

READING Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 8, 12, 15-24

“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands that I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.”

“The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.”

“The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.”

“However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. The LORD will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. The LORD will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The LORD will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed.”

(Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 8, 12, 15-24 NIV)

SERMON

Natural Disasters - God's Messages

“There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”

““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. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”” (Luke 21: 11,25-28 NIV)

Words spoken by Jesus and words that seem to fit in with the problems of today.

[HURRICANE DEAN MOVIE CLIP]

Just recently we have had Hurricane Dean in the Caribbean, where Jamaica was threatened, but the Hurricane skirted the southern coastline. Hurricane Dean then went onto towards Mexico. Of course American remembers Hurricane Katrina, especially the town of New Orleans.

Then in this country we have had the worst floods since 1947 or even beyond that - which is a little far back for most of us to remember! Anyone remember the floods of 1947?

[MOVIE CLIP OF UK FLOODING]

However there were some lighter moments which can be appreciated by all

[MOVIE CLIP OF POLICE IN FLOODS]

Are these messages from God to a sinful, fallen world? After Hurricane Katrina struck America one religious commentator said

It seems clear that the prophetic times I have been expecting for decades have finally arrived. And even worse, it appears that the judgment of America has begun. I warn continually that the last days lineup of world powers does not include anything resembling the United States of America. Instead, a revived Roman Empire in Europe is to rule the West, and then the world. (Hall Lindsey)

So often when a natural disaster happens or as it is often called, an Act of God which is defined as

An event beyond human control — e.g., hurricane, earthquake, volcanic eruption, etc. — for which there is no legal redress.

And the definition went on to say

The phrase is frequently used by insurance companies and lawyers.

I can't think why?

But we know that God **CAN** control the weather. Jesus and the disciples were going across the Sea of Galilee on day when a ferocious storm blew up. It was so ferocious that the hardened fishermen were scared, and then incensed because Jesus was asleep in the boat and so they woke him and said to him

“...”Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” (Mark 4:38-39 NIV)

God is truly in control of the weather and of the other things in nature. God created this world and does not just leave it to get on with it – he is intimately involved with his world.

Earlier we had a reading from Deuteronomy 28 where we read of the blessing that will flow from following the commands of God and also what will happen when God is not followed – and this was addressed to the emerging nation of Israel. At this time Israel was really no more than a coming together of twelve tribes – they are yet to really be one nation – that is well into the future. But Moses is addressing them and says that if they follow God then they will

- Urban and Rural life is great :3
- It doesn't matter whether you live in an urban or rural setting – you will have enough
- Strong Babies :4, 11
- Good crops :4, 11
- Healthy livestock :4, 11
- Plenty of food :8,

- Food needed to be stored there is so much :8
- Enough rain :12
- Rich enough to lend to others and never borrow :12

But then come warnings, which seem to dominate, about what will happen if they do not obey the commandments and follow God

- Urban and Rural life is dire :16
- Weak Babies :18
- Bad crops :18
- Unhealthy livestock :18
- Lack of food :17
- Plagues of diseases :21

I can remember when HIV/AIDS first came onto the scene it was seen by some as a punishment from God against homosexuality, but then things changed when heterosexuals were found to be HIV positive.

- Drought :22
- Plus, plus, plus

There are other things, but they are the highlights. If things go well, then the nation is blessed by God, if they disobey God, then he brings curses on them and things do not go well.

But then this always gives God a bad press. An Act of God defined as

An event beyond human control — e.g., hurricane, earthquake, volcanic eruption, etc. — for which there is no legal redress.

Or, as an alternative we can have that an Act of God is

A direct, sudden, and irresistible action of natural forces such as could not reasonably have been foreseen or prevented, as a flood, hurricane, earthquake, or other natural catastrophe.

Why is it that when something awful happens it is an act of God, but when something good happens, God is rarely mentioned?

However we are not just seeing nature in turmoil. Manmade structures are now collapsing with possible dire consequences

[MOVIE CLIP OF MINNESOTA BRIDGE]

The bridge that collapsed recently in Minnesota resulting in fatalities. It was only this last Monday gone, the 20 August that searchers finally found the last missing victim's remains in the wreckage. The victim was one Gregory Jolstad, one of the 18 construction workers resurfacing the bridge, was found late Monday in the Mississippi River, bringing the total death toll in the collapse to 13. An Act of God or bad workmanship by human beings?

But the problem with all natural and unnatural disasters innocent people die. Turn with me to Luke 13, page 1046

“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.”” (Luke 13:1-5 NIV)

Unfortunately bad things do not always happen just to bad people – if it did then possibly more people would become Christians to avoid the bad things, but God does not work like that because that is coercion and God does not coerce. It will be that as a nation goes away from God that because of this decisions are taken, actions made that bring consequences and so bad decisions lead to bad consequences.

After 9-11, there were those in America and elsewhere who asked, "How could God let something like this happen?" Anne Graham-Lotz, the daughter of Billy Graham went on air and said amongst other things

"I believe that God is deeply saddened by this, just as we are, but for years we've been telling God to get out of our schools, to get out of our government and to get out of our lives. And being the gentleman that He is, I believe that He has calmly backed out. How can we expect God to give us His blessing and His protection if we demand that He leave us alone?" In light of recent events...terrorists attack, school shootings, etc. (Anne Graham-Lotz)

If we tell God long enough to leave us alone, he will, but we then cannot blame him when something bad happens, when disasters occur.

Sadly innocent people will be affected because of bad things that happen, because of natural disasters. Not all those caught up in the Tsunami were evil, not all those whose homes have been destroyed by hurricanes were bad, some of those whose houses have been flooded in this country are Christians, they do follow God.

So why do we have to have natural disasters? Why do we not have a world where earthquake and floods and drought and tsunamis and disasters happen? We could just blame ourselves for affecting climate change. For causing the climate to be weird so that as I heard the other day we have had more sun in August that last year, but we feel it has been a worst summer – that is because when there has been no sun, there has been rain and lots of it. We blame climate change for the fact that we do not get hardly any snow now in the winter.

Will we blame ourselves, as human beings when the San Andreas fault finally shifts in a dramatic way bringing Los Angeles down with it? The earthquake due to the fault moving not being caused by us affect the climate, but maybe we take the blame for having built and kept on building a city there when we knew about the fault!

But there are still natural disasters which cannot be put down to climate change, to building in the wrong places. Things like a tsunami that happen due to an undersea earthquake that until Boxing Day 2004, most of us had never heard of the word, let alone the existence of a tsunami. Turn with me to Romans 8:19, page 1135

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Romans 8:18-22 NIV)

Creation was perfect, God made it that way, but when sin came into the world via Adam, then also that creation was marred and the world was marred and just as we need to be reconciled to God, so too is God reconciling creation to himself, this world to himself for we reads a little later

“For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:19-20 NIV)

Creation groans, creation is waiting to be reconciled to God, and that is still happening. Sadly that will only happen in the last days, the days when there will be a new earth and new heaven.

But let us be careful of those who talk of the end times as being round the corner because of the increase activity that there seems to be now of natural disasters. Yes we need to read the times. Just before Jesus spoke to the crowd about the innocent people who had died in the Tower of Siloam, he said

“He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?”

"Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.” (Luke 12:54-59 NIV)

There are lots of people who are prepared to interpret these times as end time. To see the signs now of the second coming of Jesus. An increase in wars, an increase in natural disasters, but beware. None of us known when the end is happening even though many have predicted it. There were those who thought it would be at the turn of the millennium – they are still waiting.

However we should live our lives with a certain amount of urgency because it could happen today, and have you told that friend, that neighbour, that work colleague that you are a Christian, that they too need to follow Jesus, that you have a great friend in God, because it will be too late one day.

However we also need to live as if it is not yet, but natural disasters mean that we also see heroism, we see Christian agencies giving aid to whoever. I had a conversation with someone recently who told me that in the aftermaths of the tsunami, Muslim agencies were only giving aid to Muslims whereas Christian agencies were giving aid to all – is this right? No, it is not, but that is not a reason for Christian agencies to withhold it from non-Christians.

Natural disaster – God messages. The answer is maybe. We cannot be categorical about this, but we as God people need always to be ready to give aid, be ready to tell others our story of our life with Christ.