

BABYLON RISING

WRITTEN

JOHN BRADSHAW

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BY
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Chapter One

BABYLON RISING

It was an interesting thing for a journalist to say. At any other time, the statement might have been entirely appropriate. But just after an enormous earthquake had struck northeastern Japan in March 2011, and it was evident that this was going to be a massive disaster of the worst kind, the timing of the comment seemed—to me at least—to be a little awry.

Measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale—the largest in Japan’s history—the earthquake caused catastrophic damage, and the ensuing tsunami wiped away entire communities. Journalists reported live as the angry floodwaters deluged cities and claimed thousands of lives.

As my wife, Melissa, and I were gazing at our computer screen in bewilderment, a journalist noted with consolation in his voice that of all the nations in the world, Japan was “perhaps the best equipped to deal with the challenges presented by an earthquake.”

No doubt the intention of the journalist's words was to communicate the fact that buildings in Japan are well engineered, to deal with the shock of a serious earthquake. Coming from New Zealand—a country that is no stranger to seismic activity, and which suffered its own devastating earthquake just a few weeks before the Japanese event—I'm well aware of the necessity of having buildings in earthquake zones constructed according to the strictest codes and highest standards.

Not only is Japan equipped with tsunami sirens, which alert people to hurry to high ground, but the people of Japan are well educated regarding what to do should an earthquake or tsunami strike. Japan could indeed be described as well equipped to deal with an earthquake.

But the thing about earthquakes is that, as *Newsweek* magazine reported, "all geologic events are sudden, and all are unexpected if not necessarily entirely unanticipated." [*"The Scariest Earthquake Is Yet to Come," Newsweek*, March 13, 2011.]

In other words, you can prepare for an earthquake, but you can't really *prepare* for an earthquake. They're not like the 1 p.m. train from Central Station. You really don't know when they're going to come, and when they do, you really don't know what you're going to get.

Tsunamis are the same—nobody knows just when a tsunami might initially strike, and once you get the warning that one is on its way, there's only so much you can do.

As *Newsweek* reported in the same article, "in this corner of northeast Japan, with its wide plains of rice meadows and ideal factory sites and conveniently flat airport

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locations, there may well be a great deal of inland—but there is almost no uphill.”

Many people had only 30 seconds to evade the incoming tide. In stunned silence, Melissa and I watched video footage of the maddened torrent sweeping away vehicles and buildings, with people desperately fleeing from the raging floodwaters.

As prepared as Japan might have been, its extensive preparations were not enough to avoid the incredible devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami, as well as the damage to the nuclear power station. This brought fear, panic and confusion to the entire nation and beyond.

For a number of countries in the world, living with the specter of the next “big one” constantly looming is a fact of everyday life. These countries know that when it comes to earthquakes, it is not a matter of *if* they will strike, but *when*, and of how much damage will be done and how many lives will be lost.

But you can’t ever tell how bad an earthquake will be. You can be fairly sure an earthquake will be bad, and that it could be very bad. It could even be utterly devastating. However, there’s no way of knowing how bad the bad thing is going to be until the bad thing arrives.

In the Bible God warns planet Earth that the “Big One” is coming. The book of Daniel speaks of a coming “time of trouble such as never was” (Daniel 12:1).

Like a predicted earthquake, it is difficult to appreciate what this time of trouble is really going to be like. In a time of uncertainty on planet Earth, with wars being

fought and economies straining, the Bible suggests that the worst is yet to come.

The Bible itself illuminates the matter in Daniel's companion book, the book of Revelation. The Apostle John wrote Revelation from the Island of Patmos. Located in the Aegean Sea, Patmos is now a Greek island, though it is located much closer to Turkey than Greece.

In the last century Patmos has been the domain of not only Greece but of Italy and Nazi Germany. When John was there, it was governed by the Roman Empire. John was a prisoner of Rome due to his faith in Jesus Christ.

No stranger to trouble, John wrote the book of Revelation to show God's people "things which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1) in large part because Jesus would "come quickly" (Revelation 22:10).

The title of the book of Revelation is derived from the Greek word *apokalupsis* (from which is derived the word "apocalypse"), and means "an unveiling." That is, the book of Revelation is a revelation—or an unveiling—of the future history of planet Earth, and of God's dealings with the world during that time.

Revelation presents God as a God of love. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

The book of Revelation reveals Jesus as a gracious, merciful Savior, soon to return to this Earth and ransom His people. "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.... Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:5, 7).

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At the same time, God's last-day book of the Bible instructs people as to how they should live while preparing for Christ's return. "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come, and worship Him who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Revelation 14:7). God's waiting people, along with having faith in Him, will worship God as Creator.

The book of Revelation also warns God's people about the very real and severe spiritual dangers that will confront the world down through history, as those with tremendous power turn against the people of God in the time immediately prior to Jesus' return.

Revelation chronicles a future time when an authoritarian power will emerge and bear almost universal sway over the people of the world, to the extent that those who refuse to cooperate with its agenda for the world will face the loss of their lives. "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Revelation 13:15).

John wrote that this "beast" would have profound power and influence. The nations of the world will be subservient to this beast, it will govern the world's economy (Revelation 18:3), and it will rule in the area of personal finance to such an extent that it will prevent many people from being able to buy and sell (Revelation 13:17).