

Divine Meaning in Natural Disaster

Ramesh Richard ThD PhD

www.rreach.org

On this rainy October day (8, 2005) in Costa Rica, I am overwhelmed as CNN scrolls news about natural disasters on several fronts:

- The earthquake in South Asia taking at least 3000 lives
- Hurricane Katrina's death toll passing the 1000 mark
- Mudslides washing away an entire village in Guatemala, followed by an earthquake
- The fear of bird flu mutating and invading the human race

I wish I could distance myself from the questions raised by natural disaster. In some ways it is easier for me to address human needs than to process such disaster theologically—to find the reasons for massive suffering and death. As death tolls rise, the questions gnaw at my soul. Why all this apparent mindless, meaningless madness of epic, biblical proportion? Is God telling us, our country, our world something specific? Is this the beginning of the end?

On the one hand, I wish I knew final and definite answers. But that requires me to be God Himself. Having been relieved of that privilege and responsibility, my next best option is to seek answers in His final and definite revelation in the Bible. Barring those absolute claims, I can propose some likely, but tentative responses with scriptural, theological, philosophical, and circumstantial warrant. So come with me as I offer my best to our common questions, while acknowledging my comprehensive limitation.

Causes

The causes for unexplainable *natural* disasters are more complicated since the perpetrators seem invisible and their purposes incomprehensible. When it comes to man-made disasters, we can identify someone to blame. Explanation is easiest when causes are placed on human (in)action; then humans become victims of human choices. For example, unstoppable natural causes of global warming have been more recently overrun by human causes in view of human activity, need and even greed. So, mere *human existence*, population growth (likely 9 billion by 2050) and economic requirements (the need for more fossil fuels by competing ascendant economies), produces ripe conditions for natural disaster.

1. However, the Bible speaks about *God's judgment* on sin through natural disaster. The Flood of Noah was directly related to human sin, as was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the plagues of Egypt. Numerous passages reveal His judgment of His own people in both individual (Uzzah, 2 Sam. 6) and corporate (Korah, Numbers 14) judgment in "covenant vengeance" (Lev. 26:25). God's righteousness, in combination with his mercy and goodness, calls for judging sin with restraint. With all

humans evidencing sin and its consequence of physical death, the fact of death itself should not cause us to claim God's retributive special vengeance to be at work.

What natural disaster highlights is seemingly *indiscriminate* death. Gross sinners are destroyed along with harmless and blameless people. "Is God judging us?" was the first question people posed as I traveled along tsunami-ravaged areas earlier this year. Further, if according to Muslim clerical pontification, God has joined the jihad and sent a hurricane to judge sin-city America, what then was He doing to Muslim-dominated Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Hindu- and Sikh-dominated India across the border? "Too much watching of cable TV smut," said a cleric.

My only response assuaged them: "If God was judging *us* for sin, why are *we* alive?" Yes, *human sin* is the cause of some disaster, but we face a problem of one-to-one equivalence. Why are any sinners alive at all? It is the living who are left with sorrow, face its woeful aftermath, need relief and aid, and yearn for illumination.

2. Another causative factor is original *human sin*. The most radical event in early earth history was humankind's Fall away from God. That mother-of-all disasters put the earth under God's curse. Thankfully, God didn't turn away from his providential care for the human race (or else we won't be here to ask the question). Sadly, humanity lost immediate, existential relationship to Him. This earth is not heaven, and often feels like hell, for it is groaning, grunting, and growling in futility. This world is stuck on the magnetic pole of sin, with humans stuck on themselves to make or become their own spiritual saviors. Our blue planet is still paying for mankind's original departure from the Creator.

That Fall feature alone comes close to the best biblical explanation for natural cataclysms. Yet the issue of death's randomness remains: Why does natural disaster seem so arbitrary and haphazard? Why are good people affected as much as the bad ones? And why are some bad people spared? Why aren't believers spared and only non-Christians judged? If only *good* Christians can be spared, whether or not bad Christians are judged, all this could be a bit easier.

3. The question of apparent randomness brings us to the *demonic factor* in natural disaster. Regardless of the human contribution to nature's distortion, whether directly or indirectly, short-term or long-term, we also factor in Satan's role in random human suffering and death. Satan defied God's sovereignty—he cannot ever overthrow it—and was cast out of heaven to *earth*. Our earth began to shudder and continues to tremble. That could explain why there are earthquakes occurring daily (visit www.earthquake.gov). Only when humans are present do complex natural phenomena—many of them observable to physicists—turn into a disaster. If no one died, we would have simply viewed them as natural, even normal events. Cataclysms only turn into catastrophes when humans are affected.

Nature is infected, disturbed, and terrorized by Satan. He has been thrown down from heaven in eternity and toppled on earth in history. By sheer force of will and with his ongoing demonic influence continues his terrorist acts on earth. Natural disasters are not “acts of God” like the insurance industry would describe nature’s fury. They could just as easily be “acts of Satan.” We can underestimate Satan’s power, but anything he does is under the determinative control of God. As airline manufacturers are not held complicit with terrorists for human casualty as long as the original product was good, God cannot be implicated for a hijacked earth. He created it good.

In the Costa Rican home where we stayed, we saw a rather engaging display—the earth suspended between top and bottom magnetic poles. I don’t fully understand magnetic fields (they are a mystery to physicists too) but that table display symbolizes earth’s spiritual, political, and physical history. Sin repels earth from God and attracts the world to Satan, the bottom pole.

God’s common grace (cf. Mt. 5:45; Acts 14:17) keeps the earth from complete destruction at present. The triumph of the Lord Jesus over all principalities and powers at the cross (Col. 2:15) prevents it from obliteration. Satan, through natural disaster and other activities, attempts to tear into the world. Humanity’s only eternal security and earthly sustenance at the present is the Triune God. One day after sin refills God’s nostrils and He pulls out His people, this earth will destruct. Satan’s present version of natural disasters is an “approved-for all-audiences” preview of what will happen when divine mercy is removed.

Until then, planet earth is suspended between the poles in cosmic warfare. Satan persists in evil activity having obtained, like in Job’s case, clearance from God to afflict the earth. During the specialized period of divine terror however, God’s wrath will be unleashed on human sin. The Sovereign Savior will then return to rule (t)his earth and to guide the nations with righteousness. When God’s plans for this worn, weary, wobbly earth are done, the Sovereign Creator will create the new earth—one totally attached to Him.

Meaning

In the above list of causes, we find many answers, but the question still remains: is there *discernible* divine meaning in natural disaster? Without a God-appointed prophet (though there are many self-appointed ones) this interpretive task is a bit difficult. I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet. I merely serve a non-profit organization. I wish I could mine the mind of God to offer absolute answers concerning bad incidents—this problem of clarification applies to good circumstances as well—but natural disasters do communicate meanings about humanity, God, and history.

About Humanity: What does natural evil tell us about humanity?

1. Natural disaster highlights man’s inability to *predict and control*. The quest of the secular (i.e., without reference to God) “humanist” enterprise is deficient at

its very premise: man is not the measure or foundation of anything. He is small, weak, and at the mercy of the elements. Natural disaster calls for humility before God and reminds believers to find their permanent security in God alone (cf. Psalm 46:1-3).

2. Yet natural disaster can showcase *human resilience and perseverance*. People return to the same location and rebuild from scratch. In Bangladesh after annual monsoons and floods that take tens of thousands of lives, people come back to reinhabit and rehabilitate the environs. Managua, Nicaragua severely debilitated by the 1972 earthquake is celebrating 150 years of history this year. Humans rebuild in the very areas prone to floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. That might be viewed by some as a foolish and practical necessity, but also shows human capacity to create something livable out of rubble against great odds. In fulfillment of the God-given mandate to rule nature (Gen. 1:26, 27; cf. Psalm 8), we can flourish precisely where we have endured calamity.

3. Natural disaster may bring out the best in *compassion and community*. The whole world united for search and rescue; recovery and aid; and relief and development after the recent tsunami took nearly 300,000 lives and could take 30 years to build infrastructure. Christians, with their special obligation to love their neighbor and especially to do good to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), ought to serve in the forefront of aid and relief efforts with unselfish abandon and generosity. Many benevolent efforts still continue despite local corruption, logistical nightmares, and donor distraction.

4. Natural disaster accents human *opportunism and entrepreneurialism* in good and dark ways. We have heard, even experienced stories, of the sinister side of opportunism in the face of someone else's misfortune. Both selfish and altruistic sides of seizing business opportunity emerge during these hard times. The price gouging for automobile fuel or the corruption of local authorities distributing food and clothing discourages those who want to help. After Hurricane Katrina, a looter ran away with a plasma TV, soon realizing he had no home to take it to! Yet, this morning I heard about the 8-year-old who mailed her freshly-fallen tooth to the Red Cross so that the "tooth fairy" can send funds for hurricane victims. That story touched people all across the nation and generated around \$1 million in funding. Christians can give wisely through reputable and knowledgeable organizations in order to help stifle fraud. We also encourage entrepreneurs (e.g., the housing industry) to make profit that appropriately rewards their risk as a result of rebuilding regions of need. And what about Christians entering and excelling in the sciences, military, and public life—assuming critical and powerful roles in these arenas as frequently as possible—in order to provide help over the short and long haul?

5. Natural disaster also provokes mankind's *resistance and defiance* of God. Unable to predict and without hope, humanity rebels against the God who could have exercised control of the elements. In Revelation 16:21 "gigantic hailstones, weighing about a hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people, but they *blasphemed* God because of the plague of hail, since it was so horrendous" (italics added). Remember Pharaoh of old? The plagues (and God) ultimately intensified the resistance of his already hardened heart. Christians can function as "watchmen" warning people of future disaster,

respectfully pleading for the apathetic to awaken and the defiant to become compliant to God's terms for human salvation (cf. Ezek. 33:1-6).

6. At other times, natural disaster induces *reflection* and *repentance*. You have read this far because you are in a reflective mode—personal, Scriptural, and historical reflection. You wouldn't have even asked the questions unless natural and man-made evil abounded worldwide. At the face of disaster, —it's human to die any way—whether by man-made (Lk. 13:1-3) or natural causes (Lk. 13:4—the tower fell probably due to an earthquake), we must repent and evidence fruit (Lk. 13:6-9).

So, I invite you to reflect on important questions of personal submission like:

Are we rightly related to God? To people? To things?

Do we read divine meaning into blessing too?

Do we carry a high enough view of God's holiness?

A stark enough view of God's judgment?

A strong enough view of heaven?

A short enough view of earth?

A frail enough view of life?

A bad enough view of sin?

An eager enough view of Christ's return?

A vital enough view of God's power and goodness?

Do we really hope in the resurrection?

Are we bearing fruit for God's Kingdom?

And let us then repent, for eternity is infinitely more important than earth; relationships are finitely more so than tasks; and life definitely more than raiment. Let's bear much, more and lasting fruit worthy of the King(dom).

I noticed that two responses characterize post-Katrina sorrow: Those (and they were usually poor) who were thankful that they had their lives left, and those (and they were usually rich) who complained that all they left was their lives! The former will make spiritual progress; the latter will regress, unless they probe divine meaning in natural disaster.

About God: What does the Bible tell us about God and natural evil?

With hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and severe thunderstorms tearing up the country from one end to another, this “quote of the month” came from late-night show host, Jay Leno: “Are we sure this is a good time to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance?” There is a sneaking suspicion among even the most lighthearted among us that God is involved in the details of this earth. Let me make a few bulleted statements, and ask you to enter into this article by finding Scriptures for each of these assertions.

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1. God communicates (theologians call it “general revelation”) through what He has created, be it beautiful or calamitous.
 2. God creates good as well as calamity on earth, and neither of which is arbitrarily or whimsically administered. Satan dispenses evil and is always destructive in intent and impact.
 3. God sends judgment on sin. Some judgment and sin are demonstrably related, while other disasters befuddle our imagination and logic. Though not all judgment is due to personal sin, all judgment is due to original sin.
 4. God does not enjoy bringing affliction nor causing grief to mortal men.
 5. God’s grace and merciful covenant preserves this broken earth. Any one alive, lives by his pleasure.
 6. God averts punishing the nations through the preaching or prayer of His people. His remedial warnings if not heeded turn retributive.
 7. God’s present solution for the problem of evil begins in the only truly innocent person who has suffered—His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 8. God’s full and final answers are not presently perceivable, and He doesn’t need to answer us on this side of eternity.
 9. God does not always give us what we want. He always gives us what is best, regardless of what we think is best.
 10. God is in complete control of all beings (human, animal, and supernatural) in history, geography, and circumstance.
 11. God loves the world and wishes that all people would repent and come to Him.
 12. God will eventually reverse his early curse that now pervades the earth.
 13. God will bring a new heaven and a new earth into existence. If there were no sin or people, there would be no death. In heaven, there will be plenty of people, but no sinning (or crying nor dying).
 14. God is our only security—nothing else can be rested or relied upon; and is our present helper in time of trouble.
 15. God does not make evil good, for evil is always evil. God turns the effects of evil into good—a great source of aggravation and frustration to Satan, especially if *he* believes in the imminent return of Christ.
- Etc.!

We will not know the total global personal story till later in our existence, but God gets through to some people via natural phenomena. At the End of history in eternity we will find out that some repented of sin and rebellion; others returned from selfishness and sliding backwards; and yet others realigned their plans toward serving God’s larger purposes because of natural disaster.

I could create a separate section here for divine meaning about Satan in natural disaster, but we must lodge any treatment of Satan under the section on God. Satan is subject to God. God has removed Satan from executive authority over the earth at the Cross, but Satan runs deathly insurgencies through his agents—demons for natural disasters, and human for man-made horrors. Just like Saddam Hussein has been removed, but his cronies and sympathizers cause terrible damage, Satan has been set aside. And

just as humans, while under God's absolute control, can be held liable for evil activity, Satan under God's determinative control can be held liable for evil activity. His rebellious and active operations continue, till he is put away forever in the lake of burning sulphur to be consciously tormented forever (Rev. 20:10; cf. 19:20).

About History: What does natural evil tell us about the end times?

Year 2005 caught the attention of humanity as never before due to mass death in rapid succession and international reach. I dined with a Pakistani Muslim nephrologist last weekend in Syracuse, New York who mourned that "we still have two months left in 2005" in view of the many disasters. This morning I woke up to the news intoning reports of a Japanese earthquake (around 6 on the Richter scale) and the approach of Hurricane Wilma—the strongest ever recorded phenomenon in the Atlantic!

There may be nothing special about 2005. All through history, terrible natural disasters have struck the planet. While we await the H5N1 avian influenza, we also remember the 1918–19 Spanish flu which killed 50 million people in 18 months. And "scientists have long forecast the appearance of an influenza virus capable of infecting 40 percent of the world's human population and killing unimaginable numbers" ("The Next Pandemic?" by Laurie Garrett, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005, 84:4:3).

However, there may be something unique about our times after all. Our catastrophic uniqueness arises from two features, probably experienced but not *known* in prior times across the globe: the frequency and scope of seismic and climatic impact on huge populations.

Frequency may relate to better news reporting. We are constantly battered by disaster reports from all over the world, so much so we exhibit donor fatigue. If we feel exhausted by merely hearing about tragedy, just think about how greatly the victims suffer over their life-time. Yet, frequency is not simply because of better news access to events and audiences. There is a real increase in the incidence of natural disasters (a student pointed me to a list on <http://across.co.nz/WorldsWorstDisasters.html>). With more people inhabiting the planet (6.5 billion now), and natural phenomena turning into disaster only if there are people around, we should expect higher death tolls from both anticipated and surprise natural occurrences. Hence, one correspondent calls for humanity to unite and wage war against natural disasters (Robert D. Kaplan, "Next: A War Against Nature," *New York Times*, October 12, 2005).

Scope: The geographical span, in addition to numerical impact, is wide too: witness the tsunami toll in a dozen nations. In this sense, no one is safe anywhere. As much as we think it will happen to other people elsewhere—the surprise sentiment during Katrina was that this kind of stuff happens in the "third world"—we must come to terms with our permanent insecurity. No military might, financial strength, and warning systems will save everybody. Personally speaking, we would be morons to think we are invincible.

What about biblically speaking? Are we at the end of history? Disciples from the very beginning have been asking their Lord the same question: “What are the signs of your coming and the end of the age?” (Mt. 24:3).

We shall not speculate about the end times, nor indulge in news-events exegesis to pinpoint the return of the Lord Jesus. If Christ’s coming is imminent, then imminence means no signs are needed! It can happen at any moment. Or as a geology professor said of the Himalayan Danger Zone that suffered 6 earthquakes at magnitude 8 or larger in the last century, “it [the next earthquake] might not occur for 10 to 20 years, but if it occurred tomorrow it wouldn’t be a surprise.” And God’s plan is moving ahead. Christ’s coming might not occur for awhile, but if it occurred tomorrow it wouldn’t be a surprise. We simply can’t predict the day or hour of Christ’s coming.

We shall also not be shy about evaluating the signs of the times. The Pharisees and Sadducees were good at weather prediction (I wish the Texas Meteorological Society could learn from them), but could not see the obvious when it came to signs pointing to the unique person of Jesus (Mt. 16:3).

This same Jesus speaks about an increase of natural catastrophes during the end times, *before* His coming. Consequently, for us to miss out on His signs of the times is to fall into the same Pharisaic and Sadducean error. “Let the reader understand” is a constant exhortation in unfulfilled prophecy (Mt. 24:15; Dan. 12:10). Especially Matthew 24 and Luke 21 identify as portentous, the *escalation* and *affect* of natural tragedies—famine, earthquakes and pestilence; in addition to human terror—wars, lawlessness, and persecution; along with spiritual signs of false messiahs, apostasy, and worldwide evangelization. Mere observation reveals the frequency and scope, the escalation and affect, of natural disaster and yields supplemental data for biblical understanding.

We do not know the day and the hour of His coming, but widespread and frequent natural disasters do set the stage for the end. We will not stir end-time passions, falling into the false fervor of sectarian errors throughout history. Nevertheless we shall not be apathetic to readily observable phenomena. Jesus calls “all these things the beginning of the birth pains” (Mt. 24:8). It’s hard to imagine that it will be worse off during the Tribulation where a quarter, even a third of humanity is wiped off the face of the earth. That Tribulation period is referred to as “the birth pangs” of the Messiah (common Jewish terminology).

We do not know whether we are in the beginning of the beginning or at the end of the beginning of the birth pains, but we do know that we are in the later stages of earth’s pregnancy. Reading through the massive global destruction described in Matthew 24, we can at best say that we are right before the beginning of the end. The heavens have not yet begun to shake, as they will when the Son of man is to arrive (vs. 29ff).

Earth is ripe for God’s judgment as never before. We are experiencing sort of false labor. Type in “false labor” on your search engine and child-birth educators will be quick to point out that it is not true labor, though still painful. The pain is false about the

baby, but true about the pain. Similarly, false labor for the earth has begun, and the contractions are getting closer and heavier. That's all we can and must say right away, for prophecy buffs have had a long history of misses (for which they stoned OT prophets). We must be extremely cautious in prophetic dogmatism. We simply do not know the day or the hour of Christ's coming.

The parable of the foliage of the fig tree (Mt. 24:32-35) encourages God's people to recognize the imminence of Christ's return by the fulfillment of "all" these signs. The word *all* in the phrase could be critically important. In no generation in the past have *all* these signs come *together*, though unusual human, natural, and spiritual signs have sporadically dotted history. Is there a coming together of all the signs at this time in human history?

For example, the possibility of the evangelization of all nations—the church already exists in every political state, but not every ethnic realm—sets the stage for the gospel of the Kingdom to be proclaimed to all ethnicities. Not every person will embrace Jesus, but people in every nation have the opportunity to do so. In Matthew 24, human and natural catastrophes are *pointers* of the end, but the opportunity for worldwide evangelization is a *marker* of the end. It is quite easy to recognize that we belong to this global, marker generation.

Since there is no sign necessary for Christ's coming, Christians always live between dual realities: Christ may not come for a 1000 years, but He may just come today. With the first Christians we pray, "Come, O Lord!" (*Maranatha*, 1 Cor. 16:22). The nearness of the End is a persistent theme in the New Testament (Jas. 5:9; 1 Pet.4:7; Rev. 22:10). And in times of disaster, we pray the historic Christian prayer, "Lord, have mercy; Christ have mercy."

We can't predict the end of history—world or individual history. Though we don't know when, we know the older we get the nearer we are to death. In the same way, however long it takes for Christ to return, it's later, and hence sooner, than ever before. Only we don't know when.

We can and must prepare for the end—our personal and historical end—with the appropriate:

1. *Perspectives*—the chaos of natural disaster will be the character of the age. These things, Jesus says, *must* (that's the word for divine decree) take place (Mt. 24:6). There is no need for alarm, but there is need for action. A world of "extreme deprivation" is one of the major realities into which we must minister, and they are here to stay. We keep watching, waiting, and working as wise people eagerly awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom.

2. *Priorities*—spiritual, theological, and missional. We are here to make Jesus look great and well known wherever we are and everywhere else. We will make

Jesus look great by going in the spirit of Jesus to do as much good as we can. We will make His Name well known by going with the truth of Jesus to as many as we can.

3. *Purpose*—reach into large numbers of desperate souls around our world with lasting solutions . When a time of distress as never known in history comes to Israel and the earth, the wise will be winning many to righteousness and shine like stars for ever, notes global statesman-prophet Daniel (Dan. 12:1-3). We will provide solutions that will benefit people throughout their lifetimes, beyond earth and into eternity.

Anticipating Hurricane Rita, thousands left Houston, Texas on a rush to Dallas. The four-hour trip took more than 20 hours at peak evacuation times. Temperature hovered around 100°, gas prices soared, fuel ran out, hotels were booked, and tempers flared in the congested traffic. On September 23, I listened to the tragic story of a bus carrying 45 elderly people that had turned into a funeral pyre.

The passengers alerted the bus driver to smoke and fire in a rear wheel. By the time the driver pulled to the shoulder, the right rear tire was an orange fireball, with flames lashing the back of the bus up to the windows. Everybody—the trapped, passersby and police—echoed the same desperate words, “Oh! My God, the bus is on fire! Get out! Get Out! Even oxygen tanks, normally meant to help breathing, aided in worsening the disaster. The interior reached 1500°, then 3000°. Firefighters carried, like new born babies, the feeble people who could be reached, but eventually “combed up its frame, carefully pulling a blue tarp over the 23 left on board.” (summarized from the *Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 2005, 1A, 16A).

Our planet is the bus. Like the bus, the earth was fine when it started on its historical journey, but “good bus earth” has developed a fire in the tire well. Our bus is shaking, and the temperature is heating up. The beginning of the pangs of intense flames is being frequently detected all over the planet. As was later unearthed in the terrifying Texas nightmare, our planetary bus is being driven by an unlicensed, illegal driver. Our bus driver will one day be convicted of homicidal charges and thrown into the lake of fire forever.

Except none of us are mere passersby, nor drivers-by. We can do something now to rescue people from the bus before it blows up.

Please read the following sacred words to scared and scarred people in any century (1st or 21st) more deliberately than you read all my words above. Let them sink in, and then let’s act on them:

Dear friends:

... I am trying to stir up your pure mind by way of reminder. I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges and saying, "Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation."

For they deliberately suppress this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water. Through these things the world existing at that time was destroyed when it was deluged with water. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day.

The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare.

Since all these things are to melt away in this manner, what sort of people must we be, conducting our lives in holiness and godliness, while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?

Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze! But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.

Sd/: The apostle Peter (2 Peter. 3:1-13, The Net Bible).

During my Costa Rica visit, a local pastor asked me if we were living in the "last days." I knew where he was going with that question and replied on the basis of Hebrews 1:1 with a resounding "Yes! these are the last-days, the end-times." He gently pushed me: "Are we in the later part of the last days?" All I could definitively assert was, "today is the later part of the last days, because it is later today than yesterday. Yes, we are in the later, latter days; the latter later days; the later, latter, last days."

Our planet is quaking, rocking, shaking, and will one day be destroyed. Can we join in rescuing large numbers of people off the bus? Even what they sincerely considered as spiritual aids to personal health will only harm them in the fires of judgment. And while we are pursuing their rescue and waiting for His coming, let's conduct our lives in godliness. It's a little later today. If God was pleased to awaken us, to let us breathe, and has kept us safe, let's give divine meaning to those who have, are, and will experience natural or unnatural disaster. If you are not assured of your salvation standing with God,

will you contact me about the possibility of personal and eternal hope for you, regardless of your earthly circumstance?

*Ramesh Richard holds a ThD (in systematic theology) from Dallas Theological Seminary and a PhD (in philosophy) from the University of Delhi. He is the founder & president of Ramesh Richard Evangelism and Church Health (**RREACH**). A Global Proclamation Ministry, **RREACH** undergirds a global proclamation ministry with a strategic burden to strengthen pastoral leaders and evangelize opinion leaders, especially of developing economies. He presently teaches in the areas of preaching, spiritual life and world-view apologetics at Dallas Seminary. You may contact him via www.rreach.org.*