

## 24. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PRESENT WORLD

Earthquakes are mentioned many times in the Bible, but at the Messiah's return at the end of this age there will be earthquakes worldwide causing massive destruction. Several OT descriptions of end-time earthquakes (Isa 29:5-8, Ezek 38:18-23, Zech 14:3-11) link the earthquakes with the Lord's coming and are confirmed by teaching in the NT.

**Isaiah** Suddenly, in an instant, the Lord Almighty will come with thunder, earthquake, and great noise, with hurricane, tornado, and devouring fire. Then the hordes of all the nations that attack Ariel, that wage war on her and her fortress and besiege her will finish as it was with a dream, vanish like a vision in the night (Isa 29:5-7).

An earthquake, great noise, and flaming fire will accompany the Lord, as he suddenly descends to earth to defeat Israel's enemies, the massive armies from all the nations fighting against Ariel, a symbolic name for Jerusalem.

**Ezekiel** This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. In my zeal and fiery wrath, I declare that at that time there shall be a massive earthquake in the land of Israel. All the fish, birds, wild animals, reptiles, and everyone in the world will tremble at my presence. The mountains will crumble, the cliffs will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground. I the Sovereign Lord declare that I will send disaster against Gog and his armies on all my mountains. Every man's sword will be against his comrade. I will punish him with plague and bloodshed. I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur on him and his troops and on the many nations with him. In this way I will show my greatness and my holiness to many nations, and reveal myself visibly to them. Then they will know that I am the Lord (Ezek 38:18-23).

The context in Ezekiel is in the latter years when Gog musters armies from the uttermost parts of the north (Russia and/or Turkic peoples) as well as from Persia, Sudan, Libya, and possibly Turkey. They

gather to fight against the land of Israel which is restored from war, and whose people were gathered from many nations. Literally “I will be known in the eyes of many nations” (38:23) is not just referring to mental perception. At that time “every eye will see him” (Rev 1:7) and then they will know that he is the Lord.

**Zechariah:** Then the Lord will come out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the mountain will split in two from East to West, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving North and half moving South. You (a future generation of Jews) will escape via my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you (your ancestors) fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. And so, the Lord my God will come with all the holy ones (angels or saints or both) (Zech 14:3-5).

The context here is the end-time siege of Jerusalem by all nations. The Lord will come out of heaven and descend to the Mount of Olives which splits in two and saves the Jews under siege in Jerusalem. After defeating his enemies, he becomes king of all the earth. The first thing the Lord does when he returns is to raise the righteous dead and rapture the living saints, so the holy ones mentioned in vs. 5 may be the saints. The word for ‘holy ones’ in Hebrew is ambiguous, it may refer to saints or angels.

There has never been such a powerful earthquake since people have been on the earth (Rev 16:18). Fish, birds, and animals, big and small, will all feel its effect. Every human being on the face of the earth will tremble at the Lord’s *presence* because this earthquake is the result of divine feet touching down on the Mount of Olives in the person of the Messiah. Mountains and cliffs will crumble and every wall will collapse. John adds that the cities of the nations will fall. Tectonic plates are among the most powerful forces that shape the Earth. A worldwide movement will result in earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis.

**Haggai:** This is what the Lord Almighty says: In a little while I will once more shake the sky and the Earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the wealth of all nations will be brought, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the Lord Almighty. ... Tell

Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the sky and the Earth. I will overturn royal thrones and destroy the kingdoms of the nations (Hag 2:6, 21-22a).

Cf. Heb 12:26-29: His voice shook the Earth then, but now he has promised saying: Once more I will shake not only the Earth but also the sky. The words 'once more' indicate the removal of what is shaken - things that have been made - so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us thank God and worship him acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

The writer of Hebrews doesn't mention the word earthquake, but following Haggai, he speaks of a shaking of the Earth. The Lord's voice first shook the Earth at Sinai at the giving of the Law. There will be one more final shaking, of both sky and Earth, at the end of this age to usher in the Messianic age. Contractions will be shaken and cities will be destroyed so that only what cannot be shaken may remain. The Messianic kingdom that the righteous will inherit will last for as long as the world lasts. After the nations are shaken to their foundations, they will bring their treasures to Jerusalem to beautify God's temple. Treasures like silver and gold belong to God and will be used to decorate the Messianic temple (Hag 2:8).

Finally, we come to the book of Revelation where earthquakes are mentioned five times (Rev 6:12, 8:5, 11:13, 19, 16:18), although we will restrict our attention to three of them. Many commentators interpret the references to physical destruction as figurative of political disturbances on Earth, but the frequency of this language and the severity of the resulting destruction suggests that the earthquakes are to be understood literally.

**Rev 6:12** When he removed the sixth seal, I saw that there was a violent earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to Earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was displaced.

The sixth seal brings us to the climax. The seventh seal only hints at the significance of the situation: Silence in heaven for half an hour! It appears that the great earthquake, which is felt worldwide, is the

cause of all the other phenomena, volcanoes, tsunamis, destruction of cities etc..

**Rev 11:13** At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people were killed. The survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

This earthquake must be part of the worldwide earthquake activity mentioned above. It occurs at the end of the 1260 days that the two witnesses preach in Jerusalem which coincides with the Messiah's return. A tenth of the city fell and 7000 people were killed, while the Jewish survivors gave glory to God, acknowledging his power and suggesting that their hardened hearts are softening and they are ready to be saved.

**Rev 16:17-21** The seventh angel emptied his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came from the throne in God's temple, saying: It is accomplished! There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on Earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the wine of his furious wrath to drink. Every island vanished and the mountains were not to be seen. Huge hailstones fell from the sky, each weighing about a hundred pounds. They fell on people and they cursed God because of the plague of hail, for the plague was so terrible.

The seventh bowl, like the sixth seal, describes the death and destruction that results from the great earthquake which terminates the Great Tribulation at the Lord's return. It was tremendous, greater than all previous earthquakes. In his wrath, God destroyed Babylon. All the cities of the nations collapse as described in Revelation 18.

## **The sign of the Messiah in the sky**

What is it that will appear in the sky and cause Israel to mourn (Mt 24:30)? The fifth seal, the sixth trumpet, and the sixth bowl of wrath all set the scene for Jesus' imminent return. When Ezekiel had his vision of the Lord's return, he saw the glory of God coming from the East with the sound of a waterfall, and the Earth lit up with his glory. When Jesus returns with power and great glory, the sign will be the bright light and the loud noise coming from the East. As it

approaches, there will be lightning and thunder and rumblings, and when the Lord descends to the Mount of Olives, there will be the massive earthquake. All the continents will quake, resulting in destructive tsunamis and submersion of islands, landslides and crumbling of mountains, and the collapse of the cities of the nations.

The sun and moon will already be darkened, and the sky will appear to roll up like a scroll. Communications will be destroyed and the wicked will call on the rocks to fall on them, to hide them from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Messiah.

What are they seeing? As the Lord approaches, the resurrection and rapture occur, when Jesus transforms his people into immortal beings. Jesus will descend with these great clouds of people to New Jerusalem, their heavenly home in the sky above Israel, and then he will descend to the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. From there he will give Israel victory over the surrounding armies at the battle of Armageddon. After the persecution of Christians throughout the world during the previous 3 ½ years, people will be in doubt that this is the return of Jesus Christ, coming to save his people and to judge the sinners.