

EARTHQUAKES IN BIBLE SYMBOLOGY

Yet Once More Will Jehovah Shake Not the Earth Only, But Also Heaven.

CLOSING OF THE GOSPEL AGE

Significance of Earthquakes—The Part They Play in Nature—In Grace. Their Association With the Reign of Sin and Death—Grand Results to Be Expected—Stability of the New Order of Things in the Messianic Kingdom—Dark Hour Preceding the Millennial Morning of Blessing.



October 18—Pastor Russell's text today was, "There shall be great earthquakes in divers places, and famines and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from Heaven." (Luke 21:11) He said: It is far from our thought that in itself an earthquake is a sign of the end of the Age; but the prevalence of earthquakes since the beginning of this twentieth century properly enough attracts our attention to "What say the Scriptures?" upon this subject. Our text is from the Master's own lips—a part of His description of the trouble coming upon the world in the close of this Gospel Age, preparatory to the inauguration of the Millennial Age and His glorious manifestation of righteousness under the King of kings. The Master was answering a question asked by His disciples respecting the End of the Age and the signs which would mark its close. In the context our Lord had told them that they might expect to hear of wars and tumults, but not to be terrified; for although such things would occur they would not be indications that the end of the Age was near. Then, coming to the events to be expected at the close of the Age, He used the words of our text. He also declared that before these terrible indications of the End of the Age, His disciples would suffer persecutions in the synagogues, churches, etc., for His sake and for the Truth's sake.

Fire of This Day Symbolic. Our Adventist friends have also been calling attention to Scriptures predicting great tribulation upon the world in the very near future; but our message is a very different one from theirs and is used for a very different purpose. Their message is that the convulsions of nature now due will result in "a wreck of matter and a crush of worlds"—in the utter destruction of our race and the reduction of this earth to a mass of clays, and they use this message as a club to drive the wicked to seek protection of the Lord. Be it noticed how different is our reference to these calamities. We hold with the Scriptures that "the earth abideth forever"; that cold and heat, summer and winter, will continue as long as the earth remains; and that God made not the earth in vain, but formed it to be inhabited.—Ecclesiastes 1:4; Genesis 8:22; Isaiah 45:18.

We have already pointed out that the fire of this Day of the Lord will be a symbolic one, just as the "fiery trials" of the Church throughout this Age have not generally consisted even in part of literal fire; and that the fiery troubles coming upon the world will overthrow present institutions—political, social, financial and religious—and will engulf the whole world in anarchy. In the Scriptures this is symbolically called in some places a flood and in others a consuming fire. We have also pointed out that the passing away of present institutions, symbolically called "the heavens and the earth that are now," will be followed by the establishment of "a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"—the reorganization of society along lines of Divine approval, intimated by the words of our Lord's prayer, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven."

Fearful Signs and Great Wonders. We will not attempt to prognosticate the character of the frightful signs which belong to the closing of this Age; but they are very particularly mentioned by our Lord and were also foretold by the Prophet Joel, saying, "I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth, blood, and fire and pillars of smoke."—Joel 2:30; Acts 2:19. The Apostle Paul refers to the same thing in Hebrews 12:26-28. He alludes to the establishment of the Law Covenant at Mount Sinai and the wonderful manifestations which at that time caused Moses and all Israel to fear and quake. Then he tells us that those events were typical, or figurative, of the still more wonderful shakings, signs, etc., to be expected at the closing of this Gospel Age, when the Kingdom of God is about to be established and the New Covenant about to go into effect between God and mankind at the hands of the great Mediator, Jesus Christ and the Church.

"Cute." The word "cute," which is a shortened form of acute, is not classical English, and it is not to be wondered at that you failed to find it in the dictionaries you consulted. It is a colloquial Americanism and might almost be classed as slang. It has two meanings. In the first place it means clever, especially in looking out for one's own advantage in petty ways, shrewd, smart, as "a cute trick." It also means small and pretty, attractive, as "a cute baby," "a cute little watch."

St. Paul declares that the Word of the Lord upon this subject implies the removing of all things that can be shaken, so that only the unshakable things will remain; and these unshakable things he associates with God's Kingdom of righteousness. When with the eyes of our understanding open we look about us, we see very many things that evidently are not permanent, not right, not satisfactory to God and to all who love righteousness and hate iniquity; and when we reflect that the shaking will be such as to loosen and destroy all these imperfect things of the present time, we can imagine better than we can describe the severity of that shaking.

In the Revelation this same thought is expressed under the figure of a mighty earthquake, the like of which there had not been before and will never be thereafter. (Revelation 16:18) Throughout the Apocalypse the term earthquake is used to symbolically represent revolution. What we are to expect, then, will be a great revolution, a great earthquake, the great shaking of the present institutions which will overthrow everything that is not of the Lord's establishment and approval. In the Divine order there seems to be a harmony between the literal and the figurative; therefore the literal earthquakes have their part to play in the great Program. Not only are they to serve the Church as signs corroborating the prophecies respecting the approach of the great Time of Trouble which closes this Gospel Age, but they are to serve also another purpose—a particular purpose.

The Scriptures clearly intimate that our physical earth has not yet attained the grand perfection which the Lord designs that it should have, to be fit for the blessed ones whose home, as the Paradise of God, it shall be throughout all eternity. Be it noticed that the Scriptures clearly point out that the Little Flock, called of God during this Gospel Age to be the Bride of Christ, are to experience a change of nature from human to spirit, which will prepare them for Heavenly conditions, spiritual conditions. But for the remainder of mankind God's provision, according to His Word, is not the change of nature, but a restoration to the perfection of human nature and the development of the earth to that perfect condition which will make it as a whole the antitype of the Garden of Eden—the Paradise restored.

Deluge Then, Fire and Earthquake Now. We have already called attention to the fact that the flood of waters in Noah's time was caused by the breaking of the last of a series of rings that once surrounded the earth after the manner of the rings of the planet Saturn. Foreknowing the wickedness that would develop amongst mankind and the power that would be exercised amongst men by the giants of that day (Genesis 6:4), God had so timed the breaking of this last ring that the flood of waters would serve the purpose of overthrowing that order of things and making ready for the next feature of the Divine Program, the present order, which began after the Deluge, upon the coming of Noah and his family out of the Ark.

Similarly, the Scriptures teach, God has reserved for the appropriate time in the end of this Age certain great physical disturbances necessary to the development of the earth and its preparation for the Reign of Righteousness and blessing of mankind, so that the troubles incidental to this change will come upon the world as disastrous floods, etc., and will co-operate in the bringing of mankind into sore straits and trials of faith and patience, which will result in anarchy and the complete shaking, not only of the physical earth, but also of the social earth and the ecclesiastical, or "heavenly," institutions. In order that all unstable things may pass away and that the new order of things may be ushered in on a permanent basis, having the Divine approval, and meaning ultimately the grandest blessing for our race.

From this standpoint a certain class can read the signs of the times intelligently and with confidence; and this class the Scriptures call the Lord's Little Flock (Luke 12:32), counted foolish by the world, but counted of the Lord as "the wise" who are to "understand." (Daniel 12:10) To these the Master Himself addressed these words, "There shall be signs in the sun, in the moon and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." And again, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance draweth nigh."—Luke 21:25, 26, 28.

The Lord's consecrated people, possessed of His Spirit, cannot in any sense of the word rejoice at the tribulation coming upon others. Their rejoicing can be only in respect to the glorious things which they know to experience, and which they know to be near by these outward signs. Their rejoicing is not merely on their own behalf, but also on behalf of the whole world; for they have the assurance of the Scriptures that beyond this Time of Trouble, which looms up as a dark cloud to cover the whole social world, there is a silver lining; and that shortly the glorious Sun of Righteousness will blaze forth, dispel every cloud and all the shadows of ignorance and superstition, and bring to the world of mankind the rich blessings of Divine favor secured through the precious blood of Christ.

Great Physical Changes Now Due. From this standpoint the news of destructive earthquakes and other appeals to us as incidental corroborations of the prophecies of Scripture which show us that we are very near the long-threatened Time of Trouble.

True Enjoyments. If we listen to the best guides, we shall turn with equal decision from the subtle allurements that beset success. We shall enjoy excellence, but not the vulgarity of excellence; find delight in our work rather than in the applause it may bring; a satisfaction in the quiet things—in the beauty of a spring morning, in the humble service of our neighbor, in our communion with the spiritual in us and beyond us—far surpassing that of any external and noisily-extolled performances.—J. Brierley.

True, there may be a lull for a brief period; but we have confidence that our Lord's prophecy as recorded in our text has a meaning, and that the time for its fulfillment must be very near at hand. We are well aware that the natural man and his scientific leaders will consider the association of the facts of our day with the words uttered more than eighteen centuries ago as very foolish. We are aware that they will say, as the Apostle Peter declared they would, that "all things continue as they have been from the foundation of the world," and that such changes have been going on, and will continue to do so, without any relationship to our Lord's Second Presence and the Time of Trouble with which this Age will end. (2 Peter 3:3, 4) This is their view—the reverse is ours.

The Word of God teaches us that at this time of transition from the Gospel Age to the Messianic Age we are to expect wonderful contortions of nature and some radical changes in the earth's condition, in order that it may be the better adapted to the wants of man throughout eternity. It is God's own declaration that He will make the place of His feet glorious—the earth, His "footstool."—Isaiah 60:13; 66:1.

Evidently great and wonderful changes will be effected, some of which will be brought about gradually. For instance, we all know of the gradual change of the temperate zone—its extension further and further toward the poles. We notice also the increasing migration nearer to the equator. Those who recognize the Power of God can have full confidence that He is able to perform all the glorious promises of His Word respecting the paradisaical conditions of this earth for the use of mankind during the Millennial Age and the ages to follow.

Symbolical Earthquakes—Revolutions. As already intimated, social upheavals are pictured in the Word of God under the symbolisms of earthquakes, "mountains carried into the sea," etc. Similarly, uprisings of the social elements in anarchy are pictured as tidal waves engulfing the "mountains"—governments. This is one of the most forcible pictures used, not only in the Psalms, but also in the Revelation and in our Lord's symbolic reference to the great Time of Trouble which is near at hand. Of this time the Prophet Daniel has declared that it will be "a Time of Trouble such as was not since there was a nation;" and our Lord, when quoting this prophecy, adds, "No, nor ever shall be."—Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21.

Let us not be misunderstood to be advocating anarchy or revolution of any kind. On the contrary, we are giving heed to the Master's injunction that all who are His true followers seek peace and pursue it, and so far as possible live peaceably with all men; that like Himself they should not resist evil with evil, force with force, but should rather commit their way unto the Lord, seek to walk in His paths, and rely upon Him for the results that will be to their profit and His glory.

So far from counseling anarchy, we hold and teach that even the meanest and poorest form of government is superior to anarchy; and in all sympathy and kindness we counsel those who are tending toward Socialism that they are unsuspectingly "hatching cockatrice eggs;" for under present conditions Socialism is absolutely impossible. The rich will not give up their advantages without a struggle to the death; and this, as soon as Socialism shall have gained the power which it is seeking, will spell anarchy for the world. For those now starting in with Socialistic hopes will find those hopes vain, and will become so angered, so disappointed, that they will be soured, embittered, mad, with the deceptions of their theories and the impossibility of carrying them out, as they intended, along the lines of benevolence. As a result, they will be drawn to the desperate methods of the anarchist.

Would that all could see with us what the Scriptures so clearly indicate; namely, the Divine foreknowledge of past, present and future conditions, and the Divine arrangement of these for the highest welfare of all who seek righteousness, all who hearken to the voice of Him that speaketh from Heaven! Such the Lord urges to take His yoke upon them and learn of Him; that they accept of trials and difficulties incidental to loyalty to Him, and thus be counted worthy of a share in the highest and best of all God's gifts—to be sharers with our Lord Jesus in His Throne, in His Nature and in the power which shortly He will exercise in the blessing of all mankind with Restitution.—Acts 3:19-21.

The More Excellent Way. We urge all who are the Lord's to seek more and more to understand His wonderful Plan of Salvation, to glory in Him with their bodies and their spirits, which are His, and to wait for His time and His manner of bringing in the blessings which all see so much needed by the poor "groaning creation." Meantime, all such should cultivate the graces of the Holy Spirit or, as the Apostle puts it, "put on Christ." His character, His meekness, patience, long suffering, brotherly kindness, love, against which things there is no law. Respecting these graces St. Peter declares, "If ye do these things ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."—2 Peter 1:10, 11. These cannot be shaken out of the Lord's hand by any amount. Indeed, if he be in the disasters of literal earthquakes they will be able to rejoice even in tribulation, knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God.

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