

Cyclone Idai Disaster in Zimbabwe: A New Testament ethical analysis of Matthew 24:37–39

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The ravaging effects of Tropical Cyclone Idai on Zimbabwe's Eastern border with Mozambique in March 2019 posed a rude awakening for the country to develop strategic disaster management policies. The loss of 340 lives, with many others declared missing, displacement and distress more than 200 and 70 000 people, annihilation of agricultural, educational, health and residential infrastructure, all combined to endorse the need for sustainable disaster risk management strategies in Zimbabwe. Matthew 24:37–39 cast the story of Noah who adopted a disaster response framework in the form of an ark, which was going to float above the floods to prevent loss of fauna and human lives. Through the lens of New Testament Ethical Analysis (NTEA), this article discusses how deployment of ethics of love, selfless service, charity, social responsibility, justice, sharing, care ministry, good neighbourliness, good relationships with self, others, God, environment and climate constitute an effective way of controlling, managing and reducing disaster risks. The article discusses moral exhortations embedded in Matthew 24:37–39 in relation to disaster response frameworks in Zimbabwe.

Contribution: The article contributes to the ongoing debate on how biblical ethics can be deployed to the catalogue of disaster management and risk reduction strategies in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Keywords: Matthew 24:37–39; Cyclone Idai; disaster management; New Testament ethics; moral values.

Introduction

Matthew 24:37–39 depicts disaster traits of suddenness and unexpectedness. On the other hand, Noah in the pericope personifies an astute disaster management expert. This article examines how Noah and his family employed a four dimensional disaster management paradigm of awareness and preparedness; community resilience; adaptability and hope and faith to save their lives and those of animals, birds, reptiles and all creatures. Drawing from the Noahic model of disaster management, the article examines gaps and strengths in the Cyclone Idai Disaster Management strategy in the eastern border of Zimbabwe in 2019. Through the lens of New Testament Ethical Analysis (NTEA), the article discourses on how moral values of mutual love, care, selflessness, good relationships with God and all creation are pinnacles of an effective disaster management policy framework. New Testament ethics, which are also identified as Christian ethics (Keck 1996:4), have been presented in the article as the bedrock of community engagement in disaster risk reduction and mitigation initiatives.

Methodology

New Testament Ethical Analysis is the main method for this study. This approach examines the role of social factors in the New Testament's moral teaching (Keck 1996). As Hartshorn (2024) contends, the New Testament's ethical teachings shape modern communities' understanding of morality, how people should relate with each other in a rich tapestry of love, compassion, forgiveness, integrity, justice and social responsibility. As Hays (1997) argues, the New Testament Ethics lens engages the theological problem of how the New Testament ought to shape the ethical norms and practices of the church as well as shaping the community and government ethical conduct in our time. The rationale that undergirds the NTEA method in this article is that New Testament Ethics of love, communal and social responsibility, justice, sharing and caring constitute the bedrock of any human interventions during natural disasters such as famines, floods and earthquakes. Wolbert (2019) states that New Testament Ethics primarily focusses on encouraging believers to act according to what is recognised as morally right, humane and commendable. Wolbert (2019) further contends that although NTEA may not be philosophically intensive in

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terms of argumentation, it entails profound ethical reflection based on the biblical message and teachings of Jesus Christ. The method is suitable in this study on natural disasters given the appeal to human passion and compassion concomitant with disaster risk interventions. The New Testament's moral vision is to cascade the love of Christ in situations of despondency, desperation, pain and suffering. Secondary sources of data in the form of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Church, Parachurch organisations, Government and media reports, published journal articles and newspaper reports on the ravages of Cyclone Idai in Manicaland province of Zimbabwe were used in this study.

Matthew 24:37–39 and the Noah Flood story fits into the scope of New Testament Ethics in the following ways:

- When Noah received the warning about the flood from God, he alerted his fellow human beings although they spited his warnings. This action on Noah's part depicted ethics of 'compassion' and 'humanity'. Although Scriptures do not explicitly state that Noah warned his counterparts about the impending flood, 2 Peter 2:5 refers to Noah as the preacher of righteousness in his time. It is therefore highly probable that during the 100 days in which he built the ark, he warned the obstinate generation of his time of the coming deluge. The tone of Jesus' reference to the wantonness of the people of Noah's time until the flood destroyed them points to the conclusion that Noah's warning of the looming disaster fell on defiant ears.
- Noah gathered enough food for his family and all creatures that were going to be with him in the ark for a period of 150 days (5 months). This action on Noah's part represented the ethics of 'sacrificial love', 'selflessness' and 'servitude'.
- In Noah's selection of beasts, cattle species, creeping species and fowl species, he exuded ethics of 'justice', 'equality', 'inclusivity', 'non-discrimination', 'impartiality', 'neutrality', 'love for all creation'.
- Noah's ability to rally together different creatures and his ability to manage them in a period of 150 days demonstrates ethics of 'caring', 'humility', 'patience', 'long-suffering' and 'fortitude'.
- Noah's ability to rally the loyalty and support of his wife, his three sons, Ham, Japheth and Shem and their wives demonstrated ethics of 'solidarity', 'joint responsibility' and 'cooperation'.

Matthew 24:37–39 and disaster management discourse

Matthew 24:37–39 belongs, together with Mark 13:33–37 and Luke 21:33–38, to what is famously known as the Olivet Discourse. Barclay (1959) emphasises that the shattering suddenness with which disaster fell on people of Noah's time and how Noah prepared himself in the calm weather for the flood that was to come remains a phenomenal lesson in disaster prevention and risk reduction. The salient themes in the Olivet Discourse are preparedness for, unexpectedness

of and suddenness of tough times (Harrington 1991:342). Generally, scholarship on the Olivet Discourse suggests that the story of Noah's flood is premised on Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 as described in Matthew 24:4–31; Mark 13:5–27 and Luke 21:25–28 (Gentry 1989). Whereas both Mark and Luke parallel the version in Matthew, Mark does not mention the Noah Flood while Luke mentions the 'days of Noah' in Luke 17:20 where themes of preparedness in the face of and the suddenness of disaster are highlighted. McLean (1995:323) stated that the Olivet Discourse focusses on calamitous occurrences such as wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and cosmic phenomena that, as interpreted in this article, include climate change, seismic induced floods, cyclones, droughts and storms. Storms (2007) avers that Matthew 24 arises out of the milieu of natural disasters that occurred between 44AD and 66AD. There was a famous famine in 44AD recorded in Acts 11:28 to which the Antioch Church responded by mounting a huge relief effort to mitigate the burden on the believers of Judea.

In terms of literary genre, Clines (1972) argues that the Noah Flood story belongs to the folktale type of 'myths of catastrophe'. Myths of catastrophe are narratives where a deity or powerful superhuman force is believed to send a disaster retributively. It is thus believed that the disaster is a will of supernatural powers, that it has been caused by some non-moral fault in humans who have angered the gods and that moral sin on the part of mankind is the major trigger of the catastrophe. Chabata (2021) argues that the Shona people believe that most of the disasters that befall them are caused by angry ancestral spirits who demand propitiation by causing floods, famines and pandemics such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). African theologians such as Taringa (2006), Gumo et al. (2012) and Magesa (2013) have argued that in dealing with disasters on the African continent, it is important to recognise African spiritual and philosophical worldviews. In terms of disaster management and risk reduction efforts, myths of catastrophe tend to create some complacency and non-interventionist stance in people as any action to mitigate the effects of a disaster is viewed as either forlorn or an affront against the gods. Arguably, the practice of attributing natural disasters to the anger of gods is one of the reasons behind the nonchalance, negligence and indifference that indigenous Zimbabweans display in the wake of the catastrophes. Even in instances where mankind has been morally culpable for disasters such as famine, the tendency has been to quickly assert the involvement of spiritual forces. From a NTEA perspective, immoral human behaviour is not only a precipitate of disasters but can also exacerbate human suffering. New Testament Ethics, as underscored in Matthew 24:37–39, emphasise on the right relationship with God, other human beings and all creation (TEARFUND 2011). Matthew 24:37–39 illustrates the view that sound morals are assurances of eschatological bliss.

The flood of Noah's time that covered the whole earth and rose higher than the mountains (Gn 7:10–24) arguably sits on the top of biblical disasters (Graham 2018). The story is

shared within Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions (Dynes 2003). The flood lasted 150 days and wiped out all creatures, animals, humans, reptiles, crawling insects, birds and everything in its way except for Noah and those creatures in the ark. Important characteristics of the Noahic flood that stick out are as follows:

- Noah was warned by God that a flood was going to take place.
- Noah received clear instructions on how to build the ark.
- Noah was given an opportunity to save himself and representative samples of creatures.
- Noah's ark was not only for saving humans but included non-human species as well.
- Noah implemented basic disaster planning of the deluge.

According to Tearfund (2011), the contemporary world can draw rich lessons from the Noah Flood story in disaster management and risk reduction. There are ways in which both natural and spiritual forces can issue warnings on disasters.

The extent and intensity of devastation that characterised the Noah Flood typifies the experiences of Cyclone Idai induced floods in Manicaland Zimbabwe. Just as in the case of the Noah Flood, birds, livestock, wild animals, creatures that swarm over the earth and mankind perished, a horrendous holocaust and dirge engulfed environs around Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique in March 2019. Heavy rains coupled with strong winds, floods and landslides pounded seven districts of Manicaland province namely, Buhera, Chimanimani, Chipinge, Makoni, Mutare, Mutasa and Nyanga leaving a trail of destruction, loss of lives, livelihoods, infrastructure and shelter. According to Chatiza (2019), 51 000 people were displaced, above 340 died and unverified number went missing. On the infrastructure side, a road stretch of 1500 km was damaged and rendered unusable. Chatiza (2019) further points out that a total of 140 schools were damaged just as houses, health, agriculture and local government facilities were colossally damaged. Flora and fauna, forests and water bodies were severely affected by the floods and storms. In terms of livestock losses, 348 cattle, 17 000 chickens, 222 goats and sheep were lost. Food barns were destroyed, and survivors were left without food.

National awareness of natural disasters and response strategies

According to the Government of Zimbabwe and United Nations' (2017) Disaster Risk Management System Assessment, parts of the country are prone to natural disasters because of climate change induced hazards. Places around the country with a high vulnerability to natural disasters include Chimanimani, Chipinge, Buhera, Chiredzi, Mwenezi, Beitbridge, Gwanda, Mangwe, Matobo, Bulilima, Umzingwane, Tsholotsho, Umguza, Bubi, Lupane, Nkayi, Binga, parts of Victoria Falls, some section of Kariba, Makonde, parts of Hurungwe, Mbire, Centenary,

parts of Gutu and Zaka (UNDP 2016). Whereas in the case of Noah's Flood, God made Noah aware of the impending holocaust, in contemporary times the most effective tool widely used to predict hazards as well as map them is geographical information systems (GIS). Trends of disasters can be detected and monitored through use of technological devices as a prelude to disaster awareness, preparedness and risk reduction initiatives. According to the World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal (2021), Zimbabwe has since year 1900 endured various natural hazards that include droughts, epidemic diseases, floods and storms. These disasters have collectively caused damage of over a billion US dollars. The World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal (2021) described Zimbabwe's natural hazards as 'historical hazards' implying that the hazards have a traceable occurrence pattern. Climate change and variability are the main culprits in causing natural disasters in Zimbabwe. The historicity of these natural disasters thus constitutes an awareness paradigm for purposes of preparedness and disaster risk reduction.

Noah's response to the impending disaster presents important didactic insights in disaster management and risk reduction. After obtaining warning from God about the looming disaster, Noah embarked on planning and preparations for it. In the first place, Noah prioritised relationships. Effective disaster management planning is hinged on relationships. Noah's story reveals that he had intimate relationships with God, self, other human beings, environment, animals, birds, crawling and creeping creatures, natural resources and the climate. Unlike his contemporaries who were obsessed with partying and revelling as depicted in Matthew 24:37–39, Noah dedicated his time to his personal relationship with God, others and the rest of creation. From a New Testament Ethical perspective, the description of his moral disposition as 'perfect' depicts virtues of integrity, blamelessness and selflessness and honesty (VanderKam 1980). According to VanderKam (1980), Noah's excellent relationships with God and all creation are revealed in his identification of the gopher wood, (possibly of the cypress family), use of pitch or bitumen, familiarisation with the law of floatation, ability to bring into the ark every kind of living creatures and planning how he was going to feed his family of eight including all creatures that he accommodated in the ark.

The Government of Zimbabwe is cognisant of the country's vulnerability to climate change-induced natural disasters. Zimbabwe, like other countries grappling with the challenge of climate change, has had to integrate climate change responses into its national development planning frameworks. According to Zhakata (2019), the Climate Change Management department in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Settlement crafted a National Climate Change Response Strategy (NCCRS) in 2014. In 2017, the government completed working on the National Climate Change Policy, which makes climate

change adaptation a government priority. The overall aim of the national climate change policy is to mainstream adaptation and mitigation efforts at national, provincial, district and ward levels in all disaster prone parts of the country. What is notable from the government's national adaptation plan is that disaster management and risk reduction programmes are institutionalised. From Noah's approach of disaster management, the contemporary society can learn that resources mobilisation and planning covering periods before, during and after the floods is critical. Noah was able to store enough food for his family of eight members and for all creatures that he admitted into the ark. In the case of Cyclone Idai disaster, mobilisation of food and other critical resources only took place during and after the disaster had already struck. The point of departure for this article is that a New Testament Ethical approach to disaster management invokes people's compassion. The New Testament Ethical approach to disaster mitigation, prevention and reduction is undergirded by the Early Church philosophy of James 1:27, which defines true religion as visiting the fatherless, widows and the sufferers in their affliction.

According to Prieur (2011), ethical principles applied prior to disasters include introduction to prevention measures; education, training and awareness raising about resilience to disasters; prior information; participation; access to justice; disaster prevention at the workplace; disaster prevention in recreation and tourist areas, public places and schools; special prevention for the most vulnerable groups; organisation of and participation in emergency drills and preventive evacuation of populations. Prior to Noah's Flood, all of Prieur's ethics of disaster management were applied. In the first place, prior information was supplied to Noah on the impending disaster. From Matthew 24:37–39, it is apparent that Noah broadcast information about the flood among his fellow citizens who ignored it and pursued revelry. Noah's fellow citizens appeared oblivious to the looming disaster. They assumed an aura of complacency and normalcy in the face of looming disaster. In a similar manner, Zimbabwe received warnings about the approaching cyclone (Goodman & Giles 2019). People in lowland areas were warned about the impending disaster but mistook the warnings to be the general warnings usually issued about flooding as an annual occurrence during the rainy season. Resultantly, those people who were supposed to have moved to safe places did not do so. According to Goodman and Giles (2019), Mrs Oppah Muchinguri, Zimbabwe's Minister of Defence, conceded that her government underestimated the strength of the cyclone.

In terms of prevention measures, education, training and awareness creation, the Government of Zimbabwe was caught flat-footed by the Cyclone Idai. As alluded to in the foregoing, the government underestimated the magnitude of the disaster. There was not adequate time for the State to introduce risk reduction and prevention measures. In the case of the Noah Flood, God spelt out to Noah how a three-story ark made of gopher wood was going to be made including all the engineering and architectural specifications (Genesis 6:14–16). An effective response to a ferocious

disaster of the scale of Cyclone Idai required a well-articulated risk prevention, risk reduction education and training to augment humanitarian and philanthropic activities across the multi-sectoral interventionist divide. Ghastly scenes of devastation in public places, schools and health amenities in Chimanimani, Chipinge and outlying areas were evidence to the fact that the Zimbabwean government had not prepared for disaster mitigation. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2019), the Cyclone Idai pummelled Eastern parts of Zimbabwe, but mainly Chimanimani and Chipinge districts, at night on 15 March 2019 'with less preparedness by the local communities as well as the government'. Typical of the warning in the Olivet Discourse that destruction comes like a thief in the middle of the night (Mt 24:43), Cyclone Idai incessantly and relentlessly hit Manicaland Province at night on 15 March 2019 and continued non-stop until 20 March 2019 giving people and the government no chance to mobilise any form of help. Strong winds and heavy rains elicited flash floods, landslides and rock falls that demolished everything that was in their way. The vulnerability of mankind, flora and fauna was exacerbated by the nocturnal invasion of the cyclone rushing with a speed above a 105 miles per hour. The lack of preparedness to deal with the deluge on the part of the government of Zimbabwe was so glaring.

Response to Cyclone Idai involved over 25 organisations including government led interventions. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2019), 45 234 people and 10 799 households received assistance out of 53 999 people affected.

A list of organisations (though inexhaustive) that participated in mitigating the risks of the deluge and the type of assistance they rendered are represented in the Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the response to Cyclone Idai involved many players from both local and international platforms. It is encouraging that Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, President of Zimbabwe, declared the Cyclone a national disaster from its onset on 15 March 2019. The President's declaration of the state of disaster gingered National, Regional and Provincial Disaster Response Teams into action. Government and NGOs stood up to the task of managing the disaster.

The Church's role and New Testament ethics during Cyclone Idai

Although there was a commendable involvement of faith-based organisations such as Plan International, Care International and Christian Care (a service arm of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches), there is still need for the Christian Churches to adopt a more pragmatic and systematic approach to disaster management and intervention. New Testament ethics demand more of action than empty good wishes and prayers. As Jesus taught his

TABLE 1: Multi-sectoral responses to Cyclone Idai.

Organisation	Type of assistance rendered	Target population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) comprising International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Danish Red Cross (DRC); Finnish Red Cross (FRC); British Red Cross (BRC) and Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCSS); Singapore Red Cross and Kuwait Red Cross. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relief assistance focussing on water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, psychological first aid and restoration of family ties. ICRC donated medical sundries worth USD\$10 000 and \$10 000 for relief services. Singapore Red Cross donated \$30 000 towards operational costs while Kuwait Red Cross donated \$10 000 for first aid kits, shelter, blankets, sleeping mats and kitchen utensils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1400 households; 7000 persons in and around Chimanimani District were covered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Volunteers led by the Provincial Administrator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search and rescue operations, identification and management of the dead; agents of information dissemination and communication; providing first aid, food distribution, shelter construction; registration of aid beneficiaries; mobilisation of community nutrition screening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chimanimani, Chipinge and Buhera Districts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Disaster Response Team (NDRT) combined with Regional and Provincial Disaster Response Teams to foster an all-inclusive response effort. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food distribution, dead bodies management, relocation of the vulnerable, registration, shelter construction, provision of land for resettling survivors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The homeless, the displaced, the deceased, those whose identity particulars had been destroyed or washed away.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chimanimani Rural District Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fed the displaced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chimanimani District victims.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zimbabwe National Army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search and Rescue operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chimanimani, Chipinge, Buhera Districts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Food Programme; Mercy Corps; UNFPA, Plan International, World Vision, Christian Care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of a helicopter for rescue activities and food distribution, shelter, healthcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chimanimani, Chipinge and Buhera Districts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Musasa Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychosocial support, counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNICEF Zimbabwe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification, access to documents, extended families placement, alternative care arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 316 boys, 261 girls (documents); 527 (extended family links); 50 (alternative care arrangements).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OXFAM, NAT PHAM, PSMI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logistics, health, sanitary wares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chimanimani, Buhera, Chipinge districts

disciples, it does not help the hungry to wish them well and blessing them without giving them food (Mt 14:16; 25:31–40). According to Jesus, the ethic of solidarity ought to be accompanied by meeting of the needs of the suffering in practical ways. The Lutheran World Federation Newsletter (2019) cites Rev Dr Martin Junge, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (2010–2021), sending a solidarity message to the Zimbabwean and Mozambican chapters of the Church saying:

With pain, we have received the news of massive destruction, injuries and death caused by Cyclone Idai. Please be assured of our prayers surrounding you in these moments of pain and distress. (Rev. Dr Martin Junge, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, 2010–2021)

While the General Secretary's pledge of prayers was noble, New Testament ethics commends a humanitarian approach that is practical in scope. It is heartening that in addition to

offering prayers, the Lutheran World Federation also went on to donate foodstuffs, clothing and health items generously to the victims of Cyclone Idai.

In Matthew 25:35–36, Jesus employed deliberative rhetoric to encourage his disciples to exercise acts of charity. In that periscope, Jesus told his disciples that when he was hungry, they gave him food; thirsty, they gave him drink; a stranger, they gave him shelter; naked, they clothed him; sick, they visited him. When the disciples asked when they had attended to Jesus in the above situations, he replied that when they do such benevolence to the needy, they will have done it to him. As Christian (2024) explains, deliberative rhetoric is a persuasive speech device aimed at encouraging or discouraging the audience to take certain action because of that action's advantages, benefits, disadvantages or demerits. Deliberative rhetoric was used to lead the audience to discover what was useful and beneficial to do in the future. Thus, in Matthew 25:35–36, Jesus was encouraging the Church to adopt ethics of compassion, magnanimity and mercy in his name.

In the context of Cyclone Idai, those who believe in Christ were supposed to demonstrate that they are God's people by the practical love they show to the needy and desperate, the hungry, the homeless, the sick and the vulnerable. Like the sheep in Matthew 25:35–40, the Christian community was supposed to show to the world the selflessness and servitude of Christ in them. According to Flemming (2005), Jesus identified with the needy to such an extent that when he sees the Church exercising virtues of kindness and mercy to them, he sees such kindness as done to himself. Zimbabwe has been arguably described as a Christian nation with over 84% of its population described as 'Christian' (Munetsi 2018). If more than 84% of the Christian citizens would espouse New Testament ethics of charity, sacrificial love, sharing, caring and selflessness, elements of unpreparedness and hopelessness during natural disasters like Cyclone Idai, it would not be so phenomenal as was the case when the deluge struck in the Manicaland province. The dominance and pre-eminence of foreign donors in the Cyclone Idai responses show that the majority of Christians in Zimbabwe typify the 'goats' in Matthew 25:41–46 who only think of themselves and lack interest and concern in the misery and suffering of others. Just as people of Noah's time were marrying, giving in marriage, eating and drinking with reckless abandon, the majority of Zimbabwean Christians nonchalantly read and heard about the devastation and destruction of livelihoods and lives during Cyclone Idai.

The New Testament ethics approach to disaster management is encapsulated in James 2:15–16, which says, 'If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you says unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body, what does it profit?' James 2:16. According to Middleton (2019), a New Testament ethical

framework for disaster planning should provide for virtues of fairness, distributive justice, equal liberty and human rights, public accountability and transparency, community resilience and empowerment, public health professionalism and responsible civic response. Middleton's viewpoint resonates with the early Church's approach to social welfare depicted in Acts 6:1-3 where ethics of distributive justice, equal liberty and public accountability were critically needed in the distribution of food to needy widows. Segregation had arisen in the sharing of food between the Hellenist and the Hebrew widows. The apostles instructed that men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom be appointed to the ministry of distributing food. The apostles applied ethical decision making based on moral awareness based on fairness and justice. As Cuthbertson and Penney (2023) argue, in circumstances where scarce resources are being distributed, leaders ought to make decisions that are not perceived as unjust resulting in erosion of public trust and community division. In the case of distribution of food to widows in Jerusalem, dissension arose as wrong people who were political and racist were distributing food to the widows. New Testament ethics of justice, integrity and honesty are hallmarks of an ethical framework in disaster management and risk reduction efforts.

Because of the moralistic nature of humanitarian aid, the Christian Church would be better placed from an ethical perspective, to spearhead welfare activities. Because of the Church's role as the salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13-14), any fairness and justice-based disaster management process is better administered by God-fearing people, men and women of an honest report such as those who were appointed in Acts 6:1-3. The communities that were affected by Cyclone Idai were affected by challenges of political polarisation as the country was just emerging from a disputed election in 2018. To further compound the trust and confidence dilemma, the government was sceptical of the involvement of some NGOs that were perceived to be detractors of the ruling party and purveyors of the regime change agenda. The frosty relationship between the government and NGOs involved in humanitarian work did not help the situation at all (Nyahunda, Tirivangasi & Mabila 2022). It is in the wake of the elements of mistrust and witch-hunting between players of humanitarian assistance that the Christian Church should step up its role as the custodian of biblical ethics and values.

The research's findings

The main findings of this research are:

- There was lack of preparedness to deal with Cyclone Idai on the part of the Government and all Disaster Response Teams at national, regional and provincial levels.
- International organisations and NGOs played a major role in mitigating the risks and suffering of the victims of Cyclone Idai.
- Political polarisation and mistrust between the government and NGOs caused bureaucratic challenges at a time victims of the disaster needed help.

- The Christian Church's presence and involvement in the management of the disaster was thinly veneered in activities of parachurch organisations without direct and holistic involvement of believers as the salt of the earth.
- The Christian Church did not live up to its defining role as champions and vanguards of the love of Christ.
- An all-encompassing disaster response approach is needed based on New Testament ethics of love, honesty, integrity, social justice, equality, servitude, equal distribution of resources, selflessness and humility as guided by the mind, which was in Christ according to Philippians 2:5-11.

Conclusion

The NTEA of Cyclone Idai has revealed that disaster response is an ethical and virtuous activity that should not be approached solely from a business and vocational perspective. Disaster management requires the major involvement of those who purport to be representatives of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, himself, the protagonist of New Testament ethics. Post-Cyclone Idai, Zimbabweans appear to have relapsed into complacency, the deceitful and ill-fated profligacy of the days of Noah instead of putting in place a robust disaster management policy and plan that is headed by all stakeholders of whom religious practitioners should occupy their position as drivers of moral values. Given that the effects of climate change that affect Southern Africa are predictable, continuous efforts should be made to rally the whole nation behind disaster risk reduction initiatives. The research has shown that humanitarian work during disasters is a vast research area that can be approached from diverse biblical lens including, but not limited to NTEA. In the study, Noah symbolises all stakeholder organisations that seek to avert and reduce disaster risks including governments, civic organisations, church and para-church organisations, NGOs, local government authorities, families and individuals. Just as God prescribed the specifics for the building of the Ark, governments, civil society organisations, churches, para-church organisations, international relief agencies, the United Nations relief organs and all institutions concerned with the safety of people, flora, fauna and the whole creation should have clearly drawn disaster mitigation and risk reduction policies in place before any foreseeable or unforeseeable disaster strikes.

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Author's contributions

L.C. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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Disclaimer

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