

Unmasking Pre-Trib Fallacies

CHAPTER ONE

This century has seen two devastating World Wars. But there is a conflict looming on the horizon which will make those seem trivial. The coming war will not be limited to earth; it will literally reach into the heavens. There Michael and his angels will wage war against Satan and his followers. Then they will cast the devil and his angels out of heaven, throwing them down to the earth. *"Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that his time is short"* (Revelation 12:12). Following this humiliating eviction from heaven, Satan's first action will be persecuting the "woman who gave birth to the male child." We interpret this to mean Israel and the Jewish people. This persecution will prove unsuccessful, however, as the Lord will miraculously deliver the woman. Enraged over this, Satan will proceed "to make war with the rest of her [the woman's] offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17).

As part of this program of persecution, Satan empowers a man to rule over the entire earth. He is the "beast" of Revelation 13, also known as the Antichrist. Because he comes "in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders," the nations will be powerless to resist. For this reason, they will promptly surrender all authority to him. *"And they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?'"* (Revelation 13:4). In fact, everyone will worship him—that is, everyone except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Unfortunately, he will use the power he has gained to persecute those who will not worship him. *"It was given to him [the beast] to make war with the saints and to overcome them"* (Revelation 13:7).

If anything should catch the attention of this present generation of believers, it is the prospect of persecution at the hands of Satan and his Antichrist. Concerning the seriousness of these perils, the Lord said, *"If anyone has ears, let him hear"* (Revelation 13:9). Yet, many in the church have no regard for this message. No doubt, this is largely due to the widespread belief that the church will be removed before Antichrist comes to power. We are referring to the doctrine of the pre-tribulation (pre-Trib) rapture. According to this doctrine, the Lord will come secretly for His church prior to the Tribulation. Then, seven years later, at the end of the Tribulation, He will come publicly to judge the world. Now, if this doctrine is true, believers have little reason to be concerned over the coming Tribulation. After all, they won't be here. And if they won't be here, it follows there is nothing to be gained in preparing for the afflictions prophesied for those days.

But for the sake of argument, we ask you to consider the consequences for multitudes of pre-Trib believers—should that theory prove false. What will be their response when Antichrist begins to "make war with the saints and to overcome them?" Will they be among those who "come off victorious from the beast?" Will they be counted among those who overcome the devil "because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony" and the fact that "they did not love their life even to death?" Considering what is at stake, it is crucial that the Biblical basis of the pre-Trib rapture be examined carefully and thoroughly. If the theory is correct, and the church is, in fact, excused from the Tribulation, well and good. We will all praise God from heaven even as the events of the Tribulation unfold on earth. But if that is not the case, if the pre-Trib rapture theory is false, it is imperative that we follow a different course than the one we are now pursuing. If Christians are expected to remain faithful in the face of worldwide persecution, there is much to be done. Attitudes toward suffering must be changed; believers must be equipped to endure Tribulation hardships as good soldiers of Christ; instruction must be given on how the Lord would have us overcome Satan and his Antichrist. With these things in mind, we begin an examination of the doctrine of the pre-Tribulation rapture.

Fourteen Reasons for Believing in the Pre-Trib Rapture

A few years ago, a prominent Christian writer named Tim LaHaye became disturbed over the fact that a number of friends and ministers had recently defected from the pre-Trib camp. This led him to embark on what he termed "the greatest research project" of his life. He read thousands of pages, visited numerous libraries, and corresponded with hundreds of people in the U.S. and abroad. Naturally, he also examined every Bible verse on the subject. Based on this research, Mr. LaHaye arranged all the major pre-Trib arguments into 14 reasons why, in his opinion, everyone should be a pre-Tribulationist.

For the purpose of our examination, we take for granted that during the nearly two centuries since the pre-Trib position first appeared, its adherents have had ample time to develop their arguments. In addition, we assume the 14 reasons compiled by LaHaye are an adequate representation of all known pre-Trib arguments. (In other words, we trust he didn't overlook anything.) That being said, our plan is simple: We will evaluate the pre-Trib rapture based on the merits of these 14 reasons. If they are valid, we can assume the pre-Trib rapture is a genuine Biblical doctrine. But if they are not, it follows that the pre-Trib rapture is not Biblical, which means it plays no part in the Lord's plans. *"Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets"* (Amos 3:7).

But first, the one pre-Trib argument you will never hear

Before we begin, let me first draw your attention to a significant argument which is *not* listed. Nowhere among the 14 reasons will you find an appeal to a Bible verse which specifically states the Lord will return before the Tribulation. Why? Because it does not exist! LaHaye freely acknowledges the absence of any explicit pre-Trib passages.¹ (He does, however, profess that all opposing positions share the same weakness. This claim will be considered fully in another chapter.) To get an idea of how rare it is for a major Bible doctrine to be established without an explicit teaching in

Scripture, consider the counsel of premier pre-Trib scholar, John Walvoord. In his writings he strongly condemns the promotion of *any* doctrine not explicitly taught in the Scriptures. He refers to such practices as "desperate exegesis."² Desperate or not, the absence of a definitive text forces pre-Tribulationists to engage in that very practice.

How should the absence of an explicit pre-Trib text affect our inquiry? For one thing, it should raise the evidentiary standard for the 14 arguments. These arguments are not being offered to confirm direct evidence—they are being offered *in place of* direct evidence. Moreover, these arguments are the only evidence pre-Tribulationists have to offer. So, obviously, if they can't hold up under scrutiny, neither can the pre-Trib rapture. For these reasons we believe the requirements for evidence should be exacting. With this in mind, we begin an analysis of the 14 major pre-Trib arguments.

Reason #1 for being a Pre-Tribulationist

"The pre-Tribulation view is the most logical view of Second Coming Scriptures when taken for their plain, literal meaning whenever possible."³

Pre-Trib Argument: The pre-Trib view provides the most logical fit. Pre-Tribulationists contend there is no single Bible passage outlining the order of end time events. So, like a jigsaw puzzle, the details must be pieced together from various passages. They are convinced their position provides the most logical fit for all the Second Coming passages.

Response. This claim, it would seem, is only true if you factor in certain pre-Trib assumptions. To illustrate, consider the status of one particular group mentioned in the Bible. Despite terrible persecution, they "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." From that description, most would reasonably assume these are members of Christ's body, the church. (If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck.) That conclusion, however, would present a huge problem for pre-Tribulationists. Why? Because they hold the church was raptured in Revelation 4:1. But this group is not mentioned until Chapter 12. That means pre-Tribbers are forced to make a painful choice. Either (1) they admit the church is not raptured before Chapter 12, meaning it goes through at least part of the Tribulation, or (2) they find some way to exclude these believers from the church. Needless to say, they opt for the latter.

How is this "exclusion" accomplished? The answer is, through a highly creative pre-Trib assumption. They assume that, though the faith of these believers is genuine, there is still one thing they do not have—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! Hal Lindsey writes, "He [the Holy Spirit] will relate to believers as He did during Old Testament times. He will regenerate the human spirits of those who accept the Messiah, but He will indwell and empower only those whom God has chosen for special service."⁴ There, my friends, is the pre-Trib solution! Simply allege that most of those who come to faith during the Tribulation will *not* be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That means they cannot possibly be part of the church since, according to Romans 8:9, those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him. So, where the plain reading of Revelation 12:17 might have submarined the entire pre-Trib system, thanks to this creative assumption, the troublesome passage now "fits" pre-Trib beliefs.

There is, of course, a glaring weakness in this explanation—it is simply not Biblical. No where does Scripture suggest the Holy Spirit will operate differently during the Tribulation, or for that matter, that people will be regenerated (born again) in a manner different than they are now. That reduces this entire explanation to a logical fallacy known as *petito principii* or begging the question. It is called that because it begs (assumes) the very thing it is trying to prove. And while worthless as an argument, it does illustrate the kind of reasoning pre-Tribulationists must use to establish their view as the "most logical fit" of all Second Coming passages.

Pre-Trib Argument: The Pre-Trib view is based on the literal approach of interpreting Scripture.

To say pre-Tribulationists are confident as to the truth of their interpretations is an understatement. No doubt, much of that confidence can be attributed to their strong reliance on the literal approach to the Scriptures. That approach is sometimes called the Golden Rule of Biblical Interpretation. That means, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise."⁵ In LaHaye's opinion, taking the Scriptures literally will naturally lead to a pre-Trib understanding of the prophetic Scriptures.⁶

Response. The implication is that the literal approach is more or less the exclusive domain of the pre-Trib camp. At least ten times in his book, LaHaye intimates that those who oppose pre-Tribulationism do so because they have abandoned the literal approach. Over and over, pre-Tribbers charge spiritualization by opponents. Walvoord even refers to the "fact that spiritualization of Scripture goes hand in hand with denial of the pretribulation rapture."⁷ Unfortunately, this charge has been leveled so often that there is no longer any meaningful debate over Second Coming passages.

It would seem that the purpose of this appeal to literalism is not so much to defend the pre-Trib position as it is to attack those who oppose it. This recurring charge of spiritualization by pre-Tribulationists brings to mind a question from the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your eye?" (Matthew 7:3). We say that because, examining prophetic passages, we find it is the pre-Trib camp which continuously engages in spiritualization. For instance, consider the treatment of Revelation 4:1. This, of course, is the verse where pre-Tribbers contend the rapture occurs. LaHaye freely admits the plain reading of the passage does not support a pre-Trib rapture teaching, yet that does not dissuade him from declaring it just the same. He writes, "The Rapture of the church is not explicitly taught in Revelation 4 but *definitely* appears here chronologically at the end of the church age and before the Tribulation" (italics added).⁸ In other words, though this passage does not

mention the rapture, does not mention the Tribulation, and does not mention the church, LaHaye has no qualms about reading these items into it. My friend, if that is not spiritualizing the plain reading of Scripture, nothing is!

Pre-Tribulationists do well to champion the literal approach of interpretation. It is, generally speaking, the most profitable way to understand prophecy. We grant that in most areas pre-Tribbers do seek to interpret Scripture literally. But when it comes to Second Coming passages, one is hard pressed to find an instance where the plain reading of the verses in question is used. As these 14 arguments are examined, it will become apparent that the pre-Trib approach is anything but literal.

Conclusion

In the analysis of pre-Trib arguments we are applying the Berean approach. That means, the only standard is the Scriptures. So, the question is this: Does the Bible teach or support this particular argument? To be fair, Reason #1 was never intended as a Scriptural argument, so it's not possible to evaluate it based on specific passages in the Bible. But can we say the pre-Trib view relies on the plain, literal meaning of Scripture wherever possible? Frankly, that has not been the case in the passages examined thus far. Finally, does it appear that pre-Tribulationists have proved their view is the most logical fit for all the Second Coming passages? As yet, we have seen no evidence that this is the case. So, at this point, Reason #1 for being a pre-Tribulationist cannot be considered more than an unsubstantiated claim.

Notes on Chapter 1.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 188.
2. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 72.
3. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 219.
4. Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming*, p. 122.
5. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 240.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
7. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 72.
8. Tim LaHaye, *Revelation*, p. 76.

CHAPTER TWO

Two Second Comings or Bust!

In the last chapter we saw how pre-Tribulationists play down the fact that their position is never explicitly taught in Scripture. Nevertheless, the absence of any such direct teaching is a huge handicap. To prove believers will not go through the Tribulation, they are forced to rely on a series of secondary or indirect arguments. Of those, none is more crucial than proving there will be two future Comings of the Lord, instead of one. If a case can be made for two future Comings, the battle for the pre-Trib position is alive and well. If not, all the remaining arguments are meaningless. After all, what is the point in debating characteristics of an earlier Coming if it can't be established that an earlier Coming exists? (Failing to prove the existence of men on Mars, shall we now procede to debate how they dress?)

Reason #2 for being a Pre-Tribulationist

"It clearly and logically untangles the contrasting details of Christ's Second Coming."¹ Reviewing all the Biblical information about the Second Coming, pre-Tribbers conclude that many details clash or are contradictory. **Their solution for "untangling" them is to suggest not one, but two Comings of our Lord— "one for His church and another for the world."**² These two Comings are said to be seven years apart. According to pre-Trib doctrine, the coming in the air for the church will be secret, while the coming to the earth will be public.³

Regarding this issue, pre-Tribbers are on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they absolutely must show there are two separate Comings. If there is only one Coming, it is a given that it will be the glorious appearance which occurs after the Tribulation. This would leave pre-Tribulationism with all the relevance of the Flat Earth Society. On the other hand, they must also defend themselves against the charge of teaching two Second Comings of Christ. Why? **Because that concept is nowhere found in Scripture.** In every instance, the Biblical words referring to the Lord's Coming are singular; never are they plural. (There is also no Biblical reference to the rapture as a secret event.)

Concerning the charge that pre-Tribulationism teaches two Comings, LaHaye writes, "I realize some will accuse me of teaching two comings of Christ, but that is untrue."⁴ No doubt, this denial would be more plausible had he not advanced the idea of two future comings in the preceding paragraph! There he stated, "Only by robbing these passages of their obvious meaning can we ignore the *two comings of Christ*, one for His church and another for the world"⁵ (italics added).

Perhaps sensing the futility of denying something so obvious, LaHaye abandons all pretense of defending the charge, abruptly suggesting that two Second Comings might be Biblical anyway! For support, he points to the experience of the Old Testament prophets. "What seemed like one coming turned out to be two events separated by at least two thousand years." From this he reasons, "Why should it be strange that His coming for His bride in blessing and His coming in judgment to the earth be separated by seven years?"⁶

There are serious problems with this reasoning. For one thing, the premise is not true. The first Coming did not become two events; one event merely followed the other. But even if it were true, the argument itself is a *fallacy of accident*. That is where you assume something to be an essential property (characteristic) of a subject, even though it is merely accidental to it. Here, it is assumed that an essential property of the first Coming is that it turns into two events,

with an interval of time in between. This property is then mistakenly applied to the Second Coming. Thus, it is erroneously suggested that the Second Coming will *also* turn out to be two events separated by a period of time.

Pre-Trib Argument: The rapture and the Second Coming cannot be the same event.

Pre-Tribulationists believe the details of the Second Coming and the rapture offer such contrasts that they cannot possibly refer to the same event. Walvoord writes, "These contrasts are such as to make any harmony of these two events an impossibility. Those who attempt it must resort to spiritualization of details that clash and avoidance of striking differences in general character."⁷

Response. By charging spiritualization, Walvoord is implying that these contrasting details are derived from literal interpretations of Scripture. Remember, to spiritualize means to reject or explain away the plain reading of Scripture, replacing it with some symbolic meaning. So, by definition, only a literal interpretation can be spiritualized. Yet, for the 24 so-called clashing details suggested by Walvoord, only one has a corresponding Scriptural reference—and that one is of little use since it is impossible to construct a contrast from a single fact (something like describing the difference between a duck). Nevertheless, we will attempt to determine if there is a Biblical basis for these 12 contrasts. Following that, we will decide whether the supposed contrasts really do demand an interpretation of two future Comings.

Contrasting details which are said to require two separate Comings

Pre-Trib Contrast #1.

"At the time of the Rapture the world is unjudged and continues in sin, while at the Second Coming the world is judged and righteousness is established in the earth."⁸

Response: The type of argument presented here is called a syllogism. It is made up of two informational statements, called premises, which support or prove a conclusion. For the purpose of analysis, the formal argument for the first contrast would read like this:

- First premise: At the rapture the world is unjudged, continuing in sin.
- Second Premise: At the Second Coming the world is judged, and righteousness is established.
- Conclusion: The rapture and the Second Coming are not the same event.

At first glance this argument seems simple and straightforward. But as you will see, it is neither. In the discipline known as informal logic, when there is nothing wrong with the form of an argument, it is said to be *valid*. But the analysis does not end there. An argument can be valid even though it contains one or more false premises. When that happens, the entire argument is said to be *unsound* (false). That is the case with this first contrast. While the argument itself is valid, it is nevertheless *unsound* because the first premise is not true.

Before getting into the formal analysis, let's see if we can intuitively discover why this first contrast is unsound. When we examine either of the Bible's two specific rapture passages (I Corinthians 15:51-53 or I Thessalonians 4:13-17), we find absolutely no language indicating the world is unjudged after the rapture and that it continues in sin. How, then, do pre-Tribulationists determine there is no judgment at the rapture? Believe it or not, it is a conclusion based solely on an argument from silence. Because the passages do not mention judgment, they assume an absence of judgment. The problem, of course, is that this kind of argument can be used to "prove" anything. For instance, we note that there is also no mention of groundhogs in these rapture passages. Based on that omission, can we conclude the rapture will not occur on groundhog day? Now, let's see what the formal argument looks like:

- Premise: Rapture passages do not mention judgment.
- Conclusion: The world is not judged at the rapture and it continues in sin.

In its present form the argument is invalid. To make it valid, an unstated premise must be added. Then it would read as follows:

- First premise (Unstated): If judgment is associated with an event, the relevant passages will make mention of that judgment.
- Second premise: Rapture passages do not mention judgment.
- Conclusion: The world is not judged at the rapture and it continues in sin.

Though the argument is now valid in form, it is, nevertheless, unsound. Why? Because the unstated premise is false. There are any number of Second Coming passages which have no reference to judgment. Consider, for instance, Acts 1:11, which reads, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*" Though it is obviously a prophecy about the Second Coming—the event associated with judgment—it contains no mention of judgment.

All this to say, the first contrast has no real Biblical basis. Like tainted evidence in a trial, it should have no bearing on the issue at hand, that is, whether or not the Bible teaches two separate Comings. By way of warning, you will see this kind of so-called "evidence" offered many times as pre-Tribulationists argue their beliefs.

Pre-Trib Contrast #2.

"At the Rapture Satan is not bound, while at the Second Coming Satan is bound and cast into the abyss."⁹

Response: Again, two sets of Biblical facts are presented which lead to a seemingly logical conclusion: namely, that there must be two different Comings. To be valid, the actual argument should be written like this:

- First premise (unstated): All Second Coming passages mention the binding of Satan.
- Second premise: Rapture passages do not mention that binding.
- Conclusion: They must be two separate events.

Obviously, the first premise is false, as the majority of Second Coming passages make no mention of Satan or his fate. That means the conclusion of two future comings is *unsound* and can add nothing to the case for a pre-Trib rapture. As an aside, we submit that this particular set of contrasts is easy to harmonize. How? Merely by recognizing that the rapture is but the beginning of the Second Coming. After the saints are caught up in the air and joined together with the Lord, they quickly return with Him to earth, where the first order of business is to destroy the armies of Armageddon, and immediately after that, Satan is bound.

Pre-Trib Contrast #3.

"No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the Second Coming ever mentions translation of living saints at the same time."¹⁰

Response: Here, pre-Tribulationists seek to demonstrate the necessity of two Comings by proving they occur at different times. In the pre-Trib system they are thought to be seven years apart. Once more, there is a serious problem in the method of proof. That is to say, another argument from silence is used to produce still another *unsound* conclusion. This is the actual formal argument:

- First Premise (unstated): If no passage says the rapture and the Second Coming resurrection occur at the same time, they must occur at different times.
- Second Premise: No passage says they occur at the same time.
- Conclusion: The rapture and the Second Coming resurrection occur at different times—hence, they are separate events.

By now, you should be familiar with this pattern and recognize that the first premise is spurious. One cannot conclude that a failure to mention that two events are simultaneous means they occur at different times. Showing a thing lacks one quality does not prove it possesses another. The verdict on this contrast is that it cannot be logically derived from the Bible.

Pre-Trib Contrast #4.

"At the time of the Rapture the Mount of Olives is unchanged, while at the Second Coming it divides and a valley is formed to the east of Jerusalem. (Zech. 14:4-5)."¹¹

Response: This contrast is notable in that it is the only one to which Walvoord attaches a Scripture reference. It arises because of a single Second Coming passage which predicts that, on the Lord's return, the Mount of Olives will be split in two (see Zechariah 14). Because no similar statement is found in any of the rapture passages, Walvoord concludes there must be two separate events. But this raises an interesting question: If omission of this one piece of information is a defining characteristic of a rapture passage, what can we say about the scores of Second Coming passages which do not mention the splitting of the Mount of Olives? By this reasoning, each and every one of them would have to be reclassified as a rapture passage!

This argument is an example of a logical fallacy known as a *non sequitur* (meaning, it does not follow). This type of fallacy occurs when both of the premises are true, but irrelevant. In this case, it is true that the rapture passages do not refer to the Mount of Olives. It is also true that *one* Second Coming verse actually mentions the splitting of the Mount. These are, however, nothing more than unrelated facts from which no logical conclusion may be drawn.

When all is said and done, it seems more reasonable to accept the Biblical account of one Second Coming, viewing these verses as revealing different aspects of the same event. There is no disharmony in Scripture by suggesting that, after the saints meet the Lord in the air, they return with Him to the Mount of Olives, where they witness the earth-splitting fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.

Pre-Trib Contrast #5.

"The Rapture is described as imminent, while the Second Coming is preceded by definite signs."¹²

Response: The doctrine of Imminency is the linchpin of the pre-Trib system. It simply means no signs are required before the rapture can occur. In other words, it could happen at any moment. Suffice to say, this contrast (as well as the doctrine of imminency) is derived in the same manner as those above.

Perhaps at this point, some may wonder whether pre-Trib teachers actually resort to logical fallacies to advance their beliefs. To demonstrate that they do, we offer the following quote by Walvoord, as he seeks to establish the doctrine of imminency. "The prospect of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ is **not qualified by description of any signs or prerequisite events**. Here [referring to John 14], as in other passages dealing with the coming of Christ for the church, the hope is presented as an imminent hope."¹³

Did you get that? By pre-Trib logic, because rapture passages contain nothing to preclude imminency, they somehow "prove" imminency! In other words, when pre-Tribulationists claim the Bible describes the rapture as imminent, what they are *really* saying is—the Bible does *not* say the rapture is *not* imminent! How is that for forthright teaching from Scripture? (The Bible also *never* says the 24 elders around the throne are *not* retired game show hosts, but that doesn't mean they are.)

Pre-Trib Contrast #6.

"No unfulfilled prophecy stands between the church and the Rapture, while many signs must be fulfilled before the Second Coming."¹⁴

Response: This contrast is merely a restatement of one above. In place of the word "imminent" is substituted the characteristic which defines imminency—that no prophesied event needs to occur. No additional comment is necessary.

Pre-Trib Contrast #7.

"At the time of the Rapture the saints meet Christ in the air, while at the second coming Christ returns to the mount of Olives to meet the saints on earth."¹⁵

Response: Despite Walvoord's claim that these contrasts could not be harmonized, in the classic rapture passage, I Thessalonians 4, we find a word which goes a long way toward doing just that. Verse 17 says "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." the Greek word for *meet* has an interesting connotation. From Moulton's Greek Testament Grammar, "It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary."¹⁶ The picture is one of the people going out from the city to greet an approaching dignitary and returning with him as part of his entourage. With this in mind, we can easily envision the saints going out to meet the Lord in the air and then returning with Him to the Mount of Olives. LaHaye counters by saying this makes the rapture sound like a yo-yo event. Though he apparently finds that picture offensive, that is precisely how Scripture presents it.

Pre-Trib Contrast #8.

"At the rapture living saints are translated, while no saints are translated in connection with the second coming of Christ to the earth."¹⁷

Response: As mentioned above, the Biblical picture seems to be one where the saints return with the Lord to the Mount of Olives very soon after they are caught up in the clouds (translated). By viewing the rapture as the opening act of the prophesied Second Coming, this supposed contrast easily disappears.

Pre-Trib Contrast #9.

"The translation of the church is pictured as a deliverance before the day of wrath, while the Second Coming is followed by the deliverance of these who have believed in Christ during the Tribulation."¹⁸

Response: This is an example of a fallacy known as begging the question. It is called that because it assumes the very thing it is trying to prove. In this case, pre-Tribbers are assuming that the seven years of Tribulation and the day of wrath are one in the same. However, as will be shown in Chapter 6, that assumption cannot be proven from Scripture.

Contrast #10.

"The translation of living believers is a truth revealed only in the New Testament, while the Second Coming with its attendant events is a prominent doctrine of both Testaments."¹⁹

Response: This argument is another example of a *non sequitur* (meaning, it does not follow). Again, this type of fallacy occurs when both of the premises are true, but irrelevant. The fact that the translation aspect of the rapture was not revealed until the pages of the New Testament is not surprising. Many Old Testament doctrines were first given partial presentments—we know them as types and foreshadowings—only to be revealed more fully in the New Testament. And, while the translation aspect of the rapture is obviously not developed in the Old Testament, it is wrong to say the rapture itself cannot be found there.

For example, consider the following passage from Isaiah. *"It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown; and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 27:13). Just how will all these people scattered outside Israel get to Jerusalem? One possible explanation is the rapture; saints from all over the world will be caught up in the air and then return (with the Lord) to earth at Jerusalem. And regarding the "great trumpet," is it not possible that this is the very trumpet mentioned in I Thessalonians 4:16 and I Corinthians 15:52? But whether these references suggest the rapture or not, the elements of this "contrast" are merely unrelated facts from which no logical conclusion may be drawn.

Contrast #11.

"The rapture concerns only the saved, while the Second Coming deals with both saved and unsaved."²⁰

Response: This contrast is also a non-event. After the saved (both dead and alive) are raised to meet the Lord in the air, they return with the Lord to earth to engage the unsaved in the Battle of Armageddon. Clearly, the rapture will have a direct effect on the unsaved (see Revelation 19:11-16).

Contrast #12.

"At the Rapture the saints go to heaven, while at the Second Coming to the earth the saints remain on the earth without translation."²¹

Response: The teaching that Christ takes the saints to heaven at the rapture has less Biblical backing than pre-Tribbers suppose. It is based on a peculiar interpretation of a single passage in John 14, an interpretation which, by the way, cannot be confirmed by any other passage in the Bible. It is the familiar text where Jesus tells His disciples of the many dwelling places in His Father's house. After revealing that He was going there to prepare a place for them, He said, *"And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

As you can see, there is no language in John 14 indicating the Lord returns to heaven immediately after the rapture. All the Lord said was that (1) the saints would be with Him, wherever He is, and (2) a dwelling place will be prepared for them in the Father's house. What's more, this verse is completely silent as to *when* believers will live in the Father's house. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that spending an eternity in the New Jerusalem would be an adequate fulfillment of the promise. Finally, we find no Scriptural basis for insisting believers will reside in the Father's house

during the seven years prior to the Second Coming. In fact, the whole pre-Trib understanding of just when believers reside in the Father's house—seven years in, a thousand years out, then in for eternity—is pure speculation without an ounce of Scriptural support.

Perhaps sensing the weakness of the 12 "contrasts," Walvoord closes his arguments for two Second Comings with a truly bewildering proposition. He writes, "While it is evident that there are some similarities between the two events, these do not prove they are the same."²² From this statement we can infer two things. First, Walvoord realizes he has not proved the case for two future Comings. Otherwise, why seek to cast doubt on evidence for the opposing view? Second, he is suggesting the burden of proof should now rest on those who hold to one Second Coming! Never mind that it is the two future Comings of pre-Tribulationism which is the *exception* to the plain reading of Scripture (Remember, the words referring to the Lord's future coming are always singular, never plural.)

Conclusion

In assessing the "contrasting details" argument for two Second Comings, there is only one question we must ask. Do pre-Tribulationists offer *any* explicit passages in which two Comings are taught, instead of one? We believe the answer is no. Walvoord intoned that it was impossible to harmonize a number of contrasts without ignoring or spiritualizing away their details. But after examining them, we realize it is not Biblical details which must be ignored or explained away; it is only the pre-Trib fallacies! In reality, **there never were any literal, Scriptural details which supported the pre-Trib position of two future Comings.** All the supposed contrasts which were offered as proof turned out to be either artificial or the product of fallacious reasoning. Though pre-Tribulationists labor mightily to disguise it, the fact remains—there is absolutely no Biblical support for two future Comings of our Lord.

What, then, does this tell us about the pre-Trib rapture? Clearly, if the Bible does not teach two future Comings of our Lord—we can rest assured that the Lord's return is **a singular event.** Why? Because "*the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets*" (Amos 3:7). And if His future coming is a singular event, the pre-Trib rapture quickly disappears.

Finally, there is an irony in the claim that the pre-Trib system of two Comings *untangles* the events of Christ's second coming. Apart from pre-Tribulationism's many fallacious assumptions, there wouldn't be much to untangle. But there is an even greater irony. Above all, pre-Tribulationists pride themselves on a literal approach to Scripture. Yet, they do not hesitate to jettison a clear, literal teaching (a single Second Coming) in favor of two future Comings—a belief which gains its support entirely from logical fallacies.

Notes on Chapter 2.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 221.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
7. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 93.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
16. Moulton, *Greek Testament Grammar*, Vol. 1, p. 14.
17. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 275.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

CHAPTER THREE

Time, time, time is on my side, yes it is. (The Rolling Stones)

In the last chapter we showed that pre-Tribulationists failed to establish two future Comings of our Lord as a Biblical fact. Nevertheless, they presume it is true and now proceed to a number of second tier arguments—such as, why the first of these Comings, the rapture, must occur at least seven years before the prophesied Second Coming.

Reason #3 for Believing in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

"It allows sufficient time to interject important end-time events."¹

In the pre-Trib system, three end-time events are said to occur in heaven in between the rapture and the prophesied Second Coming. They are: (1) the taking of believers to the Father's house, (2) the Judgment Seat of Christ, and (3) the Marriage Supper. According to LaHaye, "Only the pre- Trib position allows sufficient time for such events to be fulfilled with dignity and grace."²

This appears to be an expression of a single argument, but it is actually three. First, it is implied that certain prophesied events can *only* occur between two future Comings. Then there is a companion assertion that a time span of less than seven years would be inadequate for completing these events in a dignified manner. And finally, both these arguments rest on the foundational premise of two future Comings, as it would be nonsense to speak of interjecting end-time events *between* a single future Coming.

Pre-Trib Argument: Certain end-time events *must* occur between the two future Comings.

If it can be established from Scripture that certain end-time events must occur (1) in heaven, and (2) before the prophesied Second coming, the case for a pre-Trib rapture would be greatly improved. After all, how else might believers get from earth to heaven before the prophesied Second Coming? Unfortunately, pre-Tribbers are again plagued by an absence of direct Scriptural evidence. There are simply no passages explicitly placing these events in heaven prior to the Second Coming. Let's examine the arguments for each of the events in question.

1. Taking believers to the Father's House.

LaHaye suggests that if the Lord does not take believers to His Father's house *before* the Second Coming, He will break a promise.³ He derives this understanding from John 14:2-3. "*In My Father's house are many dwelling places; it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*" (John 14:2-3). Plainly, there is no mention of taking believers to heaven **before** the Second Coming. (Nor is there any suggestion that He will come twice.) Jesus simply promised that He would come again, and from that point on, His followers would always be with Him.

So, why do pre-Tribbers teach something the Scriptures don't? The answer is that they interpret this passage, not according to its plain reading, but based on their assumptions. Though the passage mentions only one Coming, they *assume* there are two. Of those two Comings, they *assume* Jesus is here referring to the earlier and not the later. Finally, they *assume* after this Coming Jesus will return to heaven, where He will remain until His final Coming, an event which (also *assumed*) is to take place at least seven years later. Incredibly, though not one word in this passage specifically warrants these assumptions, pre-Tribulationists routinely offer these verses as a proof text for their beliefs! That is what is known as circular reasoning—a logical fallacy wherein you assume the very thing you are trying to prove. Bottom line, this passage provides absolutely no evidence of two Comings nor for the belief that Christians will be transported to heaven seven years before the Second Coming.

2. The Judgment Seat of Christ.

In a previous chapter we alluded to Walvoord's declaration that it was desperate exegesis to build *any* doctrine without explicit teaching from Scripture. Yet, in the matter of the Judgment Seat of Christ, he succumbs to that very practice. He writes, "While the time of the judgment is not explicit in any of the passages, certain other evidences seem to require this judgment as preceding and prerequisite to the Second Coming itself."⁴

One of the evidences Walvoord uses to justify his conclusion is the presence of the 24 elders in Revelation 4:4. He opines that if they are interpreted as referring to the church "it would tend to confirm that judgment of the church has already taken place, as they are already crowned."⁵ Once more, the problem is that there is no Scriptural support for that interpretation. In fact, Walvoord admits this conclusion is disputed. That means its use as evidence is a logical fallacy (*petito principi* or begging the question).

For the second piece of evidence, he points to the fine linen which the saints are wearing in Revelation 19:8. According to the text, this linen represents the righteous acts of the saints. Walvoord believes the linen garment also represents their reward from the Judgment Seat of Christ. If that is true, it follows that at the time of the Second Coming, the saints will already have been judged, thus proving the Judgment Seat of Christ occurs between the two future Comings.

There are, however, serious difficulties with this conclusion. For one thing, because the Bible is silent on the issue, the notion that fine linen is a Judgment Seat reward is merely an assumption. Therefore, offering it as evidence to prove the Judgment Seat occurs before the Second Coming begs the question. What's more, the Bible suggests this judgment is an individual one. According to I Corinthians 3:13-15, rewards will be based on the quality of each person's individual works. It follows, then, that rewards will vary from saint to saint. In fact, Scripture indicates some will receive no reward at all. For that reason, Walvoord's assumption that the saints' fine linen is a reward from the Judgment Seat simply cannot be true. Otherwise, at least some of the Revelation 19 saints would be forced to return to earth naked (which we believe John would have noticed). All this to say, there does not appear to be any Biblical basis for teaching the Judgment Seat of Christ must convene prior to the Second Coming.

3. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

All we know about the marriage supper is from a single verse: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). The question before us is simply, does Scripture demand the Marriage Supper occur (1) in heaven and (2) before the Second Coming? The answer to both parts is no. The use of the word *invited* suggests the Supper is still future, but we can glean nothing further. In fact, the text raises more questions than it answers. For instance, is there an actual formal ceremony? If so, does it occur in heaven? Or in the clouds? On all these questions, the

Bible is silent. We can say, however, that there is nothing in Scripture to indicate a time-consuming ceremony as claimed by LaHaye,⁶ which brings us to the next pre-Trib argument.

Pre-Trib Argument: An interval is required between the two future Comings.

"If the church is to be judged, rewarded, and joined to Christ in the symbol of marriage before the Second Advent, an interval of time is required."⁷

Response. The argument that these events require an interval between Comings begs the question. As we have already shown, there is no Biblical support for interjecting these events before the Second Coming. And though this argument for an interval of time is a logical fallacy, it is nevertheless interesting to follow. As mentioned, LaHaye maintains that at least seven years is necessary for certain end-time events to be completed "with dignity and grace." This includes the "Judgement Seat of Christ for millions of people" as well as the Marriage Ceremony and Supper of the Lamb. Over 40 years ago, George Ladd pointed out the absurdity of this argument. In his excellent book, *The Blessed Hope*, he wrote, "If a period of time must intervene for this judgment to take place, will seven years be enough? It is estimated that there are two hundred million living Christians. In seven years there are just over two hundred million *seconds*. How much of a fraction of a second is necessary for the judgment of each believer?"⁸ (So much for dignity and grace.) It should be mentioned that there are now perhaps five or six times more believers than there were 40 years ago, making the necessity of a seven year interval all the more inane.

Walvoord response to Ladd's comments is also interesting. He resorts to a debating tactic known as a *red herring*. That is where you seek to draw attention to a side issue so you can avoid the central one. In this case, Walvoord launches a diversionary attack on Ladd's rebuttal, hoping he will not have to defend his own claim for the necessity of an interval between Comings. He begins by commenting, "This argument would seem to border on the ridiculous—God is not subject to the same limitations as men." He continues, "If seven years is too short, would one hundred years be long enough—approximately fourteen seconds—to judge each of Ladd's estimated two hundred million? The obvious refutation of Ladd's argument is that God is not limited. We can infer from such judgments as that of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46) that there is no divine problem in judging millions at once."⁹

What Walvoord seems to forget, however, is that it wasn't Ladd's argument in the first place—it belonged to the pre-Tribulationists! Ladd was merely taking their reasoning to its logical conclusion in order to illustrate the absurdity of a required seven year interval. It should be mentioned that Walvoord never does get around to demonstrating a Biblical basis for an interval between Comings. He merely restates his position that an interval is required. Here is how he concludes the matter: "Undoubtedly, only a fraction of the seven years between the Rapture and the Lord's return to the earth is occupied with judgments. The point is that this judgment, important as it is, precedes the return to earth and could hardly be accomplished during the process of the Second Advent itself."¹⁰ In other words, Walvoord intones that while the pre-Trib arguments for a required interval may be nonsense, an interval is still required!

Conclusion

Pre-Tribbers can't have it both ways. LaHaye and others say the Judgment seat of Christ is a time-consuming event, requiring the better part of seven years. Walvoord, on the other hand, dismisses that argument, suggesting these events might be more or less instantaneous. This is what he means by saying God is not limited. (That being the case, we wonder why Walvoord still insists an interval between Comings is required.) This, plus the fact that no passages explicitly place these events (going to the Father's house, the Judgment Seat, or the Marriage Feast) *before* the Second Coming, leads us to conclude that Reason #3 does nothing to prove the validity of the pre-Trib rapture position.

Notes on Chapter 3.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 221.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
4. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 84.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
6. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 210.
7. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 84.
8. George Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, p. 103.
9. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 85.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

CHAPTER FOUR

Israel and the Church

Have you ever wondered why there is so much disagreement regarding the Lord's return? The reason is that believers are operating under widely differing assumptions. As one pre-Trib writer put it, "The issue is not so much prophecy as it is one's view of Scripture and the church."¹ In other words, what you believe about Scripture and the church will determine how you interpret prophecy.

According to LaHaye, the pre-Trib positions on Scripture and the church are the keys to understanding prophecy. "First, one must interpret the Bible literally unless the context provides a good reason to do otherwise. Second, we must understand that Israel and the church are distinct! They had different beginnings, purposes, commissions, and they have

different futures." ² LaHaye goes on to assert that these "two facts of Scripture" must be recognized or "all discussion and argument is fruitless."

We have already pointed out that the pre-Trib approach to Scripture is anything but literal. But what of this distinction between Israel and the church? This is the issue which will be explored as we evaluate the next major pre-Trib argument.

Reason # 4 for being a Pre-Tribulationist

"This is the only view that distinguishes between Israel and the church." ³

At first glance, you might wonder what this has to do with the pre-Trib rapture. But as you will see, if it weren't for this supposed distinction, the pre-Trib rapture would literally disappear. Let me explain. There is a long standing dispute in theology over the relationship between Israel and the church. Many believe the saints of the Old Testament period and the New Testament believers together constitute the one people of God. In sharp contrast, a group known as dispensationalists believe God is working with two distinct and separate bodies—*Israel and the church*. "There is a separate plan for each of these two peoples. Israel is said to be an earthly people, while the church represents a heavenly body. National Israel's expectation is an earthly kingdom; the church's hope is eternal bliss in heaven." ⁴

This severe dichotomy results from the way dispensationalists define the church. They claim, "The church did not begin until the day of Pentecost and will be removed from this world at the rapture which precedes the Second Coming of Christ." ⁵ That means, by their definition all Old Testament saints are forever barred from the church. This includes Abraham, of whom the Scripture says we are sons if we are in the faith (see Galatians 3:7). It also includes Moses, the prophets, and even David, the man after God's own heart. In addition, under dispensationalism these saints are likewise barred from heaven, being relegated instead to an eternal existence on earth. Concerning their different eternal destinies, Chafer writes, "It should be observed that though Judaism and Christianity have much in common, they never merge the one into the other. Having each its own eschatology reaching into eternity... The word of God distinguishes between earth and heaven even after they are created new. Similarly and as clearly it distinguishes between God's consistent and eternal earthly purpose, which is the substance of Judaism; and His consistent and eternal heavenly purpose which is the substance of Christianity, and it is illogical and fanciful to contend that Judaism and Christianity ever merge as it would be to contend that heaven and earth cease to exist as separate spheres." ⁶

You might ask, why is it necessary to exclude these revered saints from the church? To answer, it would appear that the Old Testament saints are merely innocent bystanders—casualties caught in the cross-fire of another conflict. The real target is a group known as the *Tribulation saints*. The Bible reveals that a great host of people will come to faith in Jesus during the Tribulation. The pre-Tribulationist's problem is that if these believers are part of the church, the pre-Trib rapture makes no sense; it would amount to nothing more than replacing one set of believers with another. Noted pre-Trib scholar, John Walvoord, apparently concurs for he writes, "It is safe to say that pretribulationism depends on a particular definition of the church...If the term *church* includes saints of all ages, then it is self-evident that the church will go through the Tribulation, as all agree there will be saints in this time of trouble. If, however, the term *church* applies only to a certain body of saints, namely, the saints of the present dispensation, then the possibility of the translation of the church before the Tribulation is possible and even probable." ⁷

Now we begin to see why the supposed *distinction* is so important to the pre-Trib position. The only way to preserve the pre-Trib rapture is to exclude the "Tribulation saints" from the church. How is this accomplished? By imposing an artificial and narrow definition—that is, including only those believers between Pentecost and the rapture (which they assume is pre-Trib). The unfortunate side effect for barring these future believers is that all the beloved Old Testament believers are shut out as well! No doubt, this teaching makes many uncomfortable, but if the Old Testament saints are allowed in the church, the door must also be opened for the "Tribulation saints." And, as has been shown, if they get in, the game is up for the pre-Trib rapture. That, my friends, is the long and short of how the *distinction* between Israel and the church came to be an argument for the pre-Trib rapture.

The case for excluding Tribulation saints from the church

As mentioned, dispensationalists limit the church to believers between Pentecost and the pre-Trib rapture. This means those coming to faith after the rapture are excluded. Our question is, what is the Biblical warrant for barring the so-called "Tribulation saints" from the Body of Christ? Remarkably, pre-Tribbers do not appeal to Scripture to support this exclusionary stance. Instead, **they appeal to what Scripture does not say!** Walvoord writes, "It is significant that none of the truths discussed as distinctive of the church are found in the description of saints in the Tribulation. Never are tribulation saints referred to as a church or as the body of Christ or as indwelt by Christ or as subject to translation (rapture) or as the bride."⁸ In other words, the basis for this understanding is nothing more than an argument from silence. And, because the pre-Trib rapture depends on excluding these Tribulation saints, the whole system is built on a logically *unsound* conclusion. Clearly, this is not a prescription for reliable Biblical interpretation.

So, realizing we should not base interpretations on what the Bible *doesn't say*, we look instead to see what it *does say*. Right away, we see that Tribulation saints have a great deal in common with the church.

1. Like the church, they "*keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*" (Revelation 12:17).
2. They resemble the church in that their "citizenship is in heaven" (see Philippians 3:20). From the Revelation, we learn that these who come out of the great tribulation are not restricted to earth as pre-Tribbers teach. Rather, they are

clearly located in heaven. They *"are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in the temple..."* (Revelation 7:15).

3. Like the church, they are called saints. *"And it was given to him [Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them..."* (Revelation 13:7).

4. Perhaps the strongest similarity, though, is that their names, like those of the church, are recorded in the Lamb's book of life. *"And all who dwell on the earth will worship him [Antichrist], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain"* (Revelation 13:8).

When you consider all the similarities which are indicated, it is puzzling that pre-Tribulationists are so adamant in their view that they are dissimilar—a determination based solely on what *is not* indicated in Scripture.

The case for excluding Israel from the church

We now turn to an examination of why the pre-Trib definition of the church excludes those who lived before Pentecost: namely—the Old Testament saints. Again, there is no appeal to explicit passages. Rather, a series of arguments is developed to show that Israel is, both now and forever, distinct from the church.

1. ***They have different originators.*** Pre-Tribulationists say the Lord God brought Israel into being through Abraham and Sarah; the church, however, was founded by Jesus Christ. We respond by asking, was Jesus acting on His own initiative when He founded the church? Jesus testified that was not the case: *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me"* (John 6:38). With this in mind, it can easily be argued that the originator of Israel and the founder of the church are the same, i.e., the Father.

2. ***They have different foundations.*** We are told, "Israel was not founded on the finished work of Christ on the cross but on God's promises to her, which are still in force and will yet be fulfilled."⁹ The underlying premise here is that Jesus' death on the cross has no bearing on Israel, either now or in the future. If that is true, it follows that Israel and the church must always remain distinct entities.

Pre-Tribulationists teach that when the kingdom was announced by Christ and John the Baptist, it was "a legitimate offer to Israel of the promised earthly Davidic kingdom, designed particularly for Israel."¹⁰ When they rejected that offer, Jesus was forced to go the cross (what we might call, plan B), and Israel's promised kingdom was postponed until the Second coming of Christ. To grasp the weakness of this interpretation, consider the outcome if Israel had accepted the offer. At that time, a kingdom would have been established in which people were saved through legal obedience. According to dispensationalist, S. D. Gordon, "God has a plan of atonement by which men who were willing could be saved from sin and its effect. That plan is given in the Old Hebrew code. To the tabernacle of temple, under prescribed regulations, a man could bring some animal which he owned...It represented him."¹¹

Taken to its logical conclusion, this means the cross would not have been necessary for salvation had Israel accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Yet, Scripture expressly states it was always necessary for Him to die. The Old Testament sacrifices were merely *"a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin."* (Hebrews 10:3-4).

Nevertheless, pre-Tribbers cling to this line of reasoning, insisting Jesus' death on the cross was strictly for the church and had nothing to do with Israel. Moreover, they hold His death does not even affect Israel in the age to come! According to Chafer, "In this age, God is dealing with men on the ground of His grace as it is in Christ. His dealings with men in the coming age are based on a very different relationship. At that time the King will rule with a rod of iron. There is no word of the cross, or of grace, in the kingdom teachings."¹²

Scripture, however, contradicts this view, presenting Jesus' work on the cross as the event which put the new covenant in force. To explain, when the Israelites broke the old (Sinai) covenant, God brought all the curses He had promised to bear on the nation (see Leviticus 26). Then, as the Southern Kingdom was about to be carried into captivity, Jeremiah prophesied a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:27). That covenant was made effectual by none other than Jesus, the Christ. *"He takes away the first [covenant] in order to establish the second"* (Hebrews 10:9). This was accomplished through His death on the cross. *"And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death [Christ's] has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."* (Hebrews 9:15). This means Jesus' death on the cross was not just for the church; it was also an integral part of God's dealings with Israel.

3. ***They have different purposes.*** According to LaHaye, Israel was to be "the torchbearer of God's faithfulness to a nation that worshiped Him."¹³ He adds that Israel was not given the great commission as was the church. In response, we submit that the purposes were identical. In Exodus 19:6 we see that Israel was supposed to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." How, we ask, is that different from the purpose which Peter ascribed to the church? *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* (I Peter 2:9). It would appear the only difference is that under the new covenant we have an additional resource—the indwelling Holy Spirit. That means the results will be different than those obtained by Israel; but the purpose is the same.

4. ***Their prophetic futures are different.*** LaHaye contends that the church is looking for Jesus to take them to the Father's house in heaven. By contrast, Israel seeks nationhood and an earthly Jerusalem. Israel, we are told, plans to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem; the church, however, has no use for an earthly temple. Finally, as the bride of Christ,

the church is anticipating the "Marriage of the Lamb" in heaven." Israel, on the other hand, will reside on earth through all eternity.

The question is, does Scripture suggest the redeemed of "Israel" will have a final destination which is different from that of the redeemed of the church? There are two passages which seem to suggest that is not the case. The first is found in Romans 11. There, Paul was warning the Gentile church not to be arrogant toward unbelieving Israel. To make his point, he used the analogy of an olive tree. Its branches represented both believing and unbelieving Israelites. The bad branches, those who did not believe, were broken off, leaving only the believing Israelites. Then, branches from a wild olive tree were grafted in. These represented believing Gentiles. That occurrence is what prompted Paul's warning. *"But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant toward the branches, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you"* (Romans 11:17- 18).

He then suggested that if the Israelites do not continue in their unbelief, they could be grafted back into the tree. *"For God is able to graft them in again."* He further prophesied that this very thing will one day occur! *"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved..."* (Romans 11:25-26). The picture, then, is not one of Israel and the church remaining separate, but one in which they will finally be joined together as part of the same tree.

But you say (and rightly so), doctrine should not be build on an analogy. There is, however, an explicit passage which indicates the future destination of the church is no different than Israel's. It is found in the second chapter of Ephesians. There Paul presents what might be called a "before and after" view of the status of Gentile believers. He writes, *"Remember that you [Gentiles] were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."* He goes on to explain that Christ *"made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall..."* (Ephesians 2:13,14).

The picture here is not one of the church going off in a different direction from Israel. Rather, it is that Gentile believers are now allowed to participate in all that was promised for Israel. Prior to Christ's death, this was unthinkable. Gentiles had no access to God, nor was there any possibility they would partake in any of Israel's promises. No doubt, their separation was driven home in that they were never allowed to enter the Temple proper. A massive stone "dividing wall" barred their entrance from the Gentile court. Inscribed on that wall, in Latin and Greek, was a warning forbidding foreigners to enter—under pain of death. But praise be to God, Christ broke down that wall (figuratively speaking). Now, as bona fide partakers in the commonwealth of Israel, we who are Gentile believers are no longer excluded from those promises.

Conclusion

It is true that pre-Tribulationism is the only view which assumes Israel is, both now and forever, entirely distinct from the church. The problem, however, is that the Biblical evidence for that interpretation is unconvincing. Nowhere does Scripture teach that God has two separate peoples for His own possession. Moreover, the Bible never implies the redeemed of Israel will have a different eternal destination than the church. The fact of the matter is, Revelation's description of the New Jerusalem suggests just the opposite. There we read, *"It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates were twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel...And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb"* (Revelation 21:12, 14).

Upon close examination, we conclude dispensationalism's sole basis for the "distinction" between Israel and the church is its own peculiar definition—i.e., only believers between pentecost and the pre-Trib rapture. That means this argument for the pre-Trib rapture is derived from a definition which assumes the pre-Trib rapture. This, of course, is circular reasoning, which means the whole argument (Reason # 4) should be deemed worthless.

Notes on Chapter 4

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 234.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
4. William Cox, *An Examination of Dispensationalism*, p. 30.
5. Crenshaw and Gunn, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, p. 21.
6. William Cox, *An Examination of Dispensationalism*, pp. 40-41.
7. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
9. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 244.
10. William Cox, *An Examination of Dispensationalism*, p. 31.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
12. Crenshaw and Gunn, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, p. 264.
13. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 244.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Blessed Hope

In the letter to Titus, Paul used a phrase which has become prominent in the vocabulary of End-Time prophecy. That phrase is "blessed hope." To those words, pre-tribulationists have attached an interpretation which supports their particular view of prophecy. They believe "blessed hope" refers to none other than the pre-Tribulation rapture. Let's look closely at the text, to see if such an interpretation is warranted.

"For the grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:11-13). (NIV).

The first thing we want to know is, what is so special about the Lord's appearing that it should be called our "blessed hope"? In the Bible, hope is not some nebulous expectation or desire. Rather, it is specific, and it always has to do with salvation. "...having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation." (I Thess. 5:8). Simply stated, Biblical hope is the expectation that all God's promises concerning our salvation will be fulfilled. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23).

There are many facets of salvation to which Scripture attaches hope: the hope of eternal life, hope in Christ, the hope of glory, and the hope of the gospel are examples. What we must realize is that all of these facets have something in common—they are fulfilled at the time of the Glorious Appearing of our Lord, Jesus Christ. When He appears in glory, these and all other salvation hopes will be realized. For instance, then and only then will we be delivered from the flesh, Satan, and the world. Also, at that time death will lose its sting, for "the perishable must put on the imperishable" (I Cor. 15:53). And finally, in that day we will be changed. "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (I John 3:2). For all these reasons, His promised Glorious Appearing is called the "blessed hope." It is blessed because it is the event which leads to the fulfillment of all our salvation hopes.

Does "blessed hope" refer to the rapture?

As mentioned, pre-Tribulationists have a different take on the blessed hope, believing it refers to the rapture. Additionally, they determine that it has to take place before the Tribulation. Otherwise, the "blessed hope" would become a "blasted hope."¹

The famous hymn writer, Isaac Watts, wrote a wonderful book on logic. In it, he offered the following rule: "In conversation or reading be diligent to find out the true sense, or distinct idea which the speaker or writer affixes to his words; and especially to those words which are the chief subjects of his discourse." He continued by urging, "As far as possible take heed lest you put *more* or *fewer* ideas into one word than the person did when he wrote or spoke."² Clearly, there is nothing in the wording of this or any other text which indicates Paul had the rapture in mind when he penned the phrase. In fact, the text seems to contradict this interpretation. The passage explicitly ties the "blessed hope" to the *glory* associated with the Lord's appearing. That suggests His appearing will be a matter of public display, and not a private event. This understanding is supported by other accounts of His appearing. "...and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great *glory*" (Matthew 24:30). Now, contrast this with the pre-Trib rapture belief in which the Lord will "come secretly for the church."³ Plainly, this would be the antitheses of a public display. For these reasons, it is difficult to find any merit in the pre-Trib notion that the "blessed hope" is the rapture. That being said, we now move to the next major argument for Pre-Tribulationism.

Reason #5 for being a Pre-Tribulationist

"It is the only view which makes the 'blessed hope' truly a blessed hope."⁴

This argument appears straightforward, but it is not. Rather, it is an example of a *complex question*, the logical fallacy of arguing a different issue. To explain, consider the question, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" This question is designed to force you to admit to the underlying proposition that you beat your wife. In the case of Reason # 5, the apparent issue is whether the rapture occurs before or after the Tribulation. But in reality, we are being asked to give tacit approval to not one, but two, underlying propositions: (1) that there are two future Comings, and (2) that the "blessed hope" is the rapture.

And what is the status of those two propositions? As shown in Chapter Two, pre-Tribulationists can offer no valid Biblical arguments for two future Comings. The same can be said for the attempt to tie the rapture to the "blessed hope." Nevertheless, a number of pre-Trib arguments are advanced (including Reason # 5) which are based on these propositions. The result, of course, is a corresponding number of logical fallacies. Because these arguments are based on premises which cannot be proven, they merely beg the question (*pitito principii*).

Arguments for why the rapture must occur before the Tribulation

We now examine three remaining "blessed hope" arguments which attempt to establish the rapture as a pre-Trib event. Bear in mind, these arguments already have two strikes against them (in this case, fallacies): one for assuming two future Comings, and a second for assuming the "blessed hope" is the rapture. Logically speaking, that means it is impossible to arrive at a conclusion that is sound. Nevertheless, in order to give a full and fair hearing to the pre-Trib view, we will proceed as if those assumptions were true.

1. The "hope and comfort" argument.

According to Tim LaHaye, "the hope and comfort aspect of the Rapture *demand*s that we escape the Tribulation, being raptured out of this world before God's wrath begins"⁵ (italics added.)

Response: The first thing we notice is a marked difference between the way pre-Tribulationists use "hope and comfort," and the way these terms are used in the Bible. For instance, pre-Tribulationism finds its hope solely in the prospect that the church will escape Tribulation. In the words of LaHaye, "All other views are a blasted hope."⁶ The Bible, on the other hand, reveals loftier, eternal objectives for which we should hope—things like being forever united with the Lord or becoming immortal (see I Thessalonians 4:17, & I Corinthians 15:53).

More befuddling, however, is the reasoning behind the so-called "comfort" aspect. Here is how it is developed. It seems the church at Thessalonica was grieving because they thought the believers who had already died would miss out on the coming reign of Christ. Paul reassured them by means of a new doctrine. We call it the rapture. As part of that doctrine, he revealed that the dead will be raised, and then they, along with those who are still alive, will be gathered together by the Lord. From that time on, all of them are to remain with Him (logically this would include the period of His 1,000 year reign). The passage closes with the charge, "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:17).

From this benign admonition to comfort one another comes one of the more stunning *non sequiturs* (meaning, it does not follow) you will ever encounter; i.e., based on Paul's command to comfort one another, pre-Tribulationists conclude the church will escape the Tribulation! How is this accomplished? First, observing that the rapture was given as a means of comforting the church, pre-Tribbers declare the rapture to be a *doctrine of comfort*. On the basis of that declaration, a startling new dimension is added. No longer is the rapture confined to the issue of the dead in Christ. Now, thanks to this newly acquired status as a doctrine of comfort, it is now used to *demand* something which was not stipulated in the text—namely, that the church be removed before the Tribulation. As confirmation that pre-Tribulationists actually use this kind of reasoning, we offer this quote: "Rapture teaching was given to comfort those who mourn! The threat of going through the Tribulation is hardly a doctrine of comfort to the saints."⁷

Even though the "hope and comfort aspects" of the rapture are discredited, it is instructive to see they are used in pre-Trib arguments. By now, it should come as no surprise that the game plan involves another logical fallacy. This time it is the *fallacy of division*. That is where you assume because a thing is true in one respect, it must be true in all respects. In this case, because hope and comfort are aspects of the rapture, it is assumed there can be *nothing* about the event which is *not* characterized by hope and comfort. And since it would be neither hopeful nor comforting to go through the Tribulation, these characteristics *demand* a rapture before the Tribulation. To illustrate the absurdity of this reasoning, consider the following argument:

- First Premise: The rapture is a doctrine of hope and comfort.
- Second Premise: Paying taxes is neither hopeful or comforting.
- Conclusion: Therefore, the rapture must occur before April 15th.

2. **The "we can't survive" argument.**

Walvoord writes, "It is difficult to make realistic a command to 'wait for the glorious appearing' of Christ if, as a matter of fact, the event is separated from us by great trials and persecutions that in all probability would cause our physical destruction."⁸

To say pre-Tribulationists are consumed with fear about the Tribulation is an understatement. LaHaye writes, "Plainly, if the church were to go through the Tribulation, she would not survive it."⁹ What is the basis for this assertion? Apparently, it is a twofold program of persecution instigated by the false prophet. As indicated in Revelation 13, this prophet constructs an image of the beast (Antichrist), and the image is somehow given the ability to speak. He then decrees that anyone refusing to worship the beast or his image shall be killed. Next, the false prophet orders that everyone be given a mark on the right hand or the forehead. The mark is either the name Antichrist or his number (666). Anyone refusing the mark will not be able to buy or sell.

The first problem is that the Titus 2:13 text has been distorted. As you can plainly see, it does not *command* us to wait. Rather, it instructs us on how we should live *while we wait*. The second problem is that the whole argument is built on a false premise—that believers cannot survive the false prophet's persecutions (or the prophesied natural disasters). But according to Scripture, just before the bowls of wrath are poured out, a great host of "elect" from all parts of the globe are gathered together as part of the final harvest (see Revelation 14:14-16). Obviously, these people are very much alive at that time.

Frankly, it should come as no surprise that believers will survive this trial, for a similar occurrence is recorded in the Book of Daniel. There, the king of Babylon also built an image and pronounced a death penalty for those who refused to worship it. "Whosoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire" (Daniel 3:11). When the three Israelites (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) refused, the king asked them, "What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" Their reply was, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18). As you know, God delivered all three from the midst of the fire.

3. **The "we are not supposed to suffer" argument.**

This final argument is strictly an emotional appeal. Tim LaHay writes, "It is impossible to understand how a loving bridegroom, as the Lord presents Himself, would permit His church (which Ephesians 5 designates as His bride) to suffer such a terrifying time just prior to their wedding, marriage supper, and one-thousand-year honeymoon."¹⁰

If ever an argument was designed to "tickle the ears" of its hearers, this is it. The truth is, the "bride" of Christ has routinely gone through terrifying times. From the Book of Hebrews we read, "...and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." (Hebrews 11:35-38). And how did Peter comfort the believers of that day? It was through what could be called another rendition of Paul's "blessed hope": "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that *at the revelation of His glory*, you may rejoice with exaltation." (I Peter 4:12-13).

But, you say, that was long ago. What about now? Unfortunately, regarding persecution, not much has changed. In May of 1997, two Filipino Christians were beheaded for witnessing in Saudi Arabia. In that country, a Muslim converting to Christianity "would suffer an excruciating death, his whole family would suffer reprisals, and the stigma would last for generations." ¹¹ Persecution is also particularly intense in Sudan and China. Don Hodel, president of the Christian Coalition, recently wrote, "The latest form of torture imposed on those arrested for practicing their belief in God mocks the very position of worship... Chinese officials force Christians to kneel as if in prayer. Then they stomp on the backs of the heels until the ankles are broken. Other reported acts of religious persecution and torture include beatings, bindings or hangings of detainees by their limbs, torments with cattle prods, electric drills and other implements, and crushing of finger tips with pliers." ¹²

Those who take Scripture seriously should not be surprised at this. The Lord, Himself, indicated persecution would be our plight in this life: "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." (Matthew 24:9). Paul likewise wrote, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). Despite these pronouncements, pre-Tribulationists contend the "bride of Christ" should not be expected to suffer at the close of the age.

As a final comment on this argument, we present the observations of one Robert Cameron. He was an early leader of the pre-Trib movement who later rejected the belief. In his writings he addressed the pre-Tribulationists' preoccupation with avoiding Tribulation. "Everywhere in the New Testament it is taught that to suffer for Christ is one of the highest honors Christians can have bestowed on them. A desire to shirk suffering for Christ is a sign of degeneracy. At the close of this dispensation, it will be an honor to suffer shame for our adorable Lord." ¹³

Conclusion

Even if the existence of a pre-Trib rapture could be established, it would neither add nor detract from the "blessed hope" of Scripture. Pre-Tribbers would have us believe it is *blessed* only if it delivers the church from the prophesied Tribulation. This is a most unfortunate teaching. The hope described by Paul has nothing to do with deliverance of the church. Rather, it has everything to do with the climactic event of history—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus! For that reason, whether we go through seven years of Tribulation, or seventy times seven, the promise of "the revelation of His glory" (See I Peter 4:13) will remain our "blessed hope."

Notes on Chapter 5

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 68.
2. Isaac Watts, *Logic*, p. 90.
3. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 221.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
8. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 75.
9. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 56.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
11. Tom Bethell, *The American Spectator*, April 1997, p. 20.
12. *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 30, 1997.
13. George Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, p. 49.

CHAPTER SIX

Delivered from Wrath

It is a serious matter to put words in God's mouth, attributing to Him that which He has not spoken. Shortly before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel had an opportunity to learn how much the Lord despises this practice. It seems certain prophets were falsely representing themselves as having a message from the Lord. They were misleading the people of Jerusalem saying, "Peace! when there is no peace." Concerning these prophets, the Lord declared to Ezekiel, "They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word." (Ezekiel 13:6).

This bears an eerie resemblance to some pre-Trib claims of today. For instance, they too purport to have a word from the Lord for His people—in this case, a supposed promise from Scripture "that the church of Jesus Christ will not pass through the Tribulation period."¹ Yet, there is no such explicit promise anywhere in the Bible. (If there were, we wouldn't be having this discussion.) So, what are we to make of this "promise" that the church will not go through Tribulation? Can it be legitimately inferred from Scripture, or is it a modern version of "falsehood and lying divination"? This question will be answered as we examine the next major pre-Trib argument.

Reason # 6 for Being a Pre-Tribulationist

"It is the only view that takes God at His Word and claims His promises literally to save us out of the wrath to come."² From pre-Trib writings, we find three variations on the same argument. In each, an event is presented which we know the church will not experience. Included are wrath, the day of the Lord, and the hour of testing. Each of these is held to be synonymous with the seven-year Tribulation. The logical conclusion, of course, is that the church must be raptured before the Tribulation. But, whether these events are actually synonymous with the Tribulation remains to be seen.

Kept from wrath

Everyone agrees that the church will not experience the wrath of God. "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (I Thessalonians 5:9). There is considerable dispute, however, over when that wrath begins. Pre-Tribulationists assume God's wrath starts at the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation. And, since we are not destined for wrath, it follows that the church will be removed (raptured) before the Tribulation begins. Here is the formal argument:

- First Premise: The church will be delivered from the wrath of God.
- Unstated Premise: The wrath of God is synonymous with the seven-year Tribulation period.
- Conclusion: The rapture must occur prior to the seven-year Tribulation.

It should come as no surprise that this argument is based on a logical fallacy; i.e., it begs the question of whether God's wrath is synonymous with the Tribulation. The fact of the matter is, the Bible never equates God's wrath with a seven-year period of Tribulation. (For that matter, it never indicates the Tribulation lasts seven years.) In fact, a strong case can be made that God's wrath is not poured out through the entire Tribulation, but is confined to an extremely short span—a few days at most—at the end of the period.

In the Book of the Revelation we find the most detailed account of the period at the end of the age. Pre-Tribbers assume chapters 6-18 cover the seven-year Tribulation period. This is assumed even though the word *wrath* is not used until the end of the Sixth Chapter, following the events of the sixth seal. "And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood." (Revelation 6:12). Seeing this, men say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from Him who sits on the throne, and from the *wrath* of the Lamb; for the great day of their *wrath* has come and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17). What's more, you must realize that, even then, wrath is still future! According to Luke, after the signs in the sun and the moon and stars (events of the Sixth seal), there will be "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 21:26).

Nevertheless, pre-Tribbers hold that wrath begins at the first seal. For support, they point to the phrase, "the great day of their wrath has come," which is in the aorist tense. This, they say, means wrath was a "once for all" or "completed" event of the past. (No doubt, this wrath is back-dated to the beginning of the Tribulation—otherwise, it could not be synonymous with the Tribulation.) It is interesting to note that when pre-Tribulationists come to the same aorist usage in Revelation 19:7, they sing a different tune. There we read, "the marriage of the lamb has come..." Of this verse they say, "the aorist cannot be allowed to push the marriage itself back into the past."³ Rather, the marriage is said to be an imminent *future* event. The different tune is understandable, for if ever the marriage is allowed to be viewed as a completed past event, another pre-Trib rapture argument bites the dust (the claim for a required interval between Comings).

So, having established that *wrath* is not mentioned in conjunction with the broken seals of Chapter 6, we turn to the trumpet judgments of Chapters 8 and 9. Much to the dismay of pre-Tribulationists, it is not mentioned here either. The fact of the matter is, every mention of *wrath* is limited to the period of the seven bowls of judgment. "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because *in them* the wrath of God is finished." (Revelation 15:1). And again, "I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth." (Revelation 16:1).

Based on the Revelation account, there does not appear to be any justification for the pre-Trib assumption that wrath is synonymous with the seven-year Tribulation. Thus, the whole argument is unsound. In fact, it would seem more in line with the Biblical narrative to suggest the rapture will occur just prior to the seven bowls of wrath—not seven years earlier, as pre-Tribbers teach.

Kept from the day of the Lord

In a similar vein, Pre-Tribulationists also try to show the church avoids the Tribulation because it is exempt from the day of the Lord—which they say *includes* the Tribulation. According to Ryrie, the day of the Lord is, "an extended period of time, beginning with the Tribulation and including the events of the second coming of Christ and the millennial kingdom on earth."⁴

What is interesting about this definition is that it is offered by one who claims to adhere to a method of "consistently literal or plain interpretation" of Scripture.⁵ Yet, no *day of the Lord* passage remotely suggests that day is synonymous with either the Tribulation or the millennial kingdom. What, then, is the justification for including them? Regarding the millennial kingdom, Walvoord offers the following proof (?): "The Book of Zephaniah adds another aspect to the day of the Lord. After revealing in some detail the judgments to occur at that time, the prophecy describes the blessings that will follow." (Note: the judgments are found in 1:7-18). He then goes on to quote the blessings which are found in Chapter 3, verses 14-17. From this he concludes, "The significant truth revealed here is that the day of the Lord, which first inflicts terrible judgments, ends with an extended period of blessing on Israel, and this will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom."⁶ In other words, Walvoord lumps the millennial kingdom together with the day of the Lord—all because an account of one is found two chapters after an account of the other. By now, the fallacy in such reasoning should be obvious. It is a *non sequitur*. Though blessings are prophesied to occur after the judgments, it does not follow that they are part of the judgments.

But it is the first part of the definition which is our main concern. What we want to know is, does Scripture ever say the day of the Lord begins with the Tribulation? To answer, let us turn to some of the passages which describe the day of the Lord, and from these references, we make several observations about the event.

1. ***It is a day of destruction.*** From the writings of Isaiah, "Wail for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty." (Isaiah 13:6). And from the New Testament, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." (II Peter 3:10).
2. ***It is a day of wrath.*** Zephaniah writes, "A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. (Zephaniah 1:15).
3. ***It is a day of judgment.*** Isaiah wrote, "Behold the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it." (Isaiah 13:9). And from Obadiah, "For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your head." (Obadiah 15).
4. ***That judgment is linked to the battle of Armageddon.*** From Ezekiel we learn that the day of the Lord involves a battle in Israel. Addressing false prophets, Ezekiel wrote, "You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the Lord." (Ezekiel 13:5). But it is from Joel we learn that battle is none other than Armageddon! "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather together all the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land." He continues, "Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for *there* I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the great day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." (Joel 3:1-2, 12-14).

Clearly, there is nothing in these or any other passages, which would lead us to believe the day of the Lord has the same starting point as the Tribulation. (Neither is there any indication the day of the Lord lasts seven years, much less one thousand and seven). But, much to the dismay of pre-Tribulationists, there are passages which actually contradict this understanding. These texts reveal definite signs, both physical and political, which precede the day of the Lord—signs which even pre-Tribulationists agree will occur *during the Tribulation*.

A. *Physical signs.* In the Book of Isaiah, we read concerning the day of the Lord, "For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light." (Isaiah 13:10). The same signs are repeated in the Book of Joel, but this time with some additional information—that is, their chronology. There we read, "The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before* the great and awesome day of the Lord." (Joel 2:31).

This passage presents a huge problem for pre-Tribulationism. Remember, according to Joel, the prophesied signs come before the day of the Lord. If the Tribulation coincides with the day of the Lord, as pre-Tribulationists teach, it follows that the signs listed by Joel would also come before the Tribulation. But that is not the case! The prophesied signs do not occur until the Tribulation is well under way—after the breaking of the sixth seal. "And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to earth..." (Revelation 6:12). This means the day of the Lord cannot occur until well after the Tribulation has begun.

B. *Political signs.* In II Thessalonians we read, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it (the day of the Lord) will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." (2:3-4). Under pre-Trib doctrine, Antichrist is not revealed—taking his seat in the temple—until mid-way through the Tribulation. So, once again, it appears the Tribulation cannot be the starting point for the day of the Lord.

Despite these explicit prophecies, they do not budge from their positions. (Pre-Tribulationists, it would seem, have no intention of being undone by plain readings from Scripture.) Concerning the I & II Thessalonian references to that "day", their solution is to further refine the definition of the day of the Lord. According to Walvoord, problems arise when you assume the day of the Lord is "a simple and uncomplicated reference to a point in time, whereas in fact the total view of Scripture indicates something quite different."⁷ He goes on to suggest there should be *three separate definitions* for the day of the Lord. They are: "(1) references to a day of the Lord as referring to any period of time in the past or future when God deals directly in judgment on human sin; (2) a day of the Lord in the sense of certain specific future events constituting a judgment of God; (3) the broadest possible sense of the term, indicating a time in which God deals directly with the human situation, both in judgment and in blessing, hence broad enough to include not only the judgments preceding the Millennium but also the blessings of the Millennium itself."⁸ So, with three separate definitions in hand, it is always possible for the pre-Tribulationist to choose one which doesn't contradict Scripture. Walvoord writes, "As we encounter the difficult problem of I Thessalonians 5, the broadest definition of the day of the Lord is indicated. This contrasts, for instance, with 2 Thessalonians 2, where the narrower definition of the second category is illustrated."⁹ (It should be noted that Walvoord admits this method of classification is not even recognized by all pre-Tribulationists.)

From a logical standpoint, using Walvoord's solution of three definitions can only be described as begging the question. Regarding the third definition—which is unique to pre-Tribulationism—he offers no valid evidence that (1) the day of the Lord begins with the Tribulation or (2) the day of the Lord encompasses the millennial kingdom.

Their solution for handling the prophecy of Joel—that the signs in the heavens occur *before* the day of the Lord—is far less creative. Pre-Tribbers merely claim the passage does not mean what it says! Here is what Walvoord had to say about Joel's prophecy, "What is meant here is not that the day of the Lord will begin after these wonders in heaven, but that it will come to its climax when the judgment is actually executed."¹⁰ That Walvoord strives to put his own "spin" on Joel 2:31 is understandable. But there is no reason why his interpretation should be accepted over the normal reading of the passage.

Based on the passages above, we must conclude the beginning of the Tribulation does not coincide with the day of the Lord. It follows, then, that the day of the Lord cannot be used to argue for the pre-Trib rapture.

Kept from the hour of testing

In Revelation 3:10, we read, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth." Once more, pre-Tribbers find an event which they assume coincides with the Tribulation. And, as with *wrath and the day of the Lord*, they use this assumption to argue for the pre-Trib rapture. According to LaHaye, "This verse teaches that the faithful church of the open door, which will not deny His name, but will practice good works, evangelism, and missions, will be kept out of the hour of trial (the Great Tribulation) that shall try the whole earth." He goes on to exclaim, "The guarantee of rapture before Tribulation could hardly be more powerful."¹¹ (Walvoord must not think the passage is that powerful, for he admits "this passage may not be decisively in support of pre-tribulationism...")¹²

In truth, this so-called guarantee, like many other pre-Trib claims, owes its very existence to a logical fallacy. Unlike *wrath and the day of the Lord*, the phrase, "hour of testing," is found but once in Scripture. This means we can only look to the passage itself for its meaning. The fact of the matter is, the passage suggests neither what is meant by *the hour of testing*, nor what it means to be kept from that *hour*. According to Leon Morris, "*keep thee from (ek) the hour of temptation* might mean 'keep thee from undergoing the trial' or 'keep thee right through the trial.' The Greek is capable of either meaning."¹³ So, to assert either (1) that the hour of trial coincides with the seven-year Tribulation, or (2) that we will be removed from the *hour* as opposed to protected through it, is pure speculation. This, of course, renders the whole *hour of testing* argument an exercise in begging the question.

Conclusion

It is only through logical fallacies that pre-Tribulationists can claim to have a promise that the church will not pass through Tribulation. As we have shown, God has never made such a promise—not among the passages dealing with wrath, the day of the Lord, or the hour of testing. Moreover, proclaiming such a promise exists cannot be far from the error of the false prophets of Ezekiel's day. That is, claiming to have a word from the Lord when they do not. "They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for fulfillment of their word." (Ezekiel 13:6). All this to say, Reason # 6 adds nothing to the case for pre-Tribulationism.

Notes on Chapter 6

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 39.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
3. Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, p. 166.
4. Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1809.
5. Crenshaw and Gunn, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, p. 184.
6. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 218.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

9. Ibid., p. 214, 215.
10. Ibid., p. 218.
11. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 42.
12. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 258.
13. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 80.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Case for Imminency

To this point, we have examined a number of arguments for the pre-Trib rapture. Of these, the most crucial has been the claim of two future Comings of our Lord. Why? Because if two future Comings cannot be established, all the other pre-Trib arguments are meaningless. In a round about way, even Walvoord agrees with this assessment. You will remember from Chapter Two that he offers a dozen "contrasts" which supposedly cannot be harmonized apart from two future Comings. Perhaps sensing most of those were not overly convincing, he appears to have placed all his hopes on a single contrast—the one involving a proposition known as imminency. It is by means of this doctrine that he hopes, at long last, to establish two future Comings of our Lord. (No wonder he calls imminency the heart of pre-Tribulationism.)

If this can be done, the next step is far less difficult—that is, arguing one of the Comings must occur before the Tribulation. However, if two Comings cannot be established, the pre-Trib rapture will have roughly the same life expectancy as a Big Mac on Air Force One. Furthermore, based on the following quote, it is safe to say that Walvoord recognizes imminency as the last hope of the pre-Trib rapture; he writes, "For all practical purposes, abandonment of the pretribulational return of Christ is tantamount to abandonment of the hope of His imminent return." ¹ With this in mind, we turn to the next major argument for pre-Tribulationism.

Reason #7 for being a Pre-Tribulationist

"Only the pre-Trib view preserves the motivating power of imminency teaching found in the New Testament that was such a challenge to the early church." ²

Here, LaHaye presents two separate arguments for a pre-Trib rapture. First, the claim is made that imminency is taught in the New Testament. If this is true, it follows that an any-moment (and presumably pre-Trib) rapture becomes a likely possibility. Second, it is suggested that apart from the anticipation that goes with an imminent rapture, the church would become "carnal and spiritually dead." ³

The New Testament case for Imminency

Everyone agrees that many events are prophesied before the Glorious Appearing of the Lord at the end of the age (Antichrist's appearing, the appearance of the two witnesses, signs in the heavens, etc.). But pre-Tribbers also believe Jesus could return for the church at any moment (at the rapture), without regard to those prophesied events. This is known as *imminency*. While the word seems to imply that the rapture is soon or impending, it has an altogether different meaning for pre-Tribulationists. Simply stated, it is a belief that, unlike the Second Coming, there are no prophesied events which must occur before the rapture.

1. **Passages teaching imminency.** According to LaHaye, a number of New Testament passages teach an imminent return of the Lord. Included are, John 14:1-3, Acts 1:11, I Corinthians 15:51-52, Philippians 3:20, and Colossians 3:4. If we examine these passages, we gain some insight into how pre-Tribulationists handle Scripture. Take, for example, Philippians 3:20. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." While there is a clear reference to His coming, what we do *not* see is any indication as to whether or not prophesied signs precede this coming. Yet, LaHaye insists the passage teaches an imminent return! Let's look at another passage, this time, John 14:1-3. "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Again, there is a clear reference to His coming. But where, we ask, is the language showing this return is without reference to signs? Put another way, what in these passages could lead us to believe the Lord might return *before* the prophesied signs of His Second Coming? The answer, of course, is there is absolutely nothing which suggests such a conclusion.

This raises an obvious question. How is it that passages which are silent on the matter of signs can be said to teach imminency? Believe it or not, pre-Tribulationists conclude the Lord's return is imminent based solely on the fact that the passages contain nothing which precludes imminency! (Using the same logic, you could prove your neighbors are Martians—that is, if they never indicated they weren't Martians.) Perhaps you have difficulty believing respected Christian leaders resort to arguments such as this. If so, we invite you to note carefully Walvoord's comments on the John 14:1-3 passage: "The prospect of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ *is not qualified by description of any signs or prerequisite events.* (Italics added). Here, as in other passages dealing with the coming of Christ for the church, the hope is presented as an imminent hope." ⁴

It should be mentioned that LaHaye claims there are still other passages which teach we can expect the Lord at any time. They are:

- Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. (Matt. 24:42).
- Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day or the hour. (Matt. 25:13).
- For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matt. 24:44).

While these verses do say the Lord could come at any time, they do not suggest the Lord taught imminency. In fact, Walvoord flatly denies that these are imminency passages. Why? Because they are all tied to a series of signs which occur *during the Tribulation*. And by that time, all the prophesied signs will have been fulfilled. Hence, by definition, they can hardly be used to suggest a coming which occurs before the prophesied signs.

2. **Passages contributing to the concept of imminency.** To his credit, Walvoord is generally more guarded in his claims about what the Bible teaches than LaHaye. For instance, he never declares there are New Testament passages which teach imminency. Instead, he offers passages which, in his words, "contribute to the concept of imminency."⁵ Among these are, John 14:1-3, I Thessalonians 4-5, and I John 3:1-3. We will examine the arguments associated with each of these passages.

1. **John 14:1-3.** We have already seen how this passage is used to promote imminency—by invoking an argument from silence. But that is not the only tack pre-Tribbers take. LaHaye offers his own unique attempt to ascribe imminency to this familiar passage. He writes, "The promise that our Lord could appear at any moment to take His church up to His Father's house was delivered by our Lord Himself (see John 14:1-3)." ⁶ Later he adds, "Ever since our Lord promised the early Christians that He was returning to His Father's house to prepare a place for them and that He would 'come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also,' believers have looked forward to being translated (raptured) rather than seeing death." ⁷

Now, let's consider whether these comments are justified. About 25 years after the Lord spoke the words recorded in John 14, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. In that letter (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), Paul revealed the mystery of the rapture of the church. "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; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." (I Corinthians 15:51-52). A mystery, according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, is a truth previously withheld by God, but now made known by Divine revelation. Therefore, if you can believe Paul, that mystery—the fact that some believers would not die—had never before been revealed! This means, 25 years earlier, Jesus most certainly did not promise an any-moment (imminent) rapture in the John 14 passage. By the same token, because that mystery had not yet been revealed, the disciples could hardly have been anticipating the rapture instead of death, as LaHaye claims.

2. The second section of Scripture Walvoord offers in defense of imminency is **I Thessalonians, Chapters 4 and 5**. However, he makes reference to just one verse: "Therefore, comfort one another with these words." (4:18). Walvoord does not say how this passage contributes the concept of imminency. He merely asserts the rapture had been taught as an imminent hope. LaHaye, however, is not so reticent. From this phrase, he develops a "comfort" argument in favor of imminency. In his words, "the hope and comfort aspect of the Rapture demands that we escape the Tribulation, being raptured out of this world before God's wrath begins."⁸

Clearly, that is a lot to read into the simple admonition to "comfort one another with these words." Let's see if it is valid. First of all, why did that particular church need to be comforted? According to well-known Pre-Trib writer, Charles Ryrie, the specific issue that troubled them was, "Does the death of a believer before the Lord comes cause him to lose all hope of sharing in the glorious reign of Christ? Paul's answer is the reassuring affirmation that the dead will be raised and will share in the kingdom."⁹ So far, so good. But how does LaHaye expand the rapture so it not only raises the dead in Christ, but also *demands* the church be removed before the Tribulation? Here is his reasoning: God revealed the rapture in order to comfort the church at Thessalonica; that means the rapture is a doctrine of comfort; obviously, it would not be a comfort to go through Tribulation; so, it follows the church will be raptured before the Tribulation.

This, my friend, is one of the more stunning applications of the *fallacy of division* you will ever encounter. (The fact that the rapture brought comfort once does not mean it is a doctrine of comfort in every instance.) To illustrate the error in this reasoning, we could just as easily conclude the comfort nature of the rapture demands it occur before April 15, since the thought of paying income taxes is not comforting to those in the church.

3. The third passage which, we are told, contributes to imminency is **I John 3:1-3**. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

You say, how does this passage contribute to imminency? Obviously, it offers no indication that a Coming of the Lord is without reference to signs. Walvoord, however, suggests the presence of the word *hope* amounts to an argument for imminency. "The hope of seeing Christ as He is and being like Him is a purifying hope." And this hope, he claims, "is realistic in proportion to its imminency."¹⁰ Needless to say, Walvoord does not attempt to support this novel claim from Scripture. However, he does offer an analogy about a housewife. "Housewives engage in special efforts of preparation when guests are expected momentarily, while the tendency would be unconcern if visitors were far removed." From this observation he concludes, "The teaching of the coming of the Lord is always presented as an imminent event that should occupy the Christian's thought and life to a large extent."¹¹ Incredibly, this is the kind of "evidence" which leads Walvoord to suggest I John 3:1-3 contributes to the concept of imminency. To grasp the fatuousness of this logic, we need only view the formal argument.

- First premise: Believers should be concerned about the Coming of the Lord for the Church (the rapture).

- Second premise: If an event is imminent, believers will be more concerned.
- Conclusion: The coming of the Lord for the church is always presented as an imminent event.

Believe it or not, the three passages above, along with their corresponding arguments, represent the strongest "Biblical" arguments to be found in behalf of this doctrine. Little wonder Walvoord could not bring himself to say these passages actually teach imminency.

The Necessity of Imminency

As part of Reason # 7, LaHaye also suggested that apart from the anticipation that goes with an imminent rapture, the church would become "carnal and spiritually dead." In other words, he argues that the Lord's return is imminent, simply because, in his opinion, imminency is necessary for the well-being of the church.

1. As mentioned in his housewife analogy, Walvoord suggests imminency aids in achieving holiness. "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (I John 3:3). He then reasoned that "the hope is realistic in proportion to its imminency." Again, LaHaye goes beyond the scholarly Walvoord. Not content with the proposition that imminency is an aid to holiness, LaHaye asserts that is indispensable! Here is his description of a life without imminency, "In a spiritual sense, I may not be able to sleep profoundly, but I can certainly afford a few lapses, a few catnaps." He goes on to say, "Our Lord and His apostles taught imminency to those early Christians and to us in order to counter the temptations of our world system and Satan himself." ¹²

Before accepting LaHaye's proposition, we need to ask the obvious question; is it true? Is imminency, in fact, the Biblical lynch-pin which sustains holiness? (You must admit, that would be quite an accomplishment for a doctrine never mentioned in Scripture.) Reviewing the Biblical record, we find holiness stems from a number of factors. For instance, in II Corinthians 6:18, we are told we should be holy because of our relationship to the Father. "'And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty." Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And, in I Peter 2:1-3 we learn that if we have "tasted the kindness of the Lord," we are to put aside "all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander." What we do not find, however, is **any** indication that holiness stems from a belief in imminency.

What, then, is the real impetus for seeking to purify our souls? Is it the *possibility* that we might be raptured today, as LaHaye suggests? Or is it the *certainty* that we will see Him someday? We think, the latter. Because Messiah was raised from the dead, we know we will stand before Him one day. It is because of this truth, rather than a belief in imminency, that we purify our souls. But in truth, whether imminency aids holiness is irrelevant. For even if holiness increases exponentially because of the belief, it does not follow that the Bible teaches imminency.

2. As a final argument for imminency, LaHaye claims it has been the determining factor behind all productive periods in church history. "It is a sad commentary on the church that in its twenty- century history, only five centuries have featured imminency. But those have been the most consecrated, soul-winning, missionary-minded, and spiritually productive days of the church." ¹³ This is a bold and sweeping statement. Before accepting it at face value, we should ask some questions. For instance, what was the basis for determining church productivity? Who decided that imminency was the pivotal factor in those five productive centuries? Might other issues also have contributed, such as, persecution, changes in church government, the Reformation, or even the sovereign movement of God? In short, this sounds like a technique in argumentation known as *hasty generalization*. But even if this particular generalization had some merit, it would still not prove the Bible teaches imminency.

The New Testament case against imminency

By now it should be clear that, apart from employing the fallacy of an argument from silence, Scripture **NEVER** presents the rapture as a signless (imminent) event. But the problems for imminency do not stop there. Perhaps even more threatening is the fact that a number of Scriptures seem to contradict the doctrine. These problem texts imply that either an extended period of time or certain prophesied events must transpire before the Lord's return. Following are six such texts:

1. The Lord's promise to Peter that he would die at an old age. (See John 21:18-19). Herein is a huge problem for imminency. If the rapture was presented as imminent, as pre-Tribbers maintain, that means it could have happened at any moment from Pentecost until now. Yet, the Lord, Himself, prophesied that Peter would die an old man. This prophecy directly contradicts the pre- Trib doctrine of imminency in two vital points:

- *That the rapture could occur at any moment.* A number of years would have to pass before Peter became old and died. That means, at least during those intervening years, the rapture could not have occurred. Otherwise, Peter would have been translated, which would have made the Lord a false prophet.
- *That the rapture is without reference to signs.* Based on the Lord's prophecy, it was impossible for the rapture to occur before at least one future event—that being Peter's death. The obvious implication is that the Lord did not teach imminency.

It should be mentioned that Walvoord does not try to dispute the damage this prophecy does to imminency. Rather, he attempts to blunt its effect by suggesting the early church probably had no knowledge of the prophecy. He writes, "The prophecy as recorded in John 21 apparently was not common property of the church until long after he died anyway and constituted no obstacle to belief in the imminency of the Lord's coming for the great majority of Christians." ¹⁴ As to how he came to that conclusion, Walvoord does not say. Without concrete evidence that the church was ignorant of the

prophecy, we must assume Walvoord arrives at this conclusion in the same way he arrives at others—through begging the question (assuming that which you are trying to prove).

- First premise (assumed): The early church believed in imminency.
- Second premise: The Lord's prophecy that Peter would die as an old man conflicts with imminency.
- Conclusion: The early church must not have known about the prophecy.

Since the first premise cannot be proven, it appears the grounds for Walvoord's rebuttal—claiming ignorance by the early church—stems once again from a logical fallacy. What's more, the whole assumption flies in the face of common sense. The men who did most of the teaching in the early church were the apostles. No doubt they were aware of the Lord's words concerning Peter, and there is simply no reason to think they conspired to withhold that particular piece of information from the church.

2. The parables which imply a long interval of time before the Lord returns. (See Matt. 25:14-30, the parable of the talents; Luke 19:11-27, parable of the minas). These passages argue against the concept of an *any moment* rapture.

3. Various passages which imply that the program for this age would be extensive. These texts imply a considerable period of time before the Lord returns. Again, the problem is that an extended delay is inconsistent with the teaching of an *any moment* rapture. Included are:

- Parable of the soils. The seed sown on good soil will bring forth thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold returns. The implication being that this will not happen overnight.
- The kingdom compared to a mustard seed. Though small at first, it will grow, implying a passage of time.
- The kingdom compared to leaven. Though insignificant at first, over time it will permeate everywhere.
- The wheat and the tares, and the dragnet. It will take time for an increase in both the wheat and the good fish.
- Matthew 28:19-20. The Great Commission. This is the command to make disciples of all the nations. It should be noted that it has not been fully accomplished after a span of nearly 20 centuries.

4. Paul's extensive missionary plans, and his knowledge of his approaching death. As in the prophecy concerning Peter, we see the necessity of a passage of time and a prophesied future event—Paul's death—before the rapture could occur.

5. The prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, preceding the Lord's return. (See Luke 21:20- 24).

6. The specific signs of the Lord's coming given at the Olivet Discourse. (See Matt. 24:1-25:30).

Pre-Trib responses to problem texts

Considering what is at stake—the viability of the Pre-Trib rapture—pre-Tribbers have very little to say concerning these problem texts. Walvoord merely offers that "most of the difficulties raised by post-tribulationists dissolve upon examination." Yet, his meager comments on these texts by no means constitute an examination. In the matter of the Lord prophesying Peter's death, Walvoord observes, "Peter was middle-aged at the time the prophecy of John 21:18-19 was given." Regarding the parables which imply a long period before the Lord's return, he had only this to say: "The long period pictured by the parables could certainly be fitted into the doctrine of imminency. A long period for a journey might occupy only a few years, as far as the first century Christians could determine."¹⁵ What should be evident to all is that these scant observations do nothing to "dissolve" the difficulties created by these problem texts. The fact of the matter is, whether Peter was middle-aged is irrelevant; that the Lord might be gone for only a few years is also irrelevant. What does matter is that Scripture demonstrates that, for a while at least, an imminent rapture was an utter impossibility.

Perhaps the best indicator of the force of these problem texts is that Walvoord chooses not to confront them directly. Instead, he attempts to diffuse them by reassuring us that "most of the hindrances to the coming of the Lord at any moment in the first century no longer exist."¹⁶ Then he launches two indirect (and highly creative) defenses of imminency.

The Red Herring

In the first of these defenses, Walvoord attempts to divert our attention from these problem texts by introducing a side issue. This tactic is known as a *red herring*. Here, Walvoord poses a new (and altogether disturbing) line of reasoning. Incredibly, he suggests the case for imminency should hinge on what the first century believers thought about the doctrine! He writes, "the question is whether the first-century Christians believed and taught the imminent return of Christ in the sense that it could occur at any moment."¹⁷ That Walvoord would attempt this particular argument is indeed puzzling. We say that because, earlier in the same book, he concludes it is impossible to tell what first century Christians believed about imminency! Concerning the earliest Christian writings on the subject, Walvoord writes, "Frequently the same writers who seemed to imply imminency later detailed events that must precede the Rapture and the second coming of Christ. At best, the situation is confused."¹⁸ But, despite that observation, Walvoord chooses to ignore the implications of the Lord's prophecy concerning Peter (about which there is no confusion), and he assumes instead that first century Christians believed and taught the doctrine of imminency—a conclusion which he has already admitted cannot be known for certain!

Clearly, this red herring should be ignored. It is ludicrous to contend that what early Christians thought or taught about imminency should be the determining factor. All that matters is what the Scriptures say. And to this point, the problem texts still argue strongly against the doctrine.

Introducing *Imminency-lite*

The second maneuver Walvoord employs is more ingenious. Although admitting there are texts which raise difficulties for the doctrine of imminency, he states, "most of the hindrances to the coming of the Lord at any moment in the first century no longer exist. A long period has elapsed; Peter and Paul have gone home to the Lord; only the specific signs of Matthew 24-25 remain to be fulfilled."¹⁹

This argument is what we might call a theological shell game. Without notice, Walvoord withdraws the concept of imminency which, until now, he has so laboriously defended. Then he surreptitiously replaces it with a *new* proposition. Now he seeks to establish that, at some undetermined point, the Lord's return *became* (or perhaps will become) imminent! With just a little analysis, it becomes apparent that the two propositions are as different as night and day. In order to conceal this slight-of-hand, however, the new version is still referred to as imminency. (To avoid confusion, we will call this new model "imminency-lite." That's because it has all the benefits of *old* imminency, but none of the requirements.) When Walvoord asserts that the difficulties to an imminent return have been resolved by either the passage of time or events, he blithely discards the very issues which once defined imminency! Moreover, the new doctrine which he passes off in its place is utter nonsense. It is no more profound than saying—*when all the necessary signs have been fulfilled, no more signs will be required*. We think you will agree, if this is all that is left of the doctrine of imminency, the concept has been rendered worthless.

As an aside, when Pre-Trib teachers speak of imminency, more often than not, it is this substitute concept they are talking about. This can be demonstrated from their teachings on the "signs of the times." Walvoord writes, "All areas of prophecy combine in the united testimony that history is preparing our generation for the end of the age. In each area of prophecy a chronological checklist of important prophetic *events* can be compiled. In each list in regard to the church, the nations, or Israel, the events of history clearly indicate that the world is poised and ready for the rapture of the church..."²⁰ Put another way, Walvoord is suggesting that enough signs may now have been fulfilled that, perhaps at this point, the rapture can be considered imminent! Unquestionably, such a practice flies in the face of the original definition of imminency.

Perhaps you are wondering why pre-Tribbers put stock in a nonsensical doctrine such as imminency-lite. The answer is simple. Very few are aware the definition has been changed, so pre-Trib teachers now have the best of both worlds—signs and imminency. With imminency-lite, these two concepts are no longer mutually exclusive, thus allowing pre-Tribbers to continue their long-standing practice of observing sign after sign being fulfilled, while still maintaining that the rapture is (or rather, will soon be) imminent.

Conclusion

We heartily concur with Walvoord, who suggested that without imminency there is little hope for the pre-Trib rapture. It is, after all, their best chance to prove two future Comings instead of one. Unfortunately for pre-Tribulationism, it does not appear that imminency can be established as a valid Biblical doctrine. Having absolutely no direct support from Scripture, the only resort for imminency is to build an indirect case for the doctrine. That clearly fails, however, since all the arguments seem to be based on logical fallacies. What's more, common sense tells us the Lord would never transmit an important doctrine in such a way that it could only be deduced by incorporating an argument from silence. Moreover, none of the problem texts can be "explained away," which leaves Scripture completely at odds with the concept of imminency. In the final analysis, Reason # 7 cannot be considered a valid argument for the pre-Trib rapture. Therefore, it should be summarily rejected.

Notes on Chapter 7.

1. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 75.
2. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 222.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
4. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 73.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
6. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 14.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
9. Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1808.
10. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 75.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
12. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 65.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
14. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 166.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
20. John Walvoord, *Armageddon*, pp. 199-200.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Reason # 8 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"Pre-Trib Christians are looking for the coming of the Lord. Other views have them awaiting Tribulation, Antichrist, and suffering."¹

To suggest this argument as an *additional* reason for being a pre-Tribulationist is, at the very least, disingenuous. In truth, this is not a new argument at all; it is merely a restating of the tenets of the doctrine of imminency (a doctrine which was discredited in the last chapter). That this is the case can be clearly seen from LaHaye's writings: "Frankly, one of my principal objections to the mid- and post-Trib theories is their destruction of imminency. For if Christ cannot come at any moment, these views cannot instruct us to look for His return. Instead they advise us to look for the inaugurating of the Tribulation period, when Antichrist signs a covenant with Israel for seven years for the rebuilding of the Temple, the mark of the Beast, the advent of Antichrist himself..."²

That pre-Tribulationists would devise another argument having to do with imminency is not surprising. No matter how compelling the reasoning against this doctrine, they always act as though it is an irrefutable *fact* of Scripture. This unwavering confidence in the validity of imminency is captured in the following quote: "Lovers of Biblical truth will have to be confronted with more convincing evidence than has yet been produced before they will feel compelled to embrace a doctrine which destroys imminency."³ Never mind that Scripture does not teach it—that is, apart from adding arguments from silence; forget also that Scripture actually contradicts it. (See John 21:18-19, the Lord's prophecy of Peter's death). For these self-proclaimed *consistent literalists*, none of that matters—imminency stands, no matter what the Scriptures say!

That brings us back to Reason # 8. As long as pre-Tribulationists persist in interpreting Scripture through the use of logical fallacies, they will continue to view imminency as a Biblical truth. Then, armed with that erroneous assumption, they proceed to create further "proofs" for the pre-Trib rapture. No doubt, they suppose these new arguments add credibility to the pre-Trib position. The problem, of course, is that these additional proofs (such as Reason # 8) are all grounded in the same false assumptions. To fully grasp that this is the case, we need only see the formal argument.

Part 1.

- First premise: According to the doctrine of imminency, the Lord can return at any moment, and that return will occur before the prophesied events of the Tribulation.
- Second premise (unstated): The Bible teaches imminency.
- Conclusion: Christians should look for the coming of the Lord and not the prophesied events of the Tribulation.

Part 2.

- First premise: Christians should look for the coming of the Lord instead of the prophesied events of the Tribulation. (Conclusion from Part 1)
- Second premise: Only pre-Tribulationism teaches that Christians should look for the coming of the Lord and not the prophesied events of the Tribulation.
- Conclusion: Christians should be pre-Tribulationists.

Clearly, until a *sound* Biblical case for imminency can be established, Reason # 8 merely begs the question. For that reason, it is logically *unsound*. (Likewise, until we establish there are men on Mars, it is nonsense to entertain discussions on their mating habits.)

Notes on Chapter 8.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 222.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

CHAPTER NINE

Reason # 9 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"It makes a major event out of the Rapture."¹

It goes without saying that pre-Tribulationists make a big deal out of the rapture. LaHaye writes, "The pre-Trib view makes it a dignified, blessed event commensurate with a heavenly Bridegroom who comes to take His bride to His Father's house for their wedding." By contrast, we are told, "The post-Trib view trivializes it, treating it as an express elevator trip—zip up and right back down."² It is this stark difference in emphasis which is the basis for Reason # 9. Here is the formal argument:

- First premise: The rapture is a major event in the Bible.
- Second premise (unstated): Only the pre-Trib position makes a major event out of the rapture.
- Conclusion: Christians should be pre-Tribulationists.

The First Premise

According to LaHaye, because of the number of times it is presented in Scripture, we can assume the rapture is a major event. He writes, "Since at least *four* passages of Scripture describe the Rapture, it must be a significant event."³ Earlier in the same book, however, he suggests a lesser number, stating there are "at least *three* (passages) that clearly refer to the Rapture—and several that are less plain."⁴ Of the three clear references, two undoubtedly deal with the rapture. They

are I Corinthians 15:51-58 and I Thessalonians 4:13-18. But as will be seen momentarily, the third passage, John 14:1-3, is not so clear.

Among the several references which are less plain, LaHaye first mentions Titus 2:13, reaffirming a pre-Trib belief that the *blessed hope* is none other than the rapture. As was shown in Chapter 5, however, there is no Biblical basis for that interpretation. He also lists II Thessalonians 2:1-12, claiming it is a passage which "contains the Rapture, Tribulation, and the Glorious Appearing all in one chapter."⁵ This assertion is also doubtful. The phrase, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him," does not indicate two separate events, as LaHaye would have us believe. This is borne out in Leon Morris' commentary on the verse. He explains, "From the point of view of believers a most important part of the events associated with the great day is their meeting with their Lord. This is the aspect which is brought out in *our gathering together unto him.*"⁶ And finally, the whole Book of the Revelation is said to establish the pre-Tribulation rapture—this, in spite of the fact that there is no clear presentation of the event in the entire book. (Some pre-Tribulationists think Revelation 4:1 depicts the rapture, but as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, that interpretation is without merit.)

Now we turn our attention back to John 14:1-3. In the last chapter, we saw how pre-Tribbers transformed this passage into a proof text for imminency (by means of an argument from silence). Now these verses are also said to provide a "clear reference" to the rapture—this, in spite of the fact there is nothing in the text indicating the promised coming is the rapture, as opposed to the prophesied Glorious Appearing. What, then, makes pre-tribbers think it is a clear reference to the rapture? To answer, we first take note of LaHaye's rather curious comments on the passage: "Consider the Lord's challenge to His disciples the night before He died. He did not say, 'Buck up men! Don't let your hearts be troubled just because you have to go through the Tribulation before I can take you to be with Myself.' Instead He urged, 'Let not your hearts be troubled....I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.'" (John 14:1,3).⁷

As should be obvious by now, this is another argument from silence. But there is an even deeper problem. It has to do with the pre-Trib assessment of what the disciples were thinking at the time of the prophecy. As LaHaye's comments illustrate, he presumes the disciples' foremost concern was the prospect of going through the Tribulation. This is nothing short of preposterous. The context leaves no doubt as to what was troubling them—it was the Lord's announcement that He would soon be leaving them! We find a record of that declaration in John 13:33. "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, I now say to you also, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'" To this, Peter responded by asking (1) where the Lord was going, and (2) why he could not follow Him at that time. (See 13:36-37). It was then that Jesus sought to comfort His followers with the words of John 14:1-3. If Peter's questions are any indication, it does not appear the disciples had the Tribulation in mind at all.

This raises an interesting question. Why does LaHaye ignore the context of John 14, choosing instead to presume the disciples were concerned about facing the Tribulation? We conclude pre-Tribbers are so consumed with establishing the pre-Trib rapture, they can't help themselves. (If you only have a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail.) Obviously, they do not care what the plain reading of the passage or its context suggests. Perhaps that is because they are already convinced the pre-Trib rapture exists, and for that reason, they naturally assume all Second Coming passages should be interpreted in the light of that knowledge. So, whenever addressing a prophecy in which the pre-Trib rapture message is not readily apparent (such as John 14), the task is plain: The underlying truth of the pre-Trib message must be brought to the surface—even if that requires resorting to logical fallacies. Now you know what is behind the *reasoning* which turns John 14 into a "clear reference" to the rapture.

Despite pre-Trib claims to the contrary, we believe Scripture presents only two clear references to the rapture. The question then arises—are two passages enough to make the rapture a major end-time event? No doubt, pre-Tribulationists would think two are sufficient. But frankly, common sense tells us the number of references is not the key issue; all that matters is the content of those references. And based on the information in those two clear texts, we heartily agree with our pre-Trib brethren—the rapture is an altogether extraordinary event in Scripture. In I Thessalonians 4, we see a sublime account of the dead in Christ being raised so they can fully participate, along with those who are alive, in Christ's coming. In I Corinthians 15:51-55, we see a glorious picture of death being "swallowed up in victory" as believers put on immortality. If these incredible accomplishments do not signify a major event in end-time prophecy, nothing does.

The Second Premise

It appears, though, that pre-Tribulationists do not think we go far enough in our appreciation of the rapture. As mentioned, the charge has been made that the post-Trib view "trivializes" the event. To see what is behind this, we observe the contrast which is offered. On the one hand, the post-Trib view is said to treat the rapture like "an express elevator trip—zip up and right back down." Pre-Tribulationism, on the other hand, "makes it a dignified, blessed event commensurate with a heavenly Bridegroom who comes to take His bride to His Father's house for their wedding."⁸

The first thing you must realize is that this feigned indignation over the dignity of the rapture is a subterfuge. In reality, this contrast is merely a repackaging of an earlier argument, i.e., Reason # 3. Once again Pre-Tribbers are assuming an interval of time between Comings is necessary—in this case, so the wedding between Christ and the church can be "dignified." You see, the post-Trib view has the church meeting the Lord in the air, then, shortly thereafter, returning to

earth with the Lord. By pre-Trib thinking, this does not allow enough time for a proper wedding. So, when pre-Tribbers claim this interpretation trivializes the rapture, what they are really saying is—it trivializes the wedding.

However, pre-Tribulationism's problem is not with the post-Trib view; it is with the Scriptures. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the language in I Thessalonians 4:13 seems to confirm the post-Trib interpretation. The Greek word for *meet* (as in to *meet* the Lord in the air) was often used to describe what happened as a visiting dignitary approached a city. Residents would go outside the city to greet the dignitary, then they would return with him as part of his entourage. It should also be mentioned that there is no indication that a prolonged wedding ceremony is in view. Scripture merely announces, "the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7). Then, quite abruptly, the narrative shifts to the events of the Second Coming. (See Revelation 19:11-16).

This brings us to the question of the second premise: Is it true that only the pre-Trib position makes a major event out of the rapture? We believe that answer is, no. It seems evident that all views understand the rapture as a major event. Pre-Tribbers, however, are not likely to agree. That is because they have their own standard for what makes an end-time event major. For them, the rapture is major if, and only if, it is pre-Trib. We saw an example of this mind-set demonstrated in the arguments over the *blessed hope* of Titus 2:13. On that subject LaHaye writes, "If Christ does not rapture His church before the Tribulation begins, much of hope is destroyed, and thus it becomes a 'blasted hope.'" ⁹ Bottom line, there is obvious disagreement as to the validity of the second premise.

Conclusion

What should be evident by now is that whether post-Tribbers treat the rapture as a major end-time event is strictly a matter of opinion. Because of that, the second premise can never be established as fact. Therefore, using it to prove Reason # 9, renders the entire argument *unsound*.

Notes to Chapter 9.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 222.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
6. Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 124.
7. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 70.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

CHAPTER TEN

The first to present his case seems right, til another comes forward to question him. (Proverbs 18:17)

Reason # 10 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"This view most clearly fits the flow of the Book of the Revelation." ¹

For the pre-Trib view to fit the Revelation narrative, only one thing is needed. That is, there must be a passage placing the rapture before the events described in Chapter 6, which is generally considered the beginning of the Tribulation. According to pre-Tribulationists, there is such a passage; it is Revelation 4:1-2. If, in fact, that text can be established as a rapture text, it is safe to say that pre-Tribulationists will have carried the day. Not only will they have (at long last) established two future Comings, but they will also have made their case that the rapture precedes the Tribulation. But what is the evidence that Revelation 4 contains a reference to the rapture?

The case for the rapture in Revelation 4:1-2

Before we look at the arguments, it might be helpful to have the passage before us. To set the stage, the Apostle John received a vision while on the Isle of Patmos. In that vision, he was told by the Lord to write concerning three kinds of *things*. "Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things." (Revelation 1:19). No doubt, *the things he had seen* had to do with the vision of the glorified Lord, Jesus. But what was meant by *the things which are*? This probably referred to the current condition of the churches. In the vision, the Lord directed John to record messages to seven different churches. In these messages, He commended the churches for what they were doing right and strongly warned them in areas they were falling short.

That brings us to *the things which shall take place after these things*. To properly grasp this part, it was apparently necessary that John view the events from a heavenly perspective. That is why we read, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.' Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne." (Revelation 4:1-2).

Because of the trumpet reference, many think this passage is at least an allusion to the rapture. "...for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." (I Corinthians 15:52). It should be pointed out, however, that there is no trumpet in Revelation 4; there is only a voice—a voice which was "like the sound of a trumpet *speaking with me*." So, what are the remaining arguments for interpreting John's vision as a "rapture event" ²

The First Argument

LaHaye says that, when taken literally, "the Book of Revelation is a pre-Tribulational book."³ Perhaps you are wondering, what does this statement have to do with establishing the rapture in 4:1-2? That can best be answered by converting it to a formal argument:

- First Premise: The Book of the Revelation is a pre-Tribulational book.
- Second Premise (unstated): If the Book of the Revelation is pre-Tribulational, the rapture must occur in 4:1-2.
- Conclusion: The Revelation 4:1-2 passage must refer to the rapture.

This, of course, is an example of begging the question. The premise that the Book of the Revelation is a pre-Tribulational book cannot be proven; it is merely a pre-Trib assumption. Therefore, the conclusion is logically *unsound*.

The Second Argument

Pre-Tribulationists freely admit the rapture is not mentioned in Revelation 4:1-2. Nevertheless, they insist that is when it occurs. "The Rapture of the Church is not explicitly taught in Revelation 4 but it definitely appears here chronologically at the end of the church age and before the Tribulation."⁴ It seems the basis for this assertion is other rapture texts. LaHaye writes, "Revelation 4:1-2 by itself would never unlock the mystery of the rapture, but since the event is revealed in other passages, one may appropriately identify John's call up to heaven as a Rapture event that unfolds before the Tribulation period."⁵ In other words, it is suggested that, based on other rapture texts, we can conclude that when John was called up to heaven, he was *raptured*. This conclusion is then used to argue that the church will likewise be raptured before the Tribulation. LaHaye writes, "John is at least representative of the church *when he is raptured* to be with Christ in the air while the people still living on earth proceed to the Tribulation period."⁶ (Italics added). Here is the formal argument:

- First Premise: John was raptured in Revelation 4, which is prior to the chapters dealing with the Tribulation.
- Second Premise: John was a representative of the church.
- Conclusion: The church will likewise be raptured prior to the Tribulation.

This argument is fraught with problems. For one thing, the whole approach flies in the face of the pre-Trib standard of *consistent literalism*. Marvin Rosenthal puts it this way, "That kind of interpretation dishonors a literal and grammatical approach to the Scriptures. To make John's being caught up into heaven mean the church is raptured at that time is tantamount to adopting Origen's allegory method of interpretation—an approach which premillennarians universally shun in other instances."⁷

Even worse though, it can easily be shown that John was *not* raptured in Revelation 4! Despite claims to the contrary, there are no other Bible texts which suggest John's vision was a "rapture event." In fact, key rapture passages seem to dispute that interpretation. From I Corinthians 15:53 we know that when believers are raptured, they become immortal; yet, John was still mortal. I Thessalonians 4:17 tells us that, at the rapture, believers will go to be with the Lord and will remain with Him always; as we know, John returned to earth alone. Clearly, the claim that John was raptured is false. For that reason, the conclusion which flows from it—that the church will also be raptured prior to the Tribulation—is completely without merit.

The Third Argument

In the final argument, it is said that the rapture must occur in Revelation 4:1-2, simply because it can't be found anywhere else! (So much for relying on the plain reading of Scripture.) LaHaye writes, "If post-Tribs reject Revelation 4:1-2 as a reference to the Rapture, they must explain why the Rapture was not mentioned and where it fits. Since the Revelation is the most detailed sequential prediction of end-time events in the Bible, it is unthinkable that such a joyous event as the Rapture, mentioned in other books of the Bible, would be completely omitted."⁸

This argument is replete with *complex questions*. (i.e., Have you stopped beating your wife?) For instance, by charging "if not 4:1-2, then where," pre-Tribbers are trying lend credence to an unprovable assumption—namely, that the rapture and the Second Coming are two separate events. Once two Comings are established, then (and only then) is it reasonable to debate where those Comings might be located in the Revelation. The challenge issued to post-Tribbers to explain why the rapture is omitted is also a complex question. That is because it has never been established that the rapture is separate from the Second Coming. And, so as long as the Second Coming has not been omitted, it follows that the rapture has not been omitted either.

Conclusion

Without compelling evidence of the rapture in 4:1-2, there is no reason to view the Revelation as a pre-Trib book. And apart from logical fallacies, it cannot be said that the Bible indicates John's vision was a "rapture event." Therefore, Reason # 10 ought to have no bearing on whether one is a pre-Tribulationist.

Notes on Chapter 10.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 223.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
4. Tim LaHaye, *Revelation*, p. 76.
5. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 223.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
7. Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, pp. 245-246.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Reason # 11 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"The pre-Trib view explains why the church is not mentioned in Revelation 4:3 through chapter 18."¹

In the second and third chapters of the Revelation, the Lord dictated messages for each of seven specific churches. As mentioned, we interpret these messages as the second part of John's vision—the *things which are*. (See Revelation 1:19). Then, beginning in the fourth chapter, the subject changes from those seven churches to events which are future—to *things which will take place after these things*. Pre-Tribulationists note that for much of that portion of John's vision, the word "church" is absent from the narrative. This includes all of Chapters 6-18, which happens to be the section describing the Tribulation. They hold the reason for this "stunning silence" is the pre-Trib rapture. "How else can we explain that the church, the major player in the events of chapters 1 through 3, is mentioned specifically seventeen times but does not appear once during chapters 6 through 18, which describe in detail the events of the seven-year Tribulation period?"² We wonder, is this a sound argument for the pre-Trib rapture? To answer, let's first restate it in formal terms:

- First Premise (unstated): If the church were on earth during the Tribulation, it would be mentioned in the Tribulation chapters (6 through 18).
- Second Premise: The church is not mentioned during the Tribulation portion of the Revelation.
- Conclusion: The Church must have been removed (i.e., raptured) prior to the Tribulation.

There are a number of problems with this argument. To begin, the first premise is a *non sequitur*. It simply does not follow that because a thing is present, it must be mentioned. (The church was clearly present when I and II Peter were written, yet the word "church" was not used in either epistle.) There is also a huge problem with the second premise; that is, it can *only* be true if you accept the pre-Trib notion that the so-called "Tribulation saints" are not members of the church. As we have shown, this idea is clearly contradicted by Scripture. In the Revelation we learn that these believers not only "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus," but, along with all other members of the body of Christ, their names have been written "from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." (See Revelation 12:17 and 13:8). In other words, while pre-Tribulationists may wish to exclude them, the "Lamb" does not. Therefore, since neither premise is valid, the pre-Trib conclusion that the church has been removed must be rejected as *unsound*.

Conclusion

By now, you should have recognized Reason # 11 for what it is—merely another argument from silence. The problem, of course, is that this kind of argument can be used to prove anything. In fact, it could just as easily have been employed to prove the church is *not* in heaven during the Tribulation. Let me illustrate. There are a number of passages in Revelation 4 through 18 which describe events in heaven. However, nowhere in those texts will you find the word "church." Based on this "stunning silence" we could, therefore, conclude the church cannot possibly be in heaven during the Tribulation.

As an aside, it is interesting to note Walvoord's response to the fact that Scripture does not mention the church as being in heaven during the Tribulation. He counters by suggesting the church's presence in heaven "may be indicated by the twenty-four elders."³ To that we respond by saying, pre-Tribulationists cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, they argue that the word "church" is never applied to Tribulation believers, thus concluding that the church must have been removed from the earth. But on the other hand, when faced with the fact that the word "church" is not used of the 24 elders either, pre-Tribbers are loathe to come to the same kind of logical conclusion—which would be that the church must not arrive in heaven until after the Tribulation. The solution, of course, is simple. All pre-Tribbers have to do is recognize this argument for the logical fallacy it is, then they can reject it out of hand. Of course, once that is done, leaving Reason # 11 on the table might prove rather awkward.

Notes on Chapter 11.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 223.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
3. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 261.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Reason # 12 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"It preserves the credibility of Christ's word that Christians will be kept from the Tribulation."¹

The central question before us is simply this: Did Christ promise to keep Christians from the Tribulation? Pre-Tribbers profess that such a promise is found in Revelation 3:10. There we read, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." (Revelation 3:10). To assess this pre-Trib claim, we must first determine exactly what is meant by two key phrases: They are "keep from" and "the hour of testing."

The meaning of "keep from."

Pre-Tribbers hold that the Greek word for "from" (*ek*) should be interpreted "out of." That being the case, they believe the church "will be kept out of the hour of trial."² This, of course, would require a physical removal of the church before the hour of testing. Post-Tribulationists, on the other hand, do not think such a removal is necessary. That is because they believe "keep from" should be interpreted in the sense that the Lord will sustain and protect them *through* the trial. For support, they note a similar usage of *ek* in John 17:15. There the Lord said, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to *keep them from the evil one*." So, which is correct? According to noted scholar, Leon Morris, "The Greek is capable of either meaning."³ Thus, to argue that "keep from" requires the removal of the church is to be guilty of the fallacy of begging the question.

LaHaye does, however, raise a point which is worth considering. As part of this argument he alludes to the fact that believers will be martyred during the Tribulation. No doubt, for those who are martyred, the promise of being "kept through the trial" might, at least at first glance, ring a little hollow. There is a passage in Luke, however, which may shed light on the meaning of the Lord's promise. Speaking of the last days, He announced, "But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and **they will put some of you to death**, and you will be hated by all on account of My name." Then He continued by saying, "**Yet not a hair of your head will perish**. By your endurance you will gain your lives." (Luke 21:16-19). What this passage teaches is that surviving this life should not be our primary concern. Rather, we should be concerned that we remain faithful to our Lord, even unto persecution and death, and thus attain *eternal life*. With this in mind, it may well be that "keeping us from the hour of testing" is the Lord's way of saying He will see to it that we remain faithful to Him, no matter what that "hour" brings.

The meaning of the "hour of testing."

From the text, it seems clear that the hour of testing is a reference to the cataclysmic events of the end-times. The question is, does it represent the entire seven-year Tribulation, as pre-Tribbers assume? Or does it refer to a smaller segment of the Tribulation—such as the period of the bowl judgments? Unfortunately, we can determine little from the text itself. The Greek word for hour is variously used to denote "a short while" (I Thessalonians 2:17), a twelfth of a night or day, and even a definite point in time, i.e., "the hour is at hand" (Matthew 26:45). **Nowhere, however, is it ever identified with a seven-year Tribulation period.** All this to say, there does not appear to be a Biblical warrant for assuming the hour of testing encompasses the entire Tribulation. That means pre-Tribbers cannot assume that being delivered from the "hour of testing" is the same as being delivered from the Tribulation. Therefore, the claim of a promise of deliverance from the Tribulation in Revelation 3:10 is based on a logical fallacy—begging the question.

Conclusion

It appears that, once more, pre-Tribulationists are guilty of putting words in the Lord's mouth. The so-called promise to keep Christians from the Tribulation simply cannot be supported from Scripture. Therefore, using that assumption as a premise in arguing for the pre-Trib view can only result in an *unsound* conclusion. Moreover, this supposed promise directly contradicts the words of our Lord when He said, "Then *they will deliver you to tribulation* and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." For all these reasons, Reason # 11 should have no bearing on whether one should be a pre-Tribulationist.

Notes on Chapter 12.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 223.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
3. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 80.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In Chapter Seven, we saw how pre-Tribulationists used a "comfort argument" to advance imminency. Unfortunately, we see the same argument being employed once more.

Reason # 13 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"The pre-Trib view maintains I Thessalonians 4:13-18 as a comfort passage and explains why the young Christians at Thessalonica were so upset about the death of their loved ones."¹

There are actually two arguments contained within Reason # 13, but each stems from the same passage. To better assess the merits of these two claims, we should first become familiar with that text. I Thessalonians was likely the earliest of Paul's epistles. It was written to answer a number of questions from that young and enthusiastic church in the capitol of Macedonia. Apparently one of the questions had to do with the fate of some believers who had recently died. According to noted pre-Trib scholar, Charles Ryrie, the church was grieving because they were concerned that those who died before the Lord returned might "lose all hope of sharing in the glorious reign of Christ." He continues by noting, "Paul's answer is the reassuring affirmation that the dead will be raised and will share in the kingdom."² This new information was presented as part of the revelation of the end-time event known as the rapture (See 4:13-17). Then, following that revelation, we find this concluding statement, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." (I Thessalonians 4:18).

First Argument

Based on this closing admonition to "comfort one another," pre-Tribbers developed an argument (one which we have seen twice before) to advance their position:

- First Premise: "Rapture teaching was given to comfort those who mourn!"³

- Second premise: "The threat of going through the Tribulation is hardly a doctrine of comfort to the saints." ⁴
- Conclusion: "The comfort aspect of the Rapture demands that we escape the Tribulation, being raptured out of this world before God's wrath begins." ⁵

Needless to say, this is not a *sound* argument since the conclusion is an example of the *fallacy of division*. That means "believing some property of a whole to be automatically a property of every part of that whole." ⁶ In other words, the mere fact that revealing the rapture brought comfort, does not mean every other aspect of the event must also impart comfort. (See Chapters 5 and 7 for expanded treatments of the so-called "comfort" argument.)

Second Argument

In the second part of Reason # 13, LaHaye offers a truly novel interpretation of the circumstances surrounding the disclosure of the rapture in I Thessalonians 4. In his opinion, the believers at Thessalonica were not upset because they feared their departed brethren were going to miss out on the Lord's glorious reign. Rather, he suggests, "the Thessalonians are grieving because they fear their loved ones will miss the rapture." ⁷

For such an interpretation to be possible, two questionable assumptions are required. First, we must assume the church at Thessalonica was knowledgeable about the rapture *before* I Thessalonians was written! After all, they could hardly grieve over missing the rapture if they didn't know it existed. Second, we are asked to assume that if, indeed, Paul had revealed the rapture to them, he had somehow failed to mention that the dead in Christ were to be included. That means the purpose of the rapture account in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 was merely to correct the Apostle's earlier, incomplete revelation.

The question is, should we accept these assumptions? Frankly, we think not. Surveying Paul's writings, we observe that the rapture was never a prominent topic in his teaching. As an example, Paul ministered in the city of Corinth for a period of 18 months. But it was not until several years later, when he penned I Corinthians, that the Apostle finally got around to revealing the *mystery* of the rapture. By contrast, Scripture indicates Paul spent little more than three weeks in Thessalonica. So, we reason, if Paul did not deem it necessary to present the rapture during his 18 months in Corinth, why should we assume he introduced the doctrine during the few days he ministered in Thessalonica? Because of this, it seems far more reasonable to view I Thessalonians 4 as the *initial* revelation of the rapture. Of course, this understanding would render the second argument a logical impossibility; i.e., the church grieving over an event they had not yet heard about.

Conclusion

The first argument is based on a logical fallacy; the second argument is based on assumptions which cannot be supported from logic or from Scripture. For these reasons, we conclude that Reason # 13 adds absolutely nothing to the case for the pre-Trib rapture.

Notes on Chapter 13.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 224.
2. Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1808.
3. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 222.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
6. Nicholas Capaldi, *The Art of Deception*, p. 120.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Based on the analysis of the previous 13 arguments, we have learned that much of what pre-Tribbers believe is based, not on what the Bible says, but on what it doesn't say. In other words, arguments from silence. But that should come as no surprise. Since the Bible never directly attests to their views, pre-Tribulationists have no other option. The final argument, as you will see, is but another example of this approach.

Reason # 14 for being a pre-Tribulationist

"It explains why there is no Bible instruction on preparation for the Tribulation." ¹

LaHaye writes, "Doesn't it seem strange that although the Bible advises Christians how to face ordinary, everyday troubles, it submits absolutely no instructions related to the worst time the world will ever face, a period filled with frightening events that have never even come close to being fulfilled? Pre-Tribs have a simple answer. We won't be there!" ²

This is what is known as an *a priori* demonstration. It is a lesser to the greater argument. Because God provides advice for dealing with our lesser (everyday) problems, it is evident and certain that He also provides advice for the most serious trials we face. But, we are told, no instructions are provided for the coming Tribulation—the period which is supposed to constitute the greatest trial of human history. The question arises, why this glaring omission? Pre-Tribbers believe there is only one explanation. That is, God never intended for the church to face the Tribulation. Rather, it was always His plan to remove the church (by means of the rapture) before the Tribulation begins. Here is their formal argument:

Part I.

- First Premise: The Bible advises Christians on all the troubles they will face (conclusion from the *a priori* demonstration).
- Second Premise: There are no instructions in the Bible for dealing with the Tribulation.
- Conclusion: Christians will not face the Tribulation.

Part 2.

- First Premise: Christians will not face the Tribulation (conclusion from Part 1).
- Second Premise: Only the pre-Trib view holds that Christians will not face the Tribulation.
- Conclusion: Christians should be pre-Tribulationists.

Clearly, this entire argument turns on the validity of the Second Premise (of Part 1)—the statement that the Bible contains no instructions related to the Tribulation. The fact of the matter is, this claim can be shown to be false on two counts. First, there are countless Biblical principles which, being timeless in nature, can be applied to any period of persecution or affliction—including the Tribulation. Second, despite pre-Trib claims to the contrary, the Bible offers a number of detailed instructions which are specifically directed to believers of that period.

A Sampling of Principles for dealing with periods of affliction (tribulation)

It is self-evident that the Bible doesn't cover every specific problem we will face (i.e., there are no instructions for when the car won't start.) It does, however, provide general principles for dealing with a wide range of troubles in life. Following are just a few of the Biblical principles which could well apply to the particular trials of the Tribulation.

The reality of tribulation in this life

1. Tribulation is to be expected in the life of a Christian. "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). And again, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). In fact, afflictions are a believer's destiny. "...for you yourselves know we have been destined for this." (I Thessalonians 3:3).
2. Persecution is also to be expected. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (II Timothy 3:12).
3. All periods of calamity come from the hand of the Lord. "The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these." (Isaiah 45:7).
4. But, God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted (tried) beyond what we are able to handle. (I Corinthians 10:13). Though sin is definitely in view here, there is also an implication that God will limit the amount of adversity that comes to us.

How we are to react to tribulation in life

1. We are not to be surprised at the presence of affliction. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation." (I Peter 4:12).
2. We must never think the presence of affliction suggests the Lord has abandoned us. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:35-37).
3. We should keep a proper perspective, weighing present trials against eternal blessings. "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." (II Corinthians 4:17).
4. We should count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations (See James 1:2-4). And also, "But we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character, and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out with in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:3-5).

Some specific instructions for periods of intense affliction

1. We are not to fear death at the hands of our persecutors. "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28).
2. We must entrust ourselves entirely to the Lord. "Let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." (I Peter 4:19).
3. We should trust the Lord to see us through all our trials. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all." (Psalms 34:19). And also, the Lord is "my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of distress." (Jeremiah 16:19).
4. We must make prayer and love toward the brethren our top priorities. "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all keep fervent in your love for one another." (I Peter 4:7-8).
5. We must persevere during times of tribulation. (See Romans 12:12). "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 'For yet in a little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul

has no pleasure in Him.' But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." (Hebrews 10:36-39). And again, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal Glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." (I Peter 5:10).

Biblical instructions specifically for believers during the great Tribulation

Beyond these general Biblical principles, there are a host of passages which can only apply to believers of the Tribulation period.

General conditions during the Tribulation

1. Expect deception. Antichrist will come in accordance with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders. (II Thessalonians 2:9) In addition, "many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many." (Matthew 24:11).
2. God will cause unbelievers to accept Satan's deceptions. "And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false." (II Thessalonians 2:11).
3. Know that believers will be hated among all peoples because of the name of Jesus. (Matthew 24:9)
4. Many who call themselves Christians will fall away when persecution starts. (II Thessalonians 2:3). And from the parable of the sower, "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away." (Matthew 13:20-21).
5. Even friends and family will betray Christians to avoid persecution. (Matthew 24:10, Luke 21:16)
6. Some believers (but not all) will be put to death. (Luke 21:16).
7. Believers will be sealed with a mark on their foreheads. This mark will enable them to avoid the judgments from God which will soon come upon the earth. (Revelation 7:3, 9:4).
8. There will be great signs in the heavens, and men will be perplexed at the roaring of the sea and the waves. There will be a great earthquake in which all the mountains and islands will be moved out of their places. Because of all this, men will be "fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world." (Luke 21:26 and Revelation 6:12-13).

Specific instructions for the period

1. Pray for strength to escape all the things that are about to take place. (Luke 21:36).
2. "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap." (Luke 21:34).
3. Take heed and be on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is. (Mark 13:33).
4. Do not be concerned over material possessions. The earth itself is being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (II Peter 3:7).
5. When you are arrested, do not be anxious about what you should say, "but say whatever is given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit." (Mark 13:11).
6. Do not worship the beast or take his mark. Though doing so might save your life in the short run, it would cause you to become subject to "the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger." (Revelation 14:9).
7. Your victory over Satan is to be accomplished by spiritual means. (A) The blood of Christ; realizing that the final victory was secured at the cross. (B) The word of your testimony; your witness to the saving power of the blood of Christ. (C) Not loving your life even unto death; your willingness to lay down your life rather than deny Christ. (See Revelation 12:11).

Encouragement to believers during the Tribulation

1. Despite what some teach, the Holy Spirit is not removed and will be there to assist you during the Tribulation. (Mark 13:11).
2. The Bible testifies that Tribulation believers do, indeed, keep the commandments of God and faith in Jesus. (Revelation 12:17, 14:12).
3. God will cause people to minister to your needs during the Tribulation. (Matthew 26:34-46).
4. "By your endurance you will gain your lives." (Luke 21:19). Though some of you will die, "not a hair on your head will perish." (Luke 21:18).
5. Even if you are killed, your deeds will follow you. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" (Revelation 14:13).
6. Everyone whose name is written in the book, will be rescued. (Daniel 12:1).
7. Regarding those days, Daniel writes, "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Daniel 12:3).

Seeing this extensive list, you might wonder, how is it that pre-Tribbers claim there are no instructions for the Tribulation? Clearly, the evidence seems to indicate otherwise. They would respond by saying these instructions are not for Christians; they are for the "Tribulation saints." You will remember from Chapter 4 that pre-Tribulationism has its

own peculiar definition of the church—one which excludes everyone before Pentecost and after the rapture. Granted, using that definition, it is nonsense to think that any of these Tribulation instructions are for the church. After all, the church has no need for them because it won't be here during the Tribulation. (The only way the church could use them is if the church was still here—then, by definition, it would no longer be the church.) This is, of course, a circular argument.

Conclusion

There are clearly numerous instructions to prepare believers for the coming Tribulation. Pre-Tribbers, however, do not recognize them as being directed at the church, since, by definition, no members of the church will experience the Tribulation. In other words, the Second Premise begs the question as whether the saints of the Tribulation are excluded from the church. That renders Reason # 14 *unsound*, making it of no use in the case for pre-Tribulationism.

But beyond the logical fallacy of this Reason, there is a practical aspect to be considered. Some say pre-Tribulationism does no harm, but they are wrong. Considering what is at stake, holding that the Bible provides no instructions for the Tribulation is courting disaster. Because of this position, the passages listed above are seldom taken seriously by pre-Tribulationists. And why should they be? It's like the child who doesn't study his algebra because he thinks he'll never use it again. My friend, this ought not be the case concerning passages which, to at least one generation, are matters of life and death. To those who live to see the Lord's return, these passages provide crucial guidance. Unfortunately, when that day does come, the legacy of pre-Tribulationism will be that many of them saw fit to ignore that guidance and were thereby forced to suffer the consequences.

Notes on Chapter 14.

1. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, p. 224.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

CHAPTER 15

Final Conclusions

Assume, if you will, that the issue of the pre-Trib rapture is being decided in a courtroom, and you are a member of the jury. The question you are to decide is simply this: Based on the evidence presented, should we believe in the pre-Trib rapture? As you assume this duty, you are reminded of the importance of being impartial. How you prefer the end-times to unfold does not matter; what you previously thought does not matter. All that matters is the evidence before you. And what is that evidence? It is none other than the 14 Reasons we have been considering. Since no passage explicitly teaches the pre-Trib view, it follows that it must be established through indirect means. That's where the 14 Reasons come in. The hope was that these arguments will be sufficient to establish the pre-Trib rapture as a bona fide Biblical doctrine. There is, however, something which must not be forgotten: These arguments are all the pre-Tribulationists have. That means, if they fail, so does the pre-Trib rapture.

In truth, the case described above would never go to a jury. Rather, it would be dismissed for lack of evidence. No court in the land would consider these pre-Trib arguments as evidence. Once the logical fallacies are stripped away, it becomes apparent that there isn't a shred of Biblical proof in any of the 14 Reasons. That, of course, leads us to the inescapable conclusion that the pre-Trib rapture is NOT in the Bible. And if it isn't in the Bible, it isn't in God's plans. "Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

Weighing the pre-Trib rapture in the balance

But you say, what's the harm? Why should we care if someone believes in the pre-Trib rapture? If nothing else, it keeps believers on their toes, or so we are told. Unfortunately, after weighing that potential benefit against the harm which has been wrought, we find plenty of reasons for standing against pre-Tribulationism. Here are three specific areas in which the church has been injured by the pre-Trib rapture theory or by its proponents:

The harm brought to Christian truth

In Chapter One we made reference to the noble-minded Bereans of Acts 17. Remember, they were the ones who listened eagerly to what the Apostle Paul had to say, but nevertheless took time to carefully weigh his message against the Scriptures. We wonder, what was it that made them noble-minded in the eyes of Paul? Perhaps the answer is that they had great respect for truth. So much so, they were unwilling to judge Paul's message for themselves. Instead, they subjected what they heard to the word of God—which was their sole standard for measuring truth. Happily, because Paul's message was in agreement with the Sacred Writings, "many of them believed" (Acts 17:12). No doubt, those who believed would heartily echo the words of James 1:18, "He brought us forth *by the word of truth*, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures."

Unfortunately, seeking truth is not always a simple task. In the words of Isaac Watts, "deceit and evil are often clothed in the shapes and appearances of truth and goodness." He goes on to explain that it is the place of logic "to strip off the outward disguise of things, and to behold them in their own nature."¹ Regrettably, the pre-Trib view is replete with arguments which are made to appear Biblical, but the application of logic reveals they are not.

With this in mind, we pose the following question: Would God decree a doctrine which can only be apprehended through faulty reasoning? Before you answer, observe the manner in which other important truths are revealed. In introducing the doctrine of justification, Paul devotes six chapters in the book of Romans, laying out its development in logical, step by step progression. Now, contrast this with how the pre-Trib rapture is "revealed." First, through

fallacious reasoning, pre-Tribulationists realize there are two peoples of God, then define the church so it reflects that division. (Never mind that those excluded from the church are written in the Lamb's book of life). Then, by means of another logical fallacy they conclude there are two future Comings of the Lord (though the Bible mentions just one). Next, they assume one of those comings must occur before the Tribulation. Why? Because they have fallaciously reasoned the church will be delivered from the Tribulation and the rapture is the means of that deliverance. Incredibly, every link in the pre-Trib system is forged by applying one logical fallacy or another to the Scripture. Can anyone honestly believe this is how God reveals His plans? Or that the *word of truth* is rooted in logical fallacies? Bottom line, the methods used to produce the pre-Trib rapture are an embarrassment to the cause of Christ, who is, Himself, truth personified.

The harm brought to Christian fellowship

No one can deny that large numbers of Christians are leaving the pre-Trib camp. We would do well to analyze why this is happening. Certainly it has nothing to do with publicity. Virtually all television and radio teachers still promote pre-Tribulationism. And Christian bookstores are overflowing with pre-Trib publications. The answer, it seems, is that believers are beginning to search the Scriptures for themselves, and because of that, they are coming to the realization that the pre-Trib rapture is simply not in the Bible.

As defections from the ranks increase, it is natural that pre-Tribulationists would want to defend their beliefs. But what sort of defense are they mounting? Unfortunately, much of their efforts seem directed toward denigrating those who disagree with them. In logic, these are called arguments *ad hominem*, meaning against the man. As an example, LaHaye suggests there are five possible reasons why people "attack" the pre-Trib position. They are anger, jealousy, pride, personal vendetta, and shabby scholarship.² Far more serious, however, is the implication that those who oppose pre-Tribulationism may be in league with the devil. He writes, "When the pre-Trib position is attacked, undermining the faith of a young Christian, or when a minister embraces a different theory and divides his church by teaching it, Satan notches another victory."³ Apparently, in his mind the pre-Trib rapture has become so intertwined with the Christian faith, that to attack one is to undermine the other. Can anyone argue that such attitudes are beneficial to Christian fellowship?

The harm brought to Christian preparedness

In the closing chapter of II Timothy, Paul gave his young protégé a solemn charge. He urged him to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." (4:2). Why these instructions? Because, he said, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths." (4:3). Surely, the pre-Trib rapture is such a doctrine. Today, countless believers tenaciously cling to it, not because of any basis in Scripture, but simply because that's how they hope the end-times will unfold.

I once asked a pastor friend if his congregation was prepared for coming persecution. He responded, "No, not at all." As was suggested in the last chapter, the Bible has much to say about tribulation in general. It also has considerable insight into conditions during the Great Tribulation at the end of the age. Thanks to the dominance of pre-Trib teaching, most think that information is not relevant; its for the "Tribulation saints." But I ask you: What if we Christians ARE the Tribulation Saints? It is my hope that if you are a pre-Tribulationist, you will least accept the possibility that the church will go through the Tribulation. That way, if the end-times do not unfold as you have been taught, you will not think God has "broken His promise." What's more, you will be better prepared to take on the unique challenges the end of the age has to offer, even though it will no doubt involve suffering hardship "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

A Final Word

In closing, I leave you this promise which was spoken by an angel of God. Speaking of the end- times, the angel declared, "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." If ours happens to be the generation which sees the coming of the Lord in glory, and if we do, in fact, go through the Tribulation, may God grant that this bright shining be our eternal legacy.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen" (Revelation 22:20).

Notes to Chapter 15.

1. Isaac Watts, *Logic*, p.3.
2. Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, pp.179-182.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 183.