

## “FEELING SHAKEN?” (EARTHQUAKES IN THE LAST DAYS) by Jon Ikin

The church bells in Massachusetts mysteriously rang by themselves. *Gong, gong, gong, gong...* As you can imagine, the eerie sound caused quite a stir. But it wasn't a supernatural occurrence, nor was it a prank by town jokers. Rather, hundreds of miles to the south the Mississippi River valley was experiencing one of the largest known earthquakes in American history. In fact, the 1811-1812 series of quakes were so enormous in magnitude that they actually created new lakes and changed the course of the Mississippi River. And the ripple effect set the church bells in Massachusetts playing their unorthodox tune. They were literally reeling from shock. But such seismic sounds may be heard again before too long, for according to Scripture earthquakes are going to increase in the last days. And the truth is, we are all standing on shaky ground.

### QUAKE BRITAIN

*“We were in the house when there was a loud bang and I thought a lorry had crashed into the wall. Everything in the cupboards was shaking and rattling...”* - so said a resident of Moffat Road, Dumfries when an earthquake registering 3.5 on the Richter scale shook their home on Boxing Day 2006. We are not used to earthquakes in the UK, but they do happen. In fact there was one in Winchester in 2015 measuring just 2.9 and lasting about three seconds. Not long, you might think, but long enough to get locals jumping up and down like a needle on a seismic chart. Hampshire Constabulary said it received calls from residents about something which *“felt like an explosion which shook their houses.”* They were shocked to learn it was an earthquake, if only a small one.

By comparison some of the biggest known earthquakes in Britain were in 1382 and again in 1580 when a crack which opened in the earth's crust 15 kilometres beneath the Dover Straits triggered tremors measuring about 5.5 in magnitude on both occasions. That's pretty big by UK standards, but by far the strongest Brit-quake was in 1931 near the Dogger Bank on the east coast, reaching 6.1 on the Richter scale. So nowhere is exempt, not even home. And that's the point, isn't it? The Lord Jesus Christ said that in the last days *“there will be earthquakes in various places”* (Mark 13:8), and that includes Britain. In fact, to show how widely the *“various places”* can be interpreted, in 2010 a major quake in Chile unleashed minor icequakes (so-called because they are on ice not earth) in Antarctica nearly 2,900 miles to the south, causing a break in the world's largest ice sheet. So, you see, nowhere is out of range.

But why are they happening? Well, there are many answers to that question. Ask a geologist and they will tell you *“they are simply part of the continual commotion in the Earth's crust, as the massive tectonic plates floating on the molten mantle – the continents and the ocean floors – move and grind into each other, sometimes sliding under or over.”*

Their regular movement (called the creep rate) is about the same speed that your finger nails grow. They pass each other like escalators going in opposite directions but when the stresses become too great for the strength of the rock to withstand you know about it. It isn't called a slow moving crash for nothing.

Ask a theologian the same question on the other hand and they will tell you that earthquakes are a product of the fall. As the apostle Paul said in Romans 8: *"For the creation was subjected to futility... the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now"* (v20-22). Adam's sin brought a curse on the earth itself which is still felt today in natural disasters like these.

But there is still more to it than that, because the Lord Jesus Christ said in His Olivet Discourse that they would become a sign of His Second Coming. And the increase of their frequency certainly seems to indicate that we are now in the time before His return. As Tony Pearce wrote in his publication, *'Light For The Last Days'*: *"On the subject of earthquakes here is an interesting statistic. This century, from January the 1<sup>st</sup> in the year 2000 until January 2017 a total of 2,697 major quakes have been recorded. In the same period, January the 1<sup>st</sup> 1900 to January 1917 only 97 major quakes were recorded, that is an incredible increase..."* (April 2017, p.5). These are ground breaking facts. The question is, are we paying attention to them? If the signs say His Second Coming is close, then the Rapture is even closer. Are we personally prepared?

## GLOBAL CONVULSIONS

Did you know that the Greek word for earthquake is SEISMOS, which literally means 'shaking'? And that is what is definitely going to happen, not only in terms of the earth's crust movement but also the impact of major earthquakes in the future. Think, for a moment, of the changes to the earth in general. Isaiah, in his 'mini-apocalypse' (chapter 24-27), reveals major quake devastation when he says: *"The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut..."* (Isaiah 24:19-20). Believing that this is talking about the Tribulation period before the Lord Jesus comes again we can link it with the great earthquakes spoken of in the book of Revelation. The Apostle John said in that Book: *"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake...and every mountain and island was moved out of its place"* (Revelation 6:12-14). These major quakes will be like none before. The whole world will be effected, and not just a localised region. The tectonic plates of the entire world will all crash at once resulting in maps having to be redrawn as the mountains and islands move, leaving the planet with a different appearance. And other similar quakes will follow at the end of the seven year Tribulation as well: *"...such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth"* (16:18).

We wonder: will, *“the earth move out of her place”* (Isaiah 13:13) at this time? According to *Wonderpedia* magazine (Feb.2013, p.91), *“As a consequence of [the] superquake – now commonly known as the Great Chilean Earthquake [in 1960] – more than 1,500 people were killed, while the earth’s axis was tilted by three centimetres, subtly shifting our planet’s centre of gravity.”* So such an axis-shifting possibility has a precedent in recent history. It is possible it could happen again in the Tribulation.

And then consider the impact on financial markets. The same publication said: *“California would represent the fifth-largest economic power on the planet; a localised earthquake [ie, ‘the Big One’ predicted on the San Andreas Fault] would almost certainly send similarly catastrophic tremors throughout the financial markets, leading to a worldwide recession.”* In fact, German reinsurer *Munich Re* once issued a report pinpointing Tokyo as a possible disaster flashpoint that could plunge the world into global recession if it was hit by a major earthquake with, *“damage running into trillions of dollars, and global economic repercussions”* (January 2005). Would this help prepare the way for the new financial system that Revelation talks about, with the Mark of the Beast (Rev.13:16-18) being established? Again, it is certainly a possibility.

And don’t overlook the impact on the world’s biggest nations. Could the United States or China, say, lose their superpower status through the type of mega-quakes revealed in the book of Revelation? Is that partly why we hear so little of them in prophecy? The death toll of the 1556 Shaanxi quake in China was a staggering 830,000. But undoubtedly bigger quakes are on their way in the Tribulation. Perhaps this will shift the epicentre of world politics to the Revived Roman Empire when it fully emerges under the Antichrist. We’ll have to wait and see. But when the world’s infrastructure starts to topple like a house of cards – literally – at this point the message will get through that the judgments of God are not something to be sniggered at. *“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”* (Revelation 6:15-17).

## **A DIVINE WEAPON**

One aspect of prophetic earthquakes which cannot be overlooked is their use as a weapon of divine judgment. Actually, earthquakes have long been a feared weapon of man as well. Former U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen warned, in a speech to a University of Georgia forum on terrorism, that new electromagnetic weapons might be used to *“punch holes in the ozone layer or trigger earthquakes or volcanoes”* (Toronto Star, 29 April 1997). So science fiction is becoming science fact before our eyes. But coming back to the last

days scenario described by the Bible, the Lord God of heaven uses earthquakes on His enemies in a number of prophecies.

Take, for instance, the Gog and Magog battle revealed in Ezekiel 38-39. There we read: *“And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,” says the Lord God, “that My fury will show in My face. 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...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 38:18-20). Here the Lord uses an earthquake (along with other means) to defeat the invading armies against Israel in one of her greatest struggles for survival. And the rest of the prophecy shows it will be a weapon her enemies will not be able to withstand.

Another such use of earthquakes as a weapon is possibly seen in Jeremiah 49 when God says He will *“break the bow of Elam, the foremost of her might”* (v35). This is regarded by some prophecy students as a description of divine intervention against Iran (Elam in old currency) and her formidable weaponry. The word for *“break”* is a word meaning *to shiver* in Hebrew - an apt description of an earthquake. How interesting to discover that some of Iran’s main nuclear facilities are built where three fault lines converge in the south. This may be the means that the God of Israel deals with her fractious enemies and sends shockwaves of awe throughout the world.

But perhaps the greatest use of earthquakes as a weapon of wrath will be when the Lord destroys Babylon, the economic capital of Antichrist in the Tribulation. Revelation 16:18-19 says: *“...and there was a great earthquake...Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.”* When the fissures of judgment open and hell’s headquarters on earth are destroyed the cry will go around the world, *“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen...”* (Revelation 18:2). As people mournfully watched the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001 so they will watch with shock again, *“saying ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”* (v10). The nations will mourn, but heaven will rejoice at divine retribution for persecuted believers. *“After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, ‘Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has...avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her’”* (Revelation 19:1-2).

And such a weapon in the hands of a holy God should not be considered as spiritual fiction with mere symbolic meaning. The Lord will be repeating on a greater level His past judgments. In fact creationist geologist Dr Steven Austin has been researching the sink

holes opening up in the Dead Sea region. *“During the past 40 years, over 5,500 sink-holes have appeared in the area, some 300 feet across and 150-feet deep. This year [2016] alone, 750 new ones have appeared”* said a correspondent for the British Church Newspaper (8<sup>th</sup> July 2016, p16). Whilst doing this research he *“has found evidence for one particularly strong earthquake in the area which he says could well be a large one recorded in about 770 BC by the prophet Amos (Amos 1v1)...which shook the land of Israel in the time of King Uzziah... The area suffered frequent earthquakes but this one must have been especially severe.”* The One who can make the world can also shake the world – and He will once again.

## **SHAKEN AND AWAKENED**

One of the positive things about the Lord using earthquakes is that they often become turning points in people’s lives. In his commentary *Revelation Unveiled*, Tim La Haye said: *“A miniature illustration of this occurred in San Diego some years ago. I had been invited by the Lions Club president, who had recently become a Christian, to address their December luncheon meeting. As I stood up, I sensed the usual “ho hum” attitude that often greets preachers at such events. About five minutes later we felt an earthquake! The ground shook, lights went out for a moment, and the chandeliers swung to and fro. When I commenced my message a moment later, I was impressed with the fact that I now had their undivided attention. Never have I addressed a more attentive secular audience”* (p.157). The earthquake woke them up to reality. Cracks suddenly appeared in their own self-reliance and they realized they needed to be saved. This has been the case with many others who, like the Philippian jailor in Acts 16, came to the Saviour following a quake.

Take Shotaro Kogo, ‘the earthquake evangelist,’ as another example. This Japanese gentleman survived the great Tokyo earthquake in 1923 but sadly lost his family and everything else. Through a remarkable series of events he came under the sound of the Gospel, hearing a sermon on Psalm 23 which spoke to him powerfully. *“At the same time,”* he said, *“I found great encouragement in realizing that though I had lost everything in the earthquake and fire, and had hitherto been aimlessly wandering like a lost sheep, there was a God who cared for me like a shepherd.”* Touched by God’s mercy to him, he soon after repented of his sins and turned to the Lord Jesus Christ in saving faith. Following this he became a lifelong servant of the Gospel using his experience as a way of sharing the Saviour with others. Towards the end of his life Mr Kogo wrote these words: *“And the Living God, He is with me. He is close by my side, and hears me when I call. He is all I want. He is the only One who never changes, and His is the One Whose face I long to behold on the day I enter heaven. How my heart longs for that great day!”* Would you like to have such a heavenly hope and such a real relationship with your Heavenly Father as this? Then turn to the Lord Jesus Christ today. Ask Him to be your Saviour from sin and rest on His finished

work alone. Don't wait for an earthquake or some other event to shake you to reality. Turn to Him now and say with the hymn-writer, *"On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand..."*

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