

# Ministry Amidst Disasters

by Michael Rudolph

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We are all aware of the awful tragedy that is even now unfolding in Port Au Prince Haiti. Whenever we encounter tragedies such as this, it is natural for us to ask the question “Why?” As Bible believers, we know that the Bible speaks of “natural” disasters and other tragic happenings, and we automatically review in our minds what we know of the Scriptures, and are tempted to draw conclusions about the Scriptures’ applicability to the current event.

A few days ago, Reverend Pat Robertson attempted to do this while trying to explain the Haiti earthquake disaster, and he has been criticized for it because he said this:

"Something happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French. You know, Napoleon III, or whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, we will serve you if you'll get us free from the French. True story. And so, the devil said, “okay it's a deal.” Ever since, they have been cursed by one thing after the other." That island of Hispaniola is one island. It is cut down the middle; on the one side is Haiti on the other is the Dominican Republic," he said. "Dominican Republic is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etc. Haiti is in desperate poverty. Same island. They need to have and we need to pray for them a great turning to God and out of this tragedy I'm optimistic something good may come. But right now we are helping the suffering people and the suffering is unimaginable."

I am not going to either agree or disagree with Pat Robertson’s application of Scripture to Haiti, because God has not revealed anything to me about Haiti. I AM willing to say that Robertson is right when he points out that God punishes both nations and individuals who go after other gods; to confirm that, we need only remember the great flood, Sodom and Gomorra, and the words of *Torah* in Deuteronomy 11:16-17:

*"Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD'S anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you."*

And also Deuteronomy 30:19:

*"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;"*

And from the *Nach*, we read in Psalms 18:4-7:

*"The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And*

*my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry."*

I first heard about Pat Robertson's statement from a radio personality who was apparently Roman Catholic, and he was criticizing Robertson as an "Old Testament" mentality – the remark was clearly not respectful of that part of the Bible.

Although I did think Robertson's statement was somewhat untimely considering the befalling human tragedy, I was far more disturbed by the radio host's position that God's punishment of men and nations for sin was necessarily Old Testament and not according to the Gospel of – as he put it – "Christ! If I could have only shouted into my car radio and made him hear Yeshua's words in Matthew 24:4-7:

*"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Mashiach,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places."*

And also His words in Luke 21:8-11:

*"Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately." Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven."*

And then I would have shouted: "Not only that, Mr. Radio man, listen to what Revelation 6:12-17 and Revelation 16:15-21 have to say!"

*"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

*"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such*

*a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.”*

So you see, Mr. Radio man, earthquakes are associated with God’s disapproval in the New Testament as well as in the *Tanakh*, and the New Testament’s prediction is that we will blame God for them rather than repent!

Okay, there is that one aspect of this in which I am supporting Pat Robinson’s understanding of Scripture, but that still leaves the problem of his broadcast it because the public to whom Robertson was speaking had little or no biblical knowledge with which to properly process what he said. So the result was that it came across as a heartless condemnation of some poor folks who are suffering terribly.

Perhaps, what was needed instead was a response such as we find in Psalm 145:8-9:

*“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.”*

And also in Zechariah 7:9:

*“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.’”*

It is a lesson to us that a situation where human need is great, where very survival is at stake, where a need for food, shelter, healing, and safety are paramount – that is not the time for us to judge or blame, or theologize, except for one theological principle – “love your neighbor as yourself.”

What we have all seen on television in the last two days – the horror of mass deaths and horrendous injuries – the scarcity of food, water, shelter, and medicine, and the interruption of communication and power – are only one side of what is now going on in Haiti. The other side is the heroism of the first and second responders. Some are ordinary people helping their neighbors and sharing what little they have. Some are organized responders – many who are volunteers – deployed from the United States and other nations to help. Our Fairfax County firefighters who are specially trained to serve in disaster situations are among the first responders in Haiti, and so is our Coast Guard and military. We need to be proud of them and pray for them.

Part of what we have been seeing on television in the last two days is what I received training for last summer and again earlier this week, and will again this coming March. The training is in how to serve as a Crisis Care Chaplain in major disasters like the one in Haiti, and also after traumas such as the one this congregation suffered a year ago. All traumatic incidents have

things in common – there is a threat to life and property, followed by a crisis of human reaction to what has happened. The events in these incidents are abnormal, and some of our responses, while normal for the abnormal events, are sometimes psychologically severe and debilitating and, if they are not dealt with quickly and properly, they can progress to become pathological. Faith in God exercised by a disciplined individual is the strongest defense against becoming a casualty in a critical incident, and therein is the role of the Crisis Care Chaplain defined. At a disaster site, Police, firefighters, medical personnel, laborers, and suppliers care for people's property and physical needs, while chaplains, serving alongside them, care for people's emotional and spiritual needs. If you want to get a snapshot of what a Crisis Care Chaplain does at a disaster site, think of him as a spiritual first-aider or paramedic. He or she helps to spiritually and emotionally stabilize victims who are in grief and shock due to emotional and physical trauma. In smaller scale critical incidents, the chaplain serves as a specialist in crisis intervention, sometimes assisting pastors and other care-givers over an extended period of time.

There are different kinds of chaplains, and each has its unique characteristics. Chaplains serve in the military, in hospitals, in prisons, in police and fire departments, in private organizations, and on disaster response teams. Seven of us from Ohev have been receiving training to serve as chaplains at the Prince William County Detention Center, and will begin serving there this February 15.

Will our prison chaplain trainees please stand and be recognized? They are:

Art and Judy Cohen

Laurie Pearson

Jean Brown

Mildred McDuffie

Michael and Marie Rudolph

So far, I am the only one at Ohev to have received Crisis Care Chaplain training, but my reason for doing this is not for myself, but to pave the way for some of you, my brothers and sister members of Ohev Yisrael who may want to do likewise. Israel is called to be a light to others, and one way of showing our light is by serving the wider community (both its Jewish and non-Jewish components), in a way that is appreciated, and where Yeshua receives the glory. It is also a way to share ministry with Christian churches and organizations that have preceded the Messianic Jewish world in mobilizing for this type of service.

Prison Chaplaincy and Crisis Care Chaplaincy are similar in that normally, neither requires their chaplains to have gone to seminary or to be ordained. Also, the work of these chaplains is neither biblically authoritative nor governmental, so they are proper ministries for both men and women. There is one aspect of all chaplaincies that is especially challenging though, and that is that chaplains generally serve the public, which means people of all beliefs and no beliefs. The prison chaplain ministers and teaches according to his own faith, but the Crisis Care Chaplain serving at the scene of a disaster often cannot, because he or she is encountering people who are in crisis, and usually in no frame of mind to receive detailed teaching – especially teaching that is contrary to their own religious convictions. In this way, disaster chaplaincy is very different from ministering within a church or synagogue where you can expect those to whom you are

ministering to have the same or at least similar religious views. The chaplain at the scene of a disaster has to feel his way, attempt to serve everyone, and sometimes has to minister comfort that is outwardly non-religious. He or she also assists authorities by diverting traumatized persons from interfering with rescue operations and from injuring themselves in dangerous environments. Understandably, the chaplain is only free to minister religiously if he receives an individual's consent. This kind of service reminds me of James 2:14-18:

*“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*

Crisis Care Chaplaincy is a ministry of compassion, and of the kind of works that is referred to by James. In Port Au Prince Haiti today, fellow human beings are naked and destitute of daily food just as stated in James. The priority in the aftermath of this disaster and all disasters is to save lives and give victims “the things which are needed for the body,” just as stated in James.

Those of you who receive Ohev's emails were informed, earlier this week, that Ohev will contribute any Haiti relief monies it receives to “Doctors without Borders,” where it will be used for medical supplies and equipment.

Let's now pray.