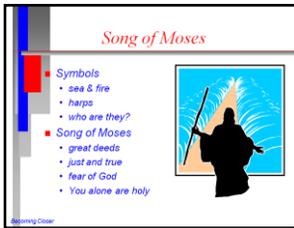


Song of the Redeemed

(Rev 15:1-4 NIV) I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. (2) And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God (3) and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. (4) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

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Symbols. What do they mean?

Sea of glass and fire. We encountered something like this, in the same locale, in Chapter 4. There, most commentators saw this as a character study of God:

- Glass was rare and expensive, indicating the cost of the Cross
- The glass is transparent, indicating purity
- The size indicates immense distance, symbolic of the omnipresent.
- To which we add now fire, a symbol of judgment.

Who then, stands on it? For that, we must divide in two camps: the amillennialists and historicists are unanimous: the church. The futurists are in all directions. For example:

- Chuck Smith, in another fit of poor editing, says it's just what he told us in Chapter 4 (which he didn't): the sea represents the believers who were raptured (the church), holding the Tribulation martyrs on their shoulders, so to speak.
- J. Vernon McGee sees this (no question possible) as the glass on fire being the persecution of the beast, and the ones with the harps as the Tribulation martyrs (all of them) triumphing over it.
- Talbot raises an interesting point. He agrees with McGee -- saying, after all, it is the song of *Moses*. He adds, however, that the sea is a parallel in heaven to the laver of the Temple (remember Solomon's bronze sea?)
- Lindsey says (without explanation) that the ones with the harps are the 144,000; the sea is purity and judgment, as before (evidently he did not have the same editor Smith did).

Harp, of course, are associated with those who reign (little David, play on) and, in chapter 5, the elders.

The **Song of Moses** shows us four great points (see the parallels in the Old Testament; Exodus 15:1-8 and Deuteronomy 31:30 - 32:43, also by Moses):

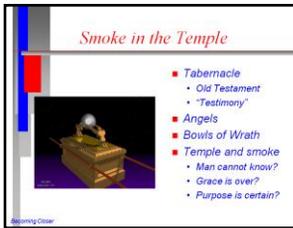
- They emphasize the *great deeds* of God.
- They tell us that God is both just and faithful (true).
- They exhort us to fear God (and thus have nothing else to fear; if these are martyrs, it is advice from those who know).
- Finally, they tell us that God alone is holy -- and that all the nations shall worship Him.

A fair Sunday School lesson, that! The song is almost entirely a quotation from the Old Testament. Some scholars see in the Old Testament songs some prophetic points, but there is one key summary point: this is the song of those who have triumphed -- and there is no note of "what I did" -- only "what God did."

Seven Angels

(Rev 15:5-8 NIV) After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. (6) Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. (7) Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. (8) And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

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If you want to understand Revelation, you must study the Old Testament. Hebrews 8:5 tells us that this vision can be understood from the Old Testament writings on the Tabernacle. Numbers 1:53 tells us that the Levites camped around the Tabernacle to prevent the wrath of God from coming to Israel. That time is now ended! Numbers 10:11 tells us how the cloud over the Tabernacle lifted as a sign that Israel was to move. Move we should.

What's even more interesting is the Tabernacle of the Testimony (the graphic is a computer constructed rendition, and presents some of the eerie quality of John's vision to us). In the ark were three things which testified to God's grace -- and man's rebellion.

- The Ten Commandments - the second tablets; the first broken for Israel's rebellion.
- Manna -- of which the Israelites complained.
- Aaron's rod -- which budded to show who God had chosen, as the Israelite's tried to reject Moses' leadership.

The ark is the sign of our rebellion. It is also the mercy seat of God. Note well: there was only one entrance in the Tabernacle! That is symbolic of Jesus Christ.

Angels: the angels in linen are symbolic of the priesthood (Ex 28:5-8 and Ezekiel 44:7). The gold is symbolic of royalty.

Bowls recall the bowl of blood presented on the Atonement Seat (cover of the ark) on the Day of Atonement. These are bowls of wrath; Talbot sees them as judgment for anti-Semitism (no one else does, however). How that wrath is to be delivered is clear:

(Jer 25:15-16 NIV) This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. {16} When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them."

The message is clear: these bowls of wrath are delivered by the sword, caused by the madness of the nations.

What is also clear is this: God now acts in judgment. Hebrews 10:51 tells us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. True in more ways than one!

The Temple: From the Old Testament we see that this smoke in the Temple prevents the priests from doing their service (1 Kings 8:10-11); that it is terrifying (Isaiah 6:6) and that this cloud prevents prayer from coming through (Lamentations 3:44). Taken together, scholars have proposed three theories of what this means:

- Some hold that this means no one can determine the purposes of God. This is, of course, true, but does not seem indicated to me.
- Others (particularly Lindsey) hold that this is the sign that the day of Grace is over; no one can be saved. (The historicists utterly reject this point of view, and it is by no means unanimous among futurists).
- Most, however, hold that this means that the purpose of God is now fixed; no intercession can stop these seven last plagues.



In keeping with our general theme that interpretation must stand on prior prophecy, we have some leverage here. Recall that we have had seven seals, then seven trumpets, and now seven bowls of wrath. We are entitled to use the interpretations again. If we said “this” means “that” before, we should be strongly inclined to say it again -- if the symbols are the same.

This will be particularly strong in the historicist view -- particularly as it relates to geography. One other point will become clear: first with first, etc. We will see that the first trumpet and the first bowl are “on the earth” -- and particularly in the historicist view, we apply the same interpretations.

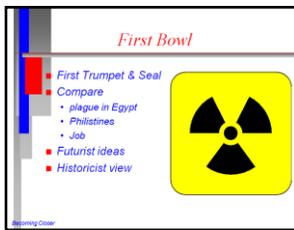
In particular, based upon this sequence and other events in later chapters, the historicist view holds as follows:

- The six seals were the fall of **pagan Rome**.
- The six trumpets were the fall of **political Rome**.
- The seven bowls complete the sequence: they are the fall of **papal Rome**.

Painful Sores

Rev 16:1-2 NIV) Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." [2] The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

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We begin with a comparison of the first trumpet and the first seal. Both are said to fall “on the earth.” Thus, if we take the historicist view, they should fall on the same place -- Rome. Many futurist commentators hold to this as well.

The word for “sores” has some familiar uses:

- It is the word used for the sixth plague on the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus.
- It is also the “tumor” of the Philistines when they captured the ark. (One commentator -- Wilcox -- asks us to picture the frantic humor of the Philistines trying to get the ark out of their territory).
- It is the “boil” of Job.

Futurists have little difficulty with this passage. Lindsey and Smith see radiation sickness (quite plausible); McGee sees germ warfare.

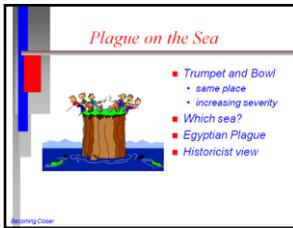
Historicists view this in the sense of a “moral ulcer.” Recall that the timing must be about 1793, and the answer leaps out of the history books: the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution.

This brings an important point. All these judgments are upon those who would recognize themselves as being in “Christian” civilization. If this view is correct, we see a change in cause. Pagan Rome fought back with demon worship (and lost). Political Rome fought back with armies (and lost). Papal Rome now is under attack not so much by armies but by ideas -- a thought which will crescendo in the historicist view. It deserves a thought in the other views as well.

It is entirely likely that the blossoming of the historicist theory in the 19th century owes much not only to Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* but also to the French Revolution -- which provided the events in this section.

Plague on the Sea

(Rev 16:3 NIV) The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.



The second trumpet again provides clues for the second bowl. Both apply to the sea, hence we can conclude a “sameness of place.” For example, in the historicist view, this would mean the Mediterranean, where the second trumpet had the Vandals sweeping over Rome from the sea. But note one thing: the severity of the judgment is increased. Before, we had one third destroyed; now, we have all of it.

Commentators disagree on which sea is meant. It’s either the Mediterranean (Chuck Smith); all the oceans (Lindsey, McGee) or some spiritual application of same (various, including Talbot).

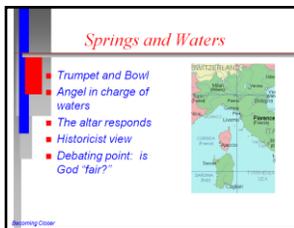
One thing is certain: it is a terrible plague. It brings to mind the stench of the water turning to blood in Egypt. Futurists tend to see this as the result of increasing pollution.

The historicist view is this: in 1793 the Catholic powers (i.e., those of Rome, though headed by France under Napoleon) began a long war against the Protestant and Orthodox powers, headed by England and Russia. When that war began, the fleets were about equally matched. When it was over, Catholic sea power had ceased to exist. The decisive battles began at the Nile -- and ended off the coast of Spain at Trafalgar. The crucial theater of operations was the Mediterranean, but combat was done in every sea of the world.

Blood in Springs and Rivers

(Rev 16:4-7 NIV) The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. (5) Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; (6) for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." (7) And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

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As with the third trumpet, this judgment falls on springs and waters. The interpretation is roughly the same; the judgment more severe.

The interesting thing is the reply of "the angel in charge of the waters." It is as if this angel -- "nature", we might say today -- is saying, "I know that I'm going to bear this pain -- but you are righteous. Do it!"

The altar -- last heard of in the fifth seal, where we had the saints under the altar crying out -- responds in chorus. It is not too much of a stretch to note this: when man rebels against God, nature itself moves to punish man. Nature is His creation; it cannot do otherwise. We have seen a tremendous upsurge in sexual sin in our time; we have also seen a tremendous upsurge in AIDS, venereal disease, unwed pregnancy, divorce, and many other such things. It must be just a coincidence, of course.

The historicist view is that (like Attila the Hun in the third trumpet) the region in question is northern Italy (see the map and point out the rivers), wherein Napoleon Bonaparte conducted a similar campaign based upon the rivers. Napoleon it seems was the one who first discovered that (according to one of his maxims of war) "a river along the line of advance is much more dangerous than one perpendicular to it." His campaign of striking at the smaller portion of the armies of his foes, while a river divided them, is still considered a military classic. From 1796 to 1798 he campaigned -- and carried off the Pope as a prisoner of war. The blow fell on Rome, again.

Interestingly, many commentators take this bowl as occasion to ask, "Is God fair?" The angels say yes, for this is judgment. It's worth a moment of discussion; does a "fair and just" God curse the earth this way?

Plague on the sun

(Rev 16:8-9 NIV) The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. (9) They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

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Do recall from our previous discussions that “all the world” can mean the Roman Empire -- in whatever form it exists. In the Fourth Trumpet, we found that one third was scorched. Now, all is scorched -- warning passes into judgment. In the historicist view, this was a third of the Roman Empire (the political Rome); it will now be all of the Roman Empire (papal Rome).

The Sun may be a king (see, for example, Joseph’s vision) or a sign of judgment (see, for example, Deu 32:24 and Isaiah 24:6). Either interpretation will fit here, in any view, for judgment is usually carried out by a person God appoints.

The literal view -- that this is some sort of astronomical phenomenon -- is restricted to the futurists, and not all of them. McGee and Talbot, for example, allow for either approach.

The literalists typically make this a *natural* event, coming under the providence of God (as opposed to the miraculous). Smith has this as ozone depletion. He follows that with the sun going supernova (based on the fifth bowl, in which the sun goes dark, paralleling such an explosion). Unless this is interpreted in the completely miraculous sense, this is very poor astronomy (the sun is not big enough to go supernova -- but Smith is no scientist).

Lindsey, on the other hand, invokes a total thermonuclear exchange -- the fourth, with several others possible (6th seal, 2nd trumpet, 6th trumpet are the others). The B-52 pilots must be rather tired by this point -- and the planet a bit shopworn. Perhaps Smith has a better imagination.

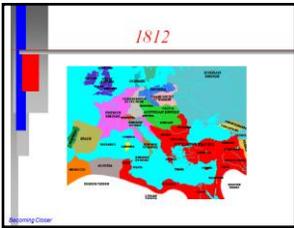
The figurative view holds, as stated, that this would be a great king. The historicist interpretation finds its fulfillment in Napoleon Bonaparte. His curse upon the papacy:

- He literally scorched the papal dominions, ultimately taking the Pope as his prisoner.
- He forced the Pope to crown him Holy Roman Emperor -- and when the moment came, took the crown from the Pope’s hands and placed it on his own head. This symbolized that the Pope no longer determined who would or would not be crowned.
- Before Napoleon, 380 states owed allegiance to the Pope. After Napoleon, only 30 did.
- Even after Napoleon’s fall, the Pope never again regained his political stature. It was the beginning of the end.

(See maps, next)









On the throne of the beast

(Rev 16:10-11 NIV) The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony (11) and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

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In the fifth trumpet, we had darkness from the smoke rising from the pit. Here it is worse -- total darkness. Then, locust gnawed the earth; here, men gnaw their tongues.

All commentators -- of all persuasions -- agree: the throne of the beast is ROME. The argument is papal Rome versus a revived Roman Empire.

Darkness, figuratively, would be judgment (or possibly ignorance) -- as it was to the Egyptians in the 9th plague. It is particularly associated with the Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20, among other passages).

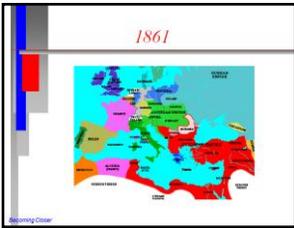
Literal thoughts -- again, limited to futurists, though not all futurists see it this way -- include

- Chuck Smith's supernova, now fading (previous arguments still stand on this one).
- Hal Lindsey has this as a physical darkness to conceal the invasion of 200,000,000 oriental soldiers (6th trumpet). This seems to me a severe violation of chronology. Hal needs them, however, for his interpretation of Armageddon.

The historicist view is that this represents the final destruction of the Pope's political power. This bowl would start in 1848, when the citizens of Rome rose up and threw out the Pope. He was promptly restored by French bayonets; but in 1870 the French withdrew to fight the invading Prussians. The city then voted overwhelmingly to join the new nation of Italy. Victor Emmanuel then deprived the Pope of all temporal sovereignty, seizing all church lands. (See maps)

To this day, however, the Pope refuses to repent. Official Catholic doctrine still proclaims the Pope as rightful *temporal* ruler of the world. Indeed, in the same year in which he was deprived of his rule, the Vatican I council declared him (under pain of excommunication) infallible.

Since then, by the courtesy of Mussolini, the Pope now rules 100 acres of Vatican City.

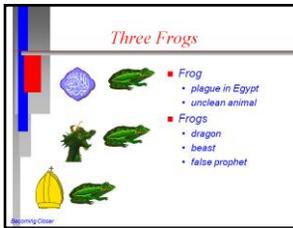




Euphrates

(Rev 16:12-16 NIV) The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. (13) Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. (14) They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. (15) "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." (16) Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

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The frog, for St. John, would have only two associations:

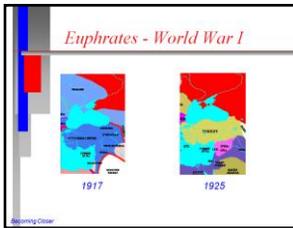
- It would be associated with a plague of Egypt
- It would be a ceremonially unclean animal.

No other prophetic implications are known. These could be taken to represent anything from armies (common in the futurist interpretation) to ideas or systems (common in the historicist and amillennialist interpretations) or both (e.g., communism).

These three frogs seem to have specific meaning. Taking them in some order:

- The first frog is associated with the dragon, who is certainly identified with Satan. This could have a couple of possible implications:
 - It could mean Satanism (e.g., New Age movement stuff)
 - It could mean (as Satan is the prince of this world) a totalitarian government. As such, it is often identified with Russia, for which there are other reasons as well.
- The second frog is associated with the beast. Loosely, this would be the two horned beast. Especially in the historicist interpretation, this would be associated with the Roman Catholic Church; in the futurist interpretation, this could be the the revived Roman Empire (opinions vary widely on this, and particularly among futurists, identification is often very hazy at best).
- The third frog introduces -- for the first time -- the false prophet. It is interesting that John seems to assume that we know who this is. There is very little detail; the most common interpretation -- by no means universal -- is Islam. This is often tied to the "King of the South" in Daniel 11.

What is not particularly certain is whether or not these are armies at the battle of Armageddon, or just forces in the world which help lead up to it. Who can say? As we shall see, the historicists say the clock has now reached the present, and from here on out, we are speculating about things -- which should be done with a great deal of humility, at the least.

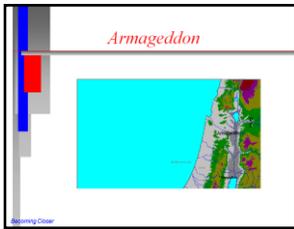


If you will recall the 6th Trumpet, the historicists claim that this set up the Ottoman Empire. This bowl shows the Euphrates - which was the starting point for the Ottoman invasion - drying up, which is taken to mean that this empire is no longer a barrier for the "kings of the east." Such a drying up occurred in World War 1. A glance at the maps will show that during that time the modern nation of Turkey replaced the Ottoman Empire -- in a muchly reduced space.

Interestingly, older historicists (such as Sir Isaac Newton, the physicist) held that one result of this "drying up" would be the return of the Jews to Palestine. I have not seen the thinking behind this (referenced only, I do not have the books), but it is one of the prime phenomena which occurred because of the "drying up."

The others?

- That same war brought about the Russian (Communist) Revolution. One of our frogs, perhaps?
- That same war brought about the Arab independence movement (another of our frogs, perhaps?)
- That same war brought about a change in "Western" thinking -- rejecting the confidence of the Gospel and replacing it with existential despair (perhaps our third frog?)
- But most important of all, there is no longer a major power standing between "the kings of the east" (whoever they might be) and Palestine. The door is opened -- for Armageddon.



As can be seen from the map, anyone wishing to invade Israel from the North must, of necessity, come down one of two paths:

- Along the coastal plain, or
- Down the Jordan valley.

At the gore point of these two paths, overlooked by the now famous Golan Heights, stands the little hill of Megiddo. Har-Megiddo, or Armageddon, is here. A defending force would concentrate here, for at this point you could block either path, thus practicing economy of force.

Note that our passage does not announce the battle; only the preparation for it. A full study of Armageddon is beyond the scope of this work (see Ezekiel 38-39, Daniel 11:40-12:3, and others for this), but there are some things that are certain:

- This battle (or campaign, culminating at Armageddon) will involve the forces of Russia. All point of view agree on that, based on Ezekiel 38-39, and the table of nations in Genesis.
- It will also involve a force from the south (Daniel), and most scholars now hold this to be an Arab, or Arab/African army. Most speculate that this will be Moslem in character. This would be Daniel's "King of the South."
- The futurists add the 200 million orientals of the 6th Trumpet. This seems poor interpretation to me, but it is indicated by the way being opened, and also the amount of blood said to be shed.
- Based upon our three frogs, we also should see an army from the West, headed by some manifestation of Roman authority.



Beyond this, speculation abounds. We are about to see the Day of the Lord, and this is future tense in all three views.

It surprises me, therefore, that so much is written with such confidence. I am by no means impressed with the scholarship or surety of any of the three theories. It seems that since we are now certain this is in the future, any nonsense is acceptable -- after all, how could we be sure, and it sure is fun to speculate.

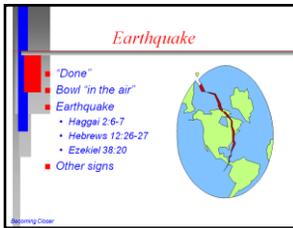
So, let us make it a principle of thought from here on out: All the major theories agree: we are now talking about the future. There is only one thing certain, and our Lord says it next.

"I come as a thief in the night." BE READY.

It is done

(Rev 16:17-21 NIV) The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" (18) Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. (19) The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. (20) Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. (21) From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

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“It is done” -- literally, in the Greek, “Done” -- parallels the cry of Christ on Calvary. It is interesting to note the completeness of this judgment. It is the seventh bowl; the bowls are the seventh trumpet; the trumpets are the seventh seal -- triply complete. And the judgment itself is rendered in three places: heaven, the air and the earth. It is completely complete.

The bowl is poured out “in the air.” For the twentieth century mind this has an almost irresistible thought: nuclear warfare, which is largely delivered “in the air.” One should consider also the possibility that “air” may mean the realm of ideas. It depends on how symbolically you wish to interpret things. We are in the future; modesty is required.

The “great earthquake” is well known in Old Testament prophecy:

(Hag 2:6-7 NIV) "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. {7} I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.

{The clear implication is that the earthquake, whether a physical one or a symbolic one (i.e., shaking all the people of the earth), directly precedes the coming of the Lord.}

(Heb 12:26-27 NIV) At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." {27} The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

{Here the author of Hebrews explains it -- the purpose is to shake down what can be shaken, and leave standing what cannot. This too can be taken symbolically}

(Ezek 38:20 NIV) The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground.

{This appears to make the earthquake literal; but see Ezekiel 13:11 for another possibility. It does definitely establish the link between Armageddon -- this passage in Ezekiel is about Russia's participation in that -- and this earthquake.}

Other symbols abound. Lightning and thunder are related to judgment, as we have seen. The hailstones (interestingly, Lindsey and Smith see them as hailstones, avoiding the temptation to see nuclear weapons) are also a sign of judgement (a plague on Egypt, for example). Ezekiel 38:22 also connects these with Armageddon.

Islands and mountains, as we saw in the sixth seal, may mean powers and authorities.

One thing is clear: symbolic, literal or both, no such shakeup has ever occurred -- yet.

