

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 125

“God and Tsunami: What is the Lord Telling Us?”

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,

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Every newsletter has for me elements of surprise. This has been especially true of the last one, “Is the Christian Cross a Pagan Symbol?” (No. 124). Two things surprised me. First, the unprecedented number of new subscriptions received. Many of you shared the newsletter with your friends who emailed their subscription. Hundreds of you emailed me messages of appreciation for my comments on the Tsunami disaster. Words fail to express my gratitude to all of you who have been sharing my studies with your friends. Just let your friends know that this newsletter is free. All what they need to do to receive it, is to email their request to <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>

The second surprise has been, the unusual number of messages received expressing disagreement over my comments on the divine responsibility for natural disasters. On the basis of some comments from Ellen White several subscribers have attempted to prove to me that natural disasters are “acts of Satan” allowed by God. The implication seems to be that there is an agreement between God and Satan about the time, the place, and the extent in which Satan is allowed to carry out his destructive activities. As we shall see, this view poses some problems that need to be resolved.

In view of the widespread interest for a deeper understanding of the biblical meaning of the Tsunami disaster, I decided to focus exclusively on this topic in this newsletter. Surprisingly, even the evening ABC news, last night (January 11), featured a report on “God and Tsunami,” mentioning the views of different religious leaders.

Considerable time and thought has been invested in preparing this essay. If you find it informative and inspiring, be sure to share it with your friends. There are many people who are eager to know what the Lord is telling us through the dramatic increase in natural disasters we are experiencing today. As Adventists we have historically been watching for the prophetic SIGNS OF THE TIMES. Today, when the signs are

intensifying we tend to take them for granted. It is imperative for us to dust off our Bibles, and take a fresh look to what the Lord is telling us in His prophetic Word about the Endtime signs we are witnessing today..

Those of you who are interested to deepen your understanding of the unprecedented fulfilment of Endtime prophecies we are experienced today, are encouraged to read over 100 pages devoted to this subject in my book *THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS*. You can order a copy (\$20.00, postage paid) at my website http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=bookstore&Category_Code=bookstore or by calling us at (269) 471-2915.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of January and February 2005. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

JANUARY 14-15, 2005: CHARLESTON SDA CHURCH

Location: 2518 Savannah Highway, Charleston, SC 29414.

For information call Pastor Eli Rojas at (843) 766-9556 or 843-345-7950.

JANUARY 21-22: ORLANDO SPANISH SDA CHURCHES

Location: The seminar is sponsored by the Sheeler Oaks Spanish SDA, located at 1822 Sheeler Road, Apopka, Florida 32703. During Sabbath School I will be speaking at the Apopka Spanish SDA Church, located at Apopka, Florida 32704.

For information call Pastor Joshue Parker at (407) 814-8735 or Pastor Jorge Suarez at (407)886-0385.

JANUARY 28-29: SACRAMENTO - CITRUS HEIGHTS SDA CHURCH

Location: 7610 Wachtel Way, Orangevale, CA 95662

For information call Elder Brian Leonard at (916) 638-1848

FEBRUARY 4-5: LOS ANGELES: ROLLING HILLS SDA CHURCH

Location: 28340 Highridge Road, Rolling Hills Estates, California 90274-3405.

For information call Pastor Jeff Rosenthal at (714) 522-5280 or (714) 928-6596.

FEBRUARY 11-12: VICTORIA SDA CHURCH, BRONX, NY

Location: 1271 Burke Avenue, Bronx, New York 10469

For information call Pastor Bancroft Daughma at (914) 381-1292

FEBRUARY 18-19: NEW YORK - JACKSON HEIGHTS SDA CHURCH

Location: 72 - 25 Woodside Avenue, Woodside, New York 11377

For information call Pastor John Pirotsky at (718) 343-2171

FEBRUARY 25-26: LAS VEGAS PARADISE SDA CHURCH

Location: 4575 South Sandhill Road, Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

For information call Pastor George McLain at (702) 456-3538

Thank you for informing your friends about the time and place of the seminars.

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO PRESENT A SEMINAR AT YOUR CHURCH?

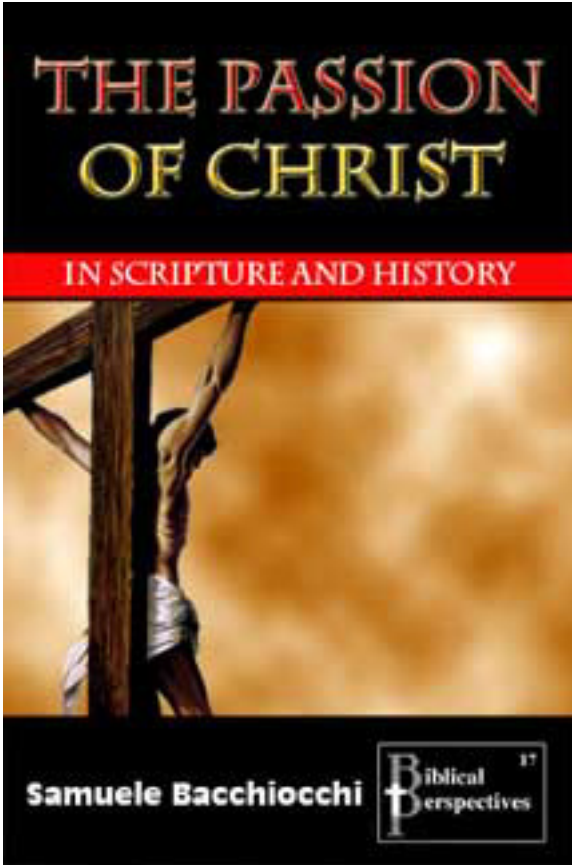
If your church is interested to invite me to present one of my popular seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, or Christian Lifestyle, feel free to call me at (269) 471-2915. There are still a few weekends left open in my calendar. If your church is small, we might be able to organize a rally of the district churches.

REPORT ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

The demand for the new book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* has been incredible. Many churches have ordered a case of 30 copies at \$5.00 per book. I just received an order for 1000 copies from Bermuda where we are planning for a reaping rally on

March 25-26, 2005. If you or your church did not order copies yet, see the special offer.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*



The long-awaited book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* (208 pages), came off the press just in time for the December 9, 2004, 3ABN interview. The demand for this timely book has surpassed my fondest expectations.

You will be proud to have copies of this timely book for your personal study of the Sabbath School and to give with confidence to your friends. The book is factual, not confrontational. It is designed to help many people to recognize the fundamental Catholic heresies embedded in

Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. More important still, the book present in a clear and compelling way the unique Adventist understanding of the redemptive accomplishments of the Cross, within the context of Protestant and Catholic teachings.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book by the case of 30 copies at the special offer of only \$5.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. You can order a single copy or a case of 30 copies online at <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/passionoffer.htm>, or by emailing us your order at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com>, or by calling us at (269) 471-2915, (269) 978-6878.

NEW OFFER ON HITACHI LCD PROJECTORS

Because of the large volume of HITACHI projectors sold to Adventist churches and schools during 2004, HITACHI has reduced the price even more on most of their HITACHI projectors. For example, the new price for the award winning HITACHI CP-X328 High Resolution 2000 lumens, is now only \$1,695.00, including 3 years of 24/7 warranty, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$7,495.00.

Read the rest of the story about the new offer on HITACHI projectors at my website: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/projector.html>. If you have a problem accessing my website, just email us your enquiry or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you all the information about the special HITACHI offer.

THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now our church did not have an authoritative commentary. Finally, Andrews University Press has published a thorough *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, authored by an outstanding Adventist scholar. This new commentary provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of the prophetic message of Revelation for our times.

Read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF ALL MY CD-ROM AND DVD RECORDINGS

For the first time we are offering the complete package of all my recordings for only \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$490.00. The package includes the latest 3ABN two hours interview on a DVD disk, ONE CD-ROM with all my research (over 7000 pages), ONE CD-ROM with all my PowerPoint lectures, TWO MP3 AUDIO disks with 22 popular lectures, and the FIVE DVD DISKS or FIVE VIDEO TAPES with 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, taped few months ago by a TV crew at Andrews University.

The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$490.00. Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and mail you the package immediately.

BED AND BREAKFAST IN LONDON, ENGLAND

If you are planning to travel to London, England in the near future, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the best bed and breakfast service you can find in London for only £20.00 a day. I stayed with this couple numerous times and they have always treated me so well that I promised to announce their services in this newsletter. They have three nice guest rooms, a lovely garden, and a modern bathroom. The home is close to Heathrow airport and at a walking distance from the Subway. You will be treated royally at a bargain price. You can see the pictures and read the details at my website <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

CLEARANCE OF OVERSTOCK VIDEO RECORDING

Few months ago a TV crew taped 10 of my popular PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent at the brand new Michiana-FilAm SDA Church at Andrews University. These messages have inspired countless congregations across North America and overseas. The 10 PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent are packaged in an attractive album containing 5 video tapes.

At present we have an overstock of the SABBATH/ADVENT VIDEO ALBUM, because most people have purchased the DVD version of the recording. To reduce our inventory, we are offering for one time only, the attractive VIDEO ALBUM containing 10 one-hour PowerPoint messages on the Sabbath and Second Advent, for only \$35.00, mailing expenses included, instead of the regular bookstore price of \$150.00. This represents 75% discount.

The special overstock offer of the SABBATH/ADVENT VIDEO ALBUM with 10 PowerPoint presentations, is available only by phone. Call us at (269) 471-2915 and we will be glad to take your order and ship you the album immediately.

“God and Tsunami: What is the Lord Telling Us?”

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The first dramatic days of the New Year 2005 have been filled with the tragic pictures of the destruction that has engulfed the coastal plains of Southeast Asia. The sea is still disgorging hundreds of bodies on the beaches across thousand of miles of coast land. Whole villages and coastal towns have disappeared from the face of the earth, while thousand of people still lay buried and unidentified under their ruins.

Video camera from tourists have captured the terrifying moments when 30 feet high tidal waves suddenly smashed into holiday resorts, towns, and villages, sweeping tens of thousands of people of all nationalities into watery graves. Through modern technology we all have become voyeurs to a catastrophe whose images have shocked the mind and numb the body.

On December 26, families were washed away, children were snatched from their parents' arms, and suffering beyond description settled upon what used to be a thriving region. At the time of this writing 170,000 are reported dead, but the thousand of persons are still unaccounted for and the subsequent deaths related to the disaster may drive to the total number of death over half a million.

Why Did such a Disaster Occur?

The question that comes to the mind of any sensitive Christian who reflects on the magnitude of the disaster, is: Why did God allow such a catastrophe to happen? How can a benevolent God allow an angry sea to swallow thousands of people after a huge seaquake? Did God choose to strike Southern Asia because He regarded the Hindus of India, the Muslim of Indonesia, the Buddhists of Thailand, or the tourists from Sweden, Australia, and the USA as especially *deserving* His divine punishment?

But, then, what about the hurricanes that devastated several costal towns in Florida? Are the Floridians *deserving* divine punishment more than the rest of the Americans? Is the Tsunami disaster a senseless, freak of nature or is God telling something to the world through the fearful scenes that have captured the attention of the entire world? These are questions in the mind of millions of people who have watched the unfolding of the Tsunami disaster on their TV screens.

Atheist or agnostic who hold to a naturalistic and materialistic worldview see this disaster as a meaningless event in an unpredictable and uncontrolled universe. They are satisfied with the geological explanation of the shifting of the tectonic plates that caused a violent rupture about 100 miles off the coast of Indonesia's Sumatra Island, generating a magnitude 9.0 earthquake. The quake in turn caused a tsunami, that is, a tidal wave that reached speeds of over 300 miles per hour in the open sea.

But even among atheist and agnostic, the colossal display of nature's power, causes them to ask questions about the nature and purpose of life. British philosopher Bryan Appleyard notes; "The simple truth is

what it has been: nature, uncontrolled, unbidden, unpredictable, can still humble our pride and wreck our schemes in an instant.”

A Christian Challenge

A Christian cannot dismiss the Tsunami disaster as a freak of nature, caused by the accidental clash of two tectonic plates that cross the Indian Ocean. The belief in an omnipotent and benevolent God, challenges the Christian faith to explain why God allows disasters like Tsunami to happen. This seems to be the favorite topic discussed in churches, saloons, around kitchen tables, and in thousand of articles posted on websites. The theological term for such topic is “theodicy” — the discipline that attempts to reconcile the belief in a good, omnipotent, and omniscient God, with the reality of evil, manifested in natural calamities as well as the demonic acts of people.

In have been seeking to find in my own mind a satisfactory answer to the question: “How can an omnipotent and benevolent God allow for a disaster like Tsunami to happen?” In fact, I have read over 100 articles, email messages, and books to find out how other Christian thinkers try to answer this fundamental question. From what I have read, it seems that three major answer are commonly given.

NATURAL DISASTERS ARE ACTS OF SATAN

Some argue that natural disasters are acts of Satan, not of God. Thus, Satan, not God, is to be blamed for the devastation caused by Tsunami. Citing the case of Job, Rev. O. E. Aighalua, President of God’s Kingdom Society, says: “The Holy Bible shows that Satan is responsible for the troubles that afflict the world. The devil makes people believe that God is the cause of their ills and thereby influences them to reproach their Maker.”

Several subscribers to our newsletter have expressed similar views that natural disasters are acts of Satan allowed by God. In support of their belief, they have emailed to me two major paragraphs taken from *the Great Controversy*, pp. 589-590, where Ellen White says: “He [Satan] has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. . . . Satan has control

of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them

“He will bring disease and disaster, until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. Even now he is at work. In accidents and calamities by sea and by land, in great conflagrations, in fierce tornadoes and terrific hailstorms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, *tidal waves*, and *earthquakes*, in every place and in a thousand forms, Satan is exercising his power.”

Personally, I find this explanation very appealing, because it makes Satan, not God, responsible for both natural and man-made disasters. This explanation has the merit of resolving the apparent contradiction between the omnipotence and the benevolence of God in the case of disasters, since God is not directly responsible for the destruction caused by disasters like Tsunami.

Does the Bible Blame Satan for Destructive Disasters?

But this explanation poses two problems which remain unresolved in my mind. Your help to resolve these two problems is greatly appreciated. I am sharing with you in this newsletter my struggle to understand the mystery of evil. The first problem is biblical. I have looked in vain for Bible texts which blame Satan for destructive disasters or attribute to him partial or total controls the forces of nature. I have also asked several subscribers to help me find such Bible texts.

The only text which a few subscribers have emailed for my consideration, is Job 1:12, where the Lord says to Satan: “Behold, all that he [Job] has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand.” The story continues outlining the outcome of God’s permission, namely, the destruction of thousands of asses, sheep, camels, and servants by the Sabeans, Chaldeans, and fire from heaven. Eventually a great wind destroyed even the house where all Job’s 10 children were eating, and killed them all (Job 1:13-19).

The story suggests that God allowed Satan to accomplish his destructive ends by using not only people like the Sabeans and the Chal-

deans, but also natural forces like the fire and the wind. However, this conclusion ignores that what at first appears to be the power of Satan to destroy Job's family through disasters, under closer scrutiny it is shown to be the work of God. For example, after the loss of his ten children Job said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). It is clear that Job understood the calamities he was experiencing as being the work of God, not an act of Satan.

This conclusion becomes clearer when we read God's subsequent words to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job . . . He still holds fast his integrity, although YOU MOVED ME AGAINST HIM, TO DESTROY HIM WITHOUT A CAUSE" (Job 2:3). The text clearly indicates that it was God, not Satan, who brought calamities upon Job's family. The purpose was to prove to Satan Job's integrity in the midst of trials.

There is no question that Satan had a hand in Job's misery, but ultimately God takes the responsibility for it all. When Satan afflicts Job with sores, Job says to his wife: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil" (Job 2:10). Job accepted his calamities and suffering as God's sent, not as Satan's caused. And the Book of Job closes by calling the satanic sores experienced by Job as "the evil that the Lord had brought upon him" (Job 42:11). It is evident that Satan brings misery, but he goes no further than God allows him. The message of the Book of Job is clear: God was ultimately responsible for the tragedies that Job experienced. The purpose was to prove to Satan Job's integrity.

Like on the case Job, Satan undoubtedly has a part in the Tsunami seaquake that has claimed over 160,000 lives, but ultimately the power over the Tsunami rests with God. In Job 38:8, 11, Job asks rhetorically: "Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb . . . and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?" In Job's mind, there is no doubt that God controls the forces of nature manifested in tidal waves.

The same thought is expressed in Psalms 89:8-9 where the Psalmist says: "O Lord God of host . . . Thou dost rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, thou stillest them." Jesus Himself exercised control

over the deadly threatening waves: “He rebuked the wind and the raging waves; and they ceased, and there was a calm” (Luke 8:24). Applying Christ’s miracle to Tsunami, God could have stopped the destructive Tsunami tidal waves, even if Satan caused the earthquake in the first place.

Does Satan Control the Forces of Nature?

The second problem I am facing in accepting the assumption that natural disasters are acts of Satan, is that I find the assumption that Satan controls the forces of nature irrational for two reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, nowhere the Bible attributes to Satan power to cause such natural disasters as earthquakes, floods, draught, hurricanes. I read the 16 references to “earthquakes” in the Bible, but none of them blame Satan for earthquakes. Sometimes Satan is called the prince of this world (2 Cor 4:4, John 12:31, 14:30, Eph 6:12), but his power appears to be limited to tempt and deceive, not to cause natural upheavals.

A second consideration is that if Satan had control over the forces of nature, he would have destroyed our planet long time ago. After all, Jesus tells us that Satan has been “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Like the terrorists today, Satan would have used every opportunity to destroy the creative and redemptive work of God in this world. The very fact that our planet has lasted so long, is an indication that Satan has no direct control over the forces of nature.

To assume that God holds Satan, as if it were, on a leash, allowing him to cause natural disasters, only at certain times and to a limited extent, presupposed some kind of a working relationship between God and Satan. I find such an idea to be absurd, because in the Bible there is no partnership between God and Satan.

Moreover, if God allowed Satan to cause disasters like the Tsunami of Southern Asia, ultimately God Himself would be blamed for the horrific destruction of human lives and property, because He could have prevented it or to stopped it. God cannot seat on His throne in heaven, oblivious to the destruction caused on earth by Satan. Such an indifference would discredit God’s benevolence and omnipotence.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, the belief that natural disasters are acts of Satan allowed by God, poses problems that need to be resolved. To allow disasters to happen means to be partly responsible for the resulting destruction. But God can hardly be held responsible for the destructive activities of Satan.

NATURAL DISASTERS ARE CAUSED BY THE OUTWORKING OF NATURAL LAWS

A second common answer to the question “How can an omnipotent and benevolent God allow for a disaster like Tsunami to happen?” is that such disasters are caused by the outworking of natural law, not by divine intervention. This view is articulated in the best seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold Kushner.

Kushner argues that natural disasters are caused by the workings of natural laws, not by divine intervention. He contends that God should be understood as all-knowing and all-loving, but not as all-powerful. He believes that God does not intervene to save good people from disasters like an earthquake nor does He send these misfortunes to punish the wicked. There is no moral judgment in disasters, because natural law is blind.

Kushner writes: “I no longer hold God responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters, because I realize that I gain little and I lose so much when I blame God for those things. I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason. . . .

God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws.”

Kushner attributes the order present in the universe to God, but he maintains that the ordering process of the universe is not yet complete. There are still certain elements in the natural world that do not function properly and consequently disasters occur. There is no point in looking for a reason for them.

There is some truth in this view, but there are also some problems in attributing disasters to the malfunctioning of natural laws, which are beyond God's control. Scripture suggest that the problem with our world is not the malfunctioning of natural laws, but the consequences of sin which affect both the human and subhuman creation. We shall come back to this shortly.

Many Christians, including some Adventists, find Kushner's view appealing because it attributes natural disasters to the outworking of natural laws, rather than to direct divine intervention. Since allegedly God has no direct control over natural laws, He cannot be blamed for natural disasters.

Is God All-Loving but not All-Powerful?

Kushner's view that God is all-loving but not all-powerfull, is re-proposed in a perceptive article published in the *Orlando Sentinel* and entitled "Did God Say: 'Let there Be a Tsunami'?" The author is James Coffin, Senior Pastor of the Markham Woods Seventh-day Adventist Church in Orlando, Florida. Coffin writes: "Did God decide which tectonic plates would shift? How hard they would bump? How large a tidal wave would ensue? What time of day it would happen? Who would be on the beaches?"

"Did God decide which people would be washed out to sea? Which would be grabbed by a friend clinging desperately to a tree? Did our heavenly Father decide which earthly fathers and mothers would lose their children and which children would lose their father or mother?"

"It's unfathomable how any believer in a loving God could picture Divinity playing such a role. Rabbi Harold Kushner (author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*) came to the conclusion that we may realistically view God as all-loving or all-powerful, but not as both.

"After great soul searching, I agree. I firmly believe that God is all-loving. It's the basis of my faith. I equally believe that, in a theoretical sense, he's all-powerful. But the moment he gave freedom of choice to some of his creatures, he ceased to be all-powerful in a practical sense. You can't give away control and still retain it. . . .

“At first blush, it’s reassuring to think that God is in control of everything—that nothing can happen that He doesn’t at least purposefully allow. Then a Tsunami hits—whether of a personal nature or like the one on December 26—and suddenly the old answers just don’t cut it.”

Pastor Coffin makes some valid observations. From a human perspective it is impossible to reconcile the belief in a God who in control of everything, with the stark reality of the Tsunami disaster that suddenly snatched out the lives of over 170,000 people, many of them innocent children. As Bishop of Durham Tom Wright puts it: “What is the point in saying ‘The heavens declare the glory of God,’ if tidal waves declare His incompetence.”

Can God be accused of “incompetence” for not intervening in the Tsunami disaster? Does the “non-intervention” indicate that God is all-loving (benevolent) but not all-powerful (omnipotent)? I find it is hard for me to believe that God is not powerful enough to intervene in a major natural disaster, like the Southern Asia Tsunami, when Jesus taught us that God is responsible even for the fall of a sparrow (Matt 10:29). A more satisfying answer is to be found in looking at natural disasters within the scope of the Fall and of God’s plan for the redemption of the human and sub-human creation. This is what we intend to do now.

NATURAL DISASTERS ARE THE RESULTS OF THE FALL AND SUMMON MANKIND TO REPENT

In an attempt to find a biblical answer to the question: “How can an omnipotent and benevolent God allow for a disaster like Southern Asia Tsunami to happen?” we will consider two major questions:

- 1) Why Does the Earth Experience Natural Disasters?
- 2) What is God telling Mankind through Natural Disasters?

Why Does the Earth Experience Natural Disasters?

Natural disasters are not natural to God’s creation. God put the laws of nature into place at creation, but sin put natural disasters in place. At the end of His six days of creation, God surveyed all what He had

done and proclaimed it “very good” (Gen 1:31). Creation was complete and perfect. The rivers, the vegetation, the flowers, the fruit trees, the birds, the fishes, the animals, all lived harmoniously together in a peaceful, stable, and idyllic environment. Missing from God’s creation was disease and death. There were no hurricanes, floods, earthquakes or Tsunamis. Adam and Even lived happily in an idyllic paradise, cultivating an intimate relationship with their Maker who visited them “in the cool of the day” (Gen 3:8).

But the peace and tranquility of Eden was shattered by the disobedience of our parents. The Fall affected not only the human, but also the sub-human creation, including the physical world: “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17). The entire creation was subjected to the curse and corruption resulting from the entrance of sin into this world.

Paul explains that “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:19-21).

The good earth and its inhabitants deteriorated rapidly. The Scripture tells us that “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air’” (Gen 6:5-7).

The global destruction of the earth caused by the Flood, was God’s judgement on a corrupt earth. The Bible indicates that the waters of the Flood came from two sources: (1) “On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, (2) and the windows of the heavens were opened” (Gen 7:11).

The South Asian Tsunami has given us a glimpse of the vast devastation that must have taken place at the time of the Flood when rain poured non-stop for 40 days, earthquakes shook the earth, and tectonic

plates shifted, spinning multiple Tsunamis. Havoc reigned in God's creation, altering permanently the face and formation of the earth.

Some scholars suggest that before the Flood natural disasters like the Tsunami did not occur. For example, in their books *The Genesis Flood*, Whitcomb and Morris, suggest that "the 'breaking-up of the fountains of the great deep (Gen 7:11), implies that this sort of activity [Tsunami], was one of the immediate causes of the Deluge; therefore it must have been restrained previously Thus the Biblical record implies that the age between the Fall of man and the resultant Deluge was one of comparative quiescence geologically. The waters both above and below the firmament were in large measure restrained, temperatures were equably warm, there were no heavy rains nor winds and probably no earthquakes nor volcanic emissions" (pp. 242,243).

It seems reasonable to assume that the Flood radically changed, not only the face of the earth, but also its geological formation and meteorological conditions. The drastic changes in the fault lines and the movement of the tectonic plates, gives rise to earthquakes, which produce the deadly Tsunamis, when earthquakes occur under the sea.

The changes in the formation of the earth that took place at the Flood, account for various natural disasters, like Tsunamis, we experience today. Brad Bromling notes that "While we may never know with precision what conditions prevailed between the Edenic period and the Flood, it seems that . . . since that event, man has been imperiled by tornadoes, blizzards, monsoons, and hurricanes Upon whom should we heap blame for the suffering resultant from such weather? Is it fair to accuse God, when He created man's home free from such things (Gen 1:31)? In all honesty, the answer is no. Sin robbed us of our original garden paradise, and sin was responsible for the global deluge ("Who Sent the Hurricane?," *Reasoning from Revelation*, September, 1992, p. 17).

The natural disasters the earth experiences today, are not natural to God's creation. There were no disasters in His original creation. God's world was a world of order. The current movements and occasional bumping of the tectonic plates that cause earthquakes and Tsunamis, is part of the curse that human disobedience has brought upon this earth. While we live in this sinful world we will inevitably face this kind of

natural disasters because they are the natural consequence of sin. Disasters serve to remind us that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail until now” awaiting for the Day when “it will be set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom 8:21-22).

God Controls the Forces of Nature

The fact that natural disasters are the natural consequence of sin, does not mean that there is no supernatural involvement in them. In our scientific age we tend to discount supernatural forces, looking instead for “natural” causes of disasters. The very designation “natural disasters” implies that there is no supernatural involvement.

In recent years the underlying cause of earthquakes has been explained by a bold new geological theory called “plate tectonics.” As *Time* graphically explains, this new theory “holds that the surface of the earth consists of about a dozen giant, 70-mile-thick rock plates. Floating on the earth’s semimolten mantle and propelled by as yet undetermined forces, the plates are in constant motion. Where they meet, friction sometimes temporarily locks them in place, causing stresses to build up near their edges. Eventually the rock fractures, allowing the plates to resume their motion. It is that sudden release of pent-up energy that causes earthquakes” (*Time*, September 1, 1975, p. 37).

This impressive theory acknowledge that “undetermined forces” propel the constant motion of the plates constituting the surface of the earth. Christians who believe in a Creator-God who upholds “the universe by his word of power” (Heb 1:3) recognize in these “undetermined forces” the mysterious outworking of divine wisdom and power.

There are numerous biblical passages that suggests that God does micromanage the forces of nature such as earthquakes, storms, floods, draughts to accomplish His purpose. Scripture tells us that God controls the rain (Deut 11:14-17, 28:12, Job 5:10, Matt 5:45, James 5:17-18), lightning (Ps 97:4), thunder, snow, whirlwind, flood, clouds “to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world, whether for correction, or for his land, or for love, he causes it to happen” (Job 37:12-13; also Job 28:10-11, Ps 107:25, 29, Nahum 1:3-4).

God causes earthquakes (Job 9:5, 28:9, Ps 18:7, 77:16-18, 97:3-5, Isa 2:19, 24:20, 29:6, Jer 10:10, Nahum 1:5, Heb 12:26), and the mountains to be thrown down and the valleys to fill (Ezek 38:20). The forces of nature never spiral out of God's control. They are controlled by God who "shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble" (Job 9:6). God "looks on the earth and it trembles, touches the mountains and they smoke!" (Ps 104:32). "I form the light and create darkness, I create peace and make calamity; I, the Lord do all these things" (Is 45:7).

The prophet Ezekiel writes: "Thus says the Lord God: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath; and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger." Likewise the Psalmist catalogues those elements of the natural world that follow God's commands: "fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!" (Ps 148:8). Amos asks the rhetorical question: "Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?" (Amos 3:6).

On a similar vein Haggai writes: "Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake the nations . . ." (Hag 2:6-7). Contrary to pagan beliefs that gods controlled the earthquake, the rain, or the lightning, biblical prophets affirm God's control over the forces of nature.

What Are the Implications of the Tsunami Disaster?

If God is in control, then, what are the implications of the Tsunami disaster? Some argue that the disaster represents God's punishment on nations that persecutes Christians. They base their argument on the fact that 8 of the 12 nations affected by the Tsunami are known for their intolerance toward Christians.

There are instances in the Bible where God used natural disasters as punishment upon human wickedness. The most noteworthy examples are the Flood and the destruction by fire of Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah, for example, warns disobedient Israel that "in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire" (Is 29:6). In this passage the prophet presents what we call "natural disasters" cause by storm, earthquake, and fire as a divine

judgment upon Israel.

The fact that sometimes God uses natural disasters to punish human wickedness, does not justify jumping to the conclusion that all disasters, including the South Asia Tsunami, are a divine judgment upon evildoers. The story of Job makes it abundantly clear that those who suffer or die because of natural disasters are NOT necessarily singled out by God as deserving special punishment.

Job's friends made the mistake of assuming that Job's afflictions were caused by his living in some sort of sin. But God vindicated Job as an upright man. Jesus refuted the fallacious reasoning that calamities are a punishment for sin, by explaining that those eighteen persons who were killed by the collapse of Siloam's tower, were no worse offenders than the rest of the people in Jerusalem (Luke 13:4). That tragedy, however, was to bring home the important lesson that "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). "These startling calamities," writes Ellen White, "were designed to lead them to humble their hearts, and repent of their sins." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 213).

A Call to Repentance

Disasters serve as a wake up call to repentance for mankind. Disasters can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. When a war breaks out, or an earthquake destroys countless lives and property, or a drought burns the crops and dries up the water supply, or an epidemic disease victimizes millions of persons, many people will call out to God either in curse or prayer. C. S. Lewis wrote that "pain is God's megaphone to a deaf world."

It was an earthquake that caused the jailer at Philippi to exclaim: "Men, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). It was a famine that sent King Ahab searching everywhere for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:10). It was a plague that brought Pharaoh to his knees, confessing before Moses: "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me" (Ex 10:16-17).

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus predicted that certain calamities will occur before His Return. Because of their nature and function, we

can call these calamities “signs of divine judgment.” Specifically Jesus said: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:6-8; cf. Mark 13:7-8). Luke adds “the roaring of the sea and the waves” (Luke 21:25) among the signs of the End. The latter reminds us of the South Asia Tsunami.

Disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruption, tornados, and hurricanes can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. They can challenge complacent, self-centered, and self-sufficient people to acknowledge their finiteness and helplessness and thus to seek God. It was the earthquake which marked the death of Christ that led the centurion and his soldiers to confess, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt 27:54).

John Wesley wrote in 1777 to a friend: “There is no divine visitation which is likely to have so general an influence upon sinners as an earthquake.” (Cited in “Forecast: Earthquake,” *Time*, September 1, 1975, p. 37). It is reported that in a high school in Palm Springs (California) there was a sign which read: “In the event of an earthquake, the Supreme Court ruling against prayers in school will be temporarily suspended.”

Harbingers of the Final Judgment

Disasters such as earthquakes figure prominently among the Endtime signs, because they are signs of divine judgment and of concern for evildoers to repent before the final judgment. They represent a solemn divine warning and appeal to repent and be saved before the final judgment.

Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as disasters occurring not exclusively at the very end but during the whole time preceding His Return. This point is implied in the admonition not to be alarmed by the occurrence of these signs “for this must take place, but *the end is not yet*” (Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). In fact, these signs are said to represent “*but the beginning of the sufferings*” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8).

The latter expression was used in Judaism in a technical way to describe the period of suffering (“the birth-pangs of the Messiah”) that

would precede the establishment of the messianic Kingdom. Possibly Jesus made use of this familiar concept to characterize the conditions that will precede His Return. The occurrence of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences does not pinpoint but point to the approaching End. They constitute a pledge that the End will surely come.

Intensification of Disasters

Disasters will intensify before the End. By saying that wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences are “but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8), Christ clearly implied that they will intensify as the End approaches. “But the beginning” presupposes that there will be more and worse disasters yet to come. These will cause such a “great tribulation” that, Jesus said, “if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved” (Matt 24:22; cf. Mark 13:20).

Christ’s prediction of the intensification of calamities before the End finds support in the prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments. These books, as I have shown in my book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, predict an intensification of warfare and disasters prior to the Coming of the Lord.

Historically Seventh-day Adventists have viewed natural disasters as signs of the approaching end. For example, our pioneers saw in the November 1, 1755 Lisbon earthquake which was followed by a big tsunami that killed more than 100,000 people, a clear sign that ushered in the Endtime. Surprisingly, the South Asia Tsunami of December 26, 2004, that killed far more people and affected a dozen of nations, is hardly discussed from a prophetic perspective by Adventist writers. We still claim to be watching the “SIGNS OF THE TIMES,” as indicated by our monthly magazine that carries that title. But, could it be that we have become so accustomed to natural disasters that we no longer appreciate their eschatological significance.

Are Natural Disasters Increasing Today?

Is the South Asia Tsunami an isolated disaster or does it represent a worldwide trend in increased natural disasters? The answer is not diffi-

cult to find. A search on the web for “natural disaster” provides countless reports by credible organizations warning of the dramatic increase in natural disasters. For the sake of brevity, only a few reports can be cited here.

The World Disasters Report 2004, says: “Over the past decade, the number of ‘natural’ and technological disasters has risen. From 1994 to 1998, reported disasters averaged 428 per year — from 1999 to 2003, this figure shot up by two-thirds to an average 707 disasters each year. The biggest rise was in countries of low human development, which suffered an increase of 142 per cent.”

A study on “Natural Disasters and Sustainable Development,” prepared in 2002 for the *United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction*, states: “During the past four decades, natural hazards such as earthquakes, droughts, floods, storms and tropical cyclones, wildland fires, and volcanic eruptions have caused major loss of human lives and livelihoods, the destruction of economic and social infrastructure, as well as environmental damages. *Economic losses have increased almost ten times during this period.* In recent years, floods in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan, Thailand, Venezuela, Vietnam and Algeria, volcanic eruptions in Indonesia, Montserrat, Ecuador and the Philippines, and earthquakes in Japan, Turkey, El Salvador, Indonesia, India and Peru, have created *widespread social, economic and environmental destruction*” (Emphasis supplied).

The report forecasts that “in addition to the projected estimation of 100,000 lives lost each year due to natural hazards, the global cost of natural disasters is anticipated to top \$300 billion annually by the year 2050.”

It is noteworthy that insurance companies agree with the Bible in predicting a dramatic increase in natural disaster. In a long-term assessment published in June, 2002, the “Munich Re”—one of the world’s main re-insurers—predicts a “dramatic increase” in devastating floods, earthquakes and storms in the future. “The company’s statistics show that, comparing the last ten years (1993-2002) with the 1960s, the number of major catastrophes has increased by a factor of 2.6 from 27 to 70. Economic losses—adjusted for inflation—multiplied by 7.3 from 75.5 billion to 84.5 billion US-Dollars.”

A report published on October 13, 1993, *The Royal Society of Canada* concludes that “Over the last two decades, natural hazards such as wind-storms, floods and fires, have increased significantly. In the past twenty years an estimated 3 million people have been killed, over 800 million lives affected and C\$300 billion lost as a result of natural disasters worldwide and the toll continues to rise.”

Recent disasters have caused some to wonder, as expressed by the headline of *U.S. News & World Report*, “Is Mother Nature Going Berserk? To the Christian this trend indicates not that “mother nature has gone berserk” but rather that divine judgments are being manifested in a special way in our time, to call mankind to repentance before the final judgment at Christ’s Coming.

What is the Lord Telling Us Through Disasters?

What is the Lord telling us through the South Asia Tsunami disaster? The answer is found in Christ’s words uttered in the face of the tragedy that killed 18 persons when the tower in Siloam fell upon them: “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5). Christ did not spend His time arguing about who was to be blamed for the tragedy. Instead, He reminded His listeners that tragedies are a wake up call to repent.

The present intensification of natural and man-made disasters must be seen as clear signs of God’s final warning to mankind of the impending divine judgment. These disasters tell us that, as in the experience of ancient nations, God will not allow human rebellion and wickedness to continue much longer (Gen 15:16). Soon Christ will come to bring an End to the colossal crises that are engulfing our fragile planet (Rom 8:19-22). Since these things are about to happen, “What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God”? (2 Pet 3:11:123).