

Biblical Realities Confront Us

By PAUL J. SCHARF

It has recently been encouraging to hear several Christian leaders express the hope—or even the belief—that interest in Bible prophecy is on the increase once again.

This certainly makes sense, given the situation enveloping our world.

We are now on the threshold of month number four of shutdowns due to the coronavirus crisis. This contagion has changed our way of life—presumably forever—bringing our economy to its knees, costing us our freedoms and filling the world with panic and fear, often based on (to put it politely) conflicting reports.

If the interpretation of Scripture known as dispensational premillennialism is correct—and I believe that it is—can you imagine a more perfect scenario in which the rapture (the “catching up” to heaven) of the church, the true body of Christ, could take place, before the seven years of tribulation begin?

Please note that I am making no predictions as to the timing of the Lord’s return. I also submit that there are no signs of the pretribulational rapture presented in the Bible, as it is described as an imminent event (see 1 Thess. 1:10).

However, there are signs of Jesus’ return at the end of the tribulation—the final aspect of His second coming. And in light of Jesus’ rebuke of “the Pharisees and Sadducees” in Matthew 16:1-4, it is incumbent upon us to be aware of and to “*discern* the signs of the times” (v. 3).

From Luke 21, we find that two specific “signs” (v. 25) of Jesus’ return are “pestilences” (v. 11) and “men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth” (v. 26).

While we are certainly seeing both of these things evident all around us right now, I do not believe that we are witnessing the *fulfillment* of Biblical prophecy. Rather, I think that we are seeing the early flickering *shadows* of future events, as they stand between us and the glory of Christ’s return. The “signs” that we see today are evidence that the stage is now being set for the final end-time drama to unfold. And, if the understanding of Bible prophecy which I have learned from so many great and godly teachers is accurate, we should not be shocked that such preparations are taking place.

If anything is surprising, it is how closely our current situation is mimicking circumstances that we had perhaps imagined as developing during the tribulation. It seems to be no exaggeration to say that we are going through a practice run for those days after the church has been removed. In fact, although the rapture is itself an act of grace for the believer (rather than judgment for the world), the simple fact is that the occurrence of the rapture at this time would plunge the nations into chaos, upon chaos, upon chaos—all in an instant. Civilization would never begin to recover from its effects.

And the Bible warned us all along that “the day of the Lord will come” (2 Pet. 3:10; see 1 Thess. 5:2). Some of us have preached on these themes for years. Perhaps we have even *preached* more than we actually *believed*. But we apparently stand now at the precipice of this time. Oh, history may back us away from that edge for a while again, but we will not—we must not—ever be the same.

So even if we find the *new normal*, and grow somewhat comfortable living within its parameters, the point is the same.

Biblical realities confront us all around.

The pandemic (and I use that term to include all the attendant aspects of the crisis) has lugged the world, against its will, out of the solace afforded by postmodern hedonism, and has left it lying in a heap—inflicted with the cold realities of poverty, sickness, suffering and death.

I might get sick—or even die prematurely. I might not see my dreams fulfilled. I may never again enjoy all the comforts that I have come to rely upon.

Generations that have presumed, until now, to be invulnerable, must grapple with these Biblical realities.

They may be especially disturbing to the nominal Christian—who always desired the comforts of the faith, but never bore its concerns.

Such Biblical realities now not only confront us, but convict us.

We have no safe alternative but to embrace them wholeheartedly with “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.

Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.