



Malvern Mashal Makon 86

**More thoughts on the shaking of all things
Perspectives on Earthquakes**

A spiritual Perspective

It takes courage and understanding to maintain a divine perspective in today's skeptical world, but that is what spiritual training helps us to do. First we must look upwards in reverence, then inwards in order to discern life's meaning and priorities and to grow in the Lord's wisdom, and then outwards in terms of wider prayer and action.

God's means and methods haven't changed. As we shall see further on in this edition, He still uses cataclysmic events as part of the shaking that lead many to salvation. Let's begin with this powerful quote from Ephesians 1:16-23, in The Message.

I can't stop thanking God for you—every time I pray, I think of you and give thanks. But I do more than thank. I ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!

This energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

The passage raises many issues. If the church at the centre isn't right then neither will the periphery be. God is on the move, as He prepares for His return, but a world that is fundamentally out of kilter with His heart and purposes is suffering the inevitable consequences.

Responding to the recent Shaking

There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven . . . There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:11, 25-28).

Carol Sampson led us in a really special time in church last Sunday praying and making music for Japan. I'm sure this must have been happening in church after church around the world, Michael Ross Watson for example wrote:

We had amazing times of intercession for Japan and forgiveness to the Japanese people for past atrocities last Sunday. When a Japanese lady came forward to represent her people it was amazing to hear the burden of prayer and the weeping. The only thing missing were classical musicians playing in the Spirit!

Japan is certainly receiving far more prayer than usual – and this is necessary. Yonggi Cho used to say that it took many times more hours of prayer to achieve a breakthrough in that fundamentally aging and non Christian land than it did in South Korea, where there is more of an open Heaven. As we have shared on various occasions over the last twenty five years in our sendouts, when people do make a profession of faith in Japan it is by no mean easy for people to develop their discipleship.¹

As the world contemplates the scale of the damage in Japan and the increasing blood bath in Libya, and all the knock on effects, I am sure that many will be feeling much as Justin Coldstream does in this email that he sent us recently.

As one surveys the desperate situation, it simply makes me want to cry – we have missionaries there, and I have also learnt a bit of Japanese recently by way of taking an interest. It seems that it has to be seen as the work of the enemy, rather than simply a 'judgement' of God. Thoughts of Elijah (1 Kings 19), experiencing the wind, earthquake and fire come to mind. The Lord was not in these things, but he was in the still small voice which followed. We should pray for the still small voice to penetrate the Japanese soul, where strong social mores have previously made that difficult.

Perspectives

The earthquake was so powerful that it has actually lowered the Japanese coastland, making it *more* vulnerable to incursions of the sea. How people view such events will depend on many factors. You could argue that the crucifixion was 100% Judas' fault for betraying Jesus. Or that it was 100% Jewish and Roman authorities fault for condemning Him unjustly. But the Bible also spells it out that Jesus 'was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.' (Acts 2:23) The maths doesn't add up, but in God's extraordinary wisdom and economy it all makes sense.

It is harder to apply this principle when it comes to contemplating the sort of catastrophes we have recently been witnessing. Marie, a pastor's wife, sent us these thoughts, for example, which I know a lot of other people identify with:

When I saw the aerial film of the Tsunami flooding across those Japanese towns and villages I knew that I was viewing something seriously devastating and significant. The water was black and swept away everything in its path. There were 'small' cars on the roads trying to drive away. They were engulfed. Thousands must have been killed.

The news from Japan gets more serious the more the impact of the devastation is revealed: Whole towns obliterated . . . the threat of a nuclear meltdown . . . This is a modern country like our own. I am asking 'What is happening?' 'What I am looking at?' and 'Is this the Lord's judgement?' 'Is this the beginnings of the end-time birth pangs?' The Middle East is in turmoil at the same time.

I know that there was a terrible persecution of the early Christians and missionaries in Japan, and I know that their hardened paganism contributed to their cruelty in the War. But they suffered for that . . . I find myself asking God for mercy. That they will call on the Lord. I find myself in tears over it.

I can't help thinking that too that the Lord is giving a stark warning to us all. Why should we escape the wrath to come? Our country too has abandoned God.

A couple of other things:- One survivor described a 'stink' prior to the arrival of the Tsunami. Why was the water black? The pictures of the towns that are no more reminded me of the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.²

*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
[Romans 8:22]*

Times of Shaking (From Malvern Mashals 48 & 50)

There are many pointers towards the great Day, so we must surely take note of what happens in the earth. The following extracts are taken from Malvern Mashals 48 and 50, where I wrote in depth on this subject in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Haiti and the earthquake and tsunami in Chile – which was one of the biggest earthquakes of all time.

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. (Haggai 2:6)

Global warming certainly can't be blamed for earthquakes. Those who love the Lord, and who are trained in the prophetic, will not have missed the fact that Scripture teaches clearly that things do not happen by chance.

My attention has been drawn once more to this verse from the prophet Haggai – the only verse from this little book that bears his name that is quoted in the New Testament. Hebrews 12:26 interprets this quotation, pointing back to the great shaking that took place at Mount Sinai when God gave the law to Moses (Exod 19:16) and then forward to the shaking that will mark the end of the world.

The main point the author stresses is that we who are in Christ have an unshakable kingdom that will survive the all but universal devastation that will mark the last days. (Heb 12:28-29)

In the Haggai passage, you will note the reference to the sea as well as to the land being shaken. Nations have once again and very recently been “in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.” (Luke 21:25) The phrase the “roaring of the sea” reminds us that the sea sometimes stands for chaos as well as a source of fear in biblical prophecy. (cf Isaiah 17:12)

The truly terrifying tsunami that battered the Chilean coast and various islands in the Pacific was up to six metres high. Scripture warns that:

Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:28)

One thing we cannot stress too clearly. The people who get caught up in such shakings are no worse than anyone else. Jesus' teaching about this in the light of the collapse of a first century skyscraper makes that abundantly clear (Luke 13:5).

In recounting Jesus' great declaration of what is to come, Luke omits His saying about the gathering of the elect (Luke 21:27, cf Matthew 24:31 (but really the whole chapter) and Mark 13:27: *And He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.* This indeed is His chief concern at His coming: that we may be with Him forever.

Luke quotes instead Jesus' encouragement not to be bowed down by these things, but to maintain the hope of our salvation and the certainty that His return will be publicly displayed and that all that is hidden and veiled will be revealed. Everyone everywhere will see Him for who He really is: the Lord of Glory.

Earthquakes

Many years ago I wrote in *Ravens and the Prophet*:

An earthquake is caused by huge tectonic plates grinding against each other. The Bible adds to this natural understanding the supernatural interpretation that it may also be a sign of the heavenly powers impacting the Earth.

Consider, for example, the earthquakes that accompanied the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, or the tremor that marked the Israelites' defeat of the Philistines. The earthquake which swallowed Korah and his friends when they rebelled against Moses, and the still larger one in Amos's day are other prime examples of God's judgment on a rebellious people. (Exodus 19:18; 1 Samuel 14:15; Numbers 16:31-33; Amos 1:1, 9:1)

With such powerful precedents, we are hardly surprised to read that a mighty earthquake accompanied the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. Later, the building the disciples were meeting in would be shaken in answer to their intense prayers. Yet another earthquake set Paul and Silas free from their unjust imprisonment, and led to the conversion of their jailer. (Acts 16:26)

More recent quakes twenty plus years ago in Romania and Armenia likewise paved the way for great spiritual harvests in their aftermath – just as the longest running revival in history – in Argentina – had its origins in the shame and humiliation the nation went through as a consequence of losing the Falklands conflict.

When London was struck by two such quakes in the late eighteenth century, the Church saw them as a serious warning and as a call to repentance. It is a sad reflection that we in the West no longer heed the Power behind earthquakes. There have been a number of prophecies in recent years that London will itself be the centre of either a major flood or earthquake in the years ahead. Concerted intercession has already, I believe, protected it from flooding. But Revelation 11:13; 16:15-21, Isaiah 29:6, Joel 2:10, and Zechariah 14:4-5 show clearly that there are still many significant earthquakes to come in the days ahead.

When sinful deeds and attitudes meet the holiness of God there cannot but be shaking. We should not be surprised – but we should redouble our prayers for people to humble their hearts to make it possible for God to bring good things out of these shakings.

It is interesting that following the prayer people put up for Chile after its great earthquake there, came the extraordinary episode which again focused the world's attention on Chile, and no doubt played its part in many trapped miners giving their lives to the Lord, with a strong resulting testimony to the Lord.

Pray that out of all these shakings, the Lord will jolt many into the level of dependency that we need to be living and moving in.

Most of us can think of times when God allows hard things to come our way but only because in the long run they turn out to be the very best for us. We ourselves are going through a variety of such shakings at the moment, as we know many of you are too. May He bring much blessing through them!

If large parts of the Church are purged of their carnality and worldliness and prayerlessness, then God will have achieved through the shaking what could not have been done in easier times in making the Bride of Christ shine like a star in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation (Phil. 2:15).

In a subsequent edition (Mashal 50) we returned to this theme and looked at the enormous fallout from an earthquake in Portugal.

The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755

In the first of my series of articles on shaking in Malvern Mashal 48 I mentioned how the Lord has moved in power in the aftermath of a number of major earthquakes. This is by no means automatic, however. Derek Williams sent me the following insights and information about the extreme earthquake that hit Lisbon in the mid eighteenth century. This earthquake was one of the worst recorded earthquakes in history. In Lisbon it caused a huge tsunami, unchecked fires and untold destruction. It was so bad that people in Lisbon talk about 'pre-earthquake' and 'post-earthquake' when referring to times in their history. The effects were felt globally. Even shingle mountains in Ireland were caused by the tsunami.

Before it struck Portugal was a world power as a result of colonising the Americas with Spain. However, if you ever watch 'The Mission', you will see that the Portuguese were taking the Indians as slaves rather than evangelising them. This was an abomination. The Spanish also did some seriously bad stuff, but in Mexico over 8 million people converted from the Pagan Aztec faith to Christianity and the Conquistadors did some serious repenting – which resulted in powerful reconciliation with the Aztecs.

As a result of the Portuguese slave trade, certainly in the same time period, this earthquake struck. It effectively ended Portuguese colonisation.

Disasters such as Lisbon made many question the beneficence as well as the power of God. This was due in no small measure to the relentless attacks of Voltaire and Rousseau against Divine Providence. From this moment on, the whole bent of philosophical thinking across Europe became noticeably less God-centred.

You might find it helpful to read Mark Meynell's review of a novel called *The Wrath of God*: a vivid novel about the Lisbon earthquake.

Mark points out that Portugal at that time was a profoundly catholic nation, but of a rampantly corrupt and hypocritical nature. The earthquake struck at 10am on Saturday 1st November 1755 - precisely the moment that many of Lisbon's citizens would have been in church. The 1st November is also All Saints' Day, a huge feast day in the life of the city. Was this God's judgment on sham piety? Or did it have nothing to do with God at all?

Lord Jesus,

Forgive us for all the ways in which we have hidden behind religion in unhelpful ways, or ignored You altogether. May word of Your doing, and the awareness of who You really are, and how You are moving more and more impact the nations of the world – especially Japan we pray. May the shaking cause hard hearts to melt in the warmth of Your love – and let men, women and children emerge in power and stature to meet the needs of this hour that You have prepared for the world to pass through.

With our love as ever

Robert & Ros

www.ruachministries.org

23 Upper Chase Road, Malvern. Worcs, WR14 2BT

¹ The following notes on the spiritual state of Japan were written in **Operation World** before the earthquake.

Uncertainty about the future has prompted spiritual searching. This is partly in response to many economic and social changes that threaten the status quo in Japan. The constant threats of a major earthquake, of economic decline, the widening generation gap and the feeling of social isolation (hikikomori) that so many suffer from are provoking widespread soul-searching.

Japan is a nation [with an aging population] that is facing many crises and is a culture with no apparent direction. (Only one per cent are Christian) Accompanying this drifting is its lack of hope or confidence in the future. This gives opportunity for prayer. For more details see:

www.operationworld.org/japa

Barnabas Fund report that over 300 churches in the affected area have lost buildings pastors and members. The people are traumatised, but the churches believe that this could be an opportunity to impact people's lives in a new way.

² Yahoo Answers came up with this suggestion as to why the waters were Japan consists of a band of volcanic created land masses, comprised of mostly volcanic ash soils. However the Tsunami stricken area contains unusually dark black topsoil (epipedon) assigned by the name "ando" or dark soil. This soil, or Andosols is not so much the result of volcanic origin, but a property inherited from the original vegetation. Volcanic sediment erosion in combination with soil darkened by organic matter and unconsolidated sediments (eolian, alluvial, lacustrine, or marine) resulted in very black water when agitated. Source: Diagnostic Surface Horizons (Epipedons), Keys to Soil Taxonomy, Eighth Edition)

It sounds plausible, though someone else suggested it may have been caused by oil floating on the surface.

