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Our Earthquake . . . and a Touch of Grace

As a writer and president of a small non-profit organization in Edmonds, I often find my schedule going into the early hours of the morning. On Wednesday, February 28th I was working until 5:00 am on my annual "Teacher to Teacher" news-



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letter and had gotten a few paragraphs beyond the point where I mentioned

earthquakes. What I had written was:

"While the problems with the Israelis and Palestinians continue to escalate, students of prophecy are studying their Bibles and checking to see where we possibly are on God's timetable... Many prophetic books in the Bible foretell a final challenge for the Jews in their homeland before Christ returns. Trouble for the Jewish people certainly is on the increase. I hope you're praying for Israel often. **More earthquakes are shaking the world every few weeks...**"

I of course did not realize that we were in for a 6.8 earthquake in Edmonds and the greater Seattle-Tacoma area nearly six hours later. The timing of my newsletter now seems almost prophetic.

When the quake came, I was in bed trying to make up for my late night's work and was awakened with the earth's shudder at 10:54 am. I saw my hanging lamp swinging and felt like I was on board ship. Realizing it was an earthquake, I jumped out of bed to the floor and laid down face to the ground. I stuck my head and as much of me as I could under the bed! I'm rather small but my bed is low and has some items stored under it. As soon as the floor stopped shaking, I got up. Still in my nightgown, I headed for the kitchen to locate my small emergency radio. I listened to the news for half an hour, learned no aftershocks were expected and so went back to sleep in total peace. Though there were two small aftershocks, we all know how fortunate it was that the quake was thirty miles deep so it did not do the horrendous damage it could have.

ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE THAT NIGHT

Later that night happened to be Ash Wednesday where ashes are placed on one's forehead to remind us of what Genesis 3:19 says "For dust you are and to dust you shall return"

(NKJV). Here God is correcting man for his woeful disobedience in what is known theologically as the Fall of man. The following selections of scripture are what is normally read as the church begins its forty days of penitence. Scripture in **Joel 2:1-2; 12-17** was significant.

Verse one of this section says "Blow the trumpet [shofar] in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand . . ." (NKJV). Blowing the shofar here is a "call to war." These verses are according to readings selected centuries ago in the Anglican and then Episcopal church Prayer Book, but look also at the ones that are optional readings, 10,11!

"The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble . . . For strong is the One who executes His word."

It didn't take much for many in the congregation at St. Alban's Episcopal Church to feel the impact of these ancient words from the Prophet Joel written during his lifetime from 795 to 755 B.C.

OTHER PERSONAL STORIES

Susan Harlick, a Sure-You-Can staff member, told me of a report on KVI Radio. When two students at Renton High School got under their desks during the quake - one's Bible

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fell open to Psalm 46 which she promptly read: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah" (Ps. 46: 1-3 NIV). How much better word could they have received?

Following the quake others were led to read this same Psalm 46 and told me so when they heard my story. One is a young Lutheran mother, Dianne Herivel, who read it to comfort her two daughters before bed, and Missy Subitch, a Messianic believer and Boeing employee, who read the Psalm for her afternoon devotions. A very comforting Psalm, indeed.

WHAT COULD IT MEAN?

Scientifically we know earthquakes are a natural phenomenon either volcanic or tectonic in origin. But we also know that since there is a Creator behind our world, He could also be sending us a spiritual message. What could this powerful quake and these verses of scripture be saying to us? I have to admit much of the total prophetic message in the Book of Joel is beyond my under-

standing, however, I am sure that part of it came to pass as recorded in the New Testament Book of Acts. Peter the apostle, newly empowered with the Holy Spirit, spoke to the large crowd of Jewish men who had gathered from all over the diaspora for their annual Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot Heb.). Two thousand years ago he was trying to explain a new phenomenon that had broken out in the crowd. He said,

"It's only nine in the morning! . . . This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams' " (Acts 2:15b-17 NIV). Read the whole chapter to get the full story.

In 1970 my late husband, Canon Dennis Bennett, wrote about his personal experience of Pentecost in the book significantly entitled, "Nine O'clock in the Morning." It has now reached over a million people in sixteen languages. So this part of the prophet Joel's message I do understand and value highly. This phenomenon began in 1959 in Van Nuys, California and was eventually called the "Charismatic Renewal." The Encyclopedia

Britannica of 1973 cited Dennis's experience as the beginning of this movement.

The 6.8 Puget Sound Shocker certainly gave me an awareness that I'm not in control of anything, including my own life. It also gave me the sure knowledge that a power higher than I is in charge. Others felt the same thing as the Seattle Post Intelligencer reporter Chris McGann shows it, "By land, sea and air, travelers yesterday faced their own kind of Earthquake aftershock: immobility."

What do these events mean? Live each day as though it could be your last. Walk in the empowerment of Joel's and the Psalmist David's messages. Compare world events with scripture to understand the

future. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and our world, that changed hearts will bring the true message of peace on earth.

Everyone knows the damage in Puget Sound could have been so much worse, and I, as many, am aware of a touch of God's amazing grace.

Rita Bennett is author of eight books, her latest being the Zondervan book "To Heaven and Back" which has sold 200,000 copies. Dennis's best-selling book "Nine O'clock in the Morning" is available with Bridge-Logos Publishing. Rita is president and C.E.O. of Christian Renewal Association Inc., a non-profit charitable organization in Edmonds, Washington. A free quarterly newsletter is available by mail or by e-mail. For info. see website www.EmotionallyFree.org.

Rita Bennett is a former elementary school teacher and social worker. Bennett and her husband, the late Rev. Dennis Bennett, founded the interdenominational Christian Renewal Association (CRA), which she runs out of her Edmonds home.

A speaker and educator, Bennett has spoken in 10 countries and has taught on college campuses, in public seminars and in several cathedrals. She is the creator and developer of the national courses, "Emotionally Free" and "Inner Wholeness Through the Lord's Prayer."

Bennett, a poet and songwriter, is also the immediate past president of Edmonds' North by Northwest Writers group.

"To Heaven and Back" is available at local bookstores or from CRA, P.O. Box 576, Edmonds, WA 98020. (425) 775-2965.