

*When the*  
**TRUMPET  
SOUNDS**



**THOMAS ICE & TIMOTHY DEMY**  
*General Editors*

**HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS**  
Eugene, Oregon 97402

Except where otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this book are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version ©, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

Verses marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Verses marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers. Used by permission.

Verses marked ASV are taken from the American Standard Version (1901).

Verses marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

All views expressed are solely the individual author's and do not reflect the position of any governmental agency or department.

## **WHEN THE TRUMPET SOUNDS**

Copyright © 1995 by Harvest House Publishers  
Eugene, Oregon 97402

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

When the trumpet sounds / Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, general editors.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-56507-313-4

1. Eschatology. 2. Dispensationalism. 3. Rapture (Christian eschatology) 4. Tribulation (Christian eschatology) I. Ice, Thomas. II. Demy, Timothy J.

BT821.2W45 1995

236'.9—dc20

95-13480

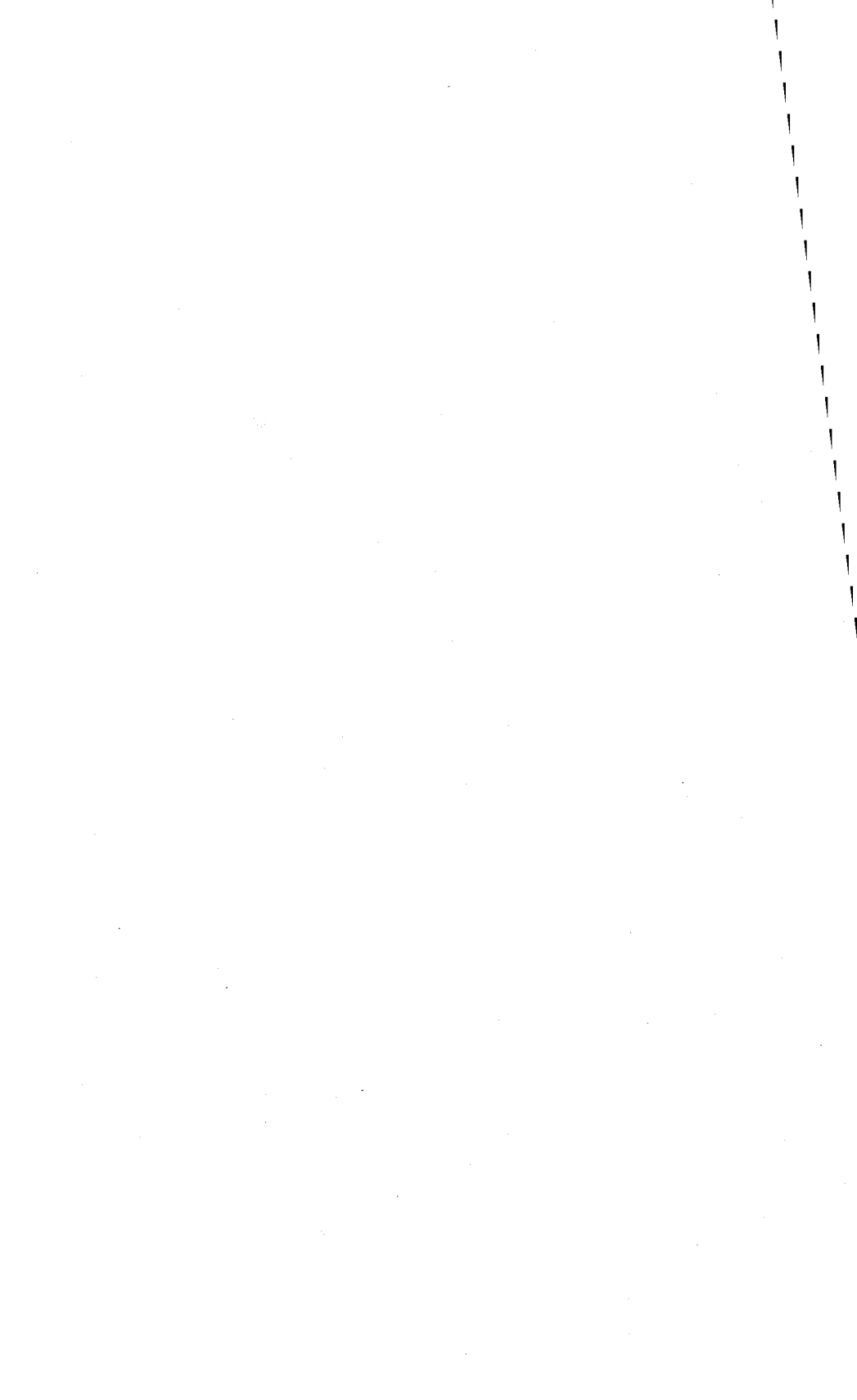
CIP

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Publisher.

Printed in the United States of America.

96 97 98 99 00 01 / BC / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

*This collection of essays  
is affectionately and respectfully  
dedicated to  
**John F. Walvoord,**  
who, as the greatest defender of the  
pretribulation rapture in our century,  
has faithfully and daily  
preached, taught, and lived  
with the blessed hope of His coming.*



# *Contents*

*Foreword*

*Introduction*

**CHAPTER ONE: 11**

Back to the Future: Keeping the Future in the Future

*THOMAS ICE*

**CHAPTER TWO: 25**

Major Rapture Terms and Passages

*MAL COUCH*

**CHAPTER THREE: 57**

Old Testament Tribulation Terms

*J. RANDALL PRICE*

**CHAPTER FOUR: 85**

The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers

*LARRY V. CRUTCHFIELD*

**CHAPTER FIVE: 105**

A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church

*GRANT R. JEFFREY*

**CHAPTER SIX: 127**

J. N. Darby's Early Years

*FLOYD ELMORE*

**CHAPTER SEVEN: 151**

The Rapture and the Return: Two Aspects of Christ's Coming

*EDWARD E. HINDSON*

**CHAPTER EIGHT: 163**

The Relationship of the Church to the Kingdom of God

*J. DWIGHT PENTECOST*

**CHAPTER NINE: 187**

Arguing for the Rapture: Who Must Prove What and How?

*JOHN S. FEINBERG*

**CHAPTER TEN: 211**

Literal Interpretation: A Plea for Consensus

*ELLIOT E. JOHNSON*

**CHAPTER ELEVEN: 221**

The Doctrine of Imminency: Is It Biblical?

*GERALD B. STANTON*

<b>CHAPTER TWELVE: 235</b>
Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?
<i>STANLEY D. TOUSSAINT</i>
<b>CHAPTER THIRTEEN: 251</b>
1 Thessalonians 4: A Central Rapture Passage
<i>JOHN F. WALVOORD</i>
<b>CHAPTER FOURTEEN: 261</b>
Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?
<i>H. WAYNE HOUSE</i>
<b>CHAPTER FIFTEEN: 297</b>
2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture
<i>PAUL D. FEINBERG</i>
<b>CHAPTER SIXTEEN: 313</b>
Chronology and Sequential Structure of John's Revelation
<i>JOHN MCLEAN</i>
<b>CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: 353</b>
Where is "the Church" in Revelation 4-19?
<i>ROBERT GROMACKI</i>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: 367</b>
The Rapture in Revelation 3:10
<i>JEFFREY L. TOWNSEND</i>
<b>CHAPTER NINETEEN: 381</b>
Is There a Pre-wrath Rapture?
<i>ARNOLD G. FRUCHTENBAUM</i>
<b>CHAPTER TWENTY: 413</b>
A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics
<i>ROBERT L. THOMAS</i>
<b>CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: 427</b>
Twelve Reasons Why This Could Be the Terminal Generation
<i>TIM LAHAYE</i>
<i>Notes 445</i>
<i>Glossary 473</i>
<i>About the Editors and Contributors 475</i>

Grant R. Jeffrey

# A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church

---

## OVERVIEW

*Was the pretribulational rapture first found in 1830 in Scotland, as some have speculated? Or can other statements be found prior to that time? This writer produces several interesting statements which suggest that some people may have divided the rapture and the second coming into two events long before 1830. In fact, Mr. Jeffrey has discovered an amazingly clear pretrib statement from the fourth century in a sermon by someone called "Pseudo-Ephraem." This discovery may revolutionize the evangelical church's understanding of the history of the rapture.*

---

**A**fter more than a decade of research I have found evidence that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture was taught in the early church almost 1500 years before John Darby issued his revival of this New Testament teaching, which had been ignored during the medieval period. In this chapter I will discuss two remarkable textual discoveries from my latest book *Final Warning*.<sup>1</sup> These texts conclusively prove that a number of Christian teachers in the centuries before John Darby rediscovered this biblical teaching in A.D. 1830, clearly taught that the rapture would occur before the Tribulation period.

### **Was the Pretribulation Rapture Taught Before John Darby in A.D. 1830?**

Obviously the truth about the timing of the rapture will ultimately be found only in Scripture. The Protestant Reformation was based essentially on a return to the authority of the Bible. The Latin phrase *sola Scriptura*, meaning “Scripture alone,” became the rallying cry of Reformers who ignored centuries of tradition and church councils in their insistence that truth could only be discovered in the Word of God. While the ultimate resolution of this discussion must be based on our interpretation of Scripture, it is important to answer the errors of opponents who disparage “the blessed hope” with misinformation about the modern rediscovery of the truth about the pretribulation rapture.

Many of these writers falsely assert that the pretribulation rapture theory first originated around A.D. 1830. They ascribe the theory’s initial creation variously to Emmanuel Lacunza (Ben Ezra, 1812), Edward Irving (1826), Margaret Macdonald (1830) and, finally, to John Darby (1830). Many of those who despise the teaching of the pretribulation rapture have dogmatically asserted that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is a modern innovation that



was taught for the first time in history in approximately 1830 by John Darby of the Plymouth Brethren. Posttribulationist writers have attacked the pretribulation rapture doctrine by claiming that it cannot be true because none of the early church writers and none of the Reformers ever taught it. Obviously, their argument has been quite effective in causing some Christians to abandon their belief in the pretribulation rapture. The question for sincere students of Scripture must be whether or not the Bible truly teaches this doctrine. The argument that no one ever saw this "truth" throughout 1800 years of church history has been somewhat effective. The only problem with their argument is that they are wrong.

### **False Statements that the Pretribulation Rapture Was Never Taught Before A.D. 1830**

Posttribulationist teachers have falsely made dogmatic statements for many years that no one ever taught the pretribulation rapture before A.D. 1830. The following statements are just a few examples taken from the books of those who reject the pretribulation rapture. George E. Ladd has said:

We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early church; and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Rapture critic John Bray insists:

People who are teaching the pretribulation rapture teaching today are teaching something that never was taught until 1812....Not one of those early church fathers taught a pretribulation rapture....I make the offer of five hundred dollars to anybody who will find a statement, a sermon, article in a commentary, or anything, prior to 1812 that taught a two-phase coming of Christ separated by a stated period of time, such as the pretribulation rapturists teach.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most vocal of all rapture critics, Dave MacPherson says:

Margaret Macdonald was the first person to teach a coming of Christ that would precede the days of Antichrist. . . . Before 1830 Christians had always believed in a single future coming, that the catching up of 1 Thessalonians 4 will take place after the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24 at the glorious coming of the Son of Man when He shall send His angels to gather together all of His Elect.<sup>4</sup>

A number of these authors will have to drastically revise the next edition of their books based on the discovery of new pretribulation rapture texts from the writings of the early church.

#### **The Discovery of Ephraem's Teaching in A.D. 373 on the Pretribulation Rapture**

For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.<sup>5</sup>

Over the last decade I came to the conclusion that the pretribulation rapture is taught so clearly in the New Testament that it is virtually impossible that no one ever taught this doctrine in the 18 centuries before 1830. During the summer of 1994, after a decade of searching, I found several fascinating manuscripts that contain clear evidence of pretribulation rapture teaching in the early church. The early Christian writer and poet Ephraem the Syrian (he lived from A.D. 306 to 373) was a major theologian of the early Byzantine Eastern Church. He was born near Nisibis, in the Roman province of Syria, near present-day Edessa, Turkey. Ephraem displayed a profound love of the Scriptures in his writings, as illustrated by several of his written comments quoted in the *Works of Nathaniel Lardner*, Volume Four (A.D. 1788): "I esteem no man more happy than him, who diligently reads the Scriptures delivered to us by the Spirit of God, and thinks how he may order his conversation by the precepts of them. . . . The truth written in the sacred volume of the gospel is a

perfect rule. Nothing can be taken from it, nor added to it, without great guilt." To this day his hymns and homilies are used in the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox and Middle Eastern Nestorian Church.

The 16-volume Post-Nicene Library includes a number of homilies and psalms by Ephraem the Syrian, and the editors noted that he also wrote a large number of commentaries which have never been translated into English. For example, Ephraem's fascinating teaching on the Antichrist has never been published before in English until today. This important prophecy manuscript from the fourth century reveals a literal hermeneutic and a teaching of the premillennial return of Jesus Christ. More importantly, Ephraem's text revealed a clear statement about the pretribulational return of Christ to take His elect saints home to heaven to escape the coming Tribulation.

In addition, Ephraem declares his belief in a personal, Jewish Antichrist, who will rule the Roman Empire during the last days, a rebuilt temple, the two witnesses, and a literal Great Tribulation lasting 1260 days. He also taught that the war of Gog and Magog would occur in the years leading up to the Tribulation period. And a second text by Ephraem reveals he taught that Daniel's seventieth week will be fulfilled in the final seven years at the end of this age, which will conclude with Christ's return at the battle of Armageddon to establish His kingdom.

### **What Ephraem the Syrian Said**

Here is what Ephraem the Syrian wrote about the last times, the Antichrist, and the end of the world (translated by Cameron Rhoades, Tyndale Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas).

1. Most dearly beloved brothers, believe the Holy Spirit who speaks in us. Now we have spoken before, because the end of the world is very near, and the consummation remains. Has not the first faith withered away in men? Which appears in boys... slanderous things among the priests, liars among the priests, false swearing among the Levites, among the ministers evil deeds, adulteries among the older men, dissipation among the youths, false appearance among women, the adulterer is influenced among virgins! And among them all there are the wars of the Persians, and the threatening of

diverse nations and kingdom rising up against kingdom... and when the kingdom of the Romans begins to be consummated by the sword, the advent of the evil one is near. Because it is necessary that the age is consummated in the fulfillment of the Roman kingdom. In those days two brothers come to the Roman kingdom, and indeed they preside with one accord, but since one surpasses the other, a division will take place between them. And so the Adversary is released and shall provoke hatred between the kingdoms of the Persians and the Romans. In those days many people rise up against the kingdom of the Romans, and the people of the Jews will be its adversaries. Because there will be violent movements of the nations and evil reports, and there will be plagues and hunger and earthquakes (movements of the earth) throughout the regions, and captives shall be led among all nations, and there will be battles and rumors of battles, and the sword shall consume many things from the rising to the setting of the sun. And there will be very many dangerous times, which do not permit the mind to think of better things because of fear and perturbation, since many pressures and desolations of regions have come.

2. We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have been predicted by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled, and there is not other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom. Why therefore are we occupied with worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for *the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that He may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms the world?* Believe you me, dearest brothers, because the coming of the Lord is nigh, believe you me, because the end of the world is at hand, believe me, because it is the very last time. Or do you not believe unless you see it with your eyes? See to it that this sentence be not fulfilled among you of the prophet who declares: "Woe to those who desire to see the Day of the Lord!" *Because all saints and the Elect of the Lord are*

*gathered together before the tribulation which is to about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.* And so, brothers, most dear to me, it is the eleventh hour, and the end of this world comes to the harvest, and angels, armed and prepared, hold sickles in their hands, awaiting the empire of the Lord. And we think that the earth exists with blind infidelity, arriving at its downfall early. Commotions are brought forth, wars of diverse peoples and battles and invasions of the barbarians threaten, and our regions shall be desolated, and we neither become very much afraid of the report nor of the appearance, in order that we may at least do penance; because they hurl fear at us, and we do not wish to be changed although we at least stand in need of penance for our actions!

3. When therefore the end of the world comes, there arise diverse wars, commotions on all sides, horrible earthquakes, perturbations of nations, tempests throughout the lands, plagues, famine, drought throughout the thoroughfares, great danger throughout the sea and dry land, constant persecutions, slaughters and massacres everywhere, fear in the homes, panic in the cities, quaking in the thoroughfares, suspicions in the male, anxiety in the streets. In the desert people become senseless, spirits melt in the cities. A friend will not be grieved over a friend, neither a brother for a brother, nor parents for their children, nor a faithful servant for his master, but one inevitably shall overcome them all; neither is anyone able to be recovered in that time, who has not been made completely aware of the coming danger, but all people, who have been constricted by fears, are consumed because of the overhanging evils.

4. Whenever therefore the earth is agitated by the nations, people will hide themselves from the wars in the mountains and rocks, by caves and caverns of the earth, by graves and memorials of the dead, and there, as they waste away gradually by fear, they draw breath, because there is not any place at all to flee, but here will be concession and intolerable pressure. And those who are in the east will flee to the west, and moreover those who are in the west shall flee to the east, and there is not a safer place anywhere, because

the world shall be overwhelmed by worthless nations, whose aspect appears to be of wild animals more than that of men. Because those very much horrible nations, most profane and most defiled, who do not spare lives, and shall destroy the living from the dead, shall consume the dead, they eat dead flesh, they drink the blood of beasts, they pollute the world, contaminate all things, and the one who is able to resist them is not there. In those days people shall not be buried, neither Christian, nor heretic, neither Jew, nor pagan, because of fear and dread there is not one who buries them; because all people ignore them while they are fleeing.

5. Whenever the days of the times of those nations have been fulfilled, after they have destroyed the earth, it shall rest; and now the kingdom of the Romans is removed from everyday life, and the empire of the Christians is handed down by God and Peter; and then the consummation comes, when the kingdom of the Romans begins to be fulfilled, and all dominions and powers have been fulfilled shall appear, he, whom Moses named in Deuteronomy, saying: Dan is a young lion, reclining and leaping from Basan. Because he reclines in order that he may seize and destroy and slay. Indeed he is a young whelp of a lion not as the lion of the tribe of Judah, but roaring because of his wrath that he may devour. And he leaps out from Basan. "Basan" is certainly interpreted "confusion." He shall rise up from the confusion of his iniquity. The one who gathers to himself like a partridge the children of confusion whom he has not brought forth, also shall multiply them in a heap and call them, just as Jeremiah the prophet says. Also in the last day they shall forsake him just as disorderly.

6. When therefore the end of the world comes, that abominable, lying and murderous one is born from the tribe of Dan. He is conceived from the seed of a man and from a most vile virgin, mixed with an evil or worthless spirit. But that abominable corrupter, more of spirits than of bodies, while a youth, the crafty dragon appears under the appearance of righteousness before he takes the kingdom. Because he will be craftily gentle to all people, not receiving gifts, not placed before another person, loving to all people, quiet to everyone, not desiring gifts, appearing friendly among close

friends, so that men may bless him, saying: He is a just man, not knowing that a wolf lies concealed under the appearance of a lamb, and that a greedy man is inside under the skin of a sheep.

7. But when the time of the abomination of his desolation begins to approach, having been made legal, he takes the empire, and, just as it is said in the Psalm: They have been made for the undertaking for the sons of Loth, the Moabites and the Ammanites shall meet him first as their king. Therefore, when he receives the kingdom, he orders the temple of God to be rebuilt for himself, which is in Jerusalem; who, after coming into it, he shall sit as God and order that he be adored by all nations, since he is carnal and filthy and mixed with worthless spirit and flesh. Then that eloquence shall be fulfilled . . . of Daniel the Prophet: And he shall not know the God of their Fathers, and he shall not know the desires of women. Because the very wicked serpent shall direct every worship to himself. Because he shall put forth an edict so that people may be circumcised according to the rite of the old law. Then the Jews shall congratulate him, because he gave them again the practice of the first covenant; then all people from everywhere shall flock together to him at the city of Jerusalem, and the holy city shall be trampled on by the nations for forty-two months just as the holy apostle says in the Apocalypse, which become three and a half years, 1260 days.

8. In these three years and a half the heaven shall suspend its dew; because there will be no rain upon the earth, and the clouds shall cease to pass through the air, and the stars shall be seen with difficulty in the sky because of the excessive dryness, which happens in the time of the very fierce dragon. Because all great rivers and very powerful fountains that overflow with themselves shall be dried up, torrents shall dry up their water-courses because of the intolerable age, and there will be a great tribulation, as there has not been, since people began to be upon the earth, and there will be famine and an insufferable thirst. And children shall waste away in the bosom of their mothers, and wives upon their knees of their husbands, by not having victuals to eat. Because there will be in those days lack of bread and water,

and no one is able to sell or to buy of the grain of the fall harvest, unless he is one who has the serpentine sign on the forehead or the hand. Then gold and silver and precious clothing or precious stones shall lie along the streets, and also even every type of pearls along the thoroughfares and streets of the cities, but there is not one who may extend the hand and take or desire them, but they consider all things as good as nothing because of the extreme lack and famine of bread, because the earth is not protected by the rains of heaven, and there will be neither dew nor moisture of the air upon the earth. But those who wander through the deserts, fleeing from the faces of the serpent, bend their knees to God, just as lambs to the udders of their mothers, being sustained by the salvation of the Lord, and while wandering in states of desertion, they eat herbs.

9. Then, when this inevitability has overwhelmed all people, just and unjust, the just so that they may be found good by their Lord; and indeed the unjust, so that they may be damned forever with their author the Devil, and as God beholds the human race in danger and being tossed about by the breath of the horrible dragon, he sends to them consolatory proclamation by his attendants, the prophets Enoch and Elijah, who, while not yet testing death, are the servants for the heralding of the second coming of Christ, and in order to accuse the enemy. And when those just ones have appeared, they confuse indeed the antagonistic serpent with his cleverness and they call back the faithful witnesses to God, in order to free them from his seduction. . . .

10. And when the three and a half years have been completed, the time of the Antichrist, through which he will have seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets, in the hour which the world does not know, and on the day which the enemy or son of perdition does not know, will come the sign of the Son of Man, and coming forward the Lord shall appear with great power and much majesty, with the sign of the word of salvation going before him, and also even with all the powers of the heavens with the whole chorus of the saints, with those who bear the sign of the holy cross upon their shoulders, as the angelic trumpet precedes him, which shall sound and declare: Arise O sleeping ones,



arise, meet Christ, because his hour of judgment has come! Then Christ shall come and the enemy shall be thrown into confusion, and the Lord shall destroy him by the Spirit of his mouth. And he shall be bound and shall be plunged into the abyss of everlasting fire alive with his father Satan; and all people, who do his wishes, shall perish with him forever; but the righteous ones shall inherit everlasting life with the Lord for ever and ever.

Throughout their books posttribulation authors have made statements such as, “The significance in this matter lies in the fact that the origin of the embryo teaching of the pretribulation rapture teaching has been traced back to a book by Emmanuel Lacunza first published in 1812 *and no further back than that.*”<sup>6</sup> They will have to change the next editions of their books to reflect the error of their previous teaching. The teachings of Ephraem the Syrian (or Pseudo-Ephraem) and Dr. John Gill (1748) prove that long before 1830 these writers taught the idea of the rapture occurring as a separate event prior to the Tribulation, which would end with Christ’s return to earth.

### The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition

Paul Alexander, perhaps the most authoritative scholar on the writings of the early Byzantine church, concluded that Pseudo-Ephraem’s text on *The Antichrist* differed from other apocalyptic writings of the first centuries in its description of how God would “alleviate the period of tribulation for his saints and for the Elect.” While other early church commentators suggested that the Lord would shorten the length of the three-and-a-half-year Tribulation period to protect the saints, Professor Alexander noted that Pseudo-Ephraem interpreted the Scriptures to teach that the Lord would supernaturally remove the church saints from the earth “prior to the tribulation that is to come.”<sup>7</sup> Pseudo-Ephraem wrote that the saints will be “taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.” This text was originally a sermon called *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*. There are four Latin manuscripts of this text ascribed to St. Ephraem or to St. Isidore (the Parisinus, the Augiensis, the Barberini, and the St. Gallen manuscript). In 1890 C. P. Caspari wrote a German commentary on this Latin manuscript.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Alexander wrote that, “Pseudo-Ephraem does not refer to the shortening of time. This author, however, mentions another measure taken by God in order to alleviate the period of tribulation for his saints and for the Elect.” He then quoted this passage from Pseudo-Ephraem’s text: “For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.” Alexander commented, “It is probably no accident that Pseudo-Ephraem does not mention the shortening of the time intervals for the Antichrist’s persecution, for if prior to it the Elect are ‘taken to the Lord,’ i.e., participate at least in some measure in beatitude, there is no need for further mitigating action on their behalf. The Gathering of the Elect according to Pseudo-Ephraem is an alternative to the shortening of the time intervals.”<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Paul Alexander believes this text was written by some unknown writer in the sixth century and was derived from an earlier Pseudo-Ephraem manuscript. Other scholars, including the German editor Professor Caspari, believed that Ephraem’s mention of wars between Rome and Persia, with two imperial brothers ruling Rome, indicated the book was actually written by Ephraem in A.D. 373 following the joint imperial reign of the brothers Valentinian and Valens.

My friend, Thomas Ice, provided assistance in confirming the significance of this discovery. In addition, Latin instructor Cameron Rhoades of Tyndale Theological Seminary translated the Latin text into English at our request.

### **A Summary of the Key Points in Ephraem’s Text on the Antichrist**

1. Ephraem’s manuscript lays out the events of the last days in chronological sequence, beginning with the rapture, then the Great Tribulation of three-and-a-half years’ duration under the Antichrist’s rule, followed by the second coming of Christ to earth with His saints to defeat the Antichrist.

2. Significantly, at the beginning of his treatise in section 2, Ephraem uses the word “imminent” to describe the rapture occurring before the Tribulation and the coming of the Antichrist. “We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging.”

3. He describes the pretribulation rapture: "Because all saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins."

4. He then states that God's purpose in rapturing the church "before the tribulation" is so that "they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins."

5. Ephraem says the saints need not fear the coming Tribulation because, "we neither become very much afraid of the report nor of the appearance, "because the rapture will occur prior to the Tribulation.

6. Ephraem describes the duration of the "great tribulation" (the last half of the seven-year Tribulation period) in sections 7, 8, and 10 as follows: "forty-two months" and "three-and-a-half years" and "1260 days."

7. He summarizes: "There will be a great tribulation, as there has not been since people began to be upon the earth," and he describes the mark of the beast system.

8. Significantly, Ephraem states there will be some (Tribulation saints) who reject the Antichrist during the Tribulation and who will "bend their knees to God," and "while not yet testing death, are the servants for the heralding of the second coming of Christ."

9. He declares that Christ will come to the earth after the "three and a half years" great Tribulation period in section 10: "And when the three and a half years have been completed, the time of the Antichrist, through which he will have seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets... will come the sign of the Son of Man, and coming forward the Lord shall appear with great power and much majesty."

### **Ephraem the Syrian and the Seventieth Week of Daniel**

A question naturally arises about how long Ephraem believed the Tribulation would last. While Ephraem describes the "great tribulation" as three-and-a-half years, his other writings reveal that he believed the whole Tribulation period, "that sore affliction," would last "one week" of seven years. In Ephraem's book *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, written about A.D. 373, he includes a

section about the genealogy of Christ. Ephraem reveals his belief that the sixty-ninth week of Daniel 9:24-27 ended with the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah. He wrote, "The Jews have no longer among them a king, or a priest, or a prophet, or a Passover, even as Daniel prophesied concerning them, saying, '*After two and sixty weeks Christ shall be slain, and the city of holiness shall be laid waste until the completion of things decreed.*' (Daniel 9:26). That is to say, for ever and ever" (italics added; page 235, *The Cave of Treasures*).

However, in the section of his book dealing with the future war of Gog and Magog, Ephraem wrote about the final (seventieth) week of Daniel as follows. "*At the end of the world and at the final consummation... suddenly the gates of the north shall be opened... They will destroy the earth, and there will be none able to stand before them. After one week of that sore affliction (Tribulation), they will all be destroyed in the plain of Joppa... Then will the son of perdition appear, of the seed and of the tribe of Dan... He will go into Jerusalem and will sit upon a throne in the Temple saying, 'I am the Christ,' and he will be borne aloft by legions of devils like a king and a lawgiver, naming himself God... The time the error of the Anti-Christ will last two years and a half, but others say three years and six months*" (italics added). Although there are some curious elements in Ephraem's description of prophetic events, it is clear that he believed that the seventieth remaining week of Daniel's 70 weeks will finally be fulfilled in the final seven years of this age when the Antichrist will appear. This evidence of belief in a "gap" or "parenthesis" between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27 from the fourth century of the Christian era is significant.

### **Requirements for Evidence of an Early Teaching of the Pretribulation Rapture**

Dr. William Everett Bell, Jr.'s doctoral dissertation, *A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology*, described criteria required to prove the early teaching of the pretribulation rapture. Bell stated, "No trace of the doctrine is to be found in church history after the Ante-Nicene fathers until the nineteenth century."<sup>10</sup>

In his dissertation he set out the following requirements for definitive proof of the early pretribulation teaching that was taught in the centuries before 1830:

Any of the following items would be of crucial importance, if found, whether by direct statement or clear inference:

1. Any mention that Christ's second coming was to consist of more than one phase, separated by an interval of years
2. Any mention that Christ was to remove the church from the earth before the Tribulation period.
3. Any reference to the resurrection of the just being in two stages.
4. Any indication that Israel and the church were to be clearly distinguished, thus providing some rationale for a removal of Christians before God again deals with Israel.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Dr. John Gill Taught the Pretribulation Rapture in 1748**

Dr. John Gill, a famous eighteenth-century Calvinist theologian, published his commentary on the New Testament in 1748. In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Dr. Gill points out that Paul is delivering teaching that is "something new and extraordinary." Gill calls the translation of the saints "the rapture," and he calls for watchfulness because "it will be sudden, and unknown before-hand, and when least thought of and expected." This is the clearest detailed teaching on the imminent pretribulation rapture that I have found, following the A.D. 373 Ephraem text just quoted, in the centuries prior to John Darby in 1830. It is significant that Dr. Gill taught an imminent, sudden rapture which could occur at any moment. In his comment on 1 Thessalonians 5:1, he wrote, "It was a well known thing that it would be sudden, and at an unawares, like the coming of a thief in the night."

Dr. Gill commented on 1 Thessalonians 4:15 as follows:

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep" (1 Thess. 4:15).

**Commentary:**

The Apostle having something new and extraordinary to deliver, concerning the coming of Christ, the first resurrection, or the resurrection of the saints, the change of the living saints, and the rapture both of the raised, and living in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, expresses itself in this manner. The dead saints will rise before the living ones are changed, and both will be caught up together to meet the Lord.

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

**Commentary:**

Suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and with force and power; by the power of Christ, and by the ministry and means of the holy angels; and to which rapture will contribute the agility, which the bodies both of the raised and changed saints will have; and this rapture of the living saints will be together with them; with the dead in Christ, that will then be raised; so that the one will not prevent the other, or the one be sooner with Christ than the other; but one being raised and the other changed, they'll be joined in one company and general assembly, and be rapt up together: in the clouds; the same clouds perhaps in which Christ will come will be let down to take them up; these will be the chariots, in which they'll be carried up to Him; and thus, as at our Lord's ascension a cloud received Him, and in it He was carried up out of the sight of men, so at this time will all the saints ride up in the clouds of Heaven: to meet the Lord in the air; whither He'll descend, and will then clear the regions of the air of Satan, and his posse of devils, which now rove about there, watching all opportunities, and taking all advantages to do mischief on earth; these shall then fall like lightning from heaven, and be bound and shut up in the bottomless pit till the thousand years are ended; here Christ will stop and will be visible to all, and as easily discerned by all, good and bad, as the body of the sun at noon-day; as yet He will not descend on earth, because it is not fit to receive Him; but when that and its works are burnt up, and it is purged and

purified by fire, and become a new earth, He'll descend upon it, and dwell with His saints in it: and this suggests another reason why He'll stay in the air, and His saints shall meet Him there, and whom He'll take up with Him into the third heaven, till the general conflagration and burning of the world is over, and to preserve them from it: and then shall all the elect of God descend from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, and He with them... then they shall be with Him, wherever He is; first in the air, where they shall meet Him; then in the third heaven, where they shall go up with Him; then on earth, where they shall descend and reign with Him a thousand years; and then in the ultimate glory to all eternity.

**Summary of Dr. Gill's  
Pretribulation Rapture Teaching from 1748**

While there is a certain ambiguity in Dr. Gill's 1748 teaching of the timing and sequence of prophetic events, it is vital to note what he declared:

1. The Lord will descend in the air.
2. The saints will be raptured in the air to meet Him.
3. In the air Christ will stop and will be visible to all.
4. As yet He will not descend on earth, because it is not fit to receive Him.
5. He will take up [the saints] with Him into the third heaven, till the general conflagration and burning of the world is over.
6. This will preserve them from that conflagration.
7. Then all the elect of God shall descend from heaven.
8. Then they shall be with Him, wherever He is
  - a) first in the air, where they shall meet Him
  - b) then in the third heaven, where they shall go up with Him

- c) then on earth, where they shall descend and reign with Him for a thousand years.

Therefore, in addition to Ephraem's pretribulation teaching from the fourth century we have another statement of this doctrine from Dr. John Gill more than 80 years before John Darby in 1830. Those who have attacked the pretribulation rapture on the basis that it is some kind of innovative theory, never taught before throughout the history of the church, need to become more familiar with these important texts. The French writer Joubert once wrote, "Nothing makes men so imprudent and conceited as ignorance of the past and a scorn for old books."

### **The Importance of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine**

The apostle Peter warned that a characteristic of the last days would be the rise of voices that would challenge our Lord's promise of His second coming. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3,4). What does the Bible teach us about the proper attitude of a Christian to the subject of Christ's return? In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul tells us, "So that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." One of the distinguishing characteristics of a true follower of Jesus will be an attitude of a faithful, waiting, and watching servant.

Dr. Klink, one of the great students of the early church, wrote, "This constant expectation of our Lord's Second Coming is one of the characteristic features of primitive Christianity." Paul also commends a constant expectation of the rapture in Philippians 3:20, where he said, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Dr. Klink also wrote about the centrality of this hope to the Christian's life: "The right waiting for the Coming of Christ allows us to remain neither idle nor unfruitful, but inspires us with an earnest zeal constantly to appropriate and improve every spiritual gift."

Among the Reformers, Calvin wrote of the hope as follows, "It ought to be the chief concern of believers to fix their minds fully on



His Second Advent.” Martin Luther, in his Sermon of Consolation, declared that the hope of Christ’s return is an absolute necessity for a Christian: “If thou be not filled with a desire after the Coming of this day, thou canst never pray the Lord’s prayer, nor canst thou repeat from thy heart the creed of faith. For with what conscience canst thou say, ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,’ if thou dost not in thy heart desire the same? If thou didst believe it, thou must, of necessity, desire it from thy heart, and long for that day to come; which, if thou dost not desire, thou art not yet a Christian, nor canst thou boast of thy faith.” Throughout the New Testament we read continual exhortations to hold the hope of our Lord’s soon return as the focus of our spiritual life. Far from being a side issue of importance only to students of prophecy, the blessed hope of the rapture should be a cornerstone of our spiritual life.

The message and hope of the imminent second coming of Christ to rapture the saints has the following purposes:

- It calls us to live in constant watchfulness for His return (1 Thess. 5:4-6).
- It motivates Christians to witness to unbelievers in light of His imminent coming (John 9:4).
- It calls the church to walk in holiness in an immoral world awaiting His return (1 John 3:3).
- It comforts the saints by reminding them of their eternal destiny with Christ (John 14:1-3).
- It warns us of the coming judgment on those who reject Christ’s salvation (2 Thess. 1:8-9).
- It calls on Christians to persevere against all opposition in light of His reward (2 Tim. 4:1-8).
- It encourages sinners to repent and accept the Lord while there is still time (Acts 3:19-21).

The promise in the Scriptures of the imminent return of the Messiah Jesus Christ is the last, best hope of mankind. It is the

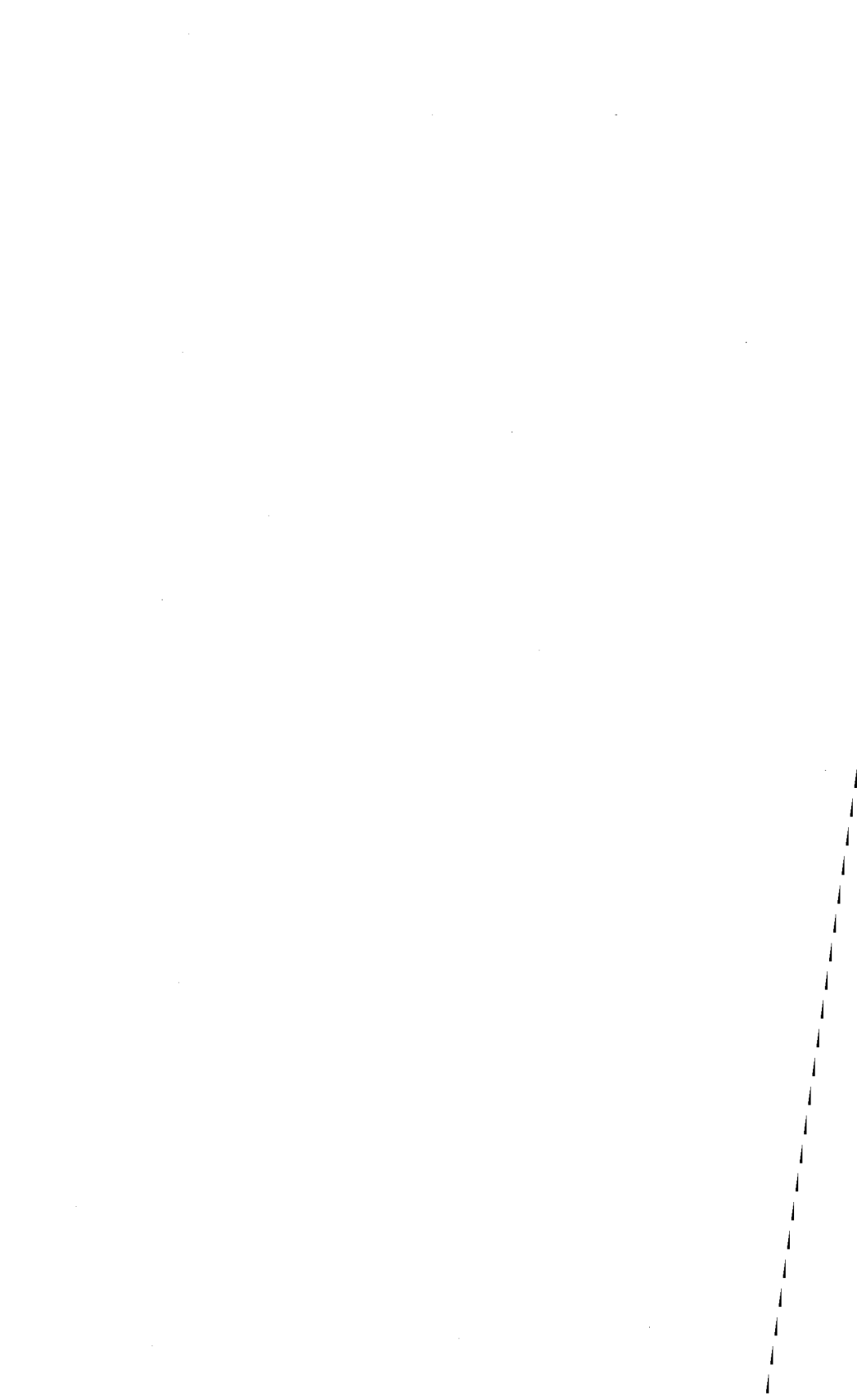
promise of the ultimate vindication of God's plan to redeem mankind and the earth from the curse of sin and death. The final vindication of Jesus Christ's claim to be the promised Messiah and the final fulfillment of the prophecies of the coming kingdom of God will culminate on that day when the heavens open to reveal Christ coming in all His glory at the battle of Armageddon. However, the Scriptures clearly teach that another event occurs separate from and earlier than the moment when Christ will defeat the Antichrist and the armies of the world at the climactic battle of Armageddon at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period. This separate and earlier event is often termed the "rapture." The timing, the participants, and the purpose of the rapture differ in every way from the characteristics of the second event, the revelation of Christ at the battle of Armageddon. Throughout the Bible, the passages that describe the revelation of Christ at the end of the Tribulation period describe a totally different event than those passages that describe the coming of Christ in the air to take the saints home to heaven.

The longing for the rapture and the return of Christ has motivated generations of Bible students to examine the Scriptures in a search for clues as to the exact timing of His glorious appearing. Unfortunately, despite clear Scriptural warnings against date-setting regarding the time of His return, many have indulged in unhelpful speculation about the time of the second coming, including Harold Camping's bestseller, *1994*, which claimed Christ would return on September 17, 1994. Millions of followers of these men's writings were deeply disappointed when their foolish predictions proved false. However, despite these disappointments, we must not abandon our hope for the imminent rapture. We must simply be obedient to Christ's command, "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28).

John Wesley de Fletcher wrote a fascinating letter to Charles Wesley in 1755 that expressed the proper attitude we should have toward the return of Christ: "I know that many have been grossly mistaken as to the year of His return, but, because they were rash, shall we be stupid? Because they say 'Today!'; shall we say, 'Never!' and cry 'Peace, Peace,' when we should look about us with eyes full of expectation?"

## Conclusion

I believe Ephraem the Syrian's A.D. 373 manuscript, *On the Last Times, the Antichrist and the End of the World*, fully meets the challenge of Dr. William Bell and Rev. John Bray's \$500 challenge. This new evidence clearly refutes the dogmatic declarations of many that there is no evidence that anyone ever taught the pre-tribulation rapture before A.D. 1830. The biblical truth of the glorious rapture of the church prior to the Tribulation was definitely taught in the early church. As I have shared in my earlier books, the truth of the pretribulation rapture is supported by the clear insistence on the imminent return of our Lord found throughout the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. In addition, as I pointed out in my *Apocalypse* book, the apocalyptic fourth vision of *The Shepherd of Hermas* from A.D. 110 declared that the elect will escape the Great Tribulation. This finding of the pretribulation rapture in Ephraem's writings illustrates that the biblical truth of God's blessed hope and deliverance of the saints was upheld by a remnant of the faithful from the beginning of the church until today



church . . .” But he avers elsewhere that “While there are in the writings of the early fathers seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture could be developed, it is difficult to find in them an unequivocal statement of the type of imminency usually believed in by pretribulationists” (*Contemporary Options in Eschatology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977], 112, 131). This in essence is all that we are arguing for. We do not say that the early fathers were pretribulationists in the modern sense, only that the seeds were indeed there but were crushed under the allegorist’s foot before they could sprout and bear early fruit.

78. See *The Didache* 16; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.29.1; Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 41, and Victorinus *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 12.1 and 15.1.
79. For examples of the language of escape see *The Shepherd of Hermas* 1.4.2-3; Hippolytus, *Appendix to Works* 32 and 35; and Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 71.
80. See, for example, Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 4; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.28.2; and *The Shepherd of Hermas* 1.4.3.
81. Among these are *The Epistle of Barnabas* 4; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.2; Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 28-29; Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 24-25; and Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 7.25.
82. See *The Epistle of Barnabas* 4. That Barnabas understood the fourth beast of Daniel 7:7-8 to be the Roman empire is certain. But what he thought of the ten-three-one horn scenario we do not know. The single horn was of course the evil one to come in the end (the Roman empire). And perhaps he held the others to represent minor kingdoms already subdued by Rome. In any case, as patristic scholar J. N. D. Kelly points out, “Barnabas is satisfied that the scandal of the last days is actually upon us . . .” (*Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. [New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978], 462).
83. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.29.1 and 5.30.2.
84. Tertullian, *The Shows, or De Spectaculis* 30.
85. Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 25 (italics added).
86. Obviously Hippolytus’ chronology made the imminent return of Christ impossible in his day. By his reckoning, some 250 years remained before the allotted 6000 years of man were to expire (*Fragments from Commentaries*, “On Daniel,” 2.4-6).
87. Some of the fathers, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Lactantius, and others, clearly have posttribulation elements in their views concerning the end-times. But we have been unable to find an instance of the unequivocal classic posttribulationism taught today. Walvoord’s assessment of the fathers’ views on the tribulation is essentially correct. He says, “The preponderance of evidence seems to support the concept that the early church did not clearly hold to a rapture as preceding the end-time tribulation period. Most of the early church fathers who wrote on the subject at all considered themselves already in the great tribulation. Accordingly Payne, as well as most other posttribulationists, takes the position that it is self-evident that pretribulationism as it is taught today was unheard of in the early centuries of the church. Consequently the viewpoint of the early church fathers is regarded by practically all posttribulationists, whether adherents of the classic view or not, as a major argument in favor of posttribulationism. However, the fact that most posttribulationists today do not accept the doctrine of imminency as the early church held it diminishes the force of their argument against pretribulationism” (*The Blessed Hope*, 1976, 24).
88. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, 25.
89. Erickson, *Contemporary Options*, 131.

#### Chapter Five—A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church

1. Grant R. Jeffrey, *Final Warning* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1995).
2. George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 31.
3. John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, 1980), 30-31.
4. Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1975), 156.
5. *On the Last Times, the Antichrist and the End of the World* by Ephraem the Syrian or Pseudo-Ephraem—around A.D. 373.
6. Bray, 30.
7. Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 210-11.
8. C. P. Caspari, ed., *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Altertums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters*, Christiania, 1890.
9. Alexander, 210-11.

10. William E. Bell, "A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1967), 27.
11. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

#### Chapter Six—J. N. Darby's Early Years

1. See John Nelson Darby, *Letters of J. N. Darby* (London: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, n.d.; reprint, Sunbury, Pa.: Believers Bookshelf, 1971), 1:73, 205, 431, 451, and 524. An excellent recent biography on Darby is by Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), 256.
2. W.G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby* (London: C. A. Hammond, 1944), 12.
3. Stuart O. Seanoir, personal letter, Dublin, Ireland, 26 January 1989. Mr. Seanoir is an assistant librarian in the Manuscripts Department at Trinity College, Dublin. He took this information from the *Alumni Dublinenses*.
4. See Darby, *Letters*, 2:310.
5. *Ibid.*, 3:297.
6. Turner, *Darby*, 13-15.
7. *Ibid.*, 16.
8. John Nelson Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby (CW)*, ed. William Kelly, new ed. (London: G. Morrish, n.d.; reprint, Sunbury, Pa.: Believers Bookshelf, 1971), 20:288. (Pagination in the new edition is different from the original.)
9. John Howard Goddard, "The Contribution of John Nelson Darby to Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 15-16.
10. Darby, *CW*, 1:36.
11. William Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 15.
12. Darby, *CW*, 1:1.
13. *Ibid.*, 1:1-19.
14. See Darby, *Letters*, 1:344; 3:298.
15. *Ibid.*, 3:298-99.
16. *Ibid.*, 3:299.
17. Darby, *CW*, 1:20-35.
18. Larry Vance Crutchfield, "The Doctrine of Ages and Dispensations as Found in the Published Works of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1985), 10.
19. Darby, *CW*, 2:1-31.
20. *Ibid.*, 2:32.
21. *Ibid.*, 2:31.
22. *Ibid.*, 2:27.
23. Neatby, *History*, 20. Compare, however, Darby's own statement: "When I left it [the Establishment], I published the tract on 'The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ'" (*CW*, 1:36). This tract is dated 1828.
24. Darby, *CW*, 1:37.
25. Darby, *Letters*, 1:344.
26. *Ibid.*, 3:298-99.
27. Darby, *CW*, 2:1-31.
28. *Ibid.*, 2:32.
29. *Ibid.*, 2:7-9.
30. *Ibid.*, 2:9.
31. *Ibid.*, 2:4.
32. *Ibid.*, 2:18.
33. *Ibid.*, 2:40.
34. *Ibid.*, 2:23.
35. See Richard Graves, *A Sermon Preached in St. Andrew's Church, Dublin, on Sunday, 21st April, 1811. In Aid of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews* (Dublin: J. Jones, 1811), 38, 40; John in F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism (1780-1850)* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 78; and D. N. Hempton, "Evangelicalism and Eschatology," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (April 1980): 182-83. On the little horn of Daniel 7, even Darby remarked, "Napoleon may serve to give us an idea of this state of things" (*CW*, 5:147; cf. 11:386-87).
36. John in F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism (1780-1850)* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 6-14.
37. Hempton, "Evangelicalism and Eschatology," 182.