

Hurricanes, Solar Eclipses and Divine Judgment

In the course of one short week, America witnessed an extremely unique solar eclipse and then watched the state of Texas get hit with a catastrophic hurricane. Is God trying to get our attention, or is it foolish (and even dangerous) to speculate like this?

On the one hand, we have not had a similar eclipse in America since 1776, as it's the first total eclipse visible only in the USA since the year of our founding. That is certainly striking.

And, when the path of the next solar eclipse, which is expected in 2024, is charted on a map, it intersects with this year's eclipse in the form of a giant X over the nation. That is also quite striking.

There are other, interesting facts connected to the Aug. 21 eclipse, and an Orthodox rabbi in Israel has pointed out in rabbinic literature, eclipses were signs of judgment (see Sukkah 29a in the Babylonian Talmud).

Not only so, but the eclipse came at a dark time in our nation's history, with deepening divisions on every front.

Could it be that God was speaking to us through this eclipse? Surely if this took place in biblical times, it would have been taken as a divine sign. Should we take it as one today?

Perhaps, but we need to tread carefully here, since it's just as wrong to speak for God when He's not speaking as it is to miss His voice when He does speak.

When it comes to the eclipse, those who witnessed it around the country had a sense of awe and wonder, not a sense of

dread and fear. And, for the most part, those who believe God created the universe sensed the majesty of the Creator in the eclipse more than a sign of impending judgment.

I'm not saying that the solar eclipse was *not* a divine warning sign. I'm simply saying that we need a lot more evidence, accompanied with a clear prophetic warning, before we make a solemn pronouncement.

When it comes to hurricanes, we need to be even more careful before making divine pronouncements, as tempting as it can be to do so.

For example, it was striking that Hurricane Katrina wiped out the Southern Decadence, a gay pride event in New Orleans that is worthy of its name. Many Christians felt it was a clearly an act of divine judgment.

And there were some who claimed that Katrina was a judgment on America for pressuring Israel to get out of Gaza, resulting in the forced (and painful) resettling of thousands of Jews. Similarly, Katrina displaced thousands of Americans, who now became refugees in other states.

But are we prepared to look into the eyes of the families who lost loved ones in Katrina, some of whom were devout believers, and tell them their loved ones were struck down in an act of divine judgment because of our treatment of Israel?

Right now, the city of Houston is bearing much of the brunt of Hurricane Harvey. Yet, from a Christian perspective, Houston is one of the few cities that has stood bravely against the rising tide of LGBT activism. Why would God single out Houston for judgment?

Read the account of Christian apologist Jeremiah Johnston, a husband and father of five (including 13-month-old triplets), as he describes what it's like to be living in Houston right now. Are you willing to tell him (along with the families of

the bereaved) that this hurricane is divine judgment?

Again, had we been living in biblical times, we would have recognized a hurricane like this as a sign of divine judgment, repenting of our sins and asking for mercy. And certainly, there's no way that we could view something like Hurricane Harvey as a *blessing* from God. Also, events like this remind us of our fragility and of God's power, which often lead us to prayer.

But we must be very careful before we make divine pronouncements about hurricanes and other natural disasters, as if they were specific acts of divine judgment against specific sets of sinners.

I once polled my radio audience about hurricanes, asking whether they were acts of divine judgment.

One caller asked, "If that's the case, why don't the hurricanes wipe out churches first, since there's so much sin in our midst?"

Another caller said, "If God wanted to get our attention, why not send a hurricane to a part of the country that normally doesn't get hurricanes? Or why not send it at a time of the year when hurricanes are rare?" (This tornado would seem to fit the description of an unusual event, pointing to divine judgment.)

I believe these are fair questions and observations, reminding us that we need to be careful before making divine pronouncements.

Are you 100 percent sure that the eclipse and hurricane are acts of divine judgment? If not, perhaps you should think and pray more before posting and speaking? On the other hand, are you 100 percent sure that they are not acts of judgment? If so, perhaps you should think and pray more before attacking those with whom you differ?

Either way, I hope we can we agree on this: America needs the Lord right now, and we should join together in asking God to have mercy on our nation, especially on those suffering effects of Hurricane Harvey today. {eo}

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