

*Earthquake Hymns, Pt. I (1750)*¹

[Baker list, #181]

Editorial Introduction:

On February 8, 1750, London was hit by a significant, but not catastrophic, earthquake. John Wesley was in London (Charles currently serving in Bristol) and records the event in his *Journal*. He followed his account with the comment: “How gently does God deal with this nation! O that our repentance may prevent heavier marks of his displeasure!” As this shows, the Wesley brothers shared the common assumption of their time that earthquakes, major storms, disease epidemic and similar events were more than just “accidents of nature.” They were considered to be providential acts—sometimes as expressions of divine protection (thwarting the French fleet) or punishment, but more often (particularly in mild cases like this) as portents to awaken complacent humanity to our spiritual failures and duties.

Exactly one month later, on March 8, Charles Wesley was taking his turn directing the work in London when a second earthquake hit—a stronger shock, but still not catastrophic. The event is noted in Charles’s *MS Journal* in an unusual way. He gives the date, marked with an asterisk, and then left a full page and a half blank. He obviously intended to insert more detail about the quake at some point, but he never returned to do so. He did, however, send a brief account in a letter to his brother, who was then in Bristol (printed in John’s *Journal* entry for March 8).

Charles also rushed into print before the end of the month, *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750*. The hymns emulate the common spirituality, calling for the British populace to acknowledge God’s gracious warning and repent of their sins. But the collection ends with a hymn of reassurance, affirming God’s power to protect God’s people.

It is possible that Charles had begun writing some of these hymns after hearing of the first quake. He clearly continued to reflect and compose on the theme, issuing a follow up collection of hymns a month later—see *Earthquake Hymns, Pt. II (1750)*. He also published that month a sermon on *The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes*.

For a more detailed introduction to this collection, see Karen Beth Westerfield Tucker, “‘On the Occasion’: Charles Wesley’s Hymns on the London Earthquakes of 1750,” *Methodist History* 42 (2004): 197–221.

Editions:

[Charles Wesley.] *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750* [Pt. I]. London: [Strahan,] 1750.

2nd London: [Strahan], 1750.

3rd London, 1755.

3rd London, 1756. [“in 2 parts”; bound with 2nd edn. of *Earthquake Hymns, Pt. II (1750)*]

2nd Bristol: Farley, 1756. [adds “Hymn on the Lisbon Earthquake”]

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HYMNS

Hymn 1.

- [1] Great God, who, ready to forgive,
 In wrath rememb'rst mercy still,
By whose preserving love we live,
 Though doomed the second death to feel;
We magnify thy patient grace,
And tremble, while we sing thy praise.
- 2 Had not thy mercy interposed,
 When sleeping in our sins we lay,
The staggering earth had yawned, and closed
 Its mouth on its devoted prey,
We now had with our city fell,
And quick descended into hell.
- 3 But O! The Saviour of mankind
 Hath gained for us a longer space,
Jesus his Father's heart inclined
 To spare a vile rebellious race,
To snatch from Corah's fearful doom,
And save us from the wrath to come.

- 4 Then let us to our Saviour turn,
 Answer his mercy's whole design,
With godly fear rejoice, and mourn,
 And praises with confessions join,
Till all these low'ring clouds remove,
And God *appears* the God of love.

Hymn 2.

- [1] God of glorious majesty,
 Whose judgments are abroad,
Pierce, and turn our hearts to thee
 With sacred horror awed;
All this drowsy land awake,
 And by the thunder of thy power
Shake, our inmost spirits shake,
 And let us sleep no more.
- 2 Rising in thy dreadful might
 The wicked to rebuke,
Thou hast with unwonted fright
 Our sleeping bodies shook;
Earth did to her center quake,
 Convulsive pangs her bowels tore;
Shake, our inmost spirits shake,
 And let us sleep no more.
- 3 Ere the threatened ruin come,
 A general terror dart,
Send the keen conviction home
 To every thoughtless heart;

Shake us out of Satan's hands,
Burst open every prison door,
Rouse, and loose us from our bands,
And bid us sin no more.

- 4 Jesus, Lord, to whom we cry,
The true repentance give,
Give us at thy feet to lie,
And tremble, and believe;
On the Rock of Ages place
Our souls, till all the wrath is o'er,
Ground, and 'stablish us in grace,
And bid us sin no more.

Hymn 3.

- [1] Tremendous Lord of earth, and skies,
Most holy, high, and just,
We fall before thy glorious eyes,
And hide us in the dust:
Thine anger's long suspended stroke
With deepest awe we feel,
And tremble on, so lately shook
Over the mouth of hell.
- 2 Appalled, o'erwhelmed with conscious fear,
Beneath thy frown we mourn,
And shudder at the judgment near,
And dread its swift return.
So oft, and terribly reprov'd,
Our land is warn'd in vain,
For O! The cause is unremoved,
The sin doth still remain.

- 3 The crowd, the poor unthinking crowd,
 Refuse thy hand to see,
They will not hear thy loudest rod,
 They will not turn to thee.
As with judicial blindness struck,
 They all thy signs despise,
Harden their hearts, and madly mock²
 The anger of the skies.
- 4 But blinder still, the rich and great
 In wickedness excel,
And revel on the brink of fate,
 And sport, and dance to hell.
Regardless of thy smile or frown,
 Their pleasures they require,
And calmly sink together down³
 To everlasting fire.
- 5 But O! Thou dreadful righteous Lord,
 The praying remnant spare,
The men that tremble at thy word,
 And see the coming snare:
Our land if yet again thou shake,
 Or utterly break down,
A merciful distinction make,
 And strangely⁴ save thine own.
- 6 If earth its mouth *should*⁵ open wide,
 To swallow up its prey,
Jesu, thy faithful people hide
 In that vindictive day:
Firm in the universal shock
 We shall not then remove,
Safe in the clefts of Israel's Rock,
 Our Lord's expiring love.

²Changed to "Harden their hearts yet more, and mock" in 2nd edn. (1750) and following.

³Changed to "And sink with gay indifference down" in 2nd edn. (1750) and following.

⁴"Strangly" in 1st edn.; changed to "strongly" in 2nd edn. (1750) and 3rd edn. (1755–56); back to "strangely" in 2nd edn. (1756).

⁵"*Should*" changed to "*must*" in 2nd edn. (1750) and following.

Hymn 4.

- [1] God of awful majesty,
 Thy glorious name we praise!
Known are all thy works to thee
 Of judgment, and of grace:
In thine only breast it lies
 To raise or sink, revive or slay:
Wilt thou yet again chastise,
 Or turn thy wrath away?
- 2 Vengeance on thy foes to take
 Hast thou in anger sworn?
Sworn again our earth to shake,
 And from its base o’erturn?
Surely then to Abraham’s seed
 Thou shalt reveal the wrath to come,
Speak the punishment decreed,
 And warn us of our doom.
- 3 But if so thy will ordain
 Its close design to hide,
Let us in thy work remain,
 And in thy love abide;
Stand for all events prepared,
 With reverence⁶ and godly fear;
Stand forever on our guard,
 ’Till thy great arm appear.
- 4 Blessed are the servants, Lord,
 Whom thou shalt watching find,
Hanging on thy faithful word,
 And to thy will resigned;

⁶“Reverence” changed to “patience armed” in 2nd edn. (1750) and following.

Safe amidst the darts of death,
Secure they rest in all alarms,
Sure, their Lord hath spread beneath
His everlasting arms.

- 5 Should the earth this moment cleave,
And swallow up the just,
Jesus would their souls receive,
And guard their sleeping dust:
Though their dust the whirlwind sweep
To earth's profoundest center driven,
Soon, emerging from the deep,
They rise, they mount to heaven!

Hymn 5.

- [1] From whence these dire portents around,⁷
That strike us with unwonted fear!
Why do these earthquakes rock the ground,
And threaten our destruction near?
Ye prophets smooth, the cause explain,
And lull us to repose again.
- 2 Or "water swelling for a vent,"
Or "air impatient to get free,"
Or "fire within earth's entrails pent;"⁸
Yet all are ordered, Lord, by thee;
The elements obey thy nod,
And nature vindicates her God.
- 3 The pillars of the earth are thine,
And thou hast set the world thereon;
They at thy sovereign word⁹ incline,
The center trembles at thy frown,
The everlasting mountains bow,
And God is in the earthquake *now*!

⁷This opening stanza echoes an earlier poem by Samuel Wesley Jr., "On the Passion of Our Saviour," *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: S. Birt, 1736), 136–37; included in *CPH* (1737), 44–45.

⁸The quotation marks are missing in the 1st edn., but appear in all others to indicate that these are alternative suggestions by the "smooth prophets" about the cause of the earthquake.

⁹"Sovereign word" changed to "threat'ning look" in 2nd edn. (1750) and following.

- 4 Now, Lord, to shake our guilty land,
Thou dost in indignation rise,
We see, we see thy lifted hand,
Made bare a nation to chastise,
Whom neither plagues nor mercies move
To fear thy wrath or court thy love.
- 5 Therefore the earth beneath us reels,
And staggers like our drunken men,
The earth the mournful cause reveals,
And groans our burden to sustain;
Ordained our evils to deplore,
And fall with us to rise no more.

Psalm 46.

- [1] God, the omnipresent God,
Our strength and refuge stands
Ready to support our load,
And bear us in his hands:
Readiest when we need him most,
When to him distressed we cry,
All who on his mercy trust
Shall find deliverance nigh.
- 2 Kept by him we scorn to fear
In danger's blackest day,
Starting at destruction near,
Though nature faint away,
Though the stormy ocean roar,
Though the madding billows rise,
Rage, and foam, and lash the shore,
And mingle earth and skies.

- 3 Let earth's inmost center quake,
And shattered nature mourn,
Let the unwieldy mountains shake,
And fall by storms uptorn,
Fall with all their trembling load
Far into the ocean hurled,
Lo! We stand secure in God,
Amidst a ruined world.
- 4 From the throne of God there springs
A pure and crystal stream,
Life, and peace, and joy it brings
To his Jerusalem:
Rivers of refreshing grace
Through the sacred city flow,
Watering all the hallowed place
Where God resides below.
- 5 God most merciful, most high,
Doth in his Sion dwell,
Kept by him their¹⁰ towers defy
The strength of earth and hell;
Built on her o'ershadowing Rock,
Who shall her foundations move,
Who her great defender shock,
The Almighty God of love,
- 6 All that on this Rock are staid
The world assaults in vain,
Ever present with his aid
He shall his own sustain:
Guardian of the chosen race,
Jesus doth his church defend,
Save them by his timely grace,
And save them to the end.

¹⁰“Their” changed to “her” in 3rd edn. (1755) only.

- 7 Furiously the heathen raged
 Against his church below,
Kingdoms all their power engaged
 Jerusalem t' o'erthrow;
Earth from her foundation stirred,
 Yawned to swallow up her prey,
Jesus spoke, she owned his word,
 And quaked, and fled away.
- 8 For his people in distress
 The God of Jacob stands,
Keeps us, 'till our troubles cease,
 In his almighty hands:
He for us his power hath shown,
 He doth still our refuge prove;
Loves the Lord of hosts his own,
 And shall forever love.
- 9 Come, behold the Almighty Lord
 In robes of vengeance clad;
By the desolating sword
 What havoc hath he made!
He hath sent his armies forth,
 States and kingdoms to o'erthrow,
Marched in anger through the earth,
 And ravaged all below.
- 10 Lo! Again in tender love
 He bids their discords cease,
Calms their spirit from above,
 And melts them into peace;
Breaks the bow and burns the car,
 Instruments of fatal ill,
Quells the horrid din of war,
 And bids the world be still.

- 11 Sons of men, be still, and know
That I am God alone,
I my saving power will show,
And make my goodness known;
All shall with my will comply,
Fear the name to sinners given,
Bow before the Lord most high,
The Lord of earth and heaven.
- 12 For his people in distress
The God of Jacob stands,
Bears us, 'till our troubles cease,
In his almighty hands:
He for us his power hath shown,
He doth still our refuge prove,
Loves the Lord of hosts his own,
And shall forever love.