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**SOME CONTEMPORARY PREMILLENNIAL VIEWS OF THE RAPTURE**

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**A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary**

---

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity**

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**by  
Kenneth E. Geeden  
July 1964**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For several years a difference of opinion has existed regarding whether or not the Church would go through the Great Tribulation. This is commonly known as the "Rapture Question." It is regrettable that the majority of the proclamations heard from evangelical holiness pulpits regarding this subject have been based on limited observation and very little scriptural evidence. In recent years the author has been frequently caught in the cross-fire of these opinions relative to this question. While one position has been rather persuasive from the aspect of popularity, the other has supplied a more logical interpretation of the Scriptures relevant to this subject. It is out of this background that the problem of this study developed.

#### I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The problem of this study centers around the fulfillment of the personal needs of this author along three lines. First, what are the major contemporary premillennial views of the Rapture?<sup>1</sup> Secondly, what are the scriptural bases for these positions? Thirdly, what relevance do these respective views have to the

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<sup>1</sup>In fulfilling the first two purposes of this study, an annotated bibliography (included in the bibliography listed in this volume) was prepared of all the books available in Asbury Theological Seminary library, published since 1950, dealing with this subject.



proclamation of the Second Coming of Christ?

The Biblical bases of these representative positions, as stated by selected leading scholars, have been set forth as a first step toward the solution of the problem. Another move toward achieving a solution has been to evaluate the validity of each representative's position and the objections raised against that position. As a final effort toward the solution of the problem, some practical conclusions have been set forth in an effort to show (1) the attitude one should hold in the discussion of this subject, (2) a possible reason for the differing positions, and (3) how these particular views are to affect the message of the Gospel.

Importance of the study. Due to the nature of the problem, the significance of this research was first of all felt most deeply by the author himself. He has been personally searching for a better understanding of this subject, in order that he might be more adequately prepared to divide aright the Word of God. A more relevant reason, as far as theology is concerned, is the relation this subject has to eschatology (the doctrine of last things). This doctrine is considered essential to Christianity by many scholars. One has stated it this way: "A so-called Christianity that is cold or hostile towards the interests of the life to come has ceased to be Christianity in the historic sense of the word."<sup>2</sup> The importance of this study might also be

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<sup>2</sup>Geerhardus Vos, Pauline Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 63.

emphasized by some Biblical facts relative to the truth of the Second Advent. This truth is referred to in all but four New Testament books. It is mentioned 318 times in 216 chapters of the New Testament, while such chapters as Matthew 24, 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 are devoted entirely to the subject. It is very conspicuous in I Thessalonians (each chapter closes with some reference to it) and Revelation. It is mentioned on an average of one out of every twenty-five verses in the New Testament. It is referred to twice as often as the Atonement, eight times as much as the First Coming, and one-fifth of the Bible is prophecy and one-third of prophecy has to do with the Return of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The International Congresses on Prophecy would also lend some evidence of support for research on the subject of the Rapture.<sup>4</sup>

A fourth reason is found in a statement made by Dr. Wilbur M. Smith in his introduction to When the King Comes Back by Oswald J. Smith. Speaking of the increase of publications on prophetic subjects, he said, "I believe . . . that a new book in this area now appears every thirty-six hours."<sup>5</sup> A more important reason than this, however,

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<sup>3</sup>Dalbert R. Rose, "Eschatology" (Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1960), p. 5. Note: These facts were originally given by Dr. William Arnett in a chapel message at Asbury Theological Seminary in 1960.

<sup>4</sup>William Culbertson and Herman B. Gertz (ed.), Understanding the Times (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956). See also John F. Walvoord, The Return of the Lord (Finlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 88-89.

<sup>5</sup>Oswald J. Smith, When the King Comes Back (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1957), p. 5.

may be seen in a statement that appeared on the cover page of the February, 1955, issue of Christian Life, "Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation? Once limited to theologians, the discussion [of this question] today rages between laymen who realize its importance."<sup>6</sup>

The words of a well-known radio minister, who would be aware of the spiritual pulse of many radio listeners, gives this additional evidence:

One of the most debated questions today is . . . "Will the Church of Jesus Christ pass through the coming Great Tribulation, or will she be raptured before that awful day of the Lord comes upon the earth?" This is one of the burning questions of the day, and many believers are at a loss as to what to believe.<sup>7</sup>

These opinions, the writings of scholars, and the facts stated above, along with the personal need of the author, have served to validate the importance of this study.

Limitations of the study. Since the writer personally subscribes to a premillennial view of the Second Coming of Christ, this laid the general circumference within which this study has been conducted. In order that the effort put forth might have greater relevancy, this investigation was further restricted to only those statements of views that were published between 1950 and 1964. Probably the major limitation of this research has been the fact that it is only representative, since only one scholar has spoken for each view. The

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<sup>6</sup>Christian Life, "Cover Page Statement" 16:cover, February, 1955.

<sup>7</sup>Martin R. DeHaan, Coming Events in Prophecy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), p. 127.

writer is fully aware that this is not the best method of research, but under the circumstances, particularly in one instance, there was no other alternative. It is the sincere belief of the author that the most representative scholars have been selected. The request of the author would be that all who evaluate this material will do so in the light of these facts.

## II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Exact definitions cannot be given because there are such numerous variations within each interpretation. All those listed below, however, are submitted as essentially correct.

Millennium. The word, millennium, is derived from two Latin words, mille, meaning thousand, and annum, meaning year. The literal meaning is, therefore, a thousand years. The prefixes, Post, A, and Pre, as used with the word designate the particular view held regarding the thousand years.<sup>8</sup>

Postmillennialism. Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the Kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that the world eventually will be Christianized, and that the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of right-

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<sup>8</sup>Lorraine Beettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957), p. 5.

eousness and peace, commonly called the Millemium; hence, a figurative interpretation of the thousand years.

Amillennialism. Amillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the Bible does not predict a "Millemium" or period of world-wide peace and righteousness on this earth before the end of the world. As a result, the passages referring to the thousand years are given a spiritualized interpretation and the millemium is considered to be the reign of God in the hearts of men in this present age.

Premillennialism. Premillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the Second Coming of Christ will be followed by a period of world-wide peace and righteousness, before the end of the world, called "the Millemium" or "Kingdom of God," during which Christ will reign in person as King on this earth. The principal method of interpretation used by this system is: "Unless there is some reason intrinsic within the text itself which requires a symbolic interpretation, or unless there are other Scriptures which interpret a parallel prophecy in a symbolic sense, we are required to employ a natural, literal interpretation."<sup>9</sup>

The Church. The Greek noun, ekklesia ("assembly"), is used at least two ways in the New Testament: (1) organizationally, to refer to a concrete assembly of the followers of God describing (a) one congrega-

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<sup>9</sup>George E. Ladd, Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 111.

tion (Matt. 18:17), (b) a group of congregations (Acts 21:18), or (c) all organized groups, either of the theocratic church in the wilderness, the organized totality of Israel (Acts 7:38) or of the apostolic churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16); (2) organically, to refer to the general assembly or universal household of God, that is, to all believers.

Imminence. The meaning of imminence applies to an event that is threatening or promising to occur immediately. For the purposes of this study, it will have reference to the event of Christ's return (parousia, Second Coming, Second Advent, Revelation, and Rapture).

Revelation. Usually, "Revelation" is considered to be the latter part of the two phases of Christ's return. Many times, as in this paper, it is called the "parousia," "Second Advent," "Second Coming" or "Blessed Hope." The distinctive factor is that it refers specifically to a downward movement of Christ to the earth and a revealing of the Son of man.

Rapture. The word, "rapture," comes from the Latin rendering of "caught up" (rapiemur).<sup>10</sup> Its usage in this investigation is to describe the event by which the saved, who are alive at Christ's return, are translated into the resurrection of life without passing through death. A synonymous term is "translation." The Rapture, or translation, is usually considered to be the upward movement of believers as at

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<sup>10</sup>George E. Ladd, Jesus Christ in History (Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 1963), p. 57.

Christ's return. Many (post-tribulationists especially) consider this to be an event which will take place simultaneously with the Revelation of Christ.

The Tribulation. Within premillennialism the expressions, "the Tribulation" and "the Great Tribulation," are usually considered to be synonymous and mean an unequalled period of suffering for humanity, at least a portion of which will be administered by Antichrist. In the majority of cases (the pre-tribulation view), the Tribulation conveys the thought of seven specific years of sorrow and persecution which immediately precede the millennium.

Antichrist. The title which is usually given to the last great adversary of Christ that shall appear in the tribulation period is Antichrist. For some, this will mean a distinct but dominating person, while for others, it means a supreme world system which is in opposition to Christ.

Pre-tribulationism. The rapture view which holds the Tribulation to be an event which follows the Rapture of the Church from the earth is known as pre-tribulationism.

Mid-tribulationism. The mid-tribulation rapture view is essentially the same position as pre-tribulationism, with the exception that the interval of time between the Lord's coming for His saints (Rapture) and His coming with them (Revelation) is shortened (usually by three

and one-half years).<sup>11</sup>

Post-tribulationism. The rapture view which holds that Christ returns at the close of the Great Tribulation period, raptures His Church, and then immediately reveals Himself with His Church to the world is called post-tribulationism.

### III. ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE THESIS

Three of the remaining chapters of this thesis include the presentations and discussion of the selected premillennial views. The three premillennial rapture views selected for discussion in this paper are: Pre-tribulationism, Reactionary Post-tribulationism and Classical Post-tribulationism. The nature of each position and scriptural basis of each position will be set forth along with objections and conclusions.

A final chapter is a summary of the paper followed by some practical conclusions. An annotated bibliography of all books examined by the author that have had any immediate influence upon this study has been included. Charts have also been included in the Appendix, in order that the clearest possible understanding might be obtained.

The Biblical text employed throughout this study is that of the American Standard Version of 1901.

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<sup>11</sup> Because mid-tribulationism was considered by so many scholars to be essentially the same as pre-tribulationism, it was not specifically considered in this study. Another factor was the small amount of material available which supported this view, especially within the time limitation of this research.



## CHAPTER II

### PRE-TRIBULATIONISM AS REPRESENTED BY JOHN F. WALVOORD

#### I. THE NATURE OF PRE-TRIBULATIONISM

The pre-tribulation interpretation regards the coming of the Lord and the translation of the Church as occurring immediately before the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of a final seven-year period before the Second Advent. Based on a literal interpretation of Daniel's prophecy, it is held that there has been no fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 in history; therefore, it foretells of a future period, familiarly called "the Tribulation." "At the translation, before the seven years, Christ will return to meet the church in the air; at the second advent, after the seven years, Christ will return with His Church from heaven to establish His millennial reign on earth."<sup>1</sup> In one of Walvoord's writings, he expresses the nature of pre-tribulationism in what he calls a "Calendar of Future Events." First, he lists the present age which includes three areas: (a) the gathering together of a church from both Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 16:18, Eph. 5:25-27), (b) the progress of Christendom (Matt. 13), and (c) the growing apostasy (II Tim. 3:13). The next event is the imminent translation of the Church (I Thess. 4, I Cor. 3:11-15, 15:51-52, II Cor. 5:10-11, John 14:3). The third event is the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27, Ezek. 38-39, Rev. 13). The judgment of

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<sup>1</sup>John F. Walvoord, The Rapture Question (Finlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, 1957), p. 51.

of the living Gentiles follows next (Matt. 25:31-46), and then comes the regathering and judgment of Israel (Ezek. 20:34-38). The sixth event is the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6), which is followed by the final great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). The final event is the coming of the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1, II Pet. 3:12).<sup>2</sup>

The most important factor about the nature of pre-tribulationism, as far as this study is concerned, is the chronological placement of the translation or Rapture of the Church. The scriptural basis upon which such a conclusion rests is the next subject of consideration.

## II. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

In representing the pre-tribulational position, Walvoord has set forth, in one of his works, as many as fifty arguments<sup>3</sup> for this particular view of the Rapture. It seems that for the purposes of this study, however, six principal reasons for the translation of the Church will be sufficient. They are as follows: (1) the doctrine of imminency, (2) the nature of the Church, (3) the nature of the Tribulation, (4) the removal of the Holy Spirit, (5) the necessity of an interval between the translation and the Second Coming, and (6) the contrast between the translation and the Second Coming. Only the scriptural basis of these reasons will be considered.

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<sup>2</sup>Walvoord, The Return of the Lord, pp. 19-20, 22-26.

<sup>3</sup>For an analysis of these fifty arguments, see Appendix B of J. Barton Payne's book, The Imminent Appearing of Christ, pp. 177-181.

### The Doctrine of Imminency

In scripturally supporting this distinctive of pre-tribulationism, Walvoord provides many references. Those set forth here, however, are only representative passages. "The hope of the return of Christ to take the saints to heaven," says Walvoord, "is presented in John 14 as an imminent hope."<sup>4</sup>

Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; 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 come again, and will receive you<sup>5</sup> unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:1-3)<sup>5</sup>

He feels that the imminency of this passage is evident from the fact that there are no teachings of intervening events, nor are the prospects of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ qualified by signs or prerequisite events.<sup>6</sup> Also the comfort which the teaching expresses is viewed to be a significant factor in its emphasis upon the imminency of Christ's return.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the exhortation of John 14:1-3, the charge, "wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:18), could only be for those who had been taught an imminent hope. "In I Thessalonians 1:10, they are described as those who 'wait for his Son from

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<sup>4</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup>The reader is reminded that all Biblical quotations are from the American Standard Version, 1901.

<sup>6</sup>Walvoord, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.<sup>8</sup>

The word "wait" is in the present tense. They had turned to God in one act, but there remained the constant, day by day expectation. In other words, they were constantly looking for the return of the Lord, the coming of the Lord for His saints.<sup>9</sup>

It is the opinion of Walvoord that most of the immediate significance of the Church's hope would be lost if the coming of Christ was impossible until they had passed through the tribulation period. For example, in I Thessalonians 5:6, the Church is exhorted to "watch and be sober"; therefore, such a command is unrealistic if the coming of Christ was greatly removed from their expectation.<sup>10</sup>

In Titus 2:13, our future hope is described as "looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." While the appearing of the glory of Christ to the world and to Israel will not be fulfilled until the second coming to establish the kingdom on earth, the church will see the glory of Christ when she meets Him in the air. This is the express teaching of I John 3:2: "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (A. V.). Again, it is difficult to make realistic a command to "look" for the glory of Christ if . . . the event is separated from us by great trials and persecutions which in all probability would cause our destruction.<sup>11</sup>

The exhortation of I John 3:3, "And every man that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as he is pure," has its most significance if

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>9</sup>John F. Walvoord, The Thessalonian Epistles (Finlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, 1955), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

Christ's coming is imminent.<sup>12</sup> Upon this evidence the conclusion is that "the teaching of the coming of the Lord for the church is always presented as an imminent event . . ."<sup>13</sup>

### The Nature of the Church

The important role the meaning of the Church plays in pre-tribulationism is expressed by Walvoord in the following statement:

The premillennial system of interpretation has especially relied upon a proper understanding of the doctrine of the church as a body distinct from Israel and from saints in general. What is essential to premillennialism becomes an indispensable foundation in the study of pre-tribulationism. It is safe to say that pre-tribulationism depends upon a particular definition of the church, and any consideration of pre-tribulationism which does not take this major factor into consideration will be largely beside the point.<sup>14</sup>

The pre-tribulation definition of the Church, according to Walvoord, is that ecclesia, or the Church, "is never used [ in the New Testament ] of an assembly or body of saints except in reference to saints of the present age."<sup>15</sup> "The teaching that the body of Christ in the New Testament is a separate entity," says he, "is supported by the predictive statement of Christ in Matthew 16:18: 'upon this rock I will build my church.' The figure of speech rests upon a concept of a future undertaking."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the body of Christ, or the Church. The Israelites who were saved under the old economy and living at the time of Pentecost are placed within the body of Christ, in the opinion of Walvoord.<sup>17</sup>

He is also persuaded that specific promises have been made to the Church which will necessitate its removal from the earth before the Tribulation. One such promise is that the Church is to be "saved from wrath" (Rev. 5:9, I Thess. 1:9-10, 5:9). The following is a statement by Walvoord regarding I Thessalonians 5:9, in particular:

This passage of Scripture teaches that Christ is coming for His church before the Day of the Lord begins, before the day of trouble pictured in Revelation and all through the Bible overtakes the world.<sup>18</sup>

"The church therefore cannot enter 'the great day of their wrath' (Rev. 6:17)."<sup>19</sup> The Church, according to I Thessalonians 5:4, is not to be overtaken by the Day of the Lord, which Walvoord equates with the Tribulation, as will be noted later. The specific promise to the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10) that they would be kept from the hour of temptation is also lifted out as evidence for the Rapture of the Church before the Tribulation.

An additional factor which Walvoord thinks to be significant in this area is "the characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers

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<sup>17</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>Walvoord, The Thessalonian Epistles, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 194.

before a divine judgment is inflicted upon the world as illustrated in the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc. (II Pet. 2:6-9).<sup>20</sup>

He also regards the Scriptures as clearly teaching that all the Church will be raptured at the coming of Christ for the Church (I Cor. 15:51-52, I Thess. 4:17).<sup>21</sup> To establish this point, Walvoord emphasizes the fact that "there is no reference to the church as the body and bride of Christ in any of the tribulation passages. Believers in the tribulation are referred to only by general terms such as saints and the elect--terms used for believers all through the Bible. Thus in Revelation, Chapter 4-19, describing the tribulation, there is no mention of the church as a body of believers."<sup>22</sup>

"The real issue," says Walvoord, "is whether Jews and Gentiles are presented as the same body in the Old Testament."<sup>23</sup> It is his opinion that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament strictly maintains the distinction between Jew and Gentile.<sup>24</sup> In illustrating this, Walvoord uses three features which he feels are distinctive to the Church. The first is the indwelling presence of Christ evidenced by Colossians 1:26-27: "Even the mystery which hath been hid for ages and generations: but now hath it been manifested to his saints, to whom God

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>22</sup>Walvoord, The Return of the Lord, p. 83.

<sup>23</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-32.

was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"<sup>25</sup>

The second is the promise of the translation of the Church, which the Old Testament believers never received (I Cor. 15:51-52, I Thess. 4:13-18).<sup>26</sup> A third distinctive of the Church which Old Testament believers did not have is the relationship of Christ, the bridegroom, to the Church, the bride (Eph. 5:22-23).<sup>27</sup> Although Walvoord recognizes the historical allegory of the book of Hosea, which declares Israel to be the wife of Jehovah, he, nevertheless, contends that "the new relationship to Christ, contemplated in the bride figure, is distinct from anything anticipated in the Old Testament and further substantiates the distinctive character of believers in the present age."<sup>28</sup>

Another significant factor is 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 or as the bride."<sup>29</sup>

It is, therefore, concluded on the basis of the usage of the word, ecclesia, in the New Testament, the specific promises to the

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-36.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 39.



Church, and the obvious contrasts in the character of the Church to believers in the Old Testament or the future millennium, that the body of believers in the present age which composes the Church has a distinct place in God's plan and program, and as such it may be expected that God will fulfill His program by translating the Church out of the earth before the Tribulation.<sup>30</sup>

### The Nature of the Tribulation

Pre-tribulationism, as represented by Walvoord, maintains the scriptural distinction between the Great Tribulation and tribulation in general.

The Scriptures teach plainly . . . that in sharp contrast to the general tribulation, which all may expect, a future period of unprecedented tribulation is in prospect which will overshadow and be distinct from all previous times of trouble.<sup>31</sup>

This unprecedented tribulation Walvoord equates with "the day of the Lord" in the Old Testament. Commenting on Revelation 6:16-17, he says, "The picture we have here of the great tribulation, the time of trouble on the earth, is identical to the picture of the Old Testament revelation of the beginnings of the Day of the Lord."<sup>32</sup>

According to his view, the Great Tribulation passages in the Old and New Testaments reveal "a twofold purpose in the time of great tribulation: (1) to bring to conclusion 'the times of the Gentiles' (Luke

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<sup>30</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, pp. 38-39.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>32</sup>Walvoord, The Thessalonian Epistles, p. 80.

21:24); (2) to prepare for the restoration and the regathering of Israel in the millennial reign of Christ following the second advent."<sup>33</sup> In sustaining these conclusions, Walvoord presents the following major tribulation passages: "But from thence ye shall seek Jehovah thy God, and thou shalt find him, when thou searchest after him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, in the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and hearken unto his voice:" (Deut. 4:29-30).

This first reference to the tribulation brings out the special relationship of this period to Israel . . . . The obvious purpose of this spiritual awakening is one of preparation of Israel for the coming millennial kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

All the main elements of the Tribulation are mentioned in Jeremiah 30:4-11:

And these are the words that Jehovah spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith Jehovah: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child: wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds; and strangers shall no more make him their bondman; but they shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith Jehovah; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will

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<sup>33</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

correct thee in measure, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished.

Other passages are: Daniel 7:7-8, 19-27, 9:27, 11:36-45, 12:11-13; Joel 2:1-11, 28-32; Zephaniah 1:14-18, and Zechariah 13:8-14:2.<sup>35</sup>

In the New Testament passages, Matthew 24:15-30, I Thessalonians 5:1-11 and II Thessalonians 2:1-12, the theme of the Great Tribulation is continued and enlarged. The reference in Matthew confirms the same major elements found in the Old Testament passages. The Thessalonian passages reveal this to be a period which will be dominated by "the man of sin," and for those walking in darkness there will be sudden destruction. "While the tribulation period is characterized by wickedness and apostasy it will nevertheless be a period of great harvest of souls."<sup>36</sup>

"The major Scripture portion in the New Testament," says Walvoord, "on the tribulation is the Book of Revelation, chapters 4-19."<sup>37</sup>

The Book of Revelation reveals the same major elements found in other passages on the tribulation in the Old and New Testament. The period is revealed to deal with Israel primarily and is specifically "the time of Jacob's trouble." Attention is also given in these chapters to the climactic character of the times of the Gentiles. In chapter nineteen the ultimate downfall of all Gentile power is traced to the personal advent of Christ to reign over the world.<sup>38</sup>

An observation which Walvoord views to be highly significant at

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>36</sup>John F. Walvoord, The Holy Spirit (Wheaton, Illinois: Van Kampen Press, 1954), p. 228.

<sup>37</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

this point is that none of the Old Testament or New Testament passages which refer to the Tribulation mention the Church, including Revelation 4-19.<sup>39</sup>

Having set forth these passages which show the purpose of the Tribulation is to purge and judge Israel and to punish and destroy the Gentile power, as well as indicating the absence of the Church during this period, Walvoord concludes that the nature of the Tribulation, as revealed in Scripture, constitutes an important argument supporting pre-tribulationism.<sup>40</sup>

### The Holy Spirit

"The chief proof text concerning the return of the Holy Spirit to heaven is found in II Thessalonians 2:6-8. . . ."<sup>41</sup>

And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation of his coming; (II Thess. 2: 6-8).

One of the principal difficulties of this passage is the change in gender from the neuter in verse 6, "that which restraineth," to the masculine in verse 7, "one that restraineth." It is the opinion of Walvoord that this is easily explained by two possibilities. The gender

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

change may be for the purpose of indicating the difference between the power of God in general as a restraining force and the person of the restrainer. The other possibility is that the change in gender is a recognition of the fact that pnouma, the word spirit in Greek, is grammatically neuter but sometimes regarded as masculine (John 15:26, 16:13-14, Eph. 1:13-14).<sup>42</sup>

He believes there is more evidence, however, which provides the only adequate answer.

The ultimate decision on the reference to the restrainer goes back to the larger question of who after all is capable of restraining sin to such an extent that the man of sin cannot be revealed until the restraint is removed. The doctrine of divine providence, the evidence of Scripture that the Spirit characteristically restrains and strives against sin (Gen. 6:3), and the teaching of Scripture that the Spirit is resident in the world and indwelling the church in a special sense in this age combine to point to the Spirit of God as the only adequate answer to the problem of identification of the restrainer.<sup>43</sup>

Upon accepting the Holy Spirit as the restrainer, this passage reveals the following chronology: (1) the restrainer is now engaged in restraining sin, (2) the restrainer will be taken away at a future point of time, (3) then the man of sin can be revealed. Since this order of events requires the removal of the Spirit, it likewise requires the removal of the Church because the Spirit of God indwells the Church.

Although Walvoord believes the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn during the tribulation period, he also feels it is essential that the Holy

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<sup>42</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-87.

Spirit minister during this period.<sup>44</sup> It is his understanding that the Holy Spirit's ministry in the Tribulation will follow a pattern of the period before Pentecost.<sup>45</sup> While this evidence is recognized by Walvoord as debatable without other scriptural evidence, he, nevertheless, considers it to be a confirmation of the pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church.<sup>46</sup>

#### The Necessity of Intervening Events

Walvoord is of the opinion that related Scriptures demonstrate that an interval of time between the translation of the Church and the coming of Christ is necessary because of certain events which must take place. He has arranged his argument under four lines of evidence:

(1) intervening events in heaven, (2) intervening events on earth, (3) the nature of the judgment of Israel, and (4) the nature of the judgment of the Gentiles.

Regarding the first category, intervening events in heaven, the character of the judgment described in II Corinthians 5:10 and I Corinthians 3:14-15 seems to set it apart from judgments occurring at the Second Advent. Another evidence is found in Revelation 19:6-8, where the "wife" of the Lamb is declared to be arrayed "in fine linen, bright and pure: for the linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19:8).

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<sup>44</sup>Walvoord, The Holy Spirit, p. 228.

<sup>45</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

Obviously, those in heaven are already translated or resurrected and their righteous acts rewarded. There is also indication that the marriage itself has taken place. "If the church," says Walvoord, "is to be judged, rewarded, and joined to Christ in the symbol of marriage before the second advent, an interval of time is required."<sup>47</sup>

Another factor which appears to necessitate an interval of time between the Rapture and the Revelation is the scriptural emphasis on the people of the millennium. The description found in Isaiah 65:20-25 is obviously people who have not been translated or resurrected.

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for calamity; for they are the seed of the blessed of Jehovah, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah. (Isa. 65:20-25)

The best answer, according to Walvoord, is to have the Church translated before the Tribulation period; therefore, allowing ample time for a new generation of believers to come into existence from Jewish and Gentile background to qualify for entrance into the millennial kingdom at the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

It is also believed by Walvoord that two major judgments which relate to the entire human race and take place in connection with the establishment of the kingdom confirm his conclusion, that an interval of time is necessary between the translation of the Church and the Revelation of Christ.

He finds in the judgment of Israel, as described in Ezekiel 20: 34-38, indication of a regathering of Israel which will take considerable time. The details of the passage also reveal that this judgment deals with Israelites still in the flesh.<sup>49</sup>

The second judgment passage is the one in Matthew 25:31-46, which describes the judgment of the Gentiles. Several facts are lifted out as demonstrative evidence that this is an entirely different event than the translation of the Church. First, "it occurs after the second advent and after a throne is set up in the earth."<sup>50</sup> "This judgment also distinguishes the individuals involved on a racial basis. The 'brethren' refers to Israel. The 'nations' refers to non-Israelites."<sup>51</sup> In contrast to this, there is no racial distinction at the translation. Another factor of difference is that the reward given to believers at the judgment of the Gentiles is the privilege of entering the millennial kingdom. Christians of this age, however, are never brought into judg-

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<sup>49</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, pp. 95-96.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.



ment relative to entrance into the millennial kingdom.<sup>52</sup>

Walvoord, therefore, concluded that "at every point of comparison the evidence points to the translation of the church as a prior event utterly different in character and which requires an interval of some years between it and the judgments of Israel and the Gentiles."<sup>53</sup>

#### The Translation and the Second Coming Contrasted

The sixth and final principal argument for the pre-tribulation view of the Rapture may have been obvious in the preceding arguments, but not emphasized as a basis within itself for the support of pre-tribulationism. In the opinion of Walvoord, the contrast between the coming of Christ "for" His Church and "with" His Church merits statement as another evidence for the translation of the Church before the Tribulation.

In the Scriptures in general and in Thessalonians particularly a contrast is drawn between the coming of Christ for His church, which is pictured in I Thessalonians 4, and the coming of Christ to set up His millennial kingdom. At His coming for His church, according to I Thessalonians 4:13-18, the dead in Christ will rise first and living Christians will be caught up to be with the Lord. It is revealed in John 14 that after the church is translated Christ will take her to heaven to be with the Father in the Father's house in the place which Christ has prepared.<sup>54</sup>

In The Return of the Lord, by Walvoord, the following eight specific contrasts of the translation and the Second Coming are listed:

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>54</sup>Walvoord, The Thessalonian Epistles, pp. 108-109.

<u>Translation</u>	<u>Second Coming</u>
1. Translation of all believers (I Thess. 4:13-18).	1. No translation.
2. Translated saints go to heaven (John 14).	2. Translated saints return to the earth.
3. Earth not judged (II Thess. 1:10).	3. Earth judged and righteousness established (Matt. 25).
4. Imminent.	4. Definite predicted signs including the Tribulation (II Thess. 2:3).
5. Not in the Old Testament.	5. Predicted often in Old Testament.
6. Believers only.	6. Affects all men.
7. Before the day of wrath.	7. Concluding the day of wrath.
8. No reference to Satan.	8. Satan bound. <sup>55</sup>

These six principal arguments, here presented, represent the scriptural bases of pre-tribulationism.

### III. OBJECTIONS TO PRE-TRIBULATIONISM

This section of the study has been included in an effort to be intellectually honest and fair to those who would "disagree agreeably." In the expressions which follow, dispensationalism is to be equated with pre-tribulationism.

#### General Objections

"The most common charge," according to Feinburg (a dispensation-

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 108, 109, 118-121, and Walvoord, The Rapture Question, pp. 87-88.

alist), "is its alleged newness or recent character."<sup>56</sup> In the evaluation of this position by J. Barton Payne, "the greatest single objection to dispensational pre-tribulationism is that the Bible simply does not teach it."<sup>57</sup> George Ladd agrees at this point.

### Specific Objections

The more specific objections include those which involve the interpretation of particular scripture passages. One writer points out that Jesus does not tell how or when He will come in John 14:1-3, but these points must be learned from other Scriptures.<sup>58</sup> In I Corinthians 15:52-53, there is no basis whatsoever for the suggestion that only Christians will be able to hear the call of the last trumpet.<sup>59</sup> The prime Scripture on the Rapture, I Thessalonians 4:13-18, does not teach a descent of the Church.<sup>60</sup> Regarding II Thessalonians 1:6-10, Jesse W. Hodges makes this comment:

Both tribulation for the wicked and rest for the righteous will be meted out by God when His son is revealed from heaven--not to the righteous before His revelation (as the theorists say) and then to the wicked a thousand years later.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Charles L. Feinburg, Premillennialism or Amillennialism (Wheaton, Illinois: VanKampen Press, 1954), p. 222.

<sup>57</sup> J. Barton Payne, The Imminent Appearing of Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> Jesse W. Hodges, Christ's Kingdom and Coming (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 197.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 198-199.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

Objectors to the pre-tribulationists' chief proof text for removing the Holy Spirit (II Thess. 2:1-8) observe that who or whatever the hindrance to the schemes of the wicked is in this passage, is just not named. The basis upon which pre-tribulationists conclude the restrainer to be the Holy Spirit is purely inference. This same basis is used to establish the removal of the Holy Spirit from the world with the Rapture of the Church before the Tribulation.<sup>62</sup> The evidence from the book of Revelation regarding the absence of the Church after chapter three is true but proves little. Israel is not mentioned by name from Revelation 7:4-21:12, though pre-tribulationists find constant reference to it. "Apparently," writes Payne, "the absence of ekklesia is not so crucial after all (!), and modern Darbyite leaders are coming to admit that the lack of the word 'church' in Revelation 6-19 is not sufficient to establish the pre-tribulationist view."<sup>63</sup>

Ockenga states that one of the stumbling blocks to his pre-tribulation eschatology was this fact:

The Jews will accomplish evangelization of the world after the church is raptured, which commission (Matt. 28:18-20) the church could not and did not do in all its history. Moreover, this will be done after "the Holy Spirit in the church is taken out of the way" (cf. Scofield Bible, note page 1272). Is it conceivable that the Jews without the Pentecostal presence and power of the Holy Spirit will do during the tribulation what the church in Holy Spirit power could not do in 2,000 years?<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>63</sup>Payne, *Imminent Appearing*, p. 81.

<sup>64</sup>Harold J. Ockenga, "Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation? Yes!" *Christian Life*, 16:66, February, 1955.

### The Most Important Objection

"The real objection," says Payne, "of dispensationalists to the church's going through the great tribulation rests upon philosophical grounds . . . and springs from . . . the relationship of the church to Israel."<sup>65</sup> "Modern scholars who have reacted against dispensationalism have stated that ecclesiology [the doctrine of the Church] is the most important reason for pre-tribulationism."<sup>66</sup> The defenders would agree that the rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology.<sup>67</sup>

When pre-tribulationists question how the New Testament can legitimately speak of the ancient Israel as a part of the ekklesia, organically related to Christ (Heb. 2:12), one must remember that the Old Testament saints were individually born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit just as the New Testament saints (Ezek. 36:25-28, cf. John 3:10).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The evidence of these objections tends to indicate that pre-tribulation dispensationalism's redefinition of the "Blessed Hope" is not legitimate. Ingenious as it is, and with all its popular following, it is not Biblical. Its development is due primarily to the philosoph-

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<sup>65</sup>Payne, Imminent Appearing, p. 123.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., cf. Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 19.

ical presuppositions of the Darbyist Movement. One of these presuppositions was a rigorous futurism in prophetic interpretation and another was the relationship of the Church to Israel. The author is unable to accept this view because of these presuppositions which lead to a deductive, rather than an inductive, method of exegesis.

Agreement is also impossible at some specific points of pre-tribulationism's ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church) and pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit). Defining the Church as only referring to the saints of this age (as Walvoord does) is not in agreement with the total meaning of the Greek noun, ekklesia, "assembly" (usually translated church). Such a definition tends to limit ones concept of the Church as a universal body of believers throughout history. Separating Israel from the Church on the ground that the Church began at Pentecost appears to segment the total plan of redemption. Disagreement is also inevitable between this writer and the pre-tribulation position relative to the removal of the Holy Spirit. Since the chief proof text (II Thess. 2:6-8) of this position is so debatable among scholars, one should take great caution in accepting it as a confirmation of pre-tribulationism. If the pre-tribulation pneumatology is accepted at this point, there are some definite problems relative to the evangelization of the world during the absence of the Holy Spirit, as Ockenga has already pointed out. Because of these points of disagreement, this writer cannot personally accept the pre-tribulation view of the Rapture as a true Biblical teaching. In the author's evaluation, pre-tribulationism is one segment of a theory which has placed

major emphasis upon minor, as well as controversial teachings of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, it has been the observation of many that pre-tribulationism is probably still the most widely accepted view among evangelicals. Although it is widely accepted, many of its advocates in recent years have made concessions and some have utterly abandoned the position. Another indication of the decreasing popularity of this position may be the revision of the Scofield reference Bible. This work is considered by some to be the chief instrument in popularizing pre-tribulationism. In the words of J. Barton Payne, ". . . one senses that the leaders of the movement [dispensational pre-tribulationism] feel they are now fighting for its very existence."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Payne, Imminent Appearing, p. 39.

## CHAPTER III

### REACTIONARY POST-TRIBULATIONISM AS REPRESENTED BY GEORGE E. LADD

#### I. THE NATURE OF REACTIONARY POST-TRIBULATIONISM

As the title indicates, this view is the reactionary expression against pre-tribulationism. The primary difference is regarding the question of whether or not the Church will go through the Tribulation, that is, whether the Rapture occurs at the beginning or at the close of the Tribulation. The preceding chapter represented the former view; this chapter will seek to represent the latter view, namely, that Christ will return at the close of the Great Tribulation period, rapture His Church, and immediately reveal Himself with His Church to the world.

In the words of Dr. George E. Ladd, "The one question must be, what does the Word of God teach?"<sup>1</sup> Following this precedent the Biblical basis of this view will now be considered.

#### II. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF REACTIONARY POST-TRIBULATIONISM

Representing this particular position, Dr. Ladd has presented his evidence supporting this view under six areas of thought. They are: (1) the terms used in the New Testament to describe the Second Advent, (2) the New Testament passages dealing with the Tribulation, Rapture, and resurrection, (3) the main bases within Scripture upon which pre-

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<sup>1</sup>George Ladd, The Blessed Hope (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 11.



tribulationism rests,<sup>2</sup> (4) the scriptural exhortation to watch, (5) Tribulation and wrath, and (6) the Church and Israel.

#### New Testament Terms Describing the Second Advent

Three words are employed in the New Testament to describe the Second Advent. The first is parousia, which means "coming," "arrival" or "presence." Two passages illustrate this:

We that are alive, that are left unto the parousia of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:15-17).

And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation of his parousia (II Thess. 2:8).

"One would naturally conclude," says Ladd, "by comparing the verses just cited that the Rapture of the living saints, the resurrection of those who have died, and the judgment upon the Antichrist will all take place at the same time, namely, at the parousia of Jesus at the end of Tribulation."<sup>3</sup> The representative of this position would also point out that it is at His parousia that Jesus will be accompanied by all His saints (I Thess. 3:13).<sup>4</sup>

To those who would seek to translate parousia, "presence," in

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<sup>2</sup>This section seeks to reveal the possibility of other interpretations from the same Scriptures used to support pre-tribulationism.

<sup>3</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

these verses, Ladd is very much opposed. "It is not the 'presence'," says he, "so much as the 'coming' of Christ which is required in the verses we have just discussed."<sup>5</sup>

A second word used to describe the Lord's return is apokalypsis, which means "Revelation." In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians (II Thess. 1:6-7), both recompense of affliction and of rest are stated as simultaneously occurring "in the revelation of the Lord." To say that the rest has already been received at a previous time is imposing an assumption on the verse which is contrary to the wording.<sup>6</sup> Peter employs this expression (1) to suggest that the fiery trial will be ended only at the apocalypse of Christ (I Pet. 4:13), (2) to show that one of the purposes of the apocalypse of Christ is to bring glory and honor to His people because of their faith (I Pet. 1:7), and (3) to assure believers that their hope of perfection in grace will be brought to them at the Revelation of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:13).<sup>7</sup> It is the conclusion of Ladd that:

All of these promises direct our hope of the fullness of our salvation not to the Rapture but to the Revelation of Christ. If these two events are one and the same, these verses are full of meaning. If, however, these blessings are not received at the Revelation but at an earlier Rapture, these verses are quite perplexing and difficult. It is difficult to see how a distinction can be made between these two events. The Revelation is continually

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 66-67.

made the object of our hope; the Rapture must therefore occur at the Revelation of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

The third word which is used to describe Christ's Second Coming is epiphaneia, which means "manifestation." Both pre-tribulationism and reactionary post-tribulationism are agreed upon the fact that this word refers to the Revelation of Christ with His saints at the end of the Tribulation to bring judgment upon the world. From II Timothy 4:8, Dr. Ladd concludes that the epiphany is a time of reward for believers. At this point, therefore, he disagrees with pre-tribulationism by placing the judgment of rewards between the Rapture and the Revelation,<sup>9</sup> and concludes by saying, "The vocabulary used of our Lord's return finds no support for the idea of two comings of Christ or of two aspects of His coming."<sup>10</sup>

#### The Tribulation, Rapture, and Resurrection

Consideration will now be given to the passages of Scripture which deal with the Great Tribulation, the Rapture of the Church, and the Resurrection, to determine whether or not the Rapture and the Resurrection occur at the beginning of the Tribulation.

The Great Tribulation. Three passages are lifted out by Dr. Ladd in relation to the Great Tribulation. They are: Matthew 24:14-31, II Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 8-16. He observes in the first pas-

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<sup>8</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

sage that only verse 31 could refer to the Rapture. "And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds; from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:31)." Some elements of similarity between this verse and Paul's teaching about the Rapture of the Church (I Thess. 4:16), which Dr. Ladd mentions, are: (1) the presence of angels, (2) the sound of a trumpet, (3) the coming of Christ, and (4) the word "gather together" (episunago) in Matthew 24:21, which is the verb whose noun (episunagoge) is used in I Thessalonians 2:1.<sup>11</sup> The point which this passage illustrates, if this verse 31 is the Rapture of the Church, is that a pre-tribulation Rapture is not taught in the Olivet Discourse. Regarding the second passage (II Thess. 2), Dr. Ladd makes this comment:

The coming of Antichrist and the persecution which he will inflict upon God's people are prophesied by Paul in II Thess. 2. Nowhere does Paul say that the Rapture of the Church is to precede these events . . .

On the contrary, Paul writes as though Christians needed to be warned against the deception of the Antichrist, and he rejoices that God has chosen them from the beginning to be saved (vs. 13), not to perish through delusion by the Antichrist (vs. 10 f.). One would naturally conclude from reading Paul's word that the coming of the Lord, our gathering together unto Him, and the day of the Lord are one and the same event which will be preceded by the apostasy and the Man of Lawlessness.<sup>12</sup>

The third passage dealing with the Great Tribulation is in the book of Revelation, chapters 8 through 16, which tells of the appearance of the Beast (Antichrist), the persecution he inflicts upon the saints of God, the sounding of seven trumpets and the outpouring of the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-74.

seven vials, which constitute the Great Tribulation from the point of view of the divine judgment on the world. "There is no pre-tribulation rapture in this prophecy," says Ladd.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of these passages which set forth the coming of Antichrist and the Great Tribulation, it is evident that none of them assert that the Church will be raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation.

The Rapture and the Tribulation. Only one passage in the Word of God describes the Rapture by name. It is the one in which Paul wrote to the Thessalonians who were concerned about the fate of believers who died before the coming of Christ.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (I Thess. 4:14-17)

It is pointed out by Ladd, regarding this passage, that the Rapture spoken of here will occur at the parousia of Jesus. He states further that the Rapture has two meanings: (1) "union with the Lord" and (2) "the transformation of the bodies of living believers."<sup>14</sup> The former meaning is the thought he feels is emphasized in the Thessalonian epistle. A passage which would represent the second meaning of the

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<sup>13</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

Rapture is I Corinthians 15:51-52. Ladd is quick to point out that the "mystery" referred to in I Corinthians 15:51 is "not the time of the Rapture" but "the fact of the Rapture."<sup>15</sup>

The Resurrection and the Tribulation. It is the contention of Ladd that Scripture speaks explicitly of a first resurrection at the beginning of the millennium and a second at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:4-15), but not of three resurrections as the pre-tribulationists believe. The difference here is that pre-tribulationism divides the first resurrection into two parts; the first being the resurrection of all saints which occurs at the coming of Christ at the beginning of the Tribulation, and the second being the martyr-resurrection at the close of the Tribulation. Ladd cannot subscribe to this view because he feels "the one passage which explicitly locates the first resurrection is the prophecy in Revelation 20, and this is also the only passage which describes the resurrection of martyrs."<sup>16</sup> This passage speaks of two groups--those seated on thrones, and the martyrs. It is the observation of Ladd that the subject of the verb in verse 4 ("They came to life") is both groups. He, therefore, concludes "there is no mention or suggestion of a resurrection earlier than the glorious return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation, and this passage locates the resurrection both of saints and martyrs at the Revelation of Christ."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

Some pre-tribulation verses. As the final point of this section of his presentation, Ladd discusses three verses that are frequently interpreted as teaching that the Church will be removed from the world before the Tribulation occurs. The first of these is I Thessalonians 5:9, where Paul writes: "For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." In Ladd's opinion, all this verse asserts is that the Church will not fall under God's wrath. The wrath may not refer to the Tribulation at all, but to God's wrath (Rom. 2:4). "If it does include the Great Tribulation, the verse neither asserts nor suggests that the Church will be removed from the world; it is only promised deliverance . . . how the deliverance is to be effected is not suggested."<sup>18</sup>

Another verse is Revelation 3:10, which says, "Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." The following are Dr. Ladd's comments:

This prophecy refers to the Great Tribulation, and it is directed not against God's people but against the "earth dwellers." This phrase is a recurring one in the Revelation by which the author designates the people of a godless society who have surrendered themselves to the worship of Antichrist and who are to suffer the wrath of God (cf. 6:10, 8:13, 11:10, 13:8, 14, 17:8). The language of this verse, taken by itself, could be interpreted to teach complete escape from the coming hour of Tribulation. The language is, "I will keep thee out of the hour of trial" (teres ek).

This language, however, neither asserts nor demands the idea of bodily removal from the midst of the coming trial . . . [because] precisely the same words are used by our Lord in His prayer that God would keep His disciples "out of the evil" (Terasas ek tou ponerou, John 17:15). In our Lord's prayer, there is no idea of

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<sup>18</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, pp. 84-85.

bodily removal of the disciples from the evil world but of preservation from the power of evil even when they are in its very presence.<sup>19</sup>

The third verse that is frequently interpreted as teaching the bodily deliverance from the Tribulation is Luke 21:36: "But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of Man." The phrase, "all these things," is not interpreted by Ladd as referring to everything that will occur during the Great Tribulation. It is his conviction that this verse (Luke 21:36) is not a parallel to Matthew 24:21 f., which describes the persecution of Antichrist during the Great Tribulation, but Matthew 24:29-30, which describes the judgment which will accompany the appearing of the Son of man at the end of the Tribulation.<sup>20</sup> It is, therefore, a promise that God's people will not be subjected to the divine judgments which will fall upon an evil world at the Second Advent of Christ.

Upon completing this survey of passages, Ladd concludes, "Nowhere is the Rapture placed before the Tribulation. On the contrary, problems of exegesis are frequently raised if it is assumed that the Rapture precedes the Tribulation."<sup>21</sup>

#### The Main Scriptural Bases of Pre-tribulationism

One argument which reactionary post-tribulationism has used to

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 88.



support its views has been to take the very Scriptures used by pre-tribulationism and show the possibilities of other interpretations. The most prominent points examined are: (1) Christ's coming for and with His saints, (2) the Day of Christ and the Day of the Lord, (3) the removal of the Holy Spirit, and (4) the teachings of the Revelation.

Coming for and with the saints. A phrase commonly used in sustaining pre-tribulationism is that Christ's coming will be "for His saints" and "with His saints." This is based on I Thessalonians 3:13, where Paul spoke of the parousia of the Lord Jesus with all His saints. The argument is that it is impossible for Christ to come with His saints if He has not come previously for them. One reason for not accepting this view is that the word, "saints," means "holy ones" and may not refer to man at all. Ladd, however, does feel the phrase refers to men but seeks to associate it with the event described in I Thessalonians 4:14: "For if we believe that Christ died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him." "This 'coming with Christ'," says he, "is simultaneous with the Rapture and the Resurrection . . . and is not an event which will occur at a considerable time after the Rapture."<sup>22</sup>

Day of Christ, Day of the Lord. It is maintained by some pre-tribulationists that "the Day of Christ" and "the Day of the Lord" are two different days. Because of the warning Paul gives in I Thessalo-

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<sup>22</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 91.

nians 5:2-9, Ladd feels believers are to see that day, and if so, the Day of Christ and the Day of the Lord are synonymous.<sup>23</sup>

Removal of the Holy Spirit. Another basis for a pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church is the claim that I Thessalonians 2:6,7 teaches that the Holy Spirit is to be taken out of the world before the Tribulation begins, and since the Holy Spirit indwells the Church, it must be concluded that the Church will be taken out of the world when the Holy Spirit is removed. This, however, says Ladd, is a "human interpretation." "The Word of God does not say that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer."<sup>24</sup> Another interpretation which he feels is just as adequate is that "the restrainer," referred to in II Thessalonians 2:7a, is "God."<sup>25</sup>

The teaching of the Revelation. Ground for a pre-tribulation Rapture in the book of Revelation is at least twofold. First, it is claimed that the Church is seen in heaven in the twenty-four elders (4:4), and secondly, the word, "church," appears frequently in the first three chapters but not at all in chapters 4 to 19.

Regarding the first claim, it is pointed out by Ladd that many scholars (Alford, Swete, Lange) see in the elders the ideal Church, but this does not infer that the Church is already raptured. He also points

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

up the fact that the distinction between stephanos, the victor's wreath, and diadema, the ruler's crown, is not always followed. The use of stephanos of the twenty-four elders does not prove that they are the Church which have received their rewards after the Rapture; the crowns may be symbolic of rule, not reward.<sup>26</sup>

The contention about the word, "church," occurring often in chapters one and three of Revelation and not at all in chapters 4 through 20, in Ladd's opinion is, "a tenuous inference, not a declaration of inspired Scripture."<sup>27</sup> His reason for this is that the word in these early chapters "is never used . . . to designate the Church in its totality."<sup>28</sup> It is Ladd's conclusion that "in no instance are the facts such that they require the theory of a pre-tribulation rapture."<sup>29</sup>

#### The Scriptural Exhortation to Watch

Rather than present Dr. Ladd's lengthy discussion at this point, only his statements regarding the different words translated "watch" and his conclusion after surveying all the New Testament references giving exhortations to watch will be set forth.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>30</sup>For a more detailed account, see George Ladd's book, The Blessed Hope, pp. 105-119.

New Testament words for "watch." In the New Testament there are five words translated by our English word, "watch." Only two of these, however, are commonly used to admonish watchfulness with relation to the Lord's return; they are: gregoreo and agrupneo. Their meanings are similar. The former meaning is "to be awake" and the latter meaning is "to be sleepless" or "wakeful." The verb, agrupneo, is used only twice in connection with the end of the age (Mark 13:33, Luke 21:36), and in each instance it is addressed to people who are in the midst of the Tribulation. Gregoreo is used of general spiritual vigilance in many verses without immediate reference to the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Conclusion. Having examined all the New Testament references where exhortation is given to watch, Ladd says, "Nowhere are we told to watch for a secret, any-moment coming of Christ to rapture the Church. The commands to watch mean to be spiritually awake, to be ready to meet the Lord whenever He comes. The exhortations to watch in the Gospels are all addressed to people who will be looking for the glorious appearing of Christ at the end of the Tribulation."<sup>32</sup>

### Tribulation and Wrath

It is the belief of Ladd that a distinction should be made between

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<sup>31</sup>Acts 20:31; I Corinthians 16:13; Colossians 4:2; I Peter 5:8, and Revelation 3:2,3.

<sup>32</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 118.

tribulation and the wrath of God. Those who do not make this distinction tend to infer that if the Church is delivered from wrath it must also be delivered from tribulation. As was previously noted, Ladd is in agreement with pre-tribulationists in believing that the Church will never suffer the wrath of God.<sup>33</sup> The point Ladd seeks to make evident is that the Church will be on earth during the entire period of the Tribulation, but will be divinely sheltered.

In establishing this point, he observes that many of the verses which speak of tribulation use the same word that is in Matthew 24:21, which refers to the Great Tribulation.<sup>34</sup> The natural result is that if God's people have always suffered persecution and tribulation, why should God be expected to change the divine order which has marked the entire course of redemptive history?<sup>35</sup> Consequently, "God will not deliver His people from such tribulation, but he will preserve them in it."<sup>36</sup>

### The Church and Israel

The reader will recall from the preceding chapter that pre-tribulationism makes a distinction between Israel and the Church. It is the opinion of Ladd that this is not what Scripture teaches, and to illustrate his point he gives evidence from two Old Testament prophecies.

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<sup>33</sup>See Chapter III, "Some Pre-tribulation Verses."

<sup>34</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 128.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

The first is the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit given by God through the prophet Joel to Israel. One would search in vain to find any reference in Joel to the Church. Jeremiah 31:31-34 foretells the new covenant which God will write in the hearts of His people.

The Church does not appear in the prophecy at all.<sup>37</sup>

If then . . . prophecies which in the Old Testament have to do with God's future purpose for Israel have their fulfillment both in the Church and in Israel, why should we not conclude that the prophecies about the Great Tribulation which have to do in their prophetic form with Israel will find their fulfillment both in the Church and in Israel . . . ?<sup>38</sup>

There appears to be no valid reason, therefore, that the prophecies about the Tribulation must be applied to a restored Jewish nation rather than to the redeemed of the New Testament church. Furthermore, Ladd is unable to find any evidence of a pre-tribulation Rapture in New Testament terms or passages which describe the Second Coming. He, therefore, accepts what he considers the only other alternative, a post-tribulation Rapture.

### III. OBJECTIONS TO REACTIONARY POST-TRIBULATIONISM

It is to be expected that such a position as stated in this chapter would draw objections. Therefore, provision for the expression of return comment has been made in the statements which follow.

Pre-tribulation comments. From this group numerous objections

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-133.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

might be listed (only a few have been selected, however) in an effort to be as objective as possible. One writer says, "They fail to see the scriptural distinction concerning Israel and the Church."<sup>39</sup> He continues, "This view . . . also removes the imminence of our Lord's coming."<sup>40</sup> Another writer is not particularly happy with the way post-tribulationism deals with the Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ.

Post-tribulation writers make the Day of the Lord synonymous with the Day of Christ, both of which are equal to the parousia and fall on the same day as the joint rapture and revelation, although they have yet to explain why God calls the same thing by so many different names. They hardly seem to recognize that the Holy Spirit . . . never uses terms indiscriminately.<sup>41</sup>

"The posttribulation position," says Walvoord, "leads logically to an abandonment of premillennialism altogether, or requires such spiritualization of the millennium that it becomes indistinguishable from an amillennial interpretation."<sup>42</sup> According to Payne, pre-tribulationism's fundamental criticism of reacting post-tribulationists is that the latter engage in exegesis without sufficiently defining 'the Church' first.<sup>43</sup>

Other Objections. Payne, as well as the writer of this paper,

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<sup>39</sup>John Dahlin, Prophetic Truth For Today (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Beacon Publications, 1961), p. 69.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Gerald Stanton, Kept From the Hour (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), p. 75.

<sup>42</sup>Walvoord, The Rapture Question, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup>J. Barton Payne, The Imminent Appearing, p. 124.

noted that reacting post-tribulationism's efforts are predominantly negative. The denial of the imminent return of Christ is also mentioned by Payne.<sup>44</sup> A question might be raised regarding the validity of Ladd's method when he sought to prove his position by disproving pre-tribulationism. In some cases it would certainly presuppose that there were only two alternatives, which may not be true.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Certainly reactionary post-tribulationism must be commended for its emphasis on inductively discovering what the Scriptures teach. Its denial of the imminent return of Christ, however, in the estimation of many does not express the classical Christian hope relative to the Second Coming of Christ. This author believes the objection against reactionary post-tribulationism's denial of an imminent return of Christ is valid. Therefore, the writer is somewhat hesitant in fully agreeing with reactionary post-tribulationism at this point, because the possibility of imminence should not be totally omitted. In the estimation of this author, reactionary post-tribulationism, however, has sought and is seeking by sound exegesis to let Scripture hold its position regarding the "Blessed Hope." This principle, if followed, should lead only to those conclusions which will be true to the Scripture. It is interesting to note that this is perhaps the most rapidly expanding position among evangelicals today.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>45</sup>Dahlin, Prophetic Truth For Today, p. 68.



## CHAPTER IV

### CLASSICAL POST-TRIBULATIONISM AS REPRESENTED BY J. BARTON PAYNE

#### I. THE NATURE OF CLASSICAL POST-TRIBULATIONISM

Classical post-tribulationism is the attempt to re-express what seems to be the classical Christian hope relative to the sequence of events at Christ's coming again. The major point of difference between this view and reacting post-tribulationism is their concept of imminence. It will be recalled that the lack of imminence was the major criticism of reacting post-tribulationism. It is the desire of contemporary classical post-tribulationism to emphasize not only the post-tribulation return of Christ, but also the imminence of His return. "True uncertainty about the time of the Lord's appearing," says Payne, "includes the possibility that He could come now, and this is the sum and substance of the classical doctrine of imminence."<sup>1</sup> The major concern is, however, upon what scriptural ground this position rests.

#### II. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF CLASSICAL POST-TRIBULATIONISM

A twofold presentation is employed by Dr. Payne in setting forth classical post-tribulationism. The first step is to establish the time of the Church's hope on the ground of ten fundamental passages of Scripture. To augment these passages, certain contributory references

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<sup>1</sup>J. Barton Payne, The Imminent Appearing of Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 98.

are also mentioned, as well as passages which are frequently cited but seem actually to be irrelevant in the opinion of Payne. The second and major emphasis of this view is to present the primary Biblical passages which apply to the question of imminency.

### The Time of the Church's Hope

The following ten portions of Scripture are considered by Payne to be determinative in fixing the relative time of the hope of the Church.

Isaiah 25:6-11. In this mountain [Zion] will Jehovah of hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees . . . And he will destroy in this mountain . . . the veil that is spread over all nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of his people will he take away from off all the earth . . . And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain will the hand of Jehovah rest; and Moab shall be trodden down in his place . . . Jehovah will lay low his pride.

It is the belief of Payne that this passage is post-tribulational because "it is located at the time of the Lord's appearing to set up His kingdom (cf. 24:21-22),"<sup>2</sup> and includes God's presence on earth, subduing of nations and the conversion of Israel.

Matthew 24:29-31 (Parallel passages are Mark 13:24-27, Luke 21:25-27). Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

It is the desire of Payne that his readers notice that:

This sequence of events is introduced as "after the tribulation," a position that is confirmed by its description of the heavenly phenomena of the wrath of God and the visible appearing of Christ. Yet at the same time it presents the detailed elements that make up the rapture according to I Thessalonians 4:16-17: the Lord's coming from heaven, His angelic following, the sound of a trumpet and the gathering together of His redeemed.<sup>3</sup>

Luke 17:24. Only the reference to this verse is given because it is so similar to the passage just described.

Romans 8:18-21. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to usward. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

The glory of God's children (8:23), Payne feels, is the Resurrection. Two observations are also made by Payne at this point. First, "when the glory of the resurrection is revealed to the church (v. 18), the glorified church is correspondingly revealed to the world."<sup>4</sup> The other observation Payne makes relative to this passage is that when the Church is delivered from corruption, the creation is delivered from corruption also (Rom. 8:21). The "Blessed Hope" is, therefore, the inauguration of Christ's visible appearing and the millennium.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Payne, *Imminent Appearing*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

I Corinthians 15:51-52. Behold, I will tell you a mystery: we all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For Payne, the phrase which dates this passage is the expression, "at the last trump." "To suggest," says he, "that I Corinthians 15:52 is a last trump, for the church, but that seven years later (after the tribulation) there will be another really last trumpet, for the Jews, denies the categorical force of the apostle's words, 'the last trump' . . . "6

II Thessalonians 1:6-8. [God will] recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation [apokalypsis] of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them . . . that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

These verses point out the fact that Christ comes for His saints and they enter into His rest at the same time He appears to punish and destroy their persecutors.<sup>7</sup>

II Thessalonians 2:1-2. Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by Spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand.

In the opinion of Payne, the natural interpretation of these verses is that "the parousia of Christ and the accompanying rapture . . . are to occur at the same 'day of the Lord,' but that the Antichrist and other aspects of the tribulation will have to come first. The hope

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

of the church, in other words, is post-tribulational."<sup>8</sup>

Titus 2:12-13. We should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing [epiphaneia] of the glory of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ.

In this classic statement of Christian hope, Payne notes that "the church's anticipation is identified not with the secret rapture, but with the visible 'epiphany' of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Revelation 7:3-4, 14:3-4. Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel . . . the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth. These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb.

Payne's interpretation of the 144,000 is that they "represent the whole of the Israel-of-God, the believing church, which is seen as protected during the wrath of God but then, with the appearing of Christ after the first part of this wrath, raptured to be with Him on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1)."<sup>10</sup>

Revelation 20:4-5. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection.

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<sup>8</sup>Payne, Iminent Appearing, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

If the premillennial interpretation of the "first resurrection" is accepted, namely, that the first resurrection is the resurrection of the just, Payne says, "This passage can allow no alternative to the post-tribulation sequence of end-time events."<sup>11</sup>

Contributory passages. Although Payne is satisfied that the preceding Scriptures establish the time of the Church's hope as coinciding with the victorious coming of her Lord to earth, he also feels there are additional passages in Scripture that confirm this understanding. Some of those which he believes contribute significantly to the classical view of post-tribulationism are: Isaiah 26:19-21, Daniel 12:1-2, Acts 1:11, Romans 11:15, I Corinthians 1:7, I Thessalonians 4:14-17, 5:2-6, I Timothy 6:14, II Timothy 4:8, I Peter 1:6-7, 5:4, and Revelation 2:25-26, 14:14-16.<sup>12</sup>

Irrelevant passages. All the passages listed above establish, for Dr. Payne, the Biblical validity of the classical view of the Church: that the Lord's coming and the Church's union with Him is a one-phased event, which occurs at His appearing to set up His kingdom, after the Tribulation. There are, however, certain passages which, though frequently cited in reference to the "Blessed Hope," seem actually to be irrelevant in the estimation of Dr. Payne. Those which he would place in this category are: Isaiah 65:20, Luke 21:36, John

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-71.

14:3, Romans 5:9, I Thessalonians 3:12-13, 5:9, II Thessalonians 2:13, and Revelation 3:10, 4:4.<sup>13</sup>

### The Imminence of Christ's Appearing

Now that the time of the Church's hope may be considered established, the focal point of discussion will come to rest on the major emphasis of classical post-tribulationism, the imminence of Christ's appearing.

Imminence defined. Before one considers the scriptural evidence on the validity of imminence, the word, imminent, itself needs defining. The term, "imminent," applies to an event "almost always of danger," which is "impending threateningly; hanging over one's head; ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand in its incidence; coming on shortly."<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that this does not mean that Christ's coming must be seen. It is interesting that Dr. Payne believes the two classes of New Testament words which describe imminence are the verbs, watching and waiting (gregoreo, "to be awake," and agrupneo, "to be sleepless").<sup>15</sup> "Both," says he, "involve the attitude of immediate vigilance and are therefore well adapted to express hope or obligation

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<sup>13</sup>Payne, Imminent Appearing, pp. 72-80.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>15</sup>It is interesting to note that Ladd makes a careful study of these words but does not interpret them as teaching imminence. See Chapter III.

toward Christ's appearing as fully imminent."<sup>16</sup>

The validity of imminency. Only by reference to Scripture may the legitimacy of a doctrine be determined; therefore, the following eleven primary passages are set forth as evidence to justify the conclusion that the appearing of Christ is indeed imminent, capable of taking place at any time.

Matthew 24:42-25:13 (Mark 13:33-37, Luke 21:34-36). selections: "Take ye heed, watch [agrupneo] and pray: for ye know not when the time is. It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, commanded the porter to watch [gregoreo]. Watch [gregoreo] therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch [gregoreo]" (Mark 13:33-37). "Know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched [gregoreo], and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore, be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh." (Matt. 24:43-44). "Watch [gregoreo] therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13).<sup>17</sup>

Luke 12:36-40. Be ye yourselves like unto men looking for [prodechomai] their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh they may straight-way open unto him. Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching [gregoreo] . . .

An observation of Payne's, relative to this passage, is: "The contextual emphasis is on the opening to Him at the unforeseeable time of His coming. The Christian, indeed, is not expected to be outside 'looking down the road'; but he is to be on the lookout."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Payne, Imminent Appearing, p. 86.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 98.



Romans 8:19,23,25. The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body . . . we with patience wait for it.

Although the subject here is the Resurrection, since it is approximately simultaneous with the coming of the Lord, the time expectation of the one may fairly be related to that of the other. Because this particular event is "hoped for," Payne believes it is potentially near fulfillment and, therefore, "it could be at hand."<sup>19</sup>

I Corinthians 1:7. Ye come behind in no gift; waiting for apekdechmai the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With regard to this verse, it is the position of Payne that "the lack of evidence for any postponement seems to suggest the 'perhaps today' possibility, which is all that a cautious imminency really seeks to maintain."<sup>20</sup>

Philippians 3:20. Our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for apekdechmai a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage is similar to the one above, except that here the emphasis is on the place of Christ's departure rather than the feeling of the saints.

Philippians 4:5. Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Since there is no particular verb of waiting in this verse, the phrase, "at hand," indicates for Payne that Paul is expecting a speedy

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

return of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

I Thessalonians 1:9-10. Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for [anameno] his Son from heaven.

Some of the Thessalonians had such an appreciation for imminence that they gave up their ordinary pursuits (II Thess. 3:10).

Titus 2:12-13. We should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for [prosdechomai] the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Payne feels the context of this passage "suggests" that Christ's appearing is as much an "ever-present possibility" as is the life of sobriety, righteousness and godliness.<sup>22</sup>

James 5:7-8. Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord . . . establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Again, there is no regular verb for "waiting" (cf. Phil. 4:5), but the phrase, "at hand," would imply imminency.

Jude 21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for [prosdechomai] the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

The "mercy" which this verse speaks of, for Payne, is not the abstract quality that is a changeless attribute of Christ, but "an everpresent possibility as is the love of God itself."<sup>23</sup>

Revelation 16:15. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth [gregoreo], and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

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<sup>21</sup>Payne, Imminent Appearing, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

In the estimation of Payne, the meaning of this verse is that Christ might not come for some time but, "it might be tonight!"<sup>24</sup>

These passages have sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of imminency, as well as establish the time of the Church's hope. Objections to the truth which classical post-tribulationism believes they teach must be considered next.

### III. OBJECTIONS TO CLASSICAL POST-TRIBULATIONISM

Although Payne has sought to restate the church's classical position through the centuries relative to the return of Christ, very few objections have been voiced in the period which this study has sought to cover. It is only natural, however, that pre-tribulationists would have many of the same objections of this view as they would hold against reactionary post-tribulationism, except for the aspect of imminence. At one point, however, two reviews of apparently extremely different theological positions seem to agree. The one, a pre-tribulationist, says:

Dr. Payne's view of the tribulation involves spiritualization of prophecy concerning the coming tribulation such as is found in Matthew 24 and Revelation 4-19. He denies that Daniel's seventieth week is future and attempts in his appendix A a synthesis of the "preterist, historical, and futurist systems of interpretation," a veritable theological hodgepodge.<sup>25</sup>

Another reviewer (possibly an amillennialist) believes that "one

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>25</sup>John F. Walvoord, "The Imminent Appearing of Christ" (book review) Bibliotheca Sacra, 119:271, July, 1962.

who is conversant with amillennialism will discover that Payne employs many of the same [amillennial] arguments and proofs but stops a half-step short of the goal."<sup>26</sup> Amillennialism is noted for its spiritualizing of Scripture.

Upon occasion, some of the Scriptures which were used in support of this view only implied the truth that Dr. Payne was seeking to establish. As previously mentioned,<sup>27</sup> it is interesting that the very words (agrupneo and gregoreo) from which classical post-tribulationism would seek to establish its doctrine of imminence are recognized by reacting post-tribulationism, but with no indication of teaching imminence.

Relative to this position, the question might be asked, "Is the truth always in the middle of the road?" If the writer correctly understands classical post-tribulationism, it is seeking to take some elements from both reacting post-tribulationism and pre-tribulationism and arrive at a position which will please everyone.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>G. H. Girod, "The Imminent Appearing of Christ" (book review) Reformed Review, 16:50, March, 1963.

<sup>27</sup>See Chapter IV, footnote 15.

<sup>28</sup>"It [classical post-tribulationism] constitutes the alternative that combines the worthwhile emphases both of dispensational pre-tribulationism and of reacting post-tribulationism, and yet that eliminates their rigorous futurism and restores the full, blessed hope of the church to one of present reality and of day by day anticipation." Payne, The Imminent Appearing of Christ, p. 159. See also the Appendix.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Commendation is in order for the effort which this position has put forth in seeking to re-express what seems to be, for Dr. Payne, the classical view of the church regarding the events of Christ's return. Certainly the method of establishing conclusions on scriptural references, rather than philosophical principles, must be recommended to all who would seek to set forth any teaching of the Word. At the present, it remains to be seen how wide-spread the acceptance of this revived position will be and the influence it will make on the contemporary views of the Second Advent.

## CHAPTER V

### A SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### I. A SUMMARY

One of the basic presuppositions of this study was that the most important question when dealing with a subject of this nature is: "What does the Word of God teach?" It has, therefore, been the purpose of this research to set forth as objectively as possible the scriptural basis upon which three of the major contemporary premillennial views of the Rapture rest. The three positions reviewed in this study were: pre-tribulationism, reactionary post-tribulationism, and classical post-tribulationism. One scholar was arbitrarily selected to represent each view.

Pre-tribulationism. The first view, pre-tribulationism, was represented by John F. Walvoord. His imminent pre-tribulation view of the Rapture was set forth under six principles. These major points were: (1) the doctrine of imminence, (2) the nature of the Church, (3) the nature of the Tribulation, (4) the Holy Spirit, (5) the necessity of an interval between the Rapture and Second Coming, and (6) a contrast of the two preceding events. The major objection was that the basis of this interpretation appears to be more of a philosophical concept of the Church rather than a true exegesis of Scripture.

Reactionary post-tribulationism. Representing the second major

premillennial position, known as reactionary post-tribulationism, was George E. Ladd. While highly commended for its exegetical achievements, this view falls short in the opinion of many by neglecting to present the return of Christ as an imminent expectation of the Church. It was also noted that pre-tribulationism's fundamental criticism was that exegesis is engaged in before "the Church" is sufficiently defined. Some consider reactionary post-tribulationism to be the most rapidly expanding position among evangelicals.

Classical post-tribulationism. One of the most recent statements on this subject of the Rapture is the view of J. Barton Payne, which he calls "classical post-tribulationism." His efforts have been to re-express what he feels is the classical Christian hope relative to Christ's return. This, to him, is an imminent post-tribulationism. By selected passages of Scripture, Payne seeks to establish imminency and the time of the Church's hope as post-tribulational. Because the only contemporary publication of this view is less than two years old, very few contemporary objections were available. One objection, however, mentioned by two reviewers of the book, was a tendency in this position to spiritualize the passages relevant to the Second Advent. Many of the objections which pre-tribulationism applies to reactionary post-tribulationism could be considered applicable to this view, except those regarding imminence.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions have been drawn from this research; they come under the three categories: tolerance, definitions, and the message.

Tolerance. Many of the books and articles read by the author in preparing this paper plead for tolerance. One of the outstanding conclusions of this study, therefore, is in this area. The sequence of events that surrounds Christ's return is of minor significance compared to the truth of His real coming. While evangelicals cannot tolerate any deviation from the clear doctrines of the Word, it is regrettable to know that certain eschatological inferences have sometimes been laid down as requirements for Christian fellowship. In recent days, however, there have been encouraging signs of a growing spirit of Christian charity.<sup>1</sup> Certainly sincere Christians should be allowed to maintain divergent opinions about certain eschatological details on which Scripture itself is not explicitly clear.

Definitions. It has been the observation of the author that one reason for such varying views regarding the Rapture is due to various definitions. As evidence of this, it will be recalled that pre-tribulationism and reactionary post-tribulationism are not in agreement on their definition of "the Church." The former position refuses to include "the elect" or Israel in their definition of "the Church." The

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, The Imminent Appearing, p. 169.



latter seeks to include both, or at least allow prophecies that apply to "the Church" to apply to both "the elect" and Israel. Consequently, one could not expect them to come out with the same conclusions. A second illustration of differing definitions bringing varying conclusions is the definition of "imminence." This word involves all three positions discussed in this paper. For Walvoord (pre-tribulationism), imminence means that no prophesied event must necessarily take place before Christ raptures the Church<sup>2</sup> and would indicate that Christ must come soon. This is exactly opposite of Payne's classical post-tribulation description of imminence when he says, "Imminency does not mean that Christ's coming must be soon."<sup>3</sup> As for Ladd (reactionary post-tribulationism), imminency might be described as the "any-moment" expectation of Christ after certain prophetic events take place. These words are only representative of what may be considered as validating evidence of why there are differing views among premillennialists concerning the time of the Rapture of the Church.

The message. It seems that one question makes all the preceding material relevant, at least to those who are called to be evangelists or proclaimers of the "good news." That question is: "How do these three particular views affect the message of the Gospel?" Contrary to the thinking of some,<sup>4</sup> the evidence would indicate that the incentive for

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<sup>2</sup>Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup>Payne, The Imminent Appearing, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Ladd, op. cit., p. 164.

world evangelisation seems to be neither decreased or increased by holding any particular one of the positions discussed in this study. More specifically, however, one should not propagate teachings of safety, about which the Word of God is not explicitly clear, nor should the hearts of God's people be filled with what may be a false hope, and thus leave them utterly unprepared for terrible days of persecution when and if they come. If there is a possibility that the Church is to suffer tribulation, do not those who believe in that possibility have a God-given responsibility to do what they can to prepare the Church for what may be ahead, even though the message is very unwelcome? Finally, let it be said that pre-tribulationism is obviously not essential to premillennialism; therefore, it would be better to be prepared for the worst and be surprised than to be disappointed. As one moderate pre-tribulationist put it, "That which counts above everything else is that we should be ready for the Rapture, whether it take place a little sooner or a little later."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>René Pache, The Return of Jesus Christ, trans. William Sanford LaSor (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), p. 131.

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**APPENDIX**

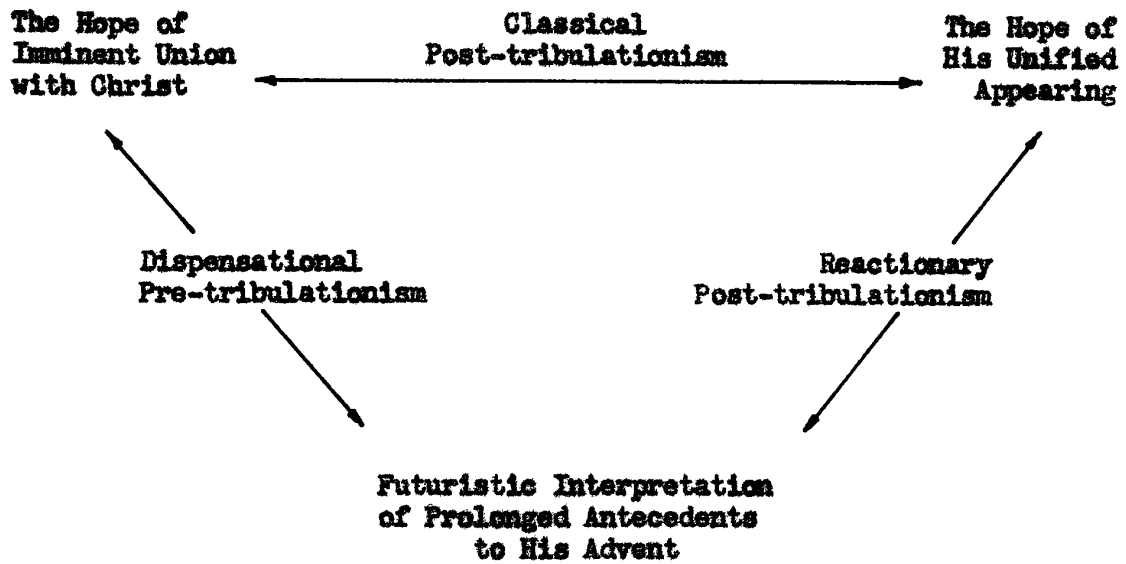
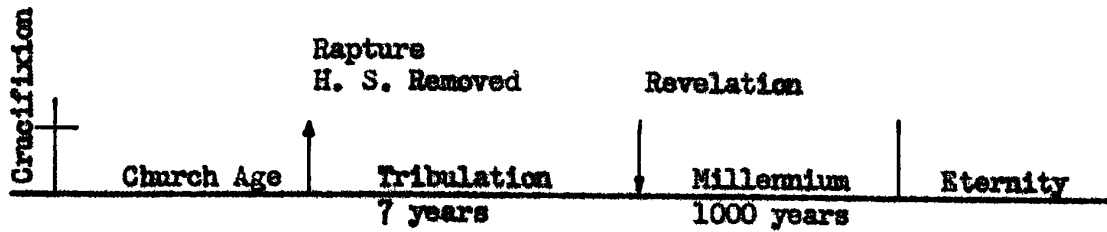
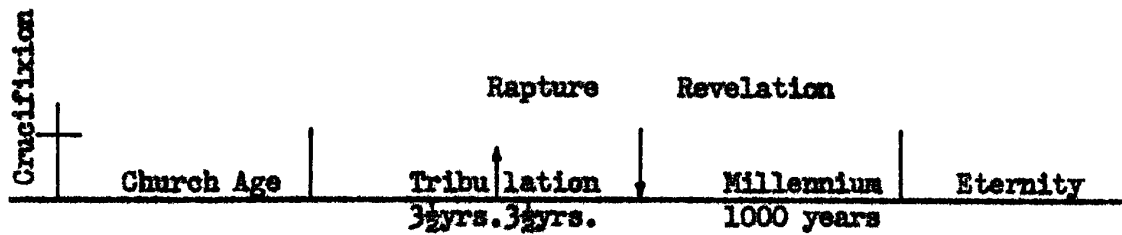


Chart suggested by: J. Barton Payne, The Imminent Appearing of Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 157.

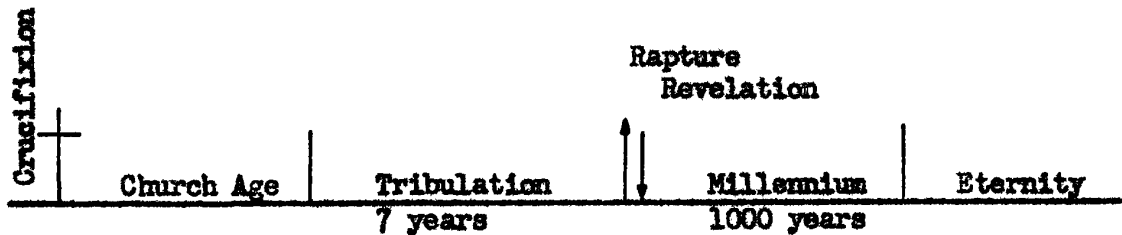
PRE-TRIBULATIONISM



MID-TRIBULATIONISM



REACTIONARY POST-TRIBULATIONISM



CLASSICAL POST-TRIBULATIONISM

