



NATURAL DISASTERS DO ALL THINGS CONTINUE AS BEFORE?

By Albert James Dager

Whenver the earth is struck with a major calamity in the form of a natural disaster there is immediate appeal to the Lord's prophecy that at the end of this age there will be "wars and rumors of wars," "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in diverse places." All these, He said, are the beginning of sorrows to be followed by great persecution of those who believe in Him, betrayal at the hands of those close to us, the rise of many false prophets, and an abundance of wickedness (Matthew 24:6-12).

The primary natural disaster mentioned by the Lord is earthquake, something that has been around at least from the time of Adam.

The recording of earthquakes goes back only as far as the second century when Chinese scientist Chang Heng invented the first known seismograph. Scripture records only a few earthquakes that took place in ancient times and during the time of Jesus. The first mentioned is that in 1 Kings 19:11-12

in which we are told YHWH was not in the earthquake, but in the still, small voice. Amos 1:1 mentions "the earthquake," the details of which are unknown; it occurred two years after Amos received a prophecy regarding Israel and concerning Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel. Zechariah referred back to that same earthquake in Zechariah 14:5. The fact that it is called merely "the earthquake" lends the idea that it must have been one of considerable note, very strong and/or resulting in much death and destruction.

Only three other earthquakes are recorded in Scripture: 1) that which took place upon the death of Jesus, whereby the graves of the saints were opened allowing for those saints to be resurrected after He was (Matt. 27:54); 2) that which took place when the angel of the Lord descended from Heaven to roll back the stone from the Lord's tomb (Matt. 28:2); 3) that in Philippi which caused to be shaken the foundations of the prison in which Paul and Silas were being held (Acts 16:26). The only other mentions of earthquakes are to be found in the Book of

Revelation's prophecies of the days just prior to the Lord's return (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13-19; 16:18), and, of course, the Lord's prophecy as stated previously.

Arguably, the most notable earthquakes in recorded history are those that struck Sumatra, Indonesia, on December 20, 2004, and that which took place off the coast of Japan on March 10, 2011. The Sumatra earthquake, with a magnitude of 9.1, is the third largest earthquake ever recorded on a

seismograph, and lasted some 8 to 10 minutes. Neither this, nor the magnitude 9.0 Japan quake were the largest ever recorded; that distinction goes to the 9.5 Chilean earthquake of May 22, 1960. Nor did either result in the greatest loss of lives; the Sumatra earthquake killed over 230,000 people in fourteen countries; the approximately 28,000 killed in Japan pales in comparison to the Sumatra quake, and even more so to the Tangshan, China, 7.8 magnitude earthquake of July 28,

1976. The official death toll of 255,000 is believed to be far short of the estimated 830,000 dead. The disparity in count is due to China's secretive approach at news control. Yet even the most conservative "official" count far outstrips those of most recorded earthquakes.

The vast majority of deaths attributed to the Japan earthquake were not caused by the quake itself, but by the ensuing tsunami that resulted from the offshore epicenter some 100 miles east of northern Japan at a depth of 32 kilometers (19 miles). Adding to the tragedy, of course, was the tsunami's destruction of the three Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plants on a scale equal to that of Chernobyl that melted down in 1986. The area of the meltdown may be uninhabitable for hundreds of years.

People around the world sat transfixed before their television sets and computers, awed at the spectacle of nature's power, watching a thirty-foot-high wall of water carrying debris far inland.



Some call it “nature’s fury,” but nature knows no fury. It merely functions on the basis of natural order according to many factors that operate in the physical realm. That’s not to say that there is no spiritual factor involved. Certainly God can and does cause the earth—the entire universe—to function according to His will, and Scripture records how He has intervened in specific cases to accomplish His purposes. He also many times brings to pass specific weather changes in certain locales in response to the prayers of His saints. But by-and-large, nature operates under the laws God has prescribed for it.

Some blame Satan for causing natural disasters. But there is nothing in Scripture to even suggest that Satan can affect the weather—certainly nothing of such cataclysmic magnitude that would cause the earth to shift on its axis, such as occurred with the recent Japan earthquake. The only possible exception is if God allowed him to be able to affect the weather.

It is commonly known that earthquakes are caused by a sudden lateral or vertical movement of rock along a rupture surface. Dr. Gerard Fryer at the Hawaii Institute of Geophysics and Planetology at University of Hawaii, Honolulu, gives a succinct explanation:

The surface of the Earth is in continuous slow motion. This is plate tectonics—the motion of immense rigid plates at the surface of the Earth in response to flow of rock within the Earth. The plates cover the entire surface of the globe. Since they are all moving they rub against each other in some places (like the San Andreas Fault in California), sink beneath each other in others (like the Peru-Chile Trench along the western border of South America), or spread apart from each other (like the Mid-Atlantic Ridge). At such places the motion isn’t smooth—the plates are stuck together at the edges but the rest of each plate is continuing to move, so the rocks along the edges are distorted (what we call “strain”). As the motion continues, the strain builds up to the point where the rock cannot withstand any more bending. With a lurch, the rock breaks and the two sides move. An earthquake is the shaking that radiates out from the breaking rock.¹

The fact that the earth is literally a fractured planet, its plates floating on a subterranean sea of magma, is bound to result in such disaster. That isn’t the scary part for most of mankind; the scary part is that the energy released by nature, either in the earth in the form of earthquakes or in the sky in the form of tornadoes, is unpredictable. Man’s science has given him an edge in predicting weather patterns. He can forecast rain, snow, sunshine, etc. He can even forecast hurricanes and cyclones because those destructive weather events are relatively slow moving; they develop gradually and their presence can be discerned through weather satellites that circle the earth. To date there is no way to predict earthquakes, and tornadoes offer warnings of only a few minutes. The unprecedented number

and strengths of the tornadoes that struck the southeast United States recently came as a surprise. And they astounded scientists as well as us laymen with their size and frequency.

Experts have said that the outbreak of tornadoes that ravaged the U.S. south in April, 2011, was the largest in recorded history. The National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimates that 362 twisters touched down with a record 312 within the 24-hour period, April 27-28. This was more than twice the previous 24-hour record of 148. It was also the single deadliest day for tornadoes since 1925 with more than 300 dead from Alabama to Kentucky. Residents were given a scant 24 minutes warning, but the twisters were too wide and too powerful to allow for escape. Tornadoes touched down in several states across the southeast in a frequency ten times what is normal for the Tornado season in that area. Exceptionally large tornadoes struck in areas that had rarely or never seen tornadoes previously. Add to this the record rainfalls worldwide of late causing highly destructive flooding and deaths.

Skeptics dismiss Scripture’s prophecies as nothing new, and say the reason students of the Bible think modern disasters are fulfillment of prophecy is merely the result of modern technology providing for better reporting around the world. After all, they reason, in Jesus’ day the known world was the Roman Empire, and even then news traveled slowly; besides, the population of the earth was a small fraction of the near 7 billion people living today. They point out that there were no mass communications to report what happened where, back then, and that the earth’s geologic evidence suggests greater cataclysms dating back millions of years—great enough to raise the Himalayan Mountains and carve great fissures into the earth’s surface. So they ask why all of a sudden think that because man can better record and report on worldwide events it means the end of this age?

This is a plausible argument. We certainly don’t have any scientifically recorded evidence of natural disasters that have occurred throughout history earlier than the second century. And even that would be spotty up until the twentieth century which saw the great advances of scientific technology, radio, television, satellites and international travel.

But if we look carefully at the Lord’s prophecy we realize that His even speaking of “earthquakes in diverse places” suggests that we would be able to hear about those earthquakes from diverse places—places beyond the known world of His time. And that was not possible before advances in printing and radio shrank the world to fit into our living rooms.

So what if the only records we have of earthquakes go back only to the second century? Recorded history does suggest a pattern of increase in frequency and magnitude over the past couple of millennia, and particularly over the past 100 years.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) lists earthquakes with 50,000 or more deaths as far back as A.D. 856. We have included them in the following list along with a number of other significant earthquakes that resulted in fewer deaths primarily because of their remote locations:

¹ <http://www.soest.hawaii.edu/GG/ASK/earthquakes.html>

856 Iran, Damghan – magnitude unknown – 200,000
 893 Iran, Ardabil– magnitude unknown 150,000
 1138 Aleppo, Syria – magnitude unknown – 230,000
 1268 Silicia, Asia Minor – magnitude unknown – 60,000
 1290 Chihli, China – magnitude unknown – 100,000
 1556 Shaanxi, China Earthquake – 8.0 est. – 830,000
 1667 Caucasi, Shemakha – magnitude unknown – 80,000
 1693 Sicily, Italy – 7.5 – 60,000
 1700 Cascadia – 9.0 sparsely populated
 1727 Tabriz, Iran – magnitude unknown – 80,000
 1755 Lisbon, Portugal 9.0 – 60,000+
 1783 Calabria, Italy – magnitude unknown – 50,000
 1811 New Madrid – 8.0+ sparsely populated
 1906 San Francisco – 7.9 – 3,000
 1908 Messina, Italy – 7.2 – 72,000
 1948 Turkmenistan, USSR – 7.3 – 110,000
 1957 Daly City, California – 5.3 no fatalities
 1964 Alaska “Good Friday” – 8.6 – 115
 1970 Chimbote, Peru – 7.9 – 70,000
 1975 Haicheng – 7.0 – 2,000
 1976 Tangshan – 7.5 – 830,000 estimated
 1989 Loma Prieta – 6.9 – 66
 1990 Western Iran – 7.4 – 50,000
 1994 Northridge, California – 6.6 – 57
 1995 Kobe – 6.9 – 5,500
 2001 Olympia, Washington – 6.8 – no fatalities
 2003 Bam, Iran – 6.7 – 30,000
 2004 Sumatra – 9.0 – 230,000
 2005 Kashmir, Pakistan – 7.6 – 86,000
 2008 Eastern Sichuan, China – 7.9 – 87,587
 2010 Haiti – 7.0 – 230,000
 2011 Sendai, Japan – 9.0 – 25,000

We see that there were only two significant earthquakes in the 9th century, one in the 12th century, two in the 13th century, one in the 16th century, three in the 17th century, three in the 18th century and one in the 19th century. Then the number increases dramatically to twelve in the 20th century, and seven in the first 11 years of the 21st century. There have been 17 in the past 100 years—a significant statistic, and more than half the list.

Might this be evidence that there is something to the Lord’s prophecy? Is it possible that there is a spiritual dimension to the history of the earth and mankind?

Which brings us to the spiritual factors involved in not only earthquakes but all natural phenomena that cause disaster.

The earth—in truth, the entire universe—bears the marks of Satan’s fall and the ensuing warfare. The chaos that man has been able to observe through the science of astronomy reveals terrible and great cataclysms occurring in deep space—black holes that suck in entire star systems with such gravitational force that not even light can escape; colliding galaxies millions of light years in diameter; novae—the remnants of exploding stars. At the center of our home galaxy, the Milky Way, is a

black hole devouring stars and, presumably, planets that encircle them. How wonderful and horrible it all is.

The earth did not escape the celestial warfare that occurred when Satan fell. Its surface is fragmented like a cracked egg. Was this how it was intended when God created it? I think not.

But this is what God’s Word has to say about it:

And He said to Adam, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it,” the ground is cursed for your sake; you shall eat from it in sorrow all the days of your life. It will also bring forth for you thorns and thistles, and you shall eat the herb of the field.” (Gen. 3:17-18)

In Noah’s time God destroyed the earth with a flood, the effects of which are noticed today. Scientists marvel that they find fossils of sea life at high altitudes. But if they believed the Scriptures there would be no need to marvel.

Certainly there were other effects from Noah’s flood. The saturated earth was no doubt remolded and reshaped to new configurations. The earth bears evidence of great upheavals and the movement of large plates that broke up the once super continent of Pangea into the seven continents that exist today.

Since the fall of Adam, especially, the earth has been in great turmoil, awaiting the day of the Lord’s return and the resurrection of the saints:

For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God....For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit—even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:19-23)

In spite of the many Scriptures that reveal the events which will occur at end of this age, there are skeptics within the Body of Christ who mock the idea that earthquakes and other natural disasters would increase in the last days.

They insist that the number of earthquakes have not increased since the second century, but they offer no empirical evidence to support that claim. But as we’ve seen, the USGS does offer credible evidence to support the Lord’s prophecy.

They also claim that Jesus was revealed in “these last days,” suggesting that “the last days” were when Jesus was on earth, and apply to the end of the Old Covenant. They do not believe in the Lord’s literal return to the earth, and those who do, suggest that it will be upon the unveiling of the New Heavens and New Earth—there will be no millennial Kingdom of Heaven on the earth regardless of the Scriptures that clearly reveal it.

The skeptics do not understand that the Scriptures reveal a number of “last days.”

Jacob gathered his sons to tell them what would happen to them “in the last days.” He then prophesied to them their future among their brethren, but there was no mention of “the last days” as understood eschatologically. Those were the latter days, or later times, of which he spoke to them.

Isaiah (2:2) also spoke of the last days, but his prophecy had nothing to do with anyone other than Israel when the nation is again restored during the Millennium.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of YHWH's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow into it.

And many people shall go and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of YHWH—to the house of the God of Jacob—and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem."

And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isa. 2:2-4)

Surely this prophecy, iterated in greater detail in Micah 4:1-8, has never been fulfilled. Nor does it apply to this present age; it is yet future, and speaks of the Lord ruling from Jerusalem over the whole earth.

Joel related that "afterward" (in the last days) God would pour out His spirit upon all flesh, which occurred at Pentecost. And it will occur again during the Millennium, because "afterward" refers to the previous verses that describe the Millennium.

Paul warned Timothy of apostasy in the last days, and described those who were apostatizing even then (2 Tim. 3:1-9).

James sounds a lamentation against the ungodly rich who heap treasure to themselves for the last days, which treasure will be destroyed. He tells the saints to be patient until the coming of the Lord.

And significant to the skeptics of today, Peter reminds the saints to remember the words that were spoken by the prophets and the apostles,

...knowing this first: that in the last days there shall come scoffers, walking according to their own desires and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

For they are willfully ignorant of this: that by the Word of God the heavens were from old times, and the earth was standing out of the water and in the water. Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, are reserved by the same Word, held securely for fire for the day of judgment and the damnation of ungodly men.

But, beloved, do not be ignorant of this one thing: that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise (as some men count slackness) but is patient toward us, not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are in it shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conduct and godliness, looking for and eagerly awaiting the coming of the Day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless, according to His promise we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. (2 Peter 3:3-13)

Here Peter relates "the last days" with the New Heavens and the New Earth. Does this mean that the Lord's coming will immediately herald the New Heavens and New Earth without a millennial Kingdom of Heaven on earth prior? No, because there are many Scriptures that foretell and describe that millennial Kingdom. What it means is that the phrase "the last days" has different meanings depending upon the particular prophecy to which it is attached. Taking that into consideration it means any time from the Messiah's first coming until the end of the physical universe as it currently exists. All the time leading up to the Lord's birth was preparation for the last days which would include His ministry, the time of the Gentiles (our current age), the millennial Kingdom which will be restored to believing Israel, and the melting of the physical elements to be refurbished into a new universe and new earth.

There will be no "last days" to the new creation which will eternally be part of the Kingdom of God—a tribute to His triumph over all evil for all time.

Regardless of the skeptics, both unbelievers and believers who don't believe that the Lord's prophecies are for us today, the truth remains that the end of this age approaches. The Lord would not have given us the warnings that He did were it not for a reason. He said there would be signs in the heavens and in the earth heralding His coming again.

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and distress of nations upon the earth with perplexity—the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear and for seeing those things that are coming on the earth.

"For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

"And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

"And when these things begin to happen, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near."

Yes, many Christians are giving up on the Lord's return and His Kingdom on earth, having fallen victim to one form of skepticism or another. But one thing is for certain: we're not getting any further away from it.

And no one is getting away from Him. ❖