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CALAMITIES AND GOD'S JUDGMENT

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"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." (Matthew 24:7, 8)

"Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:4, 5)

The Tsunami caught the world's attention. Most recently major hurricanes have filled the news. These natural disasters have raised a question in the minds of many Christians—"Is this God's judgment?" This is a simple question; the answer is complex. In order to understand the relationship of calamities in history to God's wrath against sin, we need to first establish some important categories by searching the Scriptures. Specifically we need to distinguish between general revelation and specific revelation and between God's moral will and His providential will. Furthermore we need to understand the difference between exemplary judgment and the direct outpouring of God's wrath against the whole world at the end of the age.

From this study we will conclude that the hurricanes that have ravaged parts of America show us that we are living in the end times, we are weak, vulnerable creatures, and we need to repent because these are merely birth pangs that precede the future outpouring of wrath predicted in the Bible. However, the hurricanes themselves are not God's direct judgment on cities or nations for particular sins. I have two reasons for saying this: 1) there are no inerrant, authoritative prophets to tell us this and 2) they do not fit the

pattern of exemplary judgments in the Bible because the righteous were not spared.

GENERAL REVELATION AND SPECIFIC REVELATION

General revelation is what can be seen and observed by anyone using their rational mind and physical senses. The Bible addresses in passages like these: *"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1, 2)*. Paul says that human ability to observe creation makes everyone accountable: *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20)*. Enough can be gleaned from observing the creation to know that there is a Creator and to know certain things about His attributes. But this is not specific revelation from God to man that reveals His moral law and His plan of salvation.

Specific revelation happens when God speaks directly to man, in terms that are chosen by God and understood by men. The following passage describes

specific revelation: *"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Hebrews 1:1, 2)*. God directly revealed Himself to the patriarchs as recounted in Genesis. God spoke through Moses and other prophets to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses predicted a coming "Prophet": *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15)*. The prophet that Moses predicted is Jesus Christ. Christ revealed His words to His chosen apostles who wrote the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The entire body of inerrant, authoritative revelation is the Bible.

What is of interest to us in this study is how specific revelation can inform believers of the meaning of events that are observable in history. I claim that if God has given specific revelation through infallible spokespersons about an event then we can know what relationship that event has to God's judgment or salvation. If we have no such specific revelation, we are limited in what we can deduce from the event itself. This can be shown by studying events in the Bible where the meaning of the event was revealed to men by God.

For example, consider the flood in Noah's day. God revealed specifically that He was going to bring this judgment, specifically what caused the judgment, and what he expected the righteous to do. Noah and his family were the only righteous on the earth (the righteous are believers who have found grace, not people who are innately morally superior to others). Noah found grace from God (**Genesis 6:8 NKJV**), believed God (**Hebrews 11:7**) and Noah obeyed God, all the time "preach-

ing” to the unbelieving world (2Peter 2:5). The flood was a direct judgment of God; and all the righteous were blessed while all the wicked were destroyed. This was not the final judgment, because those who were judged have yet to appear before the great white throne or to be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-14). The Flood was an exemplary judgment in history. We know its meaning because we have specific revelation about it.

The Flood gives us a good opportunity to show how those who have specific revelation and those who do not come to different conclusions. There are flood accounts in many ancient religions. This leads liberals to the conclusion that they are all mythological, including the Biblical one which they claim was borrowed from the Babylonians. It is true that there are other flood accounts in ancient religious literature. I think that the best explanation for this is that the flood really happened. The difference between the Biblical account and the others is that the Biblical account is inspired revelation from God and the others are not. They are explanations by pagans who in their history had carried along the story of the great flood, but put their own religious “spin” on it.

Let us consider, for example, the flood account in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Similarities exist between the two accounts since there is mention of a ship and the preserving of life.¹ There is also mention of a sacrifice being offered after the flood recedes.² In the Biblical account, the offering that Noah made was a sweet savor to God and in Gilgamesh there was an offering smelled by the “gods” who crowded it like flies.

However, there are very important dissimilarities. For example, one named Enlil was not invited. The account says:

“let not Enlil come to the offering, For he, unreasoning, brought on the deluge and my people consigned to destruction.” When at length Enlil arrived, and saw the ship, Enlil was wroth, He was filled with wrath over the

Igigi gods: “Has some living soul escaped? No man was to survive the destruction!”³

Since those who wrote the Epic of Gilgamesh did not have specific revelation from God, but only the memory of the event as passed down through their culture, they speculated about its meaning and spiritual cause. In their version, a god run amuck tried to wipe out the world but failed. In the Biblical version, the true Creator God was showing mercy by preserving Noah, preserving the seed promise given to Eve, and preserving future hope for the whole world through the promised Messiah. God simultaneously revealed his wrath against all sinners and His mercy toward all people of faith. The issues were clear because God gave special revelation. The pagans, remembering the same event but not having inerrant revelation, could only speculate. They concocted an understanding of the spiritual world by extrapolating from what they saw in nature.

This is universally true in paganism. People who have no specific revelation from God try to construct a religion from what can be seen in nature. They assume that negative events are caused by angry deities, but they are never sure what the gods are angry about. They assume that the gods need to be appeased, but they have to guess about what might appease them. So they construct bizarre rituals, develop spiritistic practices, engage in self-mutilation, devise shamanistic cures, and live in a confused world where the spiritual and natural apparently intersect. However, they have no way of knowing how or why with certainty. Without special revelation, we would be no different.

For example, suppose the Hebrew wilderness wanderers did not have Moses or any special revelation, then the manna still appeared. Through general revelation they would be able to discern that it was edible and would sustain them, that it would rot if left over night, and that for some reason on the sixth day it would not rot for two days (see Exodus 16). How would they

account for its appearing each day and for the difference on the sixth day? They would have no way to understand or explain it. The phenomenon only made sense because of the special revelation that came through Moses about who God was, how He was providing and why, and the need for Sabbath observance.

Accurately gleaning special revelation merely through observing nature is not possible. The Bible says: “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law*” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Divination is a forbidden practice whereby people try to gain unrevealed, spiritual information from nature.⁴ We are free to study general revelation scientifically using the reason and sense perception God gave us as humans to survive in the world. We are not free to try to construct a religion, seek spiritual information, or interact with the spiritual world using means God has not revealed in Scripture. To do so is to probe into the “secret things” that God has not revealed, which is to practice the occult.

As Christians we believe that the spiritual and natural intersect; but because of our confidence in the gospel and the certainty of eternal life, we live our lives without the need for more certain knowledge than God has already revealed. Natural disasters and spiritual powers are both filtered through the hands of a loving God whose Son died for us and who has promised to lead us through these trials to a certain and blessed eternity.

PROVIDENCE AND GOD’S MORAL WILL

In a previous issue of CIC I explained the difference between God’s providential dealings with His own creation, and His moral will.⁵ These categories are necessary for understanding such things as hurricanes that bring destruction to cities. Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God’s providential oversight of world history includes allowing actions by creatures that are both

good and evil. The Fall not only plunged the human race into sin and destruction, but introduced calamity into the whole world: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope. . . . For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (**Romans 8:20, 22**). Yet in spite of man’s moral evil and the cataclysms of nature, God still rules over all: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (**Romans 8:28**).

Providence covers all events in history because God’s purposes are marching forward in history.⁶ God allows evil, but evil itself is rebellion against God’s revealed moral will. Sin is lawlessness—rebellion against God’s revealed will. The penalty for sin is death. Day by day, God does not immediately judge the wickedness of sinners who spurn His offer for salvation through Christ who died for sins. God does not directly and fully pour out the full measure of His wrath upon sinners who blaspheme His name. In fact, some blasphemers live relatively pain-free lives and enjoy the goodness of God’s creation even though they deny Him the right to rule over their lives. God has reasons in His providential will to allow this, for now. God’s providential will includes acts of men that are evil and events in nature that are destructive.

Because God delays imposing his direct rule and immediate judgment of sin we all experience the afflictions and evil of sin and see its fruit corrupting the world around us. As bad as this may be, if God had not ruled through providence since Adam and Eve then every one of their sinning descendents would have been destroyed and we would neither have existed nor had the opportunity to believe in the gospel and take eternal refuge from coming wrath. There is a time when God will directly rule and then His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We must realize that we need specific revelation from God’s Word to discern what is good and evil as history

unfolds under God’s providential plan. That revelation reveals His moral will for us. Joseph was a proven prophet and told his brothers: “And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (**Genesis 50:20**). God used their act of wickedness (selling Joseph into slavery) to bring about the greater good of preserving the promises to Abraham, and ultimately to all the families of the earth (**Genesis 12:3**). Joseph knew what was good and evil because of specific revelation, not through observing nature. He knew that God planned to preserve many people alive because God had made specific promises to Abraham, including the fact that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years, yet ultimately preserved (**Genesis 15:13, 14**).

The question we are exploring is: “How can we know if an historical event is a direct judgment of God on a nation, people or city?” Whenever something happens historically, it is part of God’s providential oversight of the world; but that does not make it a direct intervention of God caused by either the goodness or sinfulness of certain people. Righteous people may suffer calamity (like Job) and evil people may prosper (as lamented in Psalm 73). Wicked nations and kingdoms sometimes prosper for many centuries. God allows this by postponing immediate cause and effect of sinful actions.

The answer I am proposing is that we cannot know direct, spiritual cause and effect between the relative suffering or ease of different people or peoples without special revelation from God. When there is special revelation, then we can know. For example, God specifically raised up Cyrus the Persian to defeat Babylonia and send some Jews back to rebuild Jerusalem. We know this not just from the fact that it happened, but because it was predicted by authoritative prophets and interpreted for us by the Bible (see **2Chronicles 36:22, 23**; **Isaiah 44:28**). Many hundreds of kingdoms and nations have risen and fallen in world history that are not specifically addressed in the Bible.

Since we have no special revelation in these cases, we can say that God providentially raised them up or put them down to further His overall purposes, but we cannot know more. We cannot claim to know spiritual cause and effect when such cause and effect is not revealed. The fact that we observe bad things happening to some evil people is not certain proof. It would be even worse to observe the righteous being afflicted with calamity and call this the direct judgment of God.

GOD’S DIRECT JUDGMENTS IN HISTORY

In history there are times when God has brought direct judgment and revealed its cause.

We already discussed one such judgment, the Flood. Another one is God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example of both types of calamity: one which God providentially allows with no revealed, spiritual cause and effect, and one which God directly brings accompanied with special revelation. We will examine both of these to show key differences.

The first incident was the war of the kings described in Genesis 14. During this war, Abraham’s nephew Lot was captured and the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah were taken as plunder (**Genesis 14:11, 12**). Abraham came to the rescue and defeated Chedorlaomer, the king who had defeated Sodom. After Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, king of Salem, the King of Sodom offered the goods to Abraham if he could keep the people. Abraham refused his goods (**Genesis 14:17-23**). In this incident we see God’s providential dealings, but no direct judgment by God. Both the righteous and wicked were affected the same way (captured by Chedorlaomer). There was no specific revelation from God that predicted the incident or declared the cause of it. Literary hints earlier in Genesis indicated that Lot made a bad decision moving to Sodom because he desired their prosperity in spite of their wickedness (**Genesis 13:12, 13**). But the war

of the kings was not a direct judgment of God on Sodom. If it were, Abraham would not have rescued the king of Sodom and sent him home with his goods. If God was judging Sodom as part of His direct rule it would have been sinful for Abraham to show mercy in the same way it was sinful of the Israelites 400 years later not to utterly destroy the Canaanites. Instead, Abraham extended mercy and generosity to sinful Sodom and its king.

The next incident is different. The Lord Himself appeared to Abraham (**Genesis 18:17, 22**) to reveal His intention to destroy Sodom. Abraham pleaded with the Lord: "*Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?*" (**Genesis 18:25**). As Abraham pleaded concerning the number of righteous that would be necessary to spare the city, it becomes apparent that there are not enough and Sodom would be destroyed by the direct judgment of God. However, before doing so, God sent angels into the city to rescue Lot and his family (**Genesis 19**). Lot's wife could have escaped, but her longing for Sodom caused her to disobey and look back; and she turned into a pillar of salt (**Genesis 19:26**).

The war of the kings was not a direct judgment of God, but God's providential will being revealed as it unfolded. There was no authoritative prophetic warning nor were the righteous and wicked treated differently. The direct outpouring of God's judgment on Sodom did come with a specific warning, and the righteous were spared. Furthermore, God obliterated Sodom and man has never been able to rebuild it. The once luxuriant area that attracted Lot because of its riches, became an uninhabited wasteland of burnt sulfur.

The type of judgment that God brought on Sodom is exemplary judgment. This means that God acts in history, accompanied with authoritative, special revelation, in order to demonstrate his wrath against sin so that all others are warned. This does not imply that God will always do the same thing

in history whenever a city is wicked. What it means is that all are forewarned about God's wrath against all sin. It means that when full justice comes at the end of the age, no one can say they did not know about God's wrath. Every person who has ever read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible, knows what God thinks about their particular wicked behavior.

The New Testament comments on this:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, (2Peter 2:4-9)

This passage specifically says that the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were exemplary. We know the Flood will not be repeated in history, because God promised it would not. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a warning that God does judge sin and there will be a similar judgment at the end of the age, only it will be upon the whole rebellious world system.

Notice the lesson Peter teaches from God's direct judgments in history: "*then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of*

judgment." He doesn't say that every time Sodomites appear in a city in history, God will send fire to burn up that city. He says he will rescue the godly, and keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment. The day of judgment doesn't happen until the end. In the meantime, the wicked and righteous coexist on the earth, equally enjoying the rain that falls on the just and the unjust. During this period, it says the godly are rescued from temptation; it doesn't say they are rescued from the various calamities or sorrows that come during the course of history.

I once saw a title of a message that said, "if God doesn't judge America, He owes Sodom an apology." That reflects very bad theology and ignorance of Scripture. The Bible doesn't promise that God will treat every city or nation the same, based on their relative merit. Thinking that way assumes that God is working out His system of justice in history rather than beyond history. If this were the case Eve should have died before giving birth to Seth. If this were the case the line of David would have ended with Manasseh in 1 Kings 21.

This false view assumes that one can look at the relative prosperity or lack thereof of various nations and determine from that which ones God is pleased with. The Bible never teaches that. Unless authoritative prophets are sent to a nation—prophets who bring specific revelation from God about His will, His terms, and what the consequences will be—that nation does not have God's direct judgment, but providence. Providence includes good and evil now because evil is not immediately dealt with by God. If God allows rich, sinful nations to continue to prosper, He has reasons. This could be the judgment of hardening. In such judgment God allows people or nations to go on in their delusion that all is well and face far worse wrath on the day of judgment. We cannot know why God providentially allows prosperity for some and adversity for others (whether we are talking about nations, cities, or individuals) unless God has provided specific revelation that tells us why.

There are other examples of God's direct judgment in history on nations; and they follow the same pattern. For example, consider Egypt and the Exodus. God predicted that this would happen back in Abraham's day. God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (**Genesis 15:13, 14**). So we have specific revelation that the Passover was judgment on Egypt. The other component also exists—God spared the righteous. When the final plague came upon Egypt, those who showed their faith by obedience and sprinkled the blood of a lamb on their doorposts were spared judgment. The righteous were "passed over" because God accepted the sacrifice as a substitute. They were brought out of Egypt with many possessions and the nation they served was judged, exactly as God told it to Abraham.

WHY WE MUST NOT CONFUSE PROVIDENCE AND DIRECT JUDGMENT

Exemplary judgments like the Passover show the need for atonement. They show that God's wrath against sin is real and that unless the atonement God prescribes and accepts is offered in faith, we shall all likewise perish. Ultimate judgment is shown to be real and inevitable. When it comes, only the righteous will be spared. The only way to be righteous is by faith, accepting the terms of salvation God has revealed (which is the blood atonement). We must place our faith in the promised Seed of Abraham (Messiah) or we shall perish along with the whole wicked world system when God's wrath is finally poured out during the great tribulation.

To claim that any calamity that comes upon the face of the earth is an act of God's direct judgment in history is to obscure the truth. For one thing, it makes men think they can escape. The people of Sodom did not escape

and they did not rebuild. For another, it makes people think that God is unjust, which was Abraham's concern when he pleaded with God. If a calamity comes and strikes the just and unjust together, and it is seen as a direct act of God's judgment, then it makes it appear that coming to God in faith and trusting Messiah does not spare people from judgment. This is false according to the Bible. God, in His direct rule, will not condemn the righteous with the wicked.

Furthermore, confusing providence with direct judgment leaves people confused about God's moral law. I say this because we become like the pagans, trying to glean special revelation from acts of nature. Unless there are authoritative prophets like Moses to declare the terms and the consequences (in history), people use their own prejudices and imaginations to determine what God is angry about. Reality is complex. If a given city is wiped out by a natural calamity, and we have no inerrant, authoritative prophets who predicted the event, declared what the issues were, and what action would avoid the calamity, then we have to guess. We could say, "God is angry at industrialists who burn hydrocarbons and create global warming." We could say, "God is angry at rich people who exploit the poor." We could say, "God is angry at fathers who abandon their children." We could say, "God is angry at drunkenness and riotous living." We could say, "God is angry at homosexuals." Whatever it is that we see as the problem in society becomes the cause of natural events because we imagine it is.

But think about what this says to unbelievers. Consider the recent hurricane that devastated New Orleans. If God was angry at the industrialists, why didn't He wipe out just the industries and spare the poor people with no jobs? If God was angry with fathers who abandoned their wives and children, why did some absentee fathers escape while the wives and children were left behind to die? If God was angry at the homosexuals, why did most of them escape while some Christians were left

on the roofs of their destroyed houses saying the Lord's Prayer? You see, when we claim that God's justice can be learned by watching who prospers and who doesn't on the scene of history, we give credence to the lie that God is unjust, because it appears He is. This does not help anyone understand the gospel.

The truth is that God is angry against sin—all sin. The truth is unless we repent, we shall all likewise perish:

*Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (**Luke 13:1-5**)*

There is plenty of truth to be learned from cataclysms in nature, but it is not the comparative wickedness of various sinners. What can be learned is that the whole world hangs in the balance of God's future judgment and time is running out. The only way to be spared when God DOES directly judge, is to have the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to one's account by faith. These events are happening now while judgment is being delayed, not executed.

DELAYED WRATH

After Peter describes exemplary judgment like that on Sodom he discusses the false implications some would make from the fact of delayed judgment:

that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your

apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." (2Peter 3:2-4)

Those who think they can discern God's moral will by observing history are misled. They have noticed that though God warned of His wrath against sin and coming judgment, people have lived and died on the face of the earth, apparently unmolested by God's threats. They observe wicked men blaspheming God throughout their lives, living however they see fit, and sometimes living long healthy lives. Life goes on and it is not apparent that the threat of future judgment will ever come to pass. We, however, are told to remember the Scriptures. In the Scriptures we find the truth. We will not find it by trying to glean special revelation from general revelation.

The reasoning of the mockers seems valid. Christ said He would return and bring judgment—but He has not. So why not just follow one's own lusts since there is no apparent penalty for doing so? Peter supplies the answer:

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2Peter 3:5-7)

The day of reckoning is coming, no matter how long the delay. The tragic irony is that the delay is caused by God's mercy, though the mockers think it is caused by the unreliability of God's Word. The mockers are wrong. God's infallible word is keeping this present creation together even as it is being

prepared to face ultimate judgment. Peter continues: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2Peter 3:9). God's judgment is delayed because of His compassion for those yet to be rescued.

There is something else we need to understand—delayed wrath is stored up, gathering interest. Paul said, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds" (Romans 2:5, 6). The term for "storing up" literally means "treasure up." It means to put away one's treasure somewhere, at interest, for future use. This is NOT what anyone should want to be doing with God's wrath! But the sad reality is that everyone who rejects the gospel is doing just that.

Let us step back and ponder the picture being painted for us by God's Word. God's wrath has always been fully directed against all sin. But, as shown already in the Garden of Eden with the provision of animal skins and the seed promise to Eve, God is willing to delay the execution of His wrath against sin. This delay is caused by God's mercy in promising and providing a plan of salvation. During this many thousand year delay, God has broken into human history in words and actions. He has given His special revelation (Hebrews 1:1, 2). He has occasionally shown the reality of His wrath through exemplary judgments like the Flood and Sodom. But these are merely warning shots across the bow of human history.

During the delay in the execution of God's wrath, the righteous and wicked coexist and enjoy both the benefits of God's providential provisions for man, and the pain of a creation shaken by the effects of the Fall. During this delay, the righteous always suffer to some extent. This is because God has placed within them a hunger and thirst for righteousness as they still live in a sin cursed world. But God has promised to preserve the righteous even as the wicked are kept under punishment for the day

of judgment (2Peter 2:9). During this whole time when God's wrath is not fully executed, it is being put away, at interest, for the future. That it will be executed is as certain as the fact of creation itself. What we do not know is when. Cataclysms in nature are not incidences of God's direct wrath; they are indications that the time is short.

Peter goes on to describe the certain, future, execution of God's wrath on the fallen world:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (2Peter 3:10-13)

Notice that as always, the righteous are spared. "We" who will enjoy the future righteous rule of Christ are those who came to repentance during the many thousand year delay in the execution of God's justice. For the redeemed, we look for the coming day of God because then we shall no longer be vexed by the sorrows, sins, and calamity that attend this present age.

CONCLUSION

Natural disasters are not God's direct, full judgment on sin. If they were, God would spare the righteous. God has occasionally brought exemplary judgment such as the Flood, the destruction of Sodom, and the plagues on Egypt. Such judgments were accompanied by special revelation and in those judgments, the righteous were spared. The calamities that have been coming upon the world in recent years, including

the tsunami and the hurricanes hitting America do not fit the category of exemplary judgment because there was no special revelation about them and the righteous were not spared. These were calamities that God providentially allowed for purposes we only partly know. The part we know is what the Bible says about such happenings.

We know that Jesus said, "Unless you repent you shall all likewise perish." This means that we are warned that we better be right with God now, because tomorrow we might be swept away from the scene of history—then it will then be too late.

We also know that world history is running on borrowed time. Jesus said, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." The delivery is going to be the great tribulation, seven years in which the wicked world system will be allowed to have the leader it wants (antichrist), the unity it wants, and will be deluded into thinking it can do all this in rebellion against God. But this short lived "peace and safety" is delusional: "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape" (1Thessalonians 5:3). God's wrath will be poured out as described in the Book of Revelation. No one will escape other than those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. Natural

calamities such as mentioned by Jesus warn us that time is running out.

We learn something else from calamities. We learn that we are finite and weak, and that we are not the masters of our own destiny. Sin deludes us into thinking we can solve all our own problems. God providentially sends reminders that we cannot. Seeing our weakness and helplessness should point us to the need for the gospel.

Jesus gave a message to believers: "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). The time is soon coming when we will no longer be vexed by the fact that God allows the wicked world to persecute the righteous. But we must remember what Peter told us as we wait—the delay is caused by God's mercy because there are yet others who will repent. Let us be committed to gospel preaching so that those others may be rescued before it is too late.

END NOTES

1. "The Epic of Gilgamesh" in *The Ancient Near East*; Vol. 1 James B. Pritchard ed. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1973) 66. Tablet 7 section 20 of *Gilgamesh*.
2. Ibid. 70; Tablet 7 section 150.
3. Ibid. section 160-170.
4. <http://www.twincityfellowship.com/cic/articles/issue82.htm> *The Dangers of Divination*; Bob DeWaay
5. <http://www.twincityfellowship.com/>

- [cic/articles/issue75.htm](http://www.twincityfellowship.com/cic/articles/issue75.htm) *God's Will and Christian Liberty*; Bob DeWaay
6. Providence is the beneficent outworking of God's sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made. Sinclair Ferguson and David Wright, eds. *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988) s.v. Providence; 541. Louis Berkhof offers this definition of providence: Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 one volume edition, originally published 1932) 166.

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