

Is God To Blame?

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Many have noted that the September 11 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., has forever changed the way Americans live their lives. Gone is the foolish reliance on the supposed invulnerability and impregnability of fortress America. "Normalcy" now includes within it a measure of apprehension.

For almost two hundred years, our shores remained uninvaded from east or west because America lies so far removed from where the wars of the past raged. We felt that the spans of two great oceans were so great that any plan of invasion would prove impossible. Any enemy would easily be revealed and countermeasures taken long before it could mount an effective attack. However, events of September 11 exposed the reality that the enemy is already within, having invaded us through deceitful impressions of peaceful intentions.

The sudden and mysterious mailings of anthrax to media and political figures seem to be following up the terrorists' first strike. At the time of this writing, no one has directly tied these mailings to the bombers or their cohorts, but the packages that have been positively identified originated from within the United States. In addition, federal investigators recently disclosed that credit cards used by some of the terrorists on board the hijacked planes were used after the bombings to purchase items within the U.S. Again, the enemies of our security are already among us.

Flag-waving patriotism has reached a highpoint unseen for many decades, but these circumstances are undoubtedly affecting the American's sense of well-being. Political and media figures are talking confidently of victory over the forces of terror, but the sudden and devastating effectiveness of the attacks has unquestionably struck a blow at our freedom of movement and created suspicion of those of Arabic ancestry and Islamic faith. Some Americans now admit they catch themselves "looking over their shoulder."

The economy, already in decline before the attack, has worsened significantly. Air travel has lessened to such an extent it has motivated the layoffs of some 80,000 Americans. Those in the hotel business are also expressing financial concerns. Today, one cannot even receive mail without thoughtfully and carefully examining the outside of the package or envelope before opening it.

Where Was God?

The attacks have also stirred a revival of interest in God. A minority of Americans had nearly succeeded in running God out of schools and public life in general, yet now Americans in highly visible and public positions are invoking God in virtually every appearance. God has become very popular once again. Popular, yes, but understood? Hardly!

A recent *USA Today* article reports that President George W. Bush is an openly religious man who mentions God frequently in his speeches, prays on his knees, and reads the Bible every morning before beginning his workday. The article adds that he frequently prays in the Oval Office and often asks a Cabinet secretary to lead a prayer at the beginning of Cabinet meetings. Following a recent meeting with Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski, a fellow Methodist who is also a lay minister,

he invited his guest into his private study, and there the two men knelt side-by-side in silent prayer. Overt expressions of faith by elected leaders, however, make some Americans quite uncomfortable because they fear it is the beginning of state-imposed religion.

For some, not only the success of the attacks but that they happened at all is a deep and solemn mystery. They apparently believed that the United States existed under automatic and eternal divine protection, so that tragedies like this were just not supposed to happen here. In Europe, Africa, Russia or Southeast Asia, yes, but not here.

Front-page newspaper articles report Americans asking, "Where was God?" as they struggle to understand how something of this magnitude could possibly have happened here. Syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts, Jr., writing in the *Charlotte Observer*, tells of a minister at the church he attends opining in a sermon, "that God allowed the planes to be stolen, and the people to die, because He was helpless to stop it. Maybe He didn't have the power." At first, Pitts reports, he thought this might be a clever speaker using a daring rhetorical device to make a positive statement later, yet as the preacher continued, Pitts was disappointed to find it was not. He writes, "This was just what it seemed to be: a man of God publicly struggling with a crisis of conviction. Of all I've seen in the wake of September 11, this was, in some ways, the most dismaying."

Another article by David Von Drehle of the *Washington Post* posits the familiar question, "What would Jesus do?" and applies it to President Bush's responsibility as the leader of this nation. Though he quotes one scripture that has little bearing on the truth, he reaches this conclusion:

Nowhere are God's intentions more obscure than in war, which consumes lives and destroys hopes even in a good cause. The United States rightly respects conscientious objections. But not in a president. If he is fortunate, his duty during war will not be the occasion for too many sins. But that's not his primary concern until after it's all over. He can worry over that in retirement and plead his case come Judgment Day.

Some religious figures touched on some of the truths of God's Word in an effort to help Americans think that perhaps the attacks were not completely undeserved. All this accomplished was to raise the ire of many in the media, who turned their verbal guns against them, pillorying them as unscriptural, narrow, deluded, and destructive to the confidence of the American people.

Despite the horrific results caused by the terrorists, who succeeded in ramming three hijacked planes into buildings, is it possible that God may have actually stopped far worse from occurring? We know that a fourth plane commandeered by terrorists apparently crashed after a struggle between the terrorists and passengers who mutinied to attempt to retake control of the plane. That plane was almost certainly headed for either the White House or Capitol building

In a *WorldNet Daily* commentary of September 20, 2001, Craigie McMillan writes:

A fifth plane that took off from Newark, New Jersey, near the time of the attacks was grounded when U.S. airspace was closed. The next day Ayub Khan, 51, and Mohammed Jaweed Azmath, 47, who had been on the Newark flight, were removed from an Amtrak train during a routine drug search, when police discovered box-cutting knives and \$5,000 in cash. Their associates in New Jersey are now being questioned by investigators. Was that fifth plane intended for the U.S. Capitol building? It seems likely. We know that the White House was a target, because shortly after the first airliner crashed into the World

Trade Center, the Secret Service received an anonymous call using the agency's code words relating to Air Force One procedures and whereabouts. We don't know if the Capitol building was a target—but the assumption seems reasonable.

This suggests that whoever masterminded these attacks intended not to "send a message" or cripple—but to entirely destroy the United States government. We need to think long and hard about what that means as we head into war. To me it suggests more than a terrorist attack, even one as well-planned and coordinated as this. It suggests a terrorist attack executed in conjunction with as yet unknown actions by one or more hostile nation states. I would suggest that under those circumstances, we would have been vulnerable to anyone strong enough to step forward and offer "leadership."

Was God Involved?

Is it possible for us to know the mind of God? The apostle Paul asks this question in Romans 11:33-36:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

To know the fullness of God's thoughts on any subject or any event is, of course, so far beyond us to be unimaginable. To this end, we truly do look through a glass darkly. However, He has revealed certain things about Himself, His way and His plan sufficiently enough that we may seek Him, come to conversion, and grow thereby. He has also revealed much to us about His attributes and Himself and His activities as Creator, Sovereign Ruler, Provider, Lawgiver, Judge, Savior and Father so that we are not completely without some knowledge and understanding of how He functions within His creation.

Deuteronomy 29:29 confirms God's revelation by saying, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." I Corinthians 2:10 provides a New Testament confirmation of this: "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." We can understand a great deal about God.

The "catch" in all this, though, is whether we choose to believe Him and thus choose to conduct ourselves within the parameters of what He reveals in His Word. Far more, it seems, choose not to believe. Some say they believe, but carelessly continue living their lives as though they, and not He, are all that matters—until some crisis occurs and He suddenly becomes very important to them.

Was God aware of what was transpiring? Did God see what was happening from the attack's conception, through its planning and development, to the systematic execution of each step? Of course He did! God is omniscient; nothing escapes His attention in His creation.

» **Psalm 33:13-15:** The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.

» **Psalm 66:7**: He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.

» **Psalm 121:4**: Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

» **Proverbs 5:21**: For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths.

» **Proverbs 15:3**: The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

» **Jeremiah 32:19**: You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.

» **Matthew 10:29**: Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

Even to begin to consider that God was unaware or that He somehow lacked the power to intervene suggests unfamiliarity with the God of the Bible. But to do so is neither a frailty limited to modern man nor unusual. Many who go to church apparently do not spend much time meditating on the intellectual immensity, purity of character and almighty power of Yahweh, the Lord the Bible presents. The apostle Paul puts it this way in I Corinthians 1:25, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Just mere months after God liberated the slave-nation Israel from centuries of bondage to Egypt through awesome and terrifying displays of power, capping their redemption by dividing the Red Sea and drowning their captors in its waters, they reconfigured the nature of Almighty God into the form of a bull (Exodus 32)! One has to ask, what in the world were they thinking as they cried, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (verse 8).

Is this not similar to what one may discover on the world scene today? People have created gods in their own image. They interpret God according to their own cultural biases, as well as what family, educational, and business associations have predisposed them to believe. They then attribute His favor to their political parties, athletic teams, motivations, and prejudices. All this is done with precious little careful study into, meditation upon, and especially wholeheartedly believing His inspired revelation of Himself in the Bible.

At the worship service held in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., a few days following the attack, clergy from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim faiths participated. Which clergyman represented God? Which did God hear? Can they all be His representatives, even though they all believe differently? Do these differences not matter to Him? They must matter to those men; otherwise, they would not advocate their brand of faith. Certainly, God hears just as surely as He sees what is going on. He makes very clear that no one comes to Him except through Jesus Christ, eliminating two of those faiths immediately.

He also makes clear that those who approach Him with favor must be subject to His government. In other words, they must keep His commandments. The remaining two faiths keep none of His Sabbaths, and in fact, they tell people they do not have to keep the commandments—in other words, they need not be subject to His government in daily life—because His law is "done away."

Might God, as an act of mercy, nonetheless hear and respond by delivering us from future destructions planned for us? He might. It has happened before, for instance, when God mercifully forgave Nineveh after it repented at the preaching of Jonah, and He delivered Israel a number of times. Yet when that happened, it was accompanied by a wholehearted repentance that God was willing to accept. Have we as a nation repented? How deep must the repentance be? How many must repent before it tips the balance of God's judgment so that He moves in our behalf? In Genesis 18:32, God tells Abraham He will spare Sodom if He finds ten righteous people in it. Is God using the same standard of measurement for America today?

Terrorism, a Sign of God's Judgment?

Much negative, indeed inflammatory commentary, arose in America's newspapers and radio and television programs when some suggested that we are not as innocent as we like to think we are and that we must consider this attack to be a judgment from God and repent. The fact remains that, long before the attacks occurred, critics of American morality—Americans themselves—have been calling upon their fellow citizens to change their immoral ways. The attacks and a wave of sympathy for the grief of those directly impacted by them, as well as a sudden spurt of patriotism, changed the way people heard these messages. Before, they just tuned them out. After all, the messages were not for them but for others because they considered themselves to be okay. Afterward, however, the sense of being innocent victims of a sneaky and undeserved attack made the hearers feel that the messages were demeaning and insulting. But were they true?

If a person believes the Bible, he is forced to conclude that God is in control of all things, whether good or evil. Consider such scriptures as:

» **Daniel 4:35:** All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

» **Daniel 4:17:** This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.

» **Isaiah 45:6-7:** I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.

» **Exodus 9:29:** And Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the Lord's."

» **Deuteronomy 4:39:** Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.

» **Psalm 99:1:** The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved!

» **Isaiah 33:22:** For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us.

» **Jeremiah 18:6:** "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!"

The Bible declares quite clearly that God is not only well aware of what is taking place, but He also has the power, wisdom, and love to either stop it at any time or let it run its course. In fact, Scripture plainly shows God actively—indeed proactively, not merely permissively—involved in earthly matters. God has not gone "way off somewhere," letting things simply proceed naturally. Note that Isaiah 45:7, quoted above, records God proclaiming that He "creates calamity."

Judges 2:11-15 provides a unmistakable record:

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord has said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

Forms of the situation described here appear frequently in the history of Israel's relationship with God. Several hundred years after this, God inspired Isaiah to write, "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isaiah 10:5-6). This can only mean that God inspires and empowers the Assyrian nation to punish the nations of Israel for their flagrant disobediences.

Such punishment precipitated Israel being scattered, taken into captivity into foreign lands, and losing their homeland, to which they have never returned. God remarks in II Kings 17:18, after providing a long list of Israel's sins, "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone."

However, the tribe of Judah was hardly better than Israel, as II Kings 17:19 states: "Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made." The result was similar to Israel's, for in II Kings 24:2-4 God carried out His threats of punishment against Judah too:

And the Lord sent against [Jehoiakim] raiding bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken by His servants the

prophets. Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon.

Is God Responsible?

In addition to this brief summary of God's sovereignty over Israel, ample additional evidence exists to show that He exercises equal dominion over the other nations of the world. He determines their rise and fall and the times of dominance of every nation. Clearly, God judges the inhabitants of His creation, and His judgments are not limited to Israel or to "biblical times." God lives and He always rules and judges—just as surely today as He did thousands of years ago. Since the One who judged during Old Testament times is the same One who judges today, we can be certain that He uses the same standards now that He did then. His laws, which define His standards of morality, have not changed one iota. Jesus emphatically asserts in the Sermon on the Mount that we should not think that He came to destroy the law or the prophets (Matthew 5:17). Indeed, Malachi 3:6 proclaims, "I am the Lord, I do not change," while Hebrews 13:8 says that Jesus "is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Is God to blame because He exercises His authority, punishing to maintain order and to continue the advancement of His purpose in His creation? Who sins and brings upon themselves the necessity of punishment? God does not sin, men do. If God does not punish for sin, then righteousness loses all meaning. Life will soon become a violent free-for-all (Ecclesiastes 8:11). The Bible makes it clear that human nature is violently evil, and when left unchecked as it was before the Flood, it will reproduce similar conditions (Genesis 6:5). Indeed, God forecasts that exactly those conditions will face those living just before Christ's return (Matthew 24:37). Every indication is that we live during that time now.

The Bible prophesies scores of horrific punishments: epidemics of incurable diseases; wars; fires burning fields, forests and homes; earthquakes; famines; floods from raging seas; violent weather patterns; and infestations of insects and wild animals. All of these occur as punishments for sin as God exacts His vengeance on "those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18). "Earth" here represents all aspects of His creation—including man—which He created for man.

God is most certainly not to blame if He reacts in accordance with what He has told man He will do. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 establish that, if one does well, God will bless him. Conversely, God strongly warns that, if one does not do well, He will surely punish him. Though not to blame because His sins did not cause these tragedies, He is responsible for them because He at least allowed them to occur. He may even have inspired them to occur and oversaw events so that they would.

The Curse Causeless?

Proverbs 26:2 says, "Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so a curse without cause shall not alight." We can understand "curse" in several ways: as the invoking of evil or misfortune upon another, or as the evil or scourge itself. The proverb primarily deals with invoking a curse against another when no justification for doing so exists. Such a curse is akin to the aimless flitting of birds, suggesting that it will have no effect. It will not "hit" its intended target.

We can definitely consider the tragedies of September 11 as a curse. However, God undoubtedly approved of it, or it never would have happened. This curse hit, and it hit hard. Therefore, we must conclude that there was more than ample justification for it falling upon this nation. Currently, the death toll stands somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 people, a horrendous figure to be sure, but it pales when compared to just one other death-toll figure: Every day in the United States over 4,000 human lives are snuffed out of existence by abortion. In the 30 days following September 11, 120,000 lives ceased to exist. Of those 120,000 abortions, 95% of them—114,000—occurred solely for the mother's convenience!

Is it any wonder that God cries out in Ezekiel 7:23, "Make a chain, for the land is filled with crimes of blood, and the city is full of violence." George Mason, whose great influence can be seen in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution, wrote that sin, "brings the judgment of heaven upon a country. . . . By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence [God] punishes national sin by national calamities." George Washington declared in his First Inaugural Address, "We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained."

The apostle Paul states in Romans 9:14. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!" As a people, we are guilty and fully deserve anything He in His loving wisdom decides to inflict upon us. Most assuredly, we are not innocent victims. Individually, few of us have sinned against any of the people, groups, or nations that may have done this, but as citizens, we are part of this nation, and our well-being rises and falls with it. We have eagerly accepted God's overflowing abundance of material blessings with which He showered this nation. So when He judges that we need to be brought down a peg—or many pegs— we would do well to consider deeply the many ways we may have offended the great God who created us and gives us every breath of air we breathe.

This article has not even considered the many other commandments that Americans are breaking in a multitude of ways, but one must be mentioned because it is the most important of all, the first commandment. As a nation, we Americans are not worshipping the God of the Bible. If we were, we would not be having the problem that faces this nation. We worship a multitude of gods created in our own imaginations. Many people in self-indulgent America—people who seemingly cannot delay gratification, sadly—worship a god tantamount to a nicey-nicey Santa Claus who gives good things whether one is "naughty or nice."

As a nation, we urgently need to wholeheartedly turn from breaking God's Ten Commandments, the very ones we have removed from our schools and courts of law. We "in the church" easily see these September 11 incidents as a wakeup call to America and the Western world. A couple of symbolic beasts are arising that will drag this world into horrific warfare. Yet should it not be even more of a wakeup call for us? We have so much more at stake in our lives because the true God has revealed Himself and His way to us. Our Savior says, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

There is no doubt that the Laodicean era is underway. At this time, it is especially easy to become attracted by and dragged into the course of this world. We cannot afford to allow such great salvation to slip from our grasp due to inattention. Paul writes about this time:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

In this way, the September 11 events should change the way we live our lives.