

Never Assume You Can Explain A Tragedy

A few years ago, I watched a television preacher attempt to explain why an airplane had crashed, killing the crew and its passengers. It was his opinion that either none of the people on that plane said their morning prayers or none of them prayed for the safety of their flight. I waited momentarily for him to qualify his remarks, but he added no stipulation. The preacher never claimed that the people aboard the plane were sinners, but he insinuated that not all was right between them and God.

There is a Biblical basis, of course, to place responsibility for tragedy on moral transgressions. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins. It was man's wickedness and evil that prompted the great Noachic Flood. God even rose up Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, who conquered Judah, sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and enslaved the people. This was punishment for corruption and idol worshipping.

Tragedies that are Biblical in size are difficult to explain. The devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 claimed the lives of an astounding 250,000 to 300,000 people in various countries. The tragic 2010 earthquake in Haiti took tens of thousands of lives. Thousands more were killed in the monstrous 2011 Japanese tsunami, which included a disastrous nuclear meltdown.

Sometimes personal tragedies are the result of people's reprehensible conduct. One example would be a drunk driver losing control of his car, crashing into another vehicle, and killing innocent people.

But all tragedies are not so easily explained. How do we rationalize the baby born with severe birth defects or the child courageously battling cancer? Surely their condition was not due to sin.

Do we just accept some Biblical principle that the victims, their families, or entire societies deserve to die because they are evil? Perhaps there is more than one Biblical principle.

In John 9, the disciples asked Jesus whose sin caused a man to become blind. Jesus replied that the man was not blind because of any sin, but rather to be healed by Jesus. Like most people, the disciples tried to make sense of a tragic situation. Instinctively, they assumed there was a logical cause of blindness. Jesus gave them the reason, but it was one that no one expected.

The book of Job is the Bible's best attempt to explain why horrible things happen to seemingly innocent people. Job was a godly, righteous

man and was considered blessed and prosperous. Yet, his life descended into virtual destruction, simply because God allowed Satan to afflict him with a series of horrific trials.

Throughout the poetic dialog, God explained many things to Job, but He never revealed the source of Job's suffering. Like Job, we may never know the source of tragedy.

It is easy to pretend that we know why tragedies occur. Many blame Adam and Eve, whose sin allowed death and suffering to enter Eden. Some claim that since we are all sinners and fall short of perfection, we deserve some type of punishment here on Earth.

Interestingly, Christians believe that Jesus lived a lifetime without sin – original or otherwise. Yet He too endured much suffering. Others believe that Satan has dominion over the world, so it would only make sense that the righteous would suffer while the sinful prosper.

Neither Job nor the blind man met with misfortune because of divine punishment. However, we know this only because the Bible revealed the true reasons for their suffering.

We will never know if the passengers on an ill-fated airplane flight said their morning prayers or prayed for their flight that day. Consequently, it would be wiser to give those departed souls and their families the benefit of the doubt and acknowledge the limits of our understanding.

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