

# Where Is God?

**Introduction.** Human beings are emotional and reactionary creatures. Others in the animal kingdom react to tragedy instinctually, to preserve themselves without thought of anger, malice, or retribution, but this is not so with people. Whenever tragedy strikes, the mantra is always the same: “Where is God in all of this?” (Psalm 9:9-10).

True to form, people have blamed God for Harvey. In France, the cover of a magazine called Charlie Hebdo showed cartoonish hands reaching up from beneath flood waters in a Nazi salute with Nazi flags partially submerged, and the caption read: “God drowned all the Neo-Nazis in Texas.” A famous actress, Jennifer Lawrence, said this week on a British interview show that Harvey and Irma are “Mother Nature’s rage” against Trump and his supporters. Kirk Cameron, an actor turned preacher, said this week that Harvey and Irma are God’s effort to get sinners to repent.

People are going to ask those of us who believe in God, “How could God let all those people die?” or “How can you believe in a God who would let such a tragedy occur?” My confident answer to any such question is that God was present and evident throughout all these natural occurrences, and even in their aftermath.

## ***I. God’s Power Is Seen In The Events Themselves***

A. Some statistics about the recent events.

1. Hurricanes Irma and Harvey mark the first time two Atlantic category 4 U.S. landfalls have occurred in the same year.
2. Still a named storm 117 hours after landfall, Harvey was the longest a Texas landfalling hurricane remained a named storm after landfall on record. All-time continental U.S. tropical cyclone rain records were broken. In fact, it is unlikely that we will see the name "Harvey" used again for another tropical cyclone due to its extreme damage and devastation along the Gulf Coast.
3. Irma, with 185 mph maximum winds for 37 hours, was the longest any cyclone around the globe has maintained that intensity on record. It was the first Category 5 hurricane to make landfall in Cuba since 1924.
4. At least 61 people have died after the most powerful earthquake (magnitude 8.1) to hit Mexico in a century struck off the southern coast. It shook for three minutes, and there were multiple aftershocks, including at least six with tremors measuring above 5.0 in magnitude.
5. The U.S. Forest Service has spent more than two billion dollars battling forest fires around the country — a new record as wildfires blacken the American West in one of the nation’s worst fire seasons. Wildfires have ravaged the West this summer with 64 large fires burning across 10 states as of Thursday, including 21 fires in Montana and 18 in Oregon. In all, 48,607 wildfires have burned nearly 13,000 square miles.
6. People see and hear these numbers and they cry out: “Where was God when the hurricane/flood/earthquake/wildfire happened?”

B. The power of the Creator is seen in this demonstration of natural power.

1. While those suffering through the aftermath of these events may think this is the greatest and most devastating the world has ever seen, we are assured in the Bible that it is not.

- a) Floods come but they also go. All of the water comes from sources created by God, and they abate according to God's design.
- b) Flood victims believe at the start that the water will never go away, but it always does, and life goes back to normal (Job 26:8; 36:27-28; Ecclesiastes 1:7).
- 2. There have been and there always will be natural disasters. Some were sent by God for punishment of mankind (Amos 4:6-12), but some were not. The kinds of disasters that are common to mankind are simply part of the cycles of our earth.
  - a) The flood of Noah (Genesis 7:11-12, 17-20).
  - b) Famines have been commonplace in man's history (Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 41:27-30; Acts 11:28).
  - c) Earthquakes have been relentless (Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5; Acts 16:26).
  - d) Joel warns of a locust plague that would be so severe it would ravage Israel. Yet, he writes of this plague as if the people were familiar with the disaster if not the severity of the one that was coming (Joel 1:1-5).
  - e) The destruction of the earth in the final day (2 Peter 3:7, 10).
- C. The mistake people make is assuming that disasters and their attendant suffering are not necessarily the result of sin. Sometimes God punished people with catastrophe, but often catastrophes were simply part of the natural cycles of the earth (Ecclesiastes 9:11).
  - 1. The murder of Galileans by Pilate and the people killed when the tower of Siloam fell were not caused by their sins (Luke 13:1-5). These were simply events that happen, although tragically, in the affairs of humans.
  - 2. The disciples asked Jesus whose sin was the cause of a man being born blind, the man or his parents (John 9:2-3).

## **II. Where Is God?**

- A. God is seen in every act of kindness shown by people towards other people.
  - 1. God's hand is plainly seen when people do what is recorded in the New Testament. The Weather Channel focused lengthy reports on how people in the flooded areas of Houston were going out of their way, often hazarding their own lives, for the well-being of complete strangers.
  - 2. Throughout this whole ordeal, people have pitched in to raise money, to deliver food, water, and clothing to people hundreds of miles from where they live — for complete strangers.
  - 3. People have driven many miles with tools, trailers, and muscles with the intention of helping people dry out and rebuild their homes.
  - 4. Jesus said to the righteous, in the judgment scene, that they were blessed because they showed Him compassion, mercy, and aid (Matthew 25:34-40).
  - 5. The account of the Good Samaritan shows how we ought to behave towards others (Luke 10:26-27). He took care of the needs of a man whom he did not know, and who could not take care of himself.
- B. God is seen in the fact that people helped one another without concern for ethnicity or political affiliation.

1. More reporting from the Weather Channel focused especially on how people of different races, beliefs, and social classes all were in this together and all helped each other.
  2. The Good Samaritan also shows us this principle in clear relief (Luke 10:31-33). The priest and the Levite could not be bothered to take care of anyone but themselves. However, the Samaritan man, a social pariah to the Jews, came to the Jewish man's aid, and provided all that the man needed.
  3. New Testament Christians are not the only ones practicing the mercy and compassion taught by God. Even people who do not profess any affiliation with the Lord show the effects of His teaching in their behavior toward their fellow man. Paul wrote of this phenomenon being observed among the Gentiles (Romans 2:14-15).
- C. God is seen in that people helped one another without any thought for whether or not they could be recompensed.
1. How many people handed complete strangers whatever money they had in their wallets? Or helped others by contributing to specific relief efforts (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-29)?
  2. J. J. Watt started a fundraiser in which he hoped to raise \$200,000, but he raised over \$37 million from over 200,000 contributors!
  3. The Good Samaritan gave the innkeeper two denarii and told him that when he returned, he would pay whatever costs were incurred by the innkeeper to take care of the man (Luke 10:35).
    - a) Do we have any evidence in any of this that the beaten man ever regained consciousness or knew who it was that took care of him?
    - b) The text does not say anything about the man's knowledge of what was happening to him (cp. Matthew 6:1-4). But the Samaritan did not care. He only wanted to do what was right toward this man.

### **III. Two More Thoughts That Deserve Mention**

- A. God is seen in the demonstration of the Bible truth that evil sometimes happens to good people.
1. The chief complaint that people have against God in times like these is that innocent people suffer.
  2. Jesus said that God makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45).
  3. One proof of this principle is that Job, a righteous man, suffered terribly (Job 1:8; 2:3; cp. 1:13-19).
    - a) Satan said that Job would not serve God when everything turned bad, but would only serve Him when good came along (Job 1:9-11).
    - b) When we give up or lose our faith in God when events like this occur, we show that Satan was right.
- B. God is seen in the reminder we have all witnessed of the day of judgment to come.
1. While all these natural occurrences are symbols of God's vengeance or wrath, it is true that these serve as a reminder of the judgment to come.

2. Peter spoke of those who deny the coming judgment of God, and he referred their memories to the flood of Noah (2 Peter 3:3-7). God will never again destroy the earth with water, but how can we not pause and remember Noah and ponder the power of God to keep His promise of final judgment? Because of this, we need to repent and live holy (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Peter 3:11-14).

**Conclusion.** It is a shame that whenever disasters strike, people suddenly forget that hard times come to everyone. Disasters strike and people are affected, not because God does not care, but because He designed a world that operates under natural laws, and those natural laws dictate that the planet experiences hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and wildfires regularly. However, God also made for us a home that is filled with goodness and beauty. Some of the greatest evidences of God's beauty have been on display throughout these few weeks of intense natural activities.