

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Answering the Arguments of Post-Tribulation Rapture Position

ELMER L. TOWNS, DMIN

1

Post-tribulationism is that view which anticipates the church will endure the Great Tribulation and be raptured at its conclusion. The Rapture and Second Coming of Christ are viewed as one and the same. According to Reese,

The Church of Christ will not be removed from the earth until the Advent of Christ at the very end of the present Age: The Rapture and the Appearing take place at the same crisis; hence Christians of that generation will be exposed to the final affliction under Antichrist.¹

Post-tribulation writers suggest several “proofs” for their theory. It should be noted that not every writer holding this view would necessarily hold all the arguments listed below, but the following list identifies the major arguments by leading spokesmen in this theological camp.

1. The Historical Argument. One argument advanced by post-tribulation writers is that the early church held their view. For this reason they sometimes refer to themselves as historic premillennialists. This argument has both a positive and negative emphasis. The positive argument is stated by Gundry.

Until Augustine in the fourth century, the early Church generally held to the premillenarian understanding of Bible eschatology. The chiliasm entailed a futuristic interpretation of Daniel’s seventieth week, the abomination of desolation, and the personal Antichrist. And it was post tribulational. Neither mentioned nor considered, the possibility of a pre tribulational rapture seems never to have occurred to anyone in the early Church.²

The above quotation implies that pre-tribulationism was conceived at a late date and was the idea of some individual, rather than that which the apostles handed the early church.

¹ Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.), 18.

² Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 173.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

MacPherson, an advocate of this position, attributes the pre-tribulation position to a young girl in Scotland.

What I'm about to say may come as a shock, but I have to say it. The common doctrine in certain church circles of a Pre-Trib Rapture is something that was never heard of or held by any group of Christians before the year 1830. In my earlier book *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*, I presented a lot of new evidence I found, while researching in Scotland and England in 1972, that Pre-Trib Rapture teaching began in a personal revelation of a young Scottish lassie in the spring of 1830.³

2

There are three points that need to be observed in relation to the above criticisms of the pre-tribulation position. First, it is questionable if anyone can demonstrate that there was a finely developed eschatological position taught by the early church. This means the early church was neither clearly pre-tribulation nor post-tribulation. Addressing this subject, Ryrie suggests,

The early church believed in tribulation, the imminent coming of Christ, and a Millennium to follow. The early church was clearly premillennial but not clearly pre-tribulation, nor was it clearly post-tribulation when measured against today's developed pre- or post-tribulation teachings.⁴

Second, the time of the Rapture was not an issue with early church fathers. They knew Christ was coming imminently. It was not until a hundred years ago that the Rapture became an issue. The fact is that each generation fights its own theological battles. This means that the church does not deal extensively with an issue until a need arises that demands its attention. Then the issue is debated until it becomes systematically formulated. It seems that at different periods in church history different doctrines have become central. In the two centuries following Christ's appearance on earth, the issue was Christology; during the Dark Ages the doctrine of justification was emphasized by Martin Luther; during the eighteenth century sanctification was emphasized by John Wesley. This past century the doctrine of eschatology has been the focal point of theological discussion, hence it is only natural that the timing of the events has been closely analyzed. Pentecost supports this conclusion,

It should be observed that each era of church history has been occupied with a particular doctrinal controversy, which has become the object of discussion, revision, and formulation, until there was general acceptance of what Scripture

³ Dave MacPherson, *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas City, Missouri: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974), 12.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 68.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

taught. The entire field of theology was thus formulated through the age. It was not until the last century that the field of Eschatology became a matter to which the mind of the church was turned.⁵

In the third place, the statement that “the common doctrine of a Pre-Trib Rapture began in a personal revelation of a young Scottish lassie” cannot stand unchallenged. If MacPherson were half the historian he claims to be, he would have known better than to make what he apparently knew was an inaccurate statement. In his earlier book he devoted 123 pages (including appendix, notes and bibliography) that maintained that Darby was converted to pre-tribulationism from post-tribulationism through a Miss Margaret MacDonald of Port Glasgow, Scotland. He attempts to prove she first discovered “the common doctrine of a Pre-Trib Rapture” through a pentecostal-like trance in 1830 in which “the truth” concerning the Rapture was revealed to her. He concludes his argument,

In light of the evidence I have prayerfully and carefully given in this book relative to the Pre-Trib origin (which origin has been hidden for a long time), I hereby ask all Bible teachers to declare a moratorium on such teaching — at least until they can check this out for themselves. If I am wrong, I ask your forgiveness. And if you are wrong, I have already forgiven you. This then is the story of the unbelievable — yet true — Pre-trib origin.⁶

One does not have to go far to “check this out” for himself. MacPherson includes the record of Miss MacDonald’s own testimony of the vision. She speaks of “the fiery trial” of the Christian under “THE WICKED” (*i.e.*, Antichrist) and of “the awful sight of a false Christ” which she apparently later identified as an early Communist leader living at the time. Then MacPherson is forced to admit in the final footnote of his book, “Margaret was actually a Partial Rapturist; she saw a select group caught up before the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2 is revealed, with the rest of the believers passing through and being purified in the Great Tribulation.”⁷ It is sad that many who oppose the pre-tribulation Rapture use this argument. Commenting on Miss MacDonald’s statements concerning her vision, Ryrie suggests,

As for the very young and chronically ill Margaret MacDonald, we can only truthfully label her as a “confused rapturist,” with elements of partial rapturism, post-tribulationism, perhaps mid-tribulationism, but never pre-tribulationism. By

⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 166.

⁶ Dave McPherson, *op. cit.*, 104.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Darby's own testimony, he claimed his ideas came from the Bible, particularly his understanding of the distinctiveness of the church (in 1826–28), that he believed the Rapture would be a considerable time before the second coming (in 1830), and that there would be a parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel (no later than 1833). He seemed to be unsettled about the secret aspect of the Rapture as late as the 1840's.⁸

2. The Argument Against Imminency. One cannot read the New Testament and conclude the writers believed in other than an imminent return of Christ. Christ can return at any moment. Christians are exhorted to keep watching for His return (1 Thes. 5:1–8; 2 Pet. 3:8–10) and wait for it (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Thes. 1:9, 10; Tit. 2:13). These commands were as meaningful and applicable to the first century as they are today. Even if there are “implied” signs concerning the end time, that does not preclude the belief in the imminent return of Christ. Signs are not absolute measurements of time concerning Christ's return, but relate to general conditions on earth when Christ returns. Imminency means He can come at any time.

Post-tribulation writers argue that the early church did not believe in, nor do the Scriptures teach the doctrine of imminency. They claim the biblical injunctions to watch for the return of Christ do not necessarily mean it should be anticipated immediately. Stating this conclusion, Gundry writes,

The full force of the exhortations to watch for Jesus' return, then, does not require imminence of the Parousia. A tribulational interval no more destroys expectancy than did necessary delays during the apostolic age. A number of exhortations to watch, including the fullest, appears in the immediate context of the post tribulational advent and include the observation of precursive signs during the tribulation. Such signs do not enervate expectancy, they stimulate it. Self-purification in the light of the second coming rests, not on the fear of sudden exposure, but on the certainty of the event and on the knowledge that the conduct of our whole Christian life will be revealed in the light of divine presence. Concerning NT exhortations to watch, we are led to the conclusion: until tribulational events have taken place, New Testament expectancy does not mean to look for the return of the Lord as a present possibility, but to look *forward* to His return after the events of the tribulation.⁹

The argument against the imminent return of Christ is normally based on a number of signs which had to be accomplished before Christ could return. It is also argued that

⁸ Ryrie, *op. cit.*, 72.

⁹ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 43.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

certain events such as the fall of Jerusalem, or the death of Peter had to happen before Jesus could return; therefore, He could not have returned before these things happened and was not expected by the church prior to these events. Also, the need to accomplish the Great Commission is presented as an argument against imminency. MacPherson lists the following twelve:

1. The Great Commission fulfillment implies a long period of time.
2. Seed growth in Matthew 13, a time-consuming process.
3. Paul expected death, not Rapture, in 2 Timothy 4:6–8.
4. Jesus predicted Peter's martyrdom in John 21:18–19.
5. Matthew 24 signs must come first.
6. Big interval between Christ's ascension and return: Jewish dispersion into "all nations" (Luke 21); "man traveling into a far country," "after a **long time** the lord of those servants cometh" (Matt. 25).
7. Apostasy of last days takes time to develop.
8. Bridegroom tarried in parable of virgins.
9. Pastoral Epistles teach Church's continuing ministry, which involves time.
10. Paul says Christ's coming is not imminent (2 Thess. 2:1–3), for apostasy and Antichrist must come first.
11. View of seven phases of church history (seven churches of Revelation) involves big lapse of time and imminence difficulties for Pre-Tribs; could Christ have come before the last phase?
12. Exhortations to watch and be ready tied so-called **second stage** in Matthew 24 and 25, 1 Corinthians 1:7, Colossians 3:4, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, 1 Peter 1:13, 1 Peter 4:13, and 1 John 2:28.¹⁰

At first glance, the arguments might appear conclusive to some, but in light of the biblical teaching on imminence, they require closer evaluation. When this is done, the above list reveals at least seven fundamental errors in interpretation. First, MacPherson fails to interpret the Scriptures in the context of revelation. Conservative scholars are generally

¹⁰ MacPherson, *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture*, 23.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

agreed the prophecy concerning Peter's martyrdom was recorded by John perhaps as much as thirty years after Peter was killed. How this could discourage the early Christians, who first read this Gospel from believing in the imminent return of Christ, is difficult to comprehend. The context in which this prophecy exists suggests some readers may have believed Christ would return even before the death of the aging apostle John (John 21:23).

6

A second hermeneutical problem apparent in the above list is evident in the failure to interpret a verse within its biblical context. This is particularly evident in the claim that Paul anticipated death, not Rapture. It was Paul who most fully developed the doctrine of an imminent Rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15; 1 Thes. 4). If toward the end of his life, he spoke of death as a very real possibility, it does not necessarily mean he was denying the doctrine of imminency. Perhaps he was merely recognizing the reality of the situation he faced at that time. Commenting on the statement in question, Stott notes,

The apostle uses two figures of speech to portray his coming death, one taken from the language of sacrifice and the other (probably) of boats. First, "I am already on the point of being sacrificed." Of "Already my life is being poured out on the altar" (NEB), he likens his life to a libation or drink offering. So imminent does he believe his martyrdom to be that he speaks of the sacrifice as having already begun. He goes on: "The time of my departure has come." "Departure" (**analysis**) seems to have become a regular word for death, but we need not necessarily conclude from this that its metaphorical origin had been entirely forgotten. It means "loosing" and could be used either of striking a tent (which Lock favours, because of the soldier's "I have fought a good fight" in the following verse) or of "release from shackles" (which Simpson mentions), or of untying a boat from its moorings. The last is certainly the most picturesque of the three possibilities. The two images then to some extent correspond, for the end of this life (out poured as a libation) is the beginning of another (putting out to sea). Already the anchor is weighed, the ropes are slipped, and the boat is about to set sail for another shore.¹¹

Thirdly, MacPherson assumes certain conclusions that the early church would not have assumed. The fulfillment of the Great Commission does not necessarily imply a long time. Within their generation the early Christians were accused of having turned the world upside down (Acts 17:8). Paul himself claimed the gospel had been preached "in all the world" during his lifetime (Col. 1:5, 6). While MacPherson might believe apostasy takes time to develop, that was neither the experience nor conviction of the early church. Even before the gospel was preached outside the city limits of Jerusalem, the church had to

¹¹ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 113.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

deal with the problem of deterioration (Acts 5:1–11). The whole emphasis of the biblical teaching concerning apostasy is that its growth is rapid (cf. 2 Jn. 8; Jude; 1 Cor. 15:33f.; Gal. 3:1–5).

A fourth problem with the above list is its dependence upon parables. MacPherson makes parables teach more than what they may have been intended to teach. Jesus did not teach the parable of the ten virgins to convince His listeners that the bridegroom intends to be late arriving, but to watch because he might come at any moment. Also, Jesus did not teach the parable of the wheat and tares to discuss the time it takes for germination, but to teach the certainty of the harvest or judgment. Commenting on the interpretation of parables, Ramm suggests,

*Determine the one central truth the parable is attempting to teach. This might be called the golden rule of parabolic interpretation for practically all writers on the subject mention it with stress. "The typical parable presents one single point of comparison," writes Dodd. "The details are not intended to have independent significance." Others have put the rule this way: Don't make a parable walk on all fours.*¹²

Post-tribulationists tend to ignore the distinction between the Rapture and Second Coming. This is evident in arguments 5, 10 and 12 in the above list. As the biblical distinction between the Rapture and revelation of Christ is a major argument for the pre-tribulationist view, this distinction will be examined more closely in a later section.

A sixth evident error in MacPherson's list is his misunderstanding of the doctrine of imminency and its application to the Christian life. There can be no question that imminency was taught in Scripture and believed by the early church, but no one who properly understood that Christ could return at any moment ever went to the mountains in white sheets to wait for the Rapture. Rather, Christians were urged to work hard that they might be found working when he returned. As Pentecost rightly observes,

The doctrine of imminency is taught in Scripture in such passages as John 14:2–3; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 4:16–17; 5:5–9; Titus 2:13; James 5:8–9; Revelation 3:10; 22:17–21 ... the early church held to the doctrine of imminency.¹³

When properly understood, none of the objections listed by MacPherson are effective, except his eleventh argument involving the typological interpretation of the seven

¹² Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1974), 283.

¹³ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 168.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

churches. However, this is not an argument, but an illustration and a weak foundation upon which to erect a denial of a clearly taught biblical doctrine. This typological interpretation has become popular only within the past century and not many theologians would dream of building a theology or any part of it upon an illustration.

3. The Argument that the Church is Promised Tribulation. Another argument of the post-tribulationist is that the church will endure the Great Tribulation. Verses are cited such as Job 15:17–19; John 16:1–2, 33; Acts 8:1–4; Romans 12:12 noting that tribulation is promised to the Christian, not escape from tribulation. Those holding this position argue that this tribulation is simply the trials experienced over the years by Christians, so they equate suffering with “the Great Tribulation.” Others agree there is a coming tribulation and that Christians will suffer during this period, but they are not subject to the wrath of God. This appears to be the majority belief of contemporary post-tribulationist teachers. Gundry states,

It is not a point of disagreement whether the Church will ever suffer God’s retributive wrath. She will not (John 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 5:9; 8:1; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; 1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9). And there are clear indications in the book of Revelation that the bowls of divine wrath will not touch saints, indications in addition to the theological necessity that God’s wrath not touch a saved person ... As now, the Church will suffer persecution during the tribulation, but no saint can suffer divine wrath.¹⁴

Similarly, Harold Ockenga argues the church will endure the Tribulation. Further, he recognizes the nature of this argument must deny the identification of the Tribulation with the wrath of God, noting,

The church will endure the wrath of men, but will not suffer the wrath of God. This distinction which has been of great help to me is generally overlooked by pre-tribulationists ... Pre-tribulation rapturists identify the tribulation with the wrath of God. If this cannot be disproven, we must believe that the church will be taken out of the world before the tribulation, for there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.¹⁵

This line of argumentation fails to recognize at least three distinctions between the use and interpretation of the word “tribulation” and “the Great Tribulation” as described in Scripture. First is the argument of intention and fulfillment. When the Great Tribulation and the suffering of saints are confused, it logically demands that every generation

¹⁴ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 46, 62.

¹⁵ Harold J. Ockenga, “Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation? Yes” *Christian Life*, February 19, 55, 22.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

experience its own great tribulation. Commenting on John 16:33, Mauro notes, “If the Lord meant that the Great Tribulation was the portion of His saints, then there would needs be about three ‘great tribulations’ every century—upwards of fifty to the present time—in order to meet the requirements of the case.”¹⁶ The second argument deals with the use of the word “tribulation” in Scripture. Pentecost explains,

Further, it must be noticed that the term *tribulation* is used in several different ways in Scripture. It is used in a non-technical, non-eschatological sense in reference to any time of suffering or testing into which one goes. It is so used in Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17; John 16:33; Romans 5:3; 12:12; 2 Corinthians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Revelation 1:9. It is used in its technical or eschatological sense in reference to the whole period of the seven years of tribulation, as in Revelation 2:22 or Matthew 24:29. It is also used in reference to the last half of this seven-year period, as in Matthew 24:21. When the word *tribulation* is used in reference to the church, as in John 16:33, it is used in a non-technical sense, in which the church is promised an age-long opposition from the god of this age, but it is not teaching that the church will be brought into the period technically known as the tribulation. Otherwise one would have to teach that the tribulation has already existed for over nineteen hundred years.¹⁷

The third argument notes that the Great Tribulation is everywhere in Scripture discussed as largely Jewish in character and characterized not by the wrath of men so much as by the wrath of God. According to Ironside,

It will help a great deal if we see at the very beginning that the Great Tribulation is the time of Jacob’s trouble, not the time of the Church’s trouble. It cannot begin until after that parenthetic period that comes in between Daniel’s sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, for during all this age God makes no distinction between the Jew and the Gentile. It will be after the Church is taken out of this scene that He will recognize Israel again as a nation in special covenant relationship with Himself. Then their time of final trial will begin.¹⁸

Further summarizing the character of the Great Tribulation, Thiessen notes,

We know, of course, that believers must through “much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22, A.V.); but there is besides this common experience

¹⁶ Philip Mauro, *Looking for the Savior* (London: Samuel E. Roberts, Publishers, n.d.), 37.

¹⁷ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 170.

¹⁸ Harry A. Ironside, “Why the Church Will Not Go Through the Great Tribulation” *The Sure Word of Prophecy*, ed. John W. Bradbury (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1943), 127.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

of Christians a future *period* of tribulation. In Dan. 12:1 it is spoken of as a “great tribulation”; Luke 21:34–36 refers to it as “that day,” depicted in the preceding part of the chapter; Rev. 3:20 speaks of it as “the hour of trial, that hour which is come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth”; and in Rev. 7:14 we read of a great multitude who had come “out of the great tribulation.” In the Old Testament it is referred to as the “day of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:4–7) and the time of God’s indignation with the inhabitants of the earth (Isa. 24:17–21; 26:20, 21; 34:1–3; Zech. 14:1–3). That the Tribulation period will come between the two phases of Christ’s coming appears from a study of the whole program of the future. Note particularly that Matt. 24:29 declares that it will close with Christ’s return in glory, i.e., with His Revelation.¹⁹

4. **The Argument of the Historic Fulfillment of Daniel.** 9:24–27. Some post-tribulationists hold to an historic fulfillment of Daniel 9:24–27 including the seventieth week of that prophecy. They believe the seventy weeks are a continuous, successive, unbroken period of years that ends with the death of Stephen or the destruction of Jerusalem. Typical of this interpretation, Rose writes,

If there were “gaps” and “intermissions” the prophecy would be vague, misleading and deceptive ... The “62 weeks” joined immediately unto the “7 weeks,” and their combined “69 weeks” reached “UNTO MESSIAH.” Beyond HIS birth, but not to his “triumphal entry”; only “UNTO” His public anointing. There was no “gap” between the “69th, and the 70” weeks ... The “one week” of prophetic “70 weeks” began with John the Baptist; from his first public preaching the kingdom of God, the gospel dispensation commenced. These seven years, added to the 483 years, complete the 490 years ... so that the whole of the prophecy from the times and corresponding events, has been fulfilled to the very letter ... All the evidence of the New Testament and of Christian experience agrees with the greatest teachers of the Christian church that the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy has all been fulfilled more than 1900 years ago. This leaves no future seventieth week yet to be fulfilled in “the great tribulation after the Rapture.”²⁰

It should be here noted that not all post-tribulationists hold to an historic fulfillment of Daniel’s seventieth week. In a rebuttal of the post-tribulationism of J. Barton Payne, Gundry emphasizes the futurity of the seventieth week, noting in part,

¹⁹ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 464.

²⁰ George L. Rose, *Tribulation Till Translation* (Glendale, California: Rose Publishing Company, 1943), 46–47, 62.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

We cannot spiritualize the phrase “your people” (v. 24) into a spiritual Israel inclusive of the Gentiles without doing violence to the plain sense of the passage. For example, the destruction of Jerusalem, spoken of prominently in the prophecy, deals with Israel *the nation*. And yet, since in the seventy weeks the goals listed in verse twenty-four were to be accomplished, the seventy weeks cannot have entirely elapsed, for the finishing of Israel’s transgression, the purging of her iniquity, and the bringing in of her everlasting righteousness have not reached completion. Paul writes of these as still in the future for Israel (Rom. 11:25–27).²¹

There are five major schools of interpretation surrounding the issue of Daniel’s seventieth week. Pre-tribulationists are futurists in interpreting this passage. Walvoord identifies the other views,

In opposition to the futurist interpretation, at least four other views have been advanced: (1) the liberal view that the seventieth seven is fulfilled in the events following the Maccabean persecution just as the preceding sixty-nine sevens were; (2) the view of Jewish scholars that the seventieth week is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; (3) the view that the seventieth week of Daniel is an indefinite period beginning with Christ but extending to the end, often held by amillennarians such as Young and Leupold; (4) that the seventieth seven are seven literal years beginning with the public ministry of Christ and ending about three and a half years after His death.²²

The futurist interpretation views a gap of some time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week. It is during the gap that this present dispensation exists. At some future point, that seventieth week will begin. Most futurists hold that the nature of the Tribulation (focused on regathered Israel) demands that the seventieth week not begin prior to the Rapture of the church. Gundry summarizes the view of the futurists,

Although the lack of certainty regarding the exact dates of our Lord’s ministry demands some reserve, the futuristic view rests on a more exact chronology, best and fully set forth in Sir Robert Anderson’s *The Coming Prince*. Very briefly, it is common ground that the seventy sevens are weeks of years. Anderson reckons a year at 360 days from the equation of 1,260 days with forty-two months (Rev. 12:6, 7, 13, 14; 13:4–7), from the equation of five months with 150 days (Gen. 7:11; 8:4; 7:24; 8:3), and from other evidence of unequal value. By calculating the only known decree to rebuild the *city* of Jerusalem (Neh. 1:1–11; 2:1–8) sixty-nine weeks of seven 360-day years, we are brought to Palm Sunday, the only time Jesus was

²¹ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 189.

²² John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 232.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

publicly acclaimed King, Prince, and Messiah and shortly after which He was cut off ... The accuracy is so remarkable that the objections seem paltry by comparison. The best answer to the objections is the failure of the historical view to provide an exact and accurate chronology and the resultant substitution of chronologies dealing in wide approximations, with the result that the seventy weeks of years become half-literal and half-symbolic. The futuristic view can be established apart from Anderson's calculations, but they endow the futurist view with a chronology far superior to chronologies under the historical view.²³

5. The Argument that the Resurrection Occurs After the Tribulation. Probably the strongest argument presented by post-tribulationists is the doctrine of resurrection. According to this argument, the Rapture must be post-tribulation because the resurrection occurs after the Tribulation. The importance of this argument is seen in various statements made by post-tribulation writers. According to MacPherson,

Clearly the resurrection of the holy dead takes place at the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:16). Therefore, "wheresoever the resurrection is, there will be the Rapture also." Upon examination of passages that speak of the resurrection of the holy dead, which is the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5–6), we find that this first resurrection is associated with the coming of the Lord (Isa. 26:19), the conversion of Israel (Rom. 11:15), the inauguration of the Kingdom (Luke 14:14–15; Rev. 20:4–6), the giving of rewards (Rev. 11:15–16), the Great Tribulation coming before it (Dan. 12:1–3).²⁴

Ladd views this argument as the only one based upon an explicit statement of Scripture, explaining,

With the exception of one passage, the author will grant that the Scripture nowhere explicitly states that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. God's people are seen in the Tribulation, but they are not called the Church but the elect or the saints. Nor does the Word explicitly place the Rapture at the end of the Tribulation. Most of the references to these final events lack chronological indications ... However, in one passage, Revelation 20, the Resurrection is placed at the return of Christ in Glory. This is more than an inference.²⁵

Similarly, Gundry also stresses the importance of this argument.

²³ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 192–193.

²⁴ Norman S. MacPherson, *Triumph Through Tribulation* (Otego, New York: Published by the Author, 1944), 41.

²⁵ George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 165.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The resurrection of the dead in Christ will immediately precede the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16–18). Therefore, if Scripture places the resurrection of saints in general after the tribulation and does not specifically put the resurrection of deceased members of the Church before the tribulation, it is natural to understand that the deceased of the Church will be raised after the tribulation. Such a resurrection would of course draw the translation of living members of the Church and the rapture of the whole Church into a posttribulational orbit.²⁶

This argument is based on the conclusion that the resurrection of Revelation 20:5–6, which is there called “the first resurrection,” is the same resurrection referred to in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Probably the most systematic of the presentations of this argument is that of Reese. Summarizing this position, Stanton writes,

Reese’s argument takes on the form of a syllogism, the major premises being (1) the Old Testament Scriptures prove that the resurrection of the Old Testament saints is at the revelation of Christ, just prior to the millennial kingdom; the minor premise being (2) all Darbyists agree that the resurrection of the church synchronizes with the resurrection of Israel; hence, the conclusion is drawn (3) therefore the resurrection of the church sets the time of the Rapture as post-tribulational.²⁷

The major weakness of this argument is the equating of “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5–6) or the resurrection of the Old Testament saints with the resurrection occurring at the Rapture. The Scriptures identify at least four distinct resurrections, the first chronologically being the resurrection of Christ (Mt. 28:1–7). The expression “first resurrection” can therefore be understood only within the immediate context of the passage since Christ’s resurrection was first. The resurrection there mentioned is “first” in that it comes one thousand years prior to the fourth and final resurrection, but it is also “third” in that it follows the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of saints that accompany the Rapture. Questioning Darby’s wisdom in making such a statement, Walvoord, for instance, suggests,

The Old Testament saints are never described by the phrase “in Christ.” The fact that the “voice of the archangel” — Israel’s defender — is heard at the rapture is not conclusive proof that Israel is raised at that time. The tendency of followers of Darby to spiritualize the resurrection of Daniel 12:1–2 as merely the restoration of Israel, thereby refuting its post-tribulationism, is to forsake literal interpretation to gain a point, a rather costly concession for premillenarians who build upon literal

²⁶ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 146.

²⁷ Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 320.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

interpretation of prophecy. The best answer to Reese and Ladd is to concede the point that the resurrection of Old Testament saints is after the tribulation, but to divorce it completely from the translation and resurrection of the church. Reese's carefully built argument then proves only that Darby was hasty in claiming the resurrection of the Old Testament saints at the time of the translation of the church. If the translation of the church is a different event entirely, Reese proves nothing by his argument.²⁸

Finally, perhaps the word "first" did not mean "first in time" but "first in kind," i.e., the resurrection was of God's people (whether before or after the Tribulation). The "second of a different kind," involved the unsaved (Rev. 20:11–15).

6. The Argument of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. An additional argument based upon the parable of the wheat and the tares is sometimes used to defend the post-tribulational cause. They suggest that Christ spoke of the wheat and the tares growing together "until the harvest" (Mt. 13:30), and suggest a general judgment at the end of the age. Commenting on this text, Brown writes,

The harvest is the end of the world, the period of Christ's second coming, and of the judicial separation of the righteous and the wicked. Till then, no attempt is to be made to effect such separation. But to stretch this so far as to justify allowing openly scandalous persons to remain in the communion of the Church, is to wrest the teaching of this parable to other than its proper design, and to go in the teeth of apostolic injunctions (1 Cor. 5).²⁹

It must be remembered, however, that the purpose of the kingdom parables in Matthew 13 is not to record the history of the church, but rather the history of the kingdom in mystery form, i.e., Christendom. Wiersbe emphasizes this point,

In this series of parables, Jesus explained the course of the gospel in the world. If Israel had received Him as King, the blessings would have flowed out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But the nation rejected Him, and God had to institute a new program on earth. During this present age, "the kingdom of heaven" is a mixture of true and false, good and bad, as pictured in these parables. It is "Christendom," professing allegiance to the King, and yet containing much that is contrary to the principles of the King.³⁰

²⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 154.

²⁹ David Brown, *The Four Gospels* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 79.

³⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Meet Your King* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1980), 82–83.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

7. **The Argument of Fruit.** Perhaps the weakest argument for any theological position is that based upon fruit, i.e., the apparent results of a doctrinal teaching. Nevertheless, MacPherson makes extensive use of this argument suggesting those holding a pre-tribulational view of the Rapture were at least in part responsible for the deaths of “tens of thousands, maybe millions, of Chinese Christians,” the persecution of other Christians, church splits, raising funds under false pretenses, *etc.*³¹ One has a great deal of difficulty recognizing a direct relationship between eschatology and some of the above-mentioned results. Further, in cases where a relationship might exist, it is difficult to believe that only those holding to a pre-tribulation Rapture are capable of criticizing (or, as MacPherson suggests, “persecuting”) other Christians, splitting churches or raising money under false pretenses. The real weakness of this argument is seen in W. B. Riley’s observations concerning pre-tribulational Christian workers.

There is one thing that will be denied, even our opponents themselves being witnesses, namely, that the men that held this hope, have so far discharged their obligations to God as to have promoted the interests of His church by personal service, by money sacrificed, by missionary zeal, by intelligent counsel, by tireless work, so as not to have been surpassed by any people that have ever named His name, or joined their fortunes to His cause.³²

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

The above seven arguments are those generally used by post-tribulationists. While not all holding this position see all these arguments, and some of them use these arguments with various spins, these seem to be the ammunition they use to prove their point. I believe these arguments have been sufficiently answered, probably not to their satisfaction; but if honest, they must recognize that I have demonstrated some proof on the other side, *i.e.*, the pre-tribulationist Rapture.

There’s one basic weakness I did not address. It is their lack of a consistent theological system that would naturally demand a post-tribulation Rapture. They do not have a comprehensive approach to Scriptures; if anything, their “glue” that holds them together is their vehement denial of a pre-tribulation Rapture. If this is true, their approach is not an *affirmation* of truth, but a *negation* of truth.

The pre-millennialist view is based on a dispensational interpretation of Scriptures with a clear distinction between the church and Israel. Amillennialism is based on a covenant or reformed interpretation of Scriptures that assumes a covenant ratified in the Old

³¹ MacPherson, *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture*, 16–17, 67–80, and *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*, 15.

³² W. B. Riley, *The Evolution of the Kingdom* (New York: Chas. C. Cook, 1910), 167.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Testament which continues unto the New. Also, a post-millennial view is based on certain interpretations of sin; Christ triumphed over sin in His death and purpose of His Second Coming.

The post-tribulation Rapture might gain some scholarly support if it has the support of a theological system and those who hold this position should attempt to interpret all Scriptures within their theological view of interpretation. But of course I don't believe they have one; however, I still hold a classical dispensational interpretation of Scriptures and logically the pre-tribulation Rapture.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The other answer to the seven arguments of the post-tribulationist is obviously the affirmative reasons for believing the pre-tribulation Rapture. These are (1) the contrast of the Rapture and the Revelation, (2) the necessity of an interval of time to accomplish on earth and Heaven, (3) the mention of which must take place between the Rapture and the Revelation, (4) the necessity for the removal of the restrainer and the revelation of the man of sin, *i.e.*, Antichrist, (5) the uniqueness of the church as the Body of Christ, (6) the promises to the church to be removed from the Great Tribulation, (7) the absence of the church between Revelation 4:1 and 19:11, and (8) the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, upon which pre-tribulation Rapture is based on. "Even so come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).³³

³³ Towns, E. L. (2002). "Answering the Arguments of Post-Tribulation Rapture Position." *Conservative Theological Journal* Volume 6, 6(19), 290–313.