

Where Was God in Aurora?

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A day or two after the Aurora, Colorado massacre on July 21, 2012, Stephen Prothero, a religious blogger at CNN, teased CNN readers by transposing Pope Benedict's 2006 question from, "Where was God during Auschwitz?" to "Where was God in Aurora?" A few days later, Prothero indicated on his blog that seven basic answers could be distilled from the 10,000+ responses he received:

1. There is no God.
2. Don't blame God, blame Satan.
3. Don't blame God, blame us. (Human beings have free will.)
4. God was behind the massacre, and it was just (because this nation has turned its back on God).
5. God was present at the massacre with the victims, but not the perpetrator.
6. Which God?
7. Who knows? It's a mystery.

Before offering my thoughts on God's whereabouts during the Aurora massacre (12 people killed and 58 wounded), consider these facts: Wikipedia estimates that approximately 9,500 civilians have been killed or murdered during the past 18 months in Syria. Between March 2003 and April 2009, the Associated Press estimates that 110,600 civilians were killed in Iraq.

In 2009 alone, there were 15,241 murders in the United States, and Wikipedia also reports that since 2006, approximately 9,000 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan. If we go back in time, we could ask, "Where was God when Pol Pot, Charles Taylor, Idi Amin, Stalin, and Hitler were in power?"

Collectively, these despots killed tens of millions of innocent people. I know that people tend to catalog the deaths of innocent people in war-torn areas as "unfortunate collateral damage," but isn't the massacre in Aurora another case of "unfortunate collateral damage?"

Let me explain. If a soldier is engaged in warfare and he kills unarmed civilians or if an angry or insane person kills or wounds innocent people, is there a difference? In both cases, innocent people die and our judicial systems (civilian and military) say there is no difference. Predatory violence is a crime and felons are (or should be) punished accordingly. For example, you may recall that just last year, army sergeant Calvin Gibbs was found guilty of three counts of killing

civilians in Iraq and sentenced to life in prison.

As you continue reading this article, keep this definition in mind: *A tragedy occurs when a predator harms an innocent person.* Predators can harm people in many different ways. For example, on June 22, retired Penn State football coach, Jerry Sandusky, was found guilty on 45 of 48 counts of sexually abusing several minors. Even though Jerry Sandusky did not kill anyone, the jury concluded that he had seriously harmed several young men. More and more it seems, the media tells tragic stories.

Do not forget though, the news media is limited to reporting "known sin." Given the fact that the world population is seven billion, there must be an infinite number of tragedies going on that are hidden and unknown. I have highlighted these examples to put some perspective on the tragedy in Aurora, but let me be clear, tragedies will not end until the Second Coming. Instead, I believe we really need to ask this more encompassing question: "Where is God?" Remember, tragedies have continued since Cain killed Abel!

If a person dies when he is 125 years old, we would conclude that he lived "an unusually long life." However, when compared to God's endless life span, 125 years is nothing, not even statistically significant. This comparison is important because when we investigate the ways and plans of an infinite God who knows no haste or delay, large samples of time are required. King David wrote, **"For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night."** (Psalm 90:4)

If a person wants to study the character and ways of the Most High God, he must study the Bible because it is the only document on Earth that actually quotes God. Within the Bible, apocalyptic prophecy proves the existence of the Most High God because He alone can declare the end from the beginning and no one else can do this.

Moreover, the Bible has documented God's actions, declarations, love, and plans over the past 6,000 years. No other document does this. The Bible declares that the Most High God is love (1 John 4:7,8), but God's love is poorly understood and this ignorance has created an endless amount of scoffing and skepticism.

Fortunately, certain elements of God's love can be understood because God is as reasonable as the sciences He has created (although it does require effort to understand Him and His sciences). As we continue to discuss "Where is God when tragedies occur?" let us first consider five things the Bible says about God:

1. Great King. - The Bible says that the Most High God is a great king. **"For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the Earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."** (Psalm 95:3-6) **"For by Him all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him."** (Colossians 1:16)

2. God Is Patient. The Bible says the Lord is patient: **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise [to bring the problem of sin to an end], as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** (2 Peter 3:9, insertion mine)

3. God Sees Everything. The Bible says the Lord's eyes sweep over the Earth, He sees everything: **"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the Earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. . . The Lord knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile [unwise]."** (2 Chronicles 16:9, Psalm 94:11, insertion mine)

4. God Holds Each Person Accountable for His Actions. - The Bible says that God holds a person accountable for his actions: **"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."** (Ecclesiastes 12:14) **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** (2 Corinthians 5:10)

5. God Deals with Mankind on Two Levels. - This may come as a surprise, but God deals with mankind on two levels, a corporate level and an individual level. Please consider a few of the distinctions between these levels:

Throughout Earth's history, God has "organized" people into **groups of people** called tribes, nations, or countries. The Bible says, **"From one man [Adam] He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole Earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."** (Acts 17:26, insertion mine)

Nations do not arise by the prowess of men. The prophet Daniel said, **"He [God] changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. . . . so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."** (Daniel 2:21, 4:17, insertion mine)

Consider how the Most High dealt with the *whole* world in Noah's day: **"Now the Earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the Earth had become, for all the people on Earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the Earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the Earth.' "** (Genesis 6:11-13)

These and many other verses in the Bible indicate that God takes action when *a group* of people reach a point where extended mercy has *no redeeming effect*. At times throughout history, God has destroyed nations so that future generations can know about His love.

Remember, God sees oncoming generations with the same clarity that He sees the current generation. God destroys a wicked generation so the oncoming generation will not suffer under the burden of guilt created by their forefathers. In other words, when a huge number of predators and abusive people are destroyed, future generations will not be subjected to endless rounds of tragedies, at least for awhile.

God also deals with mankind at the individual level by empowering peers to rule over peers. When God raises up a nation, He appoints people to rule over people and He has put a predisposition within most people's hearts to obey their rulers as long as the rulers are honorable.

The Bible says, **"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. . . . He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."** (Romans 13:1-4)

When rulers do what is right, God blesses that ruler and his nation. **"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for his inheritance. From Heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on Earth – He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.**

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine." (Psalm 33:12-19)

When leaders (political and religious) do evil in God's sight, God responds in different ways to eliminate them. (See Numbers 16:46; 1 Chronicles 21 and 1 Samuel 3:11-14.) God holds each leader accountable as a trustee and each leader is accountable for his actions. When Judgment Day arrives, evil leaders will be punished for their evil actions. (See Revelation 6:15-17.)

When the five Bible principles previously mentioned are aligned with the tragedies mentioned above, we find a consistent behavior. God grants freedom to each of us as individuals, but God holds us accountable for our actions. God executes corporate punishment on nations when *its majority* passes the point of no return.

God does not often deal with individuals. Instead, He has generously appointed leaders over the nations to serve as trustees of justice, and He allows peers to deal justly with injustice. (Note: Many wicked people may escape justice in this life, but at the end of the 1,000 years, God will resurrect the wicked and deal with them on an individual basis.

Until then, God does not generally execute judgment upon individuals. This is why Paul wrote, **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."** (Romans 12:19)

Summary

The Most High is keenly aware of each and every act of predatory violence. Jesus told His disciples, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the**

ground apart from the will [knowledge] of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matthew 10:29,30, insertion mine) God is moved by every sorrow (He sees them all) and He sends the Holy Spirit with sustaining grace to the victims. (John 16:7)

So, why did God allow the tragedy at Aurora, and why has He allowed tragedies (the harming of innocent people) to continue for thousands of years? I can think of several possibilities, but here are two. Perhaps it has to do with numbers! Suppose, at creation, God foreknew how many years it would take to repopulate Heaven. Perhaps God has allowed the curse of sin to linger on Earth to produce the number of saints equal to the billions of angels cast out of Heaven for rebellion. When that number is reached, the end will come.

Second, it is possible that God has allowed the curse of sin to linger for the sake of knowledge! Suppose that God foreknew that six millennial days (6,000 years) would be necessary for evil to fully mature and the knowledge of good and evil become complete. Many people still do not realize that given enough time and opportunity, every sinner becomes a predator (a tragedy maker). This is the curse that comes with sin and this is why sin (and those who love it) must be destroyed at the appointed time.

Human beings tend to look at circumstances from an earthly perspective, but God is looking forward to a new Heaven and a new Earth and He has patiently taken wise steps to prevent sin from occurring again in His universe. (This is not a simple or easy task given the fact that God's children have the power of choice.)

God is making sure that Earth's drama with sin will not be repeated in the eternity to come. Of course, the tragedy in Aurora and future tragedies that will surely come to light tell us that we have not yet reached the fullness of God's plans. But remember, a new order is coming. Unfortunately, as that date draws near, skeptics and scoffers are increasing exponentially.

God is not "missing in action." He waits patiently on His throne. He has seen the billions of tragedies that have occurred on Earth. He has not been inactive. Civilizations have come and gone because they reached a point of no return. His inaction in recent years has given scoffers a good reason to scoff (they think).

Remember, even if a person could live to be 125, that is nothing compared to the Most High who is timeless and ageless. He has a wise plan, it is flawless and on track. At the appointed time, we can be sure that He will rise up and deal with the whole world as He did in Noah's day. **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37)

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