



LAMPLIGHTER

"Prophecy is like a lamp shining in a dark place." - II Peter 1:19

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The
Rapture



Observations by the Editor

Anniversary

Twenty-five years ago, in 1980, I was the vice-president of a university in Enid, Oklahoma. In February of that year the Lord spoke to my heart during a prayer session and gave me a very precise message: "Resign your job. Step out in faith. Preach that Jesus is coming soon. Preach, 'flee from the wrath that is to come!'"

There was no doubt about the message. The problem for me was taking the step of faith. I discovered that it is one thing to teach and preach faith, and it is entirely another thing to do something by faith. I sought the confirmation of two witnesses and received it very quickly. I then asked the Lord to send me a third witness.

The next day I received in the mail the latest issue of the magazine, *Christianity Today*. On the cover was a picture of Martin Lloyd-Jones, the man considered to be Christendom's greatest expository preacher. I was familiar with him, but I didn't know much about him. I decided to read the article immediately.

The occasion of the article was the gentleman's 80th birthday. The article took the form of an interview, and the last question he was asked was this one: "If you were a young preacher just getting started, what would your message be?" He responded by saying that he had been studying Bible prophecy intensely for the past five years and had become convinced that we are living in the season of the Lord's return. Based on that conclusion, he said, "My message would be, 'Jesus is coming soon. Flee from the wrath that is to come.'"

It was the exact message that God had laid on my heart. I went to the Lord in prayer and thanked Him for being patient with me by sending a third witness. I then drove to the university and informed the president of my intention to resign and start preaching.

"When do you plan to do this?" he asked.

It was the middle of March, so I decided to give him two week's notice. "I plan to start the ministry on April 1st," I



Dave & Ann Reagan, 1982

responded.

"And what do you plan to preach?" he asked.

"That Jesus is coming soon!"

He sat there for a moment and looked at me in stunned disbelief. He then shook his head from side to side and said, "I think you have selected a very appropriate date." (Translation: "You have selected a foolish message, and April's fool day is an appropriate date to start proclaiming it!")

One year later on April 1st I arrived back in Dallas from taking my first pilgrimage group to Israel. My wife met me at the airport with what looked like a birthday present.

"This isn't my birthday," I said.

"I know, but it is a very important anniversary," she replied.

That's when it suddenly dawned on me that it was the first anniversary of the ministry. I opened the present, and discovered a framed certificate that she had hired a calligrapher to prepare for me.

The certificate had the ministry's logo at the top. Underneath it read: "Presented to my husband, David Reagan, on the first anniversary of Lamb & Lion Ministries. 'We are fools for Christ's sake (1 Corinthians 4:10).'" That certificate is one of my most prized possessions. ✚



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The Rapture

What is it?

Who will it affect?

When will it most likely take place?

Dr. David R. Reagan

The Rapture is a glorious event which God has promised to the Church.

The promise is that someday very soon, at the blowing of a trumpet and the shout of an archangel, Jesus will appear in the sky and take up His Church, living and dead, to Heaven.

The Term

The term, Rapture, comes from a Latin word, *rapio*, that means to catch up, to snatch away, or to take out. It is, in turn, a translation of the Greek word, *harpazo*.

So, rapture is a Biblical word that comes right out of the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible. The word is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. In the New American Standard Version, the English phrase, "caught up," is used. The same phrase is used in the King James and New International Versions.

A Promise to the Church

The concept of the Rapture was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets because it is a promise to the New Testament Church and not to the saints of God who lived before the establishment of the Church. Jesus will return as a bridegroom for His bride, and that bride consists only of Church Age saints.

The saints of Old Testament times will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation and not at the time of the Rapture of the Church. Daniel reveals this fact in Daniel 12:1-2 where he says that the saints of that age will be resurrected at the end of the "time of distress."

Biblical References

The first clear mention of the Rapture in Scripture is found in the words of Jesus recorded in John 14:1-4. Jesus said, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

The most detailed revelation of the actual events related to the Rapture is given by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. He says

that when Jesus appears, the dead in Christ (Church Age saints) will be resurrected and caught up first. Then, those of us who are alive in Christ will be translated "to meet the Lord in the air."

Paul mentions the Rapture again in 1 Corinthians 15 — his famous chapter on the resurrection of the dead:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (verses 51 & 52)

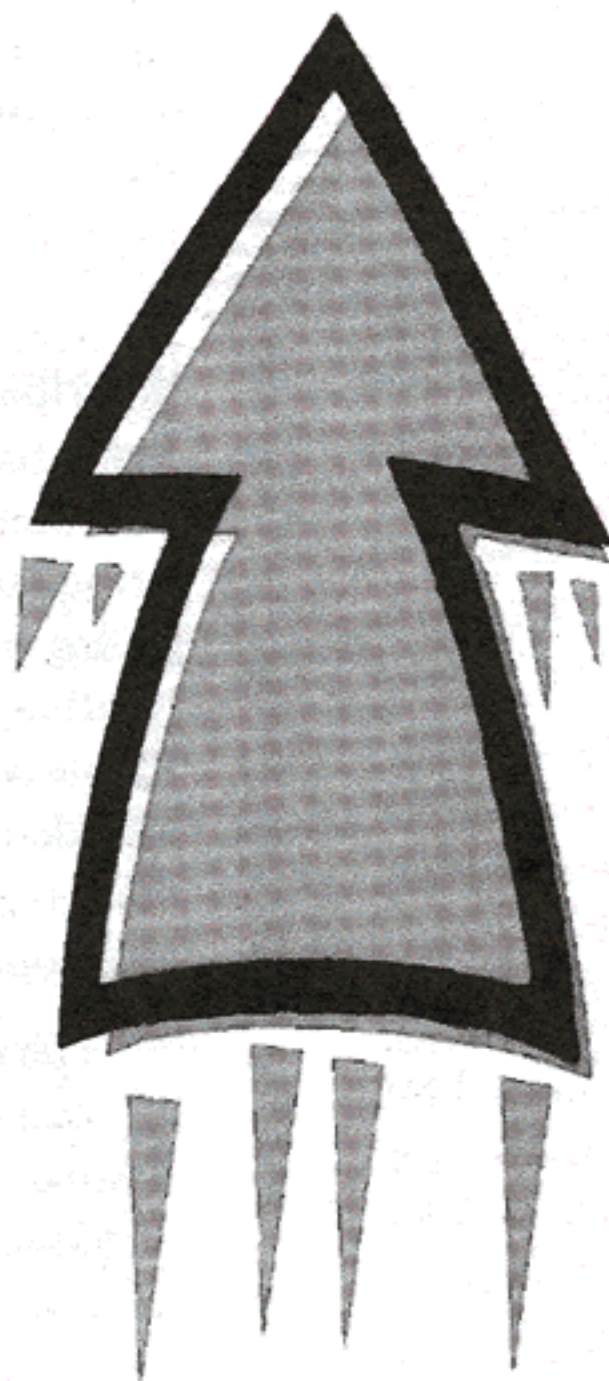
Paul's reference here to being changed is an allusion to the fact that the saints will receive glorified bodies that will be imperishable, immortal, and perfected (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 50-55 and Isaiah 35:5-6).

A Summary

To summarize, these passages teach that the shout of an archangel and the blowing of a trumpet will herald the sudden appearance of Jesus in the heavens (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The dead in Christ will be resurrected and rise up to meet the Lord in the sky. Then, those saints who are alive will be "caught up" to the Lord. Paul concludes his description in 1 Thessalonians 4 by encouraging his readers to "comfort one another with these words."

And truly the Rapture is a comforting thought! Consider the promises contained in the concept of the Rapture. Jesus will bring with Him the spirits of those who have died in Him (1 Thessalonians 4:14). He will resurrect their bodies in a great miracle of re-creation; He will reunite their bodies with their spirits; and He will then glorify their bodies, making them immortal. And those believers who are living will not even taste death. Rather, they will be caught up to the Lord, and in transit, they will be translated from mortal to immortal.

All my life I have heard that there are two things no one can avoid: taxes and death. Well, that is not true. According to 1 Thessalonians 4, a whole generation of believers will escape death. Taxes appear to be the only inevitability!



The Timing



The most controversial aspect of the Rapture is its timing. Some place it at the end of the Tribulation, making it one and the same event as the Second Coming. Others place it in the middle of the Tribulation. Still others believe that it will occur at the beginning of the Tribulation.

The reason for these differing viewpoints is that the exact time of the Rapture is not precisely revealed in scripture. It is only inferred. There is, therefore, room for honest differences of opinion, and

lines of fellowship should certainly not be drawn over differences regarding this point, even though it is an important point.

Post-Tribulation Rapture

Those who place the timing at the end of the Tribulation usually base their argument on two parables in Matthew 13 and on the Lord's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24.

In Matthew 24 the Lord portrays His gathering of the saints as an event that will take place "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (Matthew 24:29). This certainly sounds like a post-Tribulation Rapture. But it must be kept in mind that the book of Matthew was written to the Jews, and therefore the recording of Jesus' speech by Matthew has a distinctively Jewish flavor to it as compared to Luke's record of the same speech.

Note, for example, Matthew's references to Judea and to Jewish law regarding travel on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:15-20). These are omitted in Luke's account. Instead, Luke speaks of the saints looking up for deliverance "to escape all these things" when the end time signs "begin to take place" (Luke 21:28, 36). The saints in Matthew are instructed to flee from Judea and hide. The saints in Luke are told to look up for deliverance.

It appears, therefore, that Matthew and Luke are speaking of two different sets of saints. The saints in Matthew's account are most likely Jews who receive Jesus as their Messiah during the Tribulation. The saints in Luke are those who receive Christ before the Tribulation begins. Most of those who accept the Lord during the Tribulation will be martyred (Revelation 7:9-14). Those who live to the end will be gathered by the angels of the Lord (Matthew 24:31).

The parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30) and the parable of the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50) can be explained in the same way. They refer to a separation of saints and sinners that will take place at the end of the Tribulation. The saints are those who receive Jesus as their Savior during the Tribulation (Gentile and Jew) and who live to the end of that awful period.

The Bible clearly teaches that the Rapture is an event that is separate and apart from the Second Coming. The two simply cannot be combined into one event. For a detailed discussion of this point, see the next article that begins on page 7.

Mid-Tribulation Rapture

There are variations of the mid-Tribulation Rapture concept. The most common is that the Church will be taken out in the exact middle of the Tribulation, at the point in time when the Antichrist is revealed.

This concept is based upon a statement in 1 Corinthians 15:52 which says that the Rapture will occur at the blowing of "the last trumpet." This trumpet is then identified with the seventh trumpet of the trumpet judgments in the book of Revelation. Since the blowing of the seventh trumpet is recorded in Revelation 11, the mid-point of the Tribulation, the conclusion is that the Rapture must occur in the middle of the Tribulation.

But there are two problems with this interpretation. The first is that the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15 is blown for believers whereas the seven trumpets of Revelation 8, 9 and 11 are sounded for unbelievers. The Revelation trumpets have no relevance for the Church. The last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15 is a trumpet for the righteous. The last trumpet for the unrighteous is the one described in Revelation 11.

Another problem with this interpretation is that the passage in Revelation 11 that portrays the sounding of the seventh trumpet is a "flash forward" to the end of the Tribulation. Flash forwards are very common in the book of Revelation. They occur after something terrible is described in order to assure the reader that everything is going to turn out all right when Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation.

Thus, the eighth and ninth chapters of Revelation, which describe the horrors of the trumpet judgments, are followed immediately by a flash forward in chapter 10 that pictures the return of Jesus in victory at the end of the Tribulation. The mid-Tribulation action resumes in chapter 11 with a description of the killing of the two great prophets of God by the Antichrist. Then, to offset that terrible event, we are presented with another flash forward, beginning with verse 15. The seventh trumpet is sounded and we find ourselves propelled forward to the end of the Tribulation when "the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord."

The point is that the seventh trumpet of Revelation relates to the end of the Tribulation and not the middle. It is the same trumpet that is referred to in Matthew 24:31, the trumpet that will be blown to announce the Second Coming of Jesus. It is therefore no basis for an argument in behalf of a mid-Tribulation Rapture.

Pre-Wrath Rapture

A variation of the mid-Tribulation Rapture is the pre-wrath Rapture concept that places the Rapture at the beginning of the last quarter of the Tribulation, about five and a half years into the Tribulation.

The argument for this view is that the Church is promised protection only from the wrath of God and not the wrath of Man or of Satan. It is then argued that



only the bowl judgments in the last quarter of the Tribulation (Revelation 16) represent the wrath of God.

But the argument for this view disintegrates when you consider two facts. First, it is Jesus Himself who breaks the seals that launch each of the seal judgments recorded in Revelation 6. These judgments occur at the beginning of the Tribulation. Second, the seven angels who blow the trumpets that initiate each of the trumpet judgments are given their trumpets at the throne of God (Revelation 8:2).

All the judgments of Revelation are clearly superintended by God. That is the reason we are told in Revelation 15:1 that the bowl judgments at the end of the Tribulation will finish the wrath of God, not begin His wrath.

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture



I believe the best inference of Scripture is that the Rapture will occur at the beginning of the Tribulation. The most important reason I believe this has to do with the issue of imminence.

Over and over in Scripture we are told to watch for the appearing of the Lord. We are told "to be ready" (Matthew 24:44), "to be on the alert" (Matthew 24:42), "to be dressed in readiness" (Luke 12:35), and to "keep your lamps alight" (Luke 12:35). The clear force of these persistent warnings is that Jesus can appear at any moment.

Only the pre-Tribulation concept of the Rapture allows for the imminence of the Lord's appearing for His Church. When the Rapture is placed at any other point in time, the imminence of the Lord's appearing is destroyed because other prophetic events must happen first.

For example, if the Rapture is going to occur in mid-Tribulation, then why should I live looking for the Lord's appearing at any moment? I would be looking instead for an Israeli peace treaty, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the revelation of the Antichrist. Then and only then could the Lord appear.

Focus

This raises the issue of what we are to be looking for. Nowhere are believers told to watch for the appearance of the Antichrist. On the contrary, we are told to watch for Jesus Christ. In Titus 2:13 Paul says we are to live "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." Likewise, Peter urges us to "fix our hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13). John completes the apostolic chorus by similarly urging us to "fix our hope on Him" at His appearing (1 John 3:2-3).

Only Matthew speaks of watching for the Antichrist (Matthew 24:15), but he is speaking to the Jews living in Israel in the middle of the Tribulation when the Antichrist desecrates the rebuilt Temple.

Wrath

Another argument in behalf of a pre-Tribulation Rapture has to do with the promises of God to protect the Church from His wrath. As has already been demonstrated, the book of Revelation shows that the wrath of God will be poured out during the entire period of the Tribulation.

The Word promises over and over that the Church will be delivered from God's wrath. Romans 5:9 says that "we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him [Jesus]." 1 Thessalonians 1:10 states that we are waiting "for His Son from heaven . . . who will deliver us from the wrath to come." The promise is repeated in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 — "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Deliverance

Some argue that God could supernaturally protect the Church during the Tribulation. Yes, He could. In fact, He promises to do just that for the 144,000 Jews who will be sealed as bond-servants at the beginning of the Tribulation (Revelation 7:1-8).

But God's promise to the Church during the Tribulation is not one of protection but one of deliverance. Jesus said we would "escape" the horrors of the Tribulation (Luke 21:36). Paul says Jesus is coming to "deliver" us from God's wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10).



Symbolism

There are several prophetic types that seem to affirm the concept of deliverance from Tribulation.

Take Enoch for example. He was a prophet to the Gentiles who was raptured out of the world before God poured out His wrath in the great flood of Noah's time. Enoch appears to be a type of the Gentile Church that will be taken out of the world before God pours out His wrath again. If so, then Noah and his family are a type of the Jewish remnant that will be protected through the Tribulation.

Another Old Testament symbolic type which points toward a pre-Tribulation Rapture is the experience of Lot and his family. They were delivered out of Sodom and Gomorrah before those cities were destroyed.

The Apostle Peter alludes to both of these examples in his second epistle. He states that if God spared Noah and Lot, then He surely "knows how to rescue the godly from trial and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:4-9).

Another beautiful prophetic type is to be found in the Jewish wedding traditions of Jesus' time. After the betrothal, the groom

would return to his father's house to prepare a wedding chamber for his bride. He would return for his bride at an unexpected moment, so the bride had to be ready constantly. When he returned, he would take his bride back to his father's house to the chamber he had prepared. He and his bride would then be sealed in the chamber for seven days. When they emerged, a great wedding feast would be celebrated.

Likewise, Jesus has returned to Heaven to prepare a place for His bride, the Church. When He returns for His bride, He will take her to His Father's heavenly home. There He will remain with His bride for seven years (the duration of the Tribulation). The period will end with "the marriage supper of the Lamb" described in Revelation 19. Thus the seven days in the wedding chamber point prophetically to the seven years that Jesus and His bride will remain in Heaven during the Tribulation.

Revelation

Speaking of Revelation, the structure of that book also implies a pre-Tribulation Rapture in a symbolic sense.

The first three chapters focus on the Church. Chapter 4 begins with the door of Heaven opening and John being raptured from the Isle of Patmos to the throne of God in Heaven. The Church is not mentioned thereafter until Revelation 19:7-9 when it is portrayed as the "bride of Christ" in Heaven with Jesus celebrating the "marriage supper of the Lamb." At Revelation 19:11 the door of Heaven opens again, and Jesus emerges riding a white horse on His way to earth, followed by His Church (Revelation 19:14).



The rapture of the Apostle John in Revelation 4 appears to be a symbolic type of the Rapture of the Church. Note that it is initiated by the cry of a voice that sounds like the blowing of a trumpet (Revelation 4:1). Since the Tribulation does not begin until Revelation 6, the rapture of John in Revelation 4 appears to be a symbolic type that points to a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church.

Some counter this argument by pointing out that although the Church is not mentioned in Revelation during that book's description of the Tribulation, there is constant mention of "saints" (for example, Revelation 13:7). But that term is not used in the Bible exclusively to refer to members of the Church. Daniel uses it to refer to Old Testament believers who lived long before the Church was established (Daniel 7:18). The saints referred to in the book of Revelation are most likely those people who will be saved during the Tribulation, after the Church has been taken out of the world.

Paul's Assurance

An interesting argument in behalf of the pre-Tribulation timing of the Rapture can be found in 2 Thessalonians. The church at Thessalonica was in a turmoil because someone had written them a letter under Paul's name stating that they had missed the "gathering to the Lord" and were, in fact, living in "the day of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

Paul attempted to calm them down by reminding them of his teaching that the day of the Lord would not come until after the Antichrist is revealed. He then stated that the Antichrist would not be revealed until a restraining force "is taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7).

There has been much speculation as to the identity of this restraining force that Paul refers to. Some have identified it as the Holy Spirit. But it cannot be the Holy Spirit because there will be people saved during the Tribulation, and no one can be saved apart from the testimony of the Spirit (John 16:8-11 & 1 John 5:7).

Others have identified the restrainer as human government. It is true that government was ordained by God to restrain evil (Romans 13:1-4). But the governments of the world are in rebellion against God and His Son (Psalm 2), and they are therefore a contributor to the evil that characterizes the world. Furthermore, the Tribulation will not be characterized by a lack of government. Rather, it will feature the first true worldwide government (Revelation 13:7).

In my opinion that leaves only one other candidate for Paul's restrainer—and that is the Church. It is the Church that serves as the primary restrainer of evil in the world today as it proclaims the Gospel and stands for righteousness. When the Church fails in this mission, evil multiplies, as Paul graphically points out in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Paul says that society in the end times will be characterized by chaos and despair because "men will hold to a form of religion but will deny its power." When the Church is removed from the world, all hell will literally break loose.

Escapism?

The pre-Tribulation concept of the Rapture has often been condemned as "escapism." I think this criticism is unjustified. The Bible itself says that Christians are to "comfort one another" with the thought of the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Is it a comfort to think of the Rapture occurring at the end of the world's worst period of war instead of at the beginning?

Regardless of when the Rapture actually occurs, we need to keep in mind that the Bible teaches that societal conditions are going to grow increasingly worse the closer we get to the Lord's return. That means Christians will suffer tribulation whether or not they go into the Great Tribulation. And that means all of us had better be preparing ourselves for unprecedented suffering and spiritual warfare.

If you are a Christian, you can do that on a daily basis by putting on "the full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13), praying at all times in the Spirit that you will be able to stand firm against the attacks of Satan (Ephesians 6:14-18).

If you are not a Christian, your only hope is to reach out in faith and receive the free gift of God's salvation which He has provided through His Son, Jesus (John 3:16). ✚

The Nature of the Lord's Return In Love or in Wrath?

Dr. David R. Reagan

When you think of the coming of the Lord, what do you think of? What is your image? Is it positive or negative? Is it a return in love or in wrath? And what do you feel? Fear or joy? Comfort or anxiety?

How would you characterize your overall attitude about the Lord's return? Desire or apathy? Do you pray for it? Or, do you try not to think about it? Are you enthusiastic or passive?

Finally, how would you describe the Lord's coming? How would you explain it to someone who knows nothing about it?

The Scriptural Images

There are two detailed descriptions of the Lord's return in the New Testament, one written by the Apostle Paul and the other by the Apostle John. These descriptions are reproduced below, side by side. Stop for a moment and read them carefully.

one of vengeance and wrath. In the Thessalonian passage, the Lord appears in the sky, but does not descend to the earth. In the Revelation account, He comes to the earth. Zechariah 14 says He will return to the Mount of Olives from which He ascended into Heaven.

One of the most significant differences between the two passages relates to the Church. In the Thessalonian account, the Lord comes for the purpose of taking His Church, both the dead and living members, out of this world. In Revelation, by stark contrast, He returns *with* His Church. This is indicated in Revelation 19:14 where it says that "the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean were following Him on white horses." We know these people constitute the Church, because the same group is described a few verses before (verses 7 and 8) as being the "bride" of Christ.

Thus, in Paul's description of the Lord's return, He is portrayed as coming *for* His Church, to deliver believers from the "wrath that is to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). But in John's description, Jesus is portrayed as returning *with* His Church in great wrath. In Thessalonians Jesus returns as a Deliverer. In Revelation He comes back as a Warrior. In one scene He is coming to claim the righteous; in the other, He returns to condemn the unrighteous.

The New Testament Descriptions of the Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Revelation 19:11-16

13) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

11) And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

12) And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself.

13) And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God.

14) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

15) And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Now, let me ask you some more questions. How can these two descriptions be reconciled? I ask that because they are as different as night and day. Did you notice that?

Look again and make a careful comparison. Notice that they have absolutely nothing in common. In fact, they are totally incompatible.

Comparison and Contrast

The passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 presents a scene of love, mercy, and grace. The picture that is painted by Revelation 19 is

A Problem in Reconciliation

What is going on here? How could these two passages be talking about the same event? How can they be reconciled?

I believe there is only one way to reconcile them and that is to conclude that *they are describing two separate events*. That, in turn, implies rather clearly that there are going to be *two* future comings of the Lord.

One of those — the one described in 1 Thessalonians 4 — will be more of an appearing than a coming, for the Lord will not

actually return to the earth. He will, instead, appear in the heavens and supernaturally draw the Church, living and dead, to Him.

The second future appearance of the Lord — the one described in Revelation 19 — will be the true “Second Coming,” for the Lord will actually descend to the earth to pour out the wrath of God and establish His reign over all the world.

This means the “Second Coming” of the Lord is going to be in two stages. The first stage will be what has come to be known as the Rapture — the snatching of the Church out of the world. The second stage, which will occur later, will be the return of the Lord to the earth.

The Issue of Imminence

This method of reconciling these passages solves a serious problem that emerges when you think of only one future coming of the Lord. That problem relates to the emphasis that the Scriptures give to *imminence*.

What I am referring to, of course, is the constant warning of the Scriptures that the Lord may appear any moment and, therefore, we are to always be ready for the Lord’s return (Matthew 24:36, 42, 44, 50 and 25:13).

If there is only one future coming of the Lord, then these warnings are a waste of time and there is no imminence because there are many prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled before the Lord can return. For example:

- 1) A peace treaty must be signed that will guarantee Israel’s peace with all of its Arab neighbors (Daniel 9:27).
- 2) The Jewish Temple must be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, and Revelation 11:1-2).
- 3) The Great Tribulation must begin and run its seven year course, resulting in the death of over half the world’s population (Revelation 6-18).
- 4) The Antichrist must reveal himself and begin an unprecedented persecution of the Jews — one that will result in the death of two-thirds of all the Jews (Revelation 12:13-17 & Zechariah 13:7-9).
- 5) The Gospel must be preached to every person on the earth (Matthew 24:14 and Revelation 14:6-7).
- 6) An unprecedented system of economic control must be established that will prevent persons from buying or selling anything unless they can display on their right hands or foreheads the mark or name of the Antichrist.
- 7) The worldwide kingdom of the Antichrist must be destroyed in “one hour of one day” (Revelation 17 & 18).

These are all events that are clearly prophesied in Scripture as occurring before Jesus

returns to earth. None of them has yet been fulfilled in history. If there is only one future coming of the Lord, and it must take place after these events, then why should we be looking for Jesus Christ? We should be looking instead for the Antichrist!

Living with Expectancy

The only way that the imminence taught by the Scriptures can be maintained is to believe that Jesus can return any moment. The only way to maintain that belief is to conclude that the Lord’s appearing for His Church (the Rapture) is an event that is separate and apart from the Second Coming and is an event that can occur any moment.

That is what I have concluded from my study of prophecy, and I therefore live looking for the Rapture to occur any moment. This is exactly what Paul commands us to do when he writes that we are to live “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13).

I therefore do not believe there is one prophecy in the Bible that must be fulfilled before the Lord appears for His Church. He can appear any moment. And the imminence of His appearing increases daily as the signs of the time point to the events that will culminate with His Second Coming. Those signs include, among others, the re-establishment of the state of Israel, the Jewish reoccupation of the city of Jerusalem, the reunification of Europe, and the rise of Arab militancy in the Middle East.

Keep in mind that the Rapture is not the event that will kick-off the Tribulation. That event is the signing of a peace treaty that will guarantee the peace of Israel with all its Arab neighbors and will also authorize the Jews to rebuild their Temple (Daniel 9:27). The Rapture could occur years before the Tribulation begins, although it is most likely to occur near the beginning because the Tribulation is the time for the pouring out of God’s wrath, and 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says that Jesus will “deliver” His Church “from the wrath to come.”

Hope or Terror?

To summarize, we should be looking for two future comings of the Lord — one at the beginning of the Tribulation, the other at the end. The first, the Rapture, will be the appearing of the Lord for His Church. The second, the Second Coming, will be the return of the Lord to the earth to “judge and wage war” against the enemies of God (Revelation 19:11).

The signs of the times point to the fact that Jesus is at the very gates of Heaven, waiting for His Father’s command to appear for His Church. The Rapture is imminent.

Are you ready? Will Jesus appear (the Rapture) as your Blessed Hope? Or, will He return (the Second Coming) as your Holy Terror? The choice is yours. ✚



“You’re an escapist!”

Dennis Pollock

Those words have been hurled at me a number of times by those who do not believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Yes, there are some people who just cannot get the least bit joyful over the notion that the Lord may take the Church out of this world before the Great Tribulation begins. In their zeal to denounce the concept of a pre-Tribulation Rapture, they often resort to name calling, and they use a word that they believe automatically ends all debate and establishes once and for all that they have the righteous and noble position. They call us — **escapists!**

The idea seems to be that if we were truly spiritual we would have no carnal desire to go to Heaven and escape the miseries that are coming upon this world. We would be more than willing to hang around and witness and suffer for Christ, right on through the pouring out of the final bowl of God’s judgment at the conclusion of the Tribulation. Shame on any and all who would desire to leave early!

Well, *the fact of the matter is that the Rapture is an escape.* Jesus used the word unashamedly. He declared:

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to *escape* all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:36)

Daily Tribulation vs the Great Tribulation

Before we investigate what this statement means, let’s consider what it does not mean. Jesus is not saying that Christians will escape suffering in this world. Anyone who hasn’t lived their life under a rock knows that Christians are not exempt from suffering any more than we are exempt from the law of gravity.

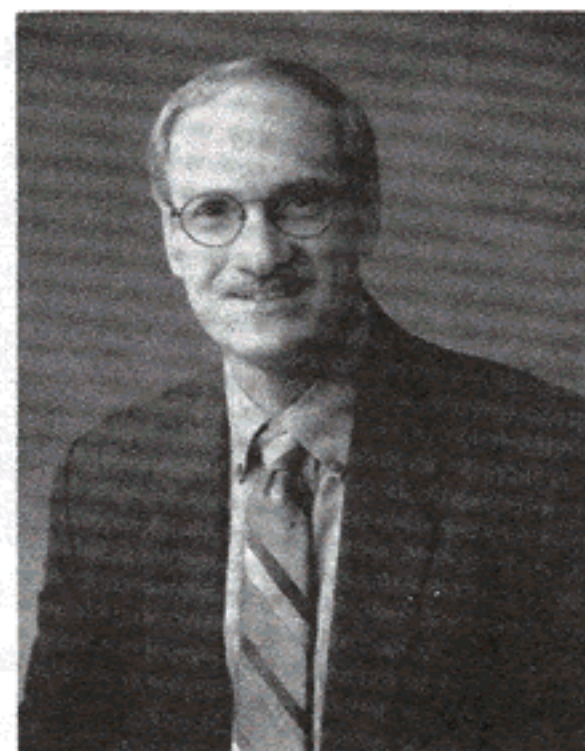
In fact, Jesus made us an important promise about suffering — one we do not like to think about. We Christians love to claim the promises of the Bible, and rightfully so. But there is one promise that I’ve never known anyone to claim. The promise is one made by our Lord, who told us:

In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Have you ever seen anyone standing on the Word, and insisting, “Lord, You promised me tribulation, and things are going too peacefully lately. Now, Father, I’m claiming Your word and expecting You to fulfill it!”

No, the promise of tribulation is one of those promises that God is going to keep whether we believe it, confess it, or deny it. It makes absolutely no difference.

In most restaurants, customers are usually asked, “Would you like smoking or non?” Wouldn’t it be great, if before we got very far in this life, God would ask, “Suffering or non?” I think we’d all end up in the non-suffering section of life’s restaurant! But He never asks and never will. Tribulation comes automatically with all the other joys and experiences of being human.



When we talk about escape, we are talking about a particular form of deliverance. Yes, Christians will suffer in this life. Sinners cry at funerals and Christians cry at funerals. Sinners have heart attacks and Christians have heart attacks. Sinners get laid off their jobs and Christians do as well. The new birth does not exempt us from these things. God doesn’t say, “No more bumps in the road.”

God does, however, promise that He will be our “shock absorber.” He promises to walk with us through the fires and high waters of life (Isaiah 43:1-3).

Escape from Wrath

So, what kind of escape is Jesus talking about in Luke 21:36? I believe it is an escape from the wrath of God.

This is one area where sinners and Christians are vastly different. The unregenerate person lives his entire life under the wrath of God. The Bible tells us:

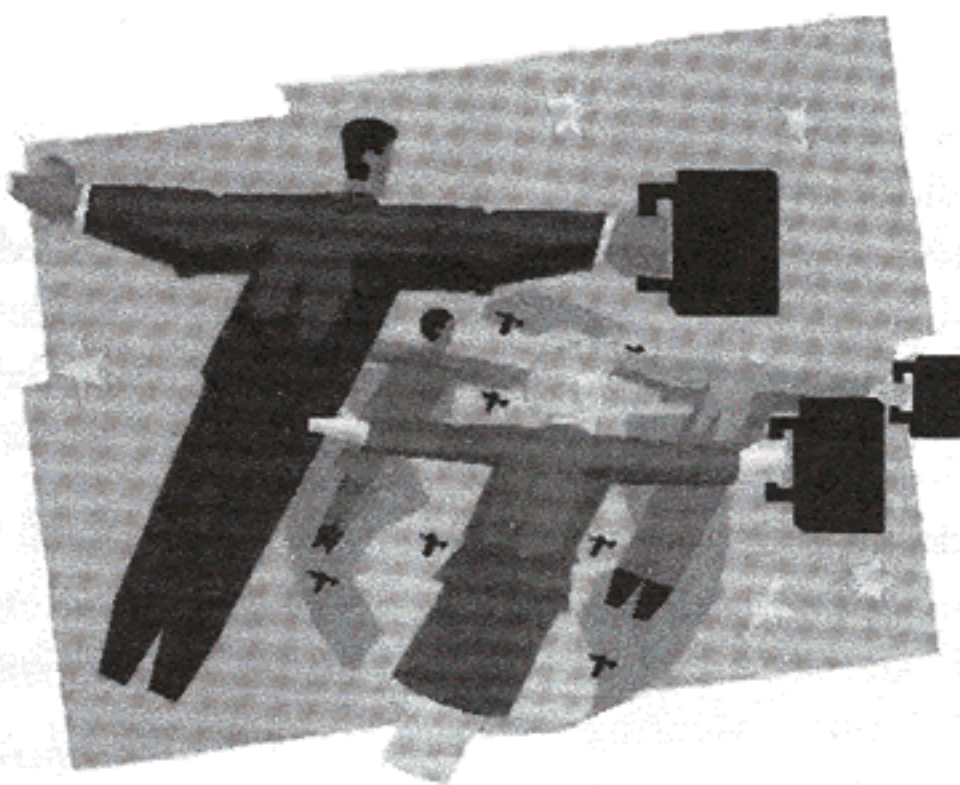
Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him. (John 3:36)

Notice that God’s wrath doesn’t come upon the sinner at his rejection of Christ; it was already there (from the day he began sinning consciously) and simply remains on him. The Christian has no such problem.

By Jesus’ death and resurrection, the wrath issue has been eternally settled. God’s anger over a Christian’s sin has been retroactively placed upon Christ, and the believer has achieved that state the Bible calls “justification.” He stands innocent before God, and he will never experience the wrath of God. In fact, it would be impossible for him to do so, as it would negate the Cross, a thing which

could never happen.

At the Rapture, we are instantly snatched from a wicked, defiant world upon which God’s fierce anger is poised to fall, and translated into that heavenly realm where His anger is never felt. Thus we “escape all these things that will come to pass” and “stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:36). ✚



Note: Dennis Pollock is Dr. Reagan’s associate evangelist. He is available to conduct evangelistic meetings and conferences about Bible prophecy. To contact him, call 972-736-3567 or email him at dpollock@vsswireless.net.

Christian Persecution

The County Supervisors of Los Angeles County voted in September of 2004 to change the official seal of the county. It was brought to their attention by the ACLU that there was a symbol on the seal that was horribly offensive — namely, a cross! The County Supervisors agreed and promptly voted to remove the offensive symbol which had been on the seal for 50 years.



Old Seal



New Seal

As you can see above, the offending cross was almost microscopic in size. It is located in the middle panel on the right, above the Hollywood Bowl and next to two stars representing the movie industry. On the new seal, the Hollywood Bowl has been moved up one panel, replacing the oil derricks in the original seal, and the cross has been replaced with a non-descript building that is supposed to represent a Spanish mission.

To be entirely politically correct, the Supervisors decided also to replace the central figure in the seal. The old seal featured the Roman goddess of gardens and trees, Pamona. The new seal shows an American Indian woman who represents the original inhabitants of the area.

The other symbols on the seal were considered to be inoffensive enough to be left alone. In the upper left-hand corner are engineering instruments representing technological achievements. In the center left panel is a Spanish galleon representing the Western discoverers of the area. In the lower-left panel is a fish representing the fishing industry. And in the lower-right panel is a cow representing the cattle industry.

Over 2,500 people showed up on a workday morning to protest the removal of the cross. Many of them were non-Christians, including atheists, Buddhists, and a fair number of Jews, including non-Orthodox Jews and Orthodox ones wearing yarmulkes. It was probably the first time in history that Jews have banded together to protect the Christian cross. It is an achievement that the ACLU should take pride in!



Bah Humbug!

The all-out assault on the Christian celebration of Christmas continued unabated during the 2004 "Holiday Season."

The superintendent of schools in Mustang, Oklahoma, censored the

TIMES and Seasons

Christmas play at Lakehoma Elementary School by refusing to allow the children to include any references to Christmas! They were not even allowed to say, "Merry Christmas." However, references to Hanukkah and Kwanza were left in the play. Hanukkah was already over and Kwanza is a fake holiday that was created in 1994 as a marketing ploy.

A fourth grader in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, was prohibited from handing out religious Christmas cards to classmates. Two middle school students in Rochester, Minnesota, were disciplined for ending their Christmas skit with the words, "We hope you all have a Merry Christmas." Two ninth graders in Plymouth, Massachusetts, were told they could not create Christmas cards saying, "Merry Christmas," or depicting a nativity scene.

During a dispute over the display of a nativity scene on the courthouse lawn in Weatherford, Texas, an atheist interviewed on TV said, "Everyone knows that the nativity has nothing to do with Christmas."



Columnist Cal Thomas lamented that "our culture has shoplifted a most glorious event — God becoming man — and has appropriated it for the sole purpose of persuading people to buy stuff that they can't afford for people who don't need it. Santa has become a God substitute who gives but requires nothing more than a child being 'nice,' and even that is negotiable."

Freedom of Speech

Mark Austin, a 17 year old junior at Watauga High School in Boone, California, was suspended from school last year for expressing his Christian convictions. The incident was prompted by his school's participation in a nationwide homosexual propaganda event called the "Day of Silence." Homosexual and pro-homosexual students were encouraged to take a vow of silence on a designated day "in recognition of the silence that is imposed upon sexual minorities."

Mark decided he was not going to remain silent. He created a special T-shirt which he wore to school on the designated day. On the front of the shirt were the following words:

Homosexuality is sin (Leviticus 18:22)

Hell is REAL (Revelation 21:8)

Jesus is the Answer! (Romans 10:9-10)

On the back, Mark had printed, "Shout for Joy! (Psalm 132:9)."

School officials were outraged. They gave Mark the choice of removing the shirt or being suspended. Mark chose suspension.

The legal arm of the American Family Association came to Mark's defense by threatening legal action in federal court. The school immediately backed down and agreed that their action had probably been unconstitutional.

The Moral Slouch

The *Dallas Morning News* recently ran an editorial bemoaning the negative moral impact of reality TV shows. The timing of the editorial was prompted by an announcement that ABC was going to air an episode of *20/20* in which Barbara Walters would award a baby to one of five couples wanting to adopt a child. Fortunately a flurry of viewer complaints led to the cancellation of the bizarre idea, and Barbara Walters apologized.

The rest of the editorial was so powerful that it is reproduced below in full:

The Dallas Morning News

Giving a human being away as part of a televised competition sounds as absurd as it is repulsive. But nowadays, it isn't unthinkable.

In contemporary America, people go on television to talk about how ugly and miserable they are and to allow the nation to see them cut, lifted, pulled, capped and dyed into a state of perfect happiness (or so they hope). People compete on the air to win a stranger's hand in marriage. And these programs are among the most-watched prime-time programs. In this context, is the idea that *20/20* would give away a baby to one of five rival couples on live TV really so unusual?

Not so long ago, the *Jerry Springer Show* elicited much criticism for its debasing carnival of freaks, adulterers, fetishists, Kluxers and the like, all displaying their perversity to entertain mouth-breathing rabble. Mr. Springer said in response that he was just giving the people what they wanted, and he had the ratings to prove it. But so what? In ancient Rome, the people went to the stadium to watch lions tear Christians to pieces.

Americans aren't at the state — yet — of watching wild animals eat captives for entertainment, but we slouch toward the Roman circus bit by bit. The coarsening of Roman society began somewhere. These TV programs can be fun to watch, but they take the most intimate and private events and aspects of our lives and turn them into commodities for public consumption and titillation.

A culture that considers it acceptable to award babies as prizes for the sake of popular entertainment is a culture that won't long recognize what it means to be human.

Sex Education in New Mexico



The New Mexico Health Department is standing behind a sex-education teacher in Santa Fe who encouraged ninth-graders to taste flavored condoms.

According to a report in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, a parent reported that when her 15 year old daughter balked over putting a condom in her mouth, her teacher told

TIMES and Seasons

her, "Come on sweetie, have a little fun."

The parent also reported that when a male student expressed his disgust concerning homosexual activity, the teacher said, "Never say never, because you never know. Someday you might like it that way."

A spokesman for the state health department responded to the parent's complaint by saying that they had investigated the matter and could find nothing wrong with what the teacher had done. "He didn't really tell them to just put condoms in their mouth," the spokesman said. "What he does basically, in his classes, depending on the age appropriateness of the class, is to try to get them . . . used to condoms and kind of destigmatize them. He tells them, if they're comfortable, they can open up the packages, they can touch them, they can stretch them out and those kind of things. And he has told them, if they're the flavored kind, they can go ahead and taste them if they want to. But it's generally to desensitize the whole stigma of 'Oh my God, it's a condom!'"

The godly parents of New Mexico must feel a whole lot better after that explanation.

Badgering the Boy Scouts

The nationwide attack on the Boy Scouts continues. Due to the urging of the ACLU, atheist groups, and homosexual organizations, many cities have banned the Boy Scouts from participating in United Fund campaigns and from using public facilities like public parks.

The Boy Scout national organization was forced to spend millions defending itself against a lawsuit that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In that legal battle, the plaintiffs attempted to force the organization to accept homosexual scoutmasters. Fortunately, the Boy Scouts won that fight.

But the harassment continues. In November of last year, the Pentagon suddenly announced that it had decided to ban all U.S. military bases around the world from sponsoring Boy Scout troops! This action was taken at the urging of the ACLU because the Boy Scouts insist that their members hold a belief in God.

Here is the horrible oath required of Boy Scouts that so troubles the ACLU and the Pentagon:

On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

Is there any hope for a nation that objects to such an oath? ✚



The Origin of the Concept of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Dr. David R. Reagan

“The Pre-Tribulation Rapture is a johnny-come-lately idea that is too new to be true.” This is the most common argument that I encounter against the concept of the Rapture of the Church occurring before the Tribulation begins.

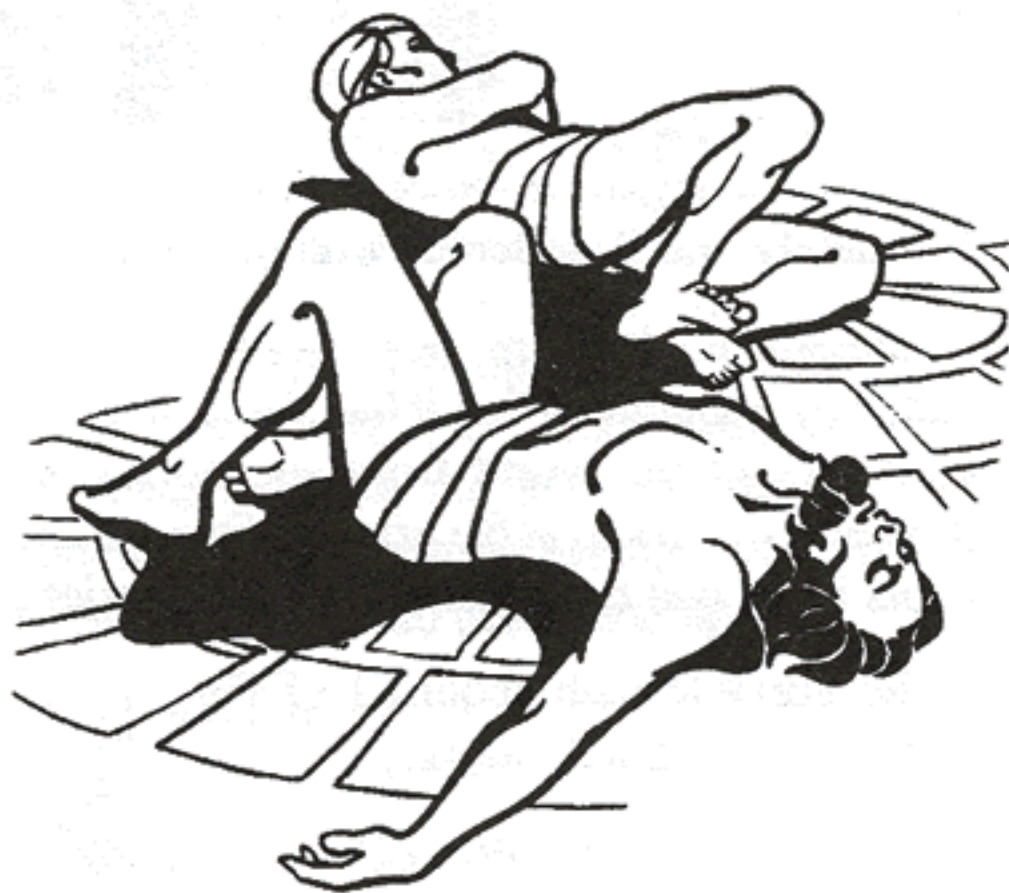
There are several problems with this argument. The first is that it ignores the fact that the Bible teaches that end time prophecies will not be understood until the time comes for the predicted events to take place.

When the prophet Daniel was given some specific prophecies about the end times, he complained to the Lord that he did not understand them. The Lord responded with these words: “Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end times” (Daniel 12:9). Jeremiah was told the same thing by the Lord on two occasions (Jeremiah 23:20 and 30:24).

Waiting on Events

There are many end time prophecies that can not be understood apart from historical or technological developments. For example, all of end time prophecy revolves around the state of Israel. Those prophecies were not fully understandable before the re-establishment of the state of Israel in May of 1948. Think of it for a moment — how could anyone in 1900 understand the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 that Russia will invade Israel in the end times? Israel did not exist, nor was there any prospect of Israel ever existing again. And Russia was a peaceful Christian Orthodox country.

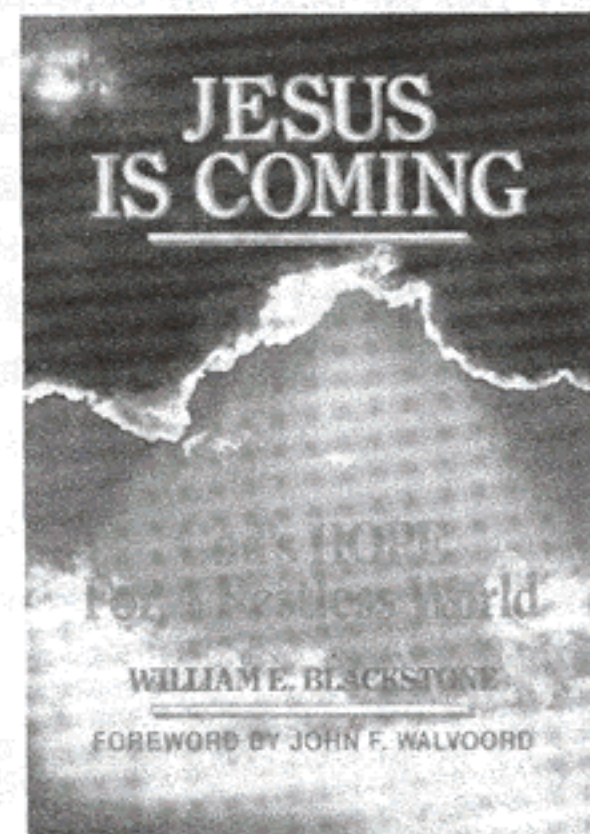
In like manner, before modern times, how could anyone understand the prophecy in Revelation 11 about the killing and resurrection of the two witnesses of God? That prophecy says that the whole world will look upon their bodies and witness their resurrection and rapture to Heaven (Revelation 11:9-12). No one could understand this prophecy before the development of satellite television communication in the 1960's.



The Two Witnesses in the streets of Jerusalem.

In summary, the Bible clearly teaches that the understanding of end time prophecy will be progressive in nature. We will understand more of the prophecies the closer we get to the time of their fulfillment.

This book became the first best-selling Bible prophecy book in history when it was published in 1878. The author, William E. Blackstone, was a humble layman who refused to have his name on the cover. Instead the author was listed as “W.E.B.” Through this book the concept of a Pre-Trib Rapture was popularized. The book is available through Lamb & Lion Ministries.



Waiting on Proper Interpretation

In this regard, the reason the Pre-Tribulation concept of the timing of the Rapture was delayed in its refinement until the 19th Century was because the Roman Catholic Church adopted St. Augustine's amillennial viewpoint of prophecy hook-line-and-sinker around 430 AD. In his book, *The City of God*, Augustine spiritualized Bible prophecy and then argued that the Millennium began at the Cross and would continue until the Second Coming.



Saint Augustine

This spiritualizing approach to the interpretation of Bible prophecy proceeded to dominate theology for the next thousand years. Protestants adopted it after the Reformation and expressed it in the Postmillennial view that emerged in the mid-17th Century. Both Amillennialism and Postmillennialism are based on the assumption that Bible prophecy does not mean what it says.

I grew up in a church that taught that assumption. It was a conservative, fundamentalist church that interpreted the Bible literally from cover to cover except for prophecies related to the Second Coming. The First Coming prophecies were accepted as literal. But the Second Coming prophecies were dismissed as allegorical or symbolic or apocalyptic — which, to us, meant that they had to be spiritualized.

The Impact of Literal Interpretation

The discovery of the distinction which the Bible makes between the Rapture and the Second Coming had to await the revival of the application of literal interpretation to Bible prophecy. I say “revival” because the writings of the Church Fathers during the first 300 years of church history (100 AD to 400 AD) reveal that they interpreted prophecy for its plain sense meaning. Accordingly, they were nearly all Premillennialists. In fact, Justin Martyr (110-165 AD) went so far as to suggest that anyone with a different viewpoint was heretical.¹

The revival of literal interpretation began in earnest among the Puritans in the 17th Century, and it quickly led to an understanding that the Rapture would be an event separate from and preceding the Second Coming. Puritan leader, Increase Mather (1639-1723), argued "that the saints would be caught up into the air" and thus escape the world's final conflagration.²



Most people I encounter seem to believe that the concept of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture originated in the writings of C. I. Scofield, as expressed in his famous study Bible that was published in 1909. It is true that Scofield's writing helped to popularize the idea, but he was by no means the originator of it.

Historical Development

Paul N. Benware, in his book, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, notes that many writers in the 17th and 18th Centuries began to speak of a Rapture separate and apart from the Second Coming.³

Peter Jurieu in his book, *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687) taught that Christ would come in the air to rapture the saints and return to Heaven before the battle of Armageddon . . . Philip Doddridge's commentary on the New Testament (1738) and John Gill's commentary on the New Testament (1748) both use the term rapture and speak of it as imminent. It is clear these men believed that this coming will precede Christ's descent to the earth and the time of judgment. The purpose was to preserve believers from the time of judgment. James Macknight (1763) and Thomas Scott (1792) taught that the righteous will be carried to heaven, where they will be secure until the time of judgment is over.

Tommy Ice, the director of the Pre-Trib Research Center, asserts that the first person to spell out in detail the idea that the Rapture would occur before the Tribulation begins was a Baptist leader named Morgan Edwards.⁴ This remarkable man was born in Wales and preached at churches in England and Ireland before emigrating to the United States in 1761 to become pastor of a church in Philadelphia. He proceeded to become the founder of Brown University and was recognized as the leading Baptist historian of his day.

As early as the 1740's Edwards was espousing a pre-tribulational viewpoint in his writings about eschatology. The difference in his view and the modern Pre-Trib concept is that he believed the Rapture would occur in the middle of Daniel's 70th

"The crucial question is not where the Pre-Tribulation Rapture concept originated; rather, *the only question that matters is whether or not it is biblical.*"



Tommy Ice

week, about 3½ years before the Second Coming.

The Modern Pre-Trib View

The person who crystalized the modern Pre-Trib viewpoint was a man named John Darby (1800-1882).⁵ Darby was born in London and was trained in the law. He practiced law for only one year before he was overcome by a deep spiritual

struggle that finally led to a decision to enter the ministry. He became an Anglican priest but quickly became disillusioned when the church decreed that all converts would have to swear allegiance to the King of England. Darby considered this to be a compromise with the lordship of Christ.

Darby decided to leave the Anglican Church. In the years following, he and other dissenters from the established state church inaugurated a movement that came to be known as the Plymouth Brethren.

In 1826 Darby broke one of his legs, and during the long convalescence that followed, he engaged in an intensive study of the Scriptures that convinced him of the clear distinction between the Church and Israel. He also became convicted of the imminent return of Jesus. Thus, by 1827 he had developed the fundamental principles that would come to characterize a new theological system that would be called Dispensationalism.

John Nelson Darby



1800-1882

The Dissemination of the View

After John Darby refined the concept, it spread rapidly throughout Europe and America. The viewpoint has always been blessed by gifted communicators. In 1878 the very first best-selling prophecy book incorporated the idea. It was *Jesus is Coming* by William E. Blackstone (1841-1935).⁶ In 1909 the very first study Bible ever published — *The Scofield Study Bible* — developed the scriptural arguments for the viewpoint in detail.⁷ Then came the amazing charts and diagrams of Clarence Larkin (1850-1924) in his book *Dispensational Truth*.⁸

Harry Ironside (1876-1951), the popular pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, preached the concept in his sermons and books during the 1930's and 40's.⁹ In 1970 Hal Lindsey published *The Late Great Planet Earth* and once again the viewpoint was expressed in a best seller.¹⁰ The 20th Century ended with the view being espoused in the "Left Behind" blockbuster series of books written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.¹¹

Attacks on the View

Over the years there have been many attacks on the Pre-Trib viewpoint. The most sustained — and the most ridiculous — has been the one launched in the 1970's by Dave MacPherson.¹² In a book he keeps re-publishing under different, sensational titles, MacPherson argued that the whole notion of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture was supposedly given to Darby when he attended a



Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was published in 1970. It introduced the Pre-Trib Rapture concept to millions of people. The book was the number one best seller of all books except the Bible for ten years! It continues to sell well today in many different languages all over the world. Lindsey's website can be found at www.hallindseyoracle.com.

Charismatic prayer meeting in Scotland in 1830 where a 15 year old girl, Margaret MacDonald, went into a state of ecstasy during which she declared there would be a Rapture prior to the Tribulation. MacPherson asserts: "Darby borrowed from her, modified her views, and then popularized them under his own name without giving her credit."¹³

The first problem with MacPherson's assertions is that we know that Darby developed his concept of the Rapture's timing in the winter of 1826-1827, some three years before the prayer meeting in Scotland. The second problem relates to a strange aspect of MacPherson's book. In an appendix, he reproduces Margaret MacDonald's handwritten account of what she said at the 1830 meeting, and there is nothing in it that even suggests a Pre-Tribulation Rapture!¹⁴

But the biggest problem with MacPherson's assertion is that it is really irrelevant. The crucial question is not where the Pre-Tribulation Rapture concept originated; rather, *the only question that matters is whether or not it is biblical*.

Ancient Examples of the Concept

As I have demonstrated in the previous articles in this issue, the concept is completely biblical. It has always been in the Scriptures, waiting for those with a literal approach to interpretation to discover it and develop it in detail. In this regard, I think it is important to note that more and more ancient writings are being discovered that contain intimations of a Rapture separate and apart from the Second Coming.

One of the early Church Fathers, The Shepherd of Hermas, writing in the early 2nd Century, makes an interesting observation about "the great tribulation that is coming." He says, "If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly."¹⁵

In medieval times evidence of pretribulation thinking can be found in the recently discovered sermon attributed to Ephraem the Syrian.¹⁶ This sermon, which was written sometime between the 4th and 6th Centuries, encourages believers to prepare themselves for meeting the Lord because "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." Scholars believe this

text was derived from the writings of the original Ephraem who lived from 306 to 373 AD. He was one of the leading theologians of the early Byzantine Church.¹⁷

It is very likely that there were always some forms of premillennialism and pretribulation thought throughout the Middle Ages but, if so, these viewpoints had to be expressed underground because they violated Catholic dogma. Sects like the Albigenses, Lombards, and the Waldenses were attracted to a literal interpretation of the Bible, but little is known about their detailed beliefs because the Catholic Church declared their writings to be heretical and destroyed them.

Concluding Observations

Two final observations before I conclude. First, there is a mistaken idea that only Dispensationalists believe in a Pre-Trib Rapture. That is not so. In the 1920's the view was adopted by many Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God. I personally am a good example of a person who holds to the Pre-Trib viewpoint but who is not a full-blown Dispensationalist.

My final observation is that I am not dogmatic about the timing of the Rapture. Unlike some of my colleagues who are downright uncompromising about the timing, I prefer to say that "I believe *the best inference of Scripture* is that the Rapture is most likely to occur before the Tribulation begins." The Bible never clearly states when the Rapture will occur, and there is, therefore, legitimate room for differences of opinion. ✚

- 1) "The Early Church Fathers" (www.ccel.org/fathers2).
- 2) Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), page 75.
- 3) Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pages 197-198.
- 4) Tommy Ice, "Morgan Edwards: A Pre-Darby Rapturist," *The Conservative Theological Journal*, April 1997, pages 4-12.
- 5) Tim LaHaye, "Target Number One," *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, September 2002, pages 1-3.
- 6) William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* (1878). The modern day version is published by Kregel (1989).
- 7) C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Study Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1909).
- 8) Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth* (Philadelphia, 1920).
- 9) Ed Reese, "Henry (Harry) Allan Ironside" (www.caec.org/faithhallfame/harryironside.htm).
- 10) Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).
- 11) Beginning in 1996 Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins started publishing a series of scriptural novels about the Rapture which came to be known as "The Left Behind" books. A total of 12 volumes have been published in the series, and to date, they have sold 55 million copies. See: www.leftbehind.com.
- 12) Dave MacPherson, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Heart of America Bible Society, 1973). The author has republished this book over the years under several different titles. For an excellent commentary on MacPherson's theory, see "Dave MacPherson: Inventor of False Pre-Trib History" by Tommy Ice (www.raptureready.com/who/DaveMacPherson.html).
- 13) Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up: Exposing the Origins of the Rapture Theories* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos 1975) page 85.
- 14) MacPherson, pages 151-154.
- 15) *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 2[23]:5. A copy of the complete writings of The Shepherd of Hermas can be found on the Internet at www.earlychristianwritings.com/shepherd.html.
- 16) Timothy J. Denny and Thomas D. Ice, "The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-September 1995, pages 306-317.
- 17) "St. Ephraem" in the Catholic Encyclopedia on the Internet (www.newadvent.org/acthen/05498a.htm).

Dangerous Evangelical Trends

Evangelist S. Lee Homoki

Editor's Note: This essay is excerpted from an article entitled "Belief and Behavior" which appeared in the Fall/Winter 2004 edition of *Truth Aflame* magazine. This magazine is published by a ministry called "Bible Doctrines to Live By." S. Lee Homoki is the founder and director of the ministry.

There are those who question the importance of doctrine. The choice is often made to follow the behavior path of tradition, custom, culture or pragmatism instead of the doctrinal instruction [of the Scriptures] . . .

As evidence, I submit the following quotes. These are actual phrases that people have used to advertise their church in the newspapers. Their doctrine and behavior are transparent:

"Let us entertain you."
"Let us make you feel good about yourself."
"We will never offend you."
"We keep it light."
"We will meet your felt needs."
"We're your therapists."
"We will never make you feel uncomfortable."
"We do it your way."

These are what I call "Burger King Churches" because they allow you to do Christianity your own way . . .

If I interpret these advertising phrases correctly, they are saying that when you come to church, it is more important for you to get that whoooooo, warm, fuzzy feeling than to endorse or embrace the Bible's theological content! Am I alone? Is there anybody out there that doesn't approve of the way the Church and the Christian communities are drifting? . . .

The Danger of Feel-Good Religion

In his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, social critic Neil Postman wrote: "Christianity is a serious and demanding religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether." I believe he's right. Jesus Himself said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). That's a clear call for self-denial . . .

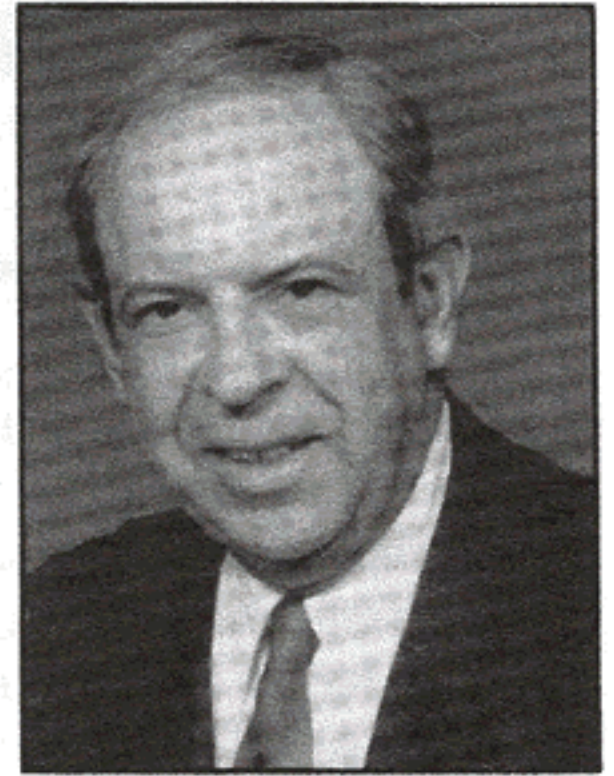
I believe there is good evidence that many evangelical churches are fast becoming a "feel-good" society! Is our theological foundation important any more? If doctrine is not important, then we are free to do basically anything that we want in the behavior of the church and in our personal life. Maybe that explains the growing apostasy. But, if doctrine is important, then it should affect our behavior. If the "foundation is destroyed" (Psalm 11:3), the Church is doomed like the house built upon shifting sand. If the foundation is destroyed, we might as well forget the rest . . .

In the book, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* (2004 by James Garlow and Peter Jones), an interesting question is asked: "Why is Gnosticism so attractive today?" The answer they give, I believe, is also why the evangelical community is slipping and sliding down the slippery slope of compromise toward apostasy:

These Gnostic writings reappeared at a time when patriarchy, doctrinal precision, canons, confessions, clearly defined sexual morality, church institutions, and authority are out. What's in? The personal spiritual quest, diversity, individualism, egalitarianism, and sexual liberation. (page 168).

It's disturbing to me when, after 25 years in full-time evangelism, I am hearing more and more disturbing comments like this one: "Preacher, we don't preach doctrine here . . . [then comes the accompanying excuse] . . . because *doctrine divides*."

Oh wait a minute! If they are talking about a man-made doctrine, then throw it out. But if it is Bible doctrine, and if it divides, then that is God's problem, not the pastor/teacher's . . .



S. Lee Homoki

A recent, 2004 religious survey of "Born-Again Christians" revealed:

26% believe all religions are essentially the same.
50% believe that a life of good works will enable a person to go to Heaven.
35% do not believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead.
33% accept same-sex marriage.
39% believe it is morally acceptable for couples to live together before marriage.
27% have experienced divorce (compared to 24% of non-Christians).

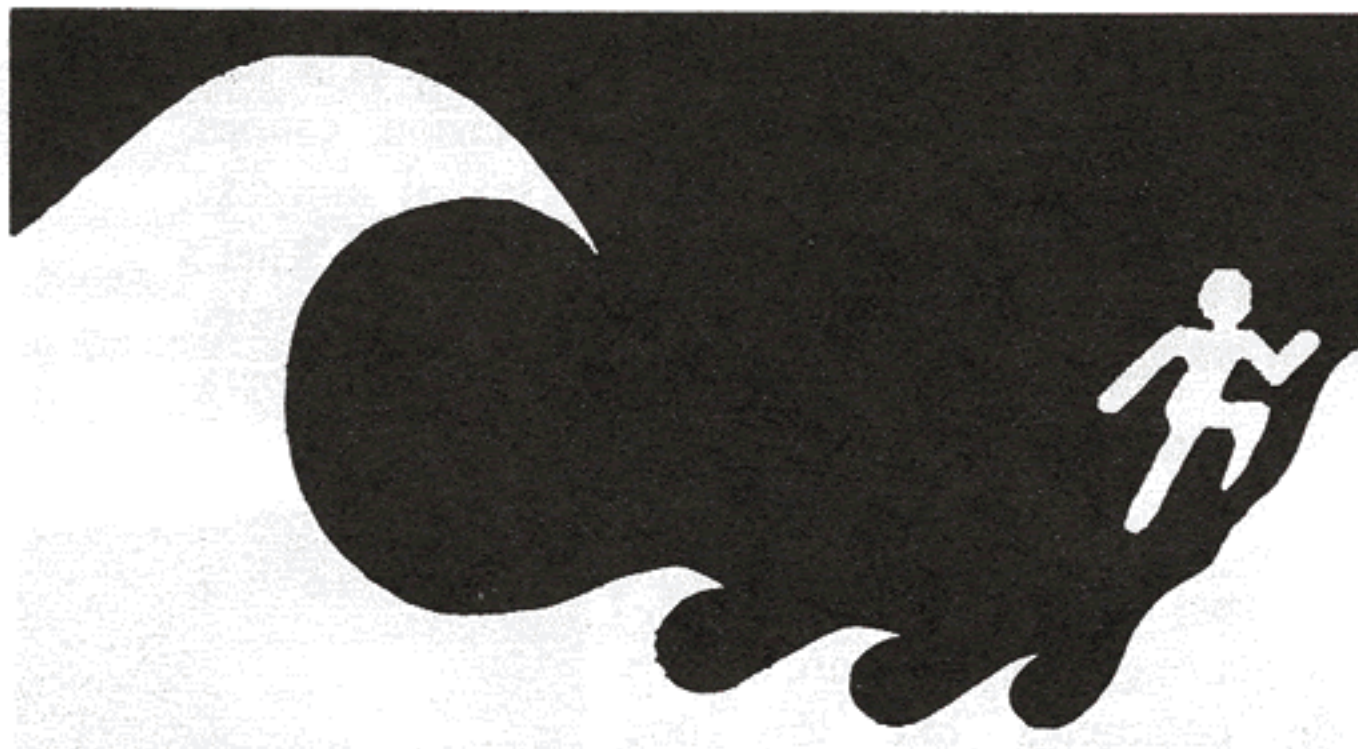
Is there something cockeyed here? Is there something missing? Is there a reason for us to be concerned? Isn't it obvious that behavior stems from what we think — our attitudes, values, and beliefs?

Recently, I received correspondence from an esteemed "Grace Preacher," a friend and scholar, Dr. John McKay. I want to quote in part from his letter with a hearty amen:

Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. The consequence is that the word, "evangelical," has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning . . .

Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the Word of God as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the Church's understanding, nurture and discipline. ✚

You can respond to this article by writing to Mr. Homoki at Lee@BDTLB.org. The website of his ministry is located at www.BDTLB.org.



TSUNAMI!

Where was God?

Three Christian Observations

Have you noticed that every time there is a major calamity, whether human, like the 9/11 Attack, or natural, like the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the skeptics start bellowing, "Where is God?" The agnostics and atheists in particular seem to fall all over each other rushing to a microphone to ask, "Where was the Christian god of love and mercy when this horrible event occurred?"

But skeptics are not the only ones who question God. Believers also struggle with their faith when things go terribly wrong. We often find ourselves questioning why the God we love so much, our God of lovingkindness, would allow such horrible suffering as we have witnessed recently as a result of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. And when a calamity affects us directly — a death in the family, the destruction of a home in a

tornado, the loss of a job — we often find ourselves crying out, "Why me, God?"

God always answers this question the same way: "The righteous shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). It is a tough answer that calls for tough faith.

We are going to need more and more of that tough faith the closer we get to the day of the Lord's return, because the Scriptures warn us that "there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth, dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

Dennis Pollock

"Where was God?" The answer may not be easy to accept, but it cannot be denied. God was on His throne, just as He always has been and always will be. The Sovereign God of all creation neither slumbers nor sleeps. Isaiah called Him the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who neither faints nor is weary, whose understanding is unsearchable.

During times of great tragedy, people tend to want to either limit God's power and control, or else impugn His compassion and concern. The Bible will allow neither. God's power is absolute, and His compassion and tender heart toward His creation is all encompassing. He is both omnipotent and concerned.

One of the basic tenets of Christian theology is that all that occurs on earth is either caused or permitted by God. A second tenet is that not all that God allows is His perfect will. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The clear inference from this simple prayer is that not all that goes on down here is God's will. Thus we pray that, on the earth, God's will may be carried out as perfectly and explicitly as it is in heaven, where there is no sin, misery, or terrorism.

When a child is sexually abused, God's will is not done. When a husband leaves his wife for another woman, God's will is not done. When a teenager breaks the sexual laws of God and contracts a disease, God's will is not done.

Our world is filled with consequences. Just as every action calls for an equal and opposite reaction, the despising of God's sacred laws invites ruin and destruction. We would like it better if the ruin only came crashing down upon the head of the lawbreakers. Such is not the case. Many an innocent child has paid a terrible price for the sins of his parents. Countless women have suffered unbearable anguish due to the callous disregard of their husbands to their pledges of fidelity.

During the burning and collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center every person that died, died because of sin. The sin was not their own sin; it was the sin birthed by a malicious hatred that filled the hearts of a few fanatical Muslims. Christians died alongside atheists. No doubt the thousands of people killed represented beliefs of every stripe and sort. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Baptists, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Catholics, agnostics, and yes, probably even some Muslims. The God who mercifully makes His sun to shine upon the just and the unjust sometimes allows tragedy to likewise touch the sinners and the saints equally.

Why must it be this way? We simply don't have all the answers, but this much is certain: if good things only happened to good people, and bad things only happened to bad people, there would be no need for faith. Faith does not insist upon life being fair for this short season we find ourselves on the earth; faith merely insists that, given enough time, all will be sorted out and every wrong will be righted. God, the Judge of all the earth, will do right.

Dave Reagan

Did God know the earthquake and tsunami were going to happen? Yes. Could God have intervened and stopped this calamity? Yes. Does this mean that God allowed the calamity to occur? Yes.

Now, I know that many Christians have great difficulty with the idea that God could allow such horror to take place. We want to just flippantly write it all off as “the work of Satan.”

The interesting thing is that the Bible has no such difficulty. In the Bible, all calamities are ascribed to God, whether they be natural disasters or acts of war. That’s because God is sovereign. He is in control. Nothing can happen without His permission. That’s why when Satan wanted to touch Job, he first had to ask God’s permission (Job 1:6-12).

Keep in mind that God has a perfect will and a permissive will. For example, the Bible states point blank that God does not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). In other words, it is God’s perfect will that all people be saved. But in His permissive will, God allows people to use their free will to reject Him and thus be lost.

God has a perfect will for history. It will result in the triumph of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling over all the nations of the world, with the world flooded with peace, righteousness, and justice. As God moves toward the accomplishment of that goal, He must deal with the evil of Satan and Man.

Thankfully, God has the wisdom and power to orchestrate all the evil of both Satan and Man to the triumph of Jesus.

Now, let me make one thing very clear: God is not the source

of evil. Evil originates from the free will of Satan and Man when they use that free will to rebel against God.

But God allows evil to succeed at times for a multiplicity of reasons. The reasons that we can discern include the following: to test us, to discipline us, and to sanctify us. Sometimes God allows evil to come into our lives to test us — not to determine how strong we are (He already knows), but to show us how weak we are so that we will lean on Him. At other times, God allows us to suffer because He desires to discipline us for drifting out of His will. Suffering is also essential to sanctification — to being shaped more fully into the image of Jesus.

There is no doubt that we sometimes suffer as the result of our own sins. But much of the suffering we experience in life is due to other reasons.

We suffer because we live in a fallen world corrupted by the sin of Man. We suffer because suffering refines us in righteousness.

We suffer because suffering restrains us from falling in love with this evil world and therefore helps us to maintain an eternal perspective, reminding us that we are to be aliens and strangers passing through this world to a better life in a new, perfected world.

We suffer because suffering motivates us to lean hard upon the Lord, trusting in Him as we have never done before. We suffer because the faith we demonstrate in the midst of suffering brings honor and glory to God.

And, yes, we suffer for purposes known only to God Himself.

Hal Lindsey

God declares that He created all men to live forever. But because of mankind’s rebellion against Him, man now has two destinations in eternity.

Every person who does not restore his relationship with God will spend eternity away from God in a place of isolation and outer darkness. This consequence is so great, that God Himself stepped out of eternity into time in the person of Jesus Christ in order to pay our penalty for rebellion. On that basis, God offers each person who will receive it a free gift of pardon and eternity with Him . . .

You see, from God’s perspective the ultimate tragedy is not the age or nature of your death. The ultimate tragedy is to die without resolving where you will spend eternity . . .

God says this world is only a preparation for eternity. Therefore if a person dies suddenly at a young age, it may be a blessing rather than a curse.

The Bible teaches that if a person dies before the age of accountability, he is automatically covered by the atonement of Jesus Christ because he didn’t have the ability to make a decision. There are many people in heaven from the Tsunami that wouldn’t have been there if they had lived out their life.

In a great catastrophe, true believers in Jesus Christ are killed

along with those who are not. However this is not a tragedy to the believer. God says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15 NKJ).

To the world, such a statement is incomprehensible. But the Bible teaches that every believer is a *saint* in the eyes of God. The word means one set apart as God’s possession. So when he dies, it is a homecoming. All pain, sorrows and tears are over . .

The one who understands life in view of eternity lives with a different purpose. He realizes that there is no guarantee on the length and condition of this life. God says, “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’” (James 4:14-15 NAS) . . .

Such catastrophes as the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami should be viewed with humility and compassion. Jesus Himself spoke out about those who self-righteously look upon catastrophes and pass judgment that those who perished must have been greater sinners than everyone else. Apart from God’s intervening grace, we could all fall victim to “natural disasters.” The Bible teaches that such catastrophes are the result of an earth that is living under the curse resulting from man’s fall. ✚

Bible Prophecy Study Resources

Books



Wrath and Glory. Dr. Reagan's explanation of the book of Revelation. Written in a down-to-earth and easy-to-understand manner. It provides guidelines for interpretation, and responds to the most frequently asked questions about Revelation. It also explains how the book relates to Christian living.

240 pages. \$10.



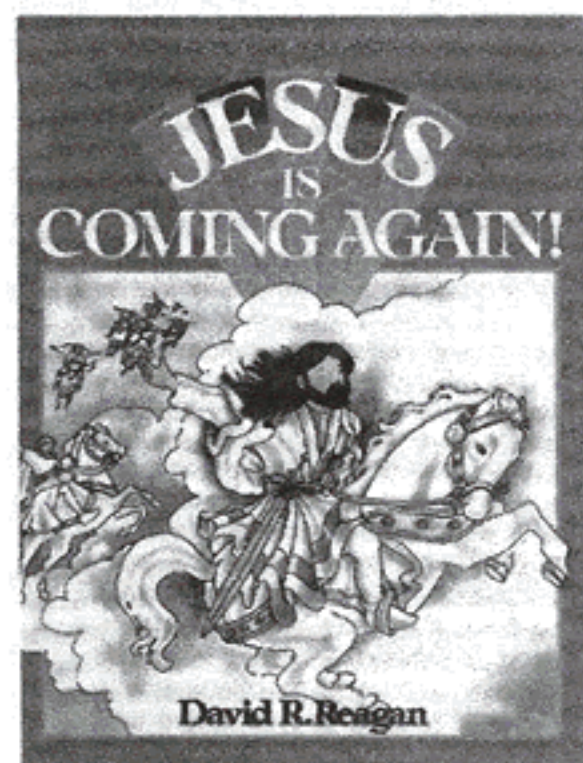
Living for Christ in the End Times. A hard-hitting commentary on how Christians are to respond to the decay of society and the increasing apostasy within the Church. The book is full of practical guidelines for overcoming paganism and living a triumphant daily life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

263 pages. \$10.



The Christ in Prophecy Study Guide. Lists in chronological order all the prophecies in the Bible concerning both the First and Second Advents of the Messiah. Represents seven years of research. Printed in a large format (8½ by 11") and spiral bound. Provides both topical and scripture indexes.

150 pages. \$15.

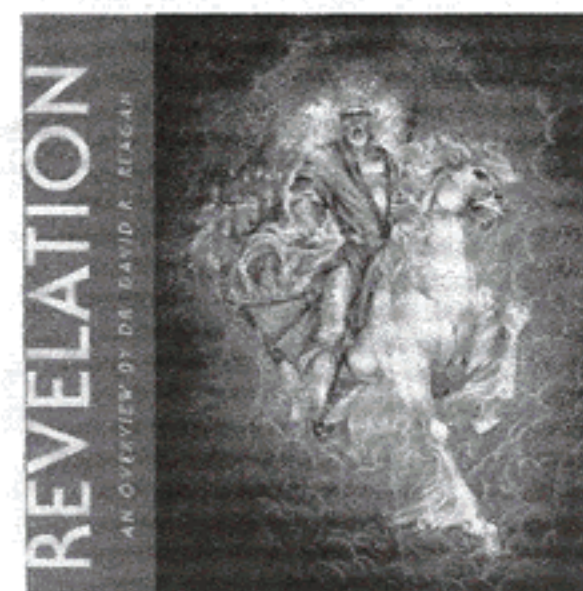


Jesus is Coming Again!

Dr. Reagan's book for children (pre-school and elementary). This is the only book ever published for children about end time prophecy. Beautifully illustrated in full color. Large format (8½ x 11"). Durable cover. Contains teaching tips for parents, together with a list of Scripture references.

28 pages. \$7.

Audio Tapes



An Overview of Revelation. Dr. Reagan presents an in-depth survey of the book of Revelation, covering it verse by verse. Twelve tapes in an album. \$30 (normally \$35). A study guide is available to accompany the album. The cost of the guide is \$5. Our most popular study resource.

Video Programs

Israel in Bible Prophecy. An exciting survey of seven prophecies that are being fulfilled in Israel today, all of which point to the soon return of Jesus. The video was shot on location at various sites in Israel. Appropriate for both individual and group study. Shows how the Jews are the key to understanding end time prophecy. Contains significant historical footage. 65 minutes in length. VHS or DVD, \$15.



Jerusalem through Spiritual Eyes.

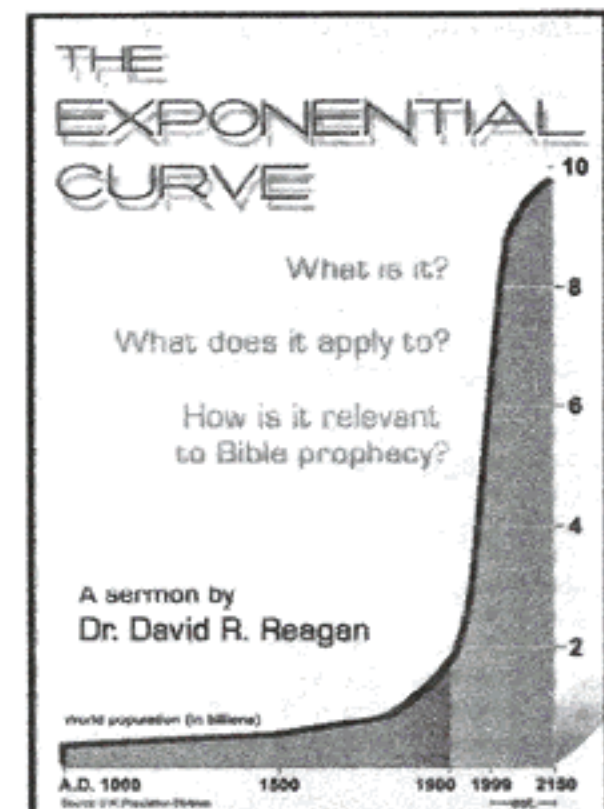
Three TV programs about Jerusalem edited together. The first focuses on the Via Dolorosa and the death of Jesus. The second features the tombs of Jerusalem leading up to a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus. The third tells the story of each of the gates of Jerusalem, concluding with the Eastern Gate and Jesus' promise to return again. VHS or DVD, \$15.



Revelation Revealed. Dr. Reagan presents a 75 minute overview of the entire book of Revelation, covering the book chapter by chapter. The video is rich with maps, charts, diagrams, still photos, animations, and video footage. Dr. Reagan clearly demonstrates that the book of Revelation can be understood and is relevant to Christian living here and now. Appropriate for individual or group study. VHS or DVD, \$15.



The Exponential Curve. A 50 minute video program featuring a fascinating presentation by Dr. Reagan in which he shows how all aspects of life in the 20th Century changed exponentially in fulfillment of end time Bible prophecy. All his points are lavishly illustrated with pictures, charts, and video footage. This is a presentation that will keep your attention riveted from start to finish. DVD only, \$12.



All resource items listed on this page can be ordered by calling 1-800-705-8316. Please call between 8am and 5pm, Central time, Monday through Friday.

Ministry News

Holy Land Pilgrimage — The ministry's next pilgrimage to Israel is scheduled for early June of this year. Dr. Reagan will personally lead the tour. The group will depart Dallas on Saturday, June 4th and will return on Wednesday, June 15th. Two nights will be spent in Tel Aviv, two in Tiberias (on the Sea of Galilee), and five in Jerusalem. For detailed information, please call 1-800-705-8316. The air carrier will be Lufthansa through Frankfurt, Germany. The group will spend the night in Frankfurt on the trip back to the States. The all-inclusive price will be \$2,895. That includes transportation, lodging, entrance fees, taxes and three meals a day. The only thing not included is \$70 per person for tips. Dr. Reagan has taken more than 30 groups to Israel over the past 25 years. The group will be limited to the first 50 who register. Call today and put yourself in the picture below.



Meeting Schedule — In **March** Dr. Reagan will be at the Day Star Tabernacle in Douglasville, Georgia (6), the White River Christian Church in Noblesville, Indiana (18-20), and the Christian Fellowship Church in Ashburn, Virginia (30). In **April** Dr. Reagan will be speaking at Concord Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Missouri (10-11) and at Poplar Ridge Christian Church in Piney Flats, Tennessee (23-24). In **May** Dr. Reagan will speak at the Days of Elijah Prophecy Conference at the New Life Christian Center in San Antonio, Texas (11-15) and at the Steeling the Mind Conference in Santa Barbara, California (21). You can schedule Dr. Reagan and Dennis Pollock by calling 972-736-3567.

Prophecy Partners — The financial base of this ministry is provided by our 1,400 Prophecy Partners who give \$20 a month or more to enable us to proclaim the soon return of Jesus to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. Please prayerfully consider becoming a member of this program. For more details, call 1-800-705-8316.



Television

The ministry's weekly television program, "Christ in Prophecy," is now available nationwide on two networks.

The DayStar Network can be accessed by satellite over SkyAngel (channel 9713) and DirecTV (channel 369). The DayStar broadcast can also be seen live over the DayStar website at ww2.daystar.com. DayStar programming is also carried over several international satellite systems. You can get a listing of these at the DayStar website. Additionally, DayStar owns 39 broadcast stations scattered across the United States. A listing of these stations can be found at the DayStar website. The Dish satellite system carries DayStar programming in the areas where these stations operate.

The Inspiration Network can be accessed by cable nationwide. Check your local cable listings to see if your cable system carries the network. If it does not, then give them a call and ask them to add it to their offerings. The programming of the Inspiration Network is also available over SkyAngel.

DayStar Network				
Zone	Pacific	Mountain	Central	Eastern
Day & Time	Wed. 4:00pm	Wed. 5:00pm	Wed. 6:00pm	Wed. 7:00pm
	Sun. 10:30pm	Sun. 11:30pm	Mon. 12:30am	Mon. 1:30am

Inspiration Network				
Zone	Pacific	Mountain	Central	Eastern
Day & Time	Tues. 5:30pm	Tues. 6:30pm	Tues. 7:30pm	Tues. 8:30pm

We were able to expand our television outreach to the Inspiration Network due to a generous gift from one of our long time supporters. We still need to raise the \$150,000 needed to cover the cost of our broadcast over DayStar.

New Book! — Dr. Reagan's comprehensive book about Bible prophecy, *The Master Plan*, is scheduled to be republished in May in an updated, completely revised edition to be entitled, *God's Plan for the Ages: The Blueprint of Bible Prophecy*. The revised edition will contain 17 new chapters. This is a down-to-earth, easy-to-read book that surveys all the fundamentals of Bible prophecy. It will sell for \$15. The pre-publication cost (until May 1st) will be \$10. Order now!



New Video Program

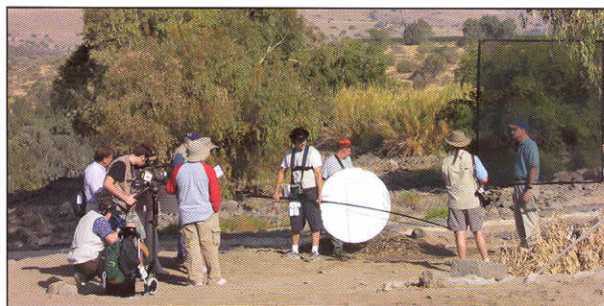
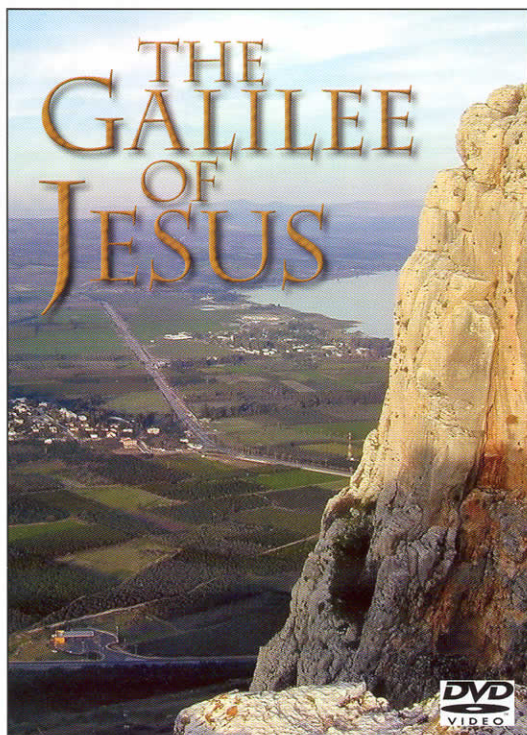
In October of 2004 we took a video crew to Israel and shot four television programs in the Galilee. The topics of the programs were as follows:

- An Introduction to the Galilee
- The Nazareth of Jesus
- The Miracles of Jesus in the Galilee
- The Transfiguration

We have edited these four TV programs together to produce a new video program called "The Galilee of Jesus." The running time will be between 75 and 90 minutes (the editing was not yet complete when this magazine was being prepared for printing).

This video is both a great learning and teaching tool. It will help bring alive the sites that are mentioned so often in the Gospels — places like Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Korazin, and Bethsaida. There is an interactive menu that helps you to navigate immediately to any part of the program.

This is a video that you will want to show to your home Bible study group, Sunday School class, or even to your church. Available only in DVD format. \$15. To order, call 1-800-705-8316. ✚



The Lamb & Lion video crew is shown at left shooting a scene with Dennis Pollock amid the ruins of the ancient town of Bethsaida. This is the site where the feeding of the 5,000 took place, the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus focused his Galilean ministry in three towns — Capernaum, Korazin, and Bethsaida. All three are featured in detail in the video program.



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