

I've Been Thinking About ...

Wars, Earthquakes, Tsunamis & Hurricanes

It is obvious that we live in a world of uncertainty and trouble. Within the last year, we have seen a devastating tsunami in Asia, floods and mudslides in California, and an avalanche in Utah. More recently, we have seen a devastating hurricane hit Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Besides these natural disasters, the conflicts and wars between humans continue to cause much pain and suffering. What is going on?

Concerning this present age, Jesus said, “*You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places*” (Matthew 24:6-7). These things – human conflicts and natural disasters – are part of the world in which we live. The world is full of trouble and evil, resulting in much pain and suffering. Why is the world full of evil and suffering?

Questions concerning suffering and evil are some of the most challenging questions to answer. However, the Bible does have answers. In general, we experience suffering and evil because we live in a “fallen world” – a world out of harmony with God. The primary cause of this disharmony is human sin – attitudes and actions that are contrary to the nature and will of God. In general, humankind is in rebellion against God. Human sin results in spiritual death – separation from God, the Source of every good thing. Most would agree that human attitudes and actions cause a great amount of suffering in our world. But what about “natural disasters?”

Is human behavior the cause of “natural” disasters? Everyone acknowledges that human behavior can result in fires, floods, erosion, and pollution. But what about earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes? Natural scientists will explain that these events are necessary byproducts of the physical world. So one may ask, “Why did God design a physical world that causes suffering?” Perhaps God *did not* create such a world, but something happened that altered His original creation. Could humankind’s rebellion against God have something to do with earthquakes?

The Bible indicates that even the physical world is under God’s judgment because of the rebellion against Him. After Adam’s sin against God (in Genesis 3), God said, “*cursed is the ground because of you*” (Genesis 3:17). In Romans 8, Paul wrote that the *whole creation* was subjected to frustration and is in bondage to decay (Romans 8:20-21). In my view, the exact relation between the present physical world and the original (pre-fall) creation is unclear. Still, we can conclude: The suffering that we experience, whether caused by people or earthquakes, is a consequence of living in a fallen world – a world out of harmony with God, because of sin.

Christians are never promised that they will escape all suffering in this life. In fact, the Bible says that Christians *will* suffer. Jesus told his disciples, “*In this world, you will have trouble*” (John 16:33). Furthermore, God uses suffering for good in the Christian life. Thus James can write, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds*” (James 1:2). And Peter can write, “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater value than gold, which is refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed*” (1 Peter 1:6-7, NIV).