



"Troubles are the tools by which God fashions us for better things."  
—Henry Ward Beecher

**07-Oct-22**

## **Fear and Trembling**

One beautiful summer afternoon, as a welder in a steel mill, I was performing a task that required a fair amount of concentration. I was alone, separated from others in my crew who were doing another part of the same job, and I remember the mill being unusually quiet for one operating at full capacity. Suddenly, I heard a tremendous explosion and felt the concussion wave hit me. In my fright, I felt my skin crawl, the hair on the back of my head stood on end, and for a moment, I shook uncontrollably. The anxiety passed quickly as I realized that I was alive and in no danger. I later learned that two men, one of whom was a welder, died in the explosion, which had occurred about 100 yards away.

During my lifetime, I have also experienced one major earthquake, an early-morning, 6.4-magnitude temblor. It occurred in the early 1970s, when we were living in Southern California. A vivid visual memory remains of watching our baby daughter's crib vibrating away from the wall and across the floor of her bedroom while she lay soundly sleeping. But the most deeply etched memory is the sound of what seemed to have been every nail used in the construction of the house groaning and screeching as the entire house writhed from the shaking.

Although the quake shook the house for less than a minute, it produced a degree of sudden, intense fear that I had never had before or since. While the dangers of the heart attack I experienced lasted far longer, it did not produce a fear that even begins to come close to the brief terror of the earthquake. In attempting to analyze my fear of the earthquake, I have concluded that my realization of utter helplessness suddenly honed and intensified it. There was nothing I could do to stop the overwhelming sense of destructive, life-ending power.

The Bible frequently uses the imagery of shaking or trembling to portray the intense terror and panic that sweeps over those who suddenly realize their lives may be about to end. Often, it uses this imagery to illustrate the heightened emotional reaction of a nation as they hear news of the approach of an army, especially God's army. The Song of [Moses](#) is a clear example:

The people will hear and be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of [Edom](#) will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, . . . till the people pass over whom You have purchased. ([Exodus 15: 14-16](#))

[Psalm 11:4-6](#), an arresting reminder of God's power, points out the terror that awaits the wicked:

The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.

Recall what happened when [God](#) appeared as a Warrior King to address those He has just redeemed from Egyptian bondage ([Exodus 19:16-18](#)): His arrival produced mass terror. He was there with a serious purpose in mind—to gain the allegiance of those redeemed from slavery—and His fearsome appearance caused the Israelites and even the mountains to tremble in fear! [Exodus 20:18-19](#) records the people's reaction:

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. They said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

Moses trembled and averted his eyes when he realized at the burning bush that he was in the presence of the God of the patriarchs ([Acts 7:32](#)). Isaiah 6 tells us of the prophet's experience on seeing the Lord in a likewise peaceful setting, sitting on His throne and hearing the doorpost-jarring voice of a seraph. It caused him to fear for his very life simply because he had seen God and witnessed His glory for a brief moment. He thought he was as good as dead! Ezekiel had a similar experience that drove him flat on his face in fear. It so drained him of strength that he had to be assisted to his feet ([Ezekiel 1:28; 2:1-2](#)).

The most terrifying of all shakings to demonstrate God's power before mankind is yet to come:

"Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory," says the Lord of hosts. ([Haggai 2:6-7](#))

This event is not isolated to one small area of earth. It is universal in scope, as it accompanies Jesus Christ's return! [Zechariah 14:4-5](#), 13, however, focuses this quake on Jerusalem:

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south. . . . Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You. . . . It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the Lord will be among them. Everyone shall seize the hand of his neighbor, and raise his hand against his neighbor's hand.

[Isaiah 2:10-11](#), 19 describes this same shocking event:

Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. . . . 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 [Hebrews 12:25-29](#), the author recalls this same event, making sure that we [Christians](#) understand its spiritual importance:

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

God is calling on His children not to be lulled into the spirit of self-absorbed lethargy that now pervades this God-denying world. Judgment is now on the house of God ([I Peter 4:17](#)). Those who do not pass His muster will be denied protection from the horrifying earthquake at Christ's return, one so terrifying that people plead for death! Our attention now, while we still have the chance, must be riveted on pleasing Him with our attention and energies focused upon the spiritual things that cannot be shaken and moved.

Which shall it be? Will we fritter away our opportunity—which is far greater than merely being golden—by carelessly allowing time to get away from us, or will we make our calling and election sure while we have time, as Peter

charges us in [II Peter 1:5-10](#)? Every one of us has this same choice. We must all take Paul's advice and not presumptuously think we stand as we are ([I Corinthians 10:12](#)). Make good use of the grace given to us!

- John W. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Elements of Motivation \(Part One\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Having knowledge of God's law is not a guarantee of spiritual success or growth. Only those motivated to use the law will experience growth and produce fruit. The fear of God is the first element of motivation, ranging from reverential awe to stark terror. Fearing God leads to a determination not to bring shame on God's name or offending and hurting the relationship between God and us. We have to, like Nehemiah, who in his determination not to offend God, developed self control, refusing to conform to the corrupt practices of the world, unlike the procurator Felix, who cowardly capitulated to the tyranny of the majority.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Benjamin: Son of the Right Hand](#)**

by Staff

We know a lot about Joseph, but we tend to know precious little about his younger brother Benjamin. This article explores the biblical references to the man, the tribe, and two of his more famous descendants to uncover instruction for us.

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