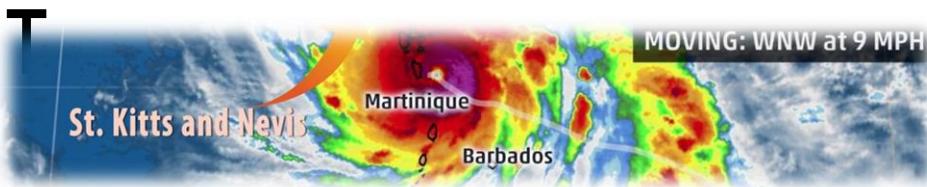


WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR NATURAL DISASTERS? *God? The Devil? Man?*

- REV. SYLVESTER HERBERT



This is a question that many persons wrestle with. Here are some biblical points to ponder:

1. Natural disasters are a natural consequence of mankind's first sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed it was not only they and their descendants who were affected but also the animal kingdom and all nature. Paul speaks of the physical world as being "subjected to frustration, not by its own choice" (Rom. 8:20, NIV). He writes of the creation's "bondage to decay" and that it "has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." (Rom. 8:21-22, NIV). Such language surely includes the wrath of Mother Nature unleashed in natural disasters.
2. Natural disasters are sometimes a direct act of judgment against specific sinners or sins (Gen. 6). While this truth is taught in Scripture we must not conclude that all those who experience a natural disaster are being judged by God or that all those who are spared from a particular disaster are favoured by God. Many innocent people suffer from natural disasters (Lk. 13:3-5). Many wicked people do not experience natural disasters. Sometimes they prosper even more than the righteous (Psa. 73:3-5).
3. God controls the weather (Exod. 9:29; Psa. 135:6-7; Jer. 10:13); the skies and the rain (Psa. 77:16-19); the clouds and the wind (Mk 4:35-41; Jer. 51:16); lightning (Psa. 18:14) and all nature (Job

26). He upholds and sustains the universe (Heb. 1:3). In His sovereignty He allows natural disasters to accomplish His purposes – purposes which more often than not remain hidden to us. When we do not have answers to the whys of human tragedy and suffering, we must learn to trust God's wisdom in all things. What we can be sure of is that His "invisible hand is in our pain" and He is working all things together for His glory and our ultimate good (Rom. 8:18-28). In the meantime we should busy ourselves alleviating human suffering whether it is caused by natural disasters or by simply living life in a fallen world.

4. God sometimes allows Satan to bring calamities. A biblical example is the killer hurricane and firestorm which destroyed Job's cattle, crops, and family. (Job 1:1-12).
5. We must not rule out the possibility that the natural disasters in our day are early warnings of God's final judgment. According to Matthew 24:7b-8 (NIV), "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." A reasonable conclusion to draw from these verses is that we can expect more and more natural disasters to occur as we approach the time of Christ's return to earth.
6. Global temperatures are rising. More ocean heat causes stronger and longer-lasting hurricanes. Some of the factors contributing to climate change are man-made and are a violation of the divine mandate to care for the environment (Gen. 2:5, 15). Our individual and collective failure to reduce carbon dioxide and other pollutants in the atmosphere is an indirect contributor to the extreme weather we are experiencing.



Natural disasters serve as reminders that this world of sin, tragedy and pain will not last forever. God will one day make all things new (Rev. 21:3-4). It is important therefore to choose Christ and to be a part of God's renewed creation where natural disasters have no part.