

“Fire and hail, snow and clouds, stormy wind, fulfilling His word” (PSALM 148:8).

NATURAL DISASTERS

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS:

In the Bible, the connection is pretty clear. A flood comes? God was involved. A famine ensues? You guessed it, God was holding the rain up in the clouds. A mighty wind? God sent it forth. And in most cases of destructive weather, the message was simple. God was either bringing consequences to bear upon those outside of His people who continued in sin, or He was disciplining His own people. The appropriate response in either case was repentance.

It seems that most people in our day refuse to acknowledge that is God still in charge of the weather. Perhaps we have heard one too many meteorologists tell us what “Mother Nature” is doing. Maybe we believe that the weather is just a wholly predictable scientific phenomenon. But here is a simple question: Does God still use weather to grab people’s attention, whether in the world or among His sheep that are walking away from His flock? Did the weather become completely random and outside of God’s control at some point in history? Or was it always generally random, with the Scriptures simply drawing our attention to the few times when it was not?

While it would be wrong to suggest that we understand the purpose of God lurking behind every weather occurrence, the fact that God controls and uses the weather for His purposes is an inescapable biblical assertion. And certainly, any time the weather turns nasty and brings calamity, it is proper for people to turn to God in repentance. This is not necessarily because there is some specific sin that is the cause of the calamity; rather, we recognize that such events would not occur at all in a world without sin. And so we repent — of specific sins if known, and in general otherwise.

Older prayer books and hymnals always encouraged prayers of corporate repentance in times of natural disaster. Now we only seem to pray that God would help those affected by the weather, as if He is only able to *respond* to weather and no longer able to *control* it. Perhaps we pray with misunderstanding. Perhaps we are not hearing when God is speaking.

We feel discomfort at the idea that God uses calamity to further His holy and perfect ends. But if the answer to our discomfort is to remove the possibility of God bringing disaster, we have chosen a scripturally inconsistent solution to the problem. The Scriptures are clear that He does bring such calamity. The answer, instead, is that God, in bringing temporal calamity, is truly restoring to us eternal salvation. He does not bring calamity to cause suffering, but to call us to repentance. And He calls us to repentance to call us to Jesus and His forgiveness.

SCRIPTURES:

Nahum 1:3

“The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.”

Matthew 8:27

“And the men marveled, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?’”

Luke 13:1–3

“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.’”

CONVERSATION POINTS:

- What might a prayer of repentance sound like when calamity strikes?
- What comfort is there in knowing God is in control of the weather?