

## **526 Our Advocate with the Father**

The nature and the effects of the two large earthquakes which occurred recently in southern Turkey and north-west Syria, are brought all-too-vividly into our homes day by day via the television. Such events, followed by such suffering, prompt some obvious questions, courteously asked of the Lord by Christians, and probably angrily spat out in His direction by those keen to be rid of Him for once and for all. In particular, how can an all-powerful, all-loving God, allow such tragedies to happen? Is He too weak to prevent such earthquakes? Is He unconcerned as He, like us, is confronted by the sheer scale of the misery caused?

Almighty God has given to us all His Word, the “Word of God”, the Holy Bible. In that Word He tells us of Himself; of ourselves, originally and now and in future; of the sin-caused morass we are in; of the God-given, Christ-wrought escape from the sin-morass; and of how all things are to be properly restored in times to come, in and through Christ and the Holy Spirit, under the bidding of God the Father. In other words, there is Bad News at present, shot through already by the Good News in Christ, with that Good News spreading to its glorious completion (its state of “telos”) for all who will receive it in Christ, as the Lord God has promised in His Word (egs., Genesis 1.31a; 3.1-24 / Isaiah 52.13-53.12 / Acts 3.19-21 / Romans 5.1-11ff; 6.23 / I Corinthians 15.55-58).

Within this broad scriptural programme outlined above we turn humbly to God’s Word in the light of the recent earthquakes and their aftermath, seeking to find His answers there under the leading of the Holy Spirit. First, creation and the ground itself are now “cursed” by the Lord God because of Adam’s sin – “cursed [is] the ground for thy sake ...” (from Genesis 3.17b, KJV). Therein lies one key answer to our earthquake questions: creation itself is currently messed up, by God’s decree, as a punishment for, and as a reminder of, human sin; (but, praise God, Romans 8.20-22).

Hence, at present, there are indeed earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, floods, famines, droughts, fires, diseases, disabilities, wars, accidents, pain, bereavement and both physical and spiritual death. The whole creation itself we could say is like one of those half-destroyed tower blocks affected by the earthquake – tottering, wonky, flawed, and in danger of collapse.

Next, the Lord God as our Creator is indeed “in charge” of all these disasters and miseries. In His own good purposes, and according to His

wisdom, and to move His gracious will forward, He either allows these events of suffering, or He positively decrees them. His allowing means He lets human folly reap its own consequences; for instance in these earthquakes, it turns out that numerous buildings have been poorly constructed in a known earthquake-prone region – with inevitable results. His decreeing means He is deliberately intervening in this, His sin-ruptured, fallen creation, in whichever way He chooses (either by Himself, or through a chosen agent such as Satan or Cyrus (egs., Job 1.6-22 / Isaiah 45.1-4). He does this to mark a particular event (eg., Matthew 27.50-54); or to make Himself known, or to warn of His impending judgments (eg., Exodus Chapters 6-11); or to test (eg., Mark 4.35-41); or to call back His wayward people (eg., Hosea 5.15-6.3); or, ultimately, to judge (Genesis Chapters 6-8 / II Kings 24.10-16 / Revelation 20.11-15).

Even so, the Lord's current acceptance of suffering within His creation, by divine allowance or decree, can still sit uncomfortably in our minds alongside His character of love. The answer to our discomfort is simple. Yes, He is love, (I John 4.8b), with His giving of His Son Jesus Christ being the ultimate proof of that love (John 3.14-18). But He is also HOLY: He will share His glory with no other; He rejects all sin; and - "I AM THAT I AM" / I [am] the first and I [am] the last; and beside me [there is] no God ... I [am] the Lord, and [there] is none else, [there] is no God beside me" / "they shall know that I [am] the Lord" (from Exodus 3.14 / Isaiah 44.6; 45.5a / Ezekiel 28.22mid, 24end, 26end ...). The essence of the Lord's wonderful answer to Job is similar – "I am the Lord. That is all you need to know or understand. Trust me, whatever" (based on Job Chapters 38-42).

The evidence around us, and the direction and pace in which things are moving, give us ample reason to believe that the Lord's "last times" promises are soon to be fulfilled. We know that by God's grace we are utterly safe in Christ, "more than conquerors" even, whatever outward trials may come our way (eg., Romans 8.28,34-39). We long that many others too will gain this utter safety by putting their belief and trust in "Jesus Christ the righteous", our "advocate with the Father ... the propitiation for our sins ... also for [the sins of] the whole world" (from I John 2.1-2, KJV).