

Letters From a Skeptic Lesson 3: Natural Disasters

“There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

Matt 24:7-8



*“There are risks in creation,
even for God.”*

Review of homework assignment

1. Last week I challenged you to ask your non-church-going neighbors/friends/coworkers what they think about the Christianity. Here’s an answer I got: *“It’s just a way to get money from people. I don’t have anything to do with any of it.”*

Correspondence 5: “Why does God create earthquakes and famines?”

Father <pg. 40>

1. States that the last letter (correspondence 4) *“threw me for a loop,”* but says the son adequately explained why God can’t guarantee ahead of time that people won’t misuse their free will.
2. Now he has another problem—what about all the “evils” (father’s word) which aren’t the result of anyone’s decision? And since God created everything, he must be to blame!
3. Mentions his “Catholic days” again. Note how the son never criticizes Catholicism, but let’s the father come to his own conclusions.

Son <pg. 41-46>

1. Briefly revisits the notion that God has given us true free will and therefore can’t know ahead of time exactly what we will decide to do.
2. Points out that sometimes God changes His mind in light of new circumstances. For example, God said He would multiply the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Gen 22:16-18), but then decided to destroy the people after they worshipped the golden calf as the god who brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 32:1-10). But after Moses pleaded with God and reminded Him of His promise, God decided not to destroy the people after all.

“So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

Exodus 32:14

- a. Consider this in light of prophesy. For example:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’”

Matt 26:34

- b. Did Peter exercise free will? If so, how could God have known what Peter would do?

“...for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.”

1 John 3:20

- c. More examples of God changing His mind: Sam 15:11 (sorry that he made Saul king), Jer 18:7-10, 26:19 (changing his mind about punishing the disobedient when they repent.)
- 3. Addresses the issue of natural disasters
 - a. Agrees that human will isn't directly at fault, but claims neither is God's will to blame.
 - b. Presents three points to support this claim
 - i. Human evil—not nature—causes much of the world's pain and suffering
 - (1) Famines could be eliminated if we'd "shared the wealth" with those in need
 - (2) Political wars kill millions
 - (3) Failing to help others properly prepare for natural disasters
 - ii. Because the world is fallen and people are imperfect, this causes problems
 - iii. Spiritual free beings—angels and demons—are also at work

"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

1 Pet 5:8-9

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Rom 8:38-39

- 4. Explains that earth is a **battlefield**, saying that *"in such a situation everything becomes a potential weapon and every person a potential victim."*
- 5. Predicts that the dad will find all this *"hard to swallow"* but emphasizes that since he (the son) believes the Bible to be true, and this is what the Bible says, then this, too, must be true.

Correspondence 6: "Why did God create Satan?"

Father <pg. 47-48>

- 1. Says the "cosmic conflict" ideas in the last letter make sense given the state the world is in, but also says that this just makes the case for an all-loving God more unbelievable
- 2. Very surprised that "a graduate of Princeton and Yale" would believe in angels and demons
- 3. Wonders why God would create beings with the capacity for evil. *"He gave us our nature, so isn't He to blame after all?"* Back to blaming God...
- 4. Also asks the question: If Satan and certain angels could choose evil in heaven, can people also choose evil once they're in heaven?

Son <pg. 49-54>

- 1. We won't have time for this one in class, so read this interesting reply on your own. Pay special attention to the first paragraph! **What faith!!**

Homework: Read Correspondence 7 and Correspondence 10.