

# ***Making Sense of the Tsunami Disaster***

**Biblical Answers to One of the World's  
Greatest Catastrophes**

**Jonathan James**



**Asia Evangelistic Fellowship International**

## ***MAKING SENSE OF THE TSUNAMI DISASTER***

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## INTRODUCTION

How can we respond to the devastation of precious lives, homes, infrastructure and villages caused by the recent mega-thrust earthquake and Tsunami in Sendai, Japan's eastern coast? The earthquake triggered Tsunami warnings in several countries including the Pacific Coast of North and South America. This tsunami is quite unprecedented in that the natural disaster has also sparked a human-made disaster as the reactors at the aging Fukushima nuclear power plant continue to deteriorate in the wake of the massive earthquake and tsunami.

In 2004, the impact of the undersea earthquake in Indonesia was felt in 11 countries spanning two continents. Scientists say that it even caused the earth's axis to shift and coastlines are believed to have moved as much as 20 metres (65 feet).

What is even more amazing is that approximately 2,600 years ago the prophet Isaiah gave this remarkable prophecy from God: "*Therefore I will shake the heavens and **the earth will move out of her place**, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts....*" (Isa.13:13, NKJ). Even if this prophecy is not directly related to what has just taken place it is startling and sufficient to shake us out of our complacency and apathy. Could it be that we are experiencing the beginning of God's prophetic timetable?

How do we respond to the fact that more than countless lives have so far lost their lives in all of this?

We can either respond in a human and fleshly way or we can respond in a spiritual and biblical way. God reminds us in Scripture:

*"...For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways..."* (Isa. 55:8).

Job the esteemed man of God suffered a series of terrible and tragic losses in his life and yet he was able to declare:

*"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord"* (Job 1:21).

## SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Here are seven biblical principles and guidelines to help us come to terms with the Tsunami catastrophe. Only God's eternal word can give us lasting hope, relief and wisdom so we can make sense of the events of these tumultuous times.

### 1. **The Effects of Sin in this World**

God created a perfect world and everything was pronounced “*good*” (Gen. 1:31). Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment and sin entered the world.

What is sin? Sin is a violation of God's holy and just laws resulting in a broken relationship between the creature and the Creator. David recognised this when he said to God: “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.....*” (Psalm 51:4 NIV).

Ultimately sin is the condition when I make myself equivalent to God. I reject the true God so I can worship my own ideas of what is right and what is good for me and others. When I do this then “*Self*” has become my god.

The Bible teaches us that every person is born into the world in a spiritual condition of sinfulness “*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23). We have inherited Adam and Eve's sinful nature in our rebellion against God.

Sin caused a four-fold alienation – man was separated from God (spiritual alienation), from himself (psychological alienation), from his fellow man (social alienation), and from nature (environmental alienation). This four-fold alienation explains the condition of our world today. All the problems in the world today are a result of the sinful condition of man.

No wonder Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus (John 11:35) and the Bible talks of creation groaning for it is under the corrupting influence of sin (Rom 8:21-22).

This groaning will continue until the “*new heaven and new earth*” are established in God's coming Kingdom (Rev 21:1). We live in a transient world and this world will ultimately give way to God's eternal Kingdom.

So in a real sense, sin is running its course here on earth and death by any means, including death caused by the recent Tsunami catastrophe points to this awful reality of the effects of sin in our world.

## 2. Death is one of the Effects of Sin

*“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...”*

(Rom 5:12)

Sin has brought about physical death. Hundreds and thousands of people die everyday from various causes: disease, old age, accidents, suicide, disasters and calamities such as the undersea earthquake and resulting Tsunami.

We need to stand back and take a look at the bigger picture. All death, regardless of the causes is **not** natural or fair. This is not the way God intended it to be. Let us not blame God for death and suffering. Death and suffering are the direct result of sin and sin is nothing less than humanity’s rebellion against our Creator – God.

## 3. The Sovereignty of God

The Bible presents God as both Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe:

*“...He who is the blessed and **only Sovereign**, the King of Kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality...”*

(1 Tim 6:15-16)

*“For by Him **all things were created**....all things have been created by Him and for Him... and in Him **all things hold together.**”*

(Col.1:16-17)

*“He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters; He makes the clouds His Chariot; He walks upon the wings of the wind; He makes the winds His messengers, flaming fire His ministers....”*

(Ps. 104:3 -4)

Jesus spoke of God’s total knowledge and power when He said:

*“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”*

(Matt. 10:29)

We are told in the Scriptures that when Jesus was in a boat with his disciples, a fierce gale of wind descended upon them and Jesus *“rebuked the wind and the surging waves and they stopped...”*

(Lk. 8:24)

God is not helpless and impotent in the realm of the natural as in all other realms.

God is continually communicating to us through His works:

*“The heavens are telling of the glory of God.....day to day pours forth speech”* (Ps.19 1-2)

*“The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; The God of Glory thunders.....The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness....”* (Ps.29:3, 7-8).

He speaks to us when He provides for us and He speaks to us when He withholds from us:

*“They all wait for Thee, to give them their food in due season. Thou dost give them, they gather it up; Thou dost open Thy hand, they are satisfied with good. Thou dost hide Thy face, they are dismayed....”* (Ps. 104: 27-29).

God could have stopped the Tsunami devastation but he has obviously allowed it for a **purpose**.

It is sometimes the sovereign and holy pleasure of God to visit the world with His wrath so as to prevent the hardening of our hearts which may then give rise to greater sin on our part and even greater judgements from God.

*“The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice”*

(Ps. 97:1)

*“Come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God...**Today if you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...**”*

(Ps. 95:6-8)

#### **4. The Wisdom and Goodness of God**

God is too wise to make a mistake and He is too righteous to do anything that is even remotely unfair. The Psalmist declares:

*“As for God His way is blameless (or perfect)”*

(Ps. 18:30)

*“The judgements of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether”*

(Ps. 19:9)

*“For there is no partiality with God”* (Rom.2:11).

When we are faced with disasters such as the Tsunami, some people may wonder why certain individuals died while others were spared. A natural disaster such as the Tsunami, even if used by God as a tool of His wrath does

not always imply a one-to-one correspondence between the sin of those who died and the judgement of God.

In Jesus' day the Tower of Siloam collapsed killing 18 people. Jesus categorically pointed out that those who died in that disaster were **not** "*more sinful*" than those who were spared. (Lk. 13:4-5).

Jesus however, implied that the disaster was a sign post to point the ones who were spared towards repentance to God.

We do not understand the mysteries of God's ways. There was a larger purpose behind the suffering of Job in the Old Testament. There was a larger purpose behind the suffering and death of Lazarus in the time of Christ...

*"...this sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God..."*  
(John 11:4)

There was a larger, eternal, and glorious purpose for the torture, suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ some two thousand years ago.

And so, there must be a larger purpose for the recent devastation along the coast of eastern Japan. Let God be God in this situation and let us worship Him for His wisdom and goodness even though we do not have all the answers now.

*"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*  
(Rom 8:28)

*"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne"*  
(Ps.97:2)

## **5. The Merciful Judgement of God**

Our view of God is often times distorted, deficient and one-sided. The Bible teaches us that God's love and God's wrath are two sides of the same coin. "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8) and yet "*...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...*" (Rom 1:18).

The Bible shows us several facets of God's wrath. **Firstly** God's wrath is **not** like human anger which is touchy, petty and self-indulgent. God's anger is a settled indignation against the deliberate disobedience of mankind. If we understand the absolute holiness of God we would realise that it is impossible for God's nature (holiness) to tolerate even the slightest sin.

**Secondly**, God's wrath is holy and righteous. Therefore His wrath is always justified "*...And we know that the judgement of God **rightly falls** upon those who practice such things*" (Rom.2:2).

**Thirdly**, His wrath is intense and terrifying. In the book of Nahum Chapter 1 vs. 5-6 we are asked. “*Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger?*” The root word for ‘wrath’ here is to ‘cross over’ from one side to the other. In other words God is primarily a God of mercy but when certain sinful conditions prevail He **crosses over** in attitude and activity from tenderness and mercy to wrath and punishment.

**Fourthly**, God is slow to anger. Psalm 86:15 says “*But you O Lord are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...*” The Bible talks of God restraining His anger and not pouring out the fullness of His wrath on mankind (Ps 78). If we should experience the wrath of God today it would be His wrath mingled with His mercy.

After the devastating destruction and the terrible loss of Jerusalem around 560 BC the writer of Lamentations declares the message of God’s mercy and hope:

*“The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness....”* (Lam. 3:22-23).

**Fifthly**, God’s wrath is corrective and disciplinary in nature. He displays His wrath to prevent us from greater judgement and suffering. The Bible says in a reference to believers “*but when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world*” (1 Cor. 11:32). He waits for us to repent and when we do, His wrath is neutralised.

Someone likened God’s wrath to a dam that is building up with water. Every sin against the Holy God adds more water in the dam of God’s wrath. One day the dam will burst violently and unleash its waters. That is exactly what happened two thousand years ago. God’s wrath against the accumulated sin of the world was unleashed on Jesus Christ when he, the sinless one died for the sins of the world. This was God’s ingenious way of dealing with the problem of human sin.

Today if you confess your sins and graciously accept Christ’s work on the cross and enthrone Him as your Lord and Saviour you will be saved from the coming judgement – eternal separation from God in hell.

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him **should not perish** but have eternal life”*

(John 3:16)

## **6. The Coming Judgement**

The Bible strongly warns us of the final judgement to come. This judgement is reserved for those who reject Christ and continue in their wilful disobedience. The graphic descriptions of this coming judgement make the Tsunami catastrophe tame by comparison.

*“But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men....the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up...”*

(2 Pet 3:7, 10)

The Prophet Isaiah tells us of the horrifying effects of the end time judgement: *“They shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty When He arises to shake the earth mightily”* (Isa. 2:19 NKJ).

The Book of Revelation in the New Testament describes in several chapters, this gruesome final judgement as that which is poured out in three sets of seven judgements each increasing in intensity (Revelation 6-11).

God has made a way for us to escape the eternal condemnation and destruction that awaits the world. All we have to do is to humbly confess our sins and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the glorious message of the Gospel.

One of the most heart warming stories coming out of the 2004 Tsunami disaster is the account of an English family holidaying in Phuket, Thailand with their young daughter Tilly. *“The West Australian”*, a Perth newspaper reported that Tilly had studied Tsunamis in her geography class at school back home. While Tilly was on the beach in Thailand on Boxing Day She saw all the signs of an imminent Tsunami—the tide had rushed out rapidly to the sea in a most unusual way. While the other tourists looked at the sea momentarily and then continued their activities, Tilly yelled out to her Mum and Dad that a Tsunami was about to hit them. Her parents listened to her and alerted the other holiday makers and the resort staff. Minutes later giant killer waves hit the beach sweeping everything away. Thankfully no one was killed at that resort only because a young girl read the signs and immediately warned people around her.

Jesus says *“even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at your door”* (Matt. 24:33). Jesus is referring here to the signs leading up to His second coming.

The crucial question is: **Will you read the signs and turn to Christ for ultimate refuge?**

According to God’s Word we can expect catastrophes such as the Tsunami to increase in number as we approach God’s prophetic timetable but as Christians, our hope and shelter is in Jesus Christ.

*“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.”*

(Nahum 1:7 NKJ)

Jesus warns us:

*“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at **the roaring of the sea and the waves**, men fainting from fear...But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and **lift your heads because your redemption is drawing near.**”*

(Lk 21:25-28)

So, as believers when these things take place we need to be all the more encouraged because God is about to usher in His eternal Kingdom – a Kingdom in which *“there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”*

(Rev 21:4)

This is the ultimate hope of all true believers in Christ – that we will be with the LORD and God Himself will commune with us in the beauty of His holiness for all eternity in the glorious perfection of heaven.

## **7. We Have Been Spared!**

While in our humanness we may ask God: “Why did countless people die such a horrific death?” But the real question should be: “God, why did you spare me?” We could have easily been one of the statistics on a list of those dead or missing.

In His mercy and grace, He has spared us for one or more of these reasons:

- So that we can come to Him in humility, seek His forgiveness and give our lives over to His Lordship. God’s goodness should lead us to repentance “...*Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*” (Rom. 2:4).
  
- So we can return to Him and confess our sins as we may have wandered away from Him. Our love may have grown cold towards the Lord.

- So we can press on in our Christian walk – to please Him and serve Him more faithfully than ever before. He still has unfinished tasks for us to complete.

We who are spared need to reach out in compassionate love to those who have suffered untold loss. More importantly as Christians we need to be faithful in sharing God's eternal word to people everywhere. Paul the Apostle says *"Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men...we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:11, 22). It is the acceptance of God's word and the Lord Jesus Christ that will save people from eternal hell and destruction. Let us be faithful to share His word and prayerfully persuade people to turn to Christ before it is too late.*

*"...Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved..."*

(Acts 16:31)

*"Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD; And He will have compassion on him"*

(Isa 55:6-7)

*"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honours me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God"*

(Ps. 50:23)

*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"*

(Phil. 4:6)

*"The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble. And those who know your name will put their trust in you..."*

(Ps. 9: 9-10)

**RETURN TO HIM**

**REPENT**

**FOLLOW HIM**

**SHARE HIS WORD**

## ***RESPONSE FORM***

- I have prayed the prayer to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour and receive eternal life through Him. Please send me follow up materials.
- Please send me information on other resources (Books, CD's, etc.) published by AEF International.
- Please send me information on AEF's weekly English Radio Programme "*Destiny*" on the HCJB network (**For residents in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia only**).
- Please send me information on how I can receive Destiny Newsletter, a tabloid publication of testimonies and helpful articles (**For residents in India only**).

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**JONATHAN JAMES**

As people search for answers after a series of great calamities all over the world, Jonathan James, the International Director of Asia Evangelistic Fellowship shares seven amazing principles from the Bible to help us come to terms with the recent devastating earthquake and Tsunami that hit Japan in 2011. This little booklet will challenge and expand your views about God and give you eternal hope and comfort during these uncertain days.



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