

But What Has God To Do With Earthquakes?

The awesome earthquake and subsequent tsunami of 11th March 2011 that has devastated the North East of Japan is another of a number of recent earthquakes that seem to be increasing in number and significance. Many consider that these are just natural happenings and give no thought or discount the possibility that these are from Almighty God. But this is not what Scripture tells us. Like the earthquake and tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean on 26th December 2004 this latest huge earthquake is truly of a magnitude that has effected the whole world, either by way of direct involvement or due to its impact that has effected the consciousness of us all. Through modern News Broadcasts we have all been able to witness the horror caused by the power unleashed by these colossal earthquakes - each being among the largest on record.

I am sure we are all touched by the tragedy that suddenly effected so many. The death toll of the Indonesian Earthquake reached more than 150,000. Estimates of the [Tōhoku](#) earthquake's magnitude make it the most powerful known earthquake to have hit Japan, and one of the five most powerful earthquakes in the world overall since modern record-keeping began in 1900. The earthquake moved Honshu 2.4 m (7.9 ft) east and shifted the Earth on its axis by almost 10 cm (3.9 in). Japan's government has said that the cost of the earthquake and tsunami could reach \$309 billion, making it the world's most expensive natural disaster on record. As the airwaves are ringing, however, there can be a deafness to just what God is saying to all mankind at this time.

If one were to ask the opinions of the 'religious' one would obtain many differing replies, but little truth, for few understand God's perspective on this present generation. Few Christians have an understanding of God's wrath that the Bible tells us is yet to be poured out on the earth and its inhabitants. Few wish to consider that it will soon be time for God to judge this sinful generation as this age finishes and the earth is prepared for the coming reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such considerations are far too 'way out' for many to consider, yet this is all prophesied in Scripture. These prophecies of scripture tell us that far worse catastrophes than this recent earthquake and tsunami await us, despite the magnitude of it. And as God shakes not only the heavens, but also the earth, in His desire to warn us and open the hearts of those who might yet desire His Kingdom, will we hear?

Hard to understand for many is God's holiness that brings judgement despite His great love for each one of us. But before judgement there is always mercy and this can sometimes seem difficult to comprehend as God endeavours to speak through our hardness of heart. Without tribulation few are prepared to listen but rather would hope in what they selfishly desire and imagine. But God wants us to hear Him!

God speaking and men listening through earthquakes is not without precedent. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century God moved in revival power, in Wales, in India, and diverse places around the world, but especially in Los Angeles in the USA. Few have taken note that this mighty move of God, that restored the gifts of the Spirit to a mainly powerless church, coincided with the infamous San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Frank Bartleman, who was involved in this move of God, has left us an eyewitness account of this time. Let us hear his words speak again:-

Extracts from His Diary of Events in 1906 by Frank Bartleman

Sunday, April 15, the Lord called me to ten days of special prayer. I felt greatly burdened but had no idea of what He had particularly in mind. But He had a work for me, and wanted to prepare me for it.

Wednesday, April 18, the terrible San Francisco earthquake came, which also devastated the surrounding cities and country. No less than ten thousand lost their lives in San Francisco alone. I felt a deep conviction that the Lord was answering our prayers for a revival in His own way. **"When Thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."**- **Isa. 26:9**. A tremendous burden of prayer came upon me that the people might not be indifferent to His voice.

Thursday, April 19, while sitting in the noon meeting at Peniel Hall, 227 South Main Street, the floor suddenly began to move with us. A most ugly sensation ran through the room. We sat in awe. Many people ran into the middle of the street, looking up anxiously at the buildings, fearing they were about to fall. It was an earnest time. I went home and after a season of prayer was impressed of the Lord to go to the meeting which had been removed from Bonnie Brae Street to 312 Azusa Street. Here they had rented an old frame building, formerly a Methodist church, in the centre of the city, now a long time out of use for meetings. It had become a receptacle for old lumber, plaster, etc. They had cleared space enough in the surrounding dirt and debris to lay some planks on top of empty nail kegs, with seats enough for possibly thirty people, if I remember rightly. These were arranged in a square, facing one another.

I was under tremendous pressure to get to the meeting that evening. It was my first visit to "Azusa Mission." Mother Wheaton, who was living with us, was going with me. She was so slow that I could hardly wait for her. I have always been a "lone wolf" for this very reason. My time is not my own. I am His servant. "The King's business requires haste." We cannot wait all day for some one to get ready who neither has the orders, nor feels the necessity. "Salute no man by the way." God's business is important. He requires obedience. Thus we also keep out of some one else's way. There is too much involved to fail God. Let those take their time and come behind who have no message. The devil can often use them tremendously to hinder those who have.

We finally reached "Azusa" and found about a dozen saints there, some white, some coloured. Brother Seymour was there, in charge. The "Ark of God" moved off slowly, but surely, at "Azusa." It was carried "on the shoulders" of His own appointed priests in the beginning. We had no "new cart" in those days, to please the carnal, mixed multitude. We had the devil to fight, but the Ark was not drawn by oxen (dumb beasts). The priests were alive unto God," through much preparation and prayer. Discernment was not perfect, and the enemy got some advantage, which brought reproach to the work, but the saints soon learned to "take the precious from the vile." The combined forces of hell were set determinedly against us in the beginning. It was not all blessing. In fact the fight was terrific. The devil scraped the country for crooked spirits, as always, to destroy the work if possible. But the fire could not be smothered. Strong saints were gathered together to the help of the Lord. Gradually the tide arose in victory. But from a small beginning, a very little flame. I gave a message at my first meeting at "Azusa." Two of the saints spoke in "tongues." Much blessing seemed to attend the utterance.

It was soon noised abroad that God was working at "Azusa." All classes began to flock to the meetings. Many were curious and unbelieving, but others were hungry for God. The newspapers began to ridicule and abuse the meetings, thus giving us much free advertising. This brought the crowds. The devil overdid himself again. Outside persecution never hurt the work. We had the most to fear from the working of evil spirits within. Even spiritualists and hypnotists came to investigate, and to try their influence. Then all the religious sore-heads and crooks and cranks came, seeking a place in the work. We had the most to fear from these. But this is always the danger to every new work. They have no place elsewhere. This condition cast a fear over many which was hard to overcome. It hindered the Spirit much. Many were afraid to seek God, for fear the devil might get them.

We found early in the "Azusa" work that when we attempted to steady the Ark the Lord stopped working. We dared not call the attention of the people too much to the working of the evil. Fear would follow. We could only pray. Then God gave victory. There was a presence of God with us, through prayer, we could depend on. The leaders had a limited experience, and the wonder is the work survived at all against its powerful adversaries. But it was of God. That was the secret.

A certain writer has well said: "On the day of Pentecost, Christianity faced the world, a new religion-without a college, a people, or a patron. All that was ancient and venerable rose up before her in solid opposition. And she did not flatter or conciliate any one of them. She assailed every existing system, and every bad habit, burning her way through innumerable forms of opposition. This she accomplished with her "tongue of fire" alone. Another writer has said: "The apostasy of the early church came as a result of a greater desire to see the spread of its power and rule than to see new natures given to its individual members. The moment we covet a large following and rejoice in the crowd that is attracted by our presentation of what we consider truth, and have not a greater desire to see the natures of individuals changed according to the divine plan, we start to travel the same road of apostasy that leads to Rome and her daughters." I found the earthquake had opened many hearts. I was distributing especially my last tract, "The Last Call." It seemed very appropriate after the earthquake.

Sunday, April 22, I took 10,000 of these to the New Testament Church. The workers seized them eagerly and scattered them quickly throughout the city.

Nearly every pulpit in the land was working overtime to prove that God had nothing to do with earthquakes and thus allay the fears of the people. The Spirit was striving to knock at hearts with conviction, through this judgement. I felt indignation that the preachers should be used of Satan to drown out His voice. Just as he later used them to stir up hatred and murder, during the great war. Even the teachers in the schools laboured hard to convince the children that God was not in earthquakes. The devil put on a big propaganda on this line. I had been much in prayer since the earthquake, and had slept little. After the shock in Los Angeles the Lord told me definitely He had a message for me for the people. On the Saturday after, He gave me a part of it. On Monday the rest was given. I finished writing it at 12:30am. Tuesday, ready for the printer. I kneeled before the Lord and He met me in a powerful way, a powerful witness that the message was from Him. I was to have it printed in the morning. From that time until 4am., I was wonderfully taken up in the spirit of intercession. I seemed to feel the wrath of God against the people and to withstand it in prayer. He showed me He was terribly grieved at their obstinacy in the face of His judgement on sin. San Francisco was a terribly wicked city.

He showed me all hell was being moved to drown out His voice in the earthquake, if possible. The message He had given me was to counteract this influence. Men had been denying His presence in the earthquake. Now He would speak. It was a terrific message He had given me. I was to argue the question with no man, but simply give them the message. They would answer to Him. I felt all hell against me in this, and so it proved. I went to bed at 4 o'clock, arose at 7, and hurried with the message to the printer.

The question in almost every heart was, "Did God do that?" But instinct taught men on the spot that He had. Even the wicked were conscious of the fact. The tract was set up quickly. The same day it was on the press, and the next noon I had my first consignment of the tract. I was impressed I must hasten and get them to the people as quickly as possible. I was reminded that the ten days I was called by the Lord to prayer was up the very day I received the first of the tracts. I understood it all now, clearly.

The enemy tried to hinder, by smashing a part of the type in the press. I had warned the printer of this. But it was set up again so that I lost no time through it. I distributed the message speedily in the missions, churches, saloons, business houses, and in fact everywhere, both in Los Angeles and Pasadena. Besides I mailed thousands to workers in nearby towns for distribution. The whole undertaking was a work of faith. I began without a dollar. But He supplied the money, as needed. I worked hard every day. Brother and Sister Otterman distributed them in San Diego. It required courage. Many raved at the message. I went through all the dives with them in Los Angeles. All hell was stirred. A man followed me on the street raving like a maniac. He followed me into a business house, to do me violence. But the Lord protected. He then tore my tract up publicly at the curb, to show his hate. Many threw the message down in a rage, only to pick it up again and read it. It seemed God held them to it. The saddest part was the fact that nearly all the preachers worked with the enemy in the matter. But I was only giving them the Word of God, on earthquakes.

I ordered the tracts in 25,000 lots. A policeman was put on my track. The people were stirred up so. But the Spirit warned me and I saw him coming. I was enabled to dodge him. He would have stopped the circulation of the tract before my work was done. I could feel hell's rage rolling up against me like a cloud. But God gave me courage for the work. Hundreds were distributed in Santa Barbara. A conductor stopped me giving them out on a Pasadena car, though the people were reaching out their hands for them. He threatened to throw me off the car. The devil was stirred. Orders came in for thousands from towns in Southern California, which I mailed to them. Everyone was curious for the tract, though it burned the most of them like fire. Sometimes they would get so excited on the street cars they would get off before they reached their street. My very presence seemed to convict many. My soul was steeped in prayer. The message struck consternation to thousands of souls. I have never written a tract that had so much influence.

God sent Brother Boehmer from Pasadena to help me. He stood outside and prayed while I went into the saloons with them. They were mad enough to kill me in some instances. Business was at a standstill after the news came from San Francisco. The people were paralysed with fear. This accounted to some extent for the influence of my tract. The pressure against me was terrific. All hell was surging around me, to stop the message. But I never faltered. I felt God's hand upon me continually in the matter. The people were appalled to see what God had to say about earthquakes. He sent me to a number of meetings with a solemn exhortation to repent and seek Him. At "Azusa Mission" we had a powerful time. The saints humbled themselves. A coloured sister both spoke and sang in "tongues." The very atmosphere of Heaven was there.

Sunday, May 11, I had finished my "Earthquake" tract distribution. Then the burden suddenly left me. My work was done. Seventy-five thousand had been published and distributed in Los Angeles and Southern California, in less than three weeks time. At Oakland, Brother Manley, of his own volition, had printed and distributed 50,000 more, in the Bay Cities and round about, in about the same space of time.

The following are some extracts from the "Earthquake" tract: **"But what has God to do with earthquakes?"**

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'When Thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness' - Isa. 26:9. 'Which removeth the mountains, when He overturneth them in His anger, which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble' - Job 9:5, 6. 'The mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt; and the earth is upheaved at His presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by Him' - Nahum 1:5,6. 'And I will punish the world for their evil. Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of her place, in the day of His fierce anger' - Isa. 13:11,13. 'Then the earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the mountains moved, and were shaken, because He was wroth. There went up a smoke in His wrath, and fire out of His mouth

devoured. The Lord thundered from Heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. Then the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were laid bare, by the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His anger' - Ps.18. 'Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and turneth it upside down (perverteth the face thereof), and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. The foundations of the earth do shake, the earth is utterly broken, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall stagger like a drunken man, and shall be moved to and fro. The transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it.' - Isa. 24:1, 18, 20. 'Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of Hosts with earthquakes, and great noise, and the flame of a devouring fire.' - Isa. 29:6. 'Men shall go into the caves of the rocks, from before the terror of the Lord, when He arises to shake terribly the earth.' - Isa. 2:19. 'And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air and there was a great earthquake.'-Rev. 16:17, 18. And will you claim there is no God in earthquakes? John Wesley has said, 'Of all the judgements which the righteous God inflicts on sinners here, the most dreadful and destructive is an earthquake.'

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From "Earthquake Tract," April, 1906.

The San Francisco earthquake was surely the voice of God to the people on the Pacific Coast. It was used mightily in conviction, for the gracious after revival.

Frank Bartleman

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Just as in the days of the San Francisco earthquake I sense that it is very hard for us to accept that God somehow allowed the recent Japanese Earthquake and previous Indian Ocean disaster. The question in almost every heart in 1906 was, "Did God do that?" Frank Bartleman's comment, "But instinct taught men on the spot that He had. Even the wicked were conscious of the fact." I think we might find a different response today. I fear that we are not ready to accept that these dreadful earthquakes and tsunamis are the work of God but would prefer to think that this was some random natural event outwith His control or purpose. Maybe some would rather consider that Satan is able to shake the earth. But do we need to be asking God to speak to our hearts, seeking Him for understanding? We need to consider that we do not understand God's view of the gross sin and evil that is increasing, perhaps like it has never done before. Our seared consciences mean that we now accept evil on an unprecedented scale. We no longer discern the filth that Satan is spewing out upon us all - and it is going to get worse! And even our acts of goodness ignore the existence of the God who made us and in whom we live and breath and have our being. Man sees himself as his own salvation but few discern this sin. Some may seek revival but "the depth of revival will be determined by the depth of the spirit of repentance."¹

Jesus warned us that there "will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and **upon the earth dismay among nations at the roaring of the sea and waves**, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Luke 21:25&26) Jesus went on to say, "When these things **begin to take place** straighten up and lift up your heads for your redemption is drawing near," (verse 28).

The present disaster does not mean that the end of this age is coming immediately for there must yet be even greater shaking. Jesus told us that "Nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there would be famines **and earthquakes**. But all these things are **the beginning of birth pangs**," (Matthew 24:7&8).

I say again, further shaking is yet to be seen as has been prophesied. The fullness of the wrath of God - the day of the Lord - is still future. Before then we will see "a time of distress such has never occurred since there was a nation until that time," (Daniel 12:1). Even this distress is not the coming judgement of God for this distress will occur when Satan is thrown down to the earth and great tribulation will result, for then he knows he only has a short time. (See Revelation 12:12). This "great tribulation," Jesus told us, would be "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world," (Matthew 24:21). Few understand this time aright but it will be in this tribulation, not before, that we are going to see the good news of the Kingdom preached unto all the world as never before, those, part of the true church, laying down their lives even unto death. God is still "not wishing any to perish but for all to come to repentance," (2 Peter 3:9) In what lies ahead we need have no fear for we can be safe in the Kingdom of God. A reality that can bring salvation to spirit, soul and body, nothing harming us outside God's will and purpose. This reality also brings the assurance that we are saved for the future aspect of the Kingdom that will see our full redemption. Let us, therefore, "strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for our feet, so that which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. **Pursuing** peace with all men and **the sanctification (holiness) without which no one will see the Lord**," (Hebrews 12:12-14), for beyond tribulation let us be aware God's full wrath will be poured out on the sin and evil that has been chosen by a mankind who have turned their backs on their Creator.

"He (God) has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven' And this expression, 'Yet once more' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a Kingdom which cannot be shaken let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe, for **our God is a consuming fire.**" (Hebrews 12:26-29)

Colin Winfield - March 2011
