

What Does the Bible Teach About “Acts of God”?

(Keeping the faith in the midst of a natural disaster)

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. In recent years, natural disasters have occurred all over the world
 1. Tsunami in Asia (2004)
 2. Hurricane Katrina (2005)
 3. Cyclone in Myanmar (2008)
 4. Earthquake in Haiti (2010)
 5. Hurricane Ian in Florida (2022)
- B. When disasters strike, people often ask: Why did it happen? Did God cause it? If not, why did He allow it?
- C. Insurance definition of “An Act of God”: “An event which is caused solely by the effect of nature or natural causes and without any interference by humans whatsoever. An Act of God refers to an accident or other natural event caused without human intervention that could not have been prevented by reasonable foresight or care.” (Wiktionary)
- D. Theologians differ on their interpretations of this.
 1. Some say that God causes a disaster. R. C. Sproul speaks of Divine Providence: “In a universe governed by God, there are no chance events”
 2. Self-serving, ignorant televanglists go on the air to claim God’s judgment against the victims.
 3. Others propose that God may allow a tragedy to occur (Deism). God started this world in the beginning, and now just sits back uninvolved allowing it to run as it will.
 4. Still others just accept unfortunate events as part of life and reference Matthew 5:45 - “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
- E. Tsunamis and other disasters come from the natural overall system of our Earth that, as we know, is a very geologically active planet. Too often, we fail to build our towns and houses with preventive safety criteria to minimize the damages created by natural events. Since we cannot prevent the occurring of a tsunami, earthquake or volcano, we can prevent most of their consequences by being prudent. As the tsunami occurred on December 26, 2004, Bangladesh was hit by the waves too, but had minimal damages because its coasts were still protected by the Sunderban’s forests and mangroves that absorbed most of the energy of the flood. Instead, other coastal regions where most of mangroves along the coasts had been destroyed to build up all the potential property along the sea, had the maximum of damage. The same happens with earthquakes; people build weak houses in zones very well known for being highly seismic. What can be expected?

I. WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

A. Did God cause it?

1. It is common to call such natural disasters acts of God, perhaps because God used natural disasters in the past.
 - a. The flood - Gen. 6:6-7, 11-13, 17
 - b. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - Gen. 18:20, 19:24-25
 - c. Famine, drought, pestilence, plague, war, earthquake, against Israel - Amos 4:6-12
2. But it is a mistake to attribute all disasters to the hand of God.
 - a. Disasters are part of a natural process of this planet's design and function. Hurricanes are part of the seasonal circulation of the ocean water that maintains a temperate climate. Volcanoes are plate tectonics resulting from the stable spin and tilt of the planet.
 - b. Sometimes God simply allows such events to run their course according to "time and chance," and many experience tragedies through no fault of their own - Ecc. 9:11-12
 - c. Some disasters are man-made (Chernobyl nuclear disaster, December 15, 1967 Silver Bridge collapse in Point Pleasant WV, most forest fires, September 11, 2001 collapse of the Twin Towers in New York).
 - d. Suffering often comes upon the innocent and righteous.
 - 1) Job 1:8-22 - Job was tested because he was righteous, not because of sin.
 2. 2Cor. 11:23-27 - Paul's suffering resulted from his faithful service as an apostle, not because of any sin he may have committed
 - e. We should never make the mistake of Job's friends, assuming guilt of those who suffer tragedy - Job 42:7
 - f. Jesus implied that sin had nothing to do with Pilate's slaughter of the Galileans or the disastrous collapse of the tower of Siloam.
 - 1) Luke 13:1-5
3. In the absence of Divine revelation, there is no way we can know if "God caused it."

B. Then why did God allow it?

1. This speaks to the overall problem of suffering, which God allows for several reasons.
 - a. It keeps this world from becoming too attractive, encouraging us to seek something better - Matt. 6:19-21; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 13:14
 - b. It can bring out the best in people: patience, generosity, a sense of community.
 - 1) Rom. 5:3-4; James 1:2-4
 - c. It encourages people to draw near to God in repentance.
 - 1) 2Cor. 7:10
2. Whenever the innocent and righteous die, we should bear in mind:
 - a. The death of the righteous is precious to God - Psalm 116:15

- b. The death of the righteous removes them from suffering and evil
 - 1) Isa. 57:1-2
- c. The death of the righteous is a blessing - Rev. 14:13
- d. Even the innocent young are delivered from heartache, suffering, and sorrow.
- e. Caused by God or not, disasters can result in some good.

II. WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

- A. Disasters supply us with opportunities to do good to others - Gal. 6:10
- B. Do Good to ALL men - Luke 10:30-37
- C. Especially the household of faith - Rom. 15:25-26; 2Cor. 8:1-4; 1Cor. 16:1-4
- D. Pray - 1Tim. 2:1-2
 - 1. We should pray for those directly afflicted, and their loved ones.
 - 2. We should pray for those providing relief.
 - 3. We should pray that people would be safe from future occurrences.
- E. Then, we must have the faith and wisdom to know that such things will happen in a fallen world, but they will never take place in heaven.