

Haiti Earthquake

Commentary for January 14, 2010 — Thousands Dead in an Instant

I do not usually comment on recent news events but the earthquake in Haiti must be an exception. The devastating earthquake that hit the 1/2 island nation of Haiti in the Caribbean¹ may have killed up to 200,000 people. This was the estimate by the Prime Minister of Haiti in a CNN interview.

The 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the most densely populated section of the island, and the poorest part of the country, with many buildings in the capital city of Port-au-Prince collapsing because few were constructed to withstand such violent movement of the land.

The earthquake hit about an hour before dusk. This hampered rescue efforts. Transport of electricity, water, and food into the devastated area have been suspended. The nations of the world are rushing aid and rescue teams to the area. There is a real possibility of famine, plague and riots breaking out unless careful and quick help is given.

Why do such things happen? Why does God allow, or cause, such devastation to snuff out 100,000 or even more instantly? Certainly one death is a tragedy if it is unexpected, but 200,000? How can one comprehend the scope of such death, injury, and destruction?

God Is Responsible

I have written previously on such topics. If God is not responsible, then who is? Does God cause such destruction or does He let such things happen? In the Middle East there has a long history in ancient times of earthquakes, as Dr. Martin wrote in his March 2001 Commentary "[Earthquake](#)" where he gives a list tsunamis that resulted from major earthquakes impacting the coast of Israel.

Fortunately the nature of this Haiti earthquake did not cause a tsunami, although the impact of the quake was severe because it originated near the surface 10 miles from Port-au-Prince.

This Haiti earthquake could be a major disaster with great loss of life. Similar events occurred in the 2004 8.5 magnitude earthquake and tsunami in Sumatra where 225,000 were killed, in October 2005 the Kashmir earthquake killed an estimated 86,000, and in 2008 a 7.9 earthquake in China killed 87,000.² These deaths and injuries occurred in just moments from the large tremors.



1. Haiti is located just 80 miles southeast of Cuba and the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay on the southeast tip of Cuba. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with few natural resources.
2. See the United States Geological Survey website "[Earthquakes with 50,000 or More Deaths](#)." for a complete list.

Even before this disaster Haiti was close to being a “failed state,”³ which is a nation that ceases to provide security and services to its people. Riots occurred often, and now that conditions are made even worse by the earthquake, riots could return.

The danger is that when United States and United Nations troops are brought in to establish order so that relief supplies and food can be brought in and distributed, rampaging mobs could surge through Port-au-Prince and even attack those who are bringing relief. It has happened before.

In fact, there is a potential for still further disaster. In spite of relief efforts it is possible for famine and pestilence to follow such a catastrophic event due to horrible conditions of water and sanitation. Many more deaths could follow as the world watches. These potential problems occur with every major earthquake. Some devastated areas take a decade or more to recover, and even then the emotional shocks to people linger for years.

Was the Haiti Earthquake a Punishment?

Yes, earthquakes can be caused by God’s anger and action as King David says: **“Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, [why?] because he [YHWH] was wrath”** (Psalm 18:7).

“Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove [quake] out of her place, in the wrath of YHWH of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.”

• *Isaiah 13:13*

“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.”

• *Nahum 1:5–6*

God’s anger in Scripture regarding earthquakes generally applies only to the people of Israel. Otherwise, it cannot be said whether a particular earthquake is a punishment from God or not. There is no scriptural way to determine that to be the case.

Earthquakes in Scripture

Scripture mentions earthquakes both past and future. Sometimes earthquakes are demonstrations of God’s power as Psalm 68:9 says happened at Mt. Sinai. Earthquakes occurred at Jesus’ crucifixion (Matthew 24:51, 54) and at his resurrection (Matthew 28:2). An earthquake caused the prison doors to open in Philippi for the apostle Paul and Silas, his colleague (Acts 16:26).

Earthquakes to happen in the future will occur in diverse places (meaning varied places) mentioned in Matthew 24:7–8, Luke 21:11. These may not be punishments exactly, but they will be the beginning of sorrows, or birth pangs as some translations render the verse. I personally believe this means that many earthquakes will happen all around the world in a short period of time. In the future this will culminate in the largest earthquake ever in history:

“And lightnings and voices and thunders occurred. And a great earthquake occurred, such as did not occur since mankind came to be on the earth; of such proportions was the quake and so great.”

• *Revelation 16:18 Concordant Version*

David Sielaff
david@askelm.com

3. See my Commentary [“The Bible and War in Lebanon”](#) where I discuss what is a “failed state.”