

The Act of God!

IN sacred history we find occasions when the Almighty God took measures to punish men for their sins while He placed under His refuge His faithful worshippers. Any of such doings was an act of God. However, what may appear in the eyes of many people in the world to be an act of God may not in reality be so. It requires divine knowledge and spiritual understanding to know what truly is an act of God.

According to JACK'S REFERENCE BOOK, the phrase "Act of God" is used by lawyers to indicate "a direct, violent, sudden, and irresistible act of nature, which could not, by any reasonable care, have been foreseen or resisted". This is said to be "one of the few defences open to a common carrier who fails to safely deliver goods; he is always freed from liability if he can show that an act of God proved the sole, direct and irresistible cause of the loss".

The American Peoples Encyclopedia states: "ACT OF GOD, as a legal expression, signifies any occurrence not caused by human negligence, or intervention; such as storms, lighting tempests, the consequence of which no party under any circumstances (independently of special contract) is bound to make good to another. The chief applications of the term are in insurance, where Act of god is an exception to the insurer's liability; and in the law of contract, where it often excuses from performance." (Vol. 1, page 129).

From the interpretation given the phrase act of God as a legal expression we can rightly judge that the ordinary understanding of the makers of the law could not be much different from what many people think up till today as regards an act of God. We agree as legally defined that unforeseen, sudden and violent occurrences caused by spiritual forces cannot be humanly resisted. But is it correct to say that ALL such occurrences are from God? Considered from a religious or scriptural standpoint, certain occurrences such as those under discussion, which have been passed by English law as acts of God, do not really proceed from God Almighty.

Misfortune

Now, when a calamity or misfortune befalls some people they often say that it is an act of God. As a matter of fact the history of the human race is filled with sad events of this nature. We can recall the incident of the earthquake which in 1960, shattered the Moroccan port of Agadir in which 12,000 were reported killed! There were instances in which storms caused rivers to rise and canoes or boats were capsized resulting in the loss of lives and property. Only last week the Sunday Post (Sept. 7, 1969) carried the news that "at least 38 people have died as the tail end of hurricane Francelia brought torrential rain and floods to low-lying areas of Southern Mexico. More than 50,000 people were left homeless as rivers burst their banks." A certain woman who lost her daughter in a canoe disaster sometime ago, said while wailing that she did not know why God always afflicted her. She believed that it was God that caused the trouble. In fact, many people always think that God is responsible for their sufferings, poverty and misfortunes. This attitude of men is borne out of ignorance concerning the purpose and ways of God.

It is our aim in this Sermon to make people of goodwill understand what actually, according to the Bible, is an act of God so that they may disabuse their minds of whatever bias they might have developed against God consequent upon any past bitter experience.

Acts of Satan

The Holy Bible clearly shows that Satan the devil is responsible for many things such as those mentioned earlier in this treatise. But he makes people believe that God is the cause of their ills and thereby influences them to reproach their Maker. There are people who because of what they have suffered in life have developed hate for God and refrained from worshiping Him. The devil is always pleased with such people for having deceived them to achieve his objective – even if only for a while.

We have a great lesson to learn from what happened to Job in his days at the instance of the devil. Job was a man who was perfect and upright in heart and one who feared God and eschewed evil. The devil boasted before God that but for His protection over Job, he (Satan) could make him (Job) to curse God to His face. But God said to Satan: “Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.” – Read Job 1:1-12.

It is recorded that Satan went forth from the presence of God and persecuted Job. He caused the loss of Job’s oxen, asses, sheep, camels and even servants with such a stroke as was capable of breaking the heart of any man. Moreover at that time of those heart-rending incidents, one of Job’s servants brought to him the most tragic news saying, “Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” – Job. 1:18, 19.

But did Job blame God for his troubles as some so-called Christians do today? He never did. Rather he worshipped God and said: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And it is written: “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” – Read Job 1:20-22.

The faith and understanding shown by Job was exemplary. When he said that God gave and He had taken away, he did not mean that it was God who killed his cattle, servants and children but that God allowed the tribulations to come to him hence the devil had his way.

Yes, God allows such things in order to test the faith of His worshippers. And where thy prove steadfast and faithful He showers blessing upon them. Job had this understanding; that was why he did not charge God foolishly but blessed Him and maintained his integrity till the end. “So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.” – Job 42:12-17; see also James 5:10, 11.

However, the point we are making is that those troubles of Job were caused by the devil and they were therefore acts of Satan. But today similar things that happen to people are termed, ignorantly of course, acts of God.

The devil has power to cause storms or violent winds and other things purposely to do havoc as in the case of Job’s children whom he killed with a storm. He did similar things in the days of Christ on earth but Jesus showed his superiority over him by commanding his storm to calmness. As it is written: “NOW it came to pass on a certain day, that he (Jesus) went into a ship with his disciple: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and

they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! For he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.” – Luke 8:22-25.

Finger of God

It has been made plain enough that the incidents which some people describe as acts of God are in truth acts of Satan. But the question that still remains is, what is an act of God, and how can it be known?

In the first place, we must point out that God does not act without first giving warning to the people. And when He acts He does not punish indiscriminately by getting the just and innocent ones involved. He warned the Jews saying: “The innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.” – Exodus 23:7; see also Proverbs 17:26.

In the genesis of the human race when the population of the earth was growing dense, God found that wickedness had become the order of the day. Every imagination of the thoughts of the hearts of men was evil continually, and so the Great Creator decided to put an end to their iniquities by destroying them. Nevertheless, Noah, whom God found righteous, was sent to warn the inhabitants of the earth against the consequences of their sins and the impending destruction.

And because the people paid no heed to the voice of God represented in Noah’s preaching but continued in the pleasures of sin, God caused the historic Deluge to destroy the world. But He saved Noah and his family of seven by means of the ark which He provided. The full account of this ancient event is recorded in Genesis chapters six to eight. And St. Peter stated that God “spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bring in the flood upon the world of the ungodly”. (2 Peter. 2:5) This was an act of God pure and simple.

Another example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in which Lot, who was a just man, with his daughters was delivered by God. – Genesis 19:1-30; 2 Peter 2:6-8.

Furthermore, mention can be made of the plagues with which the Egyptians were punished in the days of Moses the prophet, as acts of God. Those wonders were so distinctive as of divine force that the magicians of Egypt were compelled to confess to pharaoh: “This is the finger of God.” (Exodus 8:16-19). And when the Israelites on their way to Canaan were being pursued by the Egyptians with a sinister motive, God destroyed them (Egyptians) in the Red Sea. Then the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses sang saying, “I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.” – Exodus 14:5-31; 15:1-13. This again is an act of God.

Concerning those happenings, Moses later told the Jews: “..For I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, His greatness, His mighty hand, and His stretched out arm, and His miracles, and HIS ACTS, which He did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which He did.” – Deuteronomy 11:1-3, 7.

Strange Act

The prophecies of the Bible point to this our age, the last days, as a time when the most terrible of the acts of God will take place for the destruction of Satan and all wickedness. It is shown that it will be preceded by what is described as the “strange work”, which is the preaching of the gospel for the exposition of all works of error and darkness, and for the showing of the light of Christ to guide the sheep of God to salvation. This work of vital importance is now in progress. Isaiah’s prophecy says: “For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act.” – Isaiah 28:21.

The strange act is not international wars but the great tribulation and battle of the great day of God Almighty, the like of which has not been seen or known in ALL world history. Concerning it, Jesus said: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matthew 24:21) And in Jeremiah it is written: “And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground.” – Jeremiah 25:33.

On the strength of the explanation we have made in this Sermon from the Bible point of view, it will be wrong to regard every operation by forces beyond human control as an act of God knowing that there are also evil forces under the command of Satan. The incidents of storms, hurricane,s typhoons, lightnings, floods and so on, in which people, good and bad, die in different parts of the world are the works of the devil who knows that he now has but a short time to live.

Let no one therefore blame the cause of his ills upon God for He is not responsible for our temptations. James the apostle stated: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.” – James 1:13.

However, be it known to everyone that the day of the Lord’s strange act, which is going to be the greatest catastrophe of all time, is drawing near. it is those who serve God faithfully and in truth that will be fully protected and delivered at that time by His grace and power.