

Intro

Over recent weeks and years, there have been a number of natural disasters. These have included earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes etc. But why do these disasters happen and anyway, where's God in all this?

God is in control - First things First!

The first thing to make clear is that God is in control. Nothing happens that makes God say, 'man, I didn't see that one coming...' He knows what's happening, what will happen and holds the earth in his hands. It's important to be very clear that even when it doesn't feel like it, the truth is that God is in control of the whole universe.

Psalm 95.4-5 - For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Job 12.10 - In his (God's) hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

God cares really deeply about what happens in the earth. But God is not the one causing any natural disasters. These things happen for lots of reasons. God may well use these things for good, but he is not the one causing evil and suffering - that is the work of the enemy and the sin in this world.

In a DVD series called 'Transformations' there is the true story about a part of Guatemala. The land was really barren and people couldn't grow any crops. Those that did grow were tiny and pretty useless. When God moved in that part of Guatemala, many people came to faith and an amazing thing happened - the ground that had been cursed (the same ground) suddenly started producing huge vegetables and produce - lots of them. They now supply vegetables and crops around the world. God cares about the land!!

But God cannot act if people don't turn to him, say sorry and change. It's not that God is cruel - it's a spiritual law and it's really simple. God says, 'return to me and I'll bless you and the land.' Until the end time, God can't change this rule because of our sin. We are the ones that have to act and change because God doesn't force us to do anything! Our sin is the block between God and us, and between us and God's blessing. When we change we get God's amazing favour for free!!

Natural Disasters

Go round the room and shout out some natural disasters that you know of and where they happened, what caused them etc. This just gives a sense that we know some natural disasters that everyone can relate to and knows about.

Disaster Movie Clips to show (from):

(links all checked in April 2019)

There have been a large number of disaster type movies. Some of these you can show include:

1. Independence Day - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2AivoDDKn4>
2. The Day After Tomorrow - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnvqsWVluCE>
3. War of the Worlds - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJYnHA2OzfA>
4. Armageddon - <https://youtu.be/DnXmPr29VQU>
5. Deep Impact - <https://youtu.be/NTkfk4dCnu8>
6. 2012 - if you're desperate LOL! - <https://youtu.be/rvI66Xaj9-o>

Check over any videos and links first to see if you're happy with them.

The Bible - Luke 13.1-8

Let's read a short bit from Luke... We'll come back to this later.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Scientific Photos of Natural Disasters

National Geographic do a helpful information section of the physical consequences of natural disasters - covering nine different categories, each with a photo and description. The information and photos are not ones of people's suffering.

[National Geographic link](#) – (link checked April 2019)

Question - why do natural disasters occur?

Go round and shout out some reasons...

There are a number of reasons, naturally speaking, that disasters occur... These are often to do with plate tectonics and the core of the earth, or to do with ways that waves, the wind, the moon cycles happen. All this is about geography, geology, physics, meteorology etc.

But there are other reasons - such as man's interference with the world. For example building in flood plains (where rivers overflow when it's raining) or living near volcanoes etc. Man has also chopped down vegetation and trees in places, making the earth unstable (no longer things like tree roots to hold the earth in place etc).

What about God's judgement because of man's sin? Does anyone think that God pours out his judgement on places? For example when New Orleans was hit by Hurricane Katrina, some people thought this was an act of God because there was so much evil in the city. The same thing was thought about the huge Tsunami that hit places like Thailand. But is this really how God does things? What do you think? (I'll give you a clue, I don't think this was God's judgement, we'll look at why later on!)

Where was God? A Thought

It's very interesting how many people cry, "Where was God?" when anything bad happens. However, the same people never credit God when people are saved, rescued or miracles happen! One example was the landing of a US Airways 1549 Flight on the Hudson River!

[Link to animated reconstruction of the event](#) (link checked, April 2019)

There are a number of other YouTube videos with the actual CCTV footage of the plane crash.

Maybe we should (as Christians especially) be thanking and crediting God for when he does amazing things like this!

The Bible

When God made the earth and made mankind, he rested from his work on the seventh day. He had described his work as pleasing and we know that things were perfect. God and mankind were in total harmony in an amazing place of God's perfection with man. But this was broken when mankind chose (it's important to highlight the word 'chose') to sin and do the one thing God had warned would lead to problems - eat the fruit off the Tree of Knowledge. In response to this, God had no choice but to respond lovingly by having to remove what had now been corrupted from what was pure. So mankind had to leave the garden. Notice God didn't destroy them or burn them up. Instead he clothed them with animal skin (a sign of the sacrifice of Jesus to come) and set an angel there to guard the way back. This is better translated as an angel set there to keep the way open (back to God), through Jesus. With this sin, the earth was corrupted and death came into the world - into humans, animals and wildlife. Creation would start to fall into decay inevitably as sin and corruption had entered the world. (In the same kind of way, you have to remove an apple from a bowl of apples if it gets mouldy and the mould starts spreading to the other apples!)

We know that even creation is longing for the return of Jesus. This shows us that the whole earth is suffering as a consequence of sin.

[Romans 8.22 - We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.](#)

Many scientists say that the world will one day either explode (outwards) or implode (inwards). If you read the Bible, it says that in the last days, there will be all kinds of signs around the world. But these signs are just the early warnings of what is to come before Jesus returns! We really do seem to be in these early days! But don't worry, if you know Jesus, you are safe in his hands :)

[Luke 21.25 - "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.](#)

[Matthew 24.6-8 - 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. All these are the beginning of birth pains.](#)

But the message from God is one of love and hope for restoration, yet just like Adam & Eve, many people continue to reject God:

Romans 1.18-20 - The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

God's Judgement?

Some Christians say unhelpful things about disasters that it's God's judgement. But we don't live in Old Testament times. God's judgement was poured out on Jesus. Yes, we reap what we sow (we pay for the wrong things we do) but there is not always a simple answer for natural disasters.

When Hurricane Katrina struck, it destroyed the property of Godly men and women, of church buildings and other good places. The same happened with the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the Japanese Earthquake of March 2011 and the New Zealand Earthquake of February 2011. It is not as simple as God pouring out his judgement. If it were, you'd expect Christians to escape! Around the world today, hundreds of thousands of Christians are suffering persecution. Yet we don't always see God step in. Why this is, we just don't know or understand. But we have to believe the Bible that says that God works all things for good for those who love him and are called according to God's purpose (Romans 8.28).

In Luke 13, that we read earlier, Jesus talks about some people killed when a tower fell and killed eighteen in place called Siloam. He says some important words, *"Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."* In effect, Jesus was saying that disasters happen - and they don't happen because people are more 'guilty' than others that things don't happen to. But he warns that unless we repent and turn to Jesus, one day we will also die. This is a clear warning to get right with God and that these things are not God's judgement.

Secondly, we know that one day Jesus will return as judge. God has given Jesus the authority to judge the world. In the Old Testament, God judged people very directly (although he kept giving people repeated chances and warnings). But with Jesus, these judgements have been stored up to the end of time. So, the Bible makes it clear that God doesn't bring his direct judgement on people today, but all people will be judged by Jesus one day.

John 5.22-23 - Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Sowing and Reaping

There is such a thing as 'sowing and reaping' as we know from Galatians 6.7:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

This principle basically means you will get the consequences of your actions. This may be in this life, but it will certainly be the case after we die. So if we choose to mess with the earth's delicate balance, then we can expect things to happen on earth that are bad. Or if I don't build a house properly, I can expect that the house will one day fall down. This is why some seeming natural disasters happen. It's not God's judgement but an inevitable consequence of doing wrong.

This is also true spiritually - what we do with our lives will be reaped on this earth for many, but certainly in eternity with God. This is why Jesus tells us to store up treasure in heaven. This means - obey God and do right in your everyday life no matter what. Don't focus on what you can get, but focus on what you can give :)

Matthew 6.19-21 - Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

End

How are we going to respond to natural disasters?

Well, firstly we know that Christians are often the first on the ground helping with natural disasters. This was the case with Hurricane Katrina, with the devastation in Haiti and many other places. We also know that Christians stay on long after the world has forgotten.

When there is a natural disaster, it is a chance for you to take action and show the love of Jesus.

1. You can pray for people, for God to open people's eyes.
2. You can raise money and get it into the hands of Christians or people you trust working on the ground in a place.
3. You may even be able to volunteer to help in a very practical way on a mission team etc.
4. Contact people working in a place if you're able to. Encourage them and pray for them.
5. Raise awareness and keep reminding other people in your neighbourhood or city to give.

Make a commitment today to do something. We can't all do everything, but we can all do something! God's love letter to the world is you and me. It's time to show how much God cares!