

Publishing Editor's column

READERS will be aware of the disastrous flooding in Pakistan. This is one of the more recent in a series of natural disasters since the beginning of 2010 that have overwhelmed different parts of the globe, resulting in over 300,000 deaths and the displacement of over twenty million people.

The year started with a devastating earthquake in Haiti, causing immense damage that will take years to rebuild and a heavy loss of life. Over 200,000 people died at the time and some three million are struggling to establish some normality in a very poor country. Nearly two months later a more powerful earthquake occurred in Chile, but with a relatively small loss of life. More earthquakes in Turkey and Mexico followed in the succeeding months. In April there was flooding in Brazil and a volcanic eruption in Iceland that grounded all the aircraft in European airspace for several days on more than one occasion. The inadequacy of technology and man's ability to control events was dramatically exposed. May saw a heat wave in India but flooding in Poland, which was followed in June and July with wildfires in Greece, extreme cold in Latin America, flooding in Pakistan, landslides in India and China and extensive forest and peat fires in Russia. Most recently, as I write, a volcano in Sumatra, which has been dormant for 400 years, has erupted.

The more recent abnormal weather in several continents has been attributed to unusual behaviour of the jet stream. The jet stream is the high-altitude wind that circles the earth from west to east. However, scientists believe that it is producing an unusual holding pattern, keeping the weather system in one place and causing freak conditions. Even if this diagnosis is true, it is abundantly evident that man can do nothing to change the situation. Elihu rightly stated: "Behold, God is great, and we know Him not; the number of His years is unsearchable. For He draws up the drops of water; they distil His mist in rain, which the skies pour down and drop on mankind abundantly. Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds, the thunderings of His pavilion? Behold, He scatters His lightning about Him and covers the roots of the sea. For by these He judges peoples . . ." (Job 36:26-31).*

God Himself, in answering Job, says, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have

reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?" (38:22,23). This is one aspect of the operation of Divine power that brings to pass God's purpose among the nations. Nebuchadnezzar was warned that "the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Dan. 4:17); and it took seven years of madness to teach him that "all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'" (v. 35).

It may not be immediately clear to us why God has brought about this series of natural disasters, or whether they are the inevitable result of ungodly human activity on His earth. But there can be no doubt that coping with the problems will affect the policies that are pursued and their impact on the rest of the world. Such disasters can be the cause of political instability. It is not difficult to see that each new crisis contributes to the time of trouble that will also engulf the nation of Israel prior to Jesus' coming.

The scale of the disaster in Pakistan is immense. Up to twenty million people are homeless and in need of immediate aid. This is in itself a logistical conundrum, but there are genuine concerns that local politics and human greed will hamper recovery and cause more suffering. We are right to show concern and compassion in this situation, but there is little that we can do to change matters in this order of things. God has appointed the man to solve such problems and to develop a world where God's ways are known and practised. Peace will then ensue. Jesus is that man who will rule the world in righteousness. He is the only one who has learnt to master self and self-interest, the one who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). Those who want to make a real change in the world need to prepare now to work under his command when he comes as King. We may be moved to help with contributions now for the needy resulting from various disasters; but to give long-term benefit we also need to learn the ways of our King, who walked the way of self-denial and godly service.

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*All quotations from the ESV.