

# Where Was God?

An earthquake force of a million atom bombs sent tsunamis, a series of waves, surging 440 MPH across thousands of miles of water devastating a vast arc of eleven countries from Somalia, E. Africa, to Indonesia, SE Asia. Over 150,000 people were killed with vast numbers of bodies backwashed into the ocean, never to be counted. Over 5 million are destitute of food and shelter.

Satirically, skeptics speak of the tragic Southeast Asian Tsunami as God's Christmas present. Among Christians, reactions are mixed. Nominal, even some sincere, Christians question, "Where was God?" Other Christians, listening to the news flashes of the incredible mounting disasters, are overwhelmed with grief. They better understand why Jesus wept with Mary and Martha, sorrowing over the death of their brother Lazarus.

Some Predestinationists are smugly content in the "sovereign justice" of God. After all, the victims were mainly Hindus, Buddhists and Moslems, along with a few thousand vacationing Jews, who before birth were doomed to everlasting woe anyway. If any of the vacationing Christians were indeed God's elect, divine fate ushered them into their eternal joys.

This begs the question—Why does anyone, Calvinist or not, who considers unbelievers worthy of eternal torment, grieve over this massive loss of unbelievers in death? After all, they aver, God plans to imprison the vast majority of His creatures in a calamity, to which all the horrors of all earth's tragedies by comparison are nothing but a mere prelude to the most awful indescribable torment that God with fiendish cruelty will perpetuate for eternity.

And why this punishment of eternal torture? Simply because, when told by Christians that such was God's character and purpose, these unbelievers could not love Him nor praise His "good and just" (actually, diabolical) plan. Yet, other millions have died never even hearing the name of Jesus, through whom alone is salvation. How can anyone believe that thousands in the Indian Ocean's indiscriminate killing went straight to hell, never having had an opportunity to believe in the Lord Jesus?

## Where Was God?

But where was God in this humongous tragedy? God was feeling the pain of this trauma. God suffers with humankind in their disasters. Jeremiah uses the imagery of God weeping or crying for Israel suffering tragedies for their disobedience (Jer. 9:17, 18). How can the Omnipotent One communicate His capacity to suffer with fallen man? God uses imagery we can understand—tears. God doesn't literally cry. Far from being an indication of weakness, God's imagery of shedding tears assures us of a profound fatherly care and concern that He is capable of feeling even during man's waywardness.

**Where was God?** The massive response of people around the world—their outpouring of love and concern manifested in the monumental relief effort—was overwhelming. All this love and sympathy in humankind is only the remnant of the original divine likeness in which Father Adam was created. This divine likeness was not wholly effaced during thousands of years of mankind's degradation in sin. God is represented in every act of kindness, whether by Christians or by others in the world. Certainly this outpouring of love did not come from blind evolutionary development. Impossible! These actions of love reflect a measure of God's character.

However, this measure of love has also been marred by fallen man. The US made a generous offer of \$350 million for the tsunami relief victims. Regardless of our views on the Iraqi war, compare the \$350 million relief effort with the \$177 million a day it costs the US to wage war in the killing fields of Iraq. And, yes—Bush's inaugural celebration will total \$45 million.

#### **Awesome Power of God**

- Earthquake 6 miles below Indian Ocean floor equaled power of 1 million atom bombs.
- Moved Sumatra Island 100 ft.
- Moved the North Pole 1 inch.
- Accelerated earth's rotation—shortening days by a fraction of a second.
- Caused planet earth to wobble on its axis.
- Waves jolted away from epicenter at over 440 MPH.
- Shoreline hit by waves over 90 ft. high.
- Towns over 9,500 population completely wiped out.

#### **Why God Permits Calamities?**

A suffering God puts the question of the permission of calamities in a practical perspective. If God shares our suffering why would He conceive a plan that would result in His own suffering? The question is no longer—why do good people suffer or why do innocent children suffer? Rather, why has God permitted a horrific human history of not only calamities, but also of blood, tragedy, pain and mental anguish that would just tear away at His Fatherly emotions of love?

To fully understand why God permits evil—including calamities—we must go back, back to when God dwelt alone. God desired a family, to be a parent—a father or life-giver—The Heavenly Father. The most loving parents are not overly protective; rather, they are willing to permit hard knocks realizing it will cost themselves dearly in pain as they watch their children struggle to maturity.

God knew His children could only be happy individually and collectively if each one loved and obeyed His laws for the well being of all. Therefore, God created Adam and Eve in "His own image"—free will and moral discernment. God could have programmed

the ideal man and utopia would have been inevitable, but man would be no better than a robot, nor would he be happy. But free will has a built-in dilemma. God told Adam that if he obeyed he would live. If he disobeyed he would die—"dying thou shalt die" (Gen. 2:17). Because of lack of experience God knew Adam or anyone of us would disobey.

A parent will tell a baby not to touch the stove because it is hot. But what does a baby know about pain? Inevitably the baby will touch the stove. A wise parent will lightly and quickly touch the child's hand where the heat is not too severe. Likewise, God is giving mankind a controlled experience with sin.

Knowing man would disobey him, God planned for man's redemption before he even created the earth and man. First Peter 1:19-20 speaks of Jesus as slain before the foundation of the world. God lovingly planned the best for His future human children. This meant a plan that would deeply grieve His fatherly heart as He watched man trampled down into death by the machinations of evil while learning the consequences of sin. Also, it would cost the ultimate in fatherly suffering—watching His only begotten son suffer the agony of being vilified and crucified. God's gift of Jesus was the greatest demonstration of fatherly suffering in history.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God withdrew His fellowship. Loneliness, stress, depression engulfed them. The latest scientific research confirms the Biblical account of man's "Fall" into sin. Loneliness, stress and depression render both the mind and the body prone to disease. Fear, hostility and aggressiveness became the norm. Exploitation, crime and violence were the inevitable consequences. The body's immunity to disease soon broke down. The dying process had begun. Yes, Adam's children, the human race, were born sinners (Psa. 51:5) worthy of death (Rom. 6:23). This is "the sore travail God hath given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" (Eccl. 1:13; 3:10).

### **The Unfinished Earth and Calamities**

Since Adam and Eve disobeyed, mankind is learning by experience the bitter consequences of moral sin and evil that results in death. Additionally, they were cast out of their Edenic paradise into **the unfinished earth**, where the components of nature were still unbalanced. Here mankind has "toiled by the sweat of their brow" and are subjected to sporadic upheavals of nature. Perhaps these upheavals of nature are gradually preparing the earth to become the Edenic paradise in the 1000-year Kingdom of God.

Often parents, who remand a disobedient child to their room for the evening, have loving thoughts of their continued relationship. God has remanded His human children to their room—the unfinished earth. In their affliction, He is afflicted and He has wonderful loving thoughts—recorded in the Bible prophecies—concerning their restoration to His favor. Yes, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "as in Adam all die" but he continues, "so in Christ shall all be made alive." Why? Because Jesus died "a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6 and Heb. 2:9).

## A Suffering Savior and Suffering Christians

But before all are made alive in Christ's Kingdom, God has been training Christians—a "little flock" (Luke 12:32), by contrast with the billions of mankind. Why? That they might reign with Christ in his Kingdom as priests and kings (Rev. 20:6). Like Christ, they are being made sympathetic priests through suffering (2 Tim. 2:11-12). The minds of men are scarred and twisted by tragedy. Christians experience the same disasters (1 Cor. 10:13) but by the power of the holy Spirit are healed and made compassionate. Why?

They will be able to heal the minds of their fellowman when mankind comes forth from the grave (John 5:28-29, NASV) to their "judgment" (Greek **Krisis** denotes future probation) trial time in the Kingdom. Mankind will have a vivid remembrance of the bitter effects of sin and evil. Then they will learn the joyful rewards of living righteously with their fellowman and make their choice for eternity (Jer. 31:29-31, 34). Many scriptures reveal that the majority of mankind will share the joys of eternal life.

God's foreknowledge of His own suffering in sharing mankind's plight proves that the permission of evil is a necessary experience for man's eternal welfare. God's fatherly sorrow contains no anxiety like a human parent. With Divine serenity, He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). All the forces of evil are overruled for man's eternal welfare (Psa. 76:10). By faith we can have this same peace of God (Phil. 4:7). The present sufferings are but a moment compared with the joys of eternity (2 Cor. 4:17, 18).

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