

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 138

“A Rush of Natural Disasters: What is the Lord Telling us?”

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During the past ten months natural disasters have hit epic proportions. The New Year 2005 began with the tragic pictures of the destruction that has engulfed the costal plains of Southeast Asia. It was heartbreaking to watch the sea 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, and over 300,000 persons were suddenly buried under mud and ruins.

The Tsunami destruction in Southeast Asia was soon followed by a succession of disasters: four hurricanes that devastated several costal towns in Florida, the flooding in Europe and Asia, the recent mud slides in Guatemala, and the widespread devastation caused by the killers hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the Gulf Coast of the United States.

As I am writing this newsletter another two major natural disasters are being reported. The first is hurricane Wilma which is, according to meteorologists, the most intense hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic basin. It is scheduled to hit Southern Florida this weekend. The second disaster is the Pakistan earthquake. News channels are showing the devastation caused by the awful earthquake that few days ago killed over 80,000 people, leaving over three million people without food and shelter in the freezing temperature of mountain villages in Pakistan.

Thoughtful Christians who reflect on the magnitude of the recent rash of natural disasters are seeking for answers. They want to know, Why is God allowing such a chain of disasters to occur in such a rapid succession? How can a benevolent God allow earthquakes and hurricanes to kill thousands of people and destroy entire towns and villages? Are these disaster senseless, freaks of nature or do they convey a message from God to mankind through the fearful scenes that have captured the attention of the entire world?

A number of subscribers to our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS have asked me to address these timely questions. I have spent

considerable time reading and thinking about these difficult questions. What I am submitting for your consideration represents a feeble attempt to understand why a benevolent God allows for destructive disasters. Feel free to express your disagreements. Your comments may help me to see important biblical insights that I have ignored. Our goal is to help one another to better understand biblical truths.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE!

Every day I receive numerous requests to subscribe to our END-TIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS. Some submit the email addresses of friends or relatives who wish to subscribe. Thank you for sharing these newsletters with your church members and friends. The procedure to subscribe or unsubscribe is very simple. Just write in the subject line SUBSCRIBE ME or UNSUBSCRIBE ME, and I will promptly add or remove your address.

HOW TO INVITE ME FOR A WEEKEND SEMINAR IN 2006?

If your church is interested to invite me next year to present one of my PowerPoint seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, or CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE, feel free to contact me at this time. You can call me at (269) 471-2915 or email me your request at sbacchiocchi@qtm.net I will email you the open dates and the outline of the three PowerPoint seminars. At this time I am setting up my 2006 calendar of speaking engagements and I would be glad to include your church. If your church is small, there is the possibility of rallying together the district churches. Every weekend capacity crowds attend these timely seminars in the USA and overseas.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of October and November 2005. It is always a privilege and pleasure for me to ministers to our fellow believers in England. The reception and response is always very encouraging. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

OCTOBER 1: TORONTO –DOWNSVIEW SDA CHURCH

Location: 37 Bakersfield Street, Downsview, ON M3J 1Z4, Canada

For directions and information call Pastor Ken Campbell at (905) 824-7015.

OCTOBER 14-15: WASHINGTON-SPENCERVILLE KOREAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 1700 Spencerville Road, Spencerville, MD 20868

For directions and information call Pastor Doh Hyunsok at (301) 776-3285

OCTOBER 21-22: SARASOTA SDA CHURCH

Location: 5764 Churchill Downs Road, Sarasota, Florida 34241

For directions and information call Pastor Andrew Adams at (941) 359-0232 or (941) 356-7001.

OCTOBER 28-29: SAN DIEGO – VISTA SDA CHURCH

Location: 7120 Alta Vista Drive, Vista, California 92084

For directions and information call Pastor Rudoy Pavel at (760) 757-8240

NOVEMBER 4-5: ORLANDO – APOPKA SDA CHURCH

Location: 340 East Votaw Road, Apopka, Florida 32703

For directions and information call Pastor Haskell Williams at (407) 383-7250

NOVEMBER 11-12: BRISTOL CENTRAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 31-35 Lower Ashley Road, St. Pauls, Bristol, England.

For directions and information call Pastor Richard Daly at 01452 423 089 or 07958 433744

NOVEMBER 18-19: LONDON, ENGLAND –TOTENHAM SDA CHURCH

Location: 255 West Green Road, London N15, England.

For direction and information call Pastor Nicu Buitoi at 0781 622 7909. He is the new Pastor of the Romanian and Green Acres Totenham SDA churches and is arranging for a rally of several churches

**NOVEMBER 25-26: NEW YORK CITY – NEW HAVEN TEMPLE
SDA CHURCH**

Location: 634 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, NY 11216.

For directions and information call Pastor Allan Hay at (516) 334-6339
or (516) 225-7897.

DECEMBER 2-3: VANCOUVER, BC: SURREY SDA CHURCH

Location: 8520 132nd Street, Surrey, BC V3W 4N7, Canada.

For directions and information call Pastor George Ali at (604) 585-7540
or (604) 591-2922.

DECEMBER 9-10: DETROIT: BURNS SDA CHURCH

Location: 10125 E. Warren, Detroit, Michigan 48214.

For directions and information call Pastor Everett at (586) 786-0035.

TOSHIBA LAPTOPS COMPUTERS FOR ADVENTISTS

TOSHIBA has agreed to offer to Adventists two of their professional laptops models, called TECRA. I shared the information in the last newsletter and the response has been overwhelming. If you are looking for an outstanding TOSHIBA laptop at a bargain price, visit my website at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Toshiba/Notebooks.html> If you cannot surf the web, feel free to call us at 269-471-2915 or email us a message at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>.

INCREDIBLE NEW OFFERS ON HITACHI PROJECTORS

Lately HITACHI has offered me to buy in large quantity four of their projector models, to reduce their inventory. If your church is looking for an outstanding projector at a bargain price, this is the golden opportunity. To be brief I will only list the model, lumens, and special price.

CP-X345 HIGH RESOLUTION 2000 LUMENS – Only \$1195.00

Previous price for the 2000 lumens was \$1900.00.

CP-X430 HIGH RESOLUTION 2500 LUMENS – Only \$1795.00

Previous price for the 2500 lumens was \$2900.00.

CP-X444 HIGH RESOLUTION 3200 LUMENS – Only \$2195.00

Previous price for the 3200 lumens was \$3295.00.

CP-X1250 HIGH RESOLUTION 4500 LUMENS – Only \$4195.00

Previous price for the 4500 lumens was \$4900.00.

These special offers are not listed at my website, because the prices change all the time, depending on the deal that HITACHI gives us. Feel free to call to call us at 269-471-2915 or email us a message at sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com and I will email you all the details of each projector. Keep in mind that HITACHI offers us a 3 years 24/7 warranty package that I am told is worth about \$285.00.

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The size of the transmitter is smaller than a credit card. You can stick it inside the palm of your hand and nobody can see it. I tested the remote in an open environment, and the radio signal can go up to 400 feet of distance. IT IS INCREDIBLE! The transmitter has three buttons: forward, backward, and laser.

I can offer this incredible remote for only \$120.00, postage paid. To order a remote, call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com

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If your church/school is looking for a screen, the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY, the largest manufacturer of screens in the world, has agreed to offer their line of screens to our Adventist churches and schools at a about 30% discount. The procedure is very simple. Visit the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY website at <http://www.da-lite.com>. You

will see hundreds of models of screens with their respective prices. Once you find the screen that you need, give us the model number by phone (269)471-2915 or email your request <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> We will forward your order immediately to DA-LITE that will ship the screen directly to your address. You will receive the screen at about 30% discount.

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At this time we are offering the complete FOUR ALBUMS package of all my recordings for only \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$400.00. Here is a brief description of each album.

The FIRST ALBUM contains FIVE DVD DISKS with 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars. They were taped few months ago by a TV crew at Andrews University. In these lectures I share the discoveries I made at Vatican libraries in Rome on the change of the Sabbath. These are the popular lectures which I present every weekend in different parts of the world and now you can enjoy them in your home and share them with your friends.

The SECOND ALBUM consists of two CD-ROM disks. The first disk contains all my 17 books and over 200 articles, for a total of over 7000 pages of research that I have produced during the past 30 years of biblical investigation. With the Global Acrobat search engine you can find immediately what I have written on any given text or topic. The second disk contains all my popular PowerPoint seminars presentations. Each lecture consists of about 100 PowerPoint slides, for a total of 2000 slides. The text explaining each slide is provided separately and can be printed when needed. This makes it possible for any person to use and modify my lectures.

The THIRD ALBUM consists of two MP3-AUDIO DISKS that can be played on computers with CD drives, DVD players, MP3 players, newer CD players, and iPod. The disks contain 22 popular lectures on Marriage, Music, Temperance, Dress, Sabbath, Second Advent, and others. You can listen to them while driving or working.

The FOURTH ALBUM consists of one DVD disk with the two hours interview done on 3ABN on my latest book THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY. In the interview I show that Gibson's movie on THE PASSION is a strict Catholic film that in a subtle and deceptive way promotes fundamental Catholic heresies. More important still, this recording will help you appreciate more fully the Passion of Christ as His passionate love to redeem us from the penalty (Gal 3:13) and the power of sin (Titus 2:14) through His sacrificial death.

The special offer for ALL THE FOUR ALBUMS is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$400.00. You can order this package in three ways:

EMAIL: The First Way to order is via email. Just email us your home address and your credit card number, with the expiration date. Our email address is: sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com. We will process the credit card and mail you immediately the package of the four albums.

PHONE: The Second Way to order is by phone. Simply call us directly at Biblical Perspectives. Our two phone numbers are (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and process it immediately. Please call us between 8:00 a. m. and 10:00 p. m. EST, not in the middle of the night.

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“A Rash of Natural Disasters: What is the Lord Telling us?”

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.

Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

The recent rash of natural disasters has spawned many competing explanations from across the religious and ideological spectrum. A brief mention of a few major views will serve to set the stage for our study by showing how divided is the public opinion on this subject.

COMPETING EXPLANATIONS

Atheists. Atheists or agnostics who hold to a naturalistic and materialistic world view see disasters as meaningless events in an unpredictable and uncontrolled universe. They are satisfied with meteorological (weather warming trends) or geological (shifting of tectonic plates) explanations. 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."

Antiabortion Activists. Steve Lefemine, an antiabortion activist in Columbia, S.C., claims to have seen in the full-color satellite map of Hurricane Katrina, the image of an 8-week-old fetus. He wrote in his *Columbia Christians for Life* website: "In my belief, God judged New Orleans for the sin of shedding innocent blood through abortion. . . . Providence punishes national sins by national calamities. Greater divine judgment is coming upon America unless we repent of the national sin of abortion."

Moslem. Al-Qaeda fanatics are saying that Katrina is the hand of Allah striking Americans for what they have done to the people of Iraq and to the Palestinians. Muhammad Yousef Mlaifi, a Kuwaiti official, wrote in the Arabic daily *Al-Siyassa*: "The Terrorist Katrina is One of the Soldiers of Allah. . . . It is almost certain that Katrina is a wind of torment and evil that Allah has sent to this American empire."

Dispensationalists. Christian Dispensationalists who believe in the Endtime restoration of the State of Israel, see a causal correlation between the recent forced evacuation of Jewish settlers from their homes in the Gaza Strip and the Americans being forced out of their homes in New Orleans.

Stan Gooddenough wrote in a column for the Website *Jerusalem Newswire*: "Is this some sort of bizarre coincidence? Not for those who believe in the God of the Bible . . . What America is about to experience is the lifting of God's hand of protection; the implementation of His

judgment on the nation most responsible for endangering the land and people of Israel.”

Jews. The same view is expressed by some Jews who see Katrina as the Divine punishment for the destruction of the Gaza’s (Gush Katif) Jewish communities at America’s urging. Rabbi Joseph Garlitzky, head of the international *Chabad Lubavitch* movement, told his Tel Aviv congregation: “We don’t have prophets who can tell us exactly what are God’s ways, but when we see something so enormous as Katrina, I would say [President] Bush and [Secretary of State Condoleezza] Rice need to make an accounting of their actions, because something was done wrong by America in a big way. And here there are many obvious connections between the [Katrina] storm and the Gaza evacuation, which came right on top of each other. No one has permission to take away one inch of the land of Israel from the Jewish people.”

Repent America. Michael Marcavage, who was an intern in the Clinton White House in 1999 and runs now an evangelistic organization, called *Repent America*, sees Katrina as an act of God to punish a wicked city just before the annual gay “Southern Decadence” celebration. This event, he says: “fills the French Quarters section of the city with drunken homosexuals engaging in sex acts in public streets and bars. . . . We believe that God is in control of the weather. The day Bourbon Street and the French Quarter was flooded was the day that 125,000 homosexuals were going to be celebrating sin in the streets. . . . We’re calling it an act of God.”

Marcavage continues, saying: “Although the loss of lives is deeply saddening, this act of God destroyed a wicked city. From ‘Girls Gone Wild’ to ‘Southern Decadence,’ New Orleans was a city that had its doors wide open to the public celebration of sin.”

Adventist Views. Similar views are expressed in some Adventist church papers which suggest that New Orleans had reached the limit of God’s mercy and patience. A Conference President wrote that the city had so filled her cup with wickedness that God had no choice but to destroy it like Sodom and Gomorrah.

This restrictive view of Katrina poses two problems, one is the timing of the hurricane and the second is the places it hit. Katrina hit New Orleans two days before the arrival of 125,000 gays and lesbians. If these people were the primary target of divine retribution, then God miscalculated of two days the timing of the landing of Katrina. By waiting for two extra days before unleashing Katrina in New Orleans, God could have punished the homosexuals at the height of their sinful celebration.

The second problem is the places devastated by Katrina. Why did the Hurricane damage extensively the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Bass Memorial Adventist Academy, and several Adventist churches, while leaving practically untouched the French Quarter of New Orleans, which is the center of sexual perversion? Did God miss the target as it sometimes happens with guided missiles? It is evident that we need to look for more satisfactory biblical answers.

Removal of God's Protection. Alabama State Senator Hank Erwin says that the catastrophic storms that have recently hit the United States, are part of a pattern evident since the terroristic attacks of September 11, 2001—a pattern which shows that God has removed the umbrella of protection over America due to an increase in abortion, pornography, and prostitution.

Writing for the *Birmingham News*, Senator Erwin said: “New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast have always been known for gambling, sin and wickedness. It is the kind of behavior that ultimately brings the judgment of God. . . . Warnings year after year by godly evangelists and preachers went unheeded. So why were we surprised when finally the hand of judgment fell? Sadly, innocents suffered along with the guilty. Sin always brings suffering to good people as well as the bad.”

“America has been moving away from God,” continued the Senator. “We all need to embrace godliness and churchgoing and good, godly living, and we can get divine protection for that point. The Lord is sending appeals to us. As harsh as it may sound, those hurricanes do say that God is real, and we have to realize sin has consequences.”

There is no question that from a biblical perspectives that God uses natural disasters to punish human wickedness. We shall discuss this point shortly. But this fact does not justify jumping to the conclusion that Katrina struck New Orleans because it was an exceedingly sinful city deserving divine punishment. What about San Francisco, the world capital of gay and lesbians? Or Miami or Los Angeles or Las Vegas? Are these cities less morally sinful than New Orleans? If God was to judge cities by the degree of their wickedness, then few of them would escape the destruction of divine retribution through natural disasters. Shortly we shall see that such a unilateral explanation hardly does justice to the biblical view of natural disasters.

America's Mistreatment of the Blacks. Some black church leaders believe that God used Katrina to expose to the world the deplorable living conditions of the blacks in certain parts of America like New Orleans.

In an article entitled "Is God Trying to Tells Us Something? Reflections on Hurricane Katrina," Rev. Connie J. Jackson, an associate minister at the Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia, wrote: "Today God is telling us: 'You say you didn't know that two-thirds of New Orleans was black and poor? Okay, I will send a flood to uproot them. I will ensure that their faces and their deplorable living conditions will be exposed to the world. You will no longer be able to pretend that marginalized and disenfranchised persons of color don't exist because I am going to spread the evacuees all over the nation. I will allow Third World nations (whom you have reprimanded for inhumane treatment of their citizens) to see how America treats their 'least of these.' And the cost to help put these lives back together? . . . Well, it is going to cost this nation billions more than it would have, had it provided for them as I laid out in my Word. Now, you have no choice but to give them free housing, free health care, free food, and free, cash-loaded ATM cards.'"

Can any nation really do justice to the poor by providing for them on a permanent basis free food, housing, health care and "cash-loaded ATM CARD"? Free hand outs can foster chronic poverty. Some persons are poor because their physical disabilities makes it impossible for them to work. These people deserve the assistance that the State and church

can provide. But some people are poor because they do not want to work. They prefer to live on hand outs from the government and charitable organizations. What these people need is not a *hand out*, but a *hand in* willingness to work.

The command to work six days is embedded in the Decalogue as an essential part of Sabbathkeeping. We can break the Sabbath on a Tuesday by loafing around and doing nothing. In my travels around the world I find that when people become Adventists they usually improve their socio-economic conditions, partly because the Sabbath teaches them, not only to rest on the seventh-day, but also to work hard during the six days.

The best way to help poor people with healthy bodies, is to teach them how to work in suitable professions. The biblical imperative is clear: “If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busy-bodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living” (2 Thess 3:10-12).

God is Mighty, but not Omnipotent. In his article “Katrina: Not God’s Wrath—or His Will,” Dr. Tony Campolo, a prolific writer and a popular circuit speaker, rejects the notion that Katrina is a divine punishment upon wickedness. He writes: “There are Christians who, in the weeks to come, can be counted on to thunder from their pulpits that Katrina is God’s wrath against the immorality of this nation, pointing out that New Orleans is the epitome of our national degradation and debauchery. To all of this I say, ‘Wrong.’”

Dr. Campolo maintains that the message of the Bible is not about divine condemnation, but about the divine provision of salvation. “The Bible tells us about the grace of God; it is giving us the good news that our loving God does not give us what we truly deserve. Certainly, God would not create suffering for innocent people, who were—for the most part—Katrina’s victims.”

Natural disasters occur, according to Dr. Campolo, because there is “a cosmic struggle going on between the forces of darkness and the

forces of light. The good news is that, in the end, God will be victorious. That is why we can sing in the Hallelujah Chorus, ‘the kingdoms of this world [will] become the Kingdom of our Lord.’”

The problem with Dr. Campolo’s argument is his belief that in the on-going cosmic struggle, God is mighty, but not omnipotent. He will eventually be victorious at the End, but at the present time He is not powerful enough to prevent the occurrence of disasters. I find it is hard to believe that God is not powerful enough to intervene in a major natural disaster, 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.

Searching for a Satisfactory Answer. During the past few weeks I have been seeking to find in my own mind a satisfactory answer to the question: “How can an omnipotent and benevolent God allow for the recent rash of destructive disasters? In searching for an answer I have read numerous articles, email messages, and books to see how Christian thinkers answer this fundamental question.

The preceding survey of the major views expressed by prominent Christian thinkers, has shown how divided they are on this subject and how difficult is to find a satisfactory biblical answer. It would be presumptuous on my part to presume to present in this newsletter the most satisfactory biblical explanation for why an omnipotent and benevolent God allows the occurrence of destructive disasters. The only thing I intend to do in this study is to take a fresh look at the biblical teachings on three related questions:

- 1) Why Does the Earth Experience Natural Disasters?
- 2) Does God Use Disasters to Punish Evildoers?
- 3) Why Are We Experiencing a Significant Increase in 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 tranquillity 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.

The Fall Affected the Human and Sub-human Creation

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, spawning multiple Tsunamis. Havoc reigned in God’s creation, altering permanently the face and formation of the earth.

The Flood Changed the 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 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. 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. Such a view is foreign to the Bible.

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” (Ez 13:13). 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.

DOES GOD USES NATURAL DISASTERS TO PUNISH EVILDOERS?

Most theologians and religious writers tend to discount any causal connection between natural disasters and divine punishment of sinners. They prefer to emphasize the love and grace of God, at the exclusion of His justice and judgment. But the two sets of God’s attributes must be maintained in their proper balance. Do we really want a wrathless God who turns a blind eye toward cruelty, abuse, sexual perversion, oppression of the weak by the strong? Do we really want a God who is a wimp? Of course not! The Bible reassures us that God is not only perfect love, but also perfect justice. He forgives “iniquity and transgression and sin, but will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex 34:7).

The tendency is to emphasize the forgiving grace of God at the exclusion of His retributive justice. An interview conducted by *the Associated Press* with some leading theologians shows their tendency to reject the notion that natural disasters express divine displeasure for sinful behavior. For example, Albert Mohler Jr., President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, notes that God rebuked Job’s friends for contending that he was punished for his misdeeds (*The Detroit News* 10/5/05). But can the story of Job be legitimately used to prove that God never uses disasters to punish evildoers? Such a view overlooks those biblical passages which speak of disasters as divine judgments on human disobedience.

In his article “The Divine Role in Natural Disasters,” Russell Shaw argues that “if murderous hurricanes were God’s way of punishing sinners, God would be shockingly inefficient. Most of those who died in Katrina were poor, sick, elderly, or all three. The sinners escaped. Is that divine justice?” (*Arlington Catholic Herald* 9/29/05). Did all the sinners really escape? What about all the people caught by TV cameras breaking into shops, looting, shooting, and raping women in the Astrodome?

The Righteous Are not Exempted from Suffering

The problem with Shaw’s reasoning is the failure to recognize that the Bible never promises the righteous exemption from suffering when a divine judgment is inflicted especially on the wicked. The prophets explain that the exile of the Jews to Babylon was a divine judgment upon the people for their disobedience, yet righteous persons like Daniel were among the exiles. This does not stop the prophets from describing the exile as a divine judgment upon the wicked.

The biblical authors assume that a divine judgment upon evildoers affect righteous people as well. In predicting the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (Mark 13; Matt 24; Luke 21), Jesus Himself spoke of the sufferings His followers would experience and warned them to get out of the city as quickly as they could.

Disasters as Divine Punishments

Though some theologians reject or downplay the notion that God uses natural disasters to punish evildoers, this teaching is clearly found in Scripture. The most noteworthy examples are the Flood and the destruction by fire of Sodom and Gomorrah. But the Bible abounds with other examples. 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” caused by storm, earthquake, and fire as a divine judgment upon Israel.

Amos explains that God uses “natural” disasters to teach lessons to His people and to bring them to repentance. But, God admits that most

people do not repent in spite of the sufferings experienced by natural disasters.

Amos writes: “Also I gave you cleanness of teeth [famine] in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the Lord. ‘I also withheld rain from you [drought], when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me,’ says the Lord. ‘I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; yet you have not returned to Me,’ says the Lord. ‘I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, . . . yet you have not returned to Me,’ says the Lord. ‘I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; your young men I killed with a sword, . . . yet you have not returned to Me,’ says the Lord. ‘Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!’ For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth—the Lord God of hosts is His name” (Amos 4:6-13).

In this passage Amos explains that the purpose of the calamities that God visited upon His people, was to lead them to repentance and to summon them to “Prepare to meet your God.” Regretfully, the people failed to respond. As a refrain we read: “yet you have not returned to Me.”

Revelation describes with a strikingly similar language the response of the wicked to the endtime outpouring of the seven final plagues, which are unprecedented natural disasters: “And they did not repent and give him glory” (Rev 16:9, 11; 9:20, 21). But while disasters harden the wicked in their rebellion against God, believers heed God’s warning, and “come out” of figurative Babylon and prepare themselves for “the marriage of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7).

Does God Respond to Blasphemous Insults?

Among the literature I have read for this newsletter, I came across some shocking stories of disasters that appear to be a divine response to blasphemous insults against God. I was planning to post several reports, including one about the TITANIC. But for the sake of brevity I will share only one report from my own country of Italy.

In the early morning (about 5:30 a. m.) of December 28, 1908, the Monday after the Christmas weekend, a major tsunami earthquake totally destroyed Messina (population 150,000), Reggio Calabria (population 50,000), and dozens of smaller nearby towns. This was the deadliest earthquake in European history with an estimated 120,000 fatalities.

Three days before the earthquake, on Christmas evening of December 25, 1908, a group of unbelievers staged in the Messina public theater, an obscene and sacrilegious parody of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. The following day, December 26, a group of citizens assembled to insult God by decreeing the abolishment of the Christian religion.

On a similar vein, the Messina newspaper *Il Telefono*, published on December 25, this blasphemous poem on its Christmas edition:

Mio piccolo bambino
vero uomo. vero Dio
Per amore della croce
rispondi alla nostra voce:
se tu non sei veramente un Mito,
schiacciaci sotto un terremoto.

Translated into English the poem reads:

My small child
true man, true God
For the sake of the Cross
answer back to our voice:
if you truly are not a Myth,
crush us under an earthquake.

Three days later the most destructive earthquake in European history, crushed under collapsed building over 120,000 people in Messina and neighboring cities. Was such a destructive earthquake God's response to the blasphemous insults levelled against Him? No one can tell for sure, but we cannot discount such a possibility.

God does not always settle accounts so speedily. But Scripture tells us that Christ will soon come to settle accounts with every human being who ever lived. On the day of His glorious Return, He will welcome believers saying: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34). But to the unpenitent sinners, Christ will say: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41). No natural calamity can compare to the cataclysmic destruction of the Second Advent: "The heavens will pass away with a loud noise and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10). On that day nobody will doubt the divine responsibility for the destruction and restoration of the earth.

Not All Disasters Are a Divine Judgment Upon Evildoers

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 and Katrina, 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 all calamities are a punishment for sin, by mentioning two disastrous events which resulted in the loss of human lives: "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them,

think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

The Lord mentioned two tragic events familiar to His audience. One was caused by the wicked actions of sinful men; the other was the result of a freak accident. The first event involved some Galileans who came to the temple in Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices. They were suddenly cut down by Pilate’s soldiers. The people concluded that the victims of Pilate’s wrath must have been very wicked, otherwise God would not have allowed them to be murdered in this fashion.

The second event was accidental. One day the tower of Siloam, which was located near the pool of Siloam, fell crushing eighteen people to death. The popular explanation was that God allowed these people to be crushed because they were more wicked than the other people living in Jerusalem. Jesus refuted this misconception, saying: “I tell you, Nay (NO). But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5).

We are all guilty sinners deserving of an eternal death. Being murdered by a tyrant, being crushed by a tower, being killed by tsunami, earthquake, or hurricanes, is not as serious as the suffering and death impenitent sinners will experience at the final judgment. Rejecting Christ’s provision of salvation has eternal consequences.

The recent rash of natural disasters summons us to remember that we all have an appointment with death (which could happen at any time), and that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10). Jesus explained that disasters should 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 Katrina and 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.”

WHY ARE WE EXPERIENCING AN INCREASE IN NATURAL DISASTERS?

The recent rash of natural disasters causes many to ask: Are natural disasters increasing today? The answer is not difficult to find. A search in GOOGLE for “increase in natural disaster” shows 7,100,000 pages of reports and studies. Many of the reports are issued 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.”

A report published by the *Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters* shows that “over the past decade, the number of natural and technological disasters has risen sharply. Both hydro-meteorological and

geophysical disasters have become more common, becoming 68 percent and 62 percent respectively more frequent over the decade. This reflects longer-term trends.”

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.”

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.

Intensification of Disasters

The Bible teaches that natural disasters will intensify before the End. Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as being “*but the beginning of the sufferings*” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). “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).

This time of great punishments to befall humanity before Christ’s Return, is described in the Bible as “The Day of the Lord.” The prophet Isaiah tells us that those days of global suffering “will come as destruction from the Almighty” and “every man’s heart will melt and they will be afraid” (Is 13: 6-8). The Book of Revelation offers shocking details of horrific plagues by which “a third of mankind was killed” (Rev 9:18; 9:15).

Is a Catastrophic Climax to Human History Necessary?

Some Christians wonder if a catastrophic climax before Christ's Coming is really necessary. What if God would bring to an end this present age without the destruction of natural disasters? What if He would conclude human history with a peaceful return of Christ without the anguish mentioned in endtime prophecies? Why is God showing so much fury at the End of this Age? Is it simply a capricious decision on God's part designed to dramatize Christ's return? Or is it a calculated dramatic method to call mankind to repent before it is too late?

The answer is to be found in the endtime increased wickedness. In His Olivet Discourse, Christ predicted that social wickedness would increase prior to His Return: "Because of *the increase of wickedness*, the love of most will grow cold" (Matt 24:12, NIV). In the same discourse Jesus exemplified the pre-Advent social wickedness by referring to two periods of Old Testament history, namely, the "days of Noah" and "the days of Lot." By these two examples Jesus illustrates not only the sudden judgment that will come upon impenitent mankind "*on the day*" of His Return, but also the social conditions that will prevail "*in the days*" before His Coming.

Paul expands Christ's prediction on the godlessness of the last days, saying: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim 3:1-5, NIV).

This shocking prediction of the social wickedness of the last days reads like an accurate description of our time. The consistent use of the future tense suggests that Paul foresaw a deterioration of social conditions before the End. He indicates this also in verse 13 where he says: "evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived." It is in this setting that the prediction of Christ and Paul about increased wickedness in "the last days" takes on added meaning for our time.

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, Katrina, Pakistan earthquake, that killed far more people and affected a dozen of nations, are 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 grasp their eschatological significance?

What is the Lord Telling Us Through Disasters?

What is the Lord telling us through the recent rash of natural disasters that have reached epic proportions? 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).