Bible and the Headlines: Earthquakes David Bachelor, PhD

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There are many activities that generate statistics, e.g. professional sports, social media, and the stock market. Recent headlines are reporting on another area that invites statistical analysis: earthquakes. In this field, the numbers are crunched to see if what just happened was the "big one."

Fox 8 News in Greensboro, North Carolina reported on Oct 25th, "20 Earthquakes Registered in North Carolina this Year: US Geological Survey." The recent tremors rattling the Tar Heel State were all less than 3.0 on the Richter scale. Despite the high numbers, many residents were unaware anything was amiss. The US Geological Survey explained, "The intensity of magnitude 1 earthquakes is not felt, while magnitude 2 is typically felt by a few people. It's not until you reach a 3 that more people feel it and experience vibrations similar to the passing of a truck."

On October 25th, Newsweek featured, "Two Earthquakes Rattle Russia: What To Know." The seismic activity occurred in Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, where earthquakes are very common. The reason October's dual quakes merited comment is in comparison to a massive quake in July, "The July 2025 8.8-magnitude earthquake was among the strongest globally since the 2011 Tōhoku disaster in Japan and prompted tsunami warnings across the Pacific." The July quake generated aftershocks of 7.8 and 6.1 while Saturday's twin quakes only measured 5.2 and 5.3 magnitude. No tsunami warnings were issued.

The Brighter Side of News website announced on October 26th, "Catastrophic San Andreas Earthquake Could Be Triggered by the Cascadia Subduction Zone." The article was a summary of research done by marine geologist Chris Goldfinger at Oregon State University. Until Goldfinger's findings, ". . . scientists believed that the West Coast's two great earthquake engines — the Cascadia subduction zone and the San Andreas fault — operated on separate geologic stages. One dives, one slides, and both hold immense destructive potential." Using ocean floor core samples the Oregon State team provided proof that multiple Pacific earthquakes featured paired Cascadia and San Andreas quakes.

Earthquakes in the Bible were not measured on the Richter scale, but there were some big ones. A spectacular example happened during the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert. When a group of people rebelled against Moses' leadership, "The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, together with their possessions" (Num 16:32). Jesus' disciples were beneficiaries of another event, "Suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened" (Act 16:26).

Like the Kamchatka Peninsula, there were a pair of earthquakes connected with Jesus' crucifixion (Matt 27:51; Matt 28:2;). The "big one" happened at His death, "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matt 27:54) The aftershocks of that quake are still being felt today.