

Zion Bible-Presbyterian Church

Special Paper

Earthquake in Singapore?

Pastor Quek Swee Hwa

Confusion and Uncertainty

Thanks (or no thanks) to email, a “prophecy” has been circulating in Singapore creating much confusion as to what exactly was prophesied. Many are also uncertain whether or not to regard this prophecy seriously.

I shall give a response to this matter. You may circulate my paper but remember please the usual courtesies: do not alter anything and acknowledge the source. You may of course differ from me if you see fit, but be careful to provide truly biblical reasons.

Prophecy Then and Now

To understand what we can make of the prophecy of an impending earthquake in Singapore, or of any other prophecies, it is necessary to start with an understanding of prophecy during the Old Testament period, the New Testament period, and today.

In Numbers 11 Moses and seventy elders of the Israel under the influence of the Holy Spirit prophesied non-stop at the Tabernacle. Two persons, Eldad and Medad, were prophesying not in the Tabernacle but within the camp. When something from God is happening, it sometimes takes place in unusual ways. Moses waved off the suggestion by Joshua to stop the two from prophesying in the camp. In verse 29 he expressed this wish: “Would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” After that God sent quails to provide much-needed food to the people. Some conclusions can be drawn. First, prophecy during this period was highly valued; it was not to be discouraged. Second, although nothing explicit is said about the nature of the non-stop prophesying, it is reasonable to assume that it was more proclamatory – that is, urging people to repent and keep close to God – rather than predictive prophecy. And third, the signs or miracles that accompanied prophecy were purposeful and carried meaning rather than just actions which either impressed or frightened people.

Note that during the Old Testament period, predictive prophecy was more important because in the absence of a body of written Scriptures (like the OT), God revealed to people what they were to know through unusual means, such as the Urim and Thummim of the High Priest (Exodus 28:30; 1 Sam 28:6) and through specially appointed judges and prophets. Some prophets merely spoke, using occasionally symbolic actions like sleeping on one side and facing east. But during the 8th Century BC some prophets began to put their prophecies down in written form. Hence we have a wealth of prophetic books in the Old Testament. When Moses made his statement in Numbers 11:29, both the proclamatory and predictive aspects of prophecy combined to underline the importance of prophecy in the progressive revelation of God’s truths to mankind.

In the New Testament period both the predictive and proclamatory elements continued to be seen, but with a distinct change. The predictive element had been vindicated with the fulfillment of the prophecies relating to the Messiah and all that was associated with His manifestation. There is still a residue of prophecies to be fulfilled at the conclusion of the End Time. Beyond

Special Paper – Earthquake in Singapore?

By Pastor Quek Swee Hwa

clarifying what God had begun to reveal through the Old Testament prophets there was really little more that needs to be said. The few instances of predictive prophecy recorded in the New Testament outside Revelation verify what I have just stated. During the New Testament period, predictive prophecy served more to warn and prepare God's servants rather than to deter them, as in the case of the two prophecies of the Prophet Agabus recorded in Acts 11:28 and 21:10. In the latter instance Paul refused to be affected by all the weeping and persuasions given by the fellow brethren. Prophecies in the past may have been used to urge people to repent and to avert disaster (as in the case of Jonah's prophecy against Nineveh (Jonah chapter 3). But this was not the case with most of the prophecies in Revelation, apart from the warnings to the Seven Churches in Rev. Chapters 2 & 3.

The Apostle Paul considered the unveiling of mysteries regarding God's plan for His People to be an important part of his own ministry (Rom. 16:25). He was painfully aware of the forces swirling around us in a dimension of existence that we cannot fully fathom (Ephesians 3:10; 6:12). But he refused to be a prophet of doom and gloom.

The Apostle John was different in the Book of Revelation. It was his appointed task to take the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, and others before him and so we have a rich store of predictive prophecies in that book.

Within the Christian community, prophecy is one of many gifts, as we are told in Romans 12:6 Hence, "...whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith." This is confirmed in 1 Cor. 12:10 - the Spirit gives "the word of wisdom ... the word of knowledge ... [and] prophecy." The purpose of prophecy in the New Testament period was to give understanding of knowledge and mysteries (1 Cor 13:2 "and though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge"). But during this period we see the beginning of attempts to curb excessive and irresponsible use of prophecies (2 Pet 1:19 "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation"). Loving others without discrimination, which is charity, is regarded as more important than being able to prophesy (1 Cor. 13:8 "Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail ..."). A prophecy warning of an impending general disaster facing millions in the world cannot be given to one group only, Christians in particular. God loved the entire world of sinful mankind. His Word warning them of the consequences of sin is given to everyone. So those who persist, whether wittingly or unwittingly, in offering prophecies that do not conform to biblical guidelines must ask themselves whether or not by their actions they are to be categorized with the false prophets of our latter day (2 Peter 2:1 "But there were false prophets also among the people ...").

In the New Testament and for us today, emphasis is to be placed on proclamatory prophecy, as in 1 Tim 4:13-15 ("... give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them").

Signs and Visions

Throughout history those who claim to have received signs and visions have fascinated and confused people. This happened in the Old Testament period (Acts 7:36), during the New Testament (Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; Romans 15:19) and in the future to come (Acts 2:19). But we must heed the warning given by Jesus in John 4:48, "Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." While we do not deny that God can still choose to work through dreams, signs and visions, if He so wishes, it is best to go directly to the revealed Word of God for our guiding principles in life. Go easy on signs and visions, especially those that do not conform to the biblical guidelines that we can use to test them for their genuineness.

Special Paper – **Earthquake in Singapore?**

By Pastor Quek Swee Hwa

Prophecy and Ikan Bilis

I need to stress at this point that this paper is aimed not simply at analyzing the exact nature of the prophecy given by the “visionary couple” at Elim Church. I realize the anguish it has caused them to see that what they said initially was altered beyond recognition. Then comes the assessment by some friendly church leaders, like the leaders at Elim Church and others, that they might have been mistaken. To the rest of the Christian public, the credibility of the couple is at stake, not just on this particular prophecy but also on the other prophecies they claim to have received. It can be asked, if God has really given this prophecy, why has He allowed it to be mistaken by the very person or persons He has chosen to be His mouthpiece to the world?

There is a larger issue that needs to be addressed and I wish to focus also on this aspect in this paper. What is it that gives people the urge to embroider on a word of prophecy and sensationalize it? My concern is that there seems to be a tacit and facile acceptance by many Christians in Singapore today that anyone who claims to have received a prophecy is immediately believed without the application of the biblical tests (1 John 4:1 “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”).

Prophecy and ikan bilis. Yes, that was seriously added to a ‘prophecy’ concerning Singapore that a couple, Florence and Joon Lai, claimed to have received on June 5th, 2000. It was not the first time Florence had dreams and visions. She experienced this repeatedly over many years. Some of her prophecies, especially one concerning tremors to be felt in Singapore were ‘fulfilled’ in October, 1999. This prophecy was given two years before its fulfillment. How exact was the prophecy? Not enough details have been given and it is not possible for me to give an assessment on this point. Nonetheless, this is not the first time, nor will it be the last time, that earthquake tremors will take place in Singapore. If tremors of some kind occur on October 21st at the time expected, we are not to conclude that this prophecy has been fulfilled. One of the clever ways Satan uses to trick Christians is to give them some ‘truth’ and use that to mislead them and lead them in deeper error. Anyway, it is good to know that according to the experts, Singapore does not lie on any unstable tectonic plates. That does not mean that a major earthquake cannot occur. But the point is not whether small tremors or an earthquake will or will not take place in Singapore. We need to understand that conjecture, projection, and educated guesswork cannot be passed off as prophecy, especially where it is given in vague terms without any real way of testing its validity. We have reason to doubt the genuineness of a prophecy when a situation is envisioned whereby whatever happens the prophet is always right. See Rev Michael Shen’s response below.

In the email version of this prophecy reference was made to buildings collapsing, the twin towers of the World Trade Center event in New York, the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Changi Airport, and other prominent buildings. But the couple has disclaimed these references.

They did, however, mention earthquakes and I suppose if there is a major earthquake measuring 8.4 on the Richter Scale (as it is claimed) one can guess that the destruction it will leave in its wake will be unthinkable. In the email version Florence was supposed to have said that God spoke to her about an earthquake that will take place in Singapore. She asked God for the day but God only told her the time, between 7:55pm to 8:05pm. Later on an American preacher claimed that God revealed to him the date as Oct 21 that Christians in Singapore must pray and ask God for His mercy and grace that this would not happen. If Christians prayed, God will listen and the disaster will be averted. People are to prepare themselves spiritually as well as in other ways: they were to stock up on dried food items such as ikan bilis, chai poh, and Maggie mee. Also they need to gather canned food such as sardines, pork cubes, black beans; bags of rice, water cooler bottles, cooking pots/pans/charcoal stove, not forgetting can-openers. They were to put important documents and a set of light clothes in haversacks for easy reach when

Special Paper – **Earthquake in Singapore?**

By Pastor Quek Swee Hwa

disaster strikes. They were to place a pair of comfortable shoes/sandals near them so that they can be worn in an emergency.

India too will be hit by a major earthquake and the impact will be so massive that it will sweep across Asia, affecting Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia.

What comes across as alarming during this particularly sensitive time when we need to be attentive to the need for religious harmony is the claim that after the destruction, there will be a time of recovery, following a declaration that Singapore will become a Christian nation. The couple also saw God's eye and a teardrop fell. The lady asked God, "Why are you crying?" God answered, "Because some of my people are just playing church. They are not sincere in loving me. They come Sunday after Sunday just to do the routine. And this saddens my heart. "God's eye is upon Singapore and He is watching us everyday of our lives. The conclusion is, only God's love for us will save us. Only our love for God will help us pull through all situations! The Enemy is identified – Satan himself. So “we are to co-work with Jesus in prayer” against the Enemy. We are to repent, intercede and prepare for the Return of Jesus.

Whoever is the author of this email version, the theology is terrible. Does Jesus need us to “co-work” with Him? Heaven is a place without tears (Rev 7:17; 21:4). Let's not invent things that do not exist. This is deception and makes the whole process suspect. Church leaders are to be vigilant to ensure that such things are not propagated to lead astray young Christians.

Elim Church explains

The Co-Pastor (and Pastor's wife) of Elim Church, Margaret Seaward, has tried to clear up the misunderstanding. She does not know the couple personally but has been assured that they are not “flaky people”. She told the people: there is no need to stockpile things. Many of the details of the prophecy are to be taken symbolically rather than literally. She referred to Rev 16:18-20, particularly to verse 20: “And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found” and concludes that “during that large earthquake spoken of in Revelation the island of Singapore will cease to be.” Now it is important to see that this prophecy refers not to a event that is isolated but to the final moment of the End Time when God will make a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1 “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea”). At that time not only will Singapore cease to be, but Mt Everest will also cease to be. Is there a suggestion that the final moment will happen soon? The millennium mentioned in Rev. Chapter 20 has not yet taken place. There is a great deal of confusion here.

In her letter Margaret shared an assessment by her son, Frederick Seaward, who regards the couple as having received a genuine vision from the Lord. He includes some astonishing things: “the couple have also ‘intertwined’ their own interpretations and conclusions to some of ‘the words,’ like many of us do at times [underscoring mine].... They have received many different words since 1996. It is clear as you read them, that some deal with future financial calamity, some with future “war” calamity, and some with future catastrophes, like earthquakes, and other things (tidal waves, etc. etc.) affecting various different countries. There are some prophets in the Bible that received many different “prophecies” at different times, and recorded them all, and we know as students of the Word, that they are many times dealing with different events within the same chapter. I feel the couple has mistakenly combined all these events into one scenario, when they are various different events, many which may happen in the world long after 2001.... I personally believe that some kind of problem/adversity/trouble is going to happen in Oct/Nov that is going to “cause” the unprecedented turning of hearts to the Lord. But I do not believe it is an earthquake.... I do believe there will be an earthquake that affects Singapore some time in the future, but not at this time.”

Rev Michael Shen's Reply

Special Paper – **Earthquake in Singapore?**

By Pastor Quek Swee Hwa

What is our answer? I would like to refer first to an excellent reply given on 26 September, 2001, by Rev. Michael Shen, Principal of Singapore Bible College. He states that much of the prophecy is based on hearsay and it is difficult to trace it to its original version. This is the case at least from the email version of it. The prediction “is couched in a win-win way: If it happens, they [the couple] are right; if it does not [because] God’s people prayed and God relented, they are right again.... The proposed course of action contradicts the teaching of Scripture on loving one’s neighbour. If God’s people possess such certain and explicit knowledge about impending disaster, what should they do? They would tell their neighbours and friends. They would inform the whole nation and all the nations that would be devastated, to prepare for the disaster. They would urge everyone to repent and believe in the Saviour Jesus Christ....no thought is given to the people all around us who will die in the disaster.”

Rev Shen concludes: “We reject this so-called prophecy because its source is dubious and its content is questionable.... [and] we absolutely do not need such ‘prophecy’ to motivate us to carry out what we are already told [in the Scriptures].

My Conclusion

The couple concerned may be God-loving and sincere, and I have been told by their friends that this is the case, that does not mean that what they have been given is from God. I agree with many Christian leaders in rejecting this prophecy. My concern is for them that they should go back to Scripture and understand the need to give heed more to the revealed Word of God than to dreams and visions. The Bible is clear where God wants us to know clearly; it is vague where it is not God’s will for us to know what is going to happen. We must not allow our curiosity to get the better of us, resorting to dreams, visions, and prophecies. When God gives such things, He will never contradict what is expressly revealed or implicitly taught in His Word. God is not a God of confusion. What He reveals does not get mixed up and man has to unravel a so-called prophecy of God. In the final analysis our desire to evangelize the world must not lead us to make God a vengeful, unloving God who tries to frighten people into belief in Him. That is the worst way of portraying the God of the Bible.

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