

Devastation and Despair: Nature's Uncontrollable Power

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therein.”
—Nahum 1:5*

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, THE Prophet Nahum speaks of God's day of wrath and vengeance that would mark the closing years of this present Gospel Age. He uses symbolic language to illustrate the intensity and severity of God's judgments. These judgments were to be directed against the long-established and unrighteous rule of fallen man.

POWERFUL SYMBOLS

Many of the symbols that Nahum used pertain to nature and its effects on our everyday world and its people. We read, “God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and

he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”—Nah. 1:2-7

A STORMY EARTH

It is very evident that our earth can be a violent planet and one that is frequently subject to vicious storms, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, and many other natural disasters. We have vivid firsthand illustrations of this vast power when it is unleashed. As this present Gospel Age draws to a close, there is increasing evidence that the level and intensity of natural disasters is rising. Many honest-hearted and sincere people are asking why a loving Heavenly Father would allow such terrible calamities of nature to destroy man and his surroundings.

UNLEASHED FURY

On March 11, 2011, the unprecedented natural power of the earth was unleashed on the island of Japan when it was hit with a destructive earthquake and accompanying tidal wave. When the

first reports of the disaster were received, it was learned that an 8.9 magnitude earthquake had occurred in the northeastern part of the country. It was later upgraded to 9.0, which is the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Japan. This becomes even more meaningful when it is realized that Japan experiences earthquakes on a regular basis. Furthermore, statistics show that it was one of the most powerful and deadly earthquakes ever recorded anywhere in the world.

Within a few minutes after the quake hit, a massive thirty-foot-high tidal wave known as a “tsunami,” triggered by the quake, smashed into Japan’s northeastern coast with tremendous force. The horrifying destructive wave swept away everything in its path and carried it for three miles on its way inland. The resulting scene of total devastation has rarely been seen before.

Mark Magnier and Carol Williams submitted a news report published by the *Los Angeles Times* (Saturday, March 12, 2011) under the title “In Disaster’s Grip” and with the subtitle “Vast Devastation Leaves Japan Mired in Anxiety and Suffering.” Quoting in part from the article, we read, “Japan’s most punishing earthquake on record and the devastating tsunami it triggered plunged the heart of the densely populated island nation into an apocalyptic scene of blazing buildings, cratered highways, waterborne rubble and frenzied efforts to avert radiation leaks at damaged nuclear power plants.

“The death toll is expected to rise sharply once disaster-response teams reach the hardest-hit areas and assess casualties, the National Police Agency and Defense Ministry said. The force of the magnitude

9.0 quake, which seismologists said released 1,000 times the energy of the January, 2010 earthquake in Haiti, broke the foundations under homes and buildings and opened up chasms in fields and pavement, swallowing cars and shearing off sidewalks and driveways.

“More than 100 aftershocks have jolted Japan since the temblor, including many of magnitude 6 or higher. The havoc unleashed on Japan has left the nation mired in fear, suffering and hardship. Millions of people are without power, utility officials said, and they warned that outages would continue indefinitely, with rolling blackouts persisting for weeks.”

JAPAN'S COASTLINE MOVED

The earthquake that struck Japan on March 11, 2011 was so powerful that analysts point out that it moved the whole earth. According to the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology, Japan's main island coastline shifted as much as 13 feet, and averaged about 8 feet along a stretch measuring 300 miles on the country's main island. The pattern of shift over that large an area is consistent with the general shift in the land mass also reported by the United States Geological Survey's Earthquakes Hazards Program in Pasadena, California.

Analysis of the global positioning system data at the Geospatial Information Authority in Tsukuba, Japan reported that the massive earthquake moved Japan's Oshika Peninsula 17 feet in an east-south-easterly direction toward the quake's epicenter. Data indicates that the quake also dropped the

peninsula by 3.9 feet. This displacement was the largest ever recorded for Japan. The quake also shifted other points in the country including Tokyo, although the movements were smaller.

In addition to these remarkable statistics, it has also been confirmed that the earth's axis, around which the earth rotates, was shifted by about 10 inches as a result of the 9.0 earthquake. Geologists explain that the shift to the earth's tilt will have an effect on the length of day and the passage of the seasons. The speed of the planet's rotation will gradually adjust as the earth's mass is redistributed. They say that this will gradually take place over a long period of time.

THE RING OF FIRE

The Pacific Ocean basin is encircled with the circum-Pacific seismic belt commonly known as the "Ring of Fire." This natural arrangement consists of a nearly continuous series of volcanic belts, huge tectonic plates that continue to move, and oceanic trenches that form a horseshoe-shaped ring approximately 25,000 miles long. This is located along the entire western coastline of both North and South America, and the eastern coastline of Asia including the East Indies archipelago region. Within this area, there are 452 volcanoes which represent more than 75% of the world's active and dormant volcanoes.

The islands of Japan are situated in the north-western part of the Pacific Ocean basin in one of the most active areas along the "Ring of Fire." This is an extremely unstable area of the earth's crust where violent forces of nature, such as earthquakes

and volcanoes, occur on an almost daily basis. Japan has the distinction of having more earthquakes than any other country on the earth. About 90% of the world's earthquakes and 80% of the world's largest earthquakes occur along the "Ring of Fire." This fact is revealed by the most sensitive seismographic equipment that can detect approximately 7,500 earthquakes in Japan in any given year. Of these about 1,500 can be felt by the people who are living in that country, and about 50 can be felt in the Tokyo area alone.

PLATE TECTONICS

Tectonic plates are massive plates of rock that make up the earth's surface and provide its continental structure. These form the earth's crust which, in turn, floats on a plastic-like part of earth's mantle that lies underneath. These plates are about 60 miles in thickness, with continental plates tending to be thicker than oceanic plates. There are ten major tectonic plates and many smaller ones.

The continual movement of these gigantic plates and their collision with one another results in a violent convergence which causes the earthquake action so prevalent in the Pacific Ocean near Japan. Japan is situated in the subduction zone at the boundaries of three major and very active tectonic plates—the Philippine Sea plate, the North American Continental, and the Eurasian plates. Geologists explain that the Philippine Sea plate is gradually being forced under the Eurasian and the North American Continental Plates in eastern Asia near Japan.

TSUNAMI

The word “tsunami” is a Japanese word that means “harbor wave” suggesting that it is not seen until it is too late. It is estimated that approximately 80% of all tsunamis occur in the Pacific Ocean, but are possible wherever large bodies of water are located. They are associated with a series of tidal waves that are created when the tectonic plates collide and by the displacement of a large volume of water that can be generated by an earthquake, volcanic action, or a landslide. The waves formed are then sustained by gravity as they make their way toward the coast. Because of the immense amount of water and the high energy level that is available in the Pacific Ocean region near Japan, tsunamis have the power to create widespread devastation which is a frequent occurrence in Japan.

The *Los Angeles Times* (Saturday, March 12, 2011) published a news report written by Amina Khan entitled “From Ripples to a Wall of Chaos,” from which we quote in part. The article describes the power of a tsunami as it arrives on shore. “The tsunami launched by the earthquake off the eastern shores of Japan was triggered at a site called a subduction zone, where one tectonic plate slowly pushes beneath another. From there, the waves travel across the sea, little higher than ripples, before piling up into powerful towers of water as they hit land.

“Earthquake-caused tsunamis occur regularly in the Pacific Ocean, where subduction zones abound. When the pressure building between the two plates finally releases, one of the plates gets

distorted and pushed very quickly into a tiny mountain, perhaps a yard in height. That upward movement disturbs the water, as a pebble does when tossed into a pond. Just as a pebble causes many ripples, the disturbance sends a series of waves away from the ruptured fault line.

“The rate at which a tsunami travels depends on the depth of the water. The deeper the water, the less resistance there is to the wave’s movement, and the faster they travel. A wave moving across the 14,000-foot deep Pacific Ocean will typically travel at a rate of about 450 miles to 500 miles per hour—‘airline speeds.’ In the open sea, the waves, though very long, may appear short in height, perhaps a few inches. But as a tsunami wave approaches a shore and the ocean becomes more shallow there is less room for the rapidly moving water, causing a buildup of all the energy moving behind the wave front. With no way to go forward, all that water mass (and the energy it carries) gets pushed higher and higher, making the wave taller and taller.”

NUCLEAR CRISIS

While Japan was dealing with its worst ever earthquake and accompanying tsunami, another crisis was adding new fear and confusion at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The escalating catastrophe seems to slide from one grave episode to an even graver one, adding further fear as to how it all might end.

In an article entitled “State of Emergency Declared at Nuclear Plants” published by the *Los Angeles Daily News* (Sunday, March 12, 2011),

Marie Yamaguchi and Jeff Donn put the nuclear crisis in Japan in perspective. We quote in part, “Japan declared states of emergency for five nuclear reactors at two power plants after the units lost cooling ability in the aftermath of the powerful earthquake. Thousands of residents were evacuated as workers struggled to get the reactors under control to prevent meltdowns.

“The government declared a state of emergency at the Fukushima Daiichi unit—the first at a nuclear plant in Japan’s history. But hours later, the Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the six-reactor Daiichi site in northeastern Japan, announced that it had lost cooling ability at a second reactor there and three units at its nearby Fukushima Daini site. The government quickly declared states of emergency with those units too. Thousands of people living near the power plant were ordered to evacuate.

“Japan’s nuclear safety agency said the situation was most dire at Fukushima Daiichi unit number one, where pressure had risen to twice what is considered the normal level. The International Atomic Energy Agency said in a statement the diesel generators that normally would have kept cooling systems running at Fukushima Daiichi had been disabled by tsunami flooding.

“Even once a reactor is shut down, radioactive byproducts give off heat that can ultimately produce volatile hydrogen gas, melt radioactive fuel, or even breach the containment building in a full meltdown belching radioactivity into the surroundings, according to technical and government authorities.”

At the time of this writing, dangerous levels of radiation are escaping from the quake-stricken nuclear power plant 150 miles north of Tokyo. New explosions and fires are occurring at the plant which is creating new levels of fear and anxiety among the people. Prime Minister Naoko Kan has asked his people to stay calm even as the radiation levels are increasing. He said that authorities are doing everything possible to contain the problem.

THE PERMISSION OF EVIL

The terrible events that took place in Japan are not new to the human family, nor have the Japanese people been singled out for God's wrath. This is only one tragic event among countless others. Every year people around the world are confronted by natural disasters of all kinds. Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes kill, or maim, many innocent people. Many others succumb to accident, pestilence, and famine. Those who have not suffered death in any of these ways must submit to the dying process and the ultimate penalty of death. They will die from other so-called natural means such as disease, or old age. None of us can escape the grim reaper, death.

The principles of right and wrong are also an integral part of God's fundamental laws regarding his earthly creation. Much of the suffering that comes upon the human family is due to lifestyles that ignore these standards of right and wrong. Although man was endowed with a conscience, his conscience has become polluted, and his inner being is not always willing to acknowledge what would be appropriate and righteous actions. Man

has ignored his Creator while accepting increasing levels of immorality and asocial behavior.

When the first parents of the human family—Adam and Eve—disobeyed God’s commandments, they suffered the penalty of death as a result. That sentence was passed down to all others, even to our time. From the scriptural record, we read, “The LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die [dying thou shalt die, *Marginal Translation*].”—Gen. 2:15-17

Adam lived 930 years (chap. 5:5), which is less than a single thousand-year day in God’s estimation. “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (II Pet. 3:8) The *Marginal Translation* of the above verse in Genesis points out the fact that Adam and each of his progeny experience the process of growing old that ends in the grave.

MELTING ELEMENTS

As the world approaches the present foretold great time of trouble and distress, they are largely unaware that our loving Heavenly Father is preparing for their reconciliation and blessing under Christ’s future kingdom. The Apostle Peter used symbolic language to describe our day in prophecy. “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.”—II Pet. 3:10

God’s judgments are coming upon the earth—its social structure and institutions and its people. As we are witnesses to these great events, we do not fear as do others. Peter continues, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”—vss. 11-14

THE GOD OF THIS WORLD

The foretold prophecies written many centuries ago describe the final overthrow and destruction of Satan’s world which is based on selfishness pride. “In whom the god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (II Cor. 4:4) Christ’s kingdom of truth and righteousness will be established in its place. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.”—Hag. 2:6,7

The necessity for the present desolating judgments over the world are incidental to the destruction of Satan and his power over earth's people and its proud and selfish institutions. We are assured that the wonderful promises of God for the ultimate blessing of his human creation will be accomplished, and that the desire of all nations shall surely come. Through the far-reaching agencies of Christ's future millennial kingdom, the obedient of mankind will receive life on a perfected earth.

POWER OVER THE ELEMENTS

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was on a ship with his disciples when a vicious storm arose. The terrible wind and waves were crashing over the boat and its occupants, when Jesus arose to manifest the mighty power that his Heavenly Father had given him. In this case, earth's natural elements were the roaring sea and mighty waves which he was quickly able to control.

Mark recorded the incident, from which we read, "He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"—Mark 4:38-41

This recorded incident teaches that, although our faith may be tested even to the limit on certain occasions, we may put our complete trust in our

loving Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus to assume control over the earth and the destiny of its people. Under the administration of Christ's future kingdom, there will no longer be any threat of a terrifying earthquake and its accompanying tsunami waves to devastate Japan, or any other people.

PEACE BE STILL

“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”—Ps. 46:10 ■