

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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What Do Earthquakes Signify?

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On December 26, 2004, a tsunami registering 9.0 on the Richter scale sent devastating waves upon Indonesia. The estimated loss of life is over 170,000. This “harbor wave”, the literal definition of the Japanese term “tsunami”, resulted from the shifting of plates under the sea. In other words, it was caused by an earthquake.

When such strong earthquakes occur, increased talk about the end of time increases. Some religious leaders point to the Bible indicating that earthquakes are a definite sign that the Lord will soon appear.

Matthew 24:7-8 are verses to which many point: “*For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail.*” This verse is found in the context of events being accomplished in the days of Jesus’ generation, not in our own: “*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished*” (Matthew 24:34). Jesus

is speaking of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. The buildings of the temple did crumble under the assault of the Roman army in A.D. 70.

Jesus says that wars, famines and earthquakes would be “*the beginning of travail*” not the end. The point Jesus is making is that there will be more sources of sorrow or pain than just the common ones that have continued since the world and societies began. Jesus then points to other sources of sorrow (Matthew 24:9-10). The Gospel would also be preached in the whole world, and then the end would come (Matthew 24:14). The Gospel was preached to all nations and disciples were persecuted to the death in the first century before the destruction of Jerusalem occurred, exactly as Jesus promised (cf. Col. 1:23, Acts 7:59, 2 Tim. 4:6).

In Scripture, earthquakes are a sign of God’s *power, presence and wrath*. (Job 9:6, Psm. 68:8, 18:7, Isa. 13:13). John uses the devastating power of earthquakes to give hope to persecuted Christians in the first century (Rev. 11:13, 19). While the great persecuting city would experience “a

great earthquake, such as was not since there were men on the earth...” (Rev. 16:18), it would only divide the city, weakening it, not bring it to an immediate end.

God used earthquakes to grasp man’s attention at Jesus’ death and three days later to gloriously usher Christ’s resurrection (Matt. 27:51-54, 28:2). He used it to give comfort to prayerful disciples of the Lord, and help free His apostles (Acts 4:31, 16:26). The timing of these quaking events show that God was in control of their occurrence, not mere nature.

The moment we think a remarkable earthquake must be a unique sign, history reminds us that in the 1960’s the two strongest earthquakes of recorded history occurred: Chile—May, 22, 1960, 9.5 magnitude; Alaska—March 28, 1964, 9.2 magnitude). Surely in this four year span one could have used earthquakes as the harbinger of an imminent end. But we have now continued for almost a half century. Be careful in what you believe earthquakes signify.