

Times of Shaking (i)

For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.

(Acts 20:27)

Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil . . . until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

(Heb. 5:14, Eph. 4:13)

Paul's great concern was to be led by the Spirit – and that meant proclaiming everything that would be helpful to people's spiritual wellbeing. Many years ago I received a call to share the things that are on God's heart as best and as fully as I can– even when this takes me into areas that are not necessarily popular or regularly discussed.

I am taking some time out now from the Encounter series in order to share a mini series on a theme the Lord is laying on my heart: the shakings He is sending. After this week's 'opener,' we will look at God as the Initiator, before exploring a topic the Bible has a great deal to say on : the wrath of God, and then seek to link this directly in with the present day shakings.

A Message for the Mature

The Need for Discernment

The book of Hebrews speaks about constant practice helping us to discern not only between good and evil but, more subtly, between good and best.¹

How we need people trained in spiritual discernment, who can read the dynamics of what is going on in situations, ministries as well as individual lives, both to avoid wrong things and to find God's best way forward.

In Jesus' final discourses to His disciples He said, *"I have much more to say to you than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth."* (**John 16:12-13**) Jesus was letting His disciples know that what they knew so far was limited by the fact that they were insufficiently mature to be able to understand all He wanted to show them. As the Holy Spirit makes us more aware of what is on God's heart, what He shows us cannot be at odds with what Jesus already taught, but simply develops it further, preparing us for events that are yet to come. The Holy Spirit literally

¹ Having recognized that many people still need milk, the author goes on to talk about mature people are fully "trained" needing solid food (Heb. 5:13-14). The apostle Paul also often turned to the world of athletics for his best metaphors and images. *Gymnazo* means "to train (which was done without clotheson)." *Hexis* (which the NIV, translates "by constant use") denotes the fruit of the training, rather than just the training itself.

“conducts” us (*hodegeo*) into new paths even as a guide helps people to explore unknown territory.

A Shaking of the Earth and the dry Land

This is what the Lord Almighty says: `In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.²

In the last few weeks we have had an earthquake in Haiti, another major one in Japan, one of the biggest earthquakes of all time in Chile, not forgetting the major one in Italy and, not so long ago, the massive one in China. Add in the unprecedented floods in Cokermonth, Madeira and the Vendee region of France and the scale of the shaking becomes impossible to miss.

What is more debatable is what all this is pointing to. Global warming certainly can't be blamed for earthquakes. Those who love the Lord, and who are trained in the prophetic, will not have missed the fact that Scripture teaches clearly that things do not happen by chance.

My attention has been drawn once more to this verse from the prophet Haggai – the only verse from this little book that bears his name that is quoted in the New Testament. Hebrews 12:26 interprets this quotation, pointing *back* to the great shaking that took place at Mount Sinai when God gave the law to Moses (Exod 19:16) and then *forward* to the shaking that will mark the end of the world.

The main point the author stresses is that we who are in Christ have an unshakable kingdom that will survive the all but universal devastation that will mark the last days. (Heb 12:28-29).

In the Haggai passage, you will note the reference to the sea as well as to the land being shaken. Nations have once again and very recently been “in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.” (Luke 21:25) The phrase the “roaring of the sea” reminds us that the sea sometimes stands for chaos as well as a source of fear in biblical prophecy. (cf Isaiah 17:12)³

This latest tsunami to batter the Chilean coast and various islands in the Pacific was up to six metres high. Truly terrifying. Scripture warns that:

Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place,

² The expression "In a little while ... once more" is difficult in Hebrew. Word by word it reads "yet one time it." The question is not of much consequence, because "little while" could mean anything from days to millennia (cf. Ps 2:12, where the same word occurs in a similar context. Compare also with Psalm 3: 'Quietness amongst trouble')

³ In Isaiah 17:4-8 we see how a severe judgment on Israel leads to a good percentage of the survivors turning to God. Verses 12f show God opposing the roaring of godless nations.

stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:28)⁴

What does this point to? God is on the move, as He prepares for His return, but also expressing His anger at a world that is fundamentally out of kilter with His heart and purposes. God is grieved and angry when the Church is obsessed with trivia, when it flagrantly ignores His stated ways, and when it presents others as being equal to His Son.

One thing I must take care to stress is that the people who get caught up in most shakings are no worse than anyone else. Jesus' teaching about this in the light of a first century skyscraper falling makes that abundantly clear (Luke 13:5) – although there can be exceptions under certain circumstances we don't have space to look at here.

Earthquakes

Many years ago I wrote in *Ravens and the Prophet*:

An earthquake is caused by huge tectonic plates grinding against each other. The Bible adds to this natural understanding the supernatural interpretation that it may also be a sign of the heavenly powers impacting the Earth.

Consider, for example, the earthquakes that accompanied the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, or the tremor that marked the Israelites defeat of the Philistines. The earthquake which swallowed Korah and his friends when they rebelled against Moses, and the still larger one in Amos's day are other prime examples of God's judgment on a rebellious people. (Exodus 19:18; 1 Samuel 14:15; Numbers 16:31-33; Amos 1:1, 9:1)

⁴ The prophetic reference to Christ coming as the glorified Son of Man in a cloud with power and great glory (Luke 21:27) can be found in Daniel 7:13-14. The NT concept of "Power," "coming," and "glory" are terms appropriate to Christ as Son of Man and King (cf. Matt 16:27: For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done. Luke 9:26: *If anyone is ashamed of Me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.* 2 Peter 1:16-17: *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."*

Luke omits the saying about the gathering of the elect which might have followed v. 27. (cf Matt. 24:3 and Mark 13:27): *And He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.* This is indeed His chief concern at His coming, so that we may be with Him forever.

Luke quotes instead Jesus' encouragement not to be bowed down by these things, but to maintain the hope of our salvation. His redemption is indeed certain, and will be publicly displayed. What was hidden and veiled will be revealed to all. Everyone everywhere will see Him, and will realize who He really is: the Lord of power and glory.

With such powerful precedents, we are hardly surprised to read that a mighty earthquake accompanied the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. Later, the building the disciples were meeting in would be shaken in answer to their intense prayers. Yet another earthquake set Paul and Silas free from their unjust imprisonment, and led to the conversion of their jailer. (Acts 16:26) More recent quakes twenty years or so ago in Romania and Armenia likewise paved the way for great spiritual harvests in their aftermath – just as the longest running revival in history – in Argentina – had its origins in the shame and humiliation the nation went through as a consequence of losing the Falklands conflict.

When London was struck by two such quakes in the late eighteenth century, the Church saw them as a serious warning and as a call to repentance. It is a sad reflection that we in the West no longer heed the Power behind earthquakes. Revelation 11:13; 16:15-21, Isaiah 29:6, Joel 2:10, and Zechariah 14:4-5 show clearly that there are still many significant earthquakes to come in the days ahead.

When sinful deeds and attitudes meet the holiness of God there cannot but be shaking. We should not be surprised – but we should redouble our prayers for people to humble their hearts to make it possible for God to bring good things out of these shakings.

To read first hand accounts of the suffering that has devastated over 500,000 households in Chile, and to share in the rescue and rebuilding process that is going on in Chile, please go to the material we have posted on our website at www.ruachministries.org/intercession.htm.⁵ Join with others in praying for what happens in the soul of that nation as a result.

In amongst the many *natural* shakings that are afflicting the world, equally strong convulsions are happening amongst the nations: in Greece at the moment, for instance as people take to the streets against austerity measures; in Turkish-US relationships as the Congress seeks to hold Turkey to account for their treatment of Armenians nearly a hundred years ago, and in so many other areas: including the financial and political worlds.

Pray that out of all these shakings, the Lord will jolt many into the level of dependency that we need to be living and moving in.

Most of us can think of times when God allows hard things to come our way but only because in the long run they turn out to be the very best for us. We ourselves are going through a variety of such shakings at the moment, as we know many of you are too. May He bring much blessing through them!

⁵ Taiwan was also struck yesterday at a time when it is recovering from torrential flooding last year. There have been terrible landslides in northern Uganda, too, that have taken many lives.

If large parts of the Church are purged of their carnality and worldliness and prayerlessness, then God will have achieved through the shaking what could not have been done in easier times in making the Bride of Christ shine like a star in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation (Phil. 2:15). We will return to this theme in subsequent editions.

Lord Jesus,
May word of Your doing, and awareness of Your moving crisscross our islands and impact the nations of the world. May Wisdom call forth new giftings, and may hard hearts melt through Your shaking in the warmth of Your love, as men, women and children emerge for this hour that You have prepared for the world to pass through.

God bless,
Robert

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