

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #61: DOES GOD CONTROL THE WEATHER?

By John Temples

Are floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes “acts of God”? Your insurance company thinks so, and most insurance policies exclude such natural disasters from their coverage. So God is getting blamed for a lot of disasters--but is he to blame? Is a hurricane a punishment for sin? Does God control the weather? What does the Bible say?

The first principle we glean from God’s word in regard to weather is this: God designed the earth to function by natural law, without constant cosmic tinkering or divine interruption. This is certainly true with reference to living things (God created the various forms of life with the ability to “reproduce themselves according to their kind,” Genesis 1:24; and He put within plants the mechanism to reproduce by seed, Genesis 1:29). By implication, He set up weather to do the same--operate by natural law. The statement of Genesis 2:5-6--”For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground”--implies that God, having set the weather systems of the earth into motion miraculously, intended for them to operate naturally.

As further confirmation that God intended for weather to obey natural law, there are no recorded miraculous or supernatural weather events between the creation and the Flood, a period of approximately 1,650 years. (This fact, plus the deduction from Genesis 2:5-6 that there had been no rain on the earth, helps explain why so many people rejected Noah’s warnings of weather catastrophe. All things had continued “as they were from the beginning of creation.”)

Between the Flood and the time of Christ, however, there were approximately 35 miraculous weather occurrences or divine interventions in earth’s weather.¹ Almost all these weather miracles were connected with the nation of Israel. God seems to have had three purposes for these miracles:

¹ There’s a list of these at the end of this article.

1. To reward or punish Israel's conduct;
2. To supply visible evidence of God's power, to produce repentance in Israel;
3. To give divine assistance to Israel in overcoming its enemies (such as escaping from Egypt and conquering the Promised Land).

Israel certainly needed such punishments and proofs of God's power on a regular basis. They often departed from God, and one of the means He used to bring them back to Him was weather. Solomon prayed, "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance. When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is...then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men), that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You gave to our fathers" (2 Chronicles 6:26-31). The prophet Nahum reminded the Jews, "The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers, Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts" (Nahum 1:3-4).

There were a few miraculous weather events during the time of Christ. The last documented weather miracle in history might be the three hours of darkness at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45). But even that was more of a celestial phenomenon than a climate event. After that, God apparently allowed earth's weather systems to revert to the normal variations of natural law.²

² Some might say that the last recorded miraculous weather event was the prolonged and destructive storm experienced by Paul in Acts 27:13-15, which resulted in the destruction of the ship on which he was a passenger (actually a prisoner). However, there is no indication that this was a supernatural event; moreover, it was so much a predictable and natural seasonal occurrence that it even had a name--Euroclydon.

It's important to note that, even during the time God was intervening in human history through supernatural weather events, such miracles were the exception; natural law was the norm. Jesus alluded to this principle in several statements. He said in Matthew 5:45, "The rain falls on the just and on the unjust." (This text alone should assure us that God does not send calamities to punish sinners.) Another passage that implies the normalcy of natural law is John 3:8--"The wind blows where it wishes [obeys natural law]."

Twice, Jesus spoke of the predictable nature of weather. In Matthew 16:2-3, He said, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! *You know how to discern the face of the sky*, but you cannot discern the signs of the times." Again in Luke 12:54-55, He said, "Whenever you see a cloud arising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and so it is."

And behind all this is the basic, controlling statement of Genesis 8:22--"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease."

God's miraculous interruptions in natural processes were just that: interruptions. They were not--and are not--the norm. Hurricanes, floods, droughts, lightning, etc. are dramatic and destructive; but they are all predictable and explainable in terms of natural processes.

MORE ON THE IDEA THAT GOD SENDS STORMS TO PUNISH SINNERS

Since this idea is so prevalent, it deserves closer study. Every time there is a natural disaster, many people, and even some famous preachers, pontificate that "these are judgments of God on sinners."

The Jews believed, as do many people today, that if calamity hit you, it was evidence of sin in your life. Job's three "friends" persistently urged Job to "confess his sin" which he surely must have been guilty of, suffering as he was.

Jesus briefly addressed this idea on two different occasions. In John 9, Jesus and His disciples encountered a man who had been blind since birth. His disciples immediately concluded that the blindness was the result of sin. They asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Notice carefully the Lord's answer: "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him*" (John 9:3). We might think the Lord's answer ambiguous or inconclusive, but one fact is clear: you cannot establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering in any given situation. Burton Coffman says in his comments on verse 3, "Jesus' reply did not mean that either the man or his parents were sinless, but that they were guilty of no sin that had caused the blindness. The great problem of why some should be born handicapped, and others not, or why disasters should overwhelm some and not others, and why natural disasters like storms, floods, and earthquakes should destroy some and not others - all such things, affecting in their aggregate every life on earth, are not parceled out to men on a measure-for-measure basis related to the number and degree of their sins."

The prevailing explanation of disasters was also fully on display in Luke 13:1-5: "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'"

Again, Jesus does not explain everything about suffering; but He does make one thing clear: Storms, disasters, and death are not judgments of God on any particular people. Tsunamis are not morally selective; they hit everybody, both the righteous and the wicked. They just ARE--they happen because of the sin-affected world we live in.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, then, God is no longer miraculously controlling the weather, just as He is no longer miraculously confirming His word; however, lest we think that God is paying us no mind--not heeding our prayers for rain, blessing, or safety--we need to remember providence. God chooses not to operate miraculously in the world anymore, but He can and does operate PROVIDENTIALLY--through natural law. By providence, God causes those who hunger for truth to find it (Matthew 5:6). By providence, He causes all things to work together for our good (Romans 8:28). "All things" would seem to include weather! Theoretically, then, God could use weather to "send a message" to individuals (or a nation) in a non-miraculous way. Call it a divine warning if you please.

The bottom line is: While droughts, floods, tornadoes, etc. are not miraculous and divine judgments of God upon mankind, they are wondrous natural events that God obviously allows to happen, as reminders of His divine existence and power. As such, they call for awe, respect, and compassion for their victims. --John Temples

ATTACHMENT: List of miraculous weather events in the Bible

MIRACULOUS WEATHER EVENTS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE

1. Breaking up of the fountains of the deep, Genesis 7:11.
2. Opening of the windows of heaven, Genesis 7:11.
3. Continual rain for 40 days, Genesis 7:12.
4. Prevailing of the waters for 150 days, Genesis 7:24.
5. A supernatural wind to dry the earth, Genesis 8:1.
6. Stopping of the fountains of the deep, Genesis 8:2.
7. Restraining of the windows of heaven, Genesis 8:2.
8. First appearance of the rainbow, Genesis 9:14-17.
9. Rain of fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 19:24.
10. Seven years of famine/drought, Genesis 41:29-30.
11. Hail upon Egypt, Exodus 9:23-24.
12. Miraculous darkness, Exodus 10:22.
13. Pillar of fire and cloud, Exodus 14:19-20.
14. Dividing of the Red Sea by a supernatural wind, Exodus 14:21.
15. Production of manna from dew, Exodus 16:13-15.
16. Twice as much manna on Fridays, Exodus 16:22, 26.
17. Thunder and lightning atop Mount Sinai, Exodus 19:16-18.
18. Miraculous crop production in pre-sabbatical years, Leviticus 25:18.
19. Rain withheld because of disobedience, Leviticus 26:3, 4, 18-20.
20. Quail brought by an east wind, Numbers 11:31.
21. Dew on Gideon's fleece, Judges 6:36-40.
22. Thunder from God routs Philistine army, 1 Samuel 7:10.
23. Rain in answer to Samuel's prayer, 1 Samuel 12:16-18.
24. Drought caused by sin, 1 Kings 8:35-40.
25. Elijah proclaims a 3-½ year drought, 1 Kings 17:1, James 5:17.
26. End of the miraculous drought, 1 Kings 18:41-45.
27. Elijah ascends to heaven in a whirlwind, 2 Kings 2:1.
28. A Satanic wind kills Job's children, Job 1:18-19.
29. God speaks to Job from a whirlwind, Job 38:1, 40:6.
30. The winds are under God's control, Psalms 107:25.
31. God causes rain, lightning, and wind, Psalms 134:6-7.
32. God withheld rain from Israel, Amos 4:7.
33. Miraculous storm of Jonah, Jonah 1:4-15.
34. Wind and waves obey Jesus, Matthew 8:26.
35. Three hours of darkness at the crucifixion, Matthew 27:45.

