

9/11 and the Rapture (Part 1)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Most likely you remember where you were when you first learned of the terror that came to America's shores on the morning of September 11, 2001.

It is not at all difficult for me to remember, as I first heard of the attacks after teaching a class on the book of Daniel at Maranatha Baptist Bible College, where I was serving as an adjunct professor.

As I got in my car after class, I remember turning on the radio. First, I tried to listen to the news, but I could not truly comprehend what I was hearing. I remember switching to Dr. David Jeremiah on *Turning Point*. Ironically, his scheduled message for that day, from his series on the book of Revelation, was entitled—so appropriately—“When All Hell Breaks Loose.”

My wife Lynnette was on her way to Indianapolis, where her mother would have open heart surgery the next day. She had thought of flying, but drove instead. As she saw people lined up around the block to purchase gasoline that evening, her mind immediately raced to the events of the future tribulation.

Nearly 3,000 Americans died that day, with thousands more suffering injuries.

And all of our lives were changed.

For just a short time, there was real patriotism and unity in our country—even something of an outward turning to God. For just a season, news updates replaced sitcoms, sporting events became displays of nationalistic fervor, and even the late-night comedians turned somber. If you can believe it, there were chapel services held in public schools all across the country.

And the churches were flooded with people. Throughout America, congregations of every stripe opened their doors for prayer services, and community members poured in.

I have my own story to tell in this regard. I was scheduled to speak at a little country church in central Wisconsin on the Sunday after 9/11. I had spoken there once before that summer, and preached to a tiny crowd. No one even came with a key to open the door until we were already late for our first scheduled meeting.

But on the Sunday following the terrorist attacks, the church was packed! The pews were full. I could not believe it. I felt the weight of delivering a message that would reach that audience—while also secretly wondering what was truly in the heart of each one there that had driven them back to church.

In many ways, our lives were deeply and permanently impacted by the events of 9/11—even as they are being impacted once again now by the coronavirus crisis. It changed

everything from how we get on an airplane or enter a sports stadium to how we view the world—or, perhaps, even our own neighborhoods.

But as far as the most profound changes go, they were short-lived. Church attendance quickly leveled off. Questions were ultimately raised about the religious influences that had been allowed to enter our schools. The comedians went back to their old routines soon enough.

Fast forward to today, and we know all too well how vulgar our culture has become; how toxic our politics have turned; how our patriotism seems to have fallen on hard times—especially during this season of rioting and violence.

Looking back on 9/11, I see not only how it affected our country, and our world, but even more importantly how it was of great significance in further setting the stage for the future fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.

I also believe that 9/11 can illustrate important truths about the rapture of the church and the coming seven-year period of tribulation that will follow it.

The word *rapture* is a commonly accepted theological term (transliterated from the Latin, *rapturo*, and translated from the Greek, *harpazo*—a form of which is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 [“caught up”]). All orthodox Christians, thus, believe in the *rapture*—the only disagreement relates to its timing.

I use the word *rapture* to refer to the first phase or aspect of Christ’s second coming, in which He will resurrect the bodies of “those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:14) and also catch all living believers up “to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17).

We will consider how we might relate the events of 9/11 to the rapture in our next installment.

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