

## Study Guide: Understanding Tragedy

Carter Sanger, Jan-10

### Introduction

Read Luke 13:1-5.

- Haiti is in bad shape after the recent devastating earthquake. Such devastation brings questions to mind: "What can I do to help?" and "Where is God in all of this?"

### I. Are tragic events God's judgment?

Pat Robertson made a statement this past week that Haiti made a "pact with the devil" and has been cursed ever since. He was referring to a voodoo ceremony considered to be spark of the Haitian revolution in 1791. Voodoo is a religion born of out attempting to disguise some of the pagan religions of Africa with Roman Catholicism. It seeks to engage the spirit world. The spirit world is often depicted in movies and stories for its mystery and consequent ability to frighten people.

- Robertson's comment about "making a pact with the devil" is his interpretation of a voodoo ceremony. It suggests that their sin was as bad as it gets. Is it an unforgivable sin? (cf. Lk 12:10).
- Daniel 10 and Ephesians 6:10-12 and other Biblical texts show us that the spirit world is real. Read 1 John 2:26; 4:1,5. Voodoo seeks to control the spirit world and thus subjects people to evil spirits. According to these verses, who is influencing who? Who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed?
- Read Luke 13:2 and substitute "Haitians" for "Galileans" and "surrounding nations" for "other Galileans". What does this suggest about the conclusion people make about tragedies being God's judgment? What does it suggest about the way we view our own sin?

### II. If not, why not?

- Read Ecclesiastes 8:17-9:2. Can we conclusively say that tragedy is God's judgment? Can we say anything definitive about God's judgment?
- The Old Testament does provide pictures of God's judgments that help us know what to expect it to be like. Consider the flood during Noah's day (Genesis 6-8). How sweeping was the flood? Who deserved it (Ge 6:5)? Did the flood solve the problem of man's wickedness (Ge 8:21)?
- Consider the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 6ff). The conquest was a picture of the final judgment, when the sin of people has reached its full (Ge 15:16). The purpose of the judgment didn't stand by itself. What was the grander purpose for God's people?

### III. What is, then, God's role in tragedy?

The Old Testament provides us with types and shadows of which Christ is the reality. What we anticipate is the real thing. While localized tragedies are terrible, they are not the full measure of God's judgment.

- According to Luke 13:3 and 5, what should be our first response to them?
- When Jesus came, he set people free from evil spirits. In so doing, he confronted Satan. Read Mark 3:22-27. Jesus calls Satan a "strong man" and the world "his house". What is Jesus announcing about his presence?
- Read Mt 16:15-18. How does this verse alongside the one you just read paint a picture of the world and what is now possible in it (cf. Mt 28:18-20)?
- Satan has been chained (Rev 20) but not yet removed. His influence has been diminished for the sake of the gospel's success in setting people free that have been held captive by his deception. What does this suggest might be the purpose of tragedies today?

### Wrap-up

- How will you pray for the people of Haiti? How will you be engaged in smashing down of Satan's gates?