

When The Earth Shakes

By: Keith Keyser

*They shall go into the holes of the rocks, And into the caves of the earth,
From the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty,*

When He arises to shake the earth mightily.

*In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold,
Which they made, each for himself to worship, To the moles and bats,
To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks,
From the terror of the LORD, and the glory of His majesty,*

When He arises to shake the earth mightily.

Isaiah 2:19-21

The recent earthquakes in New Zealand and Japan – not to mention Haiti and Chile in 2010 – ought to remind people of the unstable nature of life on this planet. Yet one must keep in mind that “the earth is the Lord’s and all of its fullness”; as the Creator He controls its destiny (Psa. 24:1.) The Bible teaches that He sometimes uses natural catastrophes to turn men back to Himself. On other occasions, He judges cities like Sodom and Gomorrah through cataclysms of one sort or another (Gen. 19.) Natural disasters are a result of the Fall: the event when Adam and Eve brought sin and death into the world (Gen. 3.) Ever since that tragedy, the creation has groaned under the weight of sin’s corrosive effects (Rom. 8:20-22.) Thankfully, the Bible assures people that it will not be this way forever, when the glorious liberty of the sons of God dawns, the broken power of sin will be rolled back from planet earth.

Getting Man’s Attention

In this current time of grace, the Lord is not directly intervening to thwart evil or bring about the physical installation of His throne on earth. Instead He is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9.) He is holding off the outpouring of His wrath against sin and sinners, allowing them opportunity to turn to Him for the salvation that He gives as a free gift through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:10 goes on to tell of the end of this time of amnesty: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

The text at the beginning of the page refers to this future “day of the Lord of hosts” – a time synonymous with two main activities: the Lord’s glorious exaltation which vindicates Him on the earth and the simultaneous putting down of evil and sin (Isa. 2:12.) At the present time, people imagine that God is distant and does not involve Himself in human affairs. This notion will rapidly dissipate when the Lord arises to “shake the earth mightily” (vv. 19, 21.) It will be a fearful time for unbelievers, as is evidenced by their terror-stricken behavior. The idols that they trusted in – which are actually replacement gods of human invention – will instantly become obsolete. They will be cast aside as useless when the true and living God manifests His power. Men will flee to caves vainly imagining that the earth can conceal them from the One who fashioned the continents and shakes them at will. Thompson captured the thought well in his classic poem, “The Hound of Heaven”: “Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.”¹

As Christians look at these disasters, let us pray that many would consider the Lord of heaven and earth, who will one day rise to shake all that is not founded on Himself, the Rock (Psa. 18:31.) May many turn to Him for salvation before it is eternally too late. Let us also pray for those who mourn the loss of loved ones, as well as for the injured and homeless. God is merciful and works amidst human tragedies large and small. Lastly, let us thank Him for the security He offers to those who trust in Him.

ⁱ Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven", first published in 1893 & found here: <http://poetry.elcore.net/HoundOfHeavenInRtT.html> Accessed on 3/12/11.