



"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

—Albert Einstein

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Every Which Way But Up

The winds are gone. The waters are receding. The temporary residents of the Superdome have been shuffled to Houston and other locales. The pumps are beginning to work, and the lights are back on in some parts of New Orleans. The smoke of her burning drifts lazily away. The urgent humanitarian emergency seems to have faded. President Bush has vowed that "out of New Orleans is going to come that great city again." Even though the decontamination and reconstruction will stretch into the indeterminate future, the immediate crisis appears to be, as they say, all over but the shouting.

The shouting - the residual cultural noise, the opinions, the analyses, the punditry - has exposed much about the character of the nation, and things have come to light that we wish would have remained hidden. Raw carnality and human nature have been laid bare for all to see. One survivor in New Orleans observed that Katrina and her aftermath have been like the owner of a beautiful house who goes down into his basement and discovers the entire foundation is disintegrating from rot and decay. Calamity, like nothing else, reveals what is in a man's heart - whether violence, theft, rape, anger, and

wanton destruction, or charity, [kindness](#), service, and encouragement. The international media has spotlighted a great deal more of the former and less of the latter. One deeply hopes these are not accurate proportions.

The shouting has also revealed which direction people's thoughts instinctively gravitate, revealed in the blamestorming currently underway. The Mayor blames the Governor and the President - he is not sure which one is actually to blame; he just knows it is not him. The Governor blames the Mayor. The senator from New York calls for an inquiry and commission. The President says he will preside over the commission. Race-baiters blame racism. Earth-worshippers blame global warming. [Peace](#) activists blame the war in Iraq. In all, the present calamity simply magnifies the strains, tensions, and cosmologies that have been there all along.

In all the shouting, though, one kind of voice is noticeably absent - or perhaps drowned out. How many savants and experts have troubled to retain [God](#) in their thoughts? The *Washington Post*, surprisingly, allowed the following excerpt into one of their reports - although one suspects it was admissible only because it was a quotation:

. . . "It says there'll come a time you can't hide. I'm talking about people. From each other," Bernadette Washington said.

Thomas, the philosopher, waved his bandaged hand. He had a theory: "God's angry with New Orleans. It's an evil city. The worst school system anywhere. Rampant crime. Corrupt politicians. . . . A predominantly black city - and they're killing each other. God had to get their attention with a calamity. New Orleans ain't seen an earthquake yet. You can get away from a hurricane but not an earthquake. Next time, nobody may get out."

To be sure, the attention of the nation has been riveted on the destruction of New Orleans and parts of the Gulf Coast - but the nation is still not looking high enough. The focus is still on the wrong reason and wrong solution. So few seem to be willing to consider that much more is going on than merely "Nature doing her thing" and bureaucratic bumbling. One preacher in Texas went so far as to declare that "acts of God" are what happen *after* a natural disaster, implying that the two are completely unrelated and that God could

not be the author of calamity (yet compare [Amos 3:6](#); [Isaiah 45:7](#)). If God makes something crooked, no contingency plan, federal bureaucracy, levee, or military might will set it straight ([Ecclesiastes 7:13](#)).

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but [sin](#) is a reproach to any people," [Proverbs 14:34](#) tells us. The city of New Orleans has borne the brunt of this recent reproach, and it is not difficult to imagine why. As one writer put it:

To begin the litany of God-mockery is to wonder where to finally stop: [the occult](#) and voodoo, Mardi Gras and the annual Southern Decadence festival (basically a homosexual Mardi Gras), ten times the national average of murders, a reputation for the worst government corruption, casinos with their bribes of public officials, the famous Bourbon Street which has evolved into a long line of porn shops and strip joints, police officers so uncommitted as to join in recent looting, and a city heaving with crime.

In a more general sense, the entire nation has also been reproached - for what affects so vital a city as New Orleans will affect us all. Yet in this, we also get a glimpse of how much worse it could have been. Not only did Katrina lessen in intensity from a Category 5 to a Category 4 right before making landfall, but she also did not make a direct hit. In addition, the current body count is far lower than originally feared.

Many do not seem to realize that the Gulf Coast region is important because of more than just oil. The Port of Southern Louisiana is the largest port in the nation - fifth largest in [the world](#). Put simply, the New Orleans port complex is where the bulk commodities of agriculture go out to the world and the bulk commodities of industrialism come in. New Orleans sits on the mouth of the Mississippi and the many waters that make up the backbone of the U. S. transport system. Had the port been destroyed, or had the Mississippi changed its course or become unnavigable, the global food supply would be threatened, and the world's industrial products would not be coming into the U.S. in sufficient supply. While Katrina was bad, she could have been so much worse.

This fits right into the biblical pattern of God's dealing with apostate Israel. In His mercy, God always warns His people of coming calamity, either

through His prophets ([Amos 3:7](#)) or through escalating disasters that lead to His ultimate judgment. Seen in this light, Katrina was a foretaste of what is to come upon an unrepentant nation. One way or another, God will get His people to look to Him. What it will take is largely up to the people.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Day of Israel's Calamity](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The day of Israel's calamity is right upon the horizon. One perennial theme of the major and minor prophets is the deplorable faithlessness of Israel, depicted as a fickle, spoiled, pampered, well-dressed streetwalker. To the remnants of this decadent civilization of modern Israel, God provides the book of Proverbs as an antidote. Wisdom is inextricably linked with fear and reverence for God. Without wisdom, genius and brilliance are useless at best and dangerous at worst. Wisdom warns us not to let the world squeeze us into its mold. Unfortunately, as a nation, we have rejected wisdom in favor of foolishness, bringing about major devastating calamities: famines, pestilence, earthquakes, cosmic disturbances (graphically depicted in Deuteronomy 32, Jeremiah 4, and Ezekiel 2-3,6-7) upon our apostate faithless people after the prior devastation of Gentile nations who didn't have a relationship with God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Searching for Israel \(Part Six\): Israel Is Fallen, Is Fallen](#)

by Charles Whitaker

The northern tribes of Israel, having rejected Davidic rule, chose Jeroboam as their king, and he soon led the Northern Kingdom into apostasy. Charles

Whitaker shows that after just over 200 years, Israel fell to Assyria, and its people were taken captive and transported to Media. Judah lasted about a century and a half longer, falling to Babylon in 585 BC.

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