

102. Natural Disasters

By Arland Steen

It's Only The Beginning

It seems as though natural disasters are on the increase. We hear of hundreds if not thousands of people who lose their lives due to them and property damage runs in the billions of dollars as a result of them. They are a part of life. We've recently had a couple of earthquakes in Mexico, one of them 7.1 on the Richter scale that killed over 200 people, hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria and Nate that killed over 200 people, monsoon flooding in Bangladesh that killed over 1,200 people, deadly mudslides in Colombia that killed over 200, and currently destructive wildfires in California that have killed 40 people so far and destroyed 5,700 homes and businesses. So, it seems natural disasters are on the increase and are here to stay.

Something Jesus said in an answer to a question from His disciple's touches on this.

In Matthew 24, He answered a question about the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. In His answer, He stated the following (Matthew 24:6-7), "*6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass; but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*"

He said that these things were just the *beginning* of sorrows that are to come upon the earth. But He also said that we were not to be troubled. Why? Because He is our safety!

Confusion About Natural Disasters

From a theological standpoint, there is much confusion that exists regarding natural disasters. Many people blame God for them and point to His sovereignty as the root cause for them. In other words, the fact that He has all power over and absolute control of all things in heaven and on earth, infers that He is responsible for natural disasters, in this line of thinking.

Paul wrote something that points us in the right direction concerning natural disasters. He wrote (Romans 8:22), "*For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*" But many people don't get Paul's point because they highlight God's sovereignty over everything else.

In its most strict sense, the term "sovereignty" refers to sovereignty of an *unqualified* nature without regard for people, justice or character. Scriptures as the following are used to support the *unqualified* sovereignty of God.

Psalm 115:3: "*But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.*"

Psalm 135:6: "*Whatever the Lord pleases He does in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.*"

But if you know the *character* of God you will realize that He doesn't operate in *unqualified* sovereignty; instead, He operates in *qualified* sovereignty. In other words, He holds Himself under subjection to His own word. He will not do anything contrary to either His *word* or His *character*.

For instance, if God can do anything He desires to do, then *unqualified* sovereignty would allow Him to lie to you. However, Paul tells us in Titus 1:2 that we have the hope of eternal life which God promised us before time began by God "*who cannot lie.*"

The reference for that verse goes back to Numbers 23 when Balak, king of the Moabites, tried to get Balaam to curse the Israelites three times. When he tried to do this the second time Balaam said (Numbers 23:19), *“God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent. Has He said and will He not do? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?”* So from these verses we see that God has qualified His ability and will not allow Himself to lie.

Likewise, God limits His ability regarding natural disasters. The New Testament writer James lends his pen to this understanding of God’s sovereignty. He writes (James 1:17), *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”* The Authorized Standard Version puts it this way: *“with whom can be no variation.”* He seems to be saying that God gives us good and perfect gifts and that He doesn’t deviate from that by sometimes sending us bad and imperfect gifts.

Why Natural Disasters Occur

Natural disasters do not take place because of God’s sovereignty but because the earth is in chaos.

Referring back to Paul’s writing in Romans 8, he wrote this (Romans 8:20), *“For the creation was subjected to futility.”*

The Twentieth Century NT translates futility *“imperfection”* and the Berkeley Version translates it *“the bondage of transitoriness.”* The New English Bible translates it this way, *“It was made the victim of frustration, not by its own choice, but because of him who made it so; yet always there was hope because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendor of the children of God. Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth.”* And Moffatt translates it this way, *“the entire creation sighs and throbs with pain.”*

These translators describe earth as being in futility, imperfect, in bondage, as a victim of frustration and throbbing with pain. In other words, earth doesn’t work as it was when first created by God.

When Earth Changed

When was the earth subjected to this? I would submit it was subjected to this in two stages. The first stage was when Adam rebelled against God and sin was introduced into this world. From Scripture we know that:

- Water was located in two places – above and below our present firmament

Genesis paints a picture of our earth prior to Adam’s rebellion against God. Here it is from Genesis 1:6-8, *“6 Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” 7 Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.*

This lets us know that water was located in two places – above our present firmament and below it. Here’s a brief excerpt from author Henry Morris that paints a picture of this: *“These waters apparently existed in the form of a great vapor canopy around the earth Quite invisible But would have a profound effect on climate ... the most immediate and obvious of these would be to cause a uniformly warm and temperate climate around the earth. Such water vapor as is present in the atmosphere today has this special effect of regulating the earth’s temperature the inferred antediluvian vapor envelope would have produced this result in much greater degree, with a larger percentage of the sun’s incoming radiant energy being absorbed and retained and uniformly distributed*

over the earth than at present. This effect, in turn, would largely inhibit the atmospheric circulations which characterize the present troposphere ... the constant battle of "fronts" would be mostly absent so that antediluvian climates were not only warm but also without violent windstorms."

(Henry Morris, The Genesis Flood, page 240)

- There was no rainfall before the flood in Noah's day which greatly reduced the issue of humidity

We know this from Genesis 2:5-6, "⁵ before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; ⁶ but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground."

- There was no geologic activity before the flood in Noah's day

When most people think of the worldwide flood in Noah's day, the first thing they think of is 40 days and 40 nights of torrential rainfall. But the *first* recorded event of the flood wasn't rainfall – it was geologic activity – an earthquake – the biggest ever that affected all the fountains of the deep. Genesis 7:11 reads, "*In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened.*" The earthquake is mentioned first and the rain second.

This brings us to the second stage of when earth changed and it was during the global flood in Noah's day. Again, we turn to Henry Morris for a description of this event: "Presumably, great portions of the waters were entrapped below the crust and in pockets within the crust during the first three days of Creation And were in large measure imprisoned during the antediluvian period, perhaps steadily building up temperatures and pressures until, finally, the crust gave way at some point of weakness. Yielding of the crust at even one point, with resultant escape of magmas and water or steam would then lead to earth movements causing further fractures until, as the Scriptures so graphically portray, "the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up." Truly this was a giant catastrophe, beside which the explosion of the largest hydrogen bomb or of hundreds of such bombs becomes insignificant!"

(Henry Morris, The Genesis Flood, page 243)

Geologically speaking this is the most impacting even that has ever taken place on our planet to date. Consider 3 consequences:

1. The tremendous erosion that resulted from 40 days and nights of continual rainfall. This torrential downpour was the starting point of the combined processes of raindrop impact, sheet and gully erosion that excavated and transported immense quantities of earth and rock.
2. The unparalleled increase of the water level on earth. The water on earth covered *all* the mountains *all over* the earth by a minimum of 22 feet. According to the American Meteorological Society if all the water in our present atmosphere were suddenly precipitated, it would cover the ground to an average depth of less than 2 inches.
3. The resulting enlarged ocean basins.

The mass of waters which descended were not elevated back into the heavens because they are not there now. This can only mean that much of the waters of our present oceans entered at the time of the flood in Noah's day. So, there was much more land area before this flood. The implication that much of the present sea bottom was dry land then is found in Psalm 104:5-9: *"You who laid the foundations of the earth, So that it should not be moved forever, 6 You covered it with the deep as with a garment; The waters stood above the mountains. 7 At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away. 8 They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, To the place which You founded for them. 9 You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, that they may not return to cover the earth."*

The point I'm making is that all present natural disasters are a result of the consequences of the entrance of sin into the world and the global flood in Noah's day and so you cannot be intellectually honest and blame God for them because of His sovereignty.

How To Prepare For Natural Disasters

First, you can prepare spiritually by speaking Psalm 91 over your life, your property, trips you take and really, anytime you leave your house. You should get all fear out of your life so you won't be troubled by things happening around you, as Jesus said.

Fear will kill you sooner than a natural disaster. I heard of a man who lived in California but was so afraid of earthquakes that he moved to Kansas out of fear. Two weeks after moving to Kansas he was killed by a tornado!

Natural disasters are all around us and you can't exercise faith that there won't be another one but you can exercise faith for personal protection *during* one.

Second, you should also be wise and prepare naturally as best you can. There is nothing wrong with having water or food stored away or boarding up windows or fastening furniture to walls, as long as you do it in faith and not fear. Have some common sense as well as spiritual sense but always trust in the Lord and Psalm 91.