

WHERE WAS GOD WHEN THE TOWERS FELL?

John 8:12

A Seventh-Anniversary Retrospective

Daniel A. Brown, Ph.D.

Seven years after they happened, we still find ourselves reeling from the repercussions of the terrorist attacks directed against our nation on 9/11/01. Though we wouldn't have guessed it then, we have to admit that we're only beginning to deal with the grief and the loss: children have grown up without knowing their fathers—except as an image in family photos—referring to them as “*my-dad-died-in-9/11*”; people may still feel cautious toward Middle Eastern neighbors; some businesses have never recovered from the sustained economic pressures following the collapse of the Twin Towers. International travel, conventional war, and late-night wit are forever changed.

Honest hearts look for answers amidst the countless questions that continue to follow us since that day. Normal people want assurances—including some way to make sense out of what happened and why. And though there is still considerable interest in the politics and personalities responsible for such suicidal and catastrophic raids, many 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? Was 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 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 times of disaster and distress, let us look at what the Bible reveals about God's place and perspective as we try to come to terms with a post-9/11 world.

Was God Behind 9/11?

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

1. 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.
2. God has plans for us, and one hallmark of those plans is their orientation toward a future and toward 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 a future life that goes on and on without any shade of death, but a

WHERE WAS GOD WHEN THE TOWERS FELL?

John 8:12

A Seventh-Anniversary Retrospective

Daniel A. Brown, Ph.D.

quality of life right now that knows no regret or futility. That is also why He will one day make a new heavens and earth (Revelation 21:4-5):

...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." Rev. 21:4-5

3. 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

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

1. 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

2. A Judgment Day is coming, when everyone who has rejected the offer of forgiveness will have to account for what they 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 right 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

WHERE WAS GOD WHEN THE TOWERS FELL?

John 8:12

A Seventh-Anniversary Retrospective

Daniel A. Brown, Ph.D.

3. 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 The Attacks?

- A. **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?**
 1. 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.
 2. 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). He grieves over these tragedies more than we do.
 3. 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. The peace of Heaven becomes ours even now when we entrust our hearts to Him.

WHERE WAS GOD WHEN THE TOWERS FELL?

John 8:12

A Seventh-Anniversary Retrospective

Daniel A. Brown, Ph.D.

What Truths Emerge from the Rubble?

- A. **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; and it leaves us a sobering message about where to invest ourselves today.
- B. A very small number of **individuals who “love not their life unto death” 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. Both the hijackers and the courageous passengers on the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania were fearless because they knew they were dead anyway. Being mindful that our days on earth are numbered, regardless of our circumstances at the moment, can push us to consider those day-to-day choices that will make a difference in others’ lives.
- C. 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 with its collapse. What looks so stable and flourishing in this life is actually very unreliable—and when the foundations of our security crumble, we will always look to the spiritual dimension for certainty. Rather than concerning ourselves with what seems like a victory for hatred and evil intent, **we can gratefully respond to the miraculous openness of people’s hearts as they hunger for a security beyond the ruins.**
- D. The vast majority of New Yorkers will admit that they think about 9/11 almost every day, even seven years later. Those who live farther from ground zero may not consider that tragic day as often, but it nevertheless has changed our vocabulary forever. Like soldiers home from the battlefield, we can feel fearful and jittery, wondering when another tragedy might strike. Whether an attack, a natural disaster, or a personal crisis, **life-altering events will happen, and we are encouraged not to think them strange or unforeseen;** Jesus Himself assured us that “in this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

The original audio teaching can be downloaded [here](#). An additional message by Daniel Brown entitled “Shining Brighter and Brighter, particularly [Part 4](#),” has been helpful for many as well.