cosmic imagery portrays the exodus as new creation—God conquering chaos to bring His people into ordered existence.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cosmology viewed the sea as symbol of chaos and divine opposition (Babylonian Tiamat, Canaanite Yam). Israel's theology was radically different: Yahweh created the waters (Genesis 1:6-10), controls them (Job 38:8-11), and walks through them (Exodus 14:21-22). The Red Sea crossing demonstrated Yahweh's absolute sovereignty over cosmic forces. The New Testament applies this to Christ rebuking the sea (Mark 4:39) and walking on water (Matthew 14:25-27).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that even inanimate waters 'saw' and 'feared' God's presence?
2. How does this cosmic imagery elevate the exodus from political liberation to new creation?
3. How does Christ's mastery over the sea reveal His divine identity as Israel's God?

Interlinear Text

יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהִים
saw The waters thee O God saw The waters
H7200 H4325 H430 H7200 H4325 H2342

וְאַתָּה תְּהִתְּנוּ
also were troubled the depths
H637 H7264 H8415

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 14:21 (Parallel theme): And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

Habakkuk 3:15 (Parallel theme): Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.