

Spiritual Aspects
On the Northridge Earthquake
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What Is Behind the EARTHQUAKES?

EARTHQUAKES IN THE BIBLE

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WHY DOES GOD PERMIT EARTHQUAKES TO HAPPEN?

On my trip from New Jersey to Los Angeles, before the plane took off, the crew announced that a destructive earthquake centered in Northridge, California had occurred. It was felt as far as San Diego and Las Vegas. In the mean time, the Los Angeles airport had closed down. They then showed pictures of the event on the airplane's cinema screen demonstrating the extent of destruction, especially in San Fernando Valley and in Santa Monica. At that point, I felt as if God had invited me to share the suffering with our people in California. As had happened during my initial service in Los Angeles, 1971.

Many spiritual thoughts and questions crossed my mind, throughout my flight some of which included:

- * *Why does God permit earthquakes to happen?*
- * *What is the role of the divine Providence in the midst of these destructive natural disasters?*
- * *What is the significance of earthquakes in the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments?*
- * *What is the position of the church towards the victims?*

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EARTHQUAKES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adam joyfully heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8) and held a loving conversation with Him, discovering His mysteries and great love. When the peaceful dialogue with God was lost, God spoke to man in many languages, including "*the language of earthquakes.*" God did so in order to shake man's hardened heart and move the inner mountains, so that he would accept the joyfully kingdom of God inside him.

Long ago, instead of thanking God for His love when He sent Moses and Aaron, providing a means of salvation Korah, Dathan, Abi'ram and all their company rebelled and became full of envy. God spoke *the language of earthquakes* and the ground under them opened its mouth and swallowed them up, so that their rebellion would not spread among the congregation.

God created the beautiful world in order to serve man for his prosperity and enjoyment. When the nature of man became corrupted, God revealed the destructive forces of nature. Not for the sake of revenge, but for man to examine himself and recognize sin as an earthquake that destroys his inner-self. Man left God the source of his peace and strength, and chose to worship and praise the idols. Thinking that the idols can provide satisfaction and peace.

Jeremiah saw the corruption that affected the religion and civil leadership, as well as the people and said: "*I looked on the mountains and, lo, they were quaking and all the hills moved to and fro.*" (Jeremiah 4:24) He saw the earthquakes and realized that every spiritual or civil leader that stood as a mountain to support the people is now shaking and becoming a source of terror.

Another example is when Zechariah the prophet

expressed God's speech to Jerusalem that was polluted by idols, saying: "*On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem in the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the mountain shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. . . and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the day of Uzziah, king of Judah. Then the Lord your God will come and all the holy ones with Him.*" (Zechariah 14: 4,5)

David the psalmist said: "*Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because He was angry.*" (Psalm 18:7)

In the days of king Uzziah, an earthquake occurred (Amos 1:1); and in the days of Herod another earthquake occurred as result 10,000 souls were killed.

ELIJAH THE PROPHET AND THE EARTHQUAKE

When Elijah's soul was very bitter, he was invited to meet the Lord. The first book of Kings describes the meeting as the following: "*And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong **wind** rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an **earthquake**, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a **fire**, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still **small voice**. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.*" (1 Kings 19:11-13)

It was impossible for Elijah to meet God and directly speak with Him except through the "*small voice*," i.e., through the calmness of the soul. Thus, man imitates his Christ of whom it is said, "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matt. 12:19). This serenity is preceded by a great and strong wind, then an earthquake, and finally a burning fire. This is the work of

the Holy Spirit who blows like a mighty wind, as on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit quakes the depth of the soul in order to destroy its stony nature, then purify it with the Divine Fire of Love. The soul, then, calms down to meet with her Christ.

In other words, we will not experience the life of serenity and the hidden communion with the Holy One unless God's Spirit quakes the deeds of our old nature. Then, we will live according to the new nature carrying the image of our Creator. Let us say with the psalmist: "*Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.*" (Psalm 114:7,8)

With every earthquake that shakes the ground, let us ask for an inner quake that touches our souls; not to destroy us, but to destroy the deeds of the old man and build the new one. Through establishing such a spirit within us, Christ reigns on our souls, destroying what is earthly in our hearts to build His heavenly kingdom. We will then sing: "*The Lord reigns; let the people tremble! He sits enthroned upon the Cherubim; let the earth quake!*" (Psalm 99:1)

We will also understand the words of Isaiah the prophet: "*You will be visited by the Lord of Host with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.*" (Isaiah 29:6)

EARTHQUAKES AND THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT

Isaiah the prophet saw the entrance of Christ into Egypt accompanied by a quake that shook the idols and dissolved the hearts and said: "*Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the hearts of the Egyptians will melt within them... In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border... The Lord of Host has blessed us,*

saying, 'Blessed be Egypt, my people.'" (Isaiah 19:1,19,24)

The earthquake declares the presence of the Lord, who destroys the idols. He (God) established a blessed kingdom inside men's heart and converts the temple of idols into a holy house for Him. In the Lord's presence, evil quakes, trembles and is destroyed. Unlike a divine house, that can't get corrupted and death can't conquer it as long as our Lord dwells in it.



EARTHQUAKES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, we saw how man had lost the purity of his ears and became unable to listen to the voice of the Lord. However, God spoke to man in the language of earthquakes; not to destroy him, but to destroy the hardness of his heart. God wanted to establish in him a circumcised and holy inner ear that can identify the divine voice and respond to it.

In the New Testament, God uses earthquakes to speak with humanity on several occasions such as:

1. At the crucifixion, when the earthquake was accompanied by darkness. (Matt. 27:45, 51-54)
2. At the resurrection, when the guards trembled. (Matt. 28:2, 3).
3. At the descent of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
4. When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi and the prison's doors were opened and the fetters were unfastened (Acts 16:26).
5. In the speech about the signs of the last advent of the Lord. (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:9,13; 16:18)

EARTHQUAKES AND MEETING WITH THE CRUCIFIED

At the crucifixion, the earthquake was accompanied by darkness. (Matt. 24:45, 51-54) Hence, with every earthquake, the believers saw their Savior crucified and arising from the dead. They saw Him sharing their sufferings. Not with words of consolation or with monetary compensations, but by offering His life as a sacrifice of love, for their sake.

We all hurt for those who became homeless. A consolation is that the Creator of heaven and earth became homeless and expelled, hanging on the tree of the cross. *Every helping hand is offered to support these homeless victims, in fact, provided by Christ Himself, who had no place to rest His head.*

The earthquake that happened at the moment of crucifixion was accompanied by temporary darkness, declaring the anger of nature because of man's ungratefulness toward their Creator and Savior. It is meant that we, with every earthquake, extend our hands in a spirit of gratefulness to help His suffering creation victims with material and emotional losses. It is a practical opportunity to meet with the Crucified One.

THE EARTHQUAKES AND THE EMPTY SEPULCHER

St. Matthew said: *"And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it"* (Matt. 28:1, 2).

The earthquake is like a divine trumpet, inviting all to see the *empty tomb* and recognizing the resurrection. *Inasmuch as the earthquake of the crucifixion invites us to meet the Crucified through the victims of earthquakes, the earthquake of the resurrection invites us to discover the*

essence of the new life: A fellowship with the Heavenly One, and the experience of the resurrected life. With every earthquake, we should say with St. Athanasius, the apostolic: "And I am against the world." Let the world quake. My heart is not in the world. It has passed to the heavens. With every earthquake, we should say with St. Paul, the apostle: " And raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 2:6)

The world, with all its disasters, cannot lock us up in its tomb. We are joyfully resurrected in our Christ.

EARTHQUAKES AND UNFASTENING OF THE FETTERS

When the apostles Paul and Silas were imprisoned, they praised God in the middle of the night (Acts 16). *An earthquake occurred* and the prison's gates were opened and the fetters were unfastened, the jailer met with the apostles to be blessed. Consequently, the jailer and his household experienced the *joy of salvation*. Every earthquake is an invitation for us to reexamine ourselves.

Do we carry *the spirit of joy and praise in the midst of this world's suffering*? Even if our bodies are wounded and the world puts us into tribulation, undeservingly?

Can we become witnesses of Joy to our Christ, who gave us salvation in the midst of these losses?

Can we, with our Christ, change the bitterness into sweetness?

If we live the evangelic life in the midst of the sufferings of this world, God will attract the hearts of the unbelievers. Like an earthquake God destroys their lack of faith, attracting them to the joyful evangelic life.

EARTHQUAKES AND EXPECTING THE ADVENT OF CHRIST

When the Lord came, incarnated for the sake of salvation, the whole world resembled a sleeping human

being who does not recognize what goes on around him. On the other hand, St. Mary, as well as the baby St. John the Baptist in his mother's womb, his mother (Elizabeth), St. Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men recognized Him. Only a few recognized His mystery according to their ability; however, His second coming will be preceded by earthquakes to alert the ungrateful humanity. It is a divine warning, so that everyone be ready to meet Him in His glory, as the Judge.

"...there will be famines and earthquakes in various places." (Matt. 24:7, 8)

"When He opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake." (Rev. 6:12, 13)

"And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Rev. 11:13).

"The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!' And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and the great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake" (Rev. 16:17).

Indeed, God uses all means, even earthquakes, to prepare souls for repentance to expect His coming joyfully. Finally, with every earthquake, we remember that the Architect of the whole world who knows its secrets emphasizes: "Heaven and earth perish..." With every quake we await the end of the world and await His advent so that we can live with Him in the heavens where there are no quakes or disasters.

The government hastened and send its engineers to the areas afflicted by the earthquake to inspect its buildings and soon they placed the red signs: "Warning everyone to

evacuate the center of the earthquake.” As a result everyone obeyed by immediate evacuation. Now, the heavenly Architect is warning and no one is listening or believing



**DIVINE MESSAGES OF EARTHQUAKES
AND ITS MEANINGS (EQUIVALENCE)**

- ✠ The quake of Korah and his company = for discipline.
- ✠ The quake of Egypt = God wants to dwell in the heart.
(He shakes the idols that we built in our hearts.)
- ✠ The quake of the crucifixion = meeting with the Crucified Christ in His suffering children.
- ✠ The quake of the resurrection = meeting with the Risen Christ by shaking the earthly lust and practicing the resurrected life.
- ✠ The quake of the Pentecost = the power of God's Spirit who shakes our old man and provides the new life.
- ✠ The quake of the suffering church = our joy and our praise in the midst of suffering to witness to Christ in front of those with hardened hearts.
- ✠ The quake of the second advent of the Lord = an invitation for humanity to await the righteous Judge with the spirit of repentance.



From the inspiration of the Northridge quake

Quake My Earth And Build Your Heavens Inside Me

- ✠ I hear Your voice in every occasion,
and I recognize Your superb Providence,
O the Savior of my soul, the Almighty One.
- ✠ With every quake shake the depth of my soul,
to destroy my self-pride,
crack my earthly thoughts,
and convert the hardness of my heart into excellent love.
- ✠ In the old days, a wind blew, then a quake, then a fire,
and then in wonderful calmness Elijah met with You.
Let Your Spirit blow inside me,
quake all violence and evil,
and enflame my longings towards You;
so I enter quietly into Your dwelling.
There I will see You and hear Your voice,
O my soul's Groom.
- ✠ Your flight to Egypt was accompanied by a quake that
shook the idols.
The idol temples were converted into holy churches.
In place of the animal offerings, You offer Yourself, a
sacrifice of love that never ages.
In place of the curse, You blessed Your people Egypt.
Destroy, O Lord, every evil inside me and declare
Your kingdom within me.
- ✠ With earthquakes, I see a lot of homeless people.
I remember the quake of Your crucifixion,
and see You hanging outside the city with no home.
You are in the midst of those who suffer, embracing
them.
May I extend my hand to offer from what You have
given me.

✠ I remember the quake of the resurrection,
and I run to Your tomb to see it empty.
I realize You are not there. You have risen, O my
Savior, conquering death.
I yearn not to like the tomb and not to be buried in it.
In fact, I seek to come to You and live with You in the
heavens.
Shake the depth of my soul, so that I live with a
heavenly spirit.

✠ We are all awaiting that great earthquake.
You are the Creator of heaven and earth,
You emphasize: "Heaven and earth will perish..."
Let them perish, and we will enjoy a new heaven and a
new earth.
Let the whole world quake; and, we will enjoy its
Creator.
Give us the blessing of not fearing the shaking of the
world
because You are in the midst of Your church and its
foundation will not be shaken.

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