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OF BIBLE
PROPHECY

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INTRODUCTION

NEVER BEFORE HAS fascination with Bible prophecy been more acute than it is today. Part of that interest is due to the uncertainty of our times. Our world has become more and more marked by political instability and contentious strife, particularly in the Middle East. All over the globe, societies are characterized by this threat, along with our society's declining morals, rampant crime, and governmental turmoil. People living in these turbulent times want answers, and many are turning to the Bible to get them. Despite easy access to modern technologies and conveniences, including computers that can process billions of bits of information in the blink of an eye, many people still believe that the Bible, a book written thousands of years ago, holds the answers to life and the life hereafter.

Unfortunately, most seekers get little help in the area of prophetic study. Unless they take it upon themselves to make prophecy a special study, they are not fully equipped to answer many of the questions they may have on this vitally important subject. And important it must be, for 28 percent of the Bible was prophetic when it was written! Evidently God considered it important to include prophetic passages in nearly every book in the Bible, and He used, almost exclusively, prophets to record the Scriptures. As the apostle Peter said, "Holy men of God [the prophets] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21 NKJV). The accuracy of their inspired writing, particularly the prophetic portions, proves without question that the Bible is of divine origin.

Nothing motivates Christians like the study of prophecy. It puts an evangelistic fire

in the heart of the church, it gives believers a vision for world missions, and it injects a desire to live a holy life in an age of unholiness. That is why the LaHaye Prophecy Library was launched in conjunction with Harvest House Publishers several years ago. This *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* is a key book in the series and may in fact be one of the most comprehensive. With the help of Dr. Wayne Brindle, we have compiled a team of prophecy experts who have written on the most important subjects of prophetic study. They may differ slightly on minor points of discussion, but they are all in agreement with the major issues of biblical eschatology, particularly in terms of holding to the pretribulational, premillennial view of the end times. The topics covered in this encyclopedia have been arranged alphabetically for ease of study, and the articles have been written to appeal to both those who are new to prophecy and those who are experienced students of the subject. We hope this volume will inspire you to search the Scriptures and become, as the apostle Paul admonished, "Approved to God...rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Our sincere prayer is that these articles will inform your mind, bless your heart, and stir your soul with the blessed hope of Jesus' coming. As our Lord Himself instructed us, we are continually watching for His imminent return to call us home to be with Him. In the meantime, we are challenged and admonished to keep watching, be ready, and continue serving Him until He comes (Matthew 24:42-46).

Tim LaHaye
Ed Hindson

ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

THE PHRASES *abomination of desolation*, *desolating abomination*, and *abomination that makes desolate* refer to violations of the ritual purity of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. They translate the Hebrew term *shiqqutz(im) m'shomem* and the Greek term *bdelugma tes eremoseos*, and they appear in prophecies about the desecration and defilement of the Temple in both A.D. 70 and at the end of the age.

OLD TESTAMENT TERMS

In the Old Testament, the phrase occurs only in Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). It conveys the feeling of horror that God's people feel when they witness criminal and barbaric acts of idolatry. These acts rendered the Temple ritually unfit for the worship and service of God.

Daniel laments the foreign domination of Jerusalem and desolation of the Temple: "How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?" (Daniel 8:13 NASB). In Daniel 12:11 we read of a foreign invader abolishing the regular sacrifice and substituting "an abomination of desolation." The word "abomination" shows how appalled Daniel is at the forcible intrusion of idolatry into a place of sanctity in order to cause defilement.

NEW TESTAMENT TERMS

In the New Testament, the phrase appears only in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14), where Jesus has Daniel's prophecy in mind. The term *eremos* ("desolation") does appear in Luke 21:20, but it does not refer to the technical phrase and describes the condition of Jerusalem in general, not the Temple in particular. Jesus uses the same word in Matthew 23:38, and even though He is referring to the Second Temple, He is predicting its destruction (rather than its desecration) and God's judgment upon it. This is quite distinct from the desecration caused by the abomination of desolation, which results in divine

judgment not upon the Temple but upon the one who desecrates it (see Daniel 9:27). Daniel's and Jesus' use of the phrase clearly influenced other prophetic scriptures (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 11:1-2).

The New Testament uses *bdelugma* (the Greek word translated "abomination") four times (Luke 16:15; Revelation 7:4-5; 21:27). The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses it 17 times. It comes from a root term that means "to make foul" and "to stink." Thus it refers to something that makes one feel nauseous, and by implication, something morally abhorrent and detestable. As with the Hebrew meaning in the Old Testament, the New Testament Greek term points particularly to idols or idolatrous practices. The Greek word *eremoseos* (translated "desolation") means "to lay waste, make desolate, bring to ruin" (see Matthew 12:25; Luke 11:17; Revelation 17:16; 18:17,19). The Septuagint uses it to describe the desolation of the Land as a result of desecration and exile.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

In both Hebrew and Greek, the phrase *the abomination of desolation* is an unusual grammatical construction. The best explanation for this is the literary and theological linkage of *abomination* and *desolation* in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. These texts treat extensively the desecration and defilement of the Temple, and they frequently mention the abominations and desolations of pagan profanation of the Sanctuary (Jeremiah 4:1,27; 7:10; 44:22; Ezekiel 5:11,14-15; 7:20) as well as the foreign invaders who will further desecrate and destroy the Temple (Jeremiah 4:6-8; Ezekiel 6:11; 7:20-23). Jeremiah 44:22 in particular states that Israel's abominations have caused the desolation of the Land and made it "an object of horror" (compare Ezekiel 5:11,15; 7:20-24; 36:19-21).

This brief survey shows that the Israelites considered acts of ritual impurity and especially of foreign invasion of the Temple as ultimate violations of sanctity and as a sign of judgment. The Jews were extremely careful to

prevent such acts and even built a protective fence around the Second Temple. It included a warning inscription promising death to any non-Israelite who passed beyond it into the court of the Israelites. The New Testament (Acts 21:27-28) records the violent opposition of a Jewish crowd who believed Paul had taken a Gentile proselyte (Trophimus) into the Temple to offer sacrifice. They accused Paul of "defiling the holy place" (the Temple). With this background, we can understand why the future act of desecration by the abomination of desolation is the climax of Daniel's seventieth week and signals the intensification of God's wrath in the second half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-21; Mark 13:14-19).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the construction of the Second Temple, a host of actual and would-be desecrators of the Temple invaded Jerusalem. However, Daniel appears to be predicting the invasion of the Syrian-Greek ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.), who erected an idol in the Temple near the Brazen Altar. In Daniel 11:31 we read, "Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress [Temple compound], and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation." This occurred in 167 B.C. In response, the Jewish priests revolted and rededicated the Temple (an event commemorated as the Feast of the Dedication in John 10:22-23), leading to a Jewish military overthrow of Antiochus' forces.

Some critical scholars have dismissed an eschatological interpretation of the abomination of desolation in Daniel, assuming all references must refer to Antiochus' desecration and claiming Daniel was written *after* this event. However, Jesus understood that the historical application of the phrase to Antiochus' desecration was a pattern of the ultimate eschatological event—the abomination of the Antichrist. Citing Daniel's prophecy (some 200 years after Antiochus' desecration) and referring to the still-future abomination of desolation (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14),

Jesus affirmed both His and Daniel's awareness of the eschatological application of the phrase.

PROPHETIC IMPLICATIONS

Jesus saw His message as a continuation of the biblical prophets and evaluated His generation in the light of them. He frequently cited Jeremiah and Zechariah and applied these prophecies to the soon-coming judgment of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as well as the more distant final judgment. For example, at the "cleansing of the Temple," Jesus quoted both Jeremiah 7 (which referred the threat of ritual defilement to the Temple following Jeremiah's Temple sermon) and texts in Isaiah and Zechariah (which referred to the Temple's future state). Jesus' Olivet Discourse also sets the Temple in an eschatological context. When the disciples heard Jesus' prediction of the Second Temple's destruction (Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6), they apparently connected it to the messianic advent at the end of the age and asked for a *sign* (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7; see also 1 Corinthians 1:22). The "sign" He gave them was that of Daniel's abomination of desolation (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14). This, then, was the sign that the Jewish nation was nearing the time of messianic deliverance and restoration, for the desecration of the Temple would begin the persecution of the Jewish people (that is, the "great Tribulation," Matthew 24:16-22; Mark 13:14b-20). Only the Messiah Himself will be able to bring them redemption from their enemies (Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27; Luke 21:28).

Luke's account does not include the abomination of desolation in the Temple because this is an eschatological event, and he has selectively focused on the immediate concern of the disciples (note the phrase "about to take place" in Luke 21:7) concerning *when* the predicted destruction of the Temple (and Jerusalem) would occur. For this reason he also omits the end-time persecution of the Tribulation (Greek, *thlipsis*), which is connected with this event, substituting the term "great distress"

(Greek, *anagke*), which better describes the local invasion and trampling of the city (Luke 21:23-24), fulfilled in the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Matthew and Mark place the abomination of desolation in the time when “the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). It separates the period of “tribulations” or “birth pangs” (Matthew 24:6-12; Mark 13:7-9) from the “great tribulation” period (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19). Luke does this in Luke 21:24 by separating the event of Jerusalem’s desolation (A.D. 70) and the times of the Gentiles (present age) from the time when “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

The abomination of desolation marks the midpoint of Daniel’s seventieth week, dividing the Tribulation into two divisions of lesser and greater intensity (Daniel 9:27). This corresponds to the “42 months” of Revelation 11:1-2 and the 1290 days of Daniel 12:11.

Preterists interpret the abomination of desolation (as they do most prophetic events) as having its ultimate fulfillment in the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. However, the events of the First Revolt that culminated with the destruction of A.D. 70 do not match the details in the “abomination of desolation” texts. None of the incursions by Roman officials during this time could be regarded as abominations that caused desolation because they did not affect the sacrificial system. Foreigners in the Temple may desecrate the Temple without defiling it. That is why the Jews could rebuild the Temple after its desecration and destruction by the Babylonians without the need of a purification ceremony (Ezra 3:2-13). Further, the entrance of the Roman general Titus (who destroyed the Temple) occurred only *after* the Sanctuary was already in flames and had been largely ruined and *after* the Jewish sacrifices had ceased. This is important to note since the abomination of desolation of which Daniel speaks, and to which Jesus refers, speaks only of the cessation of sacrifice in the Temple, not of the Temple’s destruction.

ESCHATOLOGICAL FOCUS

Any interpretation except the eschatological leaves us with unresolved details that we must either interpret in a nonliteral, non-historical manner, or dismiss altogether. The eschatological view also explains the meaning of types that await their anti-type for ultimate fulfillment. Moreover, Daniel’s seventieth week, and especially its signal event of the abomination of desolation, influenced the literary structure of the Olivet Discourse and the judgment section of the book of Revelation (chapters 6–19). Jesus’ interpretation of the order of the events of the seventieth week in the context of prophetic history appears to confirm an eschatological interpretation for Daniel 9:27. Matthew 24:7-14 predicts that persecution, suffering, and wars will continue to the end of the age, climaxing in a time of unparalleled distress (verses 21-22). This corresponds to “the time of Jacob’s distress” (Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7). Only *after* these events does Jesus make reference to Daniel 9:27 (verse 15) concerning the signal event of this time of Tribulation. If the seventy sevens (κβν, “weeks”) were to run sequentially, without interruption, then why does Jesus place this intervening period *before* the fulfillment of the events of the seventieth week? The text of Matthew in particular shows that Jesus was answering His disciples’ questions concerning His second coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). Jesus here explains that His coming is necessary for divine intervention and national repentance (verses 27-31; Zechariah 12:9-10) and will occur “after the tribulation of those days” (Matthew 24:29). According to Matthew, the events described in this period prior to the messianic advent could *not* have been fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem because these events usher in and terminate with the coming of Messiah.

Although the phrase *abomination of desolation* does not appear in Paul’s description of the end-time desecration of the Temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, he obviously has this event in view. For example, the Septuagint sometimes uses both *bdelugma* (“abomination”) and

anomia ("lawlessness") to refer to idolatrous practices. Thus in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Paul describes the figure who magnifies himself above every idol as "the man of lawlessness." In fact, Paul's explanation of this event serves as a commentary on both Daniel's "abomination of desolation" texts (particularly Daniel 9:27) and Jesus' statement of it as a "sign" in the Olivet Discourse. Moreover, Paul uses the event to answer the same time-related question of the end time that Jesus' disciples asked. This further affirms the eschatological interpretation of the abomination of desolation.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church to admonish Christians who had abandoned the normal affairs of life. They believed the imminent coming of Christ that Paul had previously espoused (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) was already set in motion (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul explained that before the "appearance" of the Messiah, the Antichrist must first appear (verses 3-9). The signal event that will manifest the Antichrist, whom this text refers to as "the man of lawlessness," "the son of destruction" (verse 3b), and "that lawless one" (verse 8), is his usurpation of God's place in the Temple (verse 4; see also Exodus 25:8). This act will reveal not only the Antichrist but also "the lie" (the deification of the Antichrist, Revelation 13:4-6,15) that will mark his followers (Revelation 13:16-18) and confirm them in the eschatological judgment that will occur at the coming of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

ABOMINATION OF THE ANTICHRIST

Paul introduces the desecration of the Temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 by saying that the man of lawlessness "exalts himself." He elevates himself "over every so-called god or object of worship." While this might indicate a superlative blasphemy of God such as in Revelation 13:6, the immediate setting is the future (rebuilt) Jerusalem Temple, and so the "objects of worship" are sacred vessels (see 2 Chronicles 5:5-7; Hebrews 9:2-5) and the "desolation" occurs within the innermost sacred part of the Temple (the Holy of Holies), where God's presence was previously mani-

festes (Exodus 25:22; 30:6; see also Ezekiel 43:1-7).

The abomination, however, is the Antichrist's act of enthroning himself in the place of deity to "display himself" (Greek, *apodeiknuntai*) as God (literally, "that he is God"). This blasphemous act fulfills Daniel's prediction that the Antichrist "will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods" (Daniel 11:36). With the satanic background of Revelation 12:9,12-17; 13:4-10, the abomination has allusions to Isaiah 14:13-14 and Ezekiel 28:2-9, where the usurping figures "raise [their] throne above the stars of God," "make [themselves] like the Most High," and declare, "I am god; I sit in the seat of the gods."

Despite the precedent of the literal interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, which clearly refers to the desecration of the historic Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, some interpret 2 Thessalonians 2:4 in a nonliteral manner, taking "the temple of God" metaphorically as a reference to the church. They view the act of desecration by the "man of lawlessness" as apostasy in the church. However, writing to a first-century audience at a time when the Second Temple was still standing, Paul's reference to "the temple of God" could only mean one place—the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

We also have other reasons for rejecting the symbolic interpretation and applying the prophecy to a literal Temple (and therefore a literal abomination of desolation): (1) In the few places where Paul used the Greek word *naos* ("temple") to mean something other than the actual Holy Place at Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21), he always explained his special meaning so that his readers would understand his metaphorical usage. (2) The word "temple" in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 has the definite article ("the temple") in contrast to Paul's metaphorical usage, where "temple" is usually anarthrous ("a temple)."³ (3) "In the temple of God" modifies the verb "takes his seat" (Greek, *kathisai*), a verb suggesting a definite locality,

not an institution (such as the church). If Paul were referring to apostasy in the church, he would better have expressed this with a verb for “enthronement” or “usurpation” rather than a verb that referred to the literal act of “taking a seat.”

The ante-Nicene church fathers affirmed the literal understanding of this passage. For example, Irenaeus (A.D. 185) wrote: “But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the Temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom.” Irenaeus’ literal interpretation of the Temple’s desecration is both eschatological and premillennial. By contrast, the symbolic or “spiritual” use of “temple” for the church does not appear in developed form until the third century A.D. with Origen, who was influenced by the allegorical interpretations of the Hellenistic idealist school of Philo.

Consequently, the eschatological interpretation of the abomination of desolation has both textual support and the witness of early church apologists. It warns us of the future day of deception and desolation at the midpoint of the Tribulation, which will call for divine judgment climaxing in the return of the Lord.

—RANDALL PRICE

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ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

THE FOUNTAINHEAD of Bible prophecy begins with the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18). This agreement is the “mother of all redemptive covenants,” and God’s blessings springing forth from it extend to all mankind throughout the ages.

AN UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT

The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional agreement or pact in which God reveals His sovereign election of Abraham and his descendants and declares His decrees for them. Arnold Fruchtenbaum (p. 570) explains, “An unconditional covenant can be defined as a sovereign act of God whereby God unconditionally obligates Himself to bring to pass definite promises, blessings, and conditions for the covenanted people. It is a unilateral covenant. This type of covenant is characterized by the formula ‘I will’ which declares God’s determination to do exactly as He promised.”

The covenant or treaty formats commonly used in the second millennium B.C. highlight the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. The Bible contains three kinds of covenants: (1) the royal grant treaty, (2) the suzerain-vassal treaty, and (3) the parity treaty.

The royal grant treaty is an unconditional, promissory covenant based on a king’s desire to reward a loyal servant. Examples include the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 15), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:8-17), and the Land of Israel covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

God confirmed and sealed the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15 through a unique procedure whereby He put Abram into a deep sleep and bound Himself to keep the covenant regardless of Abraham’s response. Since God is the only one who swore to keep the covenant, it is clearly an unconditional covenant, based solely on God. Thus, we can be absolutely confident that He will keep it

and bring to pass in history every stipulation of the agreement.

Comparing the Abrahamic covenant with parallel expressions in the ancient Near East shows that it is a royal grant treaty. Genesis 26:5 (NASB) says, "Abraham obeyed me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws." The term "law" is from the Hebrew *torah*, which basically means "to direct, teach, or instruct." The first verb of Genesis 26:5 is "obeyed," referring to Abraham's obedience to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1-2). This is similar to terminology found at Amarna in covenant contexts. The second verb is "kept," paralleling an Assyrian grant in which Ashurbanipal rewarded his servant Bultha with a grant because he "kept the charge of my kingship." Both of these verbs indicate a personal relationship rather than a legal code of ethics. Thus, obedience to *torah* flows from a covenant relationship with God.

Abraham's obedience was not based on legalistic compulsion but rather expressed his faithfulness to God. "A close examination of the context reveals no covenant stipulations which could be viewed as pure legislative or ethical codes. What the context does reveal is that God has praised His servant Abraham because he has been faithful to do whatever the Lord instructed him to do. He did it not out of compulsion to legislation, but in a faith response to the instruction of God" (Dean, p. 13).

Royal grant treaties or covenants were unconditional. This point is important for Bible prophecy because they emphasize that God is obligated to fulfill His promise specifically to the original parties of the covenant. For example, we believe that God must fulfill the promises He made to national Israel through unconditional covenants such as the Abrahamic, Davidic, and Land covenants. If this is true, then they must be fulfilled literally, and many aspects of their fulfillment are yet future.

Eugene Merrill (p. 26) observes: "As most scholars now recognize, the covenant and its circumstances were in the form of a royal

(land) grant, a legal arrangement well attested in the ancient Near East.... The Abrahamic Covenant... must be viewed as an unconditional grant made by Yahweh to His servant Abram, a grant that was to serve a specific and irrevocable function."

THE COVENANTAL STIPULATIONS

The Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) includes three major provisions: (1) *land* to Abram and Israel, (2) a *seed*, and (3) a worldwide *blessing*. A more complete breakdown of the covenant contains 14 provisions gleaned from the five major passages containing the treaty and its reconfirmations. Fruchtenbaum (p. 570) lists them as follows:

1. A great nation was to come out of Abraham, namely, the nation of Israel (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-2,7; 22:17).
2. He was promised a land specifically, the Land of Canaan (12:1,7; 13:14-15, 17; 15:17-21; 17:8).
3. Abraham himself was to be greatly blessed (12:2; 22:15-17).
4. Abraham's name would be great (12:2).
5. Abraham would be a blessing to others (12:2).
6. Those who bless will be blessed (12:3).
7. Those who curse will be cursed (12:3).
8. In Abraham all will ultimately be blessed, a promise of Gentile blessing (12:3; 22:18).
9. Abraham would receive a son through his wife Sarah (15:1-4; 17:16-21).
10. His descendants would undergo the Egyptian bondage (15:13-14).
11. Other nations as well as Israel would come forth from Abraham (17:3-4,6; the Arab states).
12. His name would be changed from Abram to Abraham (17:5).
13. Sarai's name was to be changed to Sarah (17:15).
14. There was to be a token of the covenant—circumcision (17:9-14).

THE EXPANSION OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

John F. Walvoord (pp. 44–45) summarizes the foundational importance of the Abrahamic covenant in the study of Bible prophecy. He states: “The Abrahamic covenant contributes to the eschatology of Israel by detailing the broad program of God as it affects Abraham’s seed... It is not too much to say that the exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant and its resulting interpretation is the foundation for the study of prophecy as a whole, not only as relating to Israel, but also for the Gentiles and the church. It is here that the true basis for pre-millennial interpretation of the Scriptures is found.”

The Abrahamic covenant is important to any discussion of Bible prophecy, for it expresses many unconditional decrees that will be expanded upon in subsequent revelation and thus surely fulfilled in history. This expansion of a biblical theme in the later revelation of Scripture has been called “progressive revelation.” We see this in God’s dealings with the nation and people of Israel throughout the Bible.

the Land of Canaan. Genesis 12:7 tells us that the Lord appeared to Abram in Canaan and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” The context shows that Abram understood the Lord to be referring to the Land of Canaan. The promise was clearly not just for Abram but for his descendants.

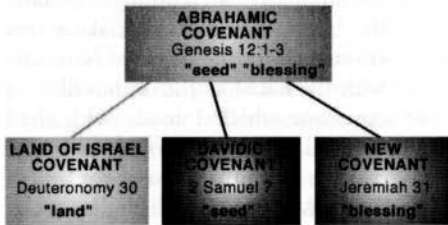
God further developed the Land promise just after Lot, Abram’s nephew, separated from Abram. At this time the Lord said to Abram: “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14-15). Again the promise emphasizes that God gave the Land to Abram and his descendants. The new element introduced is one of time—it is given *forever*. Much debate has occurred over this word. Generally its duration is determined by context. Unless otherwise indicated, it clearly refers to the duration of human history and can include eternity.

Genesis 15 provides the record of the actual covenant and describes the boundaries of the Land more precisely: “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates’” (Genesis 15:18 NASB).

God promised not only to make Abram the father of a nation but also to provide a homeland for that nation. A nation cannot be a nation without a homeland of its own. Apart from its homeland a people lose their ethnic and national identity. Amazingly, Israel maintained a national identity even after 1800 years of separation from their national homeland.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 expands this element of the Abrahamic covenant into the Land of Israel covenant (also called the Palestinian covenant). This passage teaches that all the Land promises that God has made to Israel will be fulfilled “when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse... and you return to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 30:1-2). God will fulfill this promise for national Israel after the Tribulation

ABRAHAMIC COVENANT



The Bible expands upon the three provisions of *land*, *seed*, and *blessing*. (See the chart above.) God enlarges these promises with new covenants: (1) the Land of Israel covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), (2) the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:4-17), and (3) the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Land of Israel Covenant

The first expansion of the Land promise came after Abram left Haran and arrived in

of history appear to have destroyed any such expectation.

—GARY YATES

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RAPTURE

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH is one of the most compelling and exciting prophetic events in the Bible. It is clearly taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (NKJV), where the apostle Paul provides us with these details:

This we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This passage of Scripture delineates five stages to the rapture: (1) The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout and with the sound of a trumpet, (2) the dead in Christ will

rise first, (3) we who are alive and remain on the earth will be "caught up" (Greek, *harpazo*) together with them in the clouds, (4) we will meet the Lord, and (5) we shall always be with Him. The apostle Paul also unveiled what he called a mystery pertaining to the rapture. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, He explained that some Christians would not sleep (die), but their bodies would be instantly transformed.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

This is what will happen when the rapture takes place: Without warning, the bodies of all believers who have died since the day of Pentecost will suddenly be transformed into new, living, immortal, resurrected bodies. Even those whose bodies have long since decayed or whose ashes have been scattered out over the oceans will receive a new body. This new body will be joined together with the person's spirit, which Jesus will bring with Him. Then the bodies of those who have likewise accepted Christ as their Savior and are alive at that moment will also be instantly translated into new immortal bodies. Together, all believers will be instantaneously transported into the heavens to meet the Lord. Those who are alive and have rejected the salvation of Jesus Christ will remain behind on earth and will witness a miraculous event of astonishing proportions—the sudden mass disappearance of millions upon millions of people from the face of the earth.

THE BLESSED HOPE

The rapture is often referred to as "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) because it provides assurance to believers who are concerned about the coming Tribulation, and it offers comfort to those who long to be reunited

THE EVENTS OF THE RAPTURE

1. The Lord Himself will descend from His Father's house, where He is preparing a place for us (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

2. He will come again to receive us to Himself (John 14:1-3).

3. He will resurrect those who have fallen asleep in Him (deceased believers whom we will not precede—1 Thessalonians 4:14-15).

4. The Lord will shout as He descends ("loud command," 1 Thessalonians 4:16 NIV). All this takes place in the "twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

5. We will hear the voice of the archangel (perhaps to lead Israel during the seven years of the Tribulation as he did in the Old Testament—1 Thessalonians 4:16).

6. We will also hear the trumpet call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16), the last trumpet for the church. (Don't confuse this with the seventh trumpet of judgment upon the world during the Tribulation in Revelation 11:15.)

7. The dead in Christ will rise first (the corruptible ashes of their dead bodies are made

incorruptible and joined together with their spirits, which Jesus brings with Him—1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

8. Then we who are alive and remain will be changed (or made incorruptible by having our bodies made "immortal"—1 Corinthians 15:51,53).

9. We will be caught up (raptured) together (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

10. We will be caught up in the clouds (where dead and living believers will have a monumental reunion— 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

11. We will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

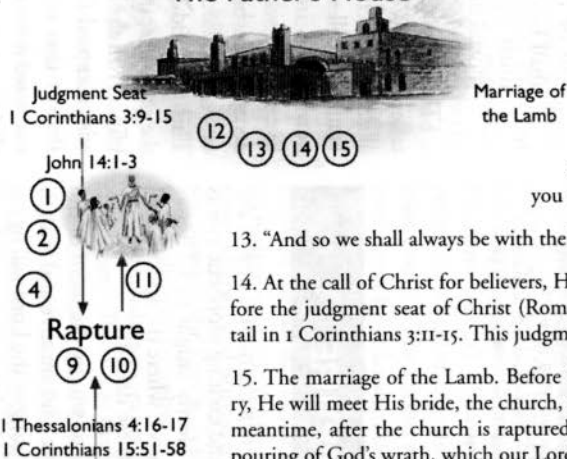
12. Christ will receive us to Himself and take us to the Father's house "that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

13. "And so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

14. At the call of Christ for believers, He will judge all things. Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10), described in detail in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. This judgment prepares Christians for...

15. The marriage of the Lamb. Before Christ returns to earth in power and great glory, He will meet His bride, the church, and the marriage supper will take place. In the meantime, after the church is raptured, the world will suffer the unprecedented outpouring of God's wrath, which our Lord called "the great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

The Father's House



Church Age

Tribulation 7 Years

Millennium 1000 Years

with their departed loved ones who share a faith in Christ.

The more than 300 biblical references to the second coming of Christ clearly show that His return has two distinct phases. The contrasting elements cannot be merged into a single event (see the article titled "Second Coming of Christ"). In the first phase, He will come suddenly to rapture His church in the air and take all believers to His Father's house in fulfillment of His promise in John 14:1-3. There, they will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8-10). While the believers are in heaven, those left behind on the earth will experience the trials of the seven-year Tribulation period. In the second phase of Jesus' second coming (the glorious appearing), He will return to earth in great power and glory to set up His millennial kingdom. The entire second coming has been compared to a two-act play (the rapture and the glorious appearing) with a seven-year intermission (the Tribulation). The apostle Paul distinguishes between these two phases in Titus 2:13, where he refers to the rapture as "the blessed hope" and the return of Christ to the earth as "the glorious appearing."

WHAT DOES RAPTURE MEAN?

The English word *rapture* comes from the Latin word *raptus*, which in Latin Bibles translates the Greek word *harpazō*, used 14 times in the New Testament. The basic idea of the word is "to suddenly remove or snatch away." It is used by the New Testament writers in reference to stealing or plundering (Matthew 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 10:12,28-29) and removing (John 6:15; Acts 8:39; 23:10; Jude 23).

The New Testament employs a third use, which focuses on being caught up to heaven. It describes Paul's "third heaven" experience (2 Corinthians 12:2,4) and Christ's ascension to heaven (Revelation 12:5). Obviously, *harpazō* is the perfect word to describe God suddenly taking up the church from earth to heaven at the first part of Christ's second coming.

WILL THE RAPTURE BE PRETRIBUTIONAL?

The Church Is Not on Earth in Revelation 4-18

The common New Testament term for *church* (Greek, *ekklēsia*) is used 19 times in Revelation 1-3, which deals with the historical church of the first century. However, Revelation uses *church* once more—at the very end (22:16), where John returns to addressing the first-century church. Most interesting is the fact that nowhere during the Tribulation period is the term *church* used in reference to believers on earth.

John's shift from his detailed instructions for the church to his absolute silence about the church for many chapters is remarkable and totally unexpected if in fact the church continued into the Tribulation. If the church were to experience the Tribulation (the seventieth week of Daniel 9), then surely the most detailed study of Tribulation events would include instructions for the church. But it doesn't. The only explanation for this frequent mention of the church in Revelation 1-3 and total absence of the church on earth until Revelation 22:16 is a pretribulation rapture, which will relocate the church from earth to heaven prior to the Tribulation.

A Posttribulation Rapture Is Inconsequential

If God miraculously preserves the church through the Tribulation, why have a rapture? If it is to avoid the wrath of God at Armageddon (at the end of the Tribulation), then why would God not continue to protect the saints on earth (as is postulated by posttribulationism) just as He protected Israel (see Exodus 8:22; 9:4,26; 10:23; 11:7) from His wrath poured out upon Pharaoh and Egypt? Further, if the purpose of the rapture is for living saints to avoid Armageddon, why also resurrect the saints (who are already immune) at the same time?

If the rapture took place in connection with our Lord's posttribulation glorious appearing, the subsequent separation of the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

would be redundant. Separation would have taken place in the very act of translation.

If all Tribulation-era believers are raptured and glorified after the Tribulation and just prior to the inauguration of the millennial kingdom, who then will be left to populate and propagate the kingdom? The Scriptures indicate that God will judge the living unbelievers at the end of the Tribulation and remove them from the earth (see Matthew 13:41-42; 25:41). Yet they also teach that children will be born to *believers* during the millennium and that these children will be capable of sin (see Isaiah 65:20; Revelation 20:7-10). This would not be possible if all the believers on earth were glorified through a posttribulational rapture.

A posttribulational rapture and the church's supposed immediate return to earth leaves no time for the *bema*—the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). For these reasons, a posttribulational rapture makes no logical sense. A pretribulational rapture, by contrast, does not leave us with these insurmountable difficulties.

The Tribulation Is Not Impending

All through the New Testament epistles, God gave many instructions to the church, including warnings, but never once are believers warned to prepare for entering and enduring the Tribulation (Daniel's seventieth week).

The New Testament warns vigorously about coming error and false prophets (Acts 20:29-30; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1-3; Jude 4) and against ungodly living (Ephesians 4:25-5:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 12:1). The New Testament even admonishes believers to endure in the midst of present tribulation (1 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; and all of 1 Peter). However, the New Testament is absolutely silent about the church preparing for the Tribulation as described in Revelation 6-18.

The Scriptures would certainly not be silent about such a major and traumatic period of time for the church. If the rapture were to happen partway through or at the end of the Tribulation, one would expect the epistles to teach the presence, purpose, and conduct of

the church during the Tribulation. However, we find none of this teaching whatsoever. Only a pretribulation rapture satisfactorily explains the lack of such instructions.

The Content of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Let us hypothetically suppose for a moment that the rapture is not pretribulational. What would we expect to find in 1 Thessalonians 4? How does this compare with what we observe there?

We would expect the Thessalonians to be joyous over the fact that loved ones are home with the Lord and will not have to endure the horrors of the Tribulation. But we discover that the Thessalonians are actually grieving because they fear their loved ones have missed the rapture. Only the possibility of a pretribulation rapture accounts for this grief.

We would also expect the Thessalonians to be grieving over their own impending trial rather than over loved ones. Furthermore, we would expect them to be inquisitive about their own future doom. But the Thessalonians have no fears or questions about the coming Tribulation.

Finally, we would expect Paul, even in the absence of interest or questions by the Thessalonians, to provide instructions and exhortation for such a supreme test, which would make their present tribulation seem microscopic in comparison. But we find not even one indication of any impending tribulation of this kind. Given the scenario in 1 Thessalonians 4, only the possibility of a pretribulation rapture makes sense.

John 14:1-3 Parallels 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

John 14:1-3 refers to Christ's coming again. It is not a promise to all believers that they will go to Him at death. Rather, it refers to the rapture of the church. Note the close parallels between the promises of John 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. First, consider the promises of a presence with Christ: "... that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3), and "Thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Second, note the promises of comfort: "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1), and

“Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Jesus instructed the disciples that He was going to His Father’s house (heaven) to prepare a place for them. He promised them that He would return and receive them so that they could be with Him wherever He was.

The phrase “wherever I am,” while implying a continued presence in general, here means presence in heaven in particular. Our Lord told the Pharisees in John 7:34, “Where I am you cannot come.” He was not talking about His present abode on earth, but rather, His resurrected presence at the right hand of the Father. In John 14:3, “where I am” must mean “in heaven,” or 14:1-3 would be meaningless.

A posttribulation rapture would require that the saints meet Christ in the air and immediately descend to earth without experiencing what our Lord promised in John 14. Because John 14 refers to the rapture, only a pretribulation rapture satisfies the language of John 14:1-3 and allows raptured saints to dwell for a meaningful period of time with Christ in His Father’s house.

The Rapture and the Return

A comparison of the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) with the glorious appearing (Matthew 24-25) reveals at least eight significant contrasts or differences. These differences demand that the rapture occur at a significantly different time from Christ’s glorious appearing:

1. At the rapture, Christ comes in the air and returns to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At the glorious appearing, Christ comes to the earth to dwell and reign (Matthew 25:31-32).
2. At the rapture, Christ gathers His own (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). At the glorious appearing, angels gather the elect (Matthew 24:31).
3. At the rapture, Christ comes to reward (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At the glorious appearing, Christ comes to judge (Matthew 25:31-46).

4. At the rapture, resurrection is prominent (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). At the glorious appearing, resurrection is not mentioned.
5. At the rapture, believers depart the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). At the glorious appearing, unbelievers are taken away from the earth (Matthew 24:37-41).
6. At the rapture, unbelievers remain on earth. At the glorious appearing, believers remain on earth (Matthew 25:34).
7. Christ’s kingdom on earth is not mentioned at the rapture. At the glorious appearing, Christ has come to set up His kingdom on earth (Matthew 25:31,34).
8. At the rapture, believers will receive glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). At the glorious appearing, survivors will not receive glorified bodies.

The Promise of Deliverance

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus promised, “I will keep you from [Greek, *ek*, “out of”] the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.” This passage makes it clear that Christ’s intention is to keep the church *out of* the Tribulation period.

The Greek preposition *ek* admittedly has the basic idea of emergence. But this is not always so. Two notable examples are 2 Corinthians 1:10 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10. In the Corinthian passage, Paul rehearses his rescue from death by God. Paul did not emerge from death but rather was rescued from the potential danger of death.

Even more convincing is 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Here, Paul states that Jesus is rescuing believers out of the wrath to come. The idea is not emergence out of, but rather protection from entrance into divine wrath.

If Revelation 3:10 means immunity or protection within as other positions insist, then several contradictions result. First, if protection in Revelation 3:10 is limited to protection from God’s wrath only and not Satan’s, then Revelation 3:10 denies our Lord’s request in John 17:15.

Second, if Revelation 3:10 means total immunity, then of what worth is the promise

in light of Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:14, where martyrs abound? The wholesale martyrdom of saints during the Tribulation demands that the promise to the Philadelphia church be interpreted as “keeping out of” the hour of testing, not “keeping within.”

The church is to be delivered from the wrath to come. The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 that we should “wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” The context of this passage points to the rapture. The church must be removed from the earth before the Tribulation begins in order to be delivered from the wrath to come.

The church is not appointed to wrath. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Once again, the context of this passage shows it is referring to the rapture. Because the Tribulation specifically involves God’s wrath, and because Christians are not appointed to His wrath, the church must be raptured out of the way before the Tribulation begins.

If the church is raptured at the end of the Tribulation, no one will be left to populate the millennium. Just prior to the beginning of the millennium, all sinners (those who reject Jesus Christ as Savior) who survive the Tribulation will be cast into hell according to Matthew 25:46. Should the rapture occur at the end of the Tribulation, all Christians would be taken from the earth as well, leaving no one on earth with a natural body to repopulate the planet during the millennium. The “righteous” (the “sheep”) who enter the millennium are the saints who survive the Tribulation—those who were unsaved at the time of the rapture but became believers during the Tribulation. Many of these saints will be martyred during this time, but those who survive the Tribulation will repopulate the earth during the millennium. For this to occur, the rapture must take place prior to the Tribulation instead of at the end.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. *Since the phrase “to meet the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 can refer to a friendly city going out to meet the visiting king and escorting him back to the city, does not this phrase point decidedly to a posttribulational rapture?*

First, this Greek term can refer to either meeting within a city (Mark 14:13; Luke 17:12) or going out of the city to meet and return back (Matthew 25:6; Acts 28:15). So the use of this particular phrase is not at all decisive. Second, remember that at the glorious appearing, Christ is coming to a hostile people in general who will eventually fight against Him at Armageddon. The pretribulational rapture best pictures the king rescuing, by a rapture, His faithful followers who are trapped in a hostile world and who will later accompany Him when He returns to earth to conquer His enemies and set up His kingdom (Revelation 19:11-16).

2. *Why does Paul write in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 for believers to be alert to “the day of the Lord” if they’re not going to face it due to being raptured before the Tribulation?*

Paul exhorts believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 to be alert and living godly in a “day of the Lord” context just as Peter does in 2 Peter 3:14-15, where the “day of the Lord” experience is clearly at the end of the millennium (because the old heavens and earth will be destroyed and replaced with the new). In such passages are exhortations for true believers to live godly lives in the light of God’s future judgment on unbelievers.

3. *Does not Matthew 24:37-42, where people are taken out of the world, teach a posttribulational rapture?*

In fact, Matthew 24:37-42 teaches just the opposite. First, it teaches that Noah and his family were left alive

while the whole world was taken away in death and judgment. This is exactly the sequence to be expected at Christ's glorious appearing as taught in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-43), the parable of the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50), and the "sheep and goats" judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46). In every one of these instances, at the glorious appearing, unbelievers are taken away in judgment, and the righteous believers remain.

4. *Does not a pretribulation rapture result in two second comings of Christ, whereas Scripture teaches there is only one second coming?*

Not at all. Regardless of the rapture position one holds, Christ's second coming is one event that occurs in two parts—Christ coming in the air to rapture the church and Christ coming to earth to conquer the world and set up His kingdom.

5. *If pretribulationism is true, why doesn't Revelation 4–19 mention the church in heaven?*

It is true that the Greek word for church (*ekklēsia*) is not used of the church in heaven in Revelation 4–19. However, that does not mean the church is invisible. The church appears in heaven at least twice. First, the 24 elders in Revelation 4–5 symbolize the church. Second, the phrase "you saints and apostles and prophets" in Revelation 18:20 clearly refers to the church in heaven. Also, Revelation 19 pictures the church (the bride of Christ) in heaven prior to her triumphal return. Which rapture scenario best accounts for the church being in heaven in these texts at this time? A pretribulation rapture.

6. *Why is Revelation addressed to the church if the church will not experience the Tribulation period due to the rapture?*

God frequently warned Israel in the Old Testament of impending judgment even though the generation who received the prophecy would not experience it. Both Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:6) and Peter (2 Peter 3:14-15) exhorted their readers to godly living by referring to a future judgment that their readers would not experience. John followed the same pattern in Revelation. He alerted the church to God's future judgments so believers would properly warn the unsaved world of judgment to come.

7. *Is the trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 the same as the trumpet of Joel 2:1; Matthew 24:31; and Revelation 11:15?*

A careful study of the almost 100 uses of "trumpet" or "trumpets" in the Old Testament quickly warns the student of Scripture not to equate the trumpets in any two texts without a great deal of corroborating contextual evidence. For example, trumpets are used for warning (Jeremiah 6:1), for worship and praise (2 Chronicles 20:28; Psalm 81:3; 150:3; Isaiah 27:13), for victory (1 Samuel 13:3), for recall (2 Samuel 2:28; 18:16), for rejoicing (2 Samuel 6:15), for announcements (2 Samuel 20:1; 1 Kings 1:34; 2 Kings 9:13), and for dispersal (2 Samuel 20:22), to name a few.

The trumpets in Joel and in the New Testament are used for several distinct purposes. The trumpet of Joel 2:1 is a trumpet of alarm that the day of the Lord is near (see Jeremiah 6:1). The trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 is a trumpet that announces the approaching king (see Psalm 47:5). The trumpet of Matthew 24:31 is a trumpet call to assembly (see Exodus 19:16; Nehemiah 4:20; Joel 2:15). The trumpet of Revelation 11:15 announces victory (see 1 Samuel 13:3). Scripture offers no compelling reason to equate the rapture trumpet with any of these other trumpets. Therefore,

these texts cannot be used to determine the time of the rapture.

One of the chief characteristics of the rapture is that it will be sudden, unexpected, and surprising. "No man knows the day or the hour," so we should live so as to "be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44). Only a pre-tribulation rapture preserves an imminent ("at any moment") return of Christ. Throughout the ages, Christians have understood the rapture to be imminent. Nothing could be a better motivator to holy living than knowing that Jesus could come at any moment.

—TIM LAHAYE AND
RICHARD MAYHUE

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RAPTURE, HISTORY OF

CRITICS OF THE PRETRIBULATIONAL rapture view often refer to its lack of historical support. For several years, opponents of the pre-tribulation rapture position have argued that it was invented by John Darby in the mid-1800s and was never mentioned before that. These arguments generally reason that because this teaching is less than 200 years old, it cannot be biblical, or Christians would have held to this view many years earlier. Ultimately, biblical truth must be determined by the clear teaching of Scripture, not how that teaching has been perceived throughout his-

tory. However, a substantial amount of evidence reveals a belief in a pretribulation rapture long before John Darby.

EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

The earliest documents of the ancient church (including the New Testament canon) reflect a clear premillennialism. However, minor controversy surrounds the relation of the rapture to the Tribulation. Pretribulationists point to the early church's clear belief in imminency as evidence that pretribulationism was held by at least a few from the earliest times.

As was typical of every area of the early church's theology, initial views of prophecy were undeveloped and sometimes contradictory, containing a seedbed out of which would develop various and diverse theological viewpoints. Finding clear pretribulationism spelled out in the early church fathers is difficult, but some pretribulation elements are clear. When systematized with their other prophetic views, these elements contradict posttribulationism and support pretribulationism. For example, the apostolic fathers clearly taught the pretribulation feature of imminency.

A cursory examination of the early church fathers reveals that they were predominantly premillennialists or chiliasts. Clear examples exist in the writings of Barnabas (ca. 100–105), Papias (ca. 60–130), Justin Martyr (110–165), Irenaeus (120–202), Tertullian (145–220), Hippolytus (ca. 185–236), Cyprian (200–250), and Lactantius (260–330). The early church fathers largely expected the church to be suffering and persecuted when the Lord returns. However, they also believed in the imminent return of Christ, which is a central feature of pretribulation thought. This lack of precision has led to debate among scholars as to how to interpret the early church fathers' writings.

Expressions of imminency abound in the apostolic fathers. Clement of Rome (90–100), Ignatius of Antioch (98–117), The Didache (100–160), The Epistle of Barnabas (117–138), and The Shepherd of Hermas (96–150) all speak of imminency. Their statements abound

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