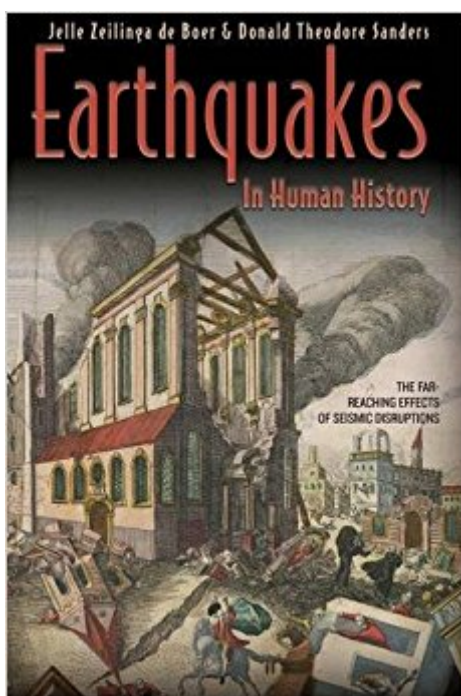


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# Earthquakes In Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects Of Seismic Disruptions



## Synopsis

On November 1, 1755--All Saints' Day--a massive earthquake struck Europe's Iberian Peninsula and destroyed the city of Lisbon. Churches collapsed upon thousands of worshippers celebrating the holy day. *Earthquakes in Human History* tells the story of that calamity and other epic earthquakes. The authors, Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, recapture the power of their previous book, *Volcanoes in Human History*. They vividly explain the geological processes responsible for earthquakes, and they describe how these events have had long-lasting aftereffects on human societies and cultures. Their accounts are enlivened with quotations from contemporary literature and from later reports. In the chaos following the Lisbon quake, government and church leaders vied for control. The Marquês de Pombal rose to power and became a virtual dictator. As a result, the Roman Catholic Jesuit Order lost much of its influence in Portugal. Voltaire wrote his satirical work *Candide* to refute the philosophy of "optimism," the belief that God had created a perfect world. And the 1755 earthquake sparked the search for a scientific understanding of natural disasters. Ranging from an examination of temblors mentioned in the Bible, to a richly detailed account of the 1906 catastrophe in San Francisco, to Japan's Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, to the Peruvian earthquake in 1970 (the Western Hemisphere's greatest natural disaster), this book is an unequalled testament to a natural phenomenon that can be not only terrifying but also threatening to humankind's fragile existence, always at risk because of destructive powers beyond our control.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Weekend scholars and disaster fans will find the physical and the social sciences blend interestingly, if sometimes a bit awkwardly, in this study of earthquakes across the centuries. As in their previous book, *Volcanoes in Human History*, coauthors de Boer and Sanders consider the repercussions of natural disasters on everything from literature and religion to politics and science. Early chapters consider biblical references to a quaking earth ("the coincidence of [Joshua's] easy passage across the Jordan and the easy conquest of Jericho suggests the aftermath of a major earthquake") and show how 14th- and 18th-century earthquakes in England and Portugal were taken as signs from God (encouraged by fiery preacher John Wesley, Londoners who had suffered through several small quakes in 1750 saw Portugal's disastrous 1755 quake as yet another warning of God's displeasure with sinners). A discussion of the New Madrid, Mo., quake of 1811 notes that while it was one of the strongest ever recorded in North America (it was followed by 1,874 aftershocks), it remains relatively unknown because the region was little populated. Modern-era quakes in San Francisco (1906), Kanto, Japan (1923), Peru (1970) and Nicaragua (1972) round out the book; the links between seismic aftermath and revolutionary ferment in the latter two countries nicely pinpoint the significant interplay between planetary and sociopolitical upheaval. Illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2005 "A splendid geographical and cultural survey of how, over the centuries, the unquiet Earth has altered our sense of nature and ourselves."--Russell Seitz, *Wall Street Journal* "The effects of tremors lasting only minutes often dwarf those of almost all other natural disasters, leaving scars on the landscape and the population that can last for centuries. Geologist Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and science writer Donald Theodore Sanders drive that point home with well-chosen evidence from notable seismic upheavals of the past. . . . [T]he best parts of the book are the stories, big and small, of people and institutions affected by the great seismic disruptions."--Laurence A. Marschall, *Natural History* "The authors provide little-known facts and insights on geologic processes and the effects of these natural disasters on the course of human history. . . . Because earthquakes are an expression of a living and evolving planet Earth, knowledge of their influence on a living and evolving human population is essential. This book goes a long way toward erasing that knowledge deficit."--Choice "A terrifying but excellent study of human history in relation to earthquakes, the tsunamis earthquakes can cause, and the consuming fires that often follow and take the greatest tolls. . . . [A] great read: The authors weave in high-profile literature, heavy doses of exciting political history and some baseline geology

for understanding, plus a bunch of tidbits that are not standard fare even for the most geology-centric reader."--Victoria Bruce, *The Globe and Mail*"Jelle Zelinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders relate fascinating historical accounts illustrating how earthquakes have repeatedly served as catalysts for significant, long-term changes in social, political, military, religious, economic, and other conditions. . . . A major strength of [their] writing is their talent for clearly and succinctly delivering complex scientific theory to the lay reader. . . . de Boer's and Sanders' work helps ensure that disaster risk receives the attention it most certainly warrants."--Shawn Fenn, *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*"The book is well written, in a clear crisp style, without unnecessary jargon. The geological aspects are admirably well informed and accurate. . . . This is an admirable book. It is easily the most scholarly and well-informed discussion of the broader historical contexts of these earthquakes that I have read, and the geological accounts of what happened are well explained."--James Jackson, *Geological Magazine*"I recommend it to any geophysicist interested in the human impact of earthquakes, and indeed, as a result of reading it I am keen to search out previous work by the authors which studies the sociological effects of volcanic eruptions."--John Brittan, *Leading Edge*"The book is written with a vivid and easily digested narrative style that helps the amateur reader to assimilate a bit of basic geological knowledge. . . . [T]he geology-centered reader will better understand the far-reaching effects of earthquakes for different aspects of the history of civilization."--Marek Lewandowski, *Pure and Applied Geophysics*

Despite prior knowledge, historical or projected, an earthquake is an unexpected, hence, immediate experience for which most people are unprepared. I've been through a couple myself and can say I really didn't know what was going on in the first few seconds. And the after-shocks can go on for several days. Hollywood has made great use of this element of surprise to create some visually sensational though at times silly movies: "San Francisco"(1936), "The Ten Commandments"(1956), "Earthquake"(1974), to name a few. The real stories of earthquakes and their immediate as well as lasting impacts on the course of human events is fascinating and worth your time to understand. That is the focus of the 2005 collaborative work, "Earthquakes in Human History," by Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders. Not only is the book entertaining reading but is still very much relevant to current global events. The first premise of the book is that throughout human "recorded" history earthquakes have had both immediate disruptive effects but, as time has passed by, have also had social and cultural impacts. After a fairly basic explanation of the underlying causes of earthquakes as the results of plate tectonic movements, i.e. shifts in the geologic

elements making up the earth's surface possibly first hypothesized by Benjamin Franklin in 1793, the authors trace the impact of several noteworthy upheavals on the course of human events:- The Holy Land: starting as early as 2100BCE with Sodom and Gomorrah, possible explanations for the cataclysmic events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and various changes to the Dead Sea and its salinity that may have spared the lives of some local people who were to be drowned by Roman soldiers but miraculously floated- Ancient Greece: primarily focusing on the role of a 464BCE earthquake and its impact on the decline of the dominant state of Sparta following the battles of Marathon (490BCE), Thermopylae - the stand of the "300" (480BCE) - and its defeat in 371BCE by Thebes- Medieval and Elizabethan England: the seemingly inexplicable earthquakes of 1382CE and 1580CE that had consequences in the religious teaching of Wycliffe and Wesley as well as the writings of Spenser ("The Fairie Queene" 1590-1596) and Shakespeare ("Romeo and Juliet" 1596)- The Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1775: a truly devastating event on November 1 ("All Saints' Day") with echoing effects for religion, royalty and rulers and post-crisis management- New Madrid, Missouri: considered probably the largest earthquake in USA history though less noticed than the San Francisco 1906 Quake due to the smaller population and less impact on public institutions and media - some eye-opening diary entries of then frontiersmen paddling canoes over a lake and looking down on a sunken forest of large trees that had been soaring over their heads only a few years prior- San Francisco, California: the world famous event of 1906 and presented in not only in exquisite detail capturing how the post-quake fires moved across the city, including the "Ham and Egg" fire started by someone preparing breakfast after the initial quake but unaware that their wooden house chimney had been damaged sufficiently to allow cinders to set the house and neighborhood ablaze, as well as the consequences of ignored requests to prepare for this type of calamity- Japan's Great Kanto Earthquake: the 1923 earthquake that destroyed substantial parts of Tokyo and Yokohama, again, due to the post-event firestorms that quickly moved out of control across the primarily wooden and oil-soaked paper screen housing- Peru: the 1970 Callejon de Huaylas earthquake and subsequent avalanche immediately destroying many villages and thousands of lives with the "real story" subsequently developing after the newly appointed national government's attempt to use the reconstruction efforts for political purposes and the inept management continuing to have impact today- Nicaragua: the 1972 Managua earthquake that had widespread immediate destruction and led to the consolidation of the country less fortunate population into the nascent Sandinista movement that ultimately overthrew the Somoza dictatorship of forty years or moreA second premise that emerges during the depictions is the impact of fires and lack of advance preventative measures. Whether inability to pump water to fight fires due to water

mains burst from the intense heat and ground upheaval or political opportunism, it is apparent that the human factor has played a more lasting role to extend recent catastrophes. These observations may not be the intent of the authors but they are certainly too obvious to ignore."Earthquakes in Human History" may be too anecdotal to satisfy those with a more scientific bent but it is a notable effort to chronicle and interpret immediate and long-term human reactions as a consequence of these natural disasters. I, for one, applaud this effort to put natural science studies in a more social science context. Maybe the drama of these events in this format (reading, how quaint) can help the next generation realize the importance of this history and advance preparation... before the next big one hits.

Thanks

I bought this product for school. I liked this product, it was shipped quickly and was exactly how it was described in the description.

Overall a fairly good job here. The first half looks at quakes in the Ancient world and gives us a brief introduction to the subject. The second half includes six of the world's most infamous tremblors, notably Lisbon, San Francisco, Tokyo and Peru (1970). The last chapter, on Nicaragua's 1972 shake up, is the least good. The author's state it is Latin America's second worst earthquake, but then tell us little about the disaster itself. Instead we are given a national history lesson. Either they didn't study up for that chapter, or it wasn't much of a calamity. Cities like Tokyo and Lisbon were truly destroyed by a combination of ground shaking, fire and tsunami. It would have been better to include more earthquakes, and 'Atheen' is right that China should not have been overlooked. After all, some of the worst have happened there, and the Chinese have always been leaders in research and prediction. Other candidates are Iran, Turkey and Italy. While I enjoyed this much more than their earlier book on volcanoes, many of the same criticisms apply. I feel the authors were unsure just what kind of book they intended to write. History or science?

I have a baccalaureate degree in geology with an emphasis in paleontology, and although I have never actually used the degree, I enjoy reading about various aspects of geology. Earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis, all of which are interrelated phenomena, are particularly intriguing as they so often impact human society where ever they occur. Probably one of the most poetic and stirring artifacts of this very fact are the ancient footprints of two of what are believed by some to be our

prehistoric ancestors, preserved in the ash of a volcanic eruption at Leotoli in Tanzania, Africa. De Boer and Sanders' book, *Earthquakes in Human History* goes a long way to pulling together the geology and sociology of various seismic events through recorded time. Without a doubt the frailty and vulnerability of the human being is graphically demonstrated in the face of these catastrophic events. The authors begin by examining ancient literature for evidence of earthquakes and earthquake damage in human terms. They look to the authors of the Biblical narrative for evidence of seismic activity in the Levant, and its effects on the course of history there. Although many of the stories they analyze are very likely to have seismic components irrespective of their ultimate cause, I think that some might well be attributable to volcanic explosions as well. Although not familiar with the geologic activity in the area beyond its part in the rifting activity in the Afar triangle in Africa, I believe that volcanoes are customarily associated with such rifts. Certainly they are in the mid-Atlantic system of which Iceland is a part and in the Rift Valley in Africa itself. Although the Levant/Dead Sea portion is considered a "failed" arm of the rifting system, it might still partake of volcanism. Whatever the cause, the geologic activity in the Levant had a major journalistic impact on the narrators that witnessed them, and on the redactors that structured the Bible as we know it today. DeBoer and Sanders also discuss the various earthquakes and geological phenomena in the Greek world of the pre-classical and classical authors. Both the Trojan epics and the historic narratives of Herodotus and others are examined for the effects of geology on mankind and the course of history. Although they discuss several episodes, they missed my favorite, the massive tsunami that swept away a sizeable portion of the Persian land army when it was about to attack a coastal city-Potidea, as I recall. Seeing that the city was fortified everywhere but on the seaward side from which the sea was rapidly receding, the general determined to attack the city for that side. No sooner did he embark on the attack than a massive wave swept them all away. The authors discuss modern era quakes in England, the southeastern colonial US-an area most of us would consider tectonically quiescent-San Francisco-everyone's favorite earthquake story--Peru, Chili, Nicaragua, and Japan. All these stories are placed into retrospective history with a discussion of the social and political events of the times, and how the earthquake derailed things one way or another. My guess is that most of the changes would have occurred anyway, they were just hurried along by the unexpected intercession of mother nature. I was disappointed in that nothing was mentioned of China, whose quakes can be formidable and have caused some greater devastation by virtue of the fact that China achieved a denser population at an earlier stage of its historical career. It is also interesting, because a quake prediction that turned out correct, saved thousands, if not millions from death. Oh well, another book, perhaps. The volume discusses the geologic aspects of each of these

quakes as they are presented. I found it particularly interesting that some of the epicenters for very serious quakes, like that which occasioned the destruction of Lisbon and of San Francisco were actually located out at sea and far under ground. These of course also included tsunamis which sort of "topped" everything off and produced more widespread devastation. It was also interesting to note that the substrate of buildings, not just how they were constructed had a direct impact upon their capacity to survive the encounter. That building codes are the key in earthquake prone areas seems abundantly apparent. Lloyd Wright's hotel in Tokyo was a brilliant case in point. The fact that most of the civil supports such as water, electricity, power, communication, emergency care and effective fire control can all be hampered or even prevented is of great concern, as most of the cities that have been hit in the past with such catastrophic effect, are still where they were and are now much more densely settled. The authors point out that many schools, hospitals and even nuclear plants have been built on the San Andreas Fault, despite the fact of the quake of 1906, and the very strong likelihood that it will rift again with a magnitude like that of 1906 or higher. It will certainly cause more damage. This is a very interesting book. It is accessible to anyone who can read at grade 5 or above. Since the world seems to be sustaining a fair number of earthquakes recently in heavily populated areas with little or no quakeproofed buildings, it seems appropriate that the population of the world recognize the danger of unpreparedness and of disinterest. Furthermore, just because it doesn't occur in your own back yard, doesn't mean it doesn't have some kind of impact on you, as the authors occasionally point out.

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