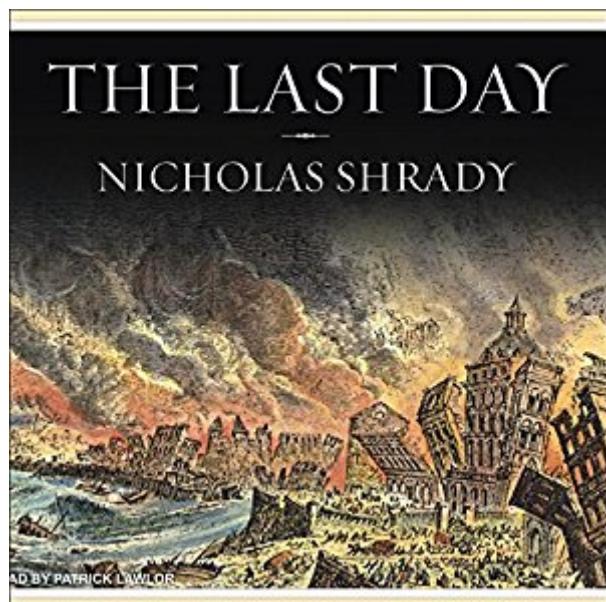


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# **The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, And Reason In The Great Lisbon Earthquake Of 1755**



## Synopsis

A riveting history of how the cataclysmic Lisbon earthquake shook the religious and intellectual foundations of Enlightenment Europe. Along with the volcanic destruction of Pompeii and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the Lisbon quake of 1755 is one of the most destructive natural disasters ever recorded. After being jolted by a massive quake, Lisbon was then pounded by a succession of tidal waves and finally reduced to ash by a fire that raged for five straight days. In *The Last Day*, Nicholas Shrady provides not only a vivid account of this horrific disaster but also a stimulating survey of the many shock waves it sent throughout Western civilization. When news of the quake spread, it inspired both a lurid fascination in the popular imagination of Europe and an intellectual debate about the natural world and God's place in human affairs. Voltaire, Alexander Pope, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among other eminent figures, took up the disaster as a sort of cause célèbre and a vehicle to express Enlightenment ideas. More practically, the Lisbon quake led to the first concerted effort at disaster control, modern urban planning, and the birth of seismology. *The Last Day* is popular history writing at its best and will appeal to readers of Simon Winchester's *Krakatoa* and *A Crack in the Edge of the World*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The earthquake that hit Lisbon on 1 November 1755 shook up a lot more than its buildings and citizens. There were repercussions for science, religion, philosophy, politics, and literature. In *The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755* (Viking) Nicholas

Shrady gives a compelling short account of the disaster itself, and the history of the events leading up to it, but spends far more of the pages in a fascinating description of the effects of the quake in local and global history. There have been bigger disasters, even in our own times, but this one was not only big, but it made gigantic differences even in the way humans looked at their place in the world. Shrady says that because of this particular disaster in a particular place, all people all over the world "from staunch clerics to enlightened philosophers were compelled to re-examine their most cherished dogmas." We are still living with some of the changes the earthquake wrought.

José I may have been king, but Portugal was largely ruled by the church which was the largest landowner and which supported the justly-feared Holy Office of the Inquisition. Every traveler noted how pious the inhabitants were, but many of them were in church when the disaster began, first with tremors, then violent waves from the sea, then from fire from all the household fireplaces that were beneath the collapsed buildings. Ten percent of the populace was wiped out. As in all disasters or diseases, there were those who knew that God was sending a message to those afflicted. The message, however, did not make sense. Lisbon was no worse than any large city, and demonstrably more pious than the others.

Because work often brings me to Lisbon, I thought it would be good to learn a bit more about the town's history and this book was a thrill - informative, interesting and easy to read without too many technical details, it gives clear picture of Lisbon the way it was before that fateful day in 1755. when earthquake, tsunamis and fire literally destroyed the town and how it was subsequently rebuilt again with heroic efforts by certain Mr. Carvalho who was given full freedom by king of Portugal, way too scared to act himself. Sure, along the way Carvalho made many enemies and stepped on people's feet too often but you have to consider immense opposition from the church and aristocracy who opposed anything new, while he had to rebuilt city from the rubble of stones and along the way managed to get rid of Jesuits who brainwashed citizens into thinking that this was God's punishment and there is no sense in building anything new. Eventually King died and his successor was religious fanatic who punished Carvalho and restored church but although Carvalho died in exile, his work is remembered and when we walk through marble streets of Lisbon centre, we appreciate this - there simply wouldn't be any Lisbon the way it is today if not for him. Nicholas Shrady writes very well and connects our reactions to natural catastrophes then and now - he also points that way back then as well as today, God's punishment is still used as explanation to these catastrophes. Listening to words of Archbishop of New Orleans ("We have reached a depth of immorality that we have never reached before") after recent devastations of hurricanes in that area, you would think we are

still in old Lisbon and Jesuits are preaching their thundering sermons.

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