

CHAPTER 8

An Earth-Shaking Kingdom!

When we look into the Word of God, we discover that the purpose of God is to bring His Kingdom into our world. For example, Jesus told the disciples that when they pray, they should pray like this: "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10). In recent years, the church has woken up to the truth that it is not here waiting to be taken away to the Kingdom; it is here to be proactive in prayer and ministry to bring the Kingdom down to Earth. It is self-evident when we read the Scriptures. When God planted a garden, it was His initial manifestation of a Kingdom on Earth, where He ruled and fellowshiped with Adam. God planted a garden, and He had a river flow out of the garden into four headwaters, dramatically demonstrating that His heart and purpose was to turn the whole world into the garden of the Lord, that the

river was to be exported to the four corners of the earth. The Book of Revelation tells us that this is what is happening in everything that we experience on Earth. Whether it is the blessings of God in power to anoint and equip us to declare His Kingdom, or whether it is the disciplines and judgments that fall on a rebellious world, everything is geared to bringing in His Kingdom. Everything that God does is to this end—that the Kingdom might come.

God's Righteous Judgment

Judgment is one of the ways that God's righteousness is demonstrated and by which His Kingdom comes. The prophet Isaiah said that when God's judgments come to the earth, the citizens of the world learn righteousness (Isa. 26:9). That is the plan and purpose of God.

Evangelical thinking sometimes equates words that actually do not mean the same thing. In evangelical thinking we often equate judgment with condemnation. If we talk about God judging, we see it as a negative thing. If we talk about God bringing His judgments into the world, we see it as some kind of destructive visitation. The Bible knows nothing of such a concept because God's judgments are always redemptive and creative. That is how they operate. To illustrate this, consider the book in the Bible called the Book of Judges. The Book of Judges helps us understand how God's judgment works. Here we find God's people in rebellion, in apostasy, following and pursuing false gods, worshiping idols, and then discovering that there are divine repercussions to their actions. They come under pressure from their godless neighbors. They become enslaved to other societies, and, in their desperation, they call out to God, and Judges tells us that, at such times, God would raise up judges who delivered them. Not judges who condemned, not judges who came and

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kicked them when they were down, but judges who delivered them. God's judgments are geared to produce deliverance.

When Paul is writing to the Corinthian church, he has to confront them with a very serious problem. There is an incestuous situation in the congregation. As if this were not terrible enough, instead of rectifying it, they were almost blasé about it, apathetic toward it, and accepting of it. Paul is outraged in his righteous spirit and he says, "I want you to know I have already judged that man." Christian thinking in these sentimental (rather than biblical) days often carries the concept that it is always wrong to judge. People will say, "I know his life is not right, I know the relationship is a little bit questionable, I know his attitude might not be good, but do not judge him." Why not? That is exactly what we are supposed to do! "Oh no, brother, do not judge or you will be judged." Jesus said that we should judge with a *right* judgment because with the judgment I used to judge, I too will be judged (Matt. 7:1-2). So if I judge righteously, I know I am going to be judged righteously. If the church does not learn to judge, it will never learn to rule.

It is with this very issue that Paul confronts the Corinthians as he reviews their terrible situation and confronts them not doing anything about it. He says, "I have decided to deliver such a one to satan for the destruction of his flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5 NASB). This is an extreme measure. He says, however, he is acting so that the transgressor's spirit may be saved. This extreme judgment is being given not to destroy the man, but to bring him to repentance and faith because God's judgments are always creative.

Now the interesting thing to note is that Paul's comments on this situation in Corinth become a trigger for him to move on

and say to them: "By the way, you should not be taking each other to court; if you do that you have already lost; whoever wins, you have both lost. Is there not anyone competent in the church to make these kinds of judgments?"

And then comes this throwaway line. It is a remarkable line. He doesn't elaborate on it. He doesn't teach on it. He simply says, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2).

And we sit there thinking, "No! I didn't know that! Tell me more!"

"Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!" (1 Cor. 6:3).

"No, tell me more!"

But he doesn't tell us any more. However, what he is telling us is this: this time on earth is a probation period to see what God will entrust us with in the age to come.

The church is here to administer the justice of God. When we read the Book of Revelation, we find God administering justice in our world, and often that justice is administered through His church. We read for example, how God sends out plagues upon our world and yet, in chapter 11, there are two witnesses who turn the water into blood, who shut the skies so that it will not rain, and call down all sorts of plagues. It is God's representatives on earth who are actually the implementers of His divine judgments. The church is here to be the executors of God's divine purpose. I want to show you some of the ways that John, in the Book of Revelation, highlights that to us.

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The Thunder and the Throne

In chapter 4, John goes up into the throne room of Heaven. We have looked at chapters 4 and 5, but I just want to take one particular picture that he sees. He describes the throne of God to us:

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God (Revelation 4:5).

God's throne is a noisy place. God's throne rumbles and thunders. From God's throne come flashes of lightning. It is a remarkable storm picture of a God who is enthroned over all things. The qualities of the throne are important for us to take note of. Thunder, rumbling, and lightning accompany the throne of God. So when we read of thunder, of rumbling, and of lightning, it should immediately remind us that these are the very qualities of the throne of God that is established in the Heavens. It is not soft clouds and harp music; there is dramatic stuff going on up there. In the presence of God there are clashes of thunder and flashes of lightning and those rumbling aftershocks that touch you and move you when the great thunderclaps of God have filled the air. It is an awesome place. It is a remarkable place. And the interesting thing is that after the last seal is opened, the last trumpet blown, and the last bowl poured out, those same manifestations are seen on the earth. Let me show you this:

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and

stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake (Revelation 8:1-5).

Let us imagine the scene. Here is the throne of Heaven. It sounds like thunder and rumblings and it is filled with flashes of lightning. But it goes quiet when it is about to move location out of Heaven on to earth. We are seeing in action the answer to the prayer, "Your Kingdom come." The throne is descending out of the Heavens, down onto the earth, and when it hits the earth, it shakes it. That's why there is an earthquake.

One of the ways that the prophets describe God's impacting of our world is by an earthquake. We do not have to be earthquake watchers, ticking off how many there have been to see how close His coming is. That is not what this is about. These are pictures and symbols. Whenever God comes into our world, He shakes it. That is what He does. There is an earthquake. The earthquake is not in Heaven—then it would have to have been called a Heaven-quake! When it comes on earth, it shakes our world. So the climax of all the undoing of the seven seals is to bring God's Kingdom down on earth. That is God's whole purpose. That is why the book has been undone. It is to set in motion the purposes of God, whose climax is to have His Kingdom down here on the earth, so that the cry can go up, "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in Heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the

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Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever'" (Rev. 11:15). The Kingdom comes with violence. It shakes our world. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews describes it like this:

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." 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" (Hebrews 12:26-29).

Then he tells us that we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. God is going to shake all the kingdoms of this world. God is going to shake our planet, and that will be a demonstration of the coming of His Kingdom.

Again in chapters 11 and 16 of Revelation (11:15-19; 16:17-21) God intervenes dramatically with the affairs of our world. We read of His throne coming among the nations of this world to such a degree that we find, in the final rendering of this drama, that the great city, which is Babylon and represents everything that is evil, is split in three. The cities of the world collapse because everything that can be shaken has been shaken, and only the Kingdom of God is going to be established and permanent in our world. We are seeing God's throne coming down onto the earth, and it is the climax of all the judgments that God fulfills through the other seals, the other trumpets, and the other bowls of wrath. Each of them leads up to this great climax where God's rule is demonstrated in the world.

God's Hailstones

Now, of course, you know I am sure that all these things are symbolic. All these things are signs. This is not history written in advance. We do not have to be worried about thrones falling out of the sky. We do not have to be worried about huge hailstones, one hundred pounds each falling on us and terrifying us. What God is saying is, "Listen, I am going to shake this world. I am going to interfere with the plans and the schemes of men because I have determined that this world will be filled with My glory. I have determined that the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of My power and of My Christ." You will notice that in the latter two incidents, of the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl, the storm was accompanied by hailstones. Hailstones actually represent God at war. They are the weapons of His warfare. So it tells us that God is coming down as a warrior to establish His Kingdom. Listen to what God said to Job:

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle? (Job 38:22-23)

God is a warrior and the weapon of His warfare is represented to us in Scripture as the hurling down of hailstones. One of the most dramatic moments when God did that is in Joshua chapter 10. Joshua is pushing forward, in obedience to the Word of God, to take the land of Canaan. The taking of Canaan by Israel, by the way, is a very important period. The books of Joshua and Judges are extremely relevant to us because they are a picture of Israel taking the land, and it is a forerunner of how the Church is to take the world. Joshua, the Old Testament Jesus, is leading the troops forward. He is pressing his advantage to overcome the enemy and bring in the kingdom, but he knows he is running out

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of time. He knows that he will not get this task fulfilled if darkness comes. He needs the light to remain with him, and in a stroke of incredible boldness he says, "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon," and they stood still in the sky (Josh. 10:12)! God gave him a unique day in which to gain his victory, and as the enemy ran away from Joshua's pursuit, God hurled great hailstones down upon them. The Bible tells us that there were more killed by the hailstones that God hurled than by the swords of Joshua's troops.

God joined in the battle and routed the enemy, and He did it on a unique day. In fact, the Bible says there has never been a day before or since like that day. This is the day that Habakkuk wanted God to renew. Do you remember when we read Habakkuk, chapter 3, and he condenses all the great works of God into one wonderful psalm? He says, "O God, the sun stood still and the moon did not move. O Lord do it again in our day." There was a desire for a new kind of day. The closing chapter of the Old Testament promises a new kind of day. For God says, "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall" (Mal. 4:2). Two thousand years ago the sun of righteousness rose and never ever set again. We have been in a new day for two thousand years!

If you have been around a prophetic people for very long, you will find that there are certain expressions that occur again and again, whoever prophesies. I am not making fun of it; it just happens. One of the things we hear repeatedly is, "Thus says the Lord, it is a new day." Well, it has been a new day for two thousand years; it is just that some of us are just beginning to wake up to it. It is a new kind of day. It is a miracle day. Mary went down with

the women to anoint Jesus' body while it was still dark. But He was up already because the Son rose before the sun rose—and ushered in God's new day. We might think it is nighttime, but that is only because we are asleep. That is why Paul says, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Eph. 5:14). Why? Because He is up already! You wake up and say it is a new day, and Jesus says it has been like that for a long time. And in God's new day, He hurls down His weapons of warfare on those who would resist Him.

Hail is one of the plagues that God sent on Egypt. When God hurled down hailstones that killed men and cattle and flattened all the crops and stripped all the trees bare, the whole land of Egypt was devastated except for one place, and that is where the people of the Lord lived. The weapons of His warfare are directed toward the unrighteous. He wants to bring them to repentance. He wants to remove them from among His enemies. Listen to what Isaiah says:

Though hail flattens the forest and the city is leveled completely, how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free (Isaiah 32:19-20).

While God's enemies are being devastated, God's people are being blessed. God is at war with His enemies, but we are at peace with God through Jesus. It would be a wise and sensible thing for the world to wake up and realize that to be God's enemy is to be a perpetual loser. To think for a moment, to imagine for the wildest second, that I could resist the living God is utter foolishness. The sensible thing is to give up and give in. But the history of the world tells us that it does not usually happen like that. Pharaoh experienced again and again the

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plagues of God, but all that happened was that his heart grew harder. And did you notice that when God devastates the city in chapter 16, that rather than bow the knee and confess His lordship, men cursed God? What a crazy world! But these dramas that are enacted here are pictures of the power of God and of the unstoppable nature of God in the face of the most severe opposition. Nothing can stand against our God. His throne will be established in the earth. His Kingdom will stretch over all the nations.

God's Mobile Throne

Ezekiel chapter 1 comes at a moment of great sadness for the people of God. They have been exiled. They have been carried away from their homes. They are in Babylon, and Ezekiel says, "In the thirtieth year." That is almost certainly Ezekiel's thirtieth year. He is thirty years of age. It is the age that he would have come into the fullness of the priestly ministry to which he was ordained. But now he has been taken into captivity. He may have had the great ambition that one day he would go behind the curtain on the Day of Atonement with the incense smoke to sanctify the people of God. That moment will now never come. The curtain will never be parted for him. He has been carried away into captivity, but although he may never see the curtain parted, Heaven is opened, just as it was to be for John on Patmos centuries later, and he sees God coming on His Heavenly chariot. He sees God coming on His mobile throne! He describes it like this:

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel

the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was upon him. I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man (Ezekiel 1:1-5).

He sees this throne with all these Heavenly manifestations. God's throne is on the move, and, although God's people are in captivity, although God's people are in defeat, although a powerful enemy has overcome God's people, God's throne is not overcome, God's purpose is not thwarted, and God's plan has not been abandoned. His throne is still intact, and His throne manifests itself even in places where it looks as if His people have been overcome. The one who sits on the throne has not abdicated, and the great thing is this: you may not hear the thunder, you may not see the lightning, you may not experience the great cloud formations that surround the throne of God, but that is how God comes to you.

It would be exciting to experience it in the Spirit as David did. At least if he did not see it and experience it, God revealed what was happening in his inner man and illumined his spirit with the reality of His visitation. Psalm 18 is a song of thanksgiving that David gives to God for a personal deliverance. He is not talking about saving the nation or about bringing in the Kingdom; he is talking about God saving him. Listen how he expresses it:

The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because He was angry.

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Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; He soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him—the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of His presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot His arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils. He reached down from on high and took hold of me; He drew me out of deep waters (Psalm 18:7-16).

Do you know when God took hold of you that is how He came? You may not have heard it. You may not have seen it, but that is what happened. There are all kinds of enigmas in the manifestation of God's presence. He is clothed in darkness, but the brightness of His presence shines. How do you work that out? I do not know! Sometimes they describe it all, and sometimes they describe elements of it. Paul, or Saul as he was then, is on his murderous way on the Damascus Road, and he discovers the presence of God breaking into his life like a light that shines brighter than the sun. Although it happened at midday, the brightest moment of our natural sun, there was a light that broke on him that was brighter than the sun. God breaks into our lives like this. God seeks you like this.

He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my

disaster, but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; He rescued me because He delighted in me (Psalm 18:17-19).

God is for you. When God comes to rescue you, He comes just like that! I guess in some ways it is a blessing that we do not see it—we might die of fright before we ever got rescued! But God brings His throne down into your circumstances and lifts you out of them. And just as God comes to you by manifesting His rule where you are, that is what He does in our world. God comes down into our world to manifest His rule. His ultimate purpose, of course, is that men and women would be saved. Whenever God comes down, these phenomena are recorded. It happened when He came down on Mount Sinai to make this rescued rabble into a holy nation, when He came down to communicate His Word to His people. Listen how it is described in Exodus chapter 19:

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled (Exodus 19:16).

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently (Exodus 19:18).

There is an earthquake because God has come down. The sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. God manifested Himself in the midst of His people as the one who rules in power. What an awesome visitation that was! How scared and awestruck the people were! It was a manifestation of unapproachable holiness. No one could come near the mountain; not

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even an animal could walk on the foothills of this mountain. If anyone did, they were to be killed. They could not come near the mountain; but we have a mountain on which God sits enthroned. And we are welcome, not only to come to the foothills of the mountain, but to ascend into the presence of the Lord, to know what it is like and to hear the sound of His throne. It is what happened to John in chapter 4 of Revelation. He went into the throne room and he saw what the throne was like so that he would recognize when the Kingdom came. He would hear the sound of the thunder and the rumblings and the lightning and he would think to himself, "I have been here before. That is what happened in Heaven. Now it is happening on earth."

What does it mean? It means the Kingdom is coming. It may come with judgments, it may come with pestilence, it may come with violence, but the Kingdom is coming. Whatever happens in our world is guaranteed by God to be one of the means of bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven. We should not be concerned. We should be concerned in a humanitarian way at the things that are happening in our world, but we should not be concerned in a fearful way. All these things are manifestations of the coming of God. Jesus told the people this: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come" (Matt. 24:6). We used to be earthquake watchers, and the more earthquakes there were, the closer His coming. But Jesus said that the earthquake is a sign that the end is not yet come. What is the sign of the end? "The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Those rumblings, those earthly disasters, those famines and pestilences, those earthquakes that happen in the world, they are not the death rattles of a dying world but the

birth pains of something new! They are the heralds of the Kingdom that is coming. They are the harbingers of a throne that will be established in our world.

In the song of Deborah and Barak, in the Book of Judges, they engage in what appears to be an isolated and localized fight, but actually it is something much more. They believe that what happened to them had cosmic significance, and they sing about it in these words:

O Lord, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel (Judges 5:4-5).

They said, "When we went out to fight, God marched ahead of us. And when God marched ahead of us, when He put down His great holy legs on those sanctified feet, He shook the earth. When we went out to battle, the earth shook because God was with us." When you go out to battle, when you go out to win the lost, Jesus goes before you on His great legs of glory and shakes everything. Here is how David spoke about it, though here he is not going out to war but is bringing the Ark into Jerusalem. It is a time of worship and celebration, but David, never one to pass up a great line, takes hold of the words of Deborah and makes them his own:

When you went out before your people, O God, when you marched through the wasteland, the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel (Psalm 68:7-8).

When we go to worship, or when we go to war, we are affecting our world. When we go forward in the purposes of God, we

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go forward with an earthquake tremor. We go forward to shake the nations, to shake the cities, to see them crumble, to see them fall because our God goes before us on His great throne. He goes before us with thunder. He goes before us with rumblings. He goes before us with flashes of lightning, and everywhere His throne lands, there is an earthquake. There is a whole lot of shaking going on because God has come down into the midst of His people! His throne, established in Heaven, comes down and impacts our world and, by the heaviness of its glory, shakes our world, collapses opposition, and brings in the Kingdom. What happens in Revelation is happening in our world today.