

**OUR TEXT**

*See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

*Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.*

**INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW**

Hebrews, Chapter 12, is a chapter of great hope. And today, as we finish our study of this chapter we find a powerful closing encouragement of hope. May God by His indwelling Spirit give us ears to hear and hearts to receive this encouragement.

Here we are given a strong urging to hear the voice of God spoken through Jesus, and to serve him wholeheartedly. The author uses three images taken from the terror of Mount Sinai to make his point:

1. The voice of God speaking
2. The tempest of God shaking
3. The fire of God burning

Here is the essence of his urging:

1. Just as God spoke from Sinai and those who failed to heed found no escape, God has now spoken through His Son Jesus, and we will not escape if we fail to heed Him.  
*Hebrews 1:1-2 God ... in these last days has spoken to us in His Son ...*  
*Hebrews 2:3 How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*
2. Just as God once shook the earth at Sinai, He will again shake both earth and heaven to show that His kingdom cannot be shaken, but will remain.  
*Matthew 16:18 [Jesus:] I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*
3. Just as God was a consuming fire at Sinai, so is He still, refining His children through the fires of life to produce purity.  
*1 Peter 1:6b-7 You have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

For those of you who know the hymn "How Firm A Foundation" you can see from the following three verses that the author had been meditating on our passage from today in Hebrews 12, for each verse emphasizes one of the three points we have highlighted: His voice, His shaking and His consuming. (If you know the hymn, sing it with me)

**How Firm a Foundation**

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word  
What more can He say than to you He hath said  
To you who to Jesus for refuge have fled?

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose  
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake  
I'll never, no never, no never, forsake!

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie  
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply  
The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine

## **THE KEY TAKEAWAY: GOD'S UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM**

OK – so we've seen the overview of this passage. Now let's focus on the key "takeaway": God's unshakable kingdom. What an amazing blessing to know that we who are Christ's own stand firm upon a foundation that will never be shaken. I see four important truths of which we must be aware.

1. God has appointed a great shaking of judgment in the Day of the Lord
2. There will be increased intensity and frequency of shakings leading to that day
3. Before the end comes, God is offering a kingdom that cannot be shaken
4. God's personal shaking comes by the consuming fire of God

## **1. THE ULTIMATE SHAKING**

v. 26b *He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."*

This is a reference to Haggai 2:6 where God declares there will come a day when He will shake the heavens and the earth and all nations in order to bring judgment on sinful mankind and fill His heavenly house with glory. This happens in what we know as the Great Tribulation and ushers in "The Day of the Lord" – the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth. I personally believe that the rapture of the church will precede this ultimate shaking, being a "pre-wrath" rapture.

Here are other key Scriptures predicting this momentous, earth-shaking event:

Isaiah 13:13 *I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.*

Isaiah 24:18–20 *The foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again.*

In the timetable of Revelation, this comes when the Lamb (Jesus) breaks the sixth seal:

Revelation 6:12–17 *I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth ... the full moon became like blood ... The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were removed out of their places ... for the great day of [Him who sits on the throne, and ... the wrath of the Lamb] has come, and who is able to stand?*

## **2. THE "BIRTH PANG" SHAKINGS**

Before this end comes, God has appointed that this great final shaking be preceded by smaller earthquakes and other calamities to give prediction of something awesome to come, the way

contractions and labor pains precede the birth of a child and tell us that he or she is coming.

Our passage in Hebrews doesn't give us this particular point, but it is part of the narrative of God's shakings. Its truth is found in Jesus' words to the disciples in Matthew 24:7–8. The disciples ask Jesus what will be the sign of his coming and the close of the age (v. 3). He answers in verses 6 and following:

*Matthew 24:6-8 You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of the birth-pangs.*

So what is the purpose of these shakings which will increase in intensity and frequency? They are God-appointed reminders of the ultimate shaking to come, which after its fulfillment, will bring about the joy of God's heavenly kingdom, just like birth-pangs are reminders of the joy of the birth that is to come. They are also meant to be reminders of God's power and justice to fall upon the world. In that way, they are meant to be "wake-up calls" to get serious about God and His Son Jesus.

So every time we hear of calamity in the form of natural disaster, we are to be reminded of God's power, God's coming judgment on the world of sin, and moved to be diligent in our pursuit of God.

In fact, any circumstantial "shaking" of our personal world should point us to the Lordship of God and His call to get our life in order for His coming. Heed the warnings, and let them be harbingers of hope to all who trust in God to shield them from His coming wrath. See the hope in the birthpangs!

### **3. THE UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM**

We are assured of many shakings now and to come. But our passage points out that these shakings should point us to that which cannot be shaken, namely God's eternal kingdom, which is not created by human hands. When Jesus began His earthly ministry he announced: "The kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:15). And throughout His earthly ministry he taught principles of this kingdom, including His Sermon on the Mount and His many parables of the kingdom.

When Peter, speaking for the disciples, made his statement: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:18), Jesus responded that He would build His Church upon the rock of Peter's proclamation of this truth. And now, the Church universal is the kingdom of God now on earth and destined to continue into heaven as the bride of Christ. And as Jesus proclaimed, "the gates of hell will not prevail against it." To put it into the language of our Hebrews passage, "the church will never be shaken – it will stand for eternity."

Jesus' invitation to "repent and believe" is the call to enter into the kingdom/church of God. (Mark 1:15) This is the sure foundation that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7 – the foundation of rock and not of sand. This is the foundation that is built upon Jesus as the Cornerstone of the church, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20).

This is the "unshakable kingdom" that all are invited to join, through faith in Jesus Christ as its Lord and Master. This is the strong tower that we are called to enter; the only strong tower that will not be shaken and will keep us safe.

*Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.*

When you find your world in turmoil; when your earthly foundations begin to crumble; when your eternal safety is in question – run, don't walk, to the Lord Jesus – the only name by which we are saved and safe.

*Acts 4:12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

Run to Jesus and run to His bride, the Church. This and this alone is the kingdom that will never be shaken. This is your only hope for your eternal future. Let the shakings of this life point you to the

only place of stability – JESUS and His eternal kingdom.

#### **4. THE PERSONAL SHAKING BY FIRE**

“Our God is a consuming fire” ends our chapter 12. It’s difficult to think of this as a closing word of hope, but I want to suggest that it is indeed.

This is a quote from Deuteronomy 4:24, and in that instance Moses adds “a jealous God.” In this context it is a frightening concept, for God will judge and punish sin – always.

Let us remember the context of Chapter 12 – the race of life we are in, the discipline of God we must endure for our betterment, and the glorious prize of the city of God to which we are climbing. God’s purpose in all this is to conform us to the image of Jesus – to make us more and more like Him. Another way of saying this is that God wants to refine us.

When dating my wife, Joanne, her father was a smelter. Now at the time I had no idea what a smelter was, but I found out that he purchased items of gold and silver and other precious metals, and then melted them at intense heat which caused all the impurities to come to the surface in the cauldrons in which they were placed. I still have a picture in my mind of the cauldrons being tipped and the dross, or impurities, being poured out, leaving only the purity of the precious metal.

This is a picture of what God does in our lives as a consuming fire – and it is filled with hope. He wants to refine us. And it takes going through the fire to do so. But when we let God do His work of refining us through the fire, the dross, or impurity is skimmed off and we are left to be more like Jesus in our purity of character. That’s what Peter is referring to in 1 Peter 1:

*1 Peter 1:6b-7 You have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

If our heart’s desire is to be holy, as He is holy, then we will allow the fires of life to refine us into the image of Christ. And God, as the consuming fire, is not the God of law that punishes our sin, but the God of grace who takes away our sin. So let God refine you. That is indeed our hope!

May God bless us each, as we yield to his shakings and refining of our life. Our hope is in Jesus AND in becoming more like Him each day.