

THERE'S A WHOLE LOT OF SHAKIN GOING ON

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Text: Hebrews 12:25-29

Michael Scott Horton wrote in *Christianity Today*, “The ultimate questions people of our day are asking are these: What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose behind my life and my destiny? What questions are we evangelicals asking? Should we immerse, sprinkle or pour? Who is the next logical candidate for Antichrist?”

While we are busy at conferences and conventions, talking with ourselves about the need for Christian aerobics, or coming up with four new and painless steps to victorious Christian living, the world is taking its business elsewhere—to merchants who apply their philosophy to the deep, essential questions of human life.”

-- Michael Scott Horton in *Mission Accomplished*. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 31, no. 7.

The world in which we live is being shaken up in every way possible. Politics, Wall Street, the environment, and Hollywood keep us wondering, “What’s next?” Then when we are confronted with the war in Iraq, and madmen running countries like North Korea and Iran, it is no wonder that people are asking if we are nearing the end—you know—THE END!

Although there is some prophetic significance to this passage, let us look a little deeper at both the warnings and the encouragement for those who are enduring trials and living in a world that seems on the brink of coming apart before our very eyes.

I. THIS SHAKING SPOKEN OF IS A DIVINE WARNING OF COSMIC PROPORTIONS (v.25-28).

*“See to it that you **do not refuse him who speaks**. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, **if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”*

As with God’s appearance at Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the commandments, the arrival of God’s presence is preceded with an earthquake—a shaking!

The arrival of God’s presence always brought one of two responses: **some ran and hid and a few would draw near.**

A. We must be careful that we are not the ones who refuse to listen or run and hide from His presence.

B. One day soon those things which are temporal will be gone and all that will remain will be our relationship with God.

The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

II. THIS SHAKING WILL REVEAL ALL THAT IS ETERNAL (v.27a-29).

The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

A. The question is, "What will be left in our life, when all temporal things have been shaken away?"

Listen to a secular thinker Peggy Noonan, one of the brightest journalistic minds around. She says this in an article entitled *"You'd Cry Too If It Happened To You."* It came in Forbes magazine, September 14, 1992, in which 11 men and women were asked to answer the question "Why are we so unhappy?" They all agreed we were unhappy because we had lost our moral and spiritual center. Listen to what Peggy Noonan says:

"[Poet W. H.] Auden called his era 'the age of anxiety.' I think what was at the heart of the dread in those days [just a few years into modern times] was that we could tell we were beginning to lose God--banishing him from the scene and from our own consciousness, losing the assumption that he was part of the daily drama or its maker. It is a terrible thing when people lose God. Life is difficult, and people are afraid, and to be without God is to lose man's greatest source of consolation and coherence ..."

-- Ravi Zacharias, "If the Foundations Be Destroyed," Preaching Today, Tape No. 142.

B. When God shakes things up in our lives, He has a purpose; He was to clarify what is most important.

CONCLUSION

Oswald Chamber said that, “It is not true to say that God wants to teach us something in our trials. In every cloud he brings, God wants us to **unlearn** something. God's purpose in the cloud is to simplify our belief until our relationship to him is exactly that of a child. God uses every cloud which comes in our physical life, in our moral or spiritual life, or in our circumstances, to bring us nearer to him, until we come to the place where our Lord Jesus Christ lived, and we do not allow our hearts to be troubled.”

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) -Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entries 187-188.

When you and I find ourselves in the middle of a whole lot of shaking going on in our lives, it is important to remember that God has no desire to harm us or to deprive us of anything good. He does, however, have every intention of helping us simplify our relationship with Him. He wants all the things that would draw us away from Him or cause us to run and hide from His presence to be shaken off, so that in the final analysis of things, all that remains is our relationship with Him—the most important thing!

Study notes: *E. A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken* (12:25-29)

Earthly, material things (things that can be "shaken") will not last forever. By contrast, God's kingdom is unshakable, and the author uses the contrast as an exhortation to right conduct. He has made it plain that God will not trifle with wrongdoing. The persistent sinner can reckon only on severe judgment. God will bring all things present to an end. Accordingly, the readers should serve him faithfully.

25 Several times in this epistle Judaism and Christianity have been contrasted, and here the contrast concerns the way God speaks. Some feel there is a contrast between Moses and Christ. This may be so, but the basic contrast is between the way God spoke of old and the way he now speaks. Israel of old "refused" him, which means that in their manner of life they rejected what God said and failed to live up to what he commanded (cf. [Deut 5:29](#); the writer cannot be referring to Israel's refusal to hear God's voice because they were praised for this, [Deut 5:24-28](#)). What God said was a warning "on earth" because it was connected with the revelation made at Sinai. If, then, the Israelites of old did not escape the consequences of their refusal of a voice on earth, the readers ought not to expect that they will escape far worse consequences if they "turn away from him who warns us from heaven."

26 Here the solemnity of Sinai is recalled. Repeatedly we are told that then the earth shook ([Exod 19:18](#); [Judg 5:4-5](#); [Pss 68:8](#); [77:18](#); [114:4, 7](#)). The writer has already spoken of the awe-inspiring nature of what happened when the law was given. Now the reference to the shaking of the earth brings it all back. At the same time it enables him to go on to speak of a promise that involved a further shaking, that recorded in [Haggai 2:6](#). The prophet looked forward to something much grander than Sinai. Then God shook the earth, but Haggai foresaw a day when God would shake "not only the earth but also the heavens." This will be no small event but one of cosmic grandeur. The reference to heaven and earth may be meant to hint at the concept of the new heaven and the new earth ([Isa 66:22](#)). At any rate, it points to the decisive intervention that God will make at the last time.

27 The writer picks out the expression "once more" (*eti hapax*; lit., "yet once more") to point out the decisive significance of the things of which he is writing. There is an air of finality about it all. This is the decisive time. The word rendered "the removing" (*metathesis*) can mean a "change" (as in [7:12](#) of a change of law). But "removal" is also possible and seems better in this context. What can be shaken will be removed in that day. NIV renders *hos pepoiemenonas* "that is, created things" (RSV, "as of what has been made"), and this is the sense of it (*poieo* is often used of God's creative activity). This physical creation can be shaken, and it is set in contrast to what cannot be shaken. These are the things that really matter, the things that have the character of permanence. The author does not go into detail about the precise nature of the ultimate rest. But whatever it may be, it will separate the things that last forever from those that do not. "So that" introduces a clause of purpose. It is God's will for this final differentiation to be made so that only what cannot be shaken will remain.

28 The "kingdom" is not a frequent subject in this epistle (the word occurs in a quotation in [1:8](#) and in the plural in [11:33](#)). This is in contrast to the synoptic Gospels, where the "kingdom" is the most frequent subject in the teaching of Jesus. **But this passage shows that the author understood ultimate reality in terms of God's sovereignty.** This reality contrasts with earthly systems. They can be shaken and in due course will be shaken. Not so God's kingdom! The author does not simply say that it will not be shaken but that it cannot be shaken. It has a quality found in nothing earthly. The kingdom is something we "receive." It is not earned or created by believers; it is God's gift.

It is not quite certain how we should understand the expression "let us be thankful" (*echomen charin*). A strong argument for this rendering is that it is the usual meaning of the expression. But *charis* means "grace"; and, as Montefiore (in loc.) points out, elsewhere in this epistle it signifies "grace" rather than "gratitude." He thinks that the duty of thanksgiving is not inculcated elsewhere in Hebrews nor is it particularly appropriate here. So he prefers to translate it, "Let us hold on to God's grace" (JB is similar). Montefiore's position is favored by the following "through which" (*di' hes*), which NIV renders "and so." The writer appears to be saying that we must appropriate the grace God offers and not let it go, because it is only by grace that we serve as we should. "Worship" may be too narrow for *latreuomen*, for the word can be used of service of various kinds. KJV renders it "serve." Whether the meaning is service in general or worship in particular, it must be done "with reverence and awe." The combination stresses the greatness of God and the lowly place his people should take in relation to him.

29 In an expression apparently taken from [Deuteronomy 4:24](#), the writer emphasizes that God is not to be trifled with. It is easy to be so taken up with the love and compassion of God that we overlook his implacable opposition to all evil. **The wrath of God is not a popular subject today but it looms large in biblical teaching.** The writer is stressing that his readers overlook this wrath at their peril. Baillie speaks of the wrath of God "as being identical with the consuming fire of inexorable divine love in relation to our sins" (D.M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* [London: Faber & Faber 1955], p. 189). It is something like this to which the writer directs his readers' attention.

The first twelve chapters of Hebrews form a closely knit argument. Chapter [13](#) is something of an appendix dealing with a number of practical points. Some commentators find the difference so striking that they think it an addition by someone other than the author of the first twelve chapters. This is going too far. There is no linguistic difference, and, while the argument is not so tight, it is in the manner of the author, especially the section on the cross (vv. [9-14](#)).