

Haiti and Earthquake Theology

☒ Concerned Americans have been shaken by sobering images from ubiquitous news footage of rubble and rescue in Haiti after a magnitude 7 earthquake rocked the tiny poor Caribbean nation earlier this month, prompting many to ask, “Where is God and why would He allow such extensive suffering?”

Whether it is an earthquake or some other adversity that turns our lives upside down, Christians grapple with trying to reconcile God’s sovereignty and His role in human suffering, including our own personal afflictions. I believe there are important truths about God and suffering that we need to keep in mind.

The first is that God exists. Those who try to discredit Christianity use the existence of evil and suffering in the world as proof that there is no God. If there is a God, why would He allow the earthquake in Haiti that killed countless thousands of people?

Evil and suffering constitute prima facie evidence that there is a God. The fact that we even care about such things in the world argues strongly for the existence of God . . . and gives us a strong clue about His character.

The second truth is that God controls all of His creation, and nothing happens without His permission. Psalm 103:19 says, “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all,” which is hard to grasp when it comes to suffering.

Frankly, it gives me no comfort to think that I am simply the victim of random acts. I want a God who has all of His creation under control, even if I don’t always understand what He does. Fortunately, the God revealed in the Scriptures is that kind of God. In Isaiah 45:7, God says He is the One causing well-being and creating calamity.

A third truth is that God is loving and just. The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word "love" and limit His mercy and goodness to what seems right to us.

God is not only a God of love, but a God of Righteousness who judges evil. Does this mean that those killed in the earthquake were evildoers who deserved to die? No, we are all evildoers who deserve to die. The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

A fourth truth is that God uses tragedy to accomplish good. We must resist the urge to offer pat answers or simplistic explanations to those who find themselves in a maelstrom of sorrow. Like the biblical character Job, who endured numerous battering catastrophes, God continues to say, "Trust me, I know what I am doing."

It is similarly irresponsible for anyone to second-guess God's redemptive purpose or explain what He is doing through an individual disaster, such as the Haitian earthquake. To try and do so would be to twist the dagger in the backs of people who are hurting.

Where was God during this tragedy? The same place He was 2,000 years ago when His Son died. Was God in control? Of course He was. Why did He allow it? I don't have a clue. He has not revealed His purpose.

A fifth truth is that God's ways are beyond comprehension. Although the Bible provides assurance that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him, we should resist trying to offer specific answers about why He allows certain disasters.

In Luke 13, Jesus referred to a natural disaster of His day, when the Tower of Siloam building project collapsed and killed 18 people. Jesus said, "Do you think the tower fell on these

people because they were worse sinners than anyone else?" The answer was an obvious "no," but He never answered why the tower fell.

God is ultimately responsible for the earthquake in Haiti and has a reason that is beyond our ability, trapped in time, to understand or comprehend. But it would be theological ignorance coupled with absolute arrogance to try and interpret God's actions as a judgment against a particular person or nation.

Instead of asking, "Why?" we should be asking, "What?" What can I be doing to help these people in their time of desperate need? I think you will discover that in your expression of love and compassion joined with people of faith and goodwill from around the world that God can be found.

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