
When the Rocks Cried Out

*“As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, . . . Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.’ But Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!’” (Luke 19:37–40).
“And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:51–53).*

Around three o’clock in the afternoon, Jesus, having gone through the six hours of offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, uttered four statements in rapid succession. He said, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (see Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34); “I am thirsty” (see John 19:28); “It is finished!” (see John 19:30); and “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (see Luke 23:46). It is specifically said that He cried out with “a loud voice” in reference to the first and last of these statements (see Matthew 27:46; 50; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46).

When Jesus lowered His head upon His chest and “sent away” (ἀφίημι, *aphiemi*) His spirit to God, Matthew recorded four confirmatory signs that immediately followed the crucifixion that substantiated the divine nature of His death. He listed the tearing of the veil of the temple from top to bottom, an earthquake that split rocks and shook the earth, the opening of tombs around Jerusalem and the resurrection of some saints, and the testimony of the centurion and those who were with him that Jesus was God’s Son (Matthew 27:51–54).

Given the fact that it was the Son of God, the second member of the Godhead, who died on the cross, we are not surprised that some miraculous signs attended it and confirmed its authenticity. When Jesus was born, God gave mankind the testimony of an angelic host (Luke 2:13) so that no one could miss the significance of the event. At His baptism (Matthew 3:16, 17), God the Father declared audibly and pointedly that Jesus was His Son. Now, at the conclusion of the crucifixion, signs were given so that ev-

eryone can confidently believe that the Son of God gave Himself for the sins of the world.

To be specific, what is implied by the testimony of the earthquake? When the rocks cried out, what was their message?

The rocks said, “Get it straight on who Jesus is!” This earthquake, the rocks splitting asunder, proclaimed Christ’s Deity. The question at issue throughout the arrest, the trials, and the crucifixion was, as the Jews put it, the fact that “He made Himself out to be the Son of God” (John 19:7). Matthew said that with this volley of signs the evidence reached its climax and some were immediately convinced: “Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54). Like this centurion, who can look at this scene and not be persuaded that the One who was crucified was indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world?

Surely, it would be not far afield from the practical use of the Scriptures to join John’s words to Matthew’s in the following fashion: “[The rendering of the veil, the earthquake, the opening of the tombs and people appearing in Jerusalem after His resurrection, and the testimony of the centurion,] these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

The rocks said, “Get it straight on what has happened here!” This earthquake, the rocks splitting

apart, was a testimony that God's work had been done. At Mount Sinai, God used a quaking mountain to convey the message that He was present and to convey the awesome significance of His personally giving the Law of Moses to His people. Moses said, "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently" (Exodus 19:18). Psalm 68:8 said, ". . . Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel."

Yes, God turned away from Jesus at the cross when He became sin for us (Matthew 27:46), but God was present at the cross in the sense that the cross was not man's doing—it was God's. After Jesus had been nailed to the cross, the Jewish leaders, who had sought His crucifixion with unrelenting determination, must have breathed a sigh of completion. They must have said to one another, "With Rome's help, we have finally gotten rid of Him. We have achieved our purposes. Now, we can go back to Judaism." However, on the other side of the event, we hear Peter saying, "This Man, [was] delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God . . ." (Acts 2:23). In Peter's second sermon, He further said, "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18). The rocks declared that God's plan for the ages had been fulfilled at the cross.

This earthquake declared that Jesus had followed through with His divine intentions. He had foretold what He was going to do. He said, ". . . 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day' . . ." (Matthew 17:22, 23). Again, He said, "'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up. . . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'" (Matthew 20:18, 19, 28).

The rocks said, "Get it straight on what is going to be true from now on!" When Jesus announced,

"It is finished!" He was declaring that He had completed God's great plan for His earthly ministry. The sound of the rocks cracking apart added their resounding affirmation to the Lord's that all that the prophets had foretold, that the full design of God, was now set in place.

With Jesus' death, the new covenant had been made a reality. With His death, Jesus had completed what He had to do to become our great high priest: "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it" (Hebrews 9:15, 16). According to God's plan, the death of Christ would bring in a new era, one over which Jesus would reign as Savior, Lord, and High Priest.

Earthquakes have and will punctuate God's dealings with man. He used one to stress His bringing in the first covenant at Mount Sinai, He used one to accentuate the bringing in of the second covenant at the cross, and He will use another at the end of time. The final earthquake will not hurt those who are hidden in God through Christ; but those who have rejected His message of eternal life will cry for the earthquake to hide them from the great day of the Lord. In highly figurative language, picturing the judgment of Rome and the judgment of all people at the end of time, John the apostle wrote:

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; . . . and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:12–17).

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“Just one short week before this day of crucifixion, as Jesus had His royal entrance into Jerusalem the multitude was shouting, ‘Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, ‘Master, rebuke thy disciples.’ And he answered and said unto them, ‘I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out’

(Luke 19:38–40). The entrance into Jerusalem that seemed to be a triumphal entrance turned out to be a tragic entrance. The death on the cross that seemed to be a tragic death turned out to be a triumphant death, for now the stones did cry out. The people now were silent, but the rocks cried out a testimony to the deity of the One who had been crucified. It was an indication of triumph.”¹

¹Homer H. Boese, *The Miracles of Golgotha* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1963), 61.