



Monthly Newsletter

# Reasons To Believe

Austin, Tx Network



Feb. 3, 2010

Volume 3 Issue 1

Contact us at  
Austin@reasons.org

### Special points of interest:

- Next meeting: Sat. Feb.13 Hill Country Bible Church, NW (see map on page 4)
- See Meeting agenda on page 4

### In this issue:

- Where was God in Haiti (page 1)
- About our next speaker (page 4)

## Where was God in Haiti?

Editor's Note: These are summaries and excerpts from a recent exchange of emails among RTB volunteer apologists on God's role in the most recent manifestation of large scale natural evil, the earthquake in Haiti. The first entry below is a request from a pastor and RTB volunteer apologist in Canada for help with his preparation for a sermon to his church on this issue.

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### Request for help with a sermon

Jan. 20, 2010: *I have been asked to speak to*

*our congregation this Sunday on the subject and I was wondering if anyone could point me toward some resources that combine some science with some theology. For example, we know that God designed the earth to have plate tectonics and that radioactivity is vital to life on planet earth. We also know that this means that earthquakes will occur.*

*I am interested in any helpful comments or resources (or both) that would help me to link the science, God's purpose in plate tectonics and*

*such, and how this can be related to the philosophical/theological questions which arise in the case of tragic disasters such as we are all seeing in Haiti.*

.....

### Responses to the request

Later that day a responder suggested that God might not be totally responsible since people are responsible for the shoddy construction that exacerbated the tragedy.

Shortly afterward, a second responder

## Coordinator's Corner—Bob Davis

One of the benefits of being a volunteer apologist for RTB is the opportunity to exchange views with fellow Christians around the world who are also RTB volunteer apologists.

When a pastor asked for help on a sermon he was preparing about *Where was God in Haiti?*, he got some excellent responses that I have shared with you (in summary fashion)

starting on this page.

One of the hardest tasks for an apologist is to provide a satisfying response to the question: where was God when a particular personal or national disaster strikes—be it from human evil or nature.

Our speaker for the February meeting (Sat., Feb 13) will be John Murphy of

Georgetown who will address a similar topic dealing with death and suffering before the Fall. (See page 4).

One of the qualifications for becoming a volunteer apologist is to prepare and present before a live audience an apologetic talk. This is John's presentation as part of this training.

Come be his live audience!

## Where was God in Haiti?

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brought up the point that “human suffering deepens victims’ dependence on God and elicits a compassionate response” from others, thus both “victim and the aid worker experience complementary elements of God’s love and character.”

The next day a nurse from Chicago says, “I can assure you that death sustains life and pain enhances the quality of life”. She attached a file containing an outstanding illustrated presentation on the topic which she had prepared. You can download it at [www.puzzleofpain.com/the\\_puzzleofpain.pdf](http://www.puzzleofpain.com/the_puzzleofpain.pdf). It is a simply written, beautifully illustrated, response to the problem of evil and suffering that departs somewhat from the usual apologetic responses to the problem of evil.

Other responders provided links to material they had prepared or found useful. One that relies heavily on science is [www.godandscience.org/ppt/natural\\_evil.ppt](http://www.godandscience.org/ppt/natural_evil.ppt).

A missionary from Japan submitted the sermon text he had prepared on the topic. His point of reference was the earthquake that had hit Kobe in 1995. You can read it at [www.konkyo.org/English/WhyDoBadThingsHappenToGoodPeople?](http://www.konkyo.org/English/WhyDoBadThingsHappenToGoodPeople?) This sermon tackles the problem in a more familiar way which is to confront the problem of evil which the

missionary frames as “either God is good and cannot do anything about these apparent injustices, in which case he is not all-powerful, or, on the other hand, he can control these things but chooses not to, which would thus seem to make the idea that ‘God is good’ an outright lie.”

The missionary addresses the



### Where is God amidst the rubble and stench of death and sounds of sorrow?

dilemma through an imaginary discussion among a variety of biblical characters. The “discussion” ends up with a majority report and a minority report with the missionary opting for the minority report. This, too, is an excellent read.

Several responders noted that moral evil (e.g., Sept. 11, 2001) is different from the natural evil of tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes.

### The Sermon

Finally, the Canadian pastor who started the series with his request, provided the notes for his sermon and added that “This is why I love RTB...so many people all over the world with so many resources they are willing to share.”

He then shared his sermon

text. After some introductory remarks, he offers up seven common responses to the question “Where was God in Haiti?”

After a survey of scriptures dealing with punishment and calamity, he revisits the seven common responses to the question and provides his own comments on these responses. These seven common responses and his reflections on them are presented on the following page.

## Seven Possible Responses to “Where was God in Haiti?”

### 1. It was punishment for a specific sin of some sort on a national or regional level.

Scripture does occasionally link calamity as a response to a nation whose people have rebelled against God in some way. However, in most cases the nation is either Israel or nations directly involved with Israel’s well-being. We must be very careful about extrapolating this to any or all the nations on the earth. If we do, then we must be entirely consistent.

When the tsunami hit, some suggested that Thailand was being judged for its sex trade that has brought much evil and suffering into the world. Well, if so, then He should have judged most of the Western world since that’s where most of the customers come from.

In this most recent event a number of Christian voices have called attention to the fact that the President of Haiti declared voodoo to be the national religion. Such comments are at best very bad timing and extremely insensitive and at worst guilty of the deepest form of pride. What’s worse? ...a society where voodoo is the national religion and 250,000 people die in an earthquake or a society where secular humanism is the national religion and 3700 unborn children are

murdered every single day by abortion (over 1.3 million every year....for over 35 years....). Why wasn’t Nazi Germany engulfed in the worst natural disaster of all time? I have no doubt that there are spiritual consequences to having voodoo as a national religion, but we must be careful if we are to link this to a natural disaster. But let’s not forget, one day God will judge EVERY nation.

### 2. It is part of a Creation damaged by the Fall, an amoral randomness effect of the “sin of Adam”

The degree to which creation was affected by the rebellion of Adam and Eve is actually not clear from scripture. We saw in Romans that Creation will one day be set free from its “slavery to corruption”. This is a reference to the fact that this creation was not God’s final creation.

The tendency of our universe and world to move from order to disorder has been around since long before the Fall. It is one of the physical laws God designed, commonly known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and is essential for life. Regardless of the influence of the Fall on creation, Scripture never attributes specific natural disasters to a random effect of the “sin of Adam”.

That would be to take Creation out from God’s direct control and have it entirely controlled by random glitches. In addition, many natural events are part of how God designed our planet and they can be shown to be necessary for life. Lightning, fires, floods, etc. are actually necessary for life on

planet earth. For those who are interested I have a full scientific presentation on this particular subject... but for another time.

### 3. Personal retribution - each individual person who died was killed for his or her own sin in a highly selective and personal way.

This is simply not logical. Many Christians and young children died in this earthquake. Many were saved, some miraculously from reports now coming out. We may never understand this aspect. Part of this thinking is rooted in Eastern thought where you acquire higher and higher levels of perfection through reincarnation depending on what you did in the current life.

### 4. There is no moral explanation, God wound up the world like a watch and let it run, this disaster is just a bit of grit in the mechanism.

This is Deism and is not Biblical. God, as we’ve seen, is ultimately in control. He may allow the world to just tick away sometimes, and other times He directly intervenes. The other extreme is a hyper-Calvinistic view that every single event, down to molecular motion, is directly determined by God. In this case, free-will choices are an illusion. The Bible is plain on this point. God is grieved by sin and selfishness. It is not His will.

### 5. It was prophesied – as part of the end-time judgments on a wicked humanity and a preparation for the return of Jesus—an evangelistic wake-up call to get them to repent and listen to God and stop chasing money, sex, idols, etc.

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## John Murphy to speak on “Death before the Fall” this Saturday

John Murphy, who frequently attends our monthly meetings with his wife, Lacy, will address the following questions in his talk on Saturday:

- What was the nature of creation before the Fall?
- Was there pain, death and suffering before the sin of Adam?
- What does the Bible specifically have to say on the matter?
- We are told that creation was cursed after the Fall, but what specifically does that mean?
- Was Eden the name for a specific location or for all of creation?
- Were man and the animals all originally vegetarians?

- Were the laws of physics as we know them affected or changed after the Fall?

John is the son of a retired Baptist minister who has had a “minor interest” in apologetics for the past 25 years, with increasing interest over the past ten years as he converted from a young earth perspective to an old earth creationist.

The Murphys live in Georgetown, attend Main Street Baptist Church. John has owned Murphy Acquisitions, Inc. which specializes in the sale of Beechcraft King Air corporate turboprops.

We hope to have the Murphys’ 16 year old daughter be part of a teen-age teaching team to make a presentation to our group on logic and apologetics later this year.

## *The Vibrant Dance of Faith and Science*

**October 26-28, 2010.**

Hill Country Institute for Contemporary Christianity will sponsor a three-day conference on faith and science issues for pastors, non-scientist church leaders, and scientists, addressing:

- understanding of current scientific issues;
- the nature of scientific inquiry and the limits of science;
- responding to the misuse of science to further naturalistic beliefs;
- the nurture and care of the scientific person; and
- engaging and transforming the culture in science and faith matters.

Call Larry Linenschmidt at 512 680-7993 for more details. ([www.HillCountryInstitute.org](http://www.HillCountryInstitute.org))



## AGENDA for RTB Austin Network Meeting February 13, 2010 10am

- Prayer and introductions of visitors
- Update on initiatives:
  - Faith and Science Symposium (Larry Linenschmidt)
  - ASA convention youth scholarships (John Weber)
  - Chapter organizational meeting (Steve Stock and Bob Davis)
  - Other??
- Presentation (John Murphy)
- Open discussions

Jesus tells us that we are to look on such disasters and repent but that is not the reason for the disaster, just a wise response to it. The end-times argument cannot stand on its own as it has been used for two thousand years to explain every disaster. Jesus said, these are just the beginning of the end. But what about our response to disaster. More on this later.



**6. It was not God but Satan that caused the earthquake and tsunami (or other natural disaster) because Satan loves to steal, kill and destroy.**

Satan does seem to have some limited ability to affect the world but he is never attributed to any major disaster in the Bible. Even if he is responsible, God would have to allow it. No, Satan's strategy is to attack the heart of human beings through the mind. Should it surprise us therefore that that is God's focus too? Will we choose faith or fear? It was the accumulated result of human folly – no warning systems, building too close to the water, causing climate change etc.

**7. Human folly may be a contributory factor but it is not a primary factor. In the case of earthquakes in particular, an obvious question we need to ask is, "Given what we**

**know about plate tectonics and earthquake zones...why do people insist on living right on top of them...California, Tokyo, etc."**

We can theorize, argue, debate, and discuss these issues at great length, and indeed, the Church must not run from honest philosophical and theological debate. But at the end of the day we must face one inexorable conclusion:

**God is God and we are not!!**

God is the potter, we are the clay, He can create us and He can destroy us. We are to humbly trust Him. We do not know our times. Our times are in his hand. And that Hand is a hand of love...not an arbitrary cruel ruler meting out a tornado here, an earthquake there....In many ways, Eastern religions have much less of a problem with disaster than the Judeo-Christian perspective. Why? Because in Eastern thought the god(s) are infinite but impersonal and so we are just pawns in the game. But the Bible tells us that He is both Infinite and Personal. That's why we care deeply about the why at times like these. We know He is personal because He came and suffered and died for this world. For God so loved the world that He gave....

The Bible is clear that the greatest disorder in the universe is not natural disasters or calamity on the earth but rather the rebellion of the heart of every human being against his or her Creator. We all deserve death. We will all die. We have all sinned. There is more moral

evil in one human heart proudly declaring that they will not bow the knee before God than in all the calamities we have seen or will ever see.

**So where is God when disaster strikes?**

He is actively involved and was so before the disaster actually struck. He is on the move. He is doing and has done some miraculous interventions already.

Why is it that in every disaster the first responders are the Christians already on the ground in the midst of chaos? In the recent earthquake we have seen video footage of gangs roaming the streets looting and pillaging an already traumatized society. And we've seen scenes of Christians praying and worshipping God after everything in their lives have been stripped away. Christian aid agencies, motivated by the love of Christ, not just human love, seem to arrive on the scene so fast that it appears that some supernatural force was compelling them....;)

They worship, they comfort, and they bring hope to those suffering around them, including the gangs. Christians and non-Christians alike are obviously touched by these events. As nice as it is to have benefit concerts and raise lots of money (yes, lots of money is needed), it is really only Christians who can give an answer for why they have hope in the midst of disaster.