

# Why God Hates Haiti

The frustrating Christian Evangelist theology of suffering.

By [Lisa Miller](#) | NEWSWEEK

Haiti is surely a Job among nations. It is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere: half its population lives on less than a dollar a day. With 98 percent of its forests felled and burned for firewood, Haiti is uniquely vulnerable to flooding from hurricanes. In 2008 four storms in as many weeks left a million homeless. Haiti has an infant-mortality rate worse than that of many African nations, and its people are plagued by disease: diarrhea, hepatitis, typhoid fever, dengue fever, malaria, and leptospirosis are rampant there. This litany doesn't even touch on Haiti's disastrous political history, most notably the reign of François (Papa Doc) Duvalier, who assassinated and tortured more than 30,000 in the 1960s.

Now, with as many as 100,000 dead in last week's earthquake, a sensible person of faith has to grapple with the problem of what scholars call theodicy. If God is good and intervenes in the world, then why does he make innocents suffer? Why, as Job might have said, would God "crush an impoverished people with a tempest and multiply their wounds without cause? He will not let them get their breath."

For Pat Robertson, the Christian TV evangelist, the answer is simple: it's the Haitians' own fault, presumably for practicing voodoo. On the Christian Broadcasting Network last week, Robertson alluded to events leading up to the Haitian Revolution of 1791, history's rare successful slave revolt. On the eve of the revolt, insurgents gathered in a forest called the Bois Caiman to swear a blood oath. "The wind was wailing," reads a passage from *Revolutionary Freedoms*, a history of the Haitian people. "Heavy drops of rain were falling from a dark and cloudy sky on the ragged leaves of the trees, on the group of men dancing slowly to the sounds of Vodou drum beats." Haitians cherish the story of the Bois Caiman as part of their liberation. Today, nearly all Haitians are Christian; about half also practice voodoo, an adaptation of their African ancestors' native religion.

In his narrow, malicious way, Robertson is making a First Commandment argument: when the God of Israel thunders from his mountain top that "you shall have no other

gods before me," he means it. This God rains down disaster—floods and so forth—on those who disobey.

But Robertson's is a fundamentalist view. It's so unkind and self-righteous—and deaf, dumb, and blind to centuries of theological discourse on suffering by thinkers from Augustine to Elie Wiesel—that one might easily call it backward. Every Western religious tradition teaches that mortals have no way of counting or weighing another's sin. "If that happened to the Haitians because they're so sinful, then why hasn't it happened to him?" retorts Bart Ehrman, a Bible scholar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"I think," adds Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, "that it's supreme hubris to think you can read God's mind."

Over the next weeks, sensible clerics will struggle with what to say. "The really smart ones," says Ehrman, "will be saying that God is mysterious and we can't explain everything." Others will teach that the earthquake is the work of the Devil or that believers can find blessings in the calamity, for in heaven the dead will finally find tranquility and repose. As a Roman Catholic blogger wrote last week, "This world is not all there is."

Rabbi Kushner teaches that natural disasters are somehow outside the purview of a loving God. In the face of unjust and inexplicable suffering, then, the responsibility of the faithful is to remain faithful—and to help relieve suffering. "The will of God," says Kushner, "is not to send us the disaster, but to send us the disaster to overcome." This, incidentally, is where the majority of scholars end up on Job. "There is a resolution to be found in the depth of a pious life lived before a mysterious God," reads the commentary in the New Oxford Annotated Bible.

Theodicy remains the most powerful tool in the atheist's kit, however, and many a believer has turned away from God over the suffering of innocents. Ehrman did. After a lifetime as a Christian, "I just got to a point where I couldn't explain how something like this could happen, if there's a powerful and loving God in charge of the world. It's a very old problem, and there are a lot of answers, but I don't think any of them work." Even so, we will continue to do *zedakah*—and to pray.

*With Johannah Cornblatt*

Find this article at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/231004>

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## Reply by : Naeem Syed

Dear Pastor

**Thanks for sending the Article of Newsweek, and other write up of yours, which I enjoy reading.**

I put forth some points from Islamic point of view with regard to the **Natural Calamities, Cause and Effect, suffering and Enjoyments** on this world. However, these should not be viewed negating your points, but only for a reading pleasure and better understanding **the Islamic concept**. I hope you will bear with me.

"No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourself but is inscribed in the Book of Decrees (Al-Lauh Al-Mahfuz), before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allah." (Al-Qur'aan : 57:22)

"And whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned. And He pardons much." (Al\_Qur'aan 42:30)

"And if Allah were to punish men for that which they earned, he would not leave a moving, (living) creature on the surface of the earth, but He gives them respite to an appointed term, and when their term comes, then verily, Allah is Ever AllSeer of His slaves. (Al-Qur'aan 35:45)

In the verse 57:22 Allah informs that the calamities either on earth or on anyone that are going to befall are already inscribed in the Book of Decrees (Al-Lauh Al-Mahfuz). But the calamity or misfortune that befalls on oneself is earned by him.

That is to say, the man himself earned any sort of misfortune for himself, and that is already recorded in the Book of Decrees, saying that so and so man will commit these sort of things and because of those foolish actions, these accidents will happen ... etc.) The recorded things will be brought into existence by Allah. It is easy for him. To understand this concept in other words, let us analyze :

Example of teacher predicting a student will fail: Suppose an experienced teacher, before the final examinations, predicts that a particular student will fail in the exams, since the student is very mischievous, not attentive in class and does not do his homework. If after the student appears for the examination, he fails, who is to be blamed for the student failing: the teacher or the student? Just because the

teacher predicted, it does not mean that the teacher is to be blamed but the student himself is responsible for his failure. Similarly Allah (swt) knows in advance that there are some people who are bent on rejecting the faith and Allah has put a seal on their hearts.

And He has created an effect for every cause. Most of the time the misfortune is self-earned by anyone, though the natural calamities, like earth-quack, floods etc. are the works of God. But Global Warming, Destruction of Forests etc. are the work of man, which will have a great effect on the nature, due to which, much damage has already been done by the man, to this world.

The question comes why do pain and sufferings exist in the world. We find sickness, old age and death. We see things that are ugly, people who are insane and foolish. There are storms, earthquakes, floods, draught and famine. We also see people commit sins, show disloyalty, unfaithfulness, greed and insincerity. We see people commit rapes, murders; they fight and make wars. We know all these and many more problems. There are evils caused by human beings and there are natural disasters. There are suffering for individuals and there are those that involve a large number of people.

But we also know that this is not the whole story. Besides all these negative things, we also see beauty, health, prosperity, life, birth, wisdom, intelligence, growth and progress. We also see goodness among people, faith, sincerity, charity, love and the spirit of sacrifice. We also see a lot of virtue and piety. It is wrong to see one side of the coin and not to see the other side. Any philosophy that concentrates on one aspect of the creation and denies or ignores the other side is partially true and partial truths are no truth at all.

It is also the fact that the element of good is more in the creation than the element of evil. We all see that there are more people who are healthy than those who are sick. There are more that eat well than those who starve.

There are more that lead decent life than those who commit crimes. Goodness is the rule and evil is the exception. Virtue is the norm and sin is the aberration. Generally trees bear fruits, the flowers bloom, the winds move smoothly.

### **But then the question is why does Allah allow these exceptions to the rules?**

Let us ask this question to understand Allah's ways in His creation. The Qur'an tells us that good, evil and whatever happens in this world happens by Allah's Will (mashi'at Allah). Only Allah knows fully His Will. We finite beings cannot grasp fully His infinite Will and Wisdom. He runs His universe the way He deems fit. The Qur'an tells us that Allah is Wise and everything that Allah does is right, just, good and fair. We must submit and surrender to His Will. The Qur'an has not given us all the details about Allah's Will, but it has enlightened us with the guidance that is useful

and sufficient for us. There are several points that we should keep in our mind to understand this issue:

1. First of all, Allah did not make this world a permanent world. This is a temporary world and everything here has a time limit. When its times comes it will die, come to an end and finish. Neither the good things of this world are forever, nor the bad things eternal. We are here for a short time and we are being tested. Those who will pass this test will find an eternal world that is perfect and permanent. Those who will fail this test shall see the evil consequences of their sins and corruption.

2. Allah has placed a physical law and a moral law in this universe. Allah allows suffering to occur when one or more of these laws are broken. The physical law is based on cause and effect. Sickness comes if one does not take care of one's health or is exposed to infections. A car accident occurs when one is not alert, or drives in a careless manner, or if the cars are not checked, roads and freeways are not made and kept in right shape, or the traffic laws are not right or not properly enforced. Study of causes and effects is very important to facilitate safeguards. Even here, we should keep in mind that Allah often saves us and He does not let us suffer from every negligence. How many times it happens that we are not careful and still we reach safely to our destinations. The way people drive in some cities, it is a miracle that more accidents do not happen and more people do not suffer. Allah says:

**“(Allah) Most Gracious! It is He Who has taught the Qur’an. He has created man: He has taught him speech (and Intelligence). The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed; and the herbs and the trees both (alike) bow in adoration. And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice), in order that you may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures.”** (Ar-Rahman:1-10)

The way we exceed the measures set by Allah and violate His laws of cause and effect is incredible. It is really the mercy of Allah that we are saved. Strictly speaking, the question should not be why does Allah allow suffering, but how much Allah protects us and saves us all the time in spite of our violations and negligence. The Qur’an says:

**“If Allah were to punish people according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back of the (earth) a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated Term: when their Term expires, verily Allah has in His sight all His servants.”** (Fatir:45)

But sometimes Allah does punish people because of their violations of His laws whether they are physical or moral. The Qur’an tells us that many nations and communities were destroyed because of their sinful lifestyles:

**"If they treat thy (mission) as false, so did the Peoples before them (with their Prophets), the People of Noah, and Ad and Thamud. Those of Abraham and Lut; and the Companions of the Madyan people; and Moses was rejected (in the same way). But I granted respite to the Unbelievers, and (only) after that did I punish them: but how (terrible) was My rejection (of them)! How many populations have We destroyed, which were given to wrong-doing! They tumbled down on their roofs. And how many wells are lying idle and neglected, and castles lofty and well-built?"**  
(Al-Hajj: 42-45)

3. Suffering can also be a test and trial for some people. Allah allows some people to suffer in order to test their patience and steadfastness. Even Allah's Prophets and Messengers were made to suffer. Prophet Ayyub is mentioned in the Qur'an as a Prophet who was very patient. Good people sometimes suffer but their sufferings heal others and bring goodness to their communities. People learn lessons from their good examples. Martyrs die for their faith, soldiers give their lives for their nations and this brings liberation and freedom for their people.

4. Allah sometimes allows some people to suffer to test others, how they react to them. When you see a person who is sick, poor and needy, then you are tested by Allah. Allah is there with that suffering person to test your charity and your faith. In a very moving Hadith Qudsi (Divine Hadith) the Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

**"Allah will say on the Day of Judgment, 'O son of Adam, I was sick and you did not visit Me.' He will say, 'O my Lord, how could I visit You, when you are the Lord of the Worlds.' Allah will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was sick and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me there?' Allah will say, 'O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not.' He shall say, 'O my Lord, how could I feed you and you are the Lord of the Worlds?' And Allah will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was in need of food and you did not feed him? Did you not know that if you had fed him, you would have found that to have been for Me?' 'O son of Adam, I asked you for water and you did not give Me to drink.' The man shall say, 'O my Lord, how could I give You water, when You are the Lord of the Worlds?' Allah will say, 'My servant so-and-so asked you for water and you did not give him to drink water. Did you not know that if you had given him to drink, you would have found that to have been for Me.'** (Muslim, Hadith no. 4661)

Prophet `Isa (Jesus), peace be upon him, is also reported to have said something similar. (See *Matthew* 25: 34-46) :

**Mathew 25 :**

- 34:** Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
- 35:** For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
- 36:** Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.
- 37:** Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?
- 38:** When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?
- 39:** Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?
- 40:** And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.
- 41:** Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
- 42:** For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:
- 43:** I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.
- 44:** Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?
- 45:** Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.
- 46:** And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

So to summarize, we can say that sufferings occur to teach us that we must adhere to Allah's natural and moral laws. It is sometimes to punish those who violate Allah's natural or moral laws. It is to test our faith in Allah and to test our commitment to human values and charity. Whenever we encounter suffering we

should ask ourselves, "Have we broken any law of Allah?" Let us study the cause of the problem and use the corrective methods. "Could it be a punishment?" Let us repent and ask forgiveness and reform our ways. "Could it be a test and trial for us?" Let us work hard to pass this test.

Believers face the sufferings with prayers, repentance and good deeds. The non-believers face the sufferings with doubts and confusions. They blame Allah or make arguments against Him.

With Regards

- Naeem Syed

