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Are Earthquakes a Sign of the End?
Matthew 24:1-31

Last week we had a horrible earthquake occur in the Indian Ocean off the west coast of Sumatra. As Christians, we need to know if earthquakes of such magnitude are a sign of the end-times. Everyone here has probably wondered if it is or has some opinion one way or the other. It's important that Christians don't just spat off opinions but rather truth. We're interested in truth not opinions. Because we are talking about prophecy, we have to be very careful. We can't look back and confirm these events because we're looking forward to tell what is going to take place. So, I think we have to be very careful on questions like this. Many popular Bible prophecy teachers have taught that as we near the end times there will be an increase in the *number* and *intensity* of earthquakes. Now, as careful Bible students we need to know if this is a legitimate teaching. Was the earthquake we saw last week in the Indian Ocean a sign of the end-times? Certainly, it was of a great magnitude killing about 100,000 people and doing billions of dollars of damage as well as spreading disease and causing food shortages. In short people, we're trying to answer the question "are present day earthquakes a sign of the end-times?"

Earthquakes are mentioned 20 times in the Bible. Seven times in the OT under the word *raash* and 13 times in the NT under the word *seismos* from which we get the English word "seismology" which is the study of tremors in the earth. We can say with a high degree of certainty that the earth quaked greatly during the Noahic Flood about 2,440BC (Gen. 6-8). Following this we have the account of Peleg, during whose life the "earth was divided" (Gen. 10:25). The first explicit mention of earthquakes is during the days of King Ahab in 870BC (1 Kings 19:11). So, earthquakes have been occurring for thousands of years. Earthquakes are not new to this world. Modern day methods of measuring earthquake intensity are only about 100 years old so we can't really say that the intensity of earthquakes is increasing. Furthermore, world population has been increasing since Noah's flood and now people live all over the globe whereas long ago, they did not. Large earthquakes could have gone unnoticed if people only lived in one portion of the world. So, what we want to

know is if there's any biblical correlation between present earthquakes and signs of the end times. To do this you'll want to turn with me to Matthew, chapter 24. Matthew 24 is Matthew's record of what is known as the Olivet Discourse because they were on Mt. Olivet when Jesus gave this discourse to his disciples (Matt. 24:3). All three of the synoptic gospels record this discourse, Mark in chapter 13 and Luke in chapter 21 indicating that this is a very important discourse. But Matthew's account is considered by most scholars to be the most complete discourse so that is the one we will turn to. Additionally, Matthew is the most Jewish of the synoptic gospels. You'll want to keep that in mind as we approach this chapter. Matt. 24:1-30 can be outlined this way.

I.	Leaving the Temple	24:1-2
II.	Disciples 3 Questions	24:3
III.	Signs of the End of the Age (1st Half of Trib)	24:4-14
IV.	Signs of the End of the Age (2nd Half of Trib)	24:15-28
V.	Signs of Christ's 2nd Coming	24:29-30

Matthew 24:1-2 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. ² And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

What we have here is Jesus and His disciples walking out away from the temple and His disciples start looking back and pointing out the beauty of the temple buildings to Jesus. In verse 2 Jesus turns and looks at the Temple and predicts its future destruction. Everyone agrees that this was fulfilled in 70AD when Titus and the Roman armies burned the Temple. Then in v. 3 the disciples ask Jesus three questions. We want to look at each of these questions carefully.

Matthew 24:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Question 1: "Tell us, when will these things happen".

That is, when will the Temple be destroyed. Now, interestingly, Matthew doesn't record Jesus' answer to this question. However, Luke does record Jesus' answer to this first question in Luke 21:12-24. Notice the same question being asked in Luke 21:7. The key words here are in v. 12 **but before all these things...**

Luke 21:12-24 ¹² "But before all these things [i.e., before the events of vv. 8-11], they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. ¹³ "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. ¹⁴ "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; ¹⁵ for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. ¹⁶ "But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, ¹⁷ and you will be hated by all because of My name. ¹⁸ "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ "By your endurance you will gain your lives. ²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. ²¹ "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; ²² because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. ²³ "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

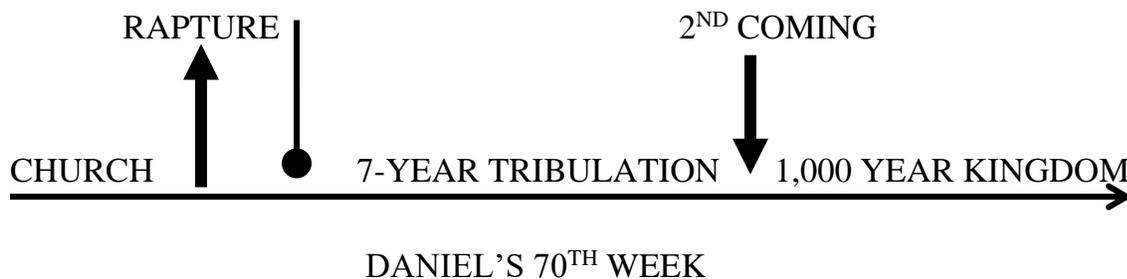
In other words, before all these other things are going to take place Jesus' (vv. 8-11)...the disciples are going to be persecuted and arrested and will give great arguments that can't be refuted, they'll be betrayed, they'll be hated and then Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies and trampled underfoot until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. This destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple there was fulfilled in 70AD and Jerusalem will remain under the control of Gentile powers until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The "times of the Gentiles" refers to the time during which Gentile nations are the head powers in the world. Obviously today we live in the time of the Gentiles. The times of the Gentiles will only be fulfilled when a Jewish nation is the head power in the world. This won't happen until the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ when He will set up His kingdom. So, we went here to Luke's account to answer the first question because Matthew's purpose wasn't to answer this question. Looking back, we know this was fulfilled in 70AD. Now for the other two questions because Matthew's purpose was to answer these two.

Question 2: "What *will be* the sign of Your coming?"

Question 3: "What will be the sign...of the end of the age?"

First, let's answer question 3, "what will be the sign...of the end of the age?" Then we'll answer question 2 since that's the order Jesus answers in Matthew 24. Actually, there are many signs that Jesus mentions here.

But first, "what did the apostles mean by the phrase '**end of the age**'?" The "end of the age" referred to the time when the kingdom would be restored to Israel. We know that won't take place until the 2nd Coming of Christ (READ Acts 1:3, 6-8). There are certain signs that occur just before the 2nd Coming that alert us that the "end of the age" is approaching. Now, remember that this context of Matthew 24 has nothing to do with the Church. Many Christians get confused here because they can't find the Rapture in Matthew 24. The reason there's no mention of the Rapture in Matthew 24 is because Jesus isn't talking about the Church. He's talking about His plan for Israel. The only mention of the Rapture in the gospels is in John 14:1-3 where Jesus is preparing His apostles for the Church. But here in Matthew Jesus is dealing with Israel. And the time period where these signs of the end of the age are given is known as the Tribulation period. We know from Daniel 9:24-27 that the Tribulation period is 7 years long. The Tribulation does not begin with the Rapture but when the Antichrist signs a firm covenant with Israel's leaders (9:27). The Antichrist will break this covenant in the middle of the tribulation but the Tribulation will not end until the 2nd Coming of Christ to restore the kingdom to Israel



The signs therefore of the "**end of the age**" are given here in Matthew 24 beginning in verse 4 and extending down to verse 28.

Verses 4-14 describe signs that take place during the 1st half of the Tribulation and verses 15-28 describe signs that take place during the 2nd half of the Tribulation, normally known as the Great Tribulation because the judgments of the 2nd half of the Tribulation are greater in intensity than those of the 1st half (24:21).

Let's read vv. 4-8 because this is where some scholars try to fit the present age. What they try to say is that vv. 4-8 began with WW1 in 1914 (Kingdom against Kingdom and nation against nation). Jehovah's Witnesses also say this.

Matthew 24:4-8 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. ⁵ "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. ⁶ "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end. ⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ⁸ "But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.

Many say these verses have to do with the present time, but such an interpretation does not fit the context. Jesus is interested in answering the question about the “**end of the age**”, He’s not interested in telling us what’s going to happen to the Church. The important point you don’t want to miss is this: there are no signs for the end of the Church. The Rapture of the Church takes place suddenly and without any warning signs. But the context here is not the Church, its **Israel, Israel, Israel**. This is why there is nothing about the Rapture in Matthew 24. Jesus is not commenting on the Church, He’s commenting on the ‘**end of the age**’ which involves the Tribulation and Israel.

Further, Jesus uses a key word in v. 8 when He says “**birth pangs**”. Vv. 4-8 are merely the beginnings of “birth pangs”. “Birth pangs” is a technical Jewish term referring to the time just before birth (for example of a baby) (cf. Jer. 30:5-7). The Hebrew equivalent of this word is derived from the root *chil* which has the basic meaning of “being in labor”. When a pregnant woman starts to have contractions then you know that she is in labor and is about to have a baby. Technically, that’s when the “**birth pangs**” start. They do not refer to the period before labor begins, that is, they do not refer to the earlier stages of pregnancy. Randall Price says, it is the “involuntary and uncontrollable nature of birth pangs, as well as their intensification leading ultimately to a time of deliverance,” which well pictures “a time of divine judgment that must run its course until the promise of new life could be experienced” for Israel. “**Birth pangs**” rise in intensity, occur for a relatively short period of time, and result in delivery. The “**birth pangs**” here in v. 8 therefore correspond to the time when the world will be in Labor (i.e., the 7-year tribulation) which will give birth to Israel’s salvation, the Messiah and Israel’s Kingdom.

Other OT phrases which correspond to the “**birth pangs**” are “the Day of the Lord”, “the day of Jacob’s trouble”, “the time of trouble”, et al. These all refer to the Tribulation which is for Israel not the Church. During the Tribulation the Church will be in heaven with Christ, her bride.

Therefore, vv. 4-8 do not refer to the present time but to the early stages of the Tribulation. If you compare vv. 4-8 with Revelation 6 you will find them parallel. That's because both sections deal with the events of the early stages of the Tribulation.

So, let's answer our original question? Are earthquakes a sign of the end-times? The answer from Scripture is "no." The section where "earthquakes" are mentioned is in vv. 4-8 but we showed that v. 4-8 are a part of the **birth pangs** and the **birth pangs do not begin until the Tribulation begins**. These earthquakes are signs that occur during the first half of the Tribulation and we are not presently in the Tribulation. Jesus says in v. 6 "*this is not yet the end...these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs*". In other words, in this text, labor has just begun for the world and Israel, the beginning of the end will have begun but it is not yet the end. So, earthquakes are a sign of the end of the age but not present-day earthquakes. Earthquakes and famines have been occurring for thousands of years. Something that has been occurring for 1,000's of years is not a very good sign.

So, what makes the "earthquakes and famines" of Matthew 24:4-8 distinct from those that occur presently? Many people say, "oh yes, we are in the Tribulation, we've already seen nations rise against nation (WWI and II), we've had kingdoms rise against kingdoms, we have earthquakes and famines, therefore we must be in the Tribulation." Well, these people aren't reading the text very carefully. First of all, the Tribulation is only 7 years long (Daniel 9:2, 24-27). Secondly, the "earthquakes" being referred to in Matthew 24 are *much larger in scale and more widespread* than those like we had last week. The text of **Matthew 24:7** says "*in various places there will be famines and earthquakes*". The Greek indicates these famines and earthquakes will be happening at various places simultaneously. So, the sign of the "end of the ages" is not just one earthquake in one part of the world but many earthquakes occurring at many places around the world all at the same time. This is what makes these tribulation earthquakes so much greater than the earthquake we had last week (if you can imagine that). And this is also what makes the earthquakes of Matthew 24:7 parallel to the earthquake mentioned in Revelation 6:12 (turn there quickly). Note that "every island will be moved" by this earthquake. Now, there were a few islands moved by last week's earthquake. One was moved 100 feet or something like that. But this text shows that "every island will be moved". Now, can you imagine that kind of destructive power? That fits with Matthew 24 because the earthquake is worldwide in scale. This earthquake mentioned here is a lot bigger than the earthquake last week. Now, if you think Rev. 6 describes a big earthquake, I want to take you to the biggest earthquake the world will ever see. Even these earthquakes at the beginning of the Tribulation that "move every island" cannot compare to the greatest earthquake yet to come. Turn to Revelation 16:16ff. Here we have the seventh bowl judgment. This is the last of the 21 Tribulation judgments.

Revelation 16:16-21 ¹⁶ And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. ¹⁷ Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." ¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. ¹⁹ The great city [Babylon, presently known as Al Hillah and located in Iraq southeast of Baghdad on the Euphrates river] was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ²¹ And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

Notice that "every island fled away". In the earthquakes of the early part of the Tribulation in chapter 6 "every island was moved", that is they all shook from the earthquake, but here "every island fled away". This means that the earthquake is so great that there won't be a single island left on earth. At present it is estimated that there are 130,000 islands and not one of those islands will exist after this earthquake. Notice also that "the mountains were not found". This includes the vast Himalayas, the Alps, the Rockies, and all the other great mountain ranges. All the great mountains and mountain ranges will be flattened by this earthquake. The high point in the Millennium is going to be Jerusalem. There will be no higher point on planet earth than Jerusalem in that day. Notice also that "the cities of the nations fell". On 9/11 we had five buildings fall in one major city. This earthquake is going to level every building in every city of the entire world. So, compare last week's earthquake with what is coming. We've all been thinking that last week's earthquake was an immense and powerful catastrophe. From our perspective, from our limited experience it was an immense catastrophe. A wave 40 feet high traveling at 500mph. That's seems like a huge catastrophe to us. But it's nothing compared to this great end-time earthquake that will destroy every island and mountain and city in the world. In comparison last week's earthquake was like a pin drop.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ here today then you don't have to worry about these great judgments. You'll be Raptured out of the world before the Tribulation. If you're not a believer then you better make that choice. The rapture can happen at any moment. I can't guarantee that it won't happen within the next 5 minutes. But what I can guarantee is that if you don't trust Jesus Christ with your eternal salvation and the Rapture does happen then

you won't be going with us. If you live until the signing of the 7-year contract between the Antichrist and Israel then you will have to go into the Tribulation and most people will die from the severity of the judgments during that time. So, do you want to trust Jesus Christ with your salvation? I hope so. It's not a laughing matter. It's not a funny issue. It's very serious and real thing. Last week's earthquake is just a tiny picture of what the tribulation will be like. Let's conclude with the glorious return of the Lord.

Question 2: "What *will be* the sign of Your coming?"

It's found in vv. 29-31. v. 29 says that *after* the signs of the end of the age, then will come the sign of His coming. THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Luke gives us some more details in his account. Turn over to **Luke 21:25-26** ²⁵ "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. So, it's going to be completely dark, no light from the sun or the moon, roaring waves of the sea which cause perplexity and dismay among the nations. Even men "fainting from fear". In the Greek this means literally "dying from fear". People will be so overwhelmed by the immensity of the things coming upon the world that they will instantly die of heart failure. And then Jesus Christ will gloriously appear in the sky riding on the clouds. So, He Himself is the sign. Jesus Christ is the sign of signs. The warnings will be over the sign Himself will appear.

In conclusion, earthquakes are a sign of the end of the age but not present-day earthquakes. Present day earthquakes pale in comparison to the earthquakes that are a sign of the end of the age. However, present day earthquakes are not to be overlooked. They are a result of the two curses upon the earth at the Fall of man and the Flood. Earthquakes are *not* normal. This truth is found in Romans 8:19-22 ¹⁹ *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.* ²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope* ²¹ *that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²² *For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers...*" Present day earthquakes can be used to illustrate to non-Christians how devastating the Tribulation judgments will be if they live to see them and how important it is to trust Jesus Christ for eternal salvation.

ⁱ Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds* (article entitled “Old Testament Tribulation Terms” by Randall Price; Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 71.

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