



**WHY
ARE
THERE**

CALAMITIES?

**BY
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WHY ARE THERE GREAT CALAMITIES?

By Given O. Blakely

Throughout history, there have been great calamities – calamities that caused physical devastation, and resulted in staggering numbers of the dead. Because these happenings extend beyond the perimeter of human wisdom, they have been a source of confusion among the sons of men. Some, of course, care nothing about devastation, disaster, and various forms of calamity and catastrophe until they themselves are involved. Then their minds are flooded with all manners of questions. Some have even used such occasions to question the existence of God. Others do not deny His existence, but wonder if He is at all active in the affairs of men. Still others ponder whether or not He is concerned for humanity, or if He has any love for men, women, and children.

It is the purpose of this short treatise to deal with some of these issues. I will tell you candidly that I do not have the kind of answers that are demanded by the inquisitive mind. I will address the matter of calamities, catastrophes, and epochs of disaster with God at the epicenter of my reasoning. I will particularly note disasters that occur in three areas.

1. Water disasters, including inordinate rain, floods, tsunami waves, and the likes.
2. Disruptions in the earth itself, including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and similar occurrences.
3. Catastrophes brought on by the wind, including hurricanes, tornados, and various forms of storms.

EPOCHAL CALAMITIES IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

First, it will be worthy to note that such occurrences have been associated with the one true God, who is over all, and governs the affairs of heaven and earth. The Scriptures identify several significant calamities that occurred on the earth as judgments from God. These were under His strict control, accomplishing what was purposed in them, and not extending for so much as a millisecond beyond the accomplishment of His purpose. Here is a sampling of significant calamities in Scripture.

THE FLOOD IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

The greatest global disaster occurred early in the history of humanity – approximately 1,655 years after Adam was created, or about B.C. 2245. This places the event about 2,300 years before the birth of Christ. The account of the flood is recorded in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of Genesis.

During the days leading up to Noah, humanity became especially corrupt. The particular trait that is mentioned is that of brutality, or violence. It is written, “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Gen 6:11). During this time, the attention of God fastened upon Noah, a just man who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8). He told Noah, “The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen 6:13). The judgment that followed is the only one of its kind, and is designed to promote the fear of the Lord.

In the judgment of the flood, God caused it to rain copiously for forty days and forty nights. Prior to this, it had never rained upon the earth. It is written of that pre-flood period (which lasted over two millennia), “. . .the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground” (Gen 2:5-6). In this 40-day rain, it appears that the heavens emptied their waters upon the earth, as nature was disrupted by the hand of the Lord. Not only did torrents of water descend upon the earth in the form of rain, but “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up” (Gen 7:11). This probably included the eruption of volcanoes, and the breaking forth of the great rivers and bodies of water that flow beneath the earth’s surface. It no doubt included gigantic earthquakes on the floors of the ocean which caused tsunami-like waves that devastated the entire world.

The waters of the flood rose above the highest mountain in the world – over twenty feet above the highest peak on the face of the earth (Gen 7:20). The waters then prevailed, remaining at that staggering depth for five months – one hundred and fifty days. It is written, “And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days” (Gen 7:24). Every living thing died during the flood, with Noah and his family (eight souls) being the only exception, and the living creatures that were with them in the ark. “And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the

ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark” (Gen 7:23)

I will address the matter of natural disasters and calamities with the account of the flood in mind. That will set this subject in a proper context, confirming that God IS mindful of humanity, for He promised He would never again send such a devastating judgment on the earth. This judgment was brought on because of man’s dreadful propensity to sin and iniquity. God declared this is the very reason He would never again judge the world in such a destructive manner, because man’s evil nature had not been changed by the flood. Thus God said, “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen 8:22).

The thing to see in this judgment is that everything was precisely controlled by the God of heaven. Those God intended to survive did precisely that – they survived. Those whom God had intended to perish (and that was everyone but Noah and his family), did precisely that – they perished. The flood did not commence until God gave the word, and as soon as He intended for it to end, it abruptly concluded, and things began to return to a state of normalcy.

If an earthly news agency would have given us a report of the flood, it would not read like God’s account. They would only guess about what was taking place, because they did not have all of the facts. The news media still does not have all of the facts at their disposal when they speak of calamities. We must trust, therefore, that there is more to them than meets the eye.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Actually, there were five cities involved in this judgment: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. Zoar was spared, being a place where Lot was afforded safety during the holocaust. In this judgment God “rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, obliterating the cities and their inhabitants, which were noted for their grievous immorality (Gen 19:24-29). The area they occupied became like a pit in the earth, and is generally understood to be the area now occupied by the Dead Sea, which is totally unproductive.

The judgment was very precise. Only the cities designated by God suffered destruction, and the only righteous man, Lot, was spared together with his daughters, being granted a place of safety (2 Pet 2:6-8)

Once again, an earthly news agency would not have seen the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as they are recorded in Scripture. Believe that there are explanations for present disasters that have not yet been given. We must be willing to wait for the answer until another time, when we will be less encumbered.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

About 2,500 years after Adam was created, God delivered the nation of Israel from Egypt. They had been in that country for four hundred and thirty years (Ex 12:40), and were slaves for the better portion of that time. God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. Because Pharaoh refused to let Israel go, God sent ten plagues upon the nation. They were designed to judge their false gods, weaken the wills of the Egyptians, and remove their stubbornness.

The ten plagues were natural catastrophes. There had never been anything like them before, nor has there been anything like them, since. I will give them with a brief description.

1. The plague of blood. In this plague the waters of the river Nile were turned into blood. In addition, the remaining waters in Egypt, their streams, other rivers, ponds, and pools of water were turned into blood (Ex 7:14-25)
2. The plague of frogs. In this plague a horde of frogs came out of the river Nile, other rivers, streams, and ponds, filling the land. They came into houses, the bedchambers, on the beds, into the house of the servants, upon all of the people, in their ovens, and in their kneadingtroughs (Ex 8:1-15).
3. The plague of lice. In this plague the dust of Egypt, which was unusually plentiful, was turned into lice, coming upon both man and beast (Ex 8:16-19).
4. The plague of flies. In this plague God sent swarms of flies upon the people, the servants, and the houses of Egypt. The flies filled the houses and covered the land (Ex 8:20-22).
5. The plague on cattle. In this plague a severe pestilence was brought upon the cattle, horses, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep of Egypt. As a result of this plague “all the cattle of Egypt died” (Ex 9:1-7).
6. The plague of boils and blains. In this plague, God commanded Moses to take the ashes of a large furnace and throw it into the air. The ashes became a fine dust that fell to the earth. When that dust fell upon man or beast it caused grievous boils that broke out in sores (Ex 9:8-12).
7. The plague of hail. In this plague an unprecedented “grievous hail” fell on the land of Egypt. While the hail fell, there was also a fire that ran along upon the ground. The hail struck both man and beast, and beat down the crops of Egypt (Ex 9:18-34).
8. The plague of locusts. In this plague God sent a horde of locusts upon Egypt. They were so thick they covered ground, and it could not be seen. They consumed the grain of Egypt that had not been destroyed by the previous plague of hail. They filled the houses of the Egyptians, together with their servant’s houses (Ex 10:1-20).
9. The plague of darkness. In this plague a supernatural darkness descended upon Egypt. It was so dark that we are told the darkness could be “felt.” The darkness continued for three

days during which no Egyptian saw anyone, or left their homes (Ex 10:21-23).

10. The plague of the death of the firstborn. In this plague the firstborn son of every Egyptian, Egyptian servant, and all beasts died in a single night (Ex 11:4-7; 12:17,29,30).

If these plagues were reported by a national news service, they would all have been identified as natural disasters – when nature did unpredictable things. Perhaps some scientists would provide an explanation for the events, but their explanations would not be true. These things were caused by God, and were very carefully orchestrated. They took place in a restricted area. The part of the country in which Israel was dwelling was exempted from them all (Ex 8:22; 9:4-6, 26; 10:23; 11:7). The plagues started precisely when God said, and ended abruptly at His word. They also accomplished His purpose, which was to constrain the Egyptians to let His people leave that country.

FAMINES

Throughout history, there have been numerous famines in the earth. Several of them are recorded in Scripture. These also are depicted as being under precise Divine control. Often they were sent at judgments. Other times they were occasions of trial and testing. Still other times they were episodes in which God confirmed He could and would sustain His people when all seemed hopeless. Here are some of the famines of Scripture.

1. When Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to go to Canaan, there was a famine in the land (Gen 12:10).
2. In the days of Jacob, grandson to Abraham there was also a famine in the land, “beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham” (Gen 26:1).
3. There were seven years of famine during the days of Joseph. That famine was “over all the face of the earth” (Gen 41:36,56). The Psalmist said that God “called” for this famine (Psa 105:16).
4. During the days of the Judges of Israel, there was a great famine in Israel. It was so significant that people had to go to other countries in order to sustain life. This famine is the setting for the Bible book of Ruth (Ruth 1:1).
5. During the time of David, there was a three year famine (2 Sam 21:1).
6. During the time of Elijah the prophet, there was a “sore famine” in Samaria (1 Kings 18:2).
7. During the time of Elisha the prophet, there was another “great famine” in Samaria, during which people sold asses’ heads and containers of dove’s dung for food (2 Kgs 6:25).
8. The prophet Elisha told of a time when the Lord “called” for a seven year famine upon the land (2 Kgs 8:1).

9. During the time when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, there was a grievous famine in that city, so that “there was no bread for the people of the land” (2 Kgs 25:3).

10. During the times following Christ’s return to heaven, a prophet named Agabus prophesied there would be a “great dearth throughout the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 17:11). Many believers in Jerusalem suffered as a result of this famine, which occasioned the gathering of a special offering for them among many of the Gentile churches (Acts 11:29; Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-2; Gal 2:10).

Among other things, these famines confirmed that the world is a place in which must trouble and difficulty occurs.

Modern Records of Famines

My purpose for providing these records is to show that calamities have taken place throughout the history of the world. They are not a strange thing, and we should not treat them as though they were.

1. Where: Egypt

When: 1200-02

The Egyptian people relied on the annual flooding of the Nile River to leave soil for growing crops. After a shortage of rain, however, the Nile didn't rise. People were unable to grow food and began to starve to death. The final death toll was 110,000, due to starvation, cannibalism, and disease.

2. Where: Ireland

When: 1845-49

Potatoes were the mainstay of the Irish diet. When the crop was struck by a potato blight (a fungus that killed the crop), farmers and their families began to starve. The grain and livestock raised in Ireland were owned by the English, and the laws of the time prevented the Irish people from importing grain to eat. This combination of plant disease and politics resulted in the Great Potato Famine, which killed 1.5 million people and caused a million more to move to America.

3. Where: The Great Plains of the U.S.

When: 1930s

The U.S. experienced its longest drought of the twentieth century. Peak periods were 1930, 1934, 1936, 1939, and 1940. During 1934, dry regions stretched solidly from New York and Pennsylvania across the Great Plains to the California coast. A great "dust bowl" covered 50 million acres in the south central plains during the winter of 1935–1936. Heavy winds caused the dry soil to be blown into huge clouds. Crops and pasture lands were ruined by the harsh dust storms, which also proved a severe health hazard.

4. Where: Northern China

When: 1959-61

The world's deadliest famine killed an estimated 30 million people in China. Drought was followed by crop failure, which was followed by starvation, disease, and cannibalism. News of the famine was not revealed to the rest of the world until 1981, some 20 years later.

5. Where: Biafra, Africa (present-day Nigeria)

When: 1967-69

As a result of civil war, famine conditions killed an estimated 1 million people and left another 3.5 million suffering from extreme malnutrition.

The Word of God affirms that God is able to sustain those whom He desires, even during a famine. "To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Psa 33:19). There are even examples of individuals in whom this promise was fulfilled: Jacob and his household (Gen 42:1), Elijah and a widow who ministered to whom (1 Kgs 17:13-16), and four lepers in Israel (2 Kgs 7:4,8-9).

EARTHQUAKES

Earthquakes are a phenomenon with which men are become more and more familiar. They are frightening occurrences when the earth convulses, heaving too and fro as though it is out of control. Ranked according to the number of fatalities caused, here is a listing of known earthquakes in post-Biblical times.

DATE	LOCATION	FATALITIES	MAGNITUDE
Jan. 23, 1556	Shansi, China	830,000	Not Available
Dec. 26, 2004	off west coast of northern Sumatra	275,950	+ 9.0
July 27, 1976	Tangshan, China	255,000	8.0
Aug. 9, 1138	Aleppo, Syria	230,000	Not Available
May 22, 1927	near Xining, China	200,000	8.3
Dec. 22, 8562	Damghan, Iran	200,000	Not Available
Dec. 16, 1920	Gansu, China	200,000	8.6
March 23, 893	Ardabil, Iran	150,000	Not Available
Sept. 1, 1923	Kwanto, Japan	143,000	8.3
Oct. 5, 1948	Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, USSR	110,000	7.3
Dec. 28, 1908	Messina, Italy	70,000–100,000	7.5
Sept. 1290	Chihli, China	100,000	Not Available
Oct 8, 2005	Pakistan	80,361	7.6
Nov. 1667	Shemakha, Caucasia	80,000	Not Available
Nov. 18, 1727	Tabriz, Iran	77,000	Not Available
Nov. 1, 1755	Lisbon, Portugal	70,000	8.7
Dec. 25, 1932	Gansu, China	70,000	7.6
May 31, 1970	Peru	66,000	7.8
1268 Silicia,	Asia Minor	60,000	Not Available .
Jan. 11, 1693	Sicily, Italy	60,000	Not Available .
May 30, 1935	Quetta, Pakistan	30,000–60,000	7.5
Feb. 4, 1783	Calabria, Italy	50,000	Not Available
June 20, 1990	Iran	50,000	7.7

THE WORD OF GOD ON EARTHQUAKES

No earthquake has ever occurred independently of God and His will. This does not mean that God takes pleasure in earthquakes. It does mean that they are never as long and bad as they could have been if He was not controlling the universe. They also serve His purposes, which quite often are not known by men. Men must be willing to have faith in God when they consider these events.

Job spoke of earthquakes in most arresting language. “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Which REMOVETH THE MOUNTAINS, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which SHAKETH THE EARTH out of her place, and THE PILLARS THEREOF TREMBLE” (Job 9:4-6). Think of it, God can “move mountains,” shake the earth “out of her place,” and cause the very foundational “pillars” of the earth to tremble and shake. That is Divine language describing an earthquake.

God is so holy, and the world is so defiled, that when He merely looks at it, it can cause an earthquake. Here is how David said it. “He looketh on the earth, and IT TREMBLETH: He toucheth the hills, and they smoke” (Psa 104:32). Jeremiah said it this way, “I beheld the mountains, and, lo, THEY TREMBLED, and all THE HILLS MOVED LIGHTLY” – or “too and fro” (Jer 4:24).

BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS OF EARTHQUAKES

There are accounts of several earthquakes in Scripture. They do not appear, as a rule, to have been frequent and unusually destructive during ancient times. Jesus told His disciples however, that toward the end of time, earthquakes would be more frequent.

1. The earthquake at Mount Sinai, when the Law, or Ten Commands, was given by Moses. “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and THE WHOLE MOUNT QUAKED GREATLY” (Ex 19:18). In a vivid description of that event, David informs us that more was involved than the mountain itself. “THE EARTH SHOOK, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel” (Psa 68:8). In the 77th Psalm, Asaph said “the EARTH TREMBLED and shook” at that time (Psa 77:18). Paul said of the occasion, “Whose voice then SHOOK THE EARTH” (Heb 12:26).

2. During their journey through the wilderness, the Israelites witnessed a most unusual earthquake. A man named Korah withstood Moses, saying that he was not qualified to be the main leader. God heard his complaint, and judged him and those who sided with them. Here is how the Scripture records that event. “And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that THE GROUND CLAVE ASUNDER that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation” (Num 16:31-33).

3. On another occasion, Jonathan, the son of king Saul, and his armor bearer discovered and defeated a band of Philistine soldiers. It is said of that victory, “And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armorbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow. And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and THE EARTH QUAKED: so it was a very great trembling” (1 Sam 14:14-15).

4. Once, when God revealed Himself to the prophet Elijah, he caused an earthquake to occur, yet did not speak to the prophet during the earthquake. “And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind AN EARTHQUAKE; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11-12).

5. A great earthquake occurred during the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. The particulars of this earthquake are not given, only that it was a significant one. “The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before THE EARTHQUAKE” (Amos 1:1). “And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before THE EARTHQUAKE in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee” (Zech 14:5).

6. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, there was a great earthquake, and even the rocks split. “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and THE EARTH DID QUAKE, and the rocks rent” (Matt 27:51).

7. When Jesus rose from the dead, an earthquake occurred when an angel from heaven came down to the empty tomb, sitting upon the stone that he rolled away from the door – not to let Jesus out, but to let the women and His disciples in. “And, behold, there was A GREAT EARTHQUAKE: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it” (Matt 28:2).

8. When Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi, they were chained in a dungeon. God used a great earthquake to loose their bonds and deliver them. “And suddenly there was A GREAT EARTHQUAKE, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed” (Acts 16:26).

THE LAST DAYS

In addition to these things, Jesus said there were going to be earthquakes in different places during the last stage of the world's history. Here are His words. “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, AND EARTHQUAKES, in divers places” (Matt 24:7). “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be EARTHQUAKES IN DIVERS PLACES, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows” (Mark 13:8).

“And GREAT EARTHQUAKES shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven” (Luke 21:11).

Confirming that we are living in the last days, the second most powerful and destructive earthquake in recorded history took place on December 26, 2004, off the coast of Sumatra. The thirteenth most destructive earthquake in history took place on October 8th, 2005. God was in control of alboth of them so that they did not last long, and allowed for some recovery.

Earthquakes, then, are not a new phenomenon. Men are to give thanks that they do not occur more often, and that they are not more destructive. A single earthquake in China, in the year of 1556, killed 830,000 people. Every earthquake would do that much damage of Lord was not controlling this universe. When earthquakes occur, our minds should be filled with thoughts of God, and of our association with Him.

VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS

This is another most peculiar activity within the earth. Beneath the surface of certain mountains there is a sea of hot molten lava – melted rock. One can only imagine what would happen if these molten seas were suddenly and simultaneously spilled out into the earth. Thank God, there are only occasion volcanic eruptions – a sort of convulsion that tells us the earth is not satisfied with its present state.

Here is a record of known volcanic eruptions. They are ranked in order of the fatalities known to have occurred.

VOLCANO	LOCATION	YEAR	DEATHS	CAUSE
Tambora,	Indonesia	1815	92,000	Starvation
Krakatau	Indonesia	1883	36,417	Tsunami
Mount Pelee	Martinique	1902	29,025	Ash flows
Ruiz	Colombia	1985	25,000	Mudflows
Unzen	Japan	1792	14,300	Volcano collapse, tsunami
Laki	Iceland	1783	9,350	Starvation
Kelut	Indonesia	1919	5,110	Mudflows
Galunggung	Indonesia	1882	4,011	Mudflows
Vesuvius	Italy	1631	3,500	Mudflows, lava flows
Vesuvius	Italy	79	3,360	Ash flows, falls
Papandayan	Indonesia	1772	2,957	Ash flows
Lamington	Papua New Guinea	1951	2,942	Ash flows
El Chichon	Mexico	1982	2,000	Ash flows
Soufriere	St. Vincent	1902	1,680	Ash flows
Oshima	Japan	1741	1,475	Tsunami
Asama	Japan	1783	1,377	Ash flows, mudflows
Taal	Philippines	1911	1,335	Ash flows
Mayon	Philippines	1814	1,200	Mudflows
Agung	Indonesia	1963	1,184	Ash flows
Cotopaxi	Ecuador	1877	1,000	Mudflows
Pinatubo	Philippines	1991	800	Disease
Komagatake	Japan	1640	700	Tsunami
Ruiz	Colombia	1845	700	Mudflows
Hibok-Hibok	Philippines	1951	500	Ash flows

Like all other natural disasters, erupting volcanoes are not an everyday occurrence.

They happen occasionally, and with varied intensity. While any volcanic eruption is potentially very destructive, God so controls them so they do not overrun the world.

Volcanic eruptions are a particular revelation of the restlessness of the earth. They are like a woman carrying a child, who becomes sick and expels what is in her stomach. This particular aspect of disasters is covered in the following section.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

THE IMPACT OF SIN UPON CREATION

The Bible reveals to us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Within a six day period, with each day consisting of one night and one day, God “created all things.” The account of this creation is found in Genesis 1:1 through 2:1. We are also informed that all of this vast creation, with all of its marvelous complexity, was accomplished by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written, “God, who created all things BY JESUS CHRIST.” This was Christ in His pre-incarnate form, before He entered the world as a man, Jesus Christ. We also read that they were created FOR Him, as well as BY Him. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Col 1:16).

Although everything that was created, including mankind, was “very good” (Gen 1:31), a tragedy occurred within the very heart of the creation, the Garden of Eden. There, before Adam and Eve (the first man and woman) had any children, sin entered into the world. Following the suggestion of the devil, also called “Satan” and “the old serpent” (Rev 12:9), Eve disobeyed God by eating a fruit God had commanded should not be touched or eaten. She then gave some of the fruit to her husband Adam, and he also ate of it, disobeying God. This resulted in Adam and Eve being “cast out” of the Garden, by the very God who had placed them there. This account is found in Genesis 3:1-24.

Before Adam and Eve left, they heard God pronounce several judgments. I will briefly summarize them here.

1. God said to the serpent, whom Satan used to deceive Adam and Eve: “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:14-15).
2. God said to Eve: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen 3:16).
3. God said to Adam: “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:17-19).

Thus the serpent was cursed, the woman was cursed, the man was cursed, and the

earth was cursed. In these curses the woman would have trouble, bringing forth children with pain. The man would have trouble, having to earn his bread by the sweat of his face, or hard toil. The ground would not cooperate with man's efforts, but would bring forth inhibiting plants, like thorns and thistles.

Particularly relevant to this discussion, I want to focus on the impact these curses had upon the heavens and the earth – the whole creation. This was not expounded in the Garden, but was opened up through the Prophets, Jesus Christ, and Christ's Apostles.

The curse of mortality, or temporality, was passed upon all creation. Commensurate with that curse, death began to occur in the impersonal creation – all of it. David said of the present heavens and the earth, "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed" (Psa 102:26). Isaiah said, "The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again" (Isa 24:19-20). Isaiah also said, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner" (Isa 51:6). Jesus Christ said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away" (Matt 24:35). The Apostle Peter said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10).

The Apostle Paul provided some further insight into the imposition of death upon all of creation. He affirms that creation is travailing in pain, like a woman labors in child birth. "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom 8:19-22).

Here we learn several things.

1. First, that mankind, who is dying, could not, in that state, occupy an eternal realm. Therefore, the habitat of man was consigned to death as well as man himself.
2. Second, that just as there is salvation for men, by which they can be rescued from death, so there is an expected deliverance of creation itself that is presently anticipated by it.
3. Third, that creation shall not be delivered from "the bondage of corruption," or mortality, until all of the children of God are delivered, and there is no more need for the earth as it presently exists.
4. Fourth, that the present creation is groaning and travailing, and that this is being done "in pain," or discomfort. Creation is in a state of agitation, turmoil, and unrest. It is this particular

point that I want to especially address.

THE IMPOSITION OF DEATH

Death, or demise, has several different characteristics. Not only is there decline, decay, and putrefying, there is also disruption, agitation, and occasional disorder. Earthly calamities, whether in the form of wind, eruptions from the earth, the quaking of the earth, or various forms of abnormal water flows, are an aspect of death. These cannot occur where there is no death. It is impossible for them NOT to occur where death exists.

These natural disruptions are like the contractions associated with travailing in child birth. Similarly, think of the human body, and of the things that occur in it because it is mortal and is therefore dying. There are disruptions in the body – fever, disease, infection, weakness, shaking, and often turmoil. The earth has the same kind of disruptions – only on an infinitely larger scale. When the world shakes, it causes massive disruption – like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunami waves. They are all part of the earth being mortal – passing away.

These convulsions of the earth are also like a voice from God, telling humanity that this is a temporal realm, and is not intended to be the final habitation for man. Like all people, the earth is dying because it is under the weight of mortality. Care must be taken, therefore, not to become unduly attached to it.

The earth's convulsions are also like a trumpet, assuring all of humanity that a day has been appointed when ALL of creation as we presently know it, will come crashing down. Here is how the Scriptures state the case. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb 12:27). The prophet Isaiah said of this time, "Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger" (Isa 13:13). The prophet Haggai said of it, "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land" (Hag 2:6), and "I will shake the heavens and the earth; (Hag 2:21).

Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and the likes, prove that the things that are seen "CAN be shaken." They can be dislodged from their present location. When they are "shaken" they do damage, for anything that can be moved or shaken can also bring great danger. All of this introduces great jeopardy to mankind. Great numbers of people are often killed in what is called "natural disasters." Some of them are good people, who are serving the Lord. Others are infants, who have done neither good nor evil, and are innocent. Some are old or helpless, not able to care for themselves. Inquiring people ask WHY such things happen? Why does humanity have to experience earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, mud slides, hurricanes, famines and the likes? If they do have to come, why don't they come only on the ungodly, the wicked, and those who are known for causing harm? What is the answer to such questions?

First, God does not provide us with all of the answers to such things. This

circumstance means that we should stop trying to find answers like this, for if God does not give them, they do not exist, for there are no answers outside of the ones provided by the Creator.

God has provided some insights into this matter. They are the only words on this subject that we can ask anyone to ponder or think about.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

1. First, God addresses the matter of righteous people being taken away – whether by human force or natural calamity. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness” (Isa 57:1-2). Admittedly, this is a different kind of approach. Yet it is the approach of God Himself, which means that we are to consider it. God charges humanity with being dull on this subject. He criticizes them for not thinking more deeply on this subject. They should consider that worse things can happen than what we have witnessed. In fact, they WILL happen. In consideration of righteous, what appeared to be only a calamity was actually a deliverance. In the calamity, whatever form it took, the righteous were delivered from greater evils that were to come. It may not look that way, but that is the way it is.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

2. Second, in calamities God confirms that He is in absolute control. A catastrophe is never as great as it COULD be. It never does as much damage as is POSSIBLE. It never extends as far as its POTENTIAL. God says of calamity, or violent disruption, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and CREATE EVIL (calamity): I the LORD do all these things” (Isa 45:7). Through Amos the Lord said, “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be EVIL IN THE CITY, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6). Again Amos says, “For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and CREATETH THE WIND, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name” (Amos 4:13). In nature, God can focus rain on one place and withhold it from another – His judgments are that precise. Through Amos the prophet God said, “And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered” (Amos 4:7).

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND

3. Third, it is not necessary to understand everything. Although God has gifted mankind with the capacity for thought, analysis, and understanding, there are some things we are not intended to know – at least not while we remain in the world. While that may seem to be of little comfort to someone who is suffering, that does not need to be the case. We have in the Word of God the example of a man who experienced great and unparalleled hardship. His name was Job, and he lived in the land of “Uz.” This land was in, what we now call, “the Middle East.” It has been placed East or Southeast of Palestine, North of Arabia, and West of the Euphrates River. I mention this because this area of the world has recently experienced much natural upheaval.

In a special trial that was sanctioned by God, Satan was allowed to assault Job, taking all of his possessions, and smiting him with boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. In a single day, Job lost all of his possessions: 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 she asses, , and ten children (Job 1:6-20). Job responded by saying, “Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

It was then that Job was smitten with grievous boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. It was so painful for him that he took a piece of pottery to “scrape himself” (Job 2:1-8).

This condition lasted for some time, and is recounted in the book of Job, chapters three through thirty-seven. During that time, Job grieved because he thought God had forsaken him, yet he could see not a reason for that happening, for he was a righteous man, and had conducted his life with the strictest integrity. He asked a number of questions. They included the following: “Why died I not from the womb?” (Job 3:11). “O Thou Preserver of men, Why hast thou set a mark against Thee, so that I am a burden to myself?” (Job 7:20). He did not have the information about his trial that we have, and thus was confused by it. He did not understand why this had happened.

Finally God personally responded to Job. He drew attention to the fact that Job was asking a lot of questions, wanting to understand everything, God then asked Job some questions – questions Job could not answer. Some of them were, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; (Job 38:4-6). He asked Job about mysteries of the clouds and the sea (Job 38:8-11), death (38:17), the earth (38:18), light (38:19), snow and hail (38:22), rain (38:26-28), ice (38:29), and the stars and constellations (38:31-33) – to name a few.

The point God was making was this: **JOB WAS SURROUNDED BY THINGS HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND**, yet he was willing to trust the Lord in such matters, that He was upholding those things and making them serve His own purpose. Things were not out of control. Yet, even though there were already a multitude of things Job did not understand, and had learned to live with, the assault upon his person was something he sorely wanted to comprehend.

This is exactly the posture that we must take in regard to calamities. Let us first acknowledge that we cannot fully explain them, or why women and children die in them, or why they are attended with what appears to be unjust suffering. There are other reasons for things that happen upon the earth than is apparent to men. In Job's case, only the heavens knew what was going on. God was showing Satan that no matter what he did to Job, Job would not deny the name of the Lord. He upheld Job in his misery and grief, so that he did not give up. And, in the end, he blessed Job more than he had ever been blessed before. God abruptly ended Job's trial, because the purpose for it had been served. It is written, “And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job

twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

The case of Job was also intended to be an example of God’s dealings with humanity. Here is how the Scriptures speak of it. “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11). Whatever the calamity, those who trust in God CAN endure – we have Job as confirmation of that. His record means much to those who are suffering. It was also used by God to show heavenly hosts how He could sustain a soul during suffering, end the suffering, and bless abundantly after the suffering. God has not changed!

STRANGERS IN THIS WORLD

4. Fourth, for the people of God, those who are in Christ Jesus, natural disasters confirm the world is not our home. A trembling earth corroborates that the people of God do not belong here. They are only here for a while. Believers in Christ are reminded, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11). They are journeying through the world like the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness – a “great and terrible wilderness” (Deut 1:19), “wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water” (Deut 8:15). God called Israel to live in Canaan, not the wilderness. Yet, they did have to walk through that vast wilderness. He has called people through Christ to dwell forever with Him, not in this present evil world. Yey, they too must spend some time in it.

When you are suffering, remember some of God’s people who have suffered before you. Here is one record of a cluster of them who lived by faith, even though their circumstances seemed to be totally against them. “They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:38). Is there anyone who imagines that was pleasant? However, if you were able to speak with these people now, who left this life thousands of years ago, asking what they have to say now about those hardships, what do you suppose they would say? While there is a bit of holy imagination in it, it seems to me that they would say some thousands of years in paradise had washed away the memory of their miserable existence upon the earth. Like many of our generation, they learned that this world is not the home of those who trust in God – even though they are here for the present time.

Calamities will, if we will allow them to do so, help to clear up our thinking about this world. They will assist in uprooting us from enslavement to the temporal, and move us to take hold of what is eternal.

OPPORTUNITIES TO DO GOOD

5. Fifth, catastrophes provide opportunities to do good. I have noticed over the years how thoughtful people rally to the aid of those who have suffered in calamity. During disasters, individuals, groups, and even nations, have even assisted those who were technically their enemies. Among other things, this shows to us the capacity of men and women, who have been made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). This serves to highlight how dreadfully sin has impacted the human race – so much so, that it often takes a calamity

or disaster to move men and women to consider other people.

SATAN'S ATTEMPT TO USE DISASTERS

6. Sixth, Satan attempts to turn disasters to his advantage, seeking to destroy the children of God. God has provided us some insight into this matter, also confirming that Satan is not able to achieve his objectives. In the book of the Revelation, we have a pictorial representation of Satan's assault of the people of God. It is depicted as a dragon spewing out of his mouth a great flood that is designed to drown the people of God. Here is the narrative. "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth" (Rev 12:15-16).

The "flood" that Satan spewed out of his mouth resulted in earthly disasters and calamities, as well as a deluge of false teaching. Physically, I see this flood as erupting in floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunami waves, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and the likes. From Satan's perspective, they are all designed to move the people of God into unbelief, and constrain them to "curse God," even as he attempted to so move Job. If there are a handful of saints in a region, Satan will attack the whole region. Spiritually, this flood is a deluge of false ideas, erroneous doctrines, and incorrect views of God, man, and time.

However, notwithstanding Satan's objectives, God can enable His people to keep their faith during such times. Over and above Satan's objectives, God's will is done during these calamities. His people learn more of their own weakness and need of the Lord. They learn more firmly how unstable the world is, and how there are better things that they must seek.

CALAMITIES DO NOT PROVE WHO IS MORE WICKED

7. Disasters and calamities are often judgments from the Lord – as in the flood of Noah's day, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But we are not to conclude from this that those who are caught in the middle of modern-day disasters are worse than others in the eyes of the Lord. Jesus addressed this matter when He walked among men. During that time, it was common knowledge that a certain tower in Jerusalem toppled, falling on eighteen people and killing them. Some thought that this proved those eighteen people were more sinful than others. Here is what Jesus said. "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" (Luke 13:4).

Actually, if disasters were always sent upon those who were especially sinful, they would be occurring on every continent, in every city, and nearly every household all of the time. But it is not God's manner to immediately judge those who have sinned, and we should not think this is what He does. Solomon pointed out that this Divine trait actually encouraged some people to continue sinning. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl 8:11).

The fact that disasters are sometimes judgments from God might lead us to believe

that righteous people never experience disaster. This simply is not true, as Hebrews 11:35-38 confirms. “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:35-38).

Jesus told people to consider disasters, and to ponder how they should repent of any wrongdoing in their lives, lest a disaster come upon them. “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, EXCEPT YE REPENT, YE SHALL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH” (Luke 13:4-5). When, therefore, calamities happen, we are NOT to assume the worst of the people who have suffered them. Rather, we should use the occasion to reflect upon our own lives.

NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM GOD’S LOVE

8. God is confirming nothing can separate His people from His love. Earthquakes and other similar disasters, cannot separate God’s people from Himself. This is involved in a question that is both asked and answered in Scripture. First, the question is asked: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom 8:35). “Tribulation” is personal trial and testing. “Distress” is pressure, when we are made to feel the pain of being in hard circumstances over which we have no power. “Persecution” is when we are opposed and hurt by those of our own race. “Famine” is when we are deprived of the necessities of life. “Nakedness” is when we do not have sufficient clothing or accommodations to promote personal comfort. “Peril” is living in the face of danger, such as is introduced by earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tsunami waves, and volcanic eruptions. The “sword” refers to times of war, when the people of God are caught in the middle, and subjected to death for the cause of Christ.

Now, the question is whether or not these experiences CAN “separate us from the love of Christ.” Can they cause Christ to stop loving us? Can they cause us to be unaware that He loves us? Can they make us doubt that He loves us? Do they have a separating power about them, causing us to be nothing more than their victims?

The answer to these questions is thundered from heaven, and echoed through the words of the apostle Paul. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:37-39). It is affirmed that “IN these things” we are “more than conquerors.” That is, God has determined that such things CANNOT destroy the faith of His people, or separate them from His love – even though they do not understand why such things are happening. It is how the people of God are AFTER the trial that counts – not what they are experiencing

DURING the trial.

This does not mean that God has no care for them during the trial. Remember that He is not allowing Satan to do what he really wants to do. The devil is not satisfied for a few thousand people to die. He would like the earth to be completely purged of the people of God, and every man, woman, and child, go to hell when they die. But he cannot accomplish that purpose. His assaults will only move the people of God to call upon Him, trust Him, and pray without ceasing. That is the truth of the matter.

CONCLUSION

It should be obvious to you that we cannot satisfy your mind with answers about WHY calamities occur, WHY they are so destructive, WHY precious people and children die in them, and WHY it is so difficult to recover from them. I cannot satisfy your MIND on with such answers, because God has not given explanations for everything. However, it is possible for your HEART to be satisfied, so that you will not be filled with fear and worry, but have peace and assurance during even very difficult times.

Some final observations are in order. These are things for you to ponder. Perhaps the Lord will join you in your thoughts and give you much more to see than I have seen. It is not unusual for those who pass through especially difficult times to be given superior understanding, so that they do not fail when circumstances appear to be out of control.

1. No calamity or disaster can happen without God's initiation or approval.
2. Ultimately, Satan cannot have his way in catastrophe and tragedy.
3. There are Divine resources available to men in disaster that are not ordinarily known.
4. Sometimes, in casualty, the righteous are delivered from greater evils that are coming.
5. There are distresses and misfortune that are initiated by God in order to show heavenly intelligences the marvelous nature of His keeping power.
6. If it is true that the earth has been cursed, and it passing away, it should not surprise us when it trembles and shakes, as though in its death throes.
7. Trouble is grievous, and calamity is difficult, but they cannot cause God to stop loving us, or us to stop loving God.
8. Our understanding is not our strongest ability, and trouble and tragedy confirm that this is true.
9. It is possible to think more clearly during trouble than in peace, and when things are taken from us rather than being given to us.
10. When we have faith in God, trouble in this world proves there is another world for which we are destined.
11. When life is ended in this world, it still goes on in another realm.
12. Those who have suffered greatly in this world and have continued to believe God, will be richly compensated for their hardship, just as surely as Job was for his.
13. Catastrophe is not the time to talk, but the time to trust.
14. If it is true, as Jesus said, that men are to hate their own lives in this world (Luke 14:26), then it is also true that disaster can assist us in accomplishing this.
15. Calamity proves that we cannot live as though this world was permanent.
16. When people lose their little children in affliction, like the Jewish mothers did when

Pharaoh ordered their babies to be killed, they must not despair. It is not over yet. There is coming a day when those babies will rise from the dead. This is what Jeremiah was writing about when he said, “Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and THEY SHALL COME AGAIN FROM THE LAND OF THE ENEMY” (Jer 31:16).

17. A person has to decide which world is most important: “this world,” or “the world to come” (Matt 12:32). A calamitous event helps us make the right decision.

18. If the “whole creation” is waiting for the revelation of the sons of God in their resurrection from the dead, let us give them a good testimony in our reaction to its death throes, and let it know we are discontent with our present state also.

19. In great difficulties, if we use our faith to see beyond the visible and apparent, we will be able to become greater than the trouble, so that it does not destroy our faith.

20. During cataclysmic events, look for Divine resources. You will discover that the shaking of the earth can actually bring things into your view that cannot be shaken.

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