
WHERE WAS GOD WHEN THE TOWERS FELL?

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We find ourselves reeling from the repercussions of the terrorist attacks directed against our nation on 9/11. We are only beginning to deal with the grief and the loss: unborn children will grow up without knowing their fathers—except as an image in family photos—and they will refer to Dad as “*Dad died in the World Trade Center attack.*” People will find suspicions in their heart toward Yemeni or Afghani neighbors; some businesses will never recover from new, sustained pressures. Conventional war, wisdom, and late night wit are forever changed.

Honest hearts look for answers amidst the countless questions. Normal people want assurances—including some way to make sense out of what has happened and why. And though there is considerable interest in the politics and personalities responsible for such suicidal and catastrophic raids, most of us want to know about God—and how He figures into all of this.

Did God cause, or at least, allow it to happen? Why didn’t He prevent or stop it? Is this disaster some sort of judgment rendered from on high against our country or its sins? Where does God stand; is He lined up with us in the coalition against terrorism (wanting to bring evil men to judgment), or not?

As is usually the case when people want to know where God stands, we tend to think in terms of whose side He is on. He doesn’t take sides; He defines the sides. He welcomes us to His side—that place of rest and peace from which all real understanding flows. But in an effort to clarify some of the misunderstandings that people have in such times of disaster and distress, let us look at what the Bible reveals about God’s place and perspective in our moment of national and personal grief.

DID GOD DO THIS?

Is what happened on September 11, 2001 part of God's intentional plan for the affected people and/or for our country?

No, God's plans are always redemptive—to restore what was lost and to give back life. The *enemy* of humankind steals, kills and destroys (and inspires people to do likewise), but Jesus' plan is to give us life in abundance (John 10:10). Whenever and wherever life, joy, bounty, or good are taken away, the culprit is never the Lord.

God has plans for us, and one hallmark of those plans is their orientation toward future hope. He is always interested in a better and brighter future for us (Jeremiah 29:11); that's why He offers us eternal life—not only life that goes on and on without any shade of death, but a quality of life that knows no sadness, regret or futility. That is also why He will one day make a new Heaven and Earth:

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’” ~Revelation 21:1-5

God's overarching purpose for the world is that everyone would come into a saving relationship with Jesus, the One God has sent as a ransom payment for us (John 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:3-6). He wants no one to perish, and the death of even the most-wicked person in the world causes Him grief:

“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord God, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?” ~Ezekiel 18:23

Was God bringing judgment against the victims or against our nation because of their sin or our ungodliness?

No, contrary to what many people imagine, God is not in the business of judging anyone right now; He has suspended the execution of His judgment, and He has placed all judgment into Jesus'

hands—meaning that Jesus has the final word (John 5:22-24). Jesus has come to save people, not to execute them; whoever responds to His words passes out of judgment into life:

“I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.” ~ John 12:46-47

A Judgment Day is coming, when everyone who has rejected the offer of forgiveness will have to account for what he or she have done, and what they have said. God is storing up His wrath against such injustices and atrocities (see Romans 2:5-6 and Jude 1:6); but that means He is not executing judgment upon the earth now:

“But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” ~2 Peter 3:7

When people point a finger of judgment at others, they are usually making two huge mistakes: first, they forget that others’ sins are no more (or less) deserving of punishment than their own (Luke 13:1-5); and, second, they forget that though Jesus does tell us to “sin no more” (John 8:11), He does not punish us for the ones we have committed. Sin has consequences, but God does not add to the fallout of our sin by throwing in a few lightning bolts for good measure.

WHY DIDN’T GOD STOP OR PREVENT THIS?

If God is all-powerful and good, how could He let something like this happen; even if He did not do it, couldn’t He have prevented it?

- Though God could impose His will on everyone, He could not do so without stealing our own will away from us. Thus, while He can force people to do His will (and not their own), He chooses not to do so. Having the knowledge of evil, we often choose it; that is the frightening reality of being “moral agents” with free will. The terrorists were acting of their own free will—just as everyone does when they make their choices.
- Though God created people to live according to His life-giving pattern, we corrupted our way and have filled the earth with violence [cruelty, wrong, injustice, damage, destruction] (Genesis 6:11-12). That is why He drove humankind from the Garden where the Tree of (Eternal) Life grew (Genesis 2:9; 3:24), and why He destroyed the earth with the great Flood. He grieves over these tragedies more than we do.

- God is putting a stop to such terrible actions by preparing a place for any who wish to go there—a place without the intrusion of evil or death. He is going to quarantine every wicked thought and power so that nothing wrong will be able to intercept us in Heaven. In the meantime, He offers us all the opportunity to surrender our wayward will to Him.

WHAT TRUTHS EMERGE FROM THE RUBBLE?

- When people face disaster and death, their thoughts and desires go toward those they love. The final cell phone calls were not made to bosses, mortgage bankers or travel agents, but to spouses, parents and loved ones. When all is said and done, we remember that the most important thing in life is love and relationship. That is exactly how God has always felt.
- People are inclined toward great compassion, heroism and selflessness, but even such nobility of spirit is limited when confronting death. We are incredibly capable of helping each other through harrowing situations, saving people's lives, preventing worse disasters and lifting others' spirits, but all of our best efforts fray at the edge of eternity.
- It is easier than we imagined to fall prey to hate, prejudice and desire for vengeance. Not recognizing that the hijackers were, themselves, acting out of indiscriminate hatred for a country that, in their minds, was guilty of atrocities, many Americans called for their own version of a "Holy War" against those who defile and endanger our way of life.
- A very small number of individuals who "*love not their life unto death*" (*Revelation 12:11*) are capable of making a huge difference in the world. Choosing to die gives people incredible freedom to do extraordinary things—either for good or for evil. The hijackers and the mutinous passengers on the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania were fearless because they knew they were dead anyway.
- The greatest building in the greatest nation with the greatest economy and resources in the world was reduced to nothing in a matter of minutes, shaking everything in this life with its collapse. What looks so stable and wealthy in this life is actually very unstable. Everyone is looking to the spiritual dimension for certainty. Those without faith in God were shaken in their unbelief. We who believe in life beyond the limits of the material, natural world, have not been shaken—for we know that the Lord is with us even when we "*walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" (*Psalms 23:4*).