

EARTHQUAKES IN PROPHECY

(The sermon below was reported in the OLD THEOLOGY QUARTERLY, #76, Part 1, January, 1907. Reported in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*.)

Their Significance at the Present Time. The Part They Play in Nature and in Grace. Their Association with the Reign of Sin and Death. The Grand Results to be Expected. The Stability of the New Order of Things in the Millennial Kingdom. A Dark Hour preceding the Millennial Morning.

Chicago, Ill., Jan. 20, 1907. Pastor C. T. Russell of Allegheny, Pa., preached twice here today to large audiences. The afternoon session at Thomas' Orchestra Hall was crowded to overflowing to hear about the "Overthrow of Satan's Empire." We report the morning topic, "Earthquakes in Prophecy," which was from the text, "And 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.) The speaker said:

About a year and half ago an earthquake destroyed eighteen villages in Calabria, Italy, with a loss of thousands of human lives. A little later another earthquake sent a monster tidal wave over the city of Esmeralda and swallowed up four small islands off the coast of Port Limones. Next came the earthquake in the island of Formosa, Japan, destroying thousands. A short interval and San Francisco and other adjacent cities were almost demolished and other thousands of lives sacrificed. Then another destroyed Valparaiso and killed many. Since then Sweden and Great Britain report slight tremors, which scientific instruments indicate must have been of great severity somewhere. Now we have the Kingston disaster.

The New York *Tribune* remarks: "The last year and a half will probably go down in history as one of the most disastrous periods of earthquake activity in the records of the human race." Our opinion is to the contrary, that much more violent and much more destructive disturbances are just ahead of us: and our opinion is based upon the testimony of the Scriptures.

The recent prevalence of earthquakes properly enough draws our attention to the Scriptures and what they have to say on this subject. Our text is from the Master's own lips—a part of his description of the trouble that would come upon the world in the close of this age, preparatory to the inauguration of the Millennial age and its glorious manifestation of righteousness under the King of king and Lord of lords. The Lord was answering a question of His disciples respecting the end of the age and the signs which would mark it. In the preceding verses he had told them that they might expect to hear of wars and tumults, but not to be terrified, that such things would come to pass, but it would not be an indication that the end of the age was near. Then, coming down to the

events at the close of the age, He uses the words of our text respecting earthquakes, famines and pestilences and fearful sights and signs in heaven. And He follows this by saying that before these terrible signs, earthquakes, etc., of the end of the age, His disciples would suffer persecution in the synagogues and churches, etc., for His sake and for the Truth's sake.

It is far from our thought that an earthquake is of itself a sign of the end of the age. We remember that history tells us of various earthquakes in the past, so that these alone would prove little respecting the time in which we are living. But as many in this audience are aware, and as tens of thousands everywhere throughout the world are also aware, we have pointed out in our "Studies of the Scriptures" various lines of prophecy which converge upon the present time, clearly marking the period between 1875 and 1915 as the harvest time of this Gospel age, in which the elect are to be gathered into closer harmony with the Lord—separated from Churchianity and error, and ultimately to experience the change of resurrection and glorification to the spiritual, heavenly nature. And that shortly thereafter the new dispensation will begin, the Millennial Kingdom, in which Christ and His glorified saints will bring order out of confusion, supplanting ignorance, superstition and error with the Truth, the knowledge of the Lord—substituting the reign of righteousness unto life everlasting for the reign of sin and death, which has prevailed for 6,000 years. The hearts of thousands of the Lord's consecrated people, in many lands and of many tongues, have been made glad with this prospect, and been made strong with the Scriptural evidences supporting these hopes.

The Lord's Secrets For Saints

It is true that our Second Adventist and Seventh Day Adventist friends have also been calling attention to the Scriptural predictions of great tribulations upon the world, now near at hand; but our message is still a very different one from theirs and used for a very different purpose. Their message is that the convulsions of nature that are now due are to result in a "wreck of matter and a crash of worlds"—in the utter destruction of our race and the reduction of this earth to a mass of cinder. And they use their message as a club to threaten and to drive the wicked to seek the cover and 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," and that cold and heat, summer and winter, will continue as long as the earth abideth. We hold again with the Scriptures that God made not the earth in vain—He made it to be inhabited.—Eccl. 1:4; Gen. 8:22; Isa. 45:18.

We have already pointed out that the fire of this day of the Lord will be a symbolical one, just as the fiery trials that have tried the Church throughout this age have not generally consisted even in part of literal fire. We have pointed out that the fiery troubles coming upon the world will overthrow present institutions, political, social, financial and religious and engulf the whole world in anarchy, and that this is in the Scriptures

symbolically called in some places a great flood and in others a consuming fire that will devour the whole earth. We have pointed out that the passing away of present institutions, called the heavens and the earth that now are, will be followed by the establishment of a new heavens and new earth, or the reorganization of society, political, social, etc., along the lines of divine approval intimated in our Lord's prayer by the words, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

We remind you again of two of the proof-texts we have offered on this subject, namely, (1) The Apostle's declaration, Every man's work shall be tried so as by fire; if any man's work abide he shall receive a reward, but only the faith that is built upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and the gold and silver and precious stones will abide the fire of that day, when all the wood, hay and stubble of human tradition, philosophies and sophistries will be consumed. (1 Cor. 3:11-18.) (2) The statement of the Lord through Zephaniah the Prophet addressed to His people, "Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations that I may assemble the kingdoms and pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger, for the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." (Zeph. 3:8) That this fire of God's jealousy is not a literal fire that will consume the earth with its inhabitants to cinders is demonstrated, we hold, by the following verse which declares, "Then will I turn to the people a pure language [message], that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent." The symbolical fire of anarchy which will overthrow and consume present institutions is thus shown to be the precursor of God's great blessing for the world, for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

Nor are we using this prophetic evidence respecting the end of this age as a club to drive the wicked to shelter. On the contrary, we are convinced and point out to others the Lord's declaration, "None of the wicked shall understand." (Dan. 12:10.) We have pointed out also our Lord's words to the disciples at the first advent, which illustrate the general operation of His providences, namely—To you (Israelites indeed) it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to them that are without (outsiders) these things are spoken in parables and dark sayings, that they may not understand. (Matt. 13:11-13.) We have pointed out again that the Scriptures everywhere declare that "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence Him, and He will show them His covenant." (Psa. 25:14.) But to the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to take my name into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee. (Psa. 50:16, 17.) Our use of these prophetic mysteries we hold is in harmony with the divine intention and message—that the Lord's consecrated people might know of the time in which we are living, and that they might be more and more quickened and energized and separated from the world and its spirit and ripened as wheat, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light—as wheat prepared for the garner.—Matt. 13:30, 43.

Fearful Sights 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 referred to here by our Lord, and also were foretold through the Prophet Joel, "I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire and pillars of smoke." (Joel 2:30; Acts 2:19.) The Apostle Paul refers to the same thing in Heb. 12:26-28. He refers to the establishment of the Law Covenant at Mount Sinai and the wonderful manifestations at that time which caused Moses and all the Israelites to fear and quake; and the Apostle tells us that those things 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 the world at the hands of the great Mediator Jesus and the Church, His "Bride," His "body."

The Apostle says that the Lord's Word on the subject implies the removing of all things that can be shaken, that only the unshakeable things will remain, and these unshakeable things the Apostle refers to as associated with God's Kingdom of righteousness. When with the eyes of our understanding open we look about us we see, O, so many things that are evidently not permanent, not right, unsatisfactory to God and to all who love righteousness, and when we think of the fact that the shaking will be such as to loose and destroy all these imperfect things of the present time we can imagine better than we can describe the awfulness of that shaking time which in the Book of Revelation is described as a mighty earthquake, of which there was not the like at any time before nor the like to be expected at any time in the future. The term earthquake is used to symbolically represent revolution—it is in this sense of the word that it is used throughout the Book of Revelation. What we are to look for then will be a great revolution, the great earthquake, the great shaking of the present institutions which will overthrow everything that is not of the Lord's establishment and approval.

Why then should we think of or speak of literal earthquakes, do you ask? Because in the divine order there seems to be a harmony between the literal and the figurative: the literal earthquakes have their part to play too, in the great program. Not only are they to serve the Church as signs corroborating the prophecies respecting the approach of the great day of trouble which closes this 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 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 during this Gospel age to be the Bride of Christ, are to experience a change of nature from human to spiritual, which will prepare them for heavenly conditions, spiritual conditions, but for the remainder of mankind God's provision 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.—Rev. 2:7.

The Flood Then, The 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 Saturn; and that God, foreknowing the wickedness that would develop amongst mankind and the power that would be exercised amongst men by the giants of that time—Gen. 6:4—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 step in the divine program, the present order, which began after the flood, upon the coming of Noah and his family out of the Ark. Similarly the Scriptures teach that God has reserved for its 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 of mankind as disastrous floods, sore troubles, and cooperate 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, that all the unstable things may pass away, that the new order of things may be ushered in on a permanent basis and have the divine approval, and mean ultimately the grandest blessing for our race.

From this standpoint a certain class only can read the signs of the times intelligently and with confidence, and this class the Scriptures call the Lord’s “little flock,” counted of the world as foolish, but counted of the Lord as the wise who are to understand. To these the Lord Himself addresses His words, saying “When ye shall see these things come to pass—when ye see men’s hearts failing them for fear and for looking after the things that are coming upon the earth—then lift up your heads and rejoice, knowing that your deliverance draweth nigh.” 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 only be in respect to the glorious things which they hope to experience, and which they know to be near by these outward signs. And 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 beyond that the glorious Sun of Righteousness, which shortly will blaze forth and dispel every cloud and all the shadows of ignorance and superstition, bringing to the world of mankind the rich blessings of divine favor secured through the precious blood of Christ, the revelation of which has been delayed until now, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, which cannot take place until they have been called hence and the faithful ones be glorified with their Lord.

New England Professor's Prophecy

From this standpoint the news of the last few months of the earthquake in Southern California, another in Valparaiso, yet another in the Antarctic circle and now another in Jamaica, doing great damage, causing frightful loss of life and great suffering, besides other minor shakings which effected little injury—all these things appeal to us as being incidental corroborations of the prophecies that show that we are getting close to the great time of trouble. True, there may be a lull for a time, but we have confidence that our Lord's prophecy of our text has a meaning, and that the time for its fulfillment must be very close. We are well aware that the natural man and his scientific leaders will consider such association of the facts of our day with the words of 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 were from the foundation of the world (2 Pet. 3:4.) that such changes have been going on and will continue to go on without any relationship to our Lord's second presence and the time of trouble with which this age will end. That is their view—the reverse of ours.

We remember that a New England Professor about seven years ago delivered an opinion which was at the time commented on as in the nature of a prophecy. His opinion was that in about eight years from the time he wrote a great earthquake would shatter and break to pieces the huge cap of ice which for centuries has covered the south pole, and his prediction was that in the breaking of this ice-cap and the dashing of these mountains of ice into the ocean great tidal waves would result, and millions of tons of water would be thrown against the coasts of the United States, resulting in terrible damage and loss of life and extending as far north at least as New York City, which, he declared, would be entirely obliterated. He further predicted that this breaking of the ice-cap of the south pole would so adjust and equalize the weight of the waters of the earth on our globe that the axis of the earth's rotation would be corrected, so that we would no longer have the unequal divisions of day and night of the present, but that the change of the axis would cause serious tidal waves, earthquakes, etc.

We know not the basis of the Professor's calculations—for aught we know they were the barest guesses; but we do know that while nothing like his guesses are a part of the inspired Word, that Word does teach that at about this time we are to expect wonderful contortions of nature and some radical changes in the earth's conditions, that the latter may be the better adapted to the wants of man during the Millennial age and throughout eternity. It is God's own declaration that He will make glorious the place of His feet—the earth, His footstool. (Isa. 60:13) And evidently great and wonderful changes shall be effected, some of these no doubt gradually; as, for instance, we know the gradual change of the temperate zone, its extension further and further toward the north pole. We notice also the increasing moderation 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 Paradisiacal conditions of this earth for the use of mankind in the Millennium and subsequently.

The Symbolic Earthquakes—Revolutions

As already intimated, social upheavals are pictured in the Word of God, under the symbolism of earthquakes, the mountains being carried into the sea, etc., and similarly uprisings of the social elements in anarchy are pictured as tidal waves engulfing the mountains, the governments. This is one of the forceful pictures used, not only in the Psalms, but also in Revelation, and in our Lord's symbolical language referring to the great time of trouble which is near at hand, of which the Prophet has declared that it will be a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation, and of which the Lord declares additionally, No, nor ever shall be the like again.—Daniel 12:1; Matt. 24:21.

Let it not be understood that we are advocating anarchy or revolution of any kind. On the contrary, we are heeding the Master's voice that all who are His true followers should 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 and seek to walk in His paths and rely upon Him for the results that would be to their profit and the Lord's glory. So far from counseling anarchy, we hold and teach that even the meanest and poorest of all the kinds of government known to the world is superior to anarchy, and we counsel in all sympathy and kindness those who are tending toward Socialism, and their number is ever increasing, that they are unsuspectingly hatching cockatrice eggs—that Socialism under present conditions is absolutely impossible, that the rich would not give up their advantage without a struggle to the death, and that this, as soon as Socialism shall have gained the power that it is seeking and that it will gain, will spell anarchy for the world, because those now starting in with Socialistic hopes, finding those hopes vain, will be so angered, so disappointed, that they will be soured, embittered, and mad with the deceptions of their theories and the impossibility of carrying them out as they intended along the lines of benevolence, that they will be drawn to the desperate methods of the anarchists.

Would that all could see with us what the Scriptures so clearly indicate, namely, the divine foreknowledge of past and present and future conditions, and the divine arrangement of them all for the highest welfare of all those who seek righteousness and 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 at the present time, and that by these attestations they shall be counted worthy of a share in the highest and best of all the gifts of God—to be sharers with Jesus in His throne, in His nature and in the power which He will exercise shortly in the blessing of all mankind with “restitution.”—Acts 3:19-21.

We urge, then, that all who are the Lord's seek more and more to understand His wonderful plan, and to glorify Him with their bodies and spirits which are His, and to wait for His time and His manner of bringing in the blessings of the world which we all see are so much needed by the poor groaning creation. Meantime, additionally, it is for all such to cultivate the graces of the Lord's Spirit, or, as the Apostle says, to "put on Christ," His character, His disposition, His meekness, gentleness, patience, long suffering, brotherly kindness, love, against which things there is no law, and respecting which, the Apostle assures us, "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 Pet. 1:10, 11.) These cannot be shaken out of the Lord's hand by any tumults. Indeed, if they be in the disasters of the literal earthquakes they will have corresponding grace sufficient for every time of need, and will be able to rejoice even in tribulation. Should they be in contact with some of the revolutionary earthquakes, still in patience they will possess their souls and be able to rejoice in their relationship to the Lord and their realization in spirit of His care and their knowledge that all things are working together for good to them that love the Lord—to the called ones according to His purpose. Rom. 8:28.

It is of this class that the Prophet declares, We will not fear though the mountains be removed and carried into the midst of the sea [literally, We will not fear though revolution should carry all the governments of the world into anarchy]. We will not fear though the sea roar and be troubled [though the multitude of mankind cry out, threaten and give evidence of great commotion in Socialism, etc.]. We will not fear though the mountains shake with the swelling of the sea [though the kingdoms tremble with the tempests of anarchy]. There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God. God is in the midst of her [the little flock, the Church, whose names are written in heaven], she shall not be moved; [earthquakes cannot dissolve the relationship subsisting between the Lord and His faithful, the peace of God which passeth understanding rules in their hearts, preserving them in peace], God shall help her and that right early—[in the morning of the Millennium—by the First Resurrection]. (Psalm 46.)