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WHAT EARTHQUAKES MAY BE TELLING US

By Larry Jaffrey

When a major earthquake erupts, it makes the news. Cable news networks go 24-7 with their coverage. Damage is pictured live along with an ever-changing tally of fatalities and injuries. Experts are called upon to explain what happened and what to expect in the days ahead. The recent Chilean earthquake created the danger of a tsunami putting many Pacific coastal areas on alert.

Immediately following the initial tragedy there comes the rescue and recovery work. Rescue teams are sent in to find people under collapsed buildings. Medical teams are called upon to help the injured. Then the recovery begins with appeals for financial and manpower assistance to rebuild the area damaged by the earthquake.

During this time we are moved by stories of amazing rescues and the sad realities of homelessness and despair. In our churches and Bible studies, we are called upon to pray for those suffering and those helping. In the Chilean earthquake, we were asked to pray specifically for a pastor and his family who had no food. Each month they would travel into the city to buy their monthly supplies. The earthquake happened on the day before their monthly trip. The roads were damaged so they could not travel to get more food. It looks like it will be weeks before they can get out.

The Chilean earthquake made us realize the power of these natural disasters. Science Daily reports the earthquake "moved the entire city of Concepcion at least 10 feet to the west....and Chile's capital, Santiago, moved about 11 inches to the west-southwest." One scientist at NASA reported the quake probably shifted the earth's axis and made days slightly shorter.

Following the immediate needs and concerns, questions begin to be asked. Why can't we better predict when and where earthquakes are going to take place? Do the building codes need to be changed or strengthened? Another question is how should we, as Christians, view these seismic events?

A SIGN OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

It is interesting to see how often earthquakes are mentioned in scriptures. Earthquakes or shakings of the earth in scriptures are used to represent several things. First the earthquake is used to symbolize the presence and holiness of God.

When Moses went up the mountain to receive the Law, "*Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.*" (Exodus 19:18 NKJV)

Elijah also encountered this quaking phenomenon when he encountered God while running from Jezebel. "*The LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*" (1 Kings 19:11-12 NKJV)

A SIGN OF A MIRACLE OF GOD

Next earthquakes occur when miraculous events take place. At Jesus' death and resurrection the earth shook. "*And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,*" (Matthew 27:50-51) and "*And behold, there was a great*

earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.” (Matthew 28:2)

Another illustration of God using earthquakes to emphasize the miraculous was when Paul and Silas were thrown into prison in Philippi. As they sang and prayed, “suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.” (Acts 16:26)

A SIGN OF JUDGMENT IN THE LAST DAYS

Most significant to us is the usage of earthquakes in the scriptures as signs of the times and judgment in the last days. When the disciples ask Jesus what would be signs of His return as king, he said, “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” (Matthew 24:7-8)

It is interesting to note that Fox News quoted Stephen S. Gao, a geophysicist at Missouri University of Science and Technology, as saying "Relative to the 20-year period from the mid 1970's to the mid 1990's, the earth has been more active over the past 15 or so years."

Ezekiel tells us of another future earthquake. When Gog of Magog along with the armies of several other nations invade Israel, the invasion is stopped in a miraculous way. God says, “For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of

Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.” (Ezekiel 38:19-20) In this scripture, we not only see the earthquake as a judgment but also as sign of God’s presence and miraculous intervention.

As God releases his judgment upon the world during the Tribulation, the judgment comes in the form of earthquakes several times during this seven-year period. The most significant earthquake is found in the seventh bowl judgment: “Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air... and there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth...Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.” (Revelation 16:17,18,20)

Notice the geographic changes that will take place in both the Ezekiel and Revelation accounts. Apparently, there will be no mountain ranges or islands when Jesus returns. Could this be the correction to what happened when the earth was covered in water in judgment?

Yes, earthquakes can be tragic events. Often people cry out at such events, “Where’s God?” Yet, the earthquakes should remind us that God is present, that He does miracles, and that He will judge sin.

-Larry Jaffrey