

Earthquakes and God's plan

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YAHWEH CREATED and sustains all creation. Everything was designed and created by Him, and through His Word He reveals that He has a plan and purpose with the earth. As Creator, God is in absolute control of all aspects of His creation. He established all the forces and cycles associated with what the world calls 'nature'. Mostly these forces operate in accordance with laws established by God, such as the laws of physics. There are other times, however, when God intervenes in the affairs of man by means of these apparently natural forces to further His will and purpose.

The psalmist makes it perfectly clear that God can and does use natural phenomena to work out His purpose in the earth:

"Praise the LORD from the earth,
you water-spouts and ocean depths;
fire and hail, snow and ice,
gales of wind obeying His voice"

(148:7,8, NEB).

All these mighty natural forces may be subject to the direction of God to fulfil His purpose. Often these phenomena just occur in accordance with natural laws, but the psalmist is clear that there are times when God uses these forces specifically for His purposes. Although these particular verses refer only to weather events, we may be certain that the same is true of all natural forces, including earthquakes. This article looks at how God has used earthquakes in the past and how He will use them in the future to further the outworking of His plan and purpose with this earth and with men and women who wish to serve Him.

In Genesis

Genesis 7 is the record of God's spectacular intervention in human affairs in the days of Noah. God had become frustrated with the wickedness of the general population, and decided to use a flood to wipe out all men except the family of Noah. That flood involved more than just heavy, sustained rain, it also involved massive earthquakes. Verse 11 speaks of the fountains of the deep breaking up, apparently indicating that vast reservoirs of water were released from under the earth through seismic upheaval. On the exact day God required this effect, and coinciding with

the Divinely sent rain, there were widespread earthquakes.

Genesis 19 records another of God's judgements, this time upon the cities of the plain. Lot was told to flee Sodom because God had decided to destroy these places for their wickedness. The language of verses 24 and 25 is dramatic, speaking of cities being overthrown and of fire and brimstone raining upon them. Clearly this is the language of cataclysm. Moses describes a massive shaking of the whole region, with associated volcanic activity that destroyed the cities. Abraham could see the smoke rising from a great distance away.

It is commonly believed that the site of these cities is now submerged beneath the Dead Sea, and the chemistry of that region testifies to such activity in ancient times. This is an unstable area, and earthquakes must have occurred from time to time. But on this occasion these things happened immediately after Lot fled, and not before. So while these were natural phenomena, God obviously was in control and directing the forces. The cataclysm took place at exactly the time determined by God, and not before or later.

Earthquakes and deliverance

God intervened in the affairs of men in the days of Noah to judge the corrupted race, and in the days of Lot to judge wicked cities. In the process He delivered His servants Noah and Lot from the vexing threat of these evil people. In 1 Samuel 14 we find another reference to God using an earthquake to deliver His people from evil men in the days of Saul.

At the end of 1 Samuel 13 the Philistines are in control of a key site and threatening Israel. 1 Samuel 14 opens with Saul's son Jonathan determining to do something about the threat posed by the Philistines. In verses 12-14 his courage meets with some success, and that had a demoralising effect upon the Philistines. God added to this by sending an earthquake at just the right time to facilitate the total defeat of the Philistines (vv. 15,16). The remainder of the Israelite army heard the commotion and, realising that the Philistines were in a panic, quickly joined in to complete the rout of the enemy (vv. 19-23). Verse 20, speaking of the Philistines, says: "every man's

sword was against his fellow". That phrase speaks of utter panic among the Philistines, and we shall encounter something similar in another context.

Jonathan and his armour-bearer showed great courage in their daring initiative. Saul and the Israelites cooperated with them in the overthrow of the Philistines. But, as verse 23 says so clearly, it was God Who delivered Israel, by sending an earthquake to allow Israel to capitalise on what Jonathan had initiated. The land of Israel is prone to earthquakes, but this was a case of seismic activity at exactly a time that matched the plan and purpose of God.

Genesis 7, Genesis 19 and 1 Samuel 14 are three examples of how God used earthquakes at specific times in the past to judge the nations and deliver His people. These were not haphazard events. They were carefully controlled in accordance with God's purpose. He has also used earthquakes in other ways.

Watersheds in God's plan

Exodus 19 is a key chapter in God's unfolding plan and purpose. It records the time when Israel entered into covenant with God, and marks the inauguration of the Law of Moses as the basis by which God's people would serve Him. It is a significant watershed in the history of God's dealings with man. At that momentous time God used an earthquake and other natural phenomena to impress the people and mark the significance of what was transpiring. Verses 16-18 describe thunder, lightning, fire and earthquake coinciding by Divine control as dramatic confirmation of a significant event. This was the beginning of a new age, the Mosaic Age. The shaking indicated that the former arrangements were being swept away.

In the New Testament we discover that a miraculous earthquake also marked the close of the Mosaic Age, the end of the age when God's servants were required to worship and serve Him in accordance with those arrangements established at Mount Sinai. In Matthew 27 the record speaks of several remarkable phenomena associated with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a supernatural darkness during the middle of the day (v. 45), and then there was an earthquake at exactly the climax of the events, when the Lord actually expired (vv. 50,51).

An eclipse is not necessarily a supernatural event. They occur regularly and can be predicted. Jerusalem, like the Dead Sea region nearby, is

in an area that is subject to earthquakes from time to time. So these two things by themselves need not have been Divinely directed.* The remarkable thing about the events on this day, however, is that they occurred at precise and significant times. God intervened to cause these forces to be unleashed at times that suited His purpose because He was making a point.

This shaking of the earth signified another watershed in God's plan and purpose. As at Sinai in the days of Moses, God was instituting new arrangements for worship, a new dispensation for the servants of God. The Lord Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Law of Moses, and now God's servants would be required to serve Him under Christ.

The overthrow of Gog

So we see that in the past there were times when God used earthquakes to judge the nations, in particular the enemies of His people. There were also other times when earthquakes accompanied significant milestones in God's plan and purpose. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find there are prophecies associated with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth and the establishment of the Kingdom that refer to earthquakes.

Ezekiel 38 is a detailed description of the conflict which will occur at this time. It describes a massive coalition that invades Israel and initially meets with success. The invading host is, however, overcome and defeated by Divine power. God intervenes, as He has in the past, to deliver His people, as described in verses 18-23.

There is no mistaking the fact that it is Divine power that defeats the invader. As in the days of Lot, God uses a range of natural phenomena, including earthquake and volcanic activity, to demoralise and defeat the army. Verse 21 describes the enemy panicking in exactly the same way that the Philistines did in 1 Samuel 14: "every man's sword shall be against his brother". The enemy actually start to kill themselves in their blind panic as these awesome forces are unleashed upon them.

* The crucifixion occurred at the time of Passover, when there is a full moon. An eclipse occurs when the moon is between the earth and the sun and therefore not visible. The darkness which occurred at the crucifixion could not have been caused by an eclipse, therefore.—*T.B.*

In Ezekiel 39 there is a hint that these forces might also be unleashed elsewhere in the earth. Some of the invading army in Ezekiel 38 come from Magog, and in 39:6 the prophet speaks of fire being unleashed there. This might be a reference to further volcanic activity affecting Europe at that time.

The outcome of this dramatic intervention is stated in 38:23; God will be acknowledged and honoured as the supreme authority in the earth. This is another example of earthquake being used to mark the end of an era and the beginning of another dispensation, in this case the Kingdom of God on earth. And it is also a case of earthquake being used to punish the wicked and to deliver God's servants from their enemies.

Joel 3 is another description of the events prophesied in Ezekiel 38, and it too speaks of a Divinely directed earthquake that brings events to a climax. In verses 16 and 17 we read of God intervening when the invading forces appear to be in control of the land of Israel. The invader is overthrown by this Divine intervention, and, as in Ezekiel 38, God is acknowledged as supreme.

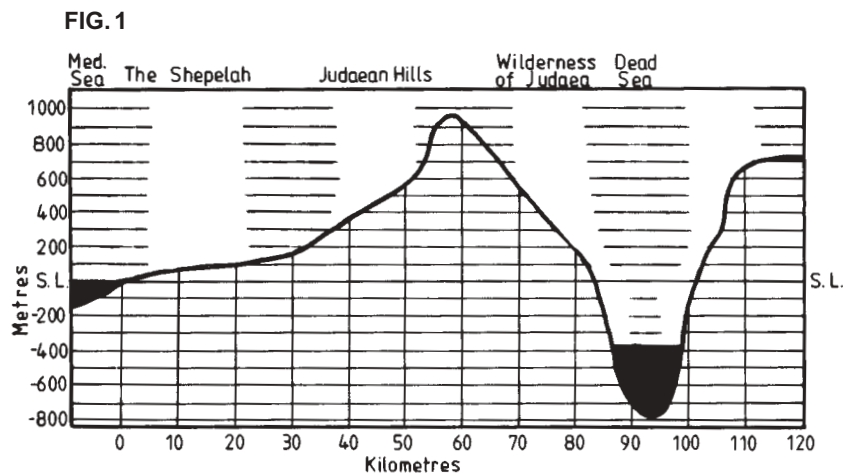
Finally, Zechariah 14 is another record that parallels those of Ezekiel 38 and Joel 3. Again there is reference to a massive earthquake. Zechariah 14, like the passages in Joel and Ezekiel, speaks of the invader enjoying initial success (vv. 1-3), but then presents God as intervening to deliver His people when the invader appears to be in control. Although verses 4 and 5 do not use the word 'earthquake', they clearly describe a massive physical upheaval. Verse 10 suggests that it will be an earthquake of enormous magnitude. The man who will stand on the Mount of Olives (v. 4) is the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 5 the saints, those faithful servants of God from all ages,

are said to be with him as he inaugurates the Kingdom of God on earth.

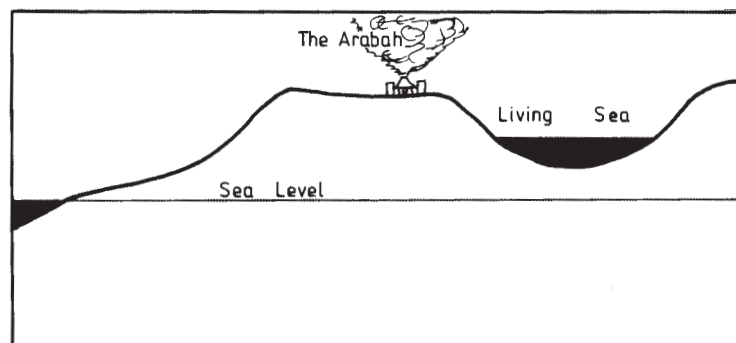
Changes in the land

Zechariah 14:10 describes the remarkable topographical changes that will take place as a result of the great earthquake, including the formation of an elevated plain: "All the land shall be turned as a plain [*arabah*] from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place". Figure 1 shows a cross-section of the land today and as it will be after the great earthquake. The map at Figure 2 overleaf suggests how the land will be changed by the splitting of the Mount of Olives, the elevation of the region and the establishment of the plain described in verse 10.

This massive earthquake will reshape the land of Israel in preparation for Jerusalem to become the capital of the Kingdom of God on earth and the centre of worship for all nations. The social



Cross section of the land today



Cross section of the land tomorrow

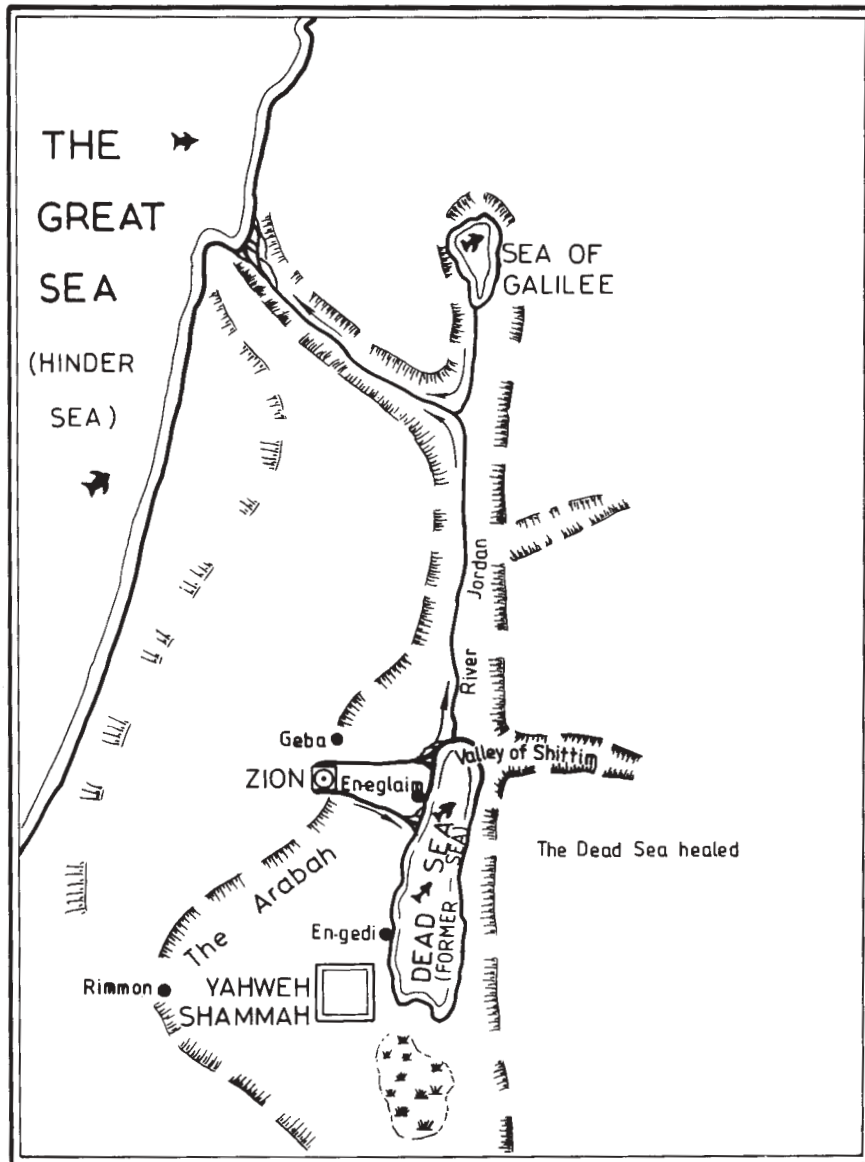


FIG. 2 Israel after the earthquake of Zechariah 14

and political changes that come about as a result of God's Kingdom being established on the earth will be profound, and they will impact on all men everywhere.

It is also possible that the earthquake described by Zechariah will have an impact that is felt across the globe. The map at [Figure 3](#) shows that Jerusalem is near the top of the Great Rift Valley, which follows a fault line deep into Africa. The earthquake Zechariah describes would be larger than any ever recorded in human history. It is likely that, as well as shaking Israel, it will cause

massive quakes right along this fault line, and probably earthquakes and tidal waves further afield. Some scientists have speculated that such a massive earthquake would have a devastating effect upon buildings and structures around the world.

Whatever the facts when it occurs, what Zechariah describes is clearly a major change in the affairs of man. As in the past, so in the future; when God intervenes to fulfil His will and purpose with the earth it will be associated with Divinely directed earthquake.

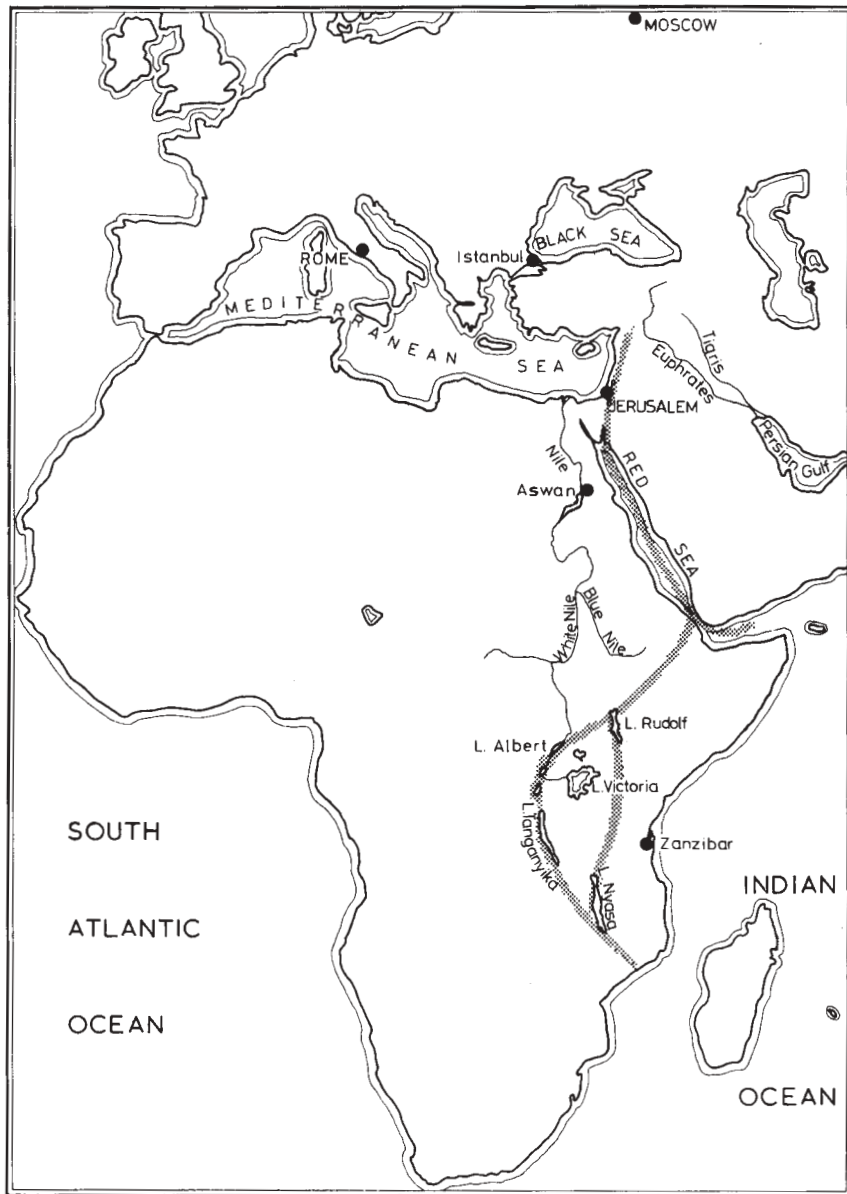


FIG. 3 Rift Valley fault lines

Yahweh is the Creator and Sustainer of this earth and all its systems. He is in control and He has a purpose. The signs about us confirm that the Lord Jesus Christ will soon return to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God. If we wish to be among those saints spoken of in Zechariah 14:5 as assisting Jesus Christ in this task we need to prepare now. All the structures and schemes of mortal man are soon to be swept away by a massive physical and social upheaval. Now is the day of opportunity for

us to prepare for that time. Tomorrow may be too late.

Maps and diagrams are from Brother Tony Benson's book *Stormy Wind Fulfilling His Word*, published by the Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, Adelaide, 1983—a revision, with illustrations added by the publishers, of a series of articles appearing in *The Testimony* from May 1979 to January 1981.