

Are Natural Disasters ‘Acts of God’?

I have often wondered why some insurance companies and news outlets describe tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, floods and wildfires as “acts of God.” I understand part of their reasoning—that these things are normally beyond human control. Why not label rays of sunshine, singing birds and colorful rainbows as “acts of God”? Those are beyond our control as well. If natural disasters are always a major sign of His involvement in human affairs, God could be blamed for any resulting tragedies. Some might propose that the Creator is cruel and unjust. Quite the opposite is true biblically:

“He is the Rock; His work is perfect; for all His ways are just. He is a God of faithfulness and without injustice; righteous and upright is He” (Deut. 32:4, MEV).

If this is correct, why would our heavenly Father allow natural disasters that cause, not just the wicked, but good people to suffer? Isn’t the Creator capable of preventing such things? Skeptics often suggest, “If God could have prevented these tragedies but didn’t, then He’s not all-loving. If God wanted to prevent them but couldn’t, then He’s not all-powerful.”

Is our reasoning limited to these two options, or are there more possibilities?

Does the Wind Have Free Will?

Could it be that God allows evil and the unpredictable quality of nature in this world as part of an overarching plan to preserve the valuable gift called free will? If people were hardwired by God only to do good, then loving worship toward Him could never be authentic. Instead, it would be robotically controlled by the very one who then becomes the object of that love. There's no reality in that.

Because human beings live on the earth, is it possible that this gift of free will overflows into everything in this realm? Even forces of nature have apparently been given freedom of expression. Jesus insisted, "The wind blows *where it wishes*" (John 3:8a, emphasis added). God initially created the wind to fulfill multiple beneficial purposes, then, presumably, He released it to express itself—while still maintaining certain constraints.

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In a perfect world, this aspect of nature would never move from "pleasant and refreshing" to "fearful and destructive." But we no longer live in a perfect world. When Adam and Eve transgressed, evidently, the world under their charge fell with them. God, at times, has exerted divine dominion these areas. Nevertheless, the functions of the natural world usually seem to be autonomous and random. So apparently, there is freedom of expression within the confines of God's sovereignty. Where do we draw the line? Only God knows.

Can catastrophic events be the result of divine judgment? Yes. Biblical examples include the fiery destruction of Sodom, hailstones falling on enemy armies and a tempest at sea endangering a ship transporting a rebellious prophet (Gen. 19:24, Josh. 10:11, Jon. 1:1-4).

Nahum 1:3b (AMP) asserts, “The LORD has *His way* in the whirlwind and in the storm” (emphasis added). Sometimes, “His way” could involve divine retribution toward the wicked. Yet the Creator having His way could also be the positive goal of converting those who need to be awakened spiritually. God having His way could also indicate times of supernatural protection over His people, just as He granted in the land of Goshen during the 10 plagues that fell on Egypt. So this Scripture can be interpreted several ways.

There are also three more possible causes:

- **Satanic involvement.** The book of Job blames the devil for the unleashing of a violent storm against Job’s children. However, it was necessary for Satan to obtain God’s permission.
- **Angelic involvement.** One prophecy foretells angels unleashing the destructive power of wind in this world in the last days to harm those who do not receive the seal of God (Rev. 7:1-3).
- **Human involvement.** Manipulation by people factors into the equation, too. Recent developments in geoengineering, weather control and directed energy weapons have empowered humans to enter the natural disaster arena, which if true, seems to be bent toward an evil agenda.

In considering these points, we conclude there are no easy answers.

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What About Noah’s Flood?

True Bible believers would agree that the judgment of God caused the first flood in the days of Noah. But does that mean

every flood since then is divinely authored? Absolutely not. However, it apparently set in motion an expression of nature that often results in similar environmental events. Can the omnipotent God release His power to withstand these forces of nature? Of course, He can. Jesus said, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39b, MEV), and the wind and waves obeyed His voice.

But does He always miraculously intervene? Inexplicably, no. However, we can be confident of His promise to Noah that there will never be another global deluge. Also, Psalm 104:9 explains that after the flood, God installed an invisible "boundary" for the oceans that they "may not again cover the earth."

Once again, where is this boundary line? Why isn't it even more constraining? Within this divine limitation, do the waters have free will too? I keep asking questions, don't you?

Are There Certainties?

What conclusions can we reach? Life and nature are both unpredictable. If there is a disastrous tragedy in nature, tracing the exact source is often impossible. Then how should we react?

- Never make blanket assessments unless God's heart is unquestionably known.
- Always lean toward the dual explanation of randomness in nature and faith in God's goodness.
- Never become bitter or charge God foolishly.
- Worship God anyway, as Job did.
- If divine judgment is a possibility, respond with humility and repentance.
- Use natural tragedies as an opportunity to express Christian compassion.
- Trust God to intervene in people's lives.

Though there are many uncertainties in this life, two things are certain, and we can tenaciously cling to these beliefs: God is love, and ultimately, He will take His people from this unpredictable realm, filled with disappointments, to a perfect and unchanging realm where no crises will ever occur again. That will be the ultimate “act of God.”

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