

The Towers Have Fallen But We Missed the Message



David Wilkerson October 8, 2001

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City were destroyed. Five days later, as I was preparing this message, I looked out the window of my study in our 30th-floor apartment. Huge clouds of smoke were still smoldering from the ruins. They rose from the rubble and drifted out over the Hudson River, passing above the Statue of Liberty.

The following Sunday, just before I preached this message at Times Square Church, I wept at the sight of the utter devastation. I pleaded with God for mercy: mercy for the grieving families who lost loved ones. Mercy for the workers still digging through the rubble, hoping to locate survivors, but finding only corpses and severed body parts. Mercy for all the police officers, fire fighters and volunteers, who wept openly over the indescribable horrors they saw.

Our church was allowed to set up a relief tent at ground zero of the disaster. Ministry leaders and volunteers from our congregation worked tirelessly around the clock, helping to feed and encourage the weary workers.

Six weeks prior to the disaster, the Holy Spirit forewarned our pastoral staff that a calamity was coming. We had scheduled several major events for the weeks ahead, including our Missions Conference and Youth Convention. But God's Spirit prompted us to cancel them all. Instead, we felt stirred to call our congregation to prayer.

We decided to hold prayer meetings four nights a week. From the very beginning, each meeting was marked by an awesome stillness that settled over the congregation. We sat quietly in the Lord's presence, often without a sound, for up to an hour, followed by soft weeping and heartrending repentance. In one meeting, I had to steady my knees with my hands, to keep them from trembling in God's awesome presence.

During this visitation from the Lord, the Holy Ghost revealed there was a reason for the weeping in our hearts. We were being so moved because a tragedy was coming. A severe calamity was coming to the nation. And even though we didn't know what it was, our hearts were stirred to intercede concerning it.

Then suddenly, the calamity struck. And it hit not only our city, but the nation's capital. One network anchor declared, "Think of it, our two symbols of power and prosperity have been smitten in one hour." Little did he know, he was quoting Revelation 18:10: "Alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come."

As a policeman from our church helped out at ground zero, his fellow officers kept asking him, "What's this all about? What's happening?" Meanwhile, the whole nation has been asking, "Where is God in all this?"

We're right to ask this question. We need to understand where God is in this calamity. And to do that, we have to trust his holy Word alone. We've heard hundreds of opinions from media experts and politicians. But all their rhetoric has begun to sound the same. There's no real understanding about the meaning of this sudden destruction.

There is one thing I can assure you of: God wasn't taken by surprise. He knows the thoughts of all human beings,

including every ruler, despot and terrorist. The Lord monitors the movements of every person in the entire mass of humankind. He knows when we sit down or stand up. And I can tell you, this one thing is sure: God has everything under control. Nothing on the face of the earth takes place without his knowledge of it, his permission for it, and, at times, his doing behind it.

If You're a Christian, You Know God Has Delivered a Message to America and the World through this Disaster.

Ministers and theologians everywhere are saying, "God had nothing to do with these disasters. He wouldn't allow such awful things to happen." Yet nothing could be further from the truth. This kind of thinking is causing our nation to rapidly miss the message God wants to speak to us through the tragedy.

The fact is, we have to have a word from God. Like many pastors, I've wept and grieved over this awful calamity. I've sought the Lord in prayer and through his Word. And I want to tell you, I've experienced a grief that's even deeper than the mourning for innocent people dying. It's a grief that says if we miss God's message, if we turn a deaf ear to what he's loudly proclaiming, then much worse is in store for us.

The prophet Isaiah speaks directly to what we've just experienced. (If you object to using the Old Testament for examples, consider Paul's words on the subject: "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" [1 Corinthians 10:11]. Paul makes it clear: the examples of the Old Testament reveal just how God moves in times like ours.)

At the time that Isaiah prophesied, God had been dealing patiently with Israel for about 250 years. The Lord had sent "light afflictions" upon his people, calling them to repentance. He was trying to woo them out of their brazen idolatry and back into his blessing and favor.

All of the prophets throughout the years had spoken to Israel the same essential word: "Humble yourselves." Scripture says, "They served idols...yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes" (2 Kings 17:12-13).

But God's chosen nation rejected his call to repentance. "They would not hear, but hardened their necks" (17:14). These people mocked the prophets who called them to humility. And, instead, they "followed vanity, and became vain...and they left all the commandments of the Lord their God...and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord...therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel" (17:15-18).

God Sent Wake-Up Calls to Israel.

The Lord's first wake-up call to Israel came in an invasion by Assyria. This arch enemy attacked two Israelite provinces, Zebulun and Naphtali. Fortunately, the attacks were limited to these two points, and the damage was minimal. Yet God was clearly speaking to his people. The Lord's chosen nation lost their sense of security. Yet they still missed the message God was speaking.

Israel then received a second wake-up call. This one was very severe. Two nations whom Scripture calls the "enemies of Israel" -- the Syrians and the Philistines -- combined forces for a sudden attack. According to Isaiah, this attack came from both "before, and...behind" (Isaiah 9:12). This means the invaders came from the east and the west, surrounding Israel. And their sudden attack was totally devastating.

Now we come to the heart of my message, and to the question most Americans are asking: Where was God in this sudden invasion of his chosen land? What were his people to make of the disaster that had come upon them? Isaiah tells us God was faithful to speak to his people: "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel" (Isaiah 9:8). God spoke a clear word. And he sent the message to the whole nation.

Beloved, this verse tells us something very important at our own time of devastation. It says simply, "God always sends his word." Never in history has the Lord left his people clueless in a time of calamity. He has never abandoned us and forced us to figure out things on our own. He always provides a word of understanding.

Even now the Lord is raising up godly watchmen to speak for him in these times. These shepherds are grieving, weeping and repenting as they seek God's face. And I believe they're hearing and understanding the Lord's

message behind the present events. Moreover, they're not afraid to proclaim dire warnings, because they know they've heard from God. They're compelled to speak of his purposes behind our calamities.

I Have to Speak a Word None of Us Wants to Hear.

Many readers won't receive the word I'm about to deliver. They'll think it's heartless, cruel, unkind in a time of grieving. But, I tell you, if we don't hear God's truth and face it, our nation is doomed. Here is the word I hear the Lord speaking to us right now: "The Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together...for the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 9:11, 13).

The Bible makes it crystal clear: God used enemy nations to chasten his people. The Lord wielded these enemies as an instrument of warning to Israel, calling the nation to repent. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (10:5-6).

God charged this coalition of Israel's enemies to chasten his chosen people. The Lord was trying to warn Israel, "You've lifted yourself up with pride. Now I'm about to bring you down. I'm going to allow you to be disciplined by your enemies."

The enemy coalition launched their massive attack. And, suddenly, the Israelites watched in horror as their buildings began to collapse. Fires raged throughout the cities, burning down stately structures. In a short time, Israel was in flames. And God's people began to wail, "The bricks are fallen down...the sycamores are cut down" (9:10).

After witnessing the recent disasters in New York and Washington, we can begin to imagine the emotions of the ancient Israelites. Yet, did Israel repent after this horrifying attack? Was there a nationwide acknowledgment that God was sending them a warning? Did the rulers hear God speaking through the awful calamity? No. Israel's reaction was just the opposite. The people's initial fear quickly gave way to a flood tide of national pride. "All the people...say in the pride and stoutness of heart" (9:9).

The Hebrew word for stoutness in this verse signifies a sense of greatness. In other words, once the attack died down, the Israelites regained their confidence. They declared, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars" (9:10). They were saying, in other words, "These calamities aren't from our Lord. They're simple fate, unfortunate disasters that can't be explained".

"We're a great and mighty nation. We're made up of a proud, unbending people. And we're going to let the world know we're coming back. We'll build everything back bigger and better. Where we used bricks before, we'll use stone. And where we once built with cheap construction, we'll use better materials. We're a God-blessed nation. And we're going to come through this disaster stronger than ever."

Doesn't this all sound very familiar? The Lord himself used an evil enemy to send a warning of chastisement to his people. He wanted to wake them up to their compromise, bring them back to himself, pour out his blessings on them, and surround them with his protection. Yet, throughout their days of grief and horror, God's people never once acknowledged his hand in it all. No one asked, "What is the Lord saying through all this? Is he trying to speak to us?" No one thought for a moment that such a proud, great nation could be humbled and chastised. On the contrary, the people used the occasion to defy any such thought. They refused to hear God's warning to them.

I ask you: does Israel's example hit home with you, after everything we've witnessed in recent weeks? Please don't misunderstand me. I thank God we have a moral President leading our country. I thank the Lord for all the devout Christians who serve in high office. Our church prays diligently for our nation's leaders. And we're grateful for the temporary outpouring of prayer nationwide. It's encouraging to see people sobering up and beginning to rethink their lifestyles.

Yet, even so, we risk missing God's message to us. Think about it: when our public assemblies call for a moment of silence, we think it's true repentance. When we see politicians singing "God Bless America," we think our nation has turned back to God. When we see sporting events observe a silent minute at halftime, we think it's a spiritual experience.

But is this all that's going to come out of our recent disaster? Will people in sports stadiums stand in silence for a minute, then go back to painting their bodies in wild colors, chug beer after beer, and scream maniacally for their favorite team?

Like most Americans, I wept as I saw Senators and Congressional leaders standing on the steps of the Capitol, singing, "God bless America...stand beside us, and guide us..." Yet, as I was crying, the Lord reminded me, "Many of the leaders you see singing have worked to rule me out of American society. They are even determined to remove my name from American history books. And they've allowed the murder of millions of babies through abortion."

Suddenly, I was struck by the absolute hypocrisy of it all. We give lip service to God, but we continue our slide into the mire of immorality.

When a Nation Is Under Divine Correction, It Will React in One of Two Ways.

A nation under chastisement may humble itself and repent, as Nineveh did. Or, it may give lip service to God, but then turn inward to its own strength to rise above the correction. There will be a rallying cry, stating, "We have the strength to endure any disaster. And we have the ability and resolve to overcome any problem. We're truly a great nation."

I'm as patriotic as any American. And I'm as thrilled as anyone at the unity our nation is experiencing. I thank God for the heroic efforts and incredible sacrifices we've seen in the wake of the terrorist attacks. The whole world is in awe of the fortitude and love displayed by the people of New York, Washington, D.C. and America in general.

But we face the same danger Israel did. In our fiery patriotism, we could easily miss God's message to our nation. And right now, we're standing at the very same crossroads where Israel stood.

I wonder: if we had lived in Isaiah's day, would we have listened to his prophetic warnings? Or would we have turned a deaf ear to him? Both Jerusalem and the nation of Judah refused to believe they could be brought low. Yet Isaiah prophesied, "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" (Isaiah 10:11). God was saying, in essence, "I've judged other nations for the very idolatry you're practicing. Why wouldn't I judge you? What makes you exempt from my law?"

All across America, people are holding meetings for "prayer and remembrance." It's right and honorable (and totally scriptural) to remember those who have died. But why are we so afraid to also call for meetings of "prayer and repentance"? Right now, most Americans are focused on remembrance and revenge. Yet, where is the call in America to turn back to God?

As for the punishment of terrorists, Isaiah addresses this issue as well. He declares, "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria" (Isaiah 10:12). Indeed, when God was finished using Assyria as "the rod of mine anger," he destroyed them. Likewise, God will bring down any terrorists who attack and murder innocent people. It won't be long before they meet their eternal destiny in hell.

Here Is the Message I Believe God Is Trumpeting in Our Calamities.

Deep in my spirit, I hear the Lord saying, "I've prospered you above all nations. Yet, for years you've persisted in worshipping idols of gold and silver. I've endured your shameless sensuality, your mockery of holy things, your shedding of innocent blood, your tireless efforts to remove me from your society. Now time is running out for you.

"I've sent you prophet after prophet, watchman after watchman. You've been warned again and again. Yet still you won't open your eyes to your wicked ways. Now I've stricken you, in hopes of saving you. I want to heal your land, to destroy your enemies, to bring you back into my blessing. But you don't have eyes to see it."

If God wouldn't spare other nations that have outlawed him, why would he spare America? He'll judge us even as he judged Sodom, Rome, Greece and every other culture that has turned its back on him.

Consider what God spoke through Ezekiel: "Cast away from you all your transgressions...and make you a new

heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezekiel 18:31-32).

For anyone who doubts that God feels pain, here is proof positive of his great compassion. He too feels grief and sorrow over death. He's telling us in this passage, "I take no pleasure in seeing you suffer and die. That's why I'm pleading with you now: turn from your sin and live."

God weeps especially over those calamities that befall innocents. In these past weeks, you can be sure Jesus has been weeping over the victims of the terrorist attacks. He is said to "bottle the tears of his saints." Indeed, I believe many of the tears shed by Christians are God's own tears, prompted by his Spirit in us.

Yet, at times, God's justice and righteousness cause him to restrain his pity. And he's forced to carry out his righteous judgments as a last resort. The greatest example of this is the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. Justice demanded that the sins of the whole world be laid on an innocent man, and that this man would be condemned to die for all. Tell me, who could be more innocent than God's own Son? Yet Christ willingly gave himself as a sacrifice, to offer deliverance and salvation to all of humankind.

What Will Happen to America If We Miss God's Message?

What will be our nation's fate if we reject God's call to turn wholly to him? What will happen if abortions continue and fetuses are used for research...if we keep erasing our Savior's name from American history...if we rebuild all things bigger and better, only to enrich ourselves more...if we rely on our armed might rather than on God for power?

Isaiah describes what happens to every nation that rejects God and boasts of its own greatness: "Wickedness burneth as the fire...they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother. And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry...they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm" (Isaiah 9:18-20).

Devouring fires will rise to the heavens. Darkness will cover the land. The economy will be hit with a staggering blow. And there will be disunity in the nation, in communities, in neighborhoods, in families. People will look out only for themselves, in a desperate fight to survive. And God help you if you come near them.

I was given a prophetic message nine years ago, and I delivered it at Times Square Church on September 7, 1992. Let me share it with you now:

"This warning is not meant to scare you. It's meant only for you to take to the Lord and pray. This is what I believe God has shown me":

"Thirty days of chastisement will fall on New York City such as the world has never seen. God is going to let down the walls. There will be unimaginable violence and looting. The violence will be so ferocious, it will shock the whole world. Our streets will be lined not just with the National Guard but with militia."

"A thousand fires will burn at the same time throughout the city. The Los Angeles fires were confined to a few sections of that city, but New York will be ablaze in all its boroughs. Times Square will be ablaze, and the flames will ascend into heaven and be seen for miles. Fire trucks will not be able to handle it all."

"Trains and buses will be shut down. Billions of dollars will be lost. Broadway shows will stop completely. Businesses will flee the city in an unstoppable hemorrhage. Such things are expected in Third World countries, but not in a civilized nation like the United States. Yet, in not too long a time afterward, New York City will go completely bankrupt. The Queen City will be cast into the dirt, becoming a city of poverty."

"You may ask, when will all this happen? All I can say is, I believe I will be here when it happens. Yet, when it does, God's people are not to panic or fear."

Calls and messages have flooded our ministry offices, asking, "Was the terrorist attack on September 11 the calamity you were prophesying back in 1992?" No, not at all. What I saw coming will be much more severe. Indeed, if America rejects God's call to turn back to him, we'll face the same judgments Israel faced. And they will hit not only New York but every region in the country. Even the heartland won't be spared. The nation's economy will

collapse, and violence will erupt. Fires will consume our cities, and tanks will rumble through the streets.

Perhaps you wonder, as I have, "Can any of this be avoided?" Yes, absolutely. I believe we'll be given a reprieve if our President proves to be a Josiah. You may well remember Josiah as the king who sought the Lord with all his heart. We all should pray that God would give our President the same spirit that Josiah had, to tremble at his Word. The Lord spoke the following to Josiah:

"Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof...because they have forsaken me, and have (worshipped) other gods...But [say] to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord...Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, and thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse...I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore...thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place" (2 Kings 22:15-20).

God told the king, in essence, "As long as you're in power, trembling at my Word and relying on me, you won't see the judgments to come. They won't happen during your reign."

I believe our window of opportunity to respond to God's call is brief. We all should pray that our nation repents and turns back to the Lord. But our most intense prayers should be for our own hearts: "Lord, let me tremble not at the disasters, but at your Word. I want to hear your voice in all of this. Cause me to turn wholly to you."

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