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9/11 and Beautiful Humility

Amid terror and tragedy, something profoundly wonderful can arise.

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That morning, before any of us knew what was happening, terrified Americans were calling family from aboard passenger planes, saying that they had been hijacked. The business and the plans of the morning, the intentions for the rest of the day—and the rest of their lives—had all dissolved.

In those last moments on those planes, many if not all experienced *clarity*. There was a yearning to survive—and a recognition that their lives were unlikely to outlast the day. They also experienced a clarity of what matters in life. In the terror, preferences, irritations, arguments and vanities dissolved. On those phone calls, they told their loved ones, “I love you.” In calamity, they saw what mattered most and what didn’t.

Then, at 8:46 a.m., the hammer blows began shaking the nation. American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of New York City’s World Trade Center, killing all 92 people on board and an untold number inside the building. Within minutes, television screens across the country and the world filled with footage of smoke billowing out of the tower. Every camera in Manhattan was fixed on the tragedy, and millions of viewers were riveted, trying to make sense of what they were witnessing. The sickening answer became clearer just minutes later when, at 9:03, United Airlines Flight 175 entered the frame. The conflagration on impact killed all 65 passengers and many more inside the South Tower.

America was under attack.

As the agonizing minutes passed, more shocks came. At 9:37, five terrorists flew yet another hijacked plane, American Airlines Flight 77, into the western side of the Pentagon, killing all 64 people on board and 125 workers in the building. At 9:59, the South Tower’s structural steel, softened by the intense fires, caused the perimeter columns to fail. The top 30 floors of the building began to fall with crushing weight and growing force, pulverizing floor after floor of the superstructure in a collapse that snuffed out the lives of 630 people who were still inside. At 10:03, a fourth jet crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, killing all 44 aboard; we would later learn that the passengers had resisted the hijackers, ensuring the crash. At 10:28, the North Tower collapsed, and 1,355 people perished.

A total of 2,977 people were mass murdered that day. And the world was changed.

September 11, 2001, was a clarifying moment that sobered and humbled America. People put their lives on hold. We watched, cried, contemplated, connected with family, clung to our loved ones—and tried to understand. That afternoon, at the nation’s capitol, U.S. representatives from both parties gathered and stood, united, behind the Speaker of the House, who told the nation, “[W]e will stand together.” After a moment of silence, they spontaneously sang “God Bless America.”

In the weeks that followed, we shared a common loss. We saw life’s fragility. We realized how easily we get distracted and consumed by trivialities. We quieted down—we listened—we reached out to each other. This monstrous atrocity caused immense grief, but also an impulse to set aside petty vanities and to become more mindful, more caring and more thankful. The nation—and to some degree even the world—recognized the reality that there is evil out there—and if we are divided, we are vulnerable. To one degree or another, people united. Acts of charity increased. American flags flew.

The catastrophe of 9/11 even turned Americans' thoughts toward God. Religious-themed signs appeared everywhere. Church attendance rose dramatically. People talked a lot about prayer, healing, forgiveness and faith.

It is tragic that it takes such shocking tribulation to turn our minds in that direction. But the fact is, *suffering brings us clarity*.

The Last Hour

That cruel day changed America, but, sadly, only briefly. After some weeks passed, Americans moved on. Church attendance dropped back to where it had been; distractions, materialism, dissipation, revelry and division came roaring back.

How *hard* is human nature.

Americans barely and briefly turned to the churches, but finding no answers, they turned back again. But there is one Church that can answer exactly why 9/11 occurred, right down to the timing.

In May 2001, *Trumpet* editor in chief and Philadelphia Church of God Pastor General Gerald Flurry delivered a sermon in which he said that the world had entered "the last hour" prophesied in 1 John 2:18. He had said the world was entering a time more serious and dangerous than any it had experienced before. "When that last hour strikes, well, then we're into it and the other side of that last hour is going to be when Jesus Christ returns to this Earth," he said. "So we're obviously getting very *close* to the return of Jesus Christ. ... It's about 'no more delay'; it's about getting us through this dreadful, horrendous time that is coming upon this Earth. ... And you need to keep track of time. God is giving us, I think, a timepiece so we can keep track of time and motivate ourselves and *never forget ... we are in that last hour.*"

Four months later, the Church saw that prophecy confirmed in a dramatic way. The whole world knew that humanity had entered a more serious and dangerous time.

Even as America reacted to 9/11 and its aftermath, Mr. Flurry forecast that the unity would not last and that the nation would grow weaker because it was not addressing the fundamental *cause* of the disaster. Four days after the attacks and the singing of "God Bless America" by congressmen, he said in a sermon to PCG members: "Is God really blessing America now? Well, He certainly wasn't Tuesday morning, was He? ... We are, brethren, living in the last hour, and we're in the death throes of this nation of Israel."

Why did God allow 9/11 to happen? "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but THAT THE WICKED TURN FROM HIS WAY AND LIVE: *turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*" (Ezekiel 33:11).

God is addressing the *fundamental cause* of our suffering—not just in 9/11, but *all suffering*. He is trying to turn us from our evil! "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

God could just forget about us and leave us to the suffering that evil brings to ourselves and everyone else. He could let us live out our lives of wallowing in our own vices and gratifying our own selfishness until we become individuals and a society that is beyond all hope.

Or He could correct us, force us into a stark clarity, and bring us *repentance* of our evil.

If 9/11 won't do it, God will proceed to harder punishments. And the Bible prophesies that this is what will happen.

Great Tribulation

Jeremiah 25:31 states: "A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations, *he will plead with all flesh....*" How will He plead? Right now, He is doing so with *words*, with the work behind the *Trumpet*, led by Gerald Flurry. It is *peaceful* pleading, like the words you are reading right now.

But it will not always be so. Jeremiah continues: "[H]e will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord. ... Behold, EVIL shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth" (verses 31-32).

This world is about to experience a time of UNPRECEDENTED CHAOS. Hundreds, even thousands of 9/11s piled high.

The Prophet Daniel described it: "[T]here shall be a time of TROUBLE, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time ..." (Daniel 12:1). The Prophet Jeremiah did as well: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble ..." (Jeremiah 30:5-7). He calls it "Jacob's trouble" because it will fall most heavily on the modern descendants of Jacob—renamed Israel—most prominently the United States and Britain.

Jesus Christ Himself also prophesied about this time of unparalleled punishment. Within His prophecy about the end of this present evil age and the signs of His return, He said, "For then shall be GREAT TRIBULATION, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

Remember the shock, minute after minute, of 9/11. One blow after another after another. Remember the feeling of knowing there were so many other planes still in the air and not knowing how many more cities would be struck, how far the terror

would spread, when or how it would end.

Now imagine not just a handful of terrorists—but world powers unleashing warplanes, warships and ballistic missiles with chemical, biological and nuclear warheads! Imagine nuclear blasts hitting city after city! Imagine the death toll rapidly climbing into the hundreds of thousands, even millions!

The trauma of that destruction would be unfathomable—indescribable.

Accepting Correction

Realize: God does not correct any more than He has to. The only reason all the horrors of the Tribulation are necessary is that mankind is so hard and uncorrectable! But *many* Bible prophecies show that as these traumas increase, more and more people will surrender to God and forsake their evil. The moment they do, God will protect them from further punishment!

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked He is a loving Father, and He simply will not let His children be turned so completely to evil that they can never be turned back. It is worth the punishment so He can turn people to Him—and ultimately give them *eternal life*.

As traumatic as the events of the Tribulation will be, it will also serve a tremendous purpose—one that would not be accomplished with anything less.

9/11 briefly changed the way Americans think and view their daily lives. The coming Tribulation will have such an effect worldwide, and magnified in severity by hundreds or thousands of times!

That taste of sobriety and humility that Americans displayed after 9/11 will be far outdone by their attitudes after the Great Tribulation. That suffering will create within the *whole world*—all who survive—a beautiful *teachability* for what will follow.

The modern descendants of Israel, including Americans, will emerge from the destruction and captivity of the Tribulation. God will deliver them with a mighty hand! “Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. *They shall come with weeping*, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jeremiah 31:8-10).

Those horrors will have softened their hearts, and they will *finally* be ready to listen to God. That is all God ever wanted—for their hearts to be turned to Him. It is nearly impossible to grasp the severity of the chastening required—but in the end, God WILL REACH THEM!

Even those who have been killed (both in 9/11 and in the 9/11s to come) *will be resurrected*. Even after they have succumbed to physical death, their loving Father will eventually *resurrect* them and offer them repentance. And the great majority of them, too, will be willing!

Imagine seeing the injured, the traumatized, the broken and the emaciated coming out of the Tribulation or perhaps the resurrection. They have seen terror. They have felt horror. Yet finally they will be willing to submit to their Creator! And their unhealable physical and mental trauma, *He will heal*.

Imagine seeing God filled with joy over their repentance. Imagine seeing the look in just one man’s eyes when he realizes that his Creator is giving him *hope* for the future. Then multiply that by millions and billions.

“Can you recognize when God is trying to reach you?” Gerald Flurry wrote. “Do you know enough about God to know where He is speaking? The Bible is Jesus Christ in print, and there is only one place on Earth where you can hear the full message He is speaking. You cannot escape the coming Tribulation unless you know where God is speaking and then heed the message being delivered by His people” (*Trumpet*, May 2019).

God allowed that shocking calamity, and He did so for a reason. You need to remember that day. Ask honestly *Did I learn the lesson, taught at such great cost?* God allowed 9/11, not from cruelty, but from love. He is warning us of the seriousness of this time, this last hour. And He is teaching us to repent.