

Luke 21:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.

Analysis

And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.

Jesus catalogs catastrophes: seismoi te megaloi kata topous kai limoi kai loimoi esontai (σεισμοί τε μεγάλοι κατὰ τόπους καὶ λιμοὶ καὶ λοιμοὶ ἔσονται, 'great earthquakes in various places and famines and plagues will be'). The phrase kata topous (κατὰ τόπους, 'throughout places/in various locations') indicates widespread, not isolated, disasters. Seismoi (σεισμοί, 'earthquakes') destabilize physical creation. Limoi (λιμοί, 'famines') threaten food supplies. Loimoi (λοιμοί, 'plagues/pestilences') describe disease epidemics.

Additionally, phobētra te kai ap' ouranou sēmeia megala estai (φοβητρά τε καὶ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ σημεῖα μεγάλα ἔσται, 'terrors and great signs from heaven will be'). The word phobētra (φοβητρά, 'fearful things/terrors') suggests events causing dread. Sēmeia megala ap' ouranou (σημεῖα μεγάλα ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ, 'great signs from heaven') may indicate astronomical phenomena or supernatural manifestations. **Creation itself groans** under sin's curse (Romans 8:22), manifesting through natural disasters. These 'birth pangs' precede the new creation's delivery.

Historical Context

Natural disasters marked the first century. A severe famine occurred under Claudius (Acts 11:28). The eruption of Mount Vesuvius (AD 79) destroyed Pompeii

and Herculaneum. Earthquakes struck various regions. Plagues periodically ravaged populations. Josephus records ominous signs before Jerusalem's destruction—a star resembling a sword, a comet, unusual celestial phenomena. Early Christians experienced these disasters, remembering Jesus' prophecy. Throughout history, earthquakes, famines, and plagues have killed millions—Justinian Plague (541-549), Black Death (1347-1353), modern earthquakes and pandemics. Each generation witnesses these patterns, confirming Jesus' words while awaiting their ultimate eschatological intensification before His return.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How should Christians interpret natural disasters theologically—as random events, divine judgment, or groaning creation awaiting redemption?
2. What does the phrase 'in divers places' suggest about the scope and frequency of these disasters throughout history?
3. How can believers maintain both compassionate response to disaster victims and theological understanding of disasters as 'birth pangs' preceding Christ's return?

Interlinear Text

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|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| σεισμοί | τε | μεγάλα | κατὰ | τόπους | καὶ | λιμοὶ | καὶ |
| earthquakes | And | great | in | divers places | and | famines | and |
| G4578 | G5037 | G3173 | G2596 | G5117 | G2532 | G3042 | G2532 |
| λοιμοὶ | ἔσται | φόβητρά | τε | καὶ | σημεῖα | ἀπ' | οὐρανοῦ |
| pestilences | shall be | fearful sights | And | and | signs | from | heaven |
| G3061 | G2071 | G5400 | G5037 | G2532 | G4592 | G575 | G3772 |
| μεγάλα | ἔσται | | | | | | |
| great | shall be | | | | | | |
| G3173 | G2071 | | | | | | |

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