



*What does God  
Have To Do With  
Earthquakes?*

*Above:  
destruction and  
devastation  
in Amatrice*

## 295 die under the ruins of the recent central Italian earthquake

### **A recent Pope suggested that God may punish the heathen with earthquakes**

But is that true? Many ask the question, especially those who are friends or relatives of earthquake victims: “What sense is there to such a mass killing, sometimes in the tens of thousands, of innocent people, including babies?”

Tens of thousands of copies of my booklet, “What does God have to do with earthquakes?”, have been distributed since it was written after a 1980 earthquake in southern Italy, which killed up to 5,000 people. Now it has been slightly revised for its sixth edition, and is being printed for those touched by this central Italian earthquake. I do not personally know any Christians who lived in the three towns severely damaged, but churches in the area will be reaching out to help and evangelize those who suffered this calamity.

Jesus answered clearly the questions of the curious of His time. In Luke 13:1-5, he warned them that they were as guilty before God as those who had died, but that the unexpected death of others is a clear warning to the living that, if they do not repent of their sins and receive God’s gift of salvation, they will die as certainly, and, perhaps, as unexpectedly, as those whose life finishes in a second.

### **My strange visitors from the destroyed town of Amatrice**

I have never personally visited Amatrice, although I have preached in many churches in the region. But I had the surprise of being visited in our mission center in Rome at least thirty years ago, by some from that town who had received our evangelistic material.

My first visitors, a man and a woman, had received our literature and came to offer me theirs! They were modestly dressed and obviously country people. The lady, who was visibly pregnant(?), told me that she was the Virgin Mary and that soon she would bear the Messiah in His second coming. The man who accompanied her was her Prophet. They were members of a sect which had come to life years before, though another "Prophet" from their town. He had raised quite a following in the area with his prophesies of a coming paradise on earth. He was shot and killed by Fascist police, while leading an "unauthorized religious procession" of his followers through the town. Mussolini considered the "coming paradise" a threat to the kingdom he was forming.

### **My third visitor from the town was an unusual "Brother in Christ"**

He entered my office like a forest sprite, reminding me of a grass-hopper. His clothing was khaki-color, apparently a military uniform from World War I. He wore a military-type jacket, knickers (Do any of you know what I mean?), heavy wool socks and hiking boots. On his head, a military hat, with a long feather in the hat-band. He came in with little hopping steps, snapped to attention, gave me a salute and said, in a couple of rhymed lines: "At your service, happy to know you, I serve Christ."

Well, that was true! In that and other visits I came to know him quite well, as a true believer, with a wide range of memorized Scripture, who travelled by foot through the area of Italy now touched by the earthquake, visiting stores and public places in the towns, stopping to ask for a glass of water in homes along the roads, always witnessing in a friendly, generous way, always in rhyme! Who knows how many thousands may have heard his testimony and received a Gospel from him? How many may have known the Lord and are now with him in heaven?



This, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is the Italy I have grown to love and serve, bringing God's Word into their lives, making known His grace, seeing men and women, youth and children come to know and love Him. Freed from their superstition and fear, from their complete ignorance of God, of the complete work of salvation by Christ, they now love and serve Him.

Last night I spent several hours with eight of the present and future leaders of our church, explaining how God had called me to Italy when I had no interest and no thought of such a thing, and one of them, a school teacher, asked, "How can we know if there are any of us here tonight that God wants to call to serve Him like you?" At my age, I have answers to their questions.

This is a tiny example of the reason I believe that God has called me to stay on and serve Him in Italy, beyond normal retirement age. It is the reason that you and I are still united in the vision that God gave me in 1948, and that still, after 68 years, burns in my heart and thoughts. I thank YOU and the Lord that so many of you have stuck with me for so long with your precious, thoughtful, loving prayers.

Millions in Italy are living and dying without the Lord and without hope and you and I can do something about it!

In HIS service,

*William (Bill) Standridge*

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