

Disaster and Devastation:

The Earthquake in China

“Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.”

—Isaiah 29:6

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, THE Prophet Isaiah is directing God’s righteous sentence of judgment and condemnation against the people of Ariel. He wrote, “Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city [the lion of God, *Marginal Translation*] where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel.” (Isa. 29:1,2) Ariel was the symbolic name for Jerusalem [*Strong’s Bible Concordance*, #739, 740]. It was the city where King David lived, and where Israel’s holy Temple was located. Isaiah’s message thus predicted the city’s destruction at the hands of Gentiles under the Babylonian Empire, and the corruption of its Temple worship given to them by God.

SYMBOL OF CORRUPTION

Throughout the Bible, the term “Babylon” is used as a powerful symbol to identify and reflect corruption and false religion. The judgments, of which the Prophet Isaiah spoke, are thus pointing symbolically toward that false system known as Christendom. The warning of the coming judgment was meant to awaken the people of Israel who were being held in bondage in Babylon, and to liberate them from its unholy influence. The symbolic earthquake in our featured text thus marks the level of turmoil that would identify the debauched system that has existed and flourished throughout the long centuries of the Gospel Age, and especially during its present closing years.

BABYLON'S JUDGMENT

The revelator spoke of the final and greater judgment that would come upon this ecclesiastical system, when he wrote, “After these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”—Rev. 18:1-4

RESERVED FOR JUDGMENT

When speaking of our time and the closing years of this age, the Apostle Peter also used symbolic language to describe God's judgments that would come upon the earth. He said, "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved under fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (II Pet. 3:7) Further in his epistle, he wrote, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."—vs. 10

OBEDIENCE REQUIRED

Because of disobedience to the laws which God had given to earth's first parents, Adam and Eve were driven from their perfect surroundings of Eden's garden, and into a cursed and hostile environment. "Unto Adam he [God] said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Gen. 3:17-19) As a mark of the Father's righteous judgment, we further read, "Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he

was taken. So he drove out the man; and and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”—vss. 23,24

These scriptures describe in part the terrible legacy of sin and death that has been handed down to the many generations of the human family for more than six thousand years. The history of mankind has been one of continual sorrow, pain, violence and corruption. It has been written in blood, and without exception has ended in the grave.

Furthermore, as a result of mankind’s first parents being driven out from the paradise of God, man has had to cope with thorns and thistles in a cursed earth because of sin.

A VISIBLE SIGN

As a powerful manifestation of the Father’s ultimate plan for the recovery of the human family from the sentence of death, an ‘earthquake’ marked the very time when our Lord Jesus died and gave his perfect human life for the sins of the world. Luke and Matthew both recorded the sobering event. “It was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost [spirit].” (Luke 23:44-46) In Matthew’s account, he referred to the earthquake that took place. “Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.”—Matt. 27:51

Afterward, when the women came to Jesus' tomb, they were astonished to learn that he had been raised from the grave. "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."—Matt. 28:1,2

EARTHQUAKES IN DIVERSE PLACES

As added testimony concerning the level of violence that was foretold to occur in the earth, both literally and figuratively, during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, Mark included in his Gospel account the following prediction in connection with earthquakes. He wrote, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows."—Mark 13:8

Earthquakes occur as a result of a sudden release of energy in the earth's crust that in turn creates seismic waves. This results in the rupture and shaking that usually takes place along a geological fault at the earth's surface. Minor quakes occur constantly around the world and larger ones less frequently, but with more substantial displacement. An area of particular high probability is located along the Pacific coastline that encircles the Pacific Ocean. These areas extend for thousands of miles along the entire western coasts of North and South America, as well as along the eastern coastlines of

Asia. Earthquakes in these areas often result in a great loss of life and property.

The term earthquake may be used in a symbolic sense, or it may identify an actual convulsion in nature. In our featured text, the Prophet Isaiah used the word 'earthquake' as a symbol to emphasize a particular feature of violence among men and their institutions. In its literal sense, it points to the earth and its physical characteristics that may react violently.

On May 12, 2008 there was a significant and major earthquake in China's Sichaun province. The Sichaun quake unleashed one of the most powerful and devastating sequence of events that has taken place in that particular location, or in other areas of the world, during the past several decades.

THE CHINA QUAKE

The great Sichaun quake measured 8.0 and 8.3 according to the China Seismological Bureau (7.9 as reported by the United States Geological Survey). It was powerful enough to be felt in Beijing 1,500 km away, as well as in Shanghai 1,700 km from the epicenter. At the time of this writing, the confirmed death toll stands at 69,136 people killed, with an additional 374,061 injured and 17,686 missing. It is also estimated that nearly five million homes were destroyed and ten million people affected. The official numbers are expected to rise dramatically. Within 72 hours of the initial quake there were 52 major aftershocks measuring between 4.4 and 6.0 which created further havoc.

Seismologists explain that the earthquake occurred in two major stages lasting about two

minutes. This sudden release of energy displaced approximately 9 meters along a fault line about 240 km long, and generated deformations of the earth's surface more than 3 meters. Because of the increased levels of stress along this fault, United States Geological Seismologists warn that there is high risk of major aftershocks over the next several weeks and months.

As a consequence of this displacement, roads were made impassable for relief workers because of numerous rock and landslides. Several 'quake lakes' were also created because of landslides blocking the free passage of water in nearby rivers. It was necessary for engineers to create man-made waterways around these rock slides to alleviate the rapid buildup of water behind these dams that were creating the 'quake lakes.' Further damage to dams along waterways required the evacuation of entire villages because of flood risk.

RESPONSE TO DISASTER

In an attempt to grasp the magnitude of the disaster, the *Los Angeles Times* (May 17, 2008) published a news report written by Ching-Ching Ni, a *Times* Staff Writer, under the title, "A Small Hospital with a Tall Order." We quote in part from Ching's report which was submitted from Jiangyou, China. "Outside a facility that is too damaged to use, hundreds of quake victims are treated in a tent-city triage center. There is no time to rest when hundreds of earthquake victims are still making their way to the small city hospital where Dr. Huang Dong works. The building remains upright, but unsafe. Patients must receive treatment

outdoors, where a tent city of tarps draped over hospital beds serves as an open-air triage center. 'I have never seen this much trauma, this many people screaming in pain,' said Huang. 'I can't begin to describe how that feels.' Thousands suffered gruesome injuries, straining the capabilities of humble facilities in Sichuan like this one, which was never equipped to cope with so many trauma patients at the same time.

"Sirens blared, and soldiers wheeled in people who were immediately assessed and treated under a couple of garden umbrellas shading them against the relentless sun. More than 100 families crowded the huge outdoor ward. Relatives kept patients cool with bamboo fans. Nurses rubbed alcohol on open wounds. Doctors read X-rays clipped to beds. Old people with their eyes shut moaned. For the medical staff, one of the biggest worries was keeping patients free of post-operational infections. 'Antiseptics, antibiotics, bandages, they are all in short supply.' Dr. Huang said."

AFTERSHOCKS

Several strong aftershocks have also caused further landslides, knocked out telephone lines, and buried vehicles and homes. These shocks severely complicated rescue efforts throughout the region. One powerful shock that measured 5.5 could be felt in Chengdu, a major city and the provincial capital 75 miles away from the epicenter. Many army trucks with heavy equipment were sent from Chengdu in response, and convoys of ambulances began transporting injured people from remote mountain regions to larger hospitals in the provincial capital.

MOBILIZATION

The People's Liberation Army mobilized one of its largest ever peacetime deployment of troops. More than 130,000 soldiers were reported to have reached the area, with thousands more soon on their way, according to the official New China News Agency. The railroads responded by sending 56 trainloads of soldiers along with 157 rail cars of ambulances and equipment. The military's role was not only one to rescue and care for quake victims, but also to repair and inspect damage to the country's infrastructure. Roads and railroads had to be cleared of landslide rubble. Numerous dams were a major concern, some with serious cracks that needed to be repaired. Many residential areas in the valleys were entombed in mud from the landslides. Government officials and citizens found themselves hard-pressed to cope with the earthquake's aftermath, the country's worst natural disaster in more than thirty years.

CHANGING TIMES

An interesting and revealing news article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* (May 17, 2008) that exposed a major change in China's twenty-first century response to natural disasters and world opinion. It was submitted by Barbara Demick and Mark Magnier under the caption "China's Old Ways Shaken by Quake." Quoting in part from this report, we note, "In a system with a centuries-long tradition of austere leaders laying down the law from behind their palace walls, China's response to its worst disaster in three decades has revealed a nation in the throes of political change."

“The China that emerged from the wreckage of Monday’s magnitude 7.9 earthquake in Sichuan province looked surprisingly modern, flexible and, if not democratic, at least open. It has admitted foreign rescue experts into disaster areas and tolerated reporting by a more aggressive news media. The leadership has appeared more responsive to the public, and the public in turn reacted with an outpouring of individual initiative to help.”

MASSIVE REBUILDING

A few days later another news report was published by the *Los Angeles Times* (May 22, 2008) under the caption “Survivor Unrest Prods China to Act.” It was submitted by Mark Magnier who wrote, “Beijing embarks on a \$10 billion rebuilding effort as it curbs media reports amid growing victim discontent. China moved to contain some of the political fallout of last week’s devastating earthquake with the launch of a major spending program amid growing survivor impatience and a tightening of media control.

“Beijing ordered state agencies to cut their budgets by 5% to help fund a \$10 billion reconstruction effort, the State Council, China’s Cabinet. Premier Wen Jiabao also called for a halt to new state projects that are not earthquake related. Many major newspapers featured an identical picture of government leaders mourning. The propaganda ministry tends to insist on uniformity when an issue is sensitive. New permit requirements for media reporting in the area have been imposed and checks stepped up.”

The State Council of China declared a three-day mourning period for quake victims. People stood

silent for three minutes while air defense, police and fire sirens, and horns of vehicles, vessels and trains sounded. All vehicular traffic came to a halt.

CHRIST'S FUTURE KINGDOM

It is our hope and prayer that the devastating and chaotic situation in China will improve in the coming months and that the Chinese people who have been so uprooted by the earthquake and its aftermath can soon begin to rebuild their lives. Christ's future kingdom of righteousness and peace will soon be established as the only answer for the sin-sick world. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."—Rom. 8:22,23

Our Heavenly Father's ultimate purpose and plan for our world and its inhabitants will be manifest to all mankind when Christ's future kingdom over all the earth is established and the New Covenant is in operation for the recovery of the human family from sin and death. Isaiah reminds us, "Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein." (Isa. 42:5) The psalmist confirms, "Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."—Ps. 115:15,16

NOT IN VAIN

The Prophet Isaiah again spoke of the ultimate plan and purpose of the Father in preparing the earth for his human creation. “Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.”—Isa. 45:18

A COVENANT OF PEACE

There is much scriptural evidence that reveals that our loving Heavenly Father cares for his human family and will grant them peace. The Prophet Ezekiel wrote, “I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid.”—Ezek. 34:25-28

SCENES OF TRANQUILITY

God’s prophet put in perspective some of the wonderful characteristics that will be associated

with that blessed time. He wrote, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ [adder’s, *Marginal Translation*] den.”—Isa. 11:6-8

NOTHING TO HURT NOR DESTROY

This wonderful scene describes the security, tranquility, and peace that is promised by our loving Heavenly Father. Isaiah further emphasizes the promise with the blessed assurance of our loving Heavenly Father. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—vs. 9 ■

“I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.

“And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. . . . There shall be showers of blessing.”

—Ezekiel 34:23-26