

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

Earthquakes are mentioned many times in the Bible, but at the Messiah's return at the end of this age there will be a series of earthquakes causing destruction worldwide. 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 these are confirmed by the NT.

Isaiah: "Suddenly, in an instant, *the LORD Almighty will come* with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire. Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel, that attack her and her fortress and besiege her will be as it is with a dream, with 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 who are 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 great earthquake in the land of Israel*. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and *all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence*. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble, and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment on 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. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the

sight of many nations. 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.

Zechariah: “Then *the LORD will go 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 Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley*, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him (Zech 14:3-5).

The context here is the end-time siege of Jerusalem by all nations. The Lord will descend from heaven to the Mount of Olives which splits in two and after defeating the enemies, he becomes king over all the earth.

“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 God 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 heavens and the Earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will

come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. ... Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms (Hag 2:6, 21-22).

“At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the Earth but also the heavens.” The words “once more” indicate the removal of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.” (Heb 12:26-29).

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 heavens and Earth, at the end of this age to usher in the Messianic age. Created things are shaken so that what cannot be shaken may remain. The Messianic kingdom that the righteous are inheriting will last for as long as the world lasts. After shaking up the nations, they would bring their treasures to Jerusalem to beautify God's temple. Silver and gold belong to God and he will use such treasures to create a beautiful Messianic temple (Hag 2:8).

Finally, we come to the book of Revelation where “earthquake” is 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 “I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a *great 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 heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and *every mountain and island was removed from its place.*”

The sixth seal brings us to the climax. The seventh seal only hints at the significance of the situation; there was silence in heaven for about half an hour! It appears that the great earthquake, which is felt worldwide is the cause of all the other phenomena, volcanoes and tsunamis.

Rev 11:13 “At that very hour there was *a severe earthquake* and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and 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. Only a tenth of the city fell and 7000 people were killed, while the Jewish survivors gave glory to God, which suggests that they are ready to be saved.

Rev 16:17-21 “The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Then there came 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 cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail because 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. It was tremendous, greater than all previous earthquakes. In his wrath, God destroyed Babylon; all the cities of the nations collapsed as described in Revelation Ch. 18.

The sign of the Messiah in the sky

What is it that will appear in the sky and cause Israel to mourn (Matt 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 shining 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 lighting and thunder and rumblings, and when the Lord descends to the Mount of Olives, there will be an 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 cut 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 Lamb.

What are they seeing? As the Lord approaches, the resurrection and rapture take place, as 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.