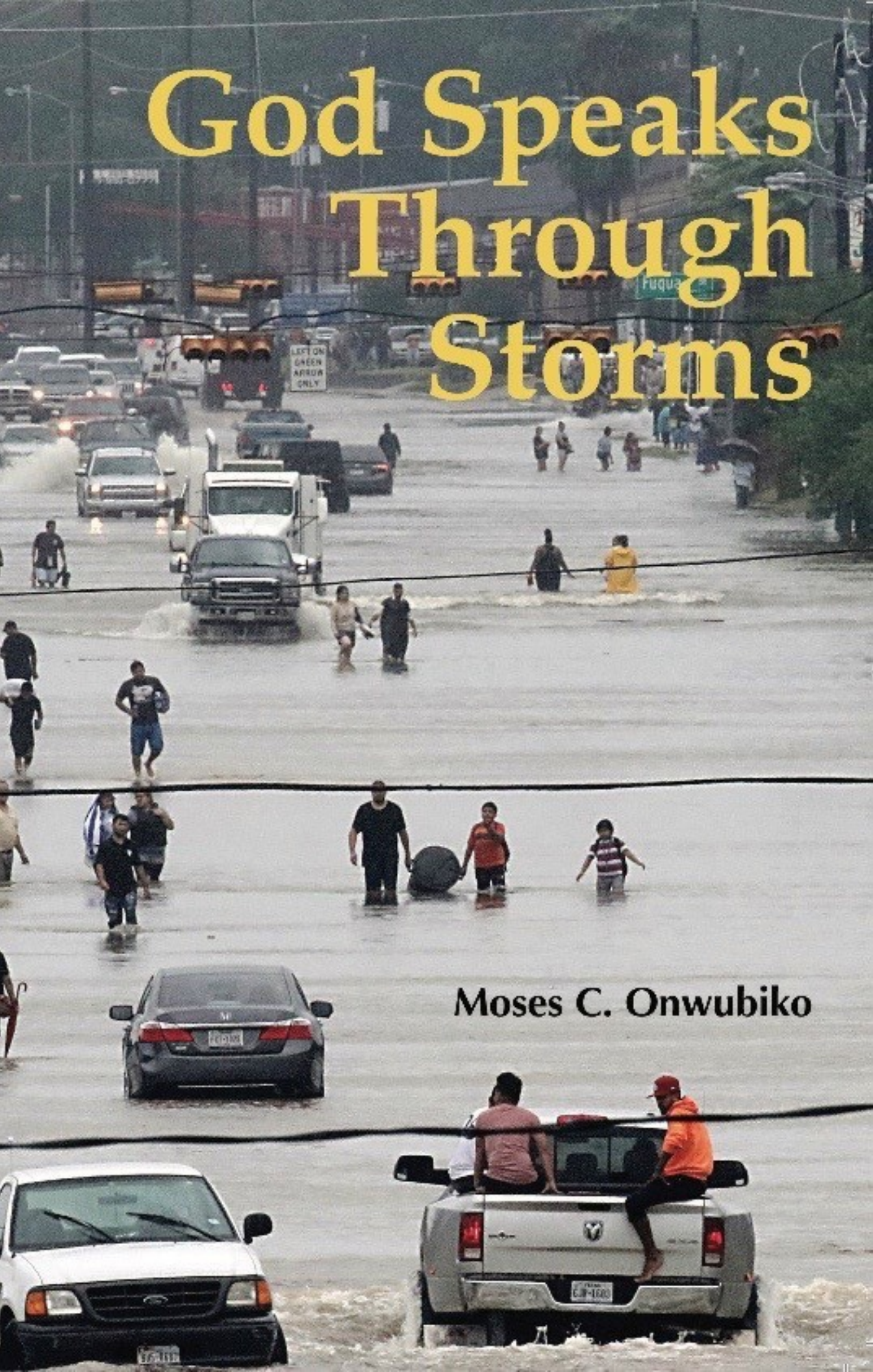


God Speaks Through Storms



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Buy Truth, and Do Not Sell It

(Proverbs 23:23)

Indeed truth, sound Bible teaching, is hard to come by; therefore, when God in His infinite grace leads you to the truth, you are to embrace and cherish it. You are to hold on to it tenaciously for life, happiness and the blessings in time and eternity to come.

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To Those Without Christ

Your salvation is the gateway to your eternal relationship with the God of the universe. It's the only key that will unlock your blessing in time and eternity. Your salvation and obedience to God ensure abundant blessing for you and our nation. That's good news.

Good news gets better: Salvation is easier to obtain than you may realize. First of all there's a price tag for salvation—horrific spiritual death. God's justice demanded full payment for our sins. Jesus Christ made that payment on the cross “God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Payment is complete; “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus Christ has paid it all. That's the ultimate in good news—our debt is paid in full.

Because salvation has been paid for, it's now available to you free of charge. “For the free gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23). Can you work for a gift? No! “For by grace are you saved...it [salvation] *is the gift of God, not of works*” (Eph. 2:8-9

emphasis added). Your effort to be good equals “work.” The Bible puts it beautifully, “He saved us not on the basis of deeds [good works] which we have done in [self] righteousness” (Titus 3:5). It cannot be stressed enough: Salvation is a gift. It’s God’s gift to whomever will accept it.

Salvation is based on grace. Grace is based on faith alone in Christ alone. Right now, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Take God’s Word at its face value. If you believe on His Son, Jesus Christ, alone for your salvation, “You will never perish...[you] will have eternal life” (John 3:16). God cannot lie. He keeps His promises. If He says, “you will never perish,” when you believe on His Son, He means just that— you cannot perish in hell. Would you believe now?

To Those Who Believe

Being in fellowship is a must if God the Holy Spirit is to bless us through the teaching of God’s Word. Sin of any magnitude ruptures our fellowship. Confession of our sin restores our broken fellowship. Take a moment and acknowledge your sins to God. “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Having been restored to fellowship you are now prepared to read on.

Restore us to You, O Lord, that we may be restored;
Renew our days as of old.

(Lam. 5:21)



“There is no basis for civilization but in the Word of God...If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering; but if we and our posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity.”

Daniel Webster
(1782-1852)

Introduction

Catastrophes and storms, to whom or what can we attribute them, God or global warming? For centuries people have pondered and wondered in awe over storms and their enormous destructive impact on man and the environment. The wonder continues.

We are left with many unanswered questions regarding tropical cyclone Bhola that struck East Pakistan in 1970, taking nearly 500,000 lives with it, making it the deadliest in recent memory.

In 1997, Hurricane Pauline made its way through Mexico leaving 400 people dead and over 300,000 people homeless. Mexicans still ponder in awe when they recall one of the fiercest hurricanes in their history. What about the powerful tsunami that hit Indonesia December 26, 2004? It took over 200,000 lives with it. The aftermath left the nation in total despair and disbelief.

Add to the list, hurricane Harvey that swept through Houston, Texas, and beyond in August 2017. Harvey is believed to be the most destructive storm in United States history. The list of countries affected by high-impact storms and tsunamis is long and growing. The question remains: Who or what causes these catastrophes? God or global warming?

Two views emerge, the secular and biblical. The secular world view believes man is responsible. It claims that man's contribution to climate change does, in fact, cause a great change in weather patterns. On the other hand, the biblical world view credits every catastrophe to God. While this may sound extreme, there are many passages of Scripture supporting this view. Read the passage carefully, "...I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these" (Isa. 45:6b-7). God takes full responsibility for creating calamities.

Elsewhere Amos the prophet asks us a stunning question, "If a calamity occurs in a city, has not the Lord done it? (Amos 3:6). Of course He has. King Solomon agrees, "In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other" (Eccl. 7:14). The Psalmist adds, "He makes the winds [hurricanes] His messengers, flaming fire His ministers" (Ps. 104:4). "He changes rivers into a wilderness and springs of water into a thirsty ground; a fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it. He changes a wilderness into a pool of water and a dry land into springs of water" (Ps. 107:33-35). Note the work of the Lord: He changes rivers into desert... He changes springs of water into a dusty ground... He changes a fruitful land into uncultivated land... He changes

wilderness into ocean...He changes dry land into fountains of water. God does all these, *not global warming*.

Ezekiel, the prophet of God, recorded Him saying, “I will make a violent wind break out in my wrath...flooding rain and hailstones” (Ezek. 13:13). The Prophet Isaiah weighs in, “Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent; as a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, He has cast it down to the earth with *His* hand.” (Isa. 28:2 emphasis added). Keep this passage in mind the next time you see or hear of a flood: “He has cast it down to the earth with His hand.”

Some may be reluctant to accept this, holding to the idea that man’s reckless action is a reason for climate change. Let’s assume for a moment that scientists are correct in their theory about man’s role in climate change; even so, their scientific discovery has no influence on God’s sovereignty. If man is a contributor to climate change, man is God’s agent, “for all things [including man] are Your servants.” (Ps. 119:91). God uses man’s foolishness to accomplish His purpose: “For the wrath of man shall praise You” (Ps. 76:10). However one views it, God rules. He is Sovereign.

Sovereignty means that God is in total and absolute control of His universe. He’s responsible for the downpour. He invoked rain (the first ever) in Noah’s day saying to Noah, “I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life” (Gen. 6:17). God kept His word, “all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened” (Gen. 7:11). Noah’s world experienced a catastrophic worldwide flood unheard of in the history of creatures, because God called for it. Global warming played no role.

What about drought? God strongly claims, “I called for drought on the land” (Hag. 1:11). Let there be no misunderstanding, God has the weather remote control in His hand. He’s the One Who created climate; He alone controls it. To say that man can do anything to change what God controls is not only blasphemy but a rejection of God’s sovereign power over His universe.

One of the questions we need to be concerned about in our study is why? Why does God inflict His creation with calamity? “I make well being and create calamity” (Isa. 45:7 ESV) “If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?” (Amos 3:6). The question as to who is responsible for calamities has been put to rest—God.

In this study we will ask: Why do people go through calamities, why do the righteous suffer and does God still speak? To answer them, we will look at God’s sovereignty, consider God’s intended purposes in calamity, and finally deliver an urgent call to change course.

The Integrity of God

Most Christians know about God’s attributes: love, eternal life, veracity, immutability, justice, righteousness, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, but are not aware of His integrity. In Psalm 89:14 we read, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne.” These two attributes join together to form His integrity—the cornerstone for the foundation of His throne. We often focus on God’s love and neglect righteousness and justice. This is a fatal mistake. He cannot under any circumstance circumvent or violate either His righteousness or justice. Likewise, love and integrity stand or fall together. God cannot compromise either of them. God is Love (1 John 4:8). “The Lord is a God of justice” (Isa. 30:18). They must carry equal weight.

God’s Integrity or Holiness is comprised of:

- Righteousness: Ensures that His dealings with His creatures are filtered through perfect righteousness. The Psalmist sang, “Righteous are You O Lord, and upright are your judgments.... The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds” (Ps. 119:137; 145:17).
- Justice: He cannot be anything but just in His ways. He is fair to all people (Rom. 2:11). Everything He does passes through the filter of justice. There’s no compromise, “He will not do violence to justice” (Job 37:23).

This is how it works! Whatever God’s righteousness demands, His justice carries out. For instance, God’s righteousness demanded full payment for the sins of the world. God’s justice made sure that payment was paid in full. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). “The Lord was pleased to crush Him [Jesus Christ] putting Him to grief” (Isa. 53:10) “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Righteousness kissed justice. Jesus Christ received God’s full wrath on the cross, where He was judged for our sins. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor. 5:21). This is the epitome of God’s integrity. Righteousness checks justice and justice checks righteousness.

It cannot be overly stressed: love does not rule justice; they co-rule. Love expresses God’s action, “for God so loved the world that He gave his only Son

[Jesus Christ]” (John 3:16 ESV). Justice will not spare anyone who rejects God’s offer of salvation expressed through His love. “He who does not obey [believe in] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him” (John 3:36). The relationship between love and justice must be etched in our souls if we are to associate calamity with God. “If a calamity occurs in a city has the Lord not done it?” (Amos 3:6). Remember, God judged His Son mercilessly because God’s righteousness required it.

There is more to be said regarding the integrity of God. The subject will be further explored in the next section.

Things to Remember:

- God’s integrity is the foundation of His being.
- Love does not weigh more than God’s righteousness and justice
- It’s wrong to focus on God’s love alone and not equally on His justice.
- God’s judgment of His Son was a demonstration of the epitome of His justice.

Questions

1. Name two attributes that make up God’s integrity.
2. What happens when God’s righteousness is violated?
3. Does love weigh more than justice? Explain.

————TWO————

God Knows What He is Doing

It’s comforting to know that God knows what He’s doing. He possesses perfect righteousness and perfect justice. He is sovereign and has control over the universe He created. He is perfect. Whatever God does is perfect! We have no right to

question God's work. "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God" (Rom. 9:20). He is not under any obligation to explain.

God is infinite; we are not. We are finite creatures. Our mind is too tiny to wrap around the mind of Almighty God. His wisdom and ways of doing things are unsearchable. David was baffled, "How precious are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" (Ps. 139:17). The Apostle Paul said, "Oh, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Rom. 11:33). Unsearchable indeed! God tells us, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways...my ways [are] higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

God's Ways are Fair

Who will argue God's fairness? Justice demands fairness and God is just. In spite of our knowledge of God's justice, questions still flow from the depth of our souls regarding God's dealings with His creatures. We ask: How can a loving God permit calamities of such great magnitude to strike His creatures? We also ask: "If God is fair why does He allow the righteous to suffer and the evil doers to often go unpunished?" We are bewildered. We ask again: "Are adversity and suffering a sign that the sufferer is wicked? Wicked people do evil and succeed, yet we do good and don't see the desired results. Why should we bother to do good?" These are mind boggling questions.

You are not alone. People in the Bible had similar questions. The Psalmist said, "Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure...I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning" (Ps. 73:12-14). The prophet Jeremiah first praised God saying, "Righteous are You, O Lord." He then went on to say, "...let me talk with you about your judgments: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bear fruit.... But you, O Lord, know me; You have seen me, and have tested my heart toward You" (Jer. 12:1-3 NKJ). Do you see what Jeremiah's argument was about? "God, you have prospered the evildoers and left your obedient servant in the bitter cold, why Lord?"

In Malachi's day the people asked the same question, "What profit is it that we have kept His charge?...We call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape" (Mal. 3:14-15).

Why Calamities?

We may not fully understand what God is doing but Scripture helps us to interpret calamities. There are five major reasons for calamities in our lives.

1. **The Fallen World:** We live in a broken world as a result of Adam's original sin. "Cursed is the ground because of you...both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you" (Gen. 3:17-18). Everything in the world is broken and often produces calamity.
2. **National Discipline:** Calamity occurs as warning discipline. God uses every tool of disaster at His disposal to discipline nations that find themselves in national spiritual dysfunction due to disregard of God's mandates. "If a country sins against Me... I [will] stretch out my hand against it [and] destroy its supply" (Ezek. 14:13). He can accomplish this through storms, "stormy wind, fulfilling His Word" (Ps. 148:8). He uses storms for correction (Job 37:13).
3. **Personal Divine Discipline:** God brings about calamity in the lives of His carnal children in order to turn them back to Him. "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). The Lord spoke through the Apostle John, "I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference" (Rev. 3:19 NLT).
4. **Spiritual Building Blocks:** As hard as it is to chew, suffering for the advancing believer is a blessing in disguise. God introduces calamity to help the believer rely solely on Him. He uses it to remove the dross of pride within (Mal. 3:3). Isaiah captures God's words, "I have refined you...I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10). James exhorts, "Consider it all joy... when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

Through suffering, the believer learns pertinent life lessons and what it means to depend on God. God used suffering to build up His Son and prepare Him for the cross. “He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect [mature or built up], He became...the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:8-9). The Bible also tells us of many others such as Job, Joseph and Paul who endured suffering for reasons other than discipline. Their suffering often prepared them or brought blessing upon themselves and others.

5. God Uses Calamity to Display His Power: “So the Lord did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died” (Ex. 9:6). God spoke to Moses, “I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my miracles which I shall do in the midst of it” (Ex. 3:20). Though the ten plagues were a punishment for Pharaoh’s stubbornness, God used them to demonstrate to the whole world that He alone is God and Pharaoh is not. The news of ten miraculous displays of God’s power in Egypt, drying up the Red Sea and many more, spread far and wide creating a frame of reference and reverence in the hearts of many. Rahab the harlot was one of those who came to trust in Yahweh because of the display of His power. She reported, “We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea...when we heard it, our hearts melted...for the Lord Your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Jos. 2:10-11).

Keep in mind the perfect, wise, righteous and just God, Who controls His universe, does everything in conformity with His knowledge and great wisdom. He never makes a mistake. His integrity ensures perfection and fairness in all He does.

Things to Remember:

- God is in control of the universe He created.
- We cannot fully comprehend an infinite God with a finite mind.
- A perfect God can only produce perfect work.

- God is fair to all His creatures.
- God uses calamities to administer justice.
- Suffering of the righteous enhances their spiritual growth.

Questions

1. Based on God's character, can we say that God is unfair in His dealings with us? Explain.
2. Name four passages of Scripture in support of the claim that God is responsible for calamity.
3. Name five reasons why we suffer.
- 4.

————THREE————

The Flood in Noah's Day

Think of Noah's day before you doubt whether a loving God could visit His creatures with calamity. Jesus Christ compares future calamities with the calamity of Noah's day, "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying...until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:26-27).

Scripture tells us that Noah's world was destroyed by flood. The Lord confirmed it. The destruction raises three important questions. First, who destroyed the people of Noah's day? Second, by what agent was it destroyed? Third, why was it destroyed? Scripture answers these questions.

God destroyed them. Recall God's Word in the introduction. The Lord warned, "I will blot out man whom I created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things" (Gen. 6:7). And then He acted upon His warning, "Thus He

blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land” (Gen. 7:23). Keep Genesis 7:23 in mind as you contemplate the justice of God: “He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land.”

God’s agent was a flood. “All the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. The rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights...all flesh that moves on the earth perished” (Gen. 7:11-12, 21). Are you beginning to revere the justice of God?

God destroyed man because of man’s excessive wickedness. This answer to the third question is critical to our study. “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). You have to go back to God’s purpose in creation in order to comprehend His destruction of the world in Noah’s day. He created man *for His glory*, “Everyone who is called by my name...I have created for my glory” (Isa. 43:7). Manufacturing all sorts of wickedness is the antithesis of God’s purpose in creation. Consequently, God’s righteousness was violated, which begged for God’s justice. If God leaves evil unchecked, His purpose in the creation of man will be unfulfilled.

Remember, whatever righteousness condemns, His justice judges. Righteousness condemns man because of wickedness. God’s justice prevails. People in Noah’s day received a cup of God’s wrath in overflowing measure. “The fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.”

Pause and reflect on the calamity of Noah’s day. Can you connect the dots between God’s righteousness and justice? The truth is sobering. No one can violate His righteousness and expect a free ride. “Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished. But the descendants of the righteous will be delivered” (Prov. 11:21).

The evil men of Noah’s generation did not escape the justice of God. God keeps His Word. He destroyed them. What about Noah and his descendants? God kept His word. “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time” (Gen. 6:9). God saved him and his righteous household (Gen. 7:13). Is the God of Noah’s day our God today? Have God’s attributes changed? God answers the questions Himself, “I, the Lord, do not change (Mal 3:6).

Things to Remember:

- God’s righteousness and justice cannot be violated without consequences.
- Violation of God’s righteousness is a recipe for calamity of any magnitude.
- Justice does not discriminate.
- We cannot disregard God’s order without paying a heavy penalty.
- God uses whatever catastrophic agent He elects to accomplish His objective. The Psalmist wrote, “He makes the winds [hurricanes] His messengers, flaming fire his ministers” (Ps. 104:4). The next time you hear of a hurricane think of it as God’s messenger. That’s what the Bible says. Who can quarrel with Scripture?

Questions

1. What was the cause for the destruction of the world of Noah’s day?
2. Was God justified in His actions? Explain.
3. State the relationship between God’s righteousness and justice concerning sin.

————FOUR————

God Speaks

Who says that God has stopped speaking? On the contrary, moment by moment, time after time, everyday, God speaks to us. God has never, in any time, left his creatures in the dark. In every age God speaks to man through creation, “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1 NIV). His creation speaks to us in a marvelous way. He speaks to us in various ways—verbally and nonverbally.

Verbal Communication

God verbally communicated to Adam in the Garden, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen. 2:16-17). Ever since, God has not stopped making Himself heard. In the past, He spoke through visions and dreams (Gen. 28:12-16; 41:1; Dan. 2:19). He spoke verbally, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord””’ (Ex. 8:1). “The Lord spoke to Joshua” (Jos. 1:1). He spoke to Isaiah (Isa. 6:8), to Jeremiah (Jer. 29:30), and so many more.

Then God spoke his last verbal words to us through His Son. “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways [visions, dreams etc.], in these last days has spoken to us through His Son, Who He appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1-2). Mark the phrases “He spoke” and “has spoken” which are in the past tense. They underscore the end of verbal communication.

End of Verbal Communication

Jesus Christ, the “Mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5 NKJ), is the final direct recipient of God the Father’s verbal message, “in the last days has spoken to us through His Son.” After Jesus Christ assembled His apostles, He spent the next three years teaching and entrusting to them the Word which He received from God the Father. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the disciples recorded the very Word of God. “After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those [the apostles] who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:3b-4). Jude exhorts, “Contend earnestly for the faith [biblical truth] which was once for all handed down to the saints....But you beloved ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:3b, 17).

Think of it, the apostles and their close associates were the Lord’s only spokesmen which explains why the entire New Testament was written by them. What they wrote was the very Word of God. “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2

Peter 1:20- 21). Jesus Christ took John, the last apostle, to the Island of Patmos and gave him the final segment of God’s revelation to men. When the Lord finished His revelation, John warns us “I testify to everyone [you/me] who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18).

Rev. 22:18 is the cut off point of God’s direct revelation. Whomever among us claims direct revelation from God either through dreams, visions or face-to-face is in violation of God’s mandate and on a collision course with His justice. We must be very careful not to add to Scripture. Remember, in the past God who spoke in many portions and in many ways, has spoken to us in these last days. The phrases “God spoke” and “has spoken” are a reference to past action.

God has spoken. All His communication to men through dreams, visions, and face to face communication, has been reduced to writing. We now have the completed Canon of Scripture. God speaks to us through the written Word, “All Scripture is inspired by God, [God-breathed], and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God might be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Has God stopped speaking? No. However, God has stopped speaking verbally to anyone. He continues to speak to His creatures today nonverbally—through circumstances.

Things to Remember:

- God in His infinite love and wisdom never leaves His creatures without communicating to them.
- God’s communication is two-fold: verbal and nonverbal.
- The heavens declare God’s glory nonverbally.
- Jesus Christ was the end of God’s verbal communication.
- The apostles of Jesus Christ and their close associates were the Lord’s spokesmen for His message to man.

- We are in violation of Rev. 22:18 when we add to Scripture.
- God no longer speaks verbally to man.

Questions

1. According to Hebrews 1:1 does God still speak to man today through visions, dreams and verbally through prophets?
2. To whom did Jesus Christ convey the Father's message?
3. What is the warning of Rev. 22:18?
4. In what ways does God communicate today?

—————FIVE—————

Speaking Through Storms

God speaks through storms. Throughout history God has used storms to convey His message to us. A storm may serve as a blessing or discipline. Elihu captures this beautifully: "Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, and the rumbling that goes out of His mouth. Under the whole heaven He lets it loose, and His lightning to the ends of the earth. After it a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice...to the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,' and to the downpour [literally shower of rain and shower of rain]... 'Be strong.' Out of the south comes the storm, and out of the north the cold. From the breath of God ice is made...with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning...it changes directions turning around by His guidance. That it *may do whatever He commands* it on the face of the inhabited earth. Whether for correction or for loving kindness, He causes it to happen" (Job 37:2-4, 6, 9-13). God asked Job, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of distress, for the day of war and battle?" (Job 38:22-23).

God is the cause of climate change, not global warming. He causes heavy rain (Job 37:6). He causes severe drought. “I call for drought” (Hag 1:11) This should dispel any thought that man’s actions can alter Divine Design.

Storm as God’s Blessing

God sends controlled rain to the earth to water it. “If you walk in my statutes...I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce” (Lev. 26:3-4). God blesses any group of people who adhere to His mandates. He releases a controlled rain to give them the right amount of water needed for a fruitful harvest.

Storm as God’s Discipline

“He commands it [storm]...for correction” (Job 37:12-13). God expresses dissatisfaction through a devastating “shower of rain, upon shower of rain” which often includes hurricanes, typhoons and tornadoes or even earthquakes and more. The Psalmist agrees, “He makes the winds [hurricanes] His messengers” (Ps. 104:4). He adds, “Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind fulfilling His word” (Ps. 148:8). The prophet Isaiah said, “Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent; as a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, He has cast *it* down to the earth with *His* hand” (Isa. 28:2).

Recall, God used a downpour to judge the people of Noah’s day. He used storms to judge the people of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. “I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to me’ declares the Lord” (Hag. 2:17). Can we hear God through storms? The answer is yes.

Things to Remember:

- God speaks to us through storms.
- God uses storms as warning discipline or as blessing.
- God is responsible for heavy rain and severe drought.
- Climate change is credited to God and not His creatures.

Questions

1. According to Job 37:1-13, who controls the weather patterns?
2. Discuss two ways God uses storms.
3. According to Job 37:1-13 and Haggai 1:10-11, who is responsible for climate change God or man?
4. Name two categories of storms God uses to convey His anger toward a nation that turns its back on Him (Ps.104:4, Ps.148:8).
- 5.

————SIX————

Voice of the Storm

Storms are encoded with God’s voice. Man’s problem with God is twofold: deafness to His voice and unwillingness to change course. Man hears God loud and clear because He communicates distinctly. Can He who created ears not know how to communicate to what He has made?

Deafness to God’s Voice

God spoke through Jeremiah His servant, “To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed and they cannot listen” (Jer. 6:10). They “stiffened their necks in order not to listen or take correction” (Jer. 17:23). God cannot hold man responsible until He ensures man clearly understands what He would have him do.

God spoke verbally to a young Galilean named Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2). Jonah heard God loud and clear. What God wanted him to do was crystal clear—go and preach to Nineveh.

Jonah developed a deaf ear. He “rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3). His disobedience called for God to communicate to him nonverbally through a storm. So, “The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up” (Jonah 1:4). Can you see the correlation between disobedience and the storm?

Even though the people on board with Jonah were pagans, they had a sense that there must be a reason for such an unusual storm: “Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us! So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah” (Jonah 1:7). “The lot is cast, [Old Testament practice] but its every decision is from the Lord” (Prov. 16:33). Jonah, on the other hand, knew that he was the reason for the storm, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you” (Jonah 1:12). Jonah made the connection.

The men “threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging” (Jonah 1:15). Amazing. The sea returned to normal. We must not delude ourselves, God is in control. The One who created the sea, is the same One Who said “to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’” (Mark 4:39 NIV).

God was not yet finished with His nonverbal communication to Jonah. He arranged for a special submarine with no windows. “And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Johah” (Jonah 1:17). Jonah knew two things. He knew that he was the cause for the unusual storm. He knew that the fish that swallowed him was from God. Who said that God cannot communicate nonverbally?

I had a similar experience. I became a believer at an early age, and began to preach when I was twelve years old. The gospel fire burned within me. Back in my small village in Nigeria I would arise early in the morning, sometimes 2:00 a.m., to proclaim the gospel to my village. Those around me, parents, siblings, friends and others, knew that God had given me the gift of communication. The God who gave me the gift made sure that it was apparent within me. Somehow, it settled in my spirit that God had called me into ministry. There were no two ways about it.

However, I had my own ambition. Like Jonah, I was on a collision course and I took a route totally opposite to God’s call. In the same fashion that He arranged a special fish to swallow Jonah, God orchestrated eight life threatening car wrecks to

cause me to change course. The last accident I had was scary beyond words. It was a head on collision with a drunk driver. No one who saw the wreckage believed that anyone could have come out of it alive. But I did—by God’s grace. Like Jonah, I knew that He had spoken and from that moment I changed course. Discipline came to an end for both of us when we each yielded to God: He ordered the fish to spit Jonah out on shore, He removed his “special messenger” of car wrecks from me. Who said that God no longer communicates to us? He still communicates; the problem is that we are often not willing to listen and change directions.

Man’s Unwillingness to Change Course

Either we listen to God and change or we will continue to encounter His severe storms. This was true in the days of Haggai. Having returned from exile God’s people chose to be defiant to His mandate (Hag. 1:2-4). Consequently, God engineered a series of calamities to get their attention. In the midst of these unusual disasters, God said to them “Consider your ways” (v. 5). In other words, make the connection between your disobedience and the devastating storm.

““You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the Lord of hosts. *‘Because of my house that is in ruins...therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains’*” (Hag. 1:9-11, NKJV emphasis added).

Reflection

Reflection is a word that we too often use superficially. Some people associate reflection with yoga or deep meditation. Going back to the origin of the word, reflection comes from a Latin word, reflex (verb: *reflectere*) which means “to bend back.” Oxford Dictionary sheds light on the meaning “to have a serious thought or consideration.”

Having serious thought or consideration is what God would have us do when things are troublesome in our lives. To the people of Judah, God told them twice in one chapter “consider your ways” (Hag. 1:5), “consider your ways” (v. 7).

King Solomon wrote, “In the day of adversity [calamity] consider...God has made [it]. (Eccl. 7:14). The statement in Job 5:18 agrees, “For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands also heal.”

Reflection requires maximum concentration and maximum concentration requires time alone between you and God. You want to avoid distraction, enter your soul and take stock of your life. Like David, tell God, “Search me, O God and know my heart...and see if there be any hurtful way in me” (Psa. 139: 23-24).

Take the time like Jonah to make the connection between your present calamity and your relationship with God. This includes the storms of life beyond weather, such as a financial or health calamity. If you are growing in grace, count your calamity as a blessing in disguise. If you are retrogressing, then consider your plight as a precursor bringing you back on track. “Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble” (Heb. 12:12). In other words, take the necessary steps to return to God. Do it now; don’t wait until God hits you hard.

The people of Judah were hit hard with calamity because of disobedience and unwillingness to change: “I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; *yet you did not turn to Me*” (Hag. 2:17 NKJ emphasis added). The drought and blasting winds had nothing to do with global warming. They were God-orchestrated. What will happen if you and I continue to turn a deaf ear to God’s nonverbal communication through storms?

Intensifying the Storm

God intensifies the storm when we remain unchanged. Elihu reminds us that God has dual purposes in sending storms, “For correction...or for lovingkindness [blessing]” (Job 37:13). In correction, God brings a mild catastrophe as a warning. When the warning is ignored, and the people “are not willing to obey” God says, “I will increase your affliction seven times” (Lev. 26:21 NET)

Have we ignored God’s warning? How many times have you heard, “This is the worst calamity in this country?” It’s time to take inventory. Is the calamity in your life increasing or decreasing?

What about your country? Is the degree of catastrophe on the decrease, or on the rise? This is not the time to look outside ourselves. It’s not the time to answer the

question for someone else. It's not the time to blame our country for turning its back on God. Remember, a country starts with an individual—you. You are your country. Will we be courageous like David who was serious about his own life. He said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts" (Ps. 139:23 ESV). He did not stop there. He further asked God to see, "If there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (vs. 24).

Let us not delude ourselves. Let's not explain personal or national disasters away. Let's not credit them to global warming. Give God the credit, "I am the One who...creates calamity" (Isa. 45:7 NET). What must we do? This question will soon be answered. For now, we need to stop and seriously search our souls. The question is worth repeating. Are your calamities decreasing or increasing?

We come back to the question, what must we do? First and foremost, let's honestly take steps toward spiritual recovery:

1. Spiritual Reflection: Are you progressing or retrogressing?
2. If retrogressing, stop and identify your sins and acknowledge them to God (1 John 1:9— "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.")
3. With a spiritual clean slate, begin your spiritual life anew.
4. Cultivate a habit of daily study and application of God's Word.
5. Pray regularly: "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Lk. 22:46).

Things to Remember:

- God no longer speaks to anyone verbally: He communicates through circumstances.
- God's storm carries a dual purpose: correction or blessing (Job 37:13).
- God is the creator of calamity (Isa. 45:7).
- God uses calamity as an attention getter.

- If God’s warning is ignored, He increases the calamity.
- If God’s warning is heeded He reduces or removes the calamity.
- Not all calamities are attributed to disobedience.
- Changing course is the best solution when face to face with God’s Judgment.

Questions

1. Name two ways by which God communicated to Jonah.
2. Did the people on board the ship with Jonah make a connection between the unusual storm and an offense to an unknown God? Explain.
3. What two things happened when Jonah was hurled into the raging sea?
4. What can we do when our calamity is related to our spiritual failure?

————SEVEN————

Turning Point

By nature, man’s tendency is to do what God does not want him to do and go where God does not want him to go. Scripture is apt, “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside...Each of us has turned to his own way” (Rom. 3:11-12; Isa. 53:6). This is a fact of life. Left alone, man is self-destructive, believers and unbelievers alike.

Grace Disguised in Calamity

Calamity is God’s grace way of reaching out to man who understands the message of calamity very well. Put in another way: nothing gets man’s attention more than the message of distress. Consider the Jews, “In their distress they turned to the

Lord God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him” (2 Chron. 15:4).

They didn’t seek God on their own; distress forced them to seek Him. “For God troubled them with every kind of distress” (v. 6). Note the phrase “every kind of distress.” God troubled them with every kind of distress-causing agent. This is true in our own lives. Distress softens or hardens us; it either makes us turn to God or away from Him.

The Psalmist praises distress, “Before I was afflicted [with distress] I went astray, but now I keep Your word...It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Ps. 119:67, 71). Calamity is God’s grace agent turning man away from total destruction.

God in His matchless grace fine tunes the degree of calamity until the desired result is achieved. He did it with Israel; in their distress they turned to God. He did it with Jonah, “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, “I called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice” (Jonah 2:1-2). He didn’t call for help until God cast him “into the deep, into the heart of the seas” to where “the current engulfed” him (v. 3).

The same was true of me. The Lord choreographed a series of calamities, one after another to get my attention. The mega attention getter was a near death head-on collision with a drunk driver. That accident was so pointed and so scary that it stood out as the turning point in my life.

Turning Point

The turning point starts with the realization that:

1. It’s futile to pursue my own plan rather than the plan God has designed for me.
2. My way always leads to despair.
3. Turning to God is the only way to security, blessing, happiness, hope and a future.

4. Turning to God takes only a decision to change course and determination to stay the course.

Decision to Change Direction

Making a decision is the first step. Following through on it is what gets the job done. The story of the Prodigal Son illustrates a turning point. He had it his way. He took his portion of His father's wealth and squandered it on just about every indecent lifestyle. He was broke. Distress paid him a visit. "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished...he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating" (Luke 15:14-16). Disgusting, yes. But that's what awaits anyone on the road of "my way." You decide; will it be my way or God's way?

Notice what the Prodigal Son did, "When he came to his senses...he got up and came to his father" (Luke 15:17, 20). We can clearly see that his decision was followed with action. What did his father do? As we might expect, "His father saw him and felt compassion for him" (v. 20).

God's Open Arms Await You

Don't delay. The longer you wait to return to God the more your situation deteriorates. Man's solution is no match for a divinely tailored distress. "Who is able to straighten what He [God] has bent?" (Eccl. 7:13). In other words, who can solve a God created distress? No one! Only God can remove distress. Scripture is clear, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7). I urge you to follow the Prodigal Son's example and return to God. Will you do it now?

Things to Remember:

- Calamity is God's grace way of reaching out to us.
- Distress causes us to look to God.
- A turning point starts with a decision to change course.

- God opens His arms wide when we turn back to Him.

Questions

1. What is God's intention in applying distress to our lives? Give a verse.
2. What got the Prodigal Son in trouble?
3. What did the Prodigal Son do to rectify his awful situation?
4. What can we do to rectify our situation with God when we fail?

————EIGHT————

Final Question

We've come to the most important section of our work. How we answer this final question will determine our destiny. So let us thoughtfully re-examine each supporting part.

Ample time was invested in the beginning of our study to make the case scripturally that the sovereign God of the Universe is responsible for calamities. "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster...*I the Lord do all these things.*" (Isa. 45:7 NIV emphasis added). It explained why every disaster directly or indirectly is attributed to God.

In Section One, we examined the integrity of God. There we emphasized two aspects of His attributes—righteousness and justice. We learned that whatever God's righteousness condemns, His justice judges straight away. For instance, when we sin, we violate God's righteous standard. His justice administers a response. Love does not trump justice, they carry equal weight

In Section Two, it is apparent to us that the omniscient God knows what He's doing! He is never surprised. He knows and controls His actions from the beginning to the end. He is fair. He judges according to His righteous standard. There we sympathized with those who were taken aback by the prospering of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. We stated five reasons why we suffer:

broken world, national spiritual dysfunction, display of God's power, divine discipline and development of spiritual strength or capacity.

Re-examining Section Three, it's crystal clear that God used the flood as an agent of destruction to wipe out the world in Noah's day. We made the connection; the world seriously violated God's righteousness and his justice forcefully responded.

Taking a closer look at Sections Four and Five of our work, we determined that God has spoken verbally and still speaks nonverbally today through storms. We dispelled preconceived notions that global warming is the cause of severe weather changes. God is in control. He controls His universe and everything therein "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it" (Deut. 10:14).

God uses storms to accomplish two things— blessing (by watering the land for agriculture) and warning or discipline (by causing destruction of property and/or life).

Looking at Section Six, we learned that each storm has a voice. It communicates. God used it to send a message to Jonah. In the same section we learned that God does indeed intensify the calamity should man refuse to heed His warning. It's clear from this section that God removes the calamity when we respond positively to His storm of warning as Jonah did.

Then in Section Seven, we examined the turning point. We saw that God uses affliction to move man to turn back to Him. The Psalmist praised affliction (Ps. 119: 67, 71). An urgent call was made for us to return to God before it's too late.

God's dealing with mankind is straight forward. Obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings calamity. As our loving Father, God applies degrees of pressure to induce compliance to His Word. Think of it, Judah's disobedience was the prime reason for unprecedented drought, "because of you [Judah] the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce" (Hag. 1:10).

God's people are the link between heaven and earth, and between God and man. God blesses or curses the world through you. You are special in that sense. "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted" (Prov. 11:11). "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14); "the salt of the earth" (v. 13); "Christ's fragrance" (2 Cor.

2:15); “an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20); a “vessel of blessing” (Prov. 11:10-11).

How Much Longer?

God asked a heart wrenching question to Israel, “Why do you insist on being battered? Why do you continue to rebel? Your head has a massive wound, your whole body is weak from the soles of your feet to your head, there is no spot that is unharmed. There are only bruises, cuts and open wounds. They have not been cleaned or bandaged, nor have they been treated with olive oil” (Isa. 1:5-6 NET). Now we come to our final question: How much longer will we remain in defiance to God’s abundant warnings?

God’s patience does run out: “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy” (Prov. 29:1). It happened to Judah, “God...sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people...but they continuously mocked the messengers...until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, and there was no remedy. Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword...and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand” (2 Chron. 36:15-17). We need to seriously consider God’s warning in our lives and nation. We should not wait until God’s patience with us runs out.

It’s my heartfelt prayer that you will take God’s Word to heart. We’ve been hit from every angle with every kind of disaster—one after another. Who knows what God is preparing to slam us with next. But it can be avoided. “If...I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation...turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it” (Jer. 18:7-8 ESV).

“If my people, who belong to Me, humble themselves, pray, seek to please Me, and repudiate their sinful practices, then I will respond from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14 NET).

Heavenly Father, “Restore us to you, O Lord, that we may be restored” (Lam. 5:21). It’s the prayer of your servant Jeremiah, then, and I make it my prayer now.

Give no rest to the reader of this booklet, until the individual decides to turn to you wholeheartedly. In the name of your only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain:
it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world”

C.S. Lewis - *The Problem of Pain*

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