

Haïti: Cursed or Blessed?

Every time a disaster happens anywhere in the world some within the Christian community tell us it's the judgment of God being poured out on sinful people. It has become increasingly difficult for me to think in those terms.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered the equation the entire creation was impacted. All creation fell and “groans and labours with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8:22). Since fallen humans live in a fallen creation we can expect disasters like the Haïti earthquake to happen from time to time. Hence the term

“natural disasters” as they can be expected to occur quite naturally in a fallen world. If one subscribes to a pre-millennial interpretation of end-time prophecy, then an increase in such tragedies would be expected based on Matthew 24:7-8.

There are specific instances in the Old Testament where God used natural disasters to express His judgment on a nation or people. However, this was not the norm in ancient history. They too had their share of disasters occurring naturally in the context of a fallen world.

In Luke 13:1-5 Jesus clearly teaches that tragedy is not necessarily the consequence of greater sin for then none of us would escape. “To begin with, He made it clear that human tragedies are not always divine punishments and that it is wrong for us to ‘play God’ and pass judgment. Job’s friends made this same mistake when they said that Job’s afflictions were evidence that he was a sinner. If we take that approach to tragedy, then we will have a hard time explaining the sufferings of the Prophets and Apostles, and even of our Lord Himself.”¹

So the earthquake in Haïti does not need to be placed in the context of a judgment from God.

But what of this supposed covenant with the devil made by the Haïtians to gain victory over the French in their war for freedom and independence? That all depends on how the historical facts are interpreted. I used to believe just such a covenant had been made but have come to understand that there are valid interpretations of the historical events that do not include demonic covenants.

There was undoubtedly a time of prayer led by the Jamaican, Boukman, in Bois-Caiman but it is difficult for me to take the available evidence and turn it into a demonic contract. Indeed, the oral traditions that preserved the prayer indicate that the prayer was addressed to God.² The available evidence could be interpreted to have been a gathering of uneducated Roman Catholic – or even animist – slaves who sought, in the best way they knew, the help of God in obtaining their freedom and defeating the French, the British and then the Spanish. In fact,



¹ Warren W. Wiersbe. 2001. *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament, Volume I*. Colorado Springs, Victor, p.224

² R. D. Heinl, Jr, and N. G. Heinl. 1978. *Written in Blood – the story of the Haitian people, 1492-1971*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, p.43

“Practising Voodoo” was “strictly forbidden by Toussaint” L’Ouverture³ This satanic covenant idea is perhaps one of those statements that have taken on the aura of an urban legend.⁴

So why has Haïti seemed to languish in underdevelopment? Perhaps the reasons are less dramatic than satanic covenants. Here are three things that have had a strong negative impact on Haïti’s ability to develop alongside its Caribbean neighbours.

Firstly, when Haïti defeated the colonial powers of the time and succeeded in declaring freedom and independence, it posed a serious threat to the system of chattel slavery practiced throughout the colonies and depended on for the enrichment of the colonisers. “It is no exaggeration to say that Haïti’s revolution was the first major blow to colonialism by [blacks], and the first assertion of black rights in the Americas.”⁵ Many in the Caribbean believe that the Haïtian revolution’s success in 1804 had a direct impact on the British Parliament’s decision to abolish the slave trade in 1807.

Consequently, “Haïti was isolated at birth – ostracised and denied access to world trade, finance, and institutional development. It was the most vicious example of national strangulation recorded in modern history.”⁶

Secondly, France demanded and received reparations from the Haïtians – initially set at 150 million francs but later reduced – for all French property lost in the war of independence, including the value of the hundreds of thousands of slaves who were freed. It took until 1922 for Haïti to pay off this reparations debt sometimes paying as much as 70% of the foreign exchange earned in any given year towards this debt.⁷ The value in today’s world of these reparations has been estimated to be billions of Euros. This national “debt” severely retarded Haïti’s ability to develop economically.

Thirdly, lack of adequate leadership has also been an ongoing difficulty facing Haïti. Leader after leader seems to have concentrated on acquiring a personal fortune rather than building the nation. Governmental corruption has become legendary. Without proper leadership no country can be built for “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”⁸



Given all of this, outlined here so briefly, there is no question in my mind that the heart of God aches over the devastation that has befallen Haïti as a result of the earthquake on January 12, 2010. It has been such an encouragement to hear persons in Haïti testifying in the news media to their confidence that it was God alone who saved them amidst the carnage. Surely God is “walking” the streets of Port-au-Prince.

³ C. L. R. James. 1989. *The Black Jacobins*. New York, Vintage Books, p.309

⁴ Michael Ireland. 2010. *Urban Legend Expert Debunks Haitian ‘Pact with the Devil.’* Assist News, <<http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2010/s10010104.htm>> accessed January 18, 2010

⁵ John Marquis. 2007. *Papa Doc: Portrait of a Haitian Tyrant 1907-1971*. Kingston, LMH Publishing Ltd, p.60

⁶ Professor Sir Hilary Beckles. 2010. “The Hate and the Quake.” *Sunday Sun, January 17, 2010*. Bridgetown, The Nation Publishing Company Limited, p.9A

⁷ Ibid, p.24A

⁸ John C. Maxwell. 1993. *Developing the Leader Within You*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers

Hearing the singing of hymns relayed by the television news channels night after night in the parks and on the streets of Port-au-Prince since the earthquake has reminded me that about one-third of the population of Haïti is said to be Evangelical Christians. Some of the largest Evangelical churches in the Caribbean are in Haïti, with single congregations numbering in the thousands of members.

Could it be that the earthquake in Haïti is nothing more than an egregious natural disaster? Is God willing to step into this calamity and give Haïti another chance to build a righteous nation? Does Haïti have a new opportunity to develop a transformed nation? With the help of the world pouring into Haïti surely we can build new and effective governmental structures, better schools and hospitals, efficient electrical and telephone systems, proper roads, habitable housing for all, delivery systems for potable water and a system of roads that will facilitate economic development.

As I intercede for Haïti I have a sense of the Holy Spirit hovering over that troubled nation “as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings” (Luke 13:34). I urge Christians everywhere to intercede for Haïti in the months and years ahead that God would enable her to rise to take her place among the nations as an equal.

Let us pray that Haïti will move very quickly from disaster relief to national construction and that those who make the decisions will be endued with divine wisdom to make those decisions that will lead to a successful Caribbean nation replacing the almost failed state that Haïti had become. Pray also that the system of corruption that has seemed inherent in Haïti would have perished in the earthquake.

May God fill Haïti with His glory. May His anointing flow down the streets of every city, town and hamlet of that country. May His people there find the courage and strength to step out by faith and build a new nation to the honour and glory of God Almighty.

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