

WHY HAS ALL THIS BEFALLEN US?

(Editor's Note: The following is part of an article written by brother Dick Blackford. The question he answers has often asked often since September 11, 2001. I think he hit the nail on the head in his answer. Some editing was required to get the whole article in one issue.)

The worst disaster on American soil since the Civil War occurred on September 11, 2001. Only God can mend broken hearts, and there are a number of people hurting deeply at this time. Though most of us were not personally acquainted with anyone injured or killed in the attack, we shed tears and offer prayers on behalf of the widows, widowers, orphans, and those who lost children, grandchildren, and friends in this great tragedy. It was declared to be an act of war. The universal question is "Why?" We don't have all the answers but there are some possibilities we need to consider.

Punishment

When America left Viet Nam, she received a slap in the face. To rid itself of American influence the first thing that nation did was close down all the bars, brothels, and gambling dens. America received an identical slap when we fled from Iran. We became immune to being slapped and have continued on a downward slide into decadence and immorality. There is no question that this nation has left the lofty principles upon which it was founded. To a large degree we have become haughty and arrogant. Many of our universities have become havens for religious scoffers who ridicule God's word while upholding the view that man is just an animal. Religion has become self-serving as billions are spent on recreation and entertainment. We have become a materialistic society, while many in Muslim countries live in poverty. The breakdown of the home, along with sexually transmitted diseases, have become epidemic. There has been much spiritual indifference. Make no mistake about it. The terrorists did not attack America because she is a "Christian nation", but because she is viewed as "the Great Satan" for her indulgences.

There is no evidence that God caused this calamity. Because of man's free will, it was allowed. If God is using this tragedy, we don't need to miss the message. While religious leaders call for a national day of prayer, we really need a national day of repentance and a return to the principles upon which that nation was founded.

God used foreign powers to punish Israel when they rebelled. He also used Israel to punish evil nation. America is not to be confused with God's Israel, but I firmly believe he still rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan. 2:20-22; Jer. 18:7-10).

False Religion – The Muslim Faith

This act of war has been attributed to Islamic fundamentalists. It should be made clear that there are a number of Muslims who are peace loving people, good citizens and who strongly oppose what happened. Just as Christian's don't want to be stereotyped with the rampant immorality and materialism of many Americans nor with those who bomb abortion clinics and claim they are doing it in the name of Christianity, these moderates should not be confused with the radicals and should be protected from persecution. They do need to come to terms with parts of the Koran which appear to advocate violence toward their opponents. "Fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them...fight those who believe not in God nor the last day" (*The Declaration of Immunity 9:5,29*).

Who are the "pagans" referred to? A decree by the grand council of 1000 Muslim clerics in Kabul (Afghan capital) said, "If infidels invade an Islamic country and that country does not have the ability to defend itself, it becomes the binding obligation of all the world's Muslims to declare a holy war" (*Memphis Commercial Appeal, 9-21-01*). Such passages are interpreted by fundamentalist Muslim clerics so that anyone who is not a Muslim is an infidel or pagan. Through history, the Islamic faith has often been spread through violence. Christ's kingdom was not of this nature (John 18:36).

Premillennialism

America's support for the Israeli government causes us to be an enemy of these radicals. Two American presidents (a Democrat and a Republican) have gone on record in saying that the modern nation of Israel is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. This is not so. First, it is a mistake to confuse the modern nation of Israel with Israel of the Old Testament. The nation of Israel, along with all the genealogical records of the Jews, were destroyed with Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There is no way to connect the modern nation of Israel to biblical Israel. Second, God gave Israel everything He promised them (Joshua 21:43-45). Their retaining the land was conditioned on being faithful to the Lord. They were not faithful and were removed from the land (Joshua 23:15,16).

Don't Criticize Other Religions

This is a popular religious view. Being "politically correct" has spread to the religious world. The denominational world of our day, with its ecumenical spirit, has created the atmosphere that does not allow religious criticism, open investigation, and debate. Right after the "Jonestown Massacre" in which over 900 people committed murder and suicide under the leadership of the "Reverend" Jim Jones, brother Harold Comer wrote an excellent piece in which he observed: "This causes a great silence that allows terrible abuses to grow and develop...At the early stages when people should have been informed of the inconsistencies of a man who denied the virgin birth and Bible miracles (while claiming to perform miracles himself), most Americans would have said, 'Don't criticize him.' When Jones threw the Bible down and would spit on it, claiming too many of his disciples were wanting to follow it and not him, the quarantine on religious criticism is in exposing false teachers...The value of all religious criticism is emphasized when the extremes of some cult that developed under the protection of 'Don't criticize other religions' are shockingly acted out before us."

The same applies in this recent tragedy. The prevailing attitude that "you don't criticize other religions" acts as an umbrella to protect error. It is no evidence of an un-Christ like spirit to expose error. Jesus did not give us a

steady diet of it but he loved all men and refuted error wherever he found it (2 Timothy 4:1-3). Why would he do that unless it has something to do with man's salvation? If it doesn't, why did he waste His breath? Jesus was not being mean, hardhearted, or unloving when he told the Sadducees: "Ye do greatly err, not knowing the scriptures." Preachers are commanded to teach those who opposed themselves, and to do so in gentleness (2 Timothy 2:24,25). When they obey this command impure motives should not be attributed to them.

A question is in order. Is there any place in the Scriptures where criticizing religious error is condemned? If so, Jesus violated it and cannot be our Savior. If the doctrine of "don't criticize other religions" was not taught by Christ and the apostles, then where did it come from? There is only one place.

Conclusion

We are fortunate that our lives have been spared to this moment. But all of us will die, either from sickness, an accident, or by violence. If this horrible tragedy can serve any good, it will be that the living come to realize how vulnerable they really are. As David said to Jonathan, "There is but a step between me and death."

We will continue to mourn this horrible tragedy for the rest of our days, but let us not forget these circumstances which may have made