

Faith, disaster and metaphors

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I've been thinking lately about disasters -- not only how frequently they have dominated the news this calendar year, but the frequency with which natural disaster comes up in the Bible.

I agree with [Stephen Prospero](#) that it's a good thing that most of us no longer attribute "acts of God" actually to God. We understand natural disasters much better in our generation, even though we're still pretty poor at predicting them and even worse at preventing them. What's astonishing is that we can endure storm after storm without ever confronting the reality that climate scientists are telling us: extreme weather is partly a function of human-caused climate change.

Even worse, we still avoid confronting the stark economic realities that make persistent drought a difficulty in the American South but a human catastrophe in places like Somalia. The lessons of Hurricane Katrina -- that the most vulnerable populations in a storm are, well, the most vulnerable in our community -- are still unlearned, or at least unacted on.

Meanwhile, the startling metaphors of the Old Testament, in which human injustice often leads directly to the "divine" reminders of God's displeasure (think Exodus, or Amos), lose a lot of their umph for us. I'm not saying Pat Robertson or Michelle Bachman are right. I just wish that having better science wouldn't give us an excuse to ignore the moral questions raised every time the poor are the first to starve in a famine, be overcome in a flood, or be crushed in an earthquake.

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