

# The Larry King Show's Approach to Evil

Introduction:

Shortly after the terrible events of 9/11 Larry King had a number of ministers on his show to answer the question, "Where was God in the events of 9/11."

"If God is both omnipotent and perfectly good, how can he permit such evil? If he is willing but not able to check the suffering, then he is not omnipotent; if he is able but unwilling, he is not perfectly good *How Long O Lord?*" By D.A. Carson. P. 17

Our personal experiences shape our understanding of scripture far more than we realize.

The most famous expression of this viewpoint in recent years is the widely circulated book by Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner lost his son and his grief drove him to question his traditional Jewish faith. Though a rabbi, Kushner came to believe that God could not have prevented his son's death. He is frank, "I can worship a God who hates suffering but who cannot eliminate it more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die." *How Long O Lord?* by D. A. Carson. P, 28

How do we address the issues of suffering that we encounter in our own lives and the lives of others?

The answers that we give as to why we suffer and experience evil must be very carefully thought out. That is true whether they be answers that we give to others or even provide to comfort ourselves.

There is evil and suffering that comes at the hands of men directly such as 9/11.

There is evil and suffering that does not come directly from the hands of men such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

Tonight is almost an aside in our study. Next week we will begin to study God's sovereignty in relationship to suffering and evil especially as it relates to the actions of mankind.

Tonight we will wrestle with the issue of "Natural Disasters?"

"The Bible begins with God creating the heavens and the earth. Gen. 1&2. Repeatedly God's verdict is that His handiwork is "very good." There is no sin and there is no suffering. The Garden of Eden brings forth food without the sweat of toil being mixed into the earth. But the first human rebellion (Gen.3) marks the onset of suffering, toil, pain and death." . Carson. P 39

I. The curse of God on all of creation as an explanation for natural disaster

- A. One common view is that “natural disasters” are a result of the curse that came upon the earth as a result of the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3.

Gen 3:17 (NASB) Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.

Gen 3:18 (NASB) "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field;

Gen 3:19 (NASB) By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

“There are those who believe that natural disasters like the tsunami are all part of God’s curse on the earth as a result of the fall. This view has the effect of removing the category of “natural evil” altogether, since it puts all such things back into the box of “moral evil.” That is to say, if these things happen because of God’s curse, then that curse came about in response to human sin and rebellion, according to Genesis 3. So in some mysterious sense, even something as utterly beyond human causation or control as the tsunami ends up being our own fault, if you push that back far enough” *The God i don’t understand*. By Christopher Wright P. 46

- B. Christopher Wright expresses some concerns with this view.

“If that were so, only some unfortunate people suffer the effects in our fallen world because they happen to live in the “wrong” place, but all of us collectively as a human race bear the blame. We brought God’s curse on the earth by our sin, and this is a part of the result. I personally find this improbable, though I know it is a view held by many. (underlining mine) Genesis 3:17 says that God cursed the ground because of human sin. .... I do not think that the curse on the ground refers to intrinsic or (ontological, if you like such words) curse on the whole natural order, which, at a particular moment in human history (the fall) changed the way that the planet actually “behaves.”. .... But there is no evidence that our planet has ever been geologically different from the way it is now, or that animals were not predatory, ....” pp. 47 The God i Don’t Understand. By Christopher Wright.

1. I personally do believe that the curse resulting from the fall plays a very important part in addressing natural disasters.

- (1) What are we to do with Wright’s statement, “ If that were so, only some unfortunate people suffer the effects in our

fallen world because they happen to live in the “wrong” place, but all of us collectively as a human race bear the blame.?”

- (2) Though we do not all experience the exact same tsunami, none of us are free from the collective sufferings of natural disasters.
- (3) None of us are free from natural disasters associated with the consequences of living in fallen world.

2. It may be true that earthquakes and tsunamis may predate the fall. There is really no way of knowing,

“But there is no evidence that our planet has ever been geologically different from the way it is now, or that animals were ever nonpredatory before the human species emerged and sinned. (underlining mine) On the contrary, the available evidence suggests that the early history of the planet included even more catastrophic events long before the emergence of human life. As Tom Wright said, ‘A tectonic plate’s got to do what a tectonic plate’s got to do.’ P. 47 Christopher Wright.

But would it be correct to classify them as disasters if they were before the creation and death of mankind? In all due fairness Wright refers to them as “catastrophes.” But he does so in discussing disasters.

3. Thirdly the curse upon the earth extends to more than the frustration that man experiences as a result of his sin i.e the “frustration of his labors.”

It is the very ground that is cursed.

Gen 3:18 (NIV) It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

The earth and not just mankind is longing for the removal of the curse.

Rom 8:18 (NASB) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Rom 8:19 (NASB) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

Rom 8:20 (NASB) For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope

Rom 8:21 (NASB) that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Rom 8:22 (NASB) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

4. Fourthly, the transformation of the earth, including that of predatory animals no longer being predatory is associated with the removal of the “curse.”

Isa 11:4 (NASB) But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

Isa 11:5 (NASB) Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist.

Isa 11:6 (NASB) And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them.

Isa 11:7 (NASB) Also the cow and the bear will graze; Their young will lie down together; And the lion will eat straw like the ox.

Isa 11:8 (NASB) And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

Isa 11:9 (NASB) They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

If predatory animals were predatory before the curse and not as a result of the curse, why then would they stop being predatory when the curse is removed?

- C. If natural disasters are not at least primarily (if not “always”) associated with the fall and are just a matter of the way the world is, why would they cease in the New Creation (assuming that they do cease.)

The apparent cessation of natural disaster in the future is seen as removal of the curse upon the earth.

Rev 22:3 (NASB) And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him;

Rev 22:1 (NASB) And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,

Rev 22:2 (NASB) in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Rev 22:3 (NASB) And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him;

Rev 22:4 (NASB) and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on

their foreheads.

Rev 22:5 (NASB) And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

## II. The immediate judgment of God as explanation for natural disasters.

### A. Another common view that is given to explain natural disasters is that they are the judgement of God.

“The Bible does include examples of God’s using nature or natural forces as agents of his judgment or salvation (e.g. the flood; the parting and return of the sea at the exodus; the flooding of the river in Judges 4-5; hailstones destroying an enemy). But these narratives are given with the clear authoritative interpretation in the text that this is how those events were to be understood - at the time and by later readers.

So the Bible does tell us that God used *some* (though actually not many) natural disasters as acts of divine judgment.” Wright p. 49

“But we cannot invert the logic and assume that *any* or *every* natural disaster is therefore an act of divine judgment on somebody. And we certainly lack an authoritative scriptural interpretation that gives us the dogmatic right to explain contemporary events in that way. On the contrary, the Bible actually discourages us from jumping to the assumption that people who suffer some disaster are the victims of God’s judgment on their particular sins.” Wright p. 49

### B. Now we consider Jesus’ words in Luke concerning a natural disaster.

1. Jesus alludes to a situation in which 18 people were killed in the city of Siloam when a tower fell. A natural disaster if you will that occurred in Jesus’ day.

Luke 13:4 (NASB) "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?"

2. Jesus then raises the question, “ Are we to understand that these individuals who died in the disaster were greater sinners than those who lived in Jerusalem?”

Luke 13:2 (NASB) And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?"

3. Jesus then answers his own question. These did not die in that disaster

because they were more sinful than others.

Luke 13:3 (NASB) "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

4. We learn that natural disasters serve as warning against a future judgment. Jesus warns that the people who suffered death at Siloam were no worse than anyone else.

Luke 13:5 (NASB) "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

- C. Even Sodom was not destroyed because it was more wicked than all the other cities although it was destroyed in God's judgment.

Ezek 16:46 (NASB) "Now your older sister is Samaria, who lives north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lives south of you, is Sodom with her daughters.

Ezek 16:47 (NASB) "Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they.

Ezek 16:48 (NASB) "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "Sodom, your sister, and her daughters, have not done as you and your daughters have done.

Ezek 16:49 (NASB) "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.

Ezek 16:50 (NASB) "Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.

In this instance cities in Israel were spared even though they were more corrupt than the city of Sodom.

- D. The heart of the matter of the immediate judgment of God as the explanation for natural disaster.

1. Is natural calamity a result of a collective moral failure upon the part of any given society?

There would be those who would say that man's sin does directly contribute to natural disasters as a result of global warming.

They would assert that the sinful greed, avarice, and apathy that produces the pollution of our planet is a major contributor to social warming which directly contributes to natural disasters that we experience.

2. Should we look for a specific immediate moral cause for the disasters that plague our human experience?

### III. Concluding Cautions:

“The Bible does include examples of God’s using nature or natural forces as agents of his judgment or salvation (e.g. the flood; the parting and return of the sea at the exodus; the flooding of the river in Judges 4-5; hailstones destroying an enemy). But these narratives are given with the clear authoritative interpretation in the text that this is how those events were to be understood - at the time and by later readers.

So the Bible does tell us that God used *some* (though actually not many) natural disasters as acts of divine judgment.” Wright p. 49

“However what cannot and must not go on to assume or affirm is that the actual people who suffer the effects of natural events like earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes, floods and so on (whether connected or totally unconnected with human activity) are worse *sinner*s, and therefore stand more under God’s judgment, than those who are fortunate enough to live somewhere else than the disaster struck. It is one thing to say there may be elements of God’s judgment at work in the natural order as a result of prolonged wickedness. It is another altogether to say that the people whose lives are snuffed out or devastated by a natural disaster are the ones deserving that judgment directly.” p. 48 Wright.

“What words are there for the website of a church in America that asserted that it was a matter of thanksgiving that 1,900 Sheepish people had been killed as God’s judgment on the wickedness of Sweden’s sexually licentious culture and laws?

Transitional Application, the same reasoning that uses God’s judgment as the explanation for natural disaster uses God’s immediate judgment being the explanation for manmade disasters.

One prominent minister said that The reason for 9/11 was God’s judgment upon America for the sin of abortion.

That kind of answer raises far more questions than it answers.

Why should that one sin be singled out?

Why would a few cities bear the brunt of a national sin?

Why would individuals who did not personally have an abortion die in that disaster?

Why would individuals who devoted their lives to fighting against abortion die in that disaster?

Is there a better answer? Are there better answers?

Are there more consistent answers with what the Bible teaches?

What the Bible teaches about sin.

What the Bible teaches about judgment.

What the Bible teaches about the character of God.

Is there a more satisfying answer”?”

Is there a more “acceptable” answer?

Is there a more cautious answer?