

Special Focus, COPING WITH TRAGEDY: *Biblical Answers to Questions about the Tragic Events of September 11, 2001*

Presented September 23, 2001 and Still Applicable in National, International, and All Other Tragedies

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1. How could a good and all-powerful God allow these events to occur? A more complete response transcends the time and space available here, but it is provided in God's Word, the Bible, and in historic Christian systematic theology. The following is a summary of some of the main points in the answer to this question. For a more complete answer to this question that the Bible does provide, see my [general Website](#), and type theodicy in the Search bar. Theodicy is the theological term that addresses the righteousness and justice of God.
  - a. The Lord created us good, and for a period of time Adam and Eve did only what was good. (Genesis 1:31)
  - b. The Lord also created human beings with free will; he didn't want us to be puppets or robots. His desire was for us to genuinely love him and people because we want to and not because we have to do so. (Genesis 2:16-17; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39-40; John 13:34-35; 14:21; Ephesians 4:15; 1 John 2:7ff. [The original Greek word for "new" in verse eight is *καίνος* (*kainos*), meaning new in nature or in quality, i.e., renewed, in Christ Jesus, not brand new, for which there is another Greek word.])
  - c. God warned Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed and sinned by violating the one law he gave them, they would die. (Genesis 2:17)
    - 1) Adam and Eve disobeyed and corrupted human nature, and in so doing human beings became capable of all sorts of evil and unworthy of fellowship with God who is most holy. (Romans 5:12-21)
    - 2) The sin and evil that Adam and Eve caused when they disobeyed God resulted in a profound and enormous four-fold cosmic disharmony: (a) between God and mankind, (b) between and among human beings themselves, including interpersonal and national tragedies (c) within themselves, and (d) throughout the whole universe. For more on this subject, including the Biblical bases, see [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions](#). (Key words: disharmony, theodicy)
  - d. When the time was right in God's sight he sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to conquer Satan and the forces of evil. (Galatians 4:4; John 16:33; Revelation 20)

- e. God understands the suffering humans experience as a result of evil. His only begotten Son suffered in agony as he provided redemption at a huge cost to himself in the greatest demonstration of love ever, which involved an extremely torturous death at an early age. (Hebrews 4:15; 13:12)
- f. When the time is right in God's sight, his only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, will return (his second coming) to complete the destruction of Satan and his demonic forces, eliminate all evil and suffering, and bring forth the new heaven and earth. (Matthew 24-25; Acts 10:42; 1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 20:11-22:21)
- g. To prohibit sin and evil now, would result in one of two outcomes: the loss of our essential humanness and the image of God in which he created us (through the necessarily severe restriction of freedom, thus turning us into a type of puppet or robot) or the second coming of Christ and the likelihood of no more humans having the opportunity of life and eternal life.

2. What are the roots of the events that took place?

- a. The spiritual warfare in which we are engaged underlies and gives rise to such hostility and violence. (Genesis 3; Romans 8:37-39; Ephesians 6:10-20; Revelation 12-20)
  - 1) People ignore God and his will and then wonder where he is when trouble comes. Yet, he is always with us. (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20) He hasn't gone anywhere; when people don't pay attention to him, they lose sight of him. But for those who love the triune God and follow him, he provides all-sufficient help to overcome all adversity, including tragedy of every kind.
  - 2) Notice the turning point in the second half of the Book of Revelation, beginning with chapter 12. The first eleven chapters talk about the evils of this age. Beginning with chapter 12, we read about what is causing these evils. We also read of God's sovereignty and his final judgment and elimination of evil. (William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, pp. 134 ff.)
- b. Human nature is essentially sinful, and inclined to do what is evil, which involves disobedience to God's will, death (spiritual and physical), disharmony, and destruction. (Genesis 2:16; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; John 3:6; James 1:13-15, 4:1-2; Romans 3:23, 5:12-21; Revelation 20:6)

- c. Injustices in America's stand on the current state of Israel inflame anti-American and anti-Christian sentiment. See the document, "[Biblical and Theological Factors Affecting the Middle East Crisis](#)," which I distributed in this class in January when we focused on this issue.
3. How as individuals should we treat Muslim people? The answer is in Christlike love.
- a. First and most of all we must remember our calling: the Lord Jesus Christ has commissioned us as his disciples to reach out to all people, and in this case to Muslims in particular, in love. (Matthew 5:43-48, 28:16-20; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:15; 1 John 4:7-5:3)
    - 1) That love is defined in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."
    - 2) We must also distinguish between Muslims and what their religion officially teaches. Stereotypes, as usual, are not dependable: e.g., Shi'ites have been seen as flaming fundamentalists who are the dangerous radicals, and the majority Sunnis have been seen as peaceable and tolerant. Yet, both hold the Qur'an, the Hadith, and Muslim tradition as their authority, and Osama bin Ladin is (now in this 2022 update, was) a Sunni. Moreover, as with all religions, many adherents are so in name only. Also, not all Muslims are strong in their faith; many long for the hope that is only to be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our calling to inform them of this hope in Christ Jesus.
  - b. At the same time, we should not be deceived. While individual Muslims are often very nice people, we should keep in mind that the Qur'an, the basis of their religion, does teach its believers to kill people, in particular unbelievers (in Islam).
    - 1) For just three examples see Sura 9:5, 5:33, 4:88-91.
    - 2) Much deception is being communicated through disinformation and in other ways in the media, e.g., through the Muslim leaders being interviewed. Our political leaders are conveying a view of Islam that is contrary to its teachings, not only in the Qur'an but in the Hadith (tradition based on the teachings of Muhammad), throughout history, and in practice in Muslim controlled

countries. Ask people who speak about Islam being a religion of peace, compassion, and love to explain the above and other teachings in the Qur'an, the history of war in Islam, and the holocausts being perpetrated against Christians by Muslims today. Ask them to contrast the first three centuries of Christianity and the first three centuries of Islam (which was comprised of constant war). Ask them where they find love anywhere in the Qur'an. Arab missionaries in Muslim lands say that the word love does not even appear in the Qur'an. Conversely, I can show you the love of God on every page of the whole Bible.

- 3) The so-called "mainstream media" in the United States is either ignorant or being deceptive when it attempts to portray Islam as a peaceful religion and refers to "Muslim extremists" as the perpetrators of such violence. [As the Islamist organization called ISIS themselves insisted years later, as they tried to establish a new caliphate, "We're not extremists; we're just following the teaching of the Qur'an." And they are right on that matter.]
- 4) Some object that the Crusades and other instances of Christians warring against non-Christians show no difference between the two religions on this issue.
  - a) On the contrary, the Crusades were not endorsed by all Christians (even Eastern Christians were badly treated and suffered greatly by the Crusaders) and no Christians today endorse the Crusades as being God's will. Islam does endorse such warring. In fact, that has been the means they have used throughout history to advance Islam, which is a religion that is inextricably linked to the political order; there is no separation between the religion and the state in Islam.
  - b) Historically, we must also keep in mind that the Crusades were in response to the Muslims conquering of Palestine and the people who lived there, many of whom were Christians.
- 5) Some may object that the Bible teaches that God told his people to kill men, women, and children.
  - a) The answer begins with the awareness that the Qur'an teaches that such killing is justified for Muslims for all time, whereas the destruction God commanded was a

judgment on especially evil cult groups during a short and specific point in history and was to be done as part of God's plan of salvation.

- b) At a certain point in history God gave a portion of land, the land of Canaan, for a specific purpose—to preserve his people from contamination by pagan practices while he helped them develop an understanding of him and his purposes for them, i.e., how they were to be a blessing, not a curse, for the whole world, how the world could be made fit for fellowship with God who is holy as well as loving. Their remaining on this land was conditional; they could stay as long as they obeyed the Lord's commandments. (E.g., Deuteronomy 28; 1 Kings 9:1-9) (SHOW OVERHEAD MAP OF MIDDLE EAST IN OLD TESTAMENT [ABRAHAM'S TIME])
- c) What were these pagan practices like, which God's people were to destroy? They practiced child sacrifice and ritual prostitution of the grossest and most morally base kind. (E.g., 2 Kings 23) Such practices were detestable to God, who is not only holy, but holy, holy, holy (the threefold repetition being the way in the Biblical Hebrew language of expressing the meaning of most holy) as well as loving, and would render his people unable to bring salvation to the lost human beings he loves, who bear his image, and whom he wants to be saved. (SHOW PICTURES AND VIDEO OF BAAL WORSHIP IN MEGIDDO. [See the PowerPoint presentation, Bible Digest, and the accompanying Bible Digest Notebook.](#))
- d) This killing was commanded by God as a judgment on the gross immorality of the Canaanites and other pagan cults and to teach his people that such practices were an abomination to God and against his will. Such killing was commanded by God as a part of his plan of salvation, and his people carried out his commands as a state (we'll talk about the significance of this dimension of God's will shortly), not as individuals. The Bible does not now command God's people or anyone else to do such killing. God is the only one who "puts to death and brings to life." (Deuteronomy 32:39) All life is in his hands. He is sovereign, perfect, and it is his right to accomplish his purposes.

- e) There is no attempt in the Qur'an to portray God's plan of salvation in history or to present a historical flow in the Qur'an; it is somewhat organized by subject matter.
- f) Finally, remember the reasons for believing the Bible is the Word of God far outweigh any claims brought forward by Muslims that the Qur'an is such. (E.g., Jesus himself affirmed the Old Testament as the Word of God, and the New Testament was written by eye witnesses [some of whom the Apostle Paul named and most of whom were still living when he wrote his first letter in the Bible to the Corinthians (15:6), so Paul's readers could go talk with these witnesses]) to Jesus' Resurrection. Also, Luke worked closely with eyewitnesses to Jesus' Resurrection.)

Since the Qur'an contradicts the Bible, it is clear the Qur'an is not the Word of God. God does not contradict himself. Further, no revelation in addition to the Bible is needed in the Bible. Just the opposite is the case. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Revelation 22:18-21)

- g) As one authority on Islam has stated, "Terrorism grows on the soil of Islam. It is a religion that grows through conquest as has been seen historically since A.D. 633."
- c. However, we must remember that vengeance belongs to God, not to human beings. (Romans 12:17-21)
- d. Also, the human use of power and force does not accomplish the work to which God has called us. "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."
- e. Again, we must remember our calling: the Lord Jesus Christ has commissioned us to reach out to all people, and Muslims in particular, in love. We will not win people to Christ with hatred, vengeance, and other forms of rejection. That is not our calling, our vocation, our purpose. Our *raison d'être*, our reason for being here, in Christ is to love people to the Lord. Within that context people wonder why we are different; they ask questions. This is why the Apostle Peter was led to write, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." For those to whom the Holy Spirit gives a new nature, the new birth, he will use our words to create saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and I will have a part in helping someone find eternal life! Could there be anything more exciting! (Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John 4:7-5:3)

4. Can a Christian support or be involved in war, or bringing justice, in any way?
- a. To correctly interpret texts in the Bible which address this issue, we must distinguish between the individual and the corporate ethic. (E.g., Exodus 20, 21) As individuals, we are to love Muslims and all other humans.
  - b. However, those whose sin and evil break laws must be brought to justice. As individuals, we cannot administer that justice, but we can facilitate such justice by urging and supporting those in governmental, corporate, authority to do so. What is prohibited for an individual is sometimes permitted and necessary for the state. Biblically, God's people must not try individually to exact justice upon Muslim people for the events of 9/11 or any other injustice.
    - 1) It is the job of the national government to identify and bring justice to the specific people involved in perpetrating this national tragedy upon the United States of America.
    - 2) We see the difference between the individual and the corporate ethic in Exodus 20 and 21. The Ten Commandments, including the commandment, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13), applies to individuals, as the Hebrew clearly indicates in the tense of the verbs: second person masculine singular, i.e., "You [second person singular] must not...."
    - 3) In the very next chapter, however, we notice the corporate ethic, wherein God gives the state authority and commands it to do what individuals are prohibited from doing, e.g., capital punishment (Exodus 21:12-17). There is no contradiction in the Bible, in this matter or in any other, which becomes clear when God's Word is properly interpreted.
      - This same distinction between the individual and corporate ethic exists today, e.g., where individuals cannot take a human life, but the state can do so under certain laws.
  - c. Pacifism bases its stand on Biblical texts that apply to individuals in their treatment of one another, not to their corporate involvements as part of the state.
  - d. Christians are to support their authorities where they are right and to oppose and work for change where they are wrong. (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Daniel 6; Acts 4:1-22, esp. v. 19)

- e. Next Sunday, September 30, Dr. DeKruyter will focus and provide further information on this subject in addition to what we have time for this morning. His subject will be, “Can a Christian support war?”
5. Discussion If any of you have questions or comments you can’t raise in the remaining time in this class, since this is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month, I’ll be at the Ask a Pastor Booth in the back of this room throughout the fellowship time between services.

## Other Resources

### Websites

[www.levant.info](http://www.levant.info) or [www.safeplace.net/members/mer](http://www.safeplace.net/members/mer)

Notice in particular the review of the book, *Islam and War* by John Kelsay.

[www.wrfnet.org](http://www.wrfnet.org)

Notice especially the articles, “Islam Is More than a Religion” and the critique of “Islam: Empire of Faith” a review of the PBS documentary aired in May 2001

### Books

*What You Need to Know about Islam and Muslims* by George W. Braswell, Jr. (Broadman and Holman Publishers) ISBN 080541829-6 Read also the review by Rev. Bassam Madany on [www.safeplace.net/members/mer](http://www.safeplace.net/members/mer).

*Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics, and Power* by George W. Braswell, Jr. Read also the review by Rev. Bassam Madany on [www.safeplace.net/members/mer](http://www.safeplace.net/members/mer).

*Islam and War* by John Kelsay

*The Bible and Islam* by Bassam Madany

*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel Huntington