

*Why does God allow*  
NATURAL DISASTERS?

David Pawson



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## PREFACE

This book is based on a series of televised talks which I delivered following the Asian tsunami.

Originating as it does from the spoken word, its style will be found by many readers to be somewhat different from my usual written style. It is hoped that this will not detract from the substance of the biblical teaching found here.

As always, I ask the reader to compare everything I say or write with what is written in the Bible and, if at any point a conflict is found, always to rely upon the clear teaching of scripture.

*David Pawson*



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# 1

## IS GOD TO BLAME?

There have been many major disasters, and they have often led to the question being asked, by the press and in many minds, ‘Where was God in this?’ So I have addressed that question, which arose most widely at the time of the Asian tsunami and after the 9/11 disaster, when the Twin Towers of New York were destroyed.

What a difference there was between the two events! The tsunami (which I call ‘26/12’) was by far the more destructive disaster, killing fifty times as many people as 9/11, damaging far more property and directly affecting many nations. But the biggest difference between the two tragedies was that the tsunami was not caused by human beings, whereas 9/11 was directly caused by people. So the tsunami was what the insurance companies call an ‘act of God’. I am not sure that that means a lot these days, except that it is something we cannot insure against because it has no human cause. The expression ‘act of God’ seems to be to most people as meaningless as swearing on a Bible in a

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court of law that you will tell the truth. These are among the vestiges of our godly past.

\* \* \* \* \*

Initially we will focus on the Asian tsunami, but many of our observations will be seen to apply equally to other kinds of natural disaster.

Nowadays we witness such events on television. As we see them happen, so their horror quickly comes home to us and we are made aware of the human needs that are waiting to be met following the catastrophic event.

First there are great physical requirements. There is need for medical aid to the wounded, for burial of the dead, for food, water and shelter. There was an outpouring of aid from the whole world into the Indian Ocean area where the tsunami took place. But those physical needs very quickly give way to emotional needs. There is the shock and trauma. Counsellors were needed for those who are suffering from what was, quite literally, a shock wave. After that shock starts to subside, the next emotion to be dealt with is grief. At such times we feel very deeply for those who lose loved ones and those who are waiting for news of their families. I am then reminded of the times in World War Two when somebody would bring a telegram which said 'Missing in action'. Often the people concerned would never find out what had actually taken place. This happened to my cousin. She escaped with her two sons from Malaya when the Japanese came in. But for years she did not know what happened to her husband. She did not know whether she

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was a widow. For years she had to live with this ignorance, which was even harder to bear than would have been the case had she been told then (as she later discovered) that her husband had been killed by the Japanese.

So after shock comes sorrow and grief —and then anger. After every disaster there is anger. People look for a scapegoat, someone to blame, on whom they can vent their anger. That anger needs to be dealt with. In the case of a natural disaster, of course, the ‘scapegoat’ is often God himself. I heard many people blaming God for the tsunami. They cannot blame any human being. They blamed the then Prime Minister for not breaking his holiday and coming back to take charge of the situation. But they knew full well that there was no human being to blame for the event itself. So God became their scapegoat.

After every disaster, people are either drawn nearer to God or driven further from him. One or the other is bound to happen to all of us, even if we were not personally involved. So there is a third need. There are the physical needs, such as food, water, medicine and shelter; there are the emotional needs, which arise from shock, grief and anger. But then we come to what I want to call the intellectual needs. There is a need in every human being to make sense of what happens, to ask deeper questions, and we move from the first and second needs into the third as people ask these big questions: How did this come to happen? What caused it?

Naturally, there is a scientific answer to this, so we know what happened. We know that two tectonic plates rubbed against each other, got caught, and the movement

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stopped for a bit and then suddenly was released. The energy released was so enormous that it sent a gigantic wave around the whole Indian Ocean. Do you know that it even wobbled planet earth two inches on its axis? So the whole earth moved. It was a gigantic thing. But we know how it happened. And of course the reason for asking the question ‘how did it happen?’ is so that in future we may avoid it, or escape it, or at the very least have a warning. The sad thing is that the Pacific Ocean has such a warning system about tsunamis, but the Indian Ocean (being in a poorer part of the world and farther from America) did not have that. That is the first kind of question that the intellect needs to ask and answer.

But there is an even more important question that many people’s minds grapple with, and need to be satisfied about, and that is: ‘Why?’ —not just ‘How did this happen?’, but, ‘Why did it happen?’ We need to find a ‘reason’ for it because the thing we cannot cope with is senseless suffering — wasted suffering; wasted life; wasted property. So we want to know whether there is any reason behind it. Is there any sense in it? Or do we have to live with something that has no reason at all and which therefore leaves us suspended in our mental questions? In the aftermath of any disaster it may seem to be heartless to discuss such objective questions. Nevertheless, I believe it is necessary, if only for the reason that God is being blamed. I want to defend the truth about God. I believe in him. I trust him. And I believe a lot of blame is wrongly attached to God in this kind of situation.