

9/11 and the Rapture (Part 2)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

The events of September 11, 2001, which we remember again this week, can illustrate important truths about the rapture of the church and the coming seven-year period of tribulation that will follow it. Here are a few of them:

- First, both 9/11 and the rapture are *immediate* events.

The people who boarded the targeted airplanes on September 11, 2001, or who went to work in the World Trade Center, or at the Pentagon, could not have detected that they might have had only a short time left to live. No one knew with any certainty that the terror attacks were about to unfold. Sadly, nothing would ultimately hinder the deadly rampage.

The rapture, in which Christ will return to catch all true believers away to be with him forever, is also *immediate* in the sense that there is no other event that must precede it, and thus no sign that will alert us to Christ's coming. The theological word for this concept is *imminence*. That means that the rapture can occur *at any moment*. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that it will happen "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." No one will warn us before it occurs—it will strike instantaneously. At that split second, every person on Earth will be in one of two categories—taken to "be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17) or . . . *left behind*.

- Second, both 9/11 and the rapture are *impactful* events.

Many suffered greatly on 9/11. Others rose up and answered the call to serve our nation heroically in its aftermath. We are well aware how much 9/11 has affected our everyday lives.

I certainly did not suffer directly from the events of 9/11, yet that day had such a profound effect on my worldview that I subconsciously seem to divide my life around it. I will never forget the events of that fall.

Two weeks after 9/11, I returned to Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa (from which I had previously graduated), to take a modular course from Dr. John C. Whitcomb on the books of Ezra and Esther. I will never forget the many allusions he made to 9/11 throughout that week of study. It was truly a remarkable experience in my life.

Even more than 9/11, the event that we call the rapture will change the world forever. In terms of the sheer impact it will have upon humanity, it will multiply the effect of 9/11 many times over—all the world around, simultaneously. In an instant, there will be cars without drivers, planes without pilots, and parents without children—perhaps even nations without key leaders. While the rapture is an act of grace for believers, not an act of judgment, yet it will inherently lead to global tragedies for those who are not taken by

the Lord. We can say with assurance that there will never be a recovery from the chaos that will unfold simply as a result of the rapture—to say nothing of the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments of the tribulation, which begin as described starting in Revelation 6.

- Third, 9/11 is profoundly *illustrative* of events that the Bible prophesies, which will occur following the rapture, during the tribulation.

In that time of tribulation, not just two towers in New York City, or one structure in Washington, D.C., will be struck, but indeed every tall building in the world will collapse.

Isaiah 2:10 says that it will be “the terror of the LORD” which will be unleashed upon the unbelieving world in those days. Notice the results in verses 12, 15 and 17:

For the day of the LORD of hosts
Shall come upon everything proud and lofty,
Upon everything lifted up—
And it shall be brought low. . . .

Upon every high tower,
And upon every fortified wall. . . .

The loftiness of man shall be bowed down,
And the haughtiness of men shall be brought low;
The LORD alone will be exalted in that day,

Zephaniah 1:16 likewise states that “the great day of the LORD” (v. 14) will be:

A day of trumpet and alarm
Against the fortified cities
And against the high towers.

The events of 9/11 transformed international politics in ways that even its masterminds surely could not have planned. Yet, it will pale in comparison to the events of the coming tribulation.

We will conclude this line of thinking in the final installment of this series next week.

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