

The coming earthquake in Israel

Tony Benson

THE DEVASTATING earthquake that struck northern Pakistan on 8 October 2005 must have made us think of the even more devastating earthquake that is to strike Israel at the time of Christ's return. It was of particular interest, therefore, to see in the *Jerusalem Report* of 17 October the headline, "A disaster foretold", and the explanatory words, "Today, next week, or in 50 years, a massive earthquake will devastate Israel. And Israel, say the experts, is no better prepared than New Orleans was for a catastrophe sure to come".

The purpose of the article was not so much to provide details of earthquakes in Israel, nor to express the fears of geologists that one is due soon, but to highlight the unreadiness of the nation for it when it does come, and the consequent injuries, loss of life and loss of property.

A major earthquake has occurred in Israel about once a century on average. The last was in

1927, a 6.4 magnitude one (by no means huge), which killed 500 people at a time when the population of the Land was a tenth of what it is now and there were no high-rise buildings. The most recent government estimate is that a similar magnitude earthquake today would leave 18,000 dead, 90,000 injured and 400,000 homeless.

In an office block near Ben Gurion Airport in Israel, occupied by the Geophysical Institute of Israel, computers are connected by satellite to sixty seismographs all over Israel. Seismologists are monitoring the situation night and day. In Jerusalem the City Council has a Security and Emergency Department whose head considers that there will be 50,000 casualties in Jerusalem alone, with the remaining population being potentially in need of food, water and shelter. The government's earthquake steering committee claims there are 400,000 buildings in Israel in danger of collapse in an earthquake because the govern-

The Holy Land (and environs): A history of earthquake disasters

In its May/June 1989 issue, the *Bible Student* magazine published an article of the above title by Dr Martin Degg of the Department of Geography at Chester College. It is a revised version of an article previously published elsewhere, and publication in the *Bible Student* resulted from the editors of the *Bible Student* becoming aware of the author's researches from a report in a local paper. The research was done on behalf of the insurance industry to aid insurers in assessing the probability of earthquake damage occurring in Middle Eastern countries.

Here are some points from the article:

- Historical records provide much evidence of repeated earthquake activity along the Red Sea, around the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Zagros Mountains on Iran's border with Iraq, and along the Jordan/Dead Sea fault system running into Syria and Lebanon.
- Earthquakes in the Eastern Mediterranean area are particularly liable to cause tsunamis, which would affect the coasts of Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Syria.
- There is little in the way of historical records of volcanic damage in the area, but there are volcanoes, particularly on the Red Sea coast, which show signs of recent activity. (End-time prophecies speak of what can surely only be volcanic eruptions, see Ezekiel 38:22, for example.)
- There is historical evidence of a process called liquefaction occurring in low-lying areas with high water tables as a result of earthquakes. This involves the subsoil becoming unstable and buildings sinking. This could have a disastrous effect on oil terminals in the Persian Gulf.

Perhaps the most interesting point made in the article is that the Dead Sea/Jordan Valley was unusually quiet in the twentieth century, whereas the Red Sea area seems to have had high seismic activity. Dr Degg's research indicates that when seismic activity is high in the Red Sea area it is low in the Dead Sea/Jordan Valley area and vice versa. He says: "If the historical patterns are to be repeated, sooner or later the emphasis of earthquake activity in this part of the Middle East must swing away from the Red Sea and back to the Dead Sea fault system".

These columns, found in the excavated ruins of Beth-shan, are thought to have collapsed in the great earthquake that affected the area in A.D. 749.



PICTURE: TONY BENSON

ment has not imposed building construction to a standard which would be earthquake resistant. There is particular fear that if an earthquake strikes while children are at school there would be severe losses because schools have not been built to appropriate standards until recently.

The article draws parallels between the unpreparedness of New Orleans for major flooding caused by a hurricane and the unpreparedness

of Israel for a major earthquake. In the case of New Orleans, the need for stronger flood defences was recognised long ago but nothing was done about it. In the case of Israel, the need to strengthen buildings against earthquake damage is recognised but little is being done about it. Lack of finance is the problem, as it was with New Orleans; governments and local authorities are simply not prepared to commit large sums

Websites about earthquakes in Israel

The edition of the *Jerusalem Report* which contained the article on which this article is based gave details of a number of websites with information about earthquakes, which I have investigated. Details are as follows:

www.shalomjerusalem.com/earthquakes/. This quotes all Bible passages referring to earthquakes and provides data about the frequency of earthquakes worldwide since 1900, claiming that earthquakes across the world have increased significantly in the last ten years.

www.idolphin.org/quakes.html. An article about earthquakes in the Bible. Contains a list of major earthquakes which have occurred in Israel right up to the present day. Presents evidence that there was no increase in the number of earthquakes during the course of the twentieth century, but the information only runs up to 1995, and does not therefore contradict what the previous site says.

Articles about the researches of Amos Nur (see main article) may be found by going to the Stanford University website, **www.stanford.edu**. Type 'news Amos Nur' into the search box on the site's home page and articles about his researches will be listed for you to click on and read.

www.gii.co.il is the website of the Geophysical Institute of Israel (see main article). It provides rather technical lists of earthquakes in Israel in modern times but not much in the way of interesting information.

Doing a Google search on 'Martin Degg' (see separate panel) leads to links to several further examples of his research on earthquakes, though not necessarily to do with the Middle East.

of money on protection against future disaster when there are so many pressing calls on finance to meet more immediate needs.

One scientist who has done much work on the subject of earthquakes in the Middle East is Amos Nur, the Israeli-born Professor of Geophysics at Stanford University, California. His research has shown that earthquakes in Israel result from the fact that the Afro-Sinaitic Plate is moving against the Arabian Plate at a rate of about six millimetres a year. This means they should have moved twelve metres against each other in the last 2,000 years, but the evidence is that they have moved only about four metres at the most. Earthquakes occur when plates get stuck against each other, then move with a jerk. A jerk of eight metres would produce a colossal earthquake.¹

A major cause of concern in Israel is that even a moderate earthquake could cause the retaining walls of the Temple Mount to collapse on the southern side, where there is already a bulge. If this happened then there could be a major outbreak of protest from the Arabs, who would blame Israel for the collapse.²

The experts referred to in the *Jerusalem Report* article tend to talk about "the earthquake" rather than "an earthquake", and use the word "when" rather than "if", so sure are they that a major earthquake is coming. We know from Scripture that a very large earthquake is going to happen in Israel at the time of Christ's return. Whether there will be a big one, though not as big, before then we do not know. However, the warning of Scripture is there for modern Israel in its pride in its achievements:

"And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols He shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. 2:17-19).

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1. I wrote in more detail about Amos Nur's researches in "Earthquakes in the Holy Land" (Sept. 92, p. 332).
 2. See "[The Temple Mount 'bulge'](#)", David Burges, [Aug. 2003, p. 319](#).

The Garden of Eden (2)

Andrew E. Walker

IN THE FIRST PART of this article we concluded that, though the Garden of Eden is traditionally placed in Mesopotamia, other references to Eden in Scripture, and the use of 'Eden' language in various passages, indicates a location in Israel. We conclude the article by considering 'Eden' connections in descriptions of the tabernacle and in the incident of David and Goliath.

The use of 'tabernacle' language

Throughout the first two chapters of Genesis we find language that we come across many times later in Scripture. In particular, many of the phrases used of Adam and the garden are used of the building of the tabernacle. It is worth listing these in some detail.

- 1 When God finished His creation it was all "very good", and the earth is described in Genesis 2 as comprising three parts:
 - the earth
 - the land of Eden
 - the Garden of Eden.

There is a correspondence here with the tabernacle and the temple. Each comprised:

- the outer court
- the holy place
- the most holy place.

- 2 This link is further strengthened in the way the same language was used at creation and by Moses describing the erection of the tabernacle in Exodus 40:

"And on the seventh day God *ended* [Heb. *kalah*] His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Gen. 2:2);

"And [Moses] reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses *finished* [*kalah*] the work" (Ex. 40:33).

Note also the very strong links with the prayer of Jesus in John 17.

- 3 Just as the most holy place could be entered by the high priest only, and that once a year on the Day of Atonement, so the Garden of Eden was the place given especially to one