

Why Did Haiti Happen?

It's been a long time since I have felt so uneasy commenting about anything on this page. So, before I plod forward with my awkward comments, I will first answer the question posed in the title with a resounding, "I do not know and cannot know."

Some indigenous religious leaders in Haiti are convinced that the earthquake there was God's judgment against that nation. A well-known American television preacher cryptically suggested that there was a connection between the natural disaster and a "pact with the devil" that certain Haitians had made out in the jungle somewhere to the effect that if the devil would free them from French rule, they would serve him. I judge those observations to be stupid, but not necessarily for the reasons you might suspect.

In an email to his mailing list, one Christian songwriter "worked-over" said TV preacher pretty good. He indicted him of being "ignorant ... concerning the Cross, the atonement, and the very character of God Himself." Yet, the only answer he set forth regarding the "Why?" behind the tragedy was the unpredictability of the fallen creation. He seemed to leave open no possibility that God ever could, might or would rise up in some special judgment against a nation or a people-group engaged in some particularly odious sin. While my sensibilities tend to ally themselves with those of the songwriter, my head tells me that it sure is easy for all of us to pop-off "beyond our pay grades."

Regarding the TV preacher's comments, the songwriter went on to add: "When public religious leaders promote these ideas, they turn people away from God in droves." I agree with him completely on that matter, but I have to add that when we tie the hands of the divine to the point that He would NEVER do such things, we usurp His judgment, His wisdom and His sovereignty. I don't want to drive people away from God in droves but neither do I want to draw people to a notion of a God that I have taken it upon myself to neuter, not because of the doctrine of biblical grace, but because of the human sentimentality in which we tend to saturate our understanding of grace.

To say that God acted in judgment on Haiti is to pontificate as recklessly as the Pharisees often did. Their theology of "bad things happen to bad people" led to the following exchange with Jesus:

¹Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." - Luke 13:1-5

On the other hand, to deny that a good God would ever rise up in judgment *via* natural disaster, plague, *etc.* seems to me to carry a certain recklessness of its own in that it ignores the activity of *YAHWEH* throughout the Old Testament.

In light of what can be known, churches around the country have done exactly the right thing in their quick response to the tragedy in Haiti. But, to authoritatively answer the question, "Why?" is to delve into matters that we cannot possibly understand. Perhaps, we should emulate the wisdom of Job in such matters after he and his friends had sounded off freely about the afflictions that had tormented that man:

¹The LORD said to Job:
²"Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!"
³Then Job answered the LORD:
⁴"I am unworthy—how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.
⁵I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more." – Job 40:1-5

I said at the outset that I was uneasy commenting on why Haiti happened, but I am paradoxically "at ease" that "uneasy" is precisely the right posture in such circumstances. Sometimes, we honor God best by rolling up our sleeves and keeping our mouths shut.

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