

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Rapture, John 14, and Myths

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I believe that John 14:1–3 speaks of Christ’s return at the Rapture for His church. However, many who do not believe that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation say that this passage refers to Christ coming at death for a believer. There are good reasons why this passage is Christ’s introduction of the Rapture of the church.

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### CHRIST COMING AT DEATH?

Preterist Dr. Ken Gentry believes that the Scripture “teaches that Christ comes ... to believers at death (John 14:1–3)”<sup>1</sup> Contrary to Dr. Gentry, Leon Morris notes, “The reference to the second advent should not be missed.”<sup>2</sup> So why does Dr. Gentry and others of his persuasion miss the thrust of this passage? Because to take this as a reference to a future second coming would contradict their theology. Why have the majority of ancient and modern interpreters taken this text as a future second coming passage? Because the plain meaning, taken in context, of the language in this passage demands such an understanding.

John 14:3, where Christ tells His disciples, “I will come again, and receive you to Myself,” is an expression that is never used of death in the whole Bible. Commentators on this passage simply declare their view to be so, without substantiation. Yet, many times, various Biblical texts speak of Christ coming in reference to His Second Advent (Matt. 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42–44, 46; 25:31; John 21:23; Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thess. 4:15; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:1, 8, etc.). One of the most vocal opponents of the coming at death view is David Brown. In his pro-postmillennial diatribe against premillennialism (1882), in which Dr. Gentry penned a favorable introduction, Brown provides a six page rebuttal of the “death” view.<sup>3</sup> Brown argues:

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 25–26.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p.639.

<sup>3</sup> David Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?* (Edmonton Alberta, Canada: Still Water Revival Books, [1882] 1990), pp. 20–25.

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“And if I go away” —What then? “Ye shall soon follow me? Death shall shortly bring us together?” Nay; but “If I go away, *I will come again and receive you unto myself, ...*”<sup>4</sup>

The coming of Christ to individuals at death ... is not *fitted* for taking that place in the view of the believer which Scripture assigns to the second advent....

The death of believers, however changed in its character, in virtue of their union to Christ, is, intrinsically considered, not joyous, but grievous—not attractive, but repulsive....<sup>5</sup>

The bliss of the disembodied spirits of the just is not only *incomplete*, but, in some sense, *private* and *fragmentary*, if I may so express myself....

But at the Redeemer’s appearing, all his redeemed will be collected together, and PERFECTLY, PUBLICLY, and SIMULTANEOUSLY glorified.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible never speaks of death as an event in which the Lord comes for a believer, instead, Scripture speaks of Lazarus “carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). In the instance of Stephen the Martyr, he saw “the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Arno Gaebelein aptly summarizes the Biblical statements when he says,

This error is clearly refuted by the fact that elsewhere in the New Testament the Spirit of God tells us that the believer’s death is not the Lord coming to the dying believer, but the death of a Christian means that he goes to be with the Lord; ... For the believer to be absent from the body means “present with the Lord,” ... (2 Cor. 5:1–8).<sup>7</sup>

So then, to what does this passage specifically refer to?

## CHRIST COMING AT THE RAPTURE

Further study of John 14:3 provides further evidence that our Lord’s coming again is not only a future coming, but His coming for the church at the Rapture. We find that the aorist tense of the verbs “go” and “prepare” “denote actuality as well as single acts,”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, p. 21. (emphasis original)

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, p. 22. (emphasis original)

<sup>6</sup> Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, p. 23. (emphasis original)

<sup>7</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John. A complete analytical exposition of the Gospel of John* (New York: Our Hope Publishers, 1925), pp. 266–67.

<sup>8</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), p. 973.

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which support a second coming view of the passage. “The coming again is the counterpart of the going away; visibly Jesus ascends, visibly he returns, Acts 1:9–11.”<sup>9</sup> But note also that the language speaks of Christ coming “from heaven to the earth, He describes a coming for His saints to take them to the Father’s house.”<sup>10</sup> This is a description of the Rapture in contrast to the Second Coming.<sup>11</sup>

“This passage, taken literally, indicates that the believer is going to go to heaven at the time of Christ’s coming for Him.”<sup>12</sup> This will not occur at the Second Advent because that will be a time in which Christ comes *with* His saints, who are already in heaven, not *for* His saints as John 14:1–3 requires. Arno Gaebelein tells us that Christ is unveiling a new revelation about the Rapture of the Church:

But here in John 14 the Lord gives a new and unique revelation; He speaks of something which no prophet had promised, or even could promise. Where is it written that this Messiah would come and instead of gathering His saints into an earthly Jerusalem, would take them to the Father’s house, to the very place where He is? It is something new. And let it be noticed in promising to come again, He addresses the eleven disciples and tells them, “I will receive you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also.” He speaks then of a coming which is not for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, not of a coming to establish His kingdom over the earth, not a coming to judge the nations, but coming which concerns only His own.<sup>13</sup>

## JOHN 14 AND 1 THESSALONIANS 4

A significant number of commentators note that our Lord’s statements in John 14:1–3 parallel another New Testament passage—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.<sup>14</sup> Renald Showers points out a number of similarities between the two passages.<sup>15</sup> However, it was the late

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<sup>9</sup> Lenski, *John’s Gospel*, p. 974.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> For a comparison between the Rapture and the Second Coming see Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *The Truth About the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), pp. 26–31. Or Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *Prophecy Watch: What to Expect in the Days to Come* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), pp. 100–02.

<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, *Rapture Question*, p. 195.

<sup>13</sup> Gaebelein, *Gospel of John*, p. 268.

<sup>14</sup> Renald Showers cites the following individuals who see a connection between John 14:1–3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18: J. H. Bernard, James Montgomery Boice, Arno C. Gaebelein, Arthur Pink, Rudolf Schnackenburg, F. F. Bruce, R. V. G. Tasker, and W. E. Vine in *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel, 1995), p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> Showers, *Maranatha*, pp. 161–64.

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Mennonite commentator, J. B. Smith,<sup>16</sup> who demonstrated just how extensive the relationship of these two passages really are.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Smith made word-for-word comparisons between the Rapture passage (1 Thess. 4:13–18) and a clear Second Advent text (Rev. 19:11–21) and found no significant parallels. “Hence it is impossible that one sentence or even one phrase can be alike in the two lists,” observes Dr. Smith. “And finally not one word in the two lists is used in the same relation or connection.”<sup>18</sup> He goes on to conclude that “it would be difficult if not impossible to find elsewhere any two important passages of Scripture that are so diverse in the words employed and so opposite in their implications.... We believe the comparison of the words of these two passages ... describe different events.”<sup>19</sup>

When it comes to a comparison between John 14:1–3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 we see amazing parallels. That John 14:1–3 is a Rapture reference is supported by the progression of words and thoughts when compared to Paul’s more extensive Rapture passage (1 Thess. 4:13–18). Observe the following comparison:

John 14:1–3	1 Thess. 4:13–18
trouble v. 1	sorrow v. 13
believe v. 1	believe v. 14
God, Me v. 1	Jesus, God v. 14
told you v. 2	say to you v. 15
come again v. 3	coming of the Lord v. 15
receive you v. 3	caught up v. 17
to Myself v. 3	to meet the Lord v. 17
be where I am v. 3	ever be with the Lord v. 17

Dr. Smith notes the following observations as a result of these comparisons:

- The words or phrases are almost an exact parallel.
- They follow one another in both passages in exactly the same order.

<sup>16</sup> J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), pp. 311–13.

<sup>17</sup> Earl Radmacher first called my attention to Smith’s comparison during a debate with Robert Gundry in Long Beach, CA in 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *A Revelation*, p.312.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *A Revelation*, p.312.

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- Only the righteous are dealt with in each case.
- There is not a single irregularity in the progression of words from first to last.
- Either column takes the believer from the troubles of earth to the glories of heaven.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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In light of comparing Scripture with Scripture, it appears obvious that Jesus' teaching in John 14:1–3 and Paul's revelation in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 speak of the same event. Dr. Smith concludes, "It is but consistent to interpret each passage as dealing with the same event—the Rapture of the church."<sup>21</sup> How else does one explain the progression of eight specific words/phrases in exactly the same order, in two different passages, by two different spokesmen? It is clear that these passages refer to a single future event—the Rapture of the church. We learn that the church's Blessed Hope was first revealed by our Lord on the eve of His crucifixion to His disciples as they grieved over His departure. Later, the doctrine of the Rapture was explained in greater detail via Paul's revelation to give comfort to the Thessalonians who were faced with a similar problem of departing loved ones that Jesus dealt with in the Upper Room with His disciples. Now, 2,000 years later and half-way around the world, today's church can be comforted by the Blessed Hope that in the next moment of time we could be face-to-face with our Lord, in the Father's house, via the Rapture of the Church. May it be today. Maranatha!

## MYTHS OF THE ORIGIN OF PRETRIBULATIONISM

A history of the Rapture is of necessity a history of pretribulationism, since most other views do not distinguish between the two phases of Christ's return—the Rapture and Second Advent. The partial Rapture and midtribulationism theories have been developed only within the past 100 years.

## THE POST APOSTOLIC CHURCH

That the earliest documents (in addition to the New Testament canon) of the ancient church reflect a clear premillennialism is generally conceded, but great controversy surrounds their understanding of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation. Pretribulationists point to the early church's clear belief in imminency and a few passages

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<sup>20</sup> Smith, *A Revelation*, pp. 312–13.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *A Revelation*, p. 313.

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from a couple of documents as evidence that pretribulationism was held by at least a few from the earliest times.

As was typical of every area of the early church's theology, their views of prophecy were undeveloped and sometimes contradictory, containing a seedbed out of which could develop various and diverse theological viewpoints. While it is hard to find clear pretribulationism spelled out in the fathers, there are also found clear pre-trib elements that if systematized with their other prophetic views contradict posttribulationism but support pretribulationism.

Since imminency is considered to be a crucial feature of pretribulationism by scholars such as John Walvoord,<sup>22</sup> it is significant that the Apostolic Fathers, though posttribulational, at the same time just as clearly taught the pretribulational feature of imminency.<sup>23</sup> Because it was common in the early church to hold contradictory positions without even an awareness of inconsistency, it would not be surprising to learn that their era supports both views. Larry Crutchfield notes, "This belief in the imminent return of Christ within the context of ongoing persecution has prompted us to broadly label the views of the earliest fathers, 'imminent intratribulationism.'"<sup>24</sup>

Expressions of imminency abound in the Apostolic Fathers. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, *The Didache*, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, and *The Shepherd of Hermas* all speak of imminency.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, *The Shepherd of Hermas* speaks of the pretribulational concept of escaping the Tribulation.

You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be

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<sup>22</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), pp. 24–25.

<sup>23</sup> Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 87–93. Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 112. J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 12–19.

<sup>24</sup> Larry V. Crutchfield, "The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers" in Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, editors, *When The Trumpet Sounds* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Crutchfield, "The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers", pp. 88–101.

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pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly.<sup>26</sup>

Evidence of pretribulationism surfaces during the early medieval period in a sermon some attribute to Ephraem the Syrian entitled *Sermon on The Last Times, The Antichrist, and The End of the World*.<sup>27</sup> The sermon was written some time between the fourth and sixth century. The Rapture statement reads as follows:

Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms all the world?... For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.

This statement evidences a clear belief that all Christians will escape the Tribulation through a gathering to the Lord. How else can this be understood other than as pretribulationist? The later second coming of Christ to the earth with the saints is mentioned at the end of the sermon.

## THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

By the fifth century A.D., the amillennialism of Origen and Augustine had won the day in the established Church—East and West. It is probable that there were always some forms of premillennialism throughout the Middle Ages, but it existed primarily underground. Dorothy deF. Abrahamse notes:

By medieval times the belief in an imminent apocalypse had officially been relegated to the role of symbolic theory by the Church; as early as the fourth century, Augustine had declared that the Revelation of John was to be interpreted symbolically rather than literally, and for most of the Middle Ages Church councils and theologians considered only abstract eschatology to be acceptable speculation. Since the nineteenth century, however, historians have recognized that *literal apocalypses did continue to circulate in the medieval world* and that they played a fundamental role in the creation of important strains of thought and legend [emphasis added].<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The Shepherd of Hermas* 1.4.2.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on this matter see Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, "The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Vol. 152, No. 607; July–Sept. 1995), pp.306–17

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy deF. Abrahamse, introduction to *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, by Paul J. Alexander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 1–2.

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It is believed that sects like the Albigenses, Lombards, and the Waldenses were attracted to premillennialism, but little is known of the details of their beliefs since the Catholics destroyed their works when they were found.

It must be noted at this point that it is extremely unlikely for the Middle Ages to produce advocates of a pre-trib Rapture when the more foundational belief of premillennialism is all but absent. Thus, the Rapture question is likewise absent. This continued until the time of the Reformation, when many things within Christendom began to be revolutionized.

## THE REFORMATION CHURCH

Premillennialism began to be revived as a result of at least three factors. First, the Reformers went back to the sources, which for them were the Bible and Apostolic Fathers. This exposed them to an orthodox premillennialism. Specifically significant was the reappearance of the full text of Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, which included the last five chapters that espouse a consistent futurism and cast the 70th week of Daniel into the future.

Second, they repudiated much, but not all, of the allegorization that dominated mediaeval hermeneutics by adopting a more literal approach, especially in the area of the historical exegesis.

Third, many of the Protestants came into contact with Jews and learned Hebrew. This raised concerns over whether passages that speak of national Israel were to be taken historically or continued to be allegorized within the tradition of the Middle Ages. The more the Reformers took them as historical, the more they were awakened to premillennial interpretations, in spite of the fact that they were often labeled "Judaizers."

By the late 1500's and the early 1600's, premillennialism began to return as a factor within the mainstream church after more than a 1,000 year reign of amillennialism. With the flowering of Biblical interpretation during the late Reformation Period, premillennial interpreters began to abound throughout Protestantism and so did the development of sub-issues like the Rapture.

It has been claimed that some separated the Rapture from the second coming as early as Joseph Mede in his seminal work *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627), who is considered the father of English premillennialism. Paul Boyer says that Increase Mather proved "that the saints would *'be caught up into the Air'* beforehand, thereby escaping the final conflagration—an early formulation of the Rapture doctrine more fully elaborated in the nineteenth



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century.”<sup>29</sup> Whatever these men were saying, it is clear that the application of a more literal hermeneutic was leading to a distinction between the Rapture and the second coming as separate events.

Others began to speak of the Rapture. Paul Benware notes:

Peter Jurieu in his book *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687) taught that Christ would come in the air to Rapture the saints and return to heaven before the battle of Armageddon. He spoke of a secret Rapture prior to His coming in glory and judgment at Armageddon. Philip Doddridge’s commentary on the New Testament (1738) and John Gill’s commentary on the New Testament (1748) both use the term *Rapture* and speak of it as imminent. It is clear that these men believed that this coming will precede Christ’s descent to the earth and the time of judgment. The purpose was to preserve believers from the time of judgment. James Macknight (1763) and Thomas Scott (1792) taught that the righteous will be carried to heaven, where they will be secure until the time of judgment is over.<sup>30</sup>

Frank Marotta, a Brethren researcher, believes that Thomas Collier in 1674 makes reference to a pretribulational Rapture, but rejects the view,<sup>31</sup> thus showing his awareness that such a view was being taught. Perhaps the clearest reference to a pre-trib Rapture before Darby comes from Baptist Morgan Edwards (founder of Brown University) in 1742–44 who saw a distinct Rapture three and a half years before the start of the millennium.<sup>32</sup>

## THE MODERN CHURCH

As futurism began to replace historicism within premillennial circles in the 1820’s, the modern proponent of dispensational pretribulationism arrives on the scene. J.N. Darby claims to have first understood his view of the Rapture as the result of Bible study during a convalescence from December 1826 until January 1827.<sup>33</sup> He is the fountainhead for the modern version of the doctrine.

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pp. 197–98.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Marotta, *Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist* (Morganville, N.J.: Present Truth Publishers, 1995), pp. 10–12.

<sup>32</sup> Marotta, *Morgan Edwards*.

<sup>33</sup> Roy A. Huebner, *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J.N. Darby*, Vol. 1 (Morganville, N.J.: Present Truth Publishers, 1991), pp. 63–77.

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The doctrine of the Rapture spread around the world through the Brethren movement with which Darby and other like-minded Christians were associated. It appears that either through their writings or personal visits to North America, this version of pretribulationism was spread throughout American Evangelicalism. Two early proponents of the view include Presbyterian James H. Brookes and Baptist J. R. Graves.

The Rapture was further spread through annual Bible conferences such as the Niagara Bible Conference (1878–1909); turn of the century publications like *The Truth and Our Hope*; popular books like Brookes' *Maranatha*, William Blackstone's *Jesus Is Coming*, and *The Scofield Reference Bible* (1909). Many of the greatest Bible teachers of the first-half of the twentieth century helped spread the doctrine such as Arno Gaebelein, C.I Scofield, A.J. Gordon, James M. Gray, R.A. Torrey, Harry Ironside, and Lewis S. Chafer.

In virtually every major metropolitan area in North America a Bible Institute, Bible College, or Seminary was founded that expounded dispensational pretribulationism. Schools like Moody Bible Institute, The Philadelphia Bible College, Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA), and Dallas Theological Seminary taught and defended these views. These teachings were found primarily in independent churches, Bible churches, Baptists, and a significant number of Presbyterian churches. Around 1925, pretribulationism was adopted by many Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God and The Four-Square Gospel denomination. Pretribulationism was dominant among Charismatics in the 1960s and '70s. Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) furthered the spread of the pre-trib Rapture as it exerted great influence throughout popular American culture and then around the world. Many radio and T.V. programs taught pretribulationism as well.

## CURRENT STATUS

Although still widely popular among Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, dominance of pretribulationism began to wane first in some academic circles in the 1950s and '60s. A decline among Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Evangelicals began in the 1980s as the result of a shift toward greater social concern emerged. Pretribulationism is still the most widely held view of the day, but it cannot be taken for granted in many Evangelical, Charismatic, and Fundamentalist circles as it was a generation ago.

The doctrine of the Rapture has not been the most visible teaching in the history of the church. However, it has had significant advocates throughout the last 2,000 years. It has surfaced wherever premillennialism is taught, especially when literal interpretation, futurism, dispensationalism, and a distinction between Israel and the church are also advocated. Regardless of its history, belief in the Rapture has been supported primarily by those who attempt a faithful exposition of the Biblical text.

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## RECENT CHALLENGES TO PRE-TRIB ORIGINS

A few years ago, pre-wrath advocate Marvin Rosenthal wrote that the pre-trib Rapture was of Satanic origin and unheard of before 1830. "To thwart the Lord's warning to His children, in 1830," proclaims Rosenthal, "Satan, the 'father of lies,' gave to a fifteen-year-old girl named Margaret McDonald a lengthy vision."<sup>34</sup> Rosenthal gives no documentation, he merely asserts that this is true. However, he is wrong. He is undoubtedly relying upon the questionable work of Dave MacPherson.

Another thing amazing about Rosenthal's declaration is that a few paragraphs later in the article he characterizes his opposition as those who "did not deal with the issues, misrepresented the facts, or attempted character assassination."<sup>35</sup> This description is exactly what he has done in his characterization of pre-trib Rapture origins. Why would Rosenthal make such outlandish and unsubstantiated charges about the pre-trib Rapture?

### THE BIG LIE

One of the things that facilitated the Nazi rise to power in Germany earlier this century was their propaganda approach called "The Big Lie." If you told a big enough lie often enough then the people would come to believe it. This the Nazis did well. This is what anti-pretribulationists like John Bray<sup>36</sup> and Dave MacPherson<sup>37</sup> have done over the last 25 years. Apparently the big lie about the origins of the pre-trib Rapture has penetrated the thinking of the late Robert Van Kampen<sup>38</sup> and Marvin Rosenthal to the extent that they have adopted such a falsehood as true. This is amazing in light of the fact that their own pre-wrath viewpoint is not much more than fifteen years old itself. Rosenthal must have changed his mind about pre-trib origins between the time he wrote his book *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* (1990) and the recent article (Dec. 1994) since, in the former, he says that the pre-trib Rapture "can be traced back to John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the year 1830."<sup>39</sup> Rosenthal goes on to say, "Some scholars, seeking to prove error by

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<sup>34</sup> Marvin J. Rosenthal, "Is the Church in Matthew Chapter 24?" *Zion's Fire* (Nov–Dec 1994), p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Rosenthal, "Is the Church in Matthew Chapter 24?" p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, FL.: John L. Bray Ministry, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Dave MacPherson, *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Kansas City: Heart of America Bible Society, 1973). *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas City: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974). *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, N.C.: New Puritan Library, 1983). *Rapture?* (Fletcher, N.C.: New Puritan Library, 1987). *The Rapture Plot* (Monticello, Utah: P.O.S.T. Inc., 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 1992), pp. 445–47.

<sup>39</sup> Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), p. 53.

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association, have attempted (perhaps unfairly) to trace its origin back two years earlier to a charismatic, visionary woman named Margaret MacDonald."<sup>40</sup> Even this statement is in error, since the Margaret Macdonald claim has always been related to 1830, not 1828. However, Rosenthal is correct in his original assessment that these charges are "unfair" and probably spring out of a motive to "prove error by association," known as the *ad hominem* argument.

Pretribulationists have sought to defend against "The Big Lie" through direct interaction against the charges.<sup>41</sup> In a rebuttal I made in 1990 to these charges, I gave two major reasons why "The Big Lie" is not true. First, it is doubtful that Margaret Macdonald's "prophecy" contains any elements related to the pre-trib Rapture.<sup>42</sup> Second, no one has ever demonstrated *from actual facts of history* that Darby was influenced by Macdonald's "prophecy" even if it had (which it did not) contained pre-trib elements.<sup>43</sup> John Walvoord has said,

The whole controversy as aroused by Dave MacPherson's claims has so little supporting evidence, despite his careful research, that one wonders how he can write his book with a straight face. Pretribulationists should be indebted to Dave

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<sup>40</sup> Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>41</sup> Some of the pre-trib responses include the following: R. A. Huebner, *The Truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Recovered* (Millington, N.J.: Present Truth Publishers, 1976); *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, Vol. 1 (Morganville, N. J.: Present Truth Publishers, 1991). Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From The Hour*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956). John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). Robert L. Sumner, "Looking For The Blessed Horrible Holocaust!" A book review of *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* in *The Biblical Evangelist* (Vol. 10, Num. 1; May, 1975); "Hope? Or Hoax?" *The Biblical Evangelist* (Vol. 18, Num. 3; Feb., 1984). Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth Or Consequences* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983). Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981). Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm: Why Christians will Escape All the Tribulation* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1992). Thomas D. Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990), pp. 155–68; "The Origin of the Pre-Trib Rapture," Part I & II, *Biblical Perspectives*, vol. 2, no. 1, Jan./Feb. 1989 & vol. 2, no. 2, Mar./Apr. 1989; "Did J. N. Darby Believe in the Pretrib Rapture by 1827?" *Dispensational Distinctives*, vol. I, no. 6, Nov./Dec. 1991.

<sup>42</sup> The following books are some of those which have the full text of Macdonald's utterance: MacPherson's *Cover-Up*, and *Hoax*. R. A. Huebner, *The Truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Recovered* (Millington, N.J.: Present Truth Publishers, 1976), pp. 67–69. Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth Or Consequences* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), pp. 169–172. William R. Kimball, *The Rapture: A Question of Timing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 44–47.

<sup>43</sup> Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald," pp. 158, 161.

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MacPherson for exposing the facts, namely, that there is no proof that MacDonald or Irving originated the pretribulation Rapture teaching.<sup>44</sup>

There is a third reason why MacPherson's theory is wrong, Darby clearly held to an early form of the pre-trib Rapture by January 1827. This is a full three years before MacPherson's claim of 1830.

## DARBY AND THE PRE-TRIB RAPTURE

Brethren writer Roy A. Huebner claims and *documents* his belief that J.N. Darby first began to believe in the pre-trib Rapture and develop his dispensational thinking while convalescing from a riding accident during December 1826 and January 1827.<sup>45</sup> If this is true, then all of the origin-of-the-Rapture-conspiracy-theories fall to the ground in a heap of speculative rubble. Darby would have at least a three-year jump on any who would have supposedly influenced his thought, making it impossible for all the "influence" theories to have any credibility.

Huebner provides clarification and evidence that Darby was not influenced by a fifteen-year-old girl (Margaret Macdonald), Lacunza, Edward Irving, or the Irvingites. These are all said by the detractors of Darby and the pre-trib Rapture to be bridges which led to Darby's thought. Instead, he demonstrates that Darby's understanding of the pre-trib Rapture was the product of the development of his personal interactive thought with the text of Scripture as he, his friends, and dispensationalists have long contended.

Darby's pre-trib and dispensational thoughts, says Huebner, were developed from the following factors: **1)** "he saw from Isaiah 32 that there was a different dispensation coming ... that *Israel and the Church were distinct*."<sup>46</sup>**2)** "During his convalescence JND learned that **he ought daily to expect his Lord's return**."<sup>47</sup>**3)** "In 1827 JND understood the fall of the church ... 'the ruin of the Church.'"<sup>48</sup>**4)** Darby also was beginning to see a gap of time between the Rapture and the second coming by 1827.<sup>49</sup>**5)** Darby himself said in 1857 that he first started understanding things relating to the pre-trib Rapture "thirty years ago." "With that fixed point of reference, Jan. 31, 1827," declares Huebner, we can

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<sup>44</sup> Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> R. A. Huebner, *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, Vol. 1 (Morganville, N. J.: Present Truth Publishers, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 23.

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see that Darby “had already understood those truths upon which the pre-tribulation Rapture hinges.”<sup>50</sup>

German author Max S. Weremchuk has produced a major new biography on Darby entitled *John Nelson Darby: A Biography*.<sup>51</sup> He agrees with Huebner’s conclusions concerning the matter. “Having read MacPherson’s book ...” says Weremchuk, “I find it impossible to make a just comparison between what Miss MacDonald ‘prophesied’ and what Darby taught. It appears that the wish was the father of the idea.”<sup>52</sup>

When reading Darby’s earliest published essay on Biblical prophecy (1829), it is clear that while it still has elements of historicism, it also reflects the fact that for Darby, the Rapture was to be the church’s focus and hope.<sup>53</sup> Even in this earliest of essays, Darby expounds upon the Rapture as the church’s hope.<sup>54</sup>

## SCHOLARS REJECT THE BIG LIE

The various “Rapture origin” theories espoused by opponents of pretribulationism are not accepted as historically valid by scholars who have examined the evidence. The only ones who appear to have accepted these theories are those who already are opposed to the pre-trib Rapture. A look at various scholars and historians reveals that they think, in varying degrees, that *MacPherson has not proven his point*. Most, if not all, who are quoted below do not hold to the pre-trib Rapture teaching. Ernest R. Sandeen declares,

This seems to be a groundless and pernicious charge. Neither Irving nor any member of the Albury group advocated any doctrine resembling the secret Rapture ... Since the clear intention of this charge is to discredit the doctrine by attributing its origin to fanaticism rather than Scripture, there seems little ground for giving it any credence.<sup>55</sup>

Historian Timothy P. Weber’s evaluation is as follows:

The pretribulation Rapture was a neat solution to a thorny problem and historians are still trying to determine how or where Darby got it....

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<sup>50</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (Neptune, N. J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Weremchuk, *Darby: A Biography*, p. 242.

<sup>53</sup> J. N. Darby, “Reflections upon the Prophetic Inquiry and the Views Advanced in it” *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 2 (Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, reprint 1971), pp. 1–31.

<sup>54</sup> Darby, “Reflections,” pp. 16–18, 25, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 64.

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A newer though still not totally convincing view contends that the doctrine initially appeared in a prophetic vision of Margaret Macdonald, ...

Possibly, we may have to settle for Darby's own explanation. He claimed that the doctrine virtually jumped out of the pages of Scripture once he accepted and consistently maintained the distinction between Israel and the church.<sup>56</sup>

American historian Richard R. Reiter informs us that,

[Robert] Cameron probably traced this important but apparently erroneous view back to S. P. Tregelles, ... Recently more detailed study on this view as the origin of pretribulationism appeared in works by Dave McPherson, ... historian Ian S. Rennie ... regarded McPherson's case as interesting but not conclusive.<sup>57</sup>

Posttribulationist William E. Bell asserts that,

It seems only fair, however, in the absence of eyewitnesses to settle the argument conclusively, that the benefit of the doubt should be given to Darby, and that the charge made by Tregelles be regarded as a possibility but with insufficient support to merit its acceptance.... On the whole, however, it seems that Darby is perhaps the most likely choice—with help from Tweedy. This conclusion is greatly strengthened by Darby's own claim to have arrived at the doctrine through his study of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2.<sup>58</sup>

Pre-trib Rapture opponent John Bray does not accept the MacPherson thesis either.

He [Darby] rejected those practices, and he already had his new view of the Lord coming FOR THE SAINTS (as contrasted to the later coming to the earth) which he had believed since 1827, ... It was the coupling of this "70th week of Daniel" prophecy and its futuristic interpretation, with the teaching of the "secret Rapture," that gave to us the completed "Pre-tribulation Secret Rapture" teaching as it has now been taught for many years.... makes it impossible for me to believe that Darby got his Pre-Tribulation Rapture teaching from Margaret MacDonald's vision in 1830. He was already a believer in it since 1827, as he plainly said.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *Living In The Shadow Of The Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1982* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), pp. 21–22.

<sup>57</sup> Richard R. Reiter, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publication, 1984), p. 236.

<sup>58</sup> William E. Bell, *A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1967), pp. 60–61, 64–65.

<sup>59</sup> Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching*, pp. 24–25, 28.

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Huebner considers MacPherson's charges as "using slander that J. N. Darby took the (truth of the) pretribulation Rapture from those very opposing, demon-inspired utterances."<sup>60</sup> He goes on to conclude that MacPherson:

did not profit by reading the utterances allegedly by Miss M. M. Instead of apprehending the plain import of her statements, as given by R. Norton, which has some affinity to the post-tribulation scheme and no real resemblance to the pretribulation Rapture and dispensational truth, he has read into it what he appears so anxious to find.<sup>61</sup>

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## IRVINGITES AND THE RAPTURE

One of Dave McPherson's strangest claims is that Edward Irving and the Irvingites taught a pre-trib Rapture. The Irvingites are said by McPherson to be the source from which Darby clandestinely stole the doctrine and then claimed it as his own discovery.<sup>62</sup> More recently, two British theologians have also cited Irving as the real source of dispensationalism and pretribulationism. "Clearly, then, it is incontrovertible that Irving held to a pretribulation doctrine in a form that is developed and remarkably similar to contemporary dispensational views," say Patterson and Walker.<sup>63</sup> Such remarks and conclusions make me wonder if these writers have read very deeply in either Edward Irving or the Irvingite view of eschatology.

A few years ago, an extensive critical analysis of Irvingite doctrine declared that they were still overwhelmingly historicist, while Darby and the Brethren had become futurist. Further, Columba G. Flegg notes that the Brethren teaching on the Rapture and the present invisible and spiritual nature of the church:

The later Powerscourt Conferences were dominated by the new sect. The Brethren took a futurist view of the Apocalypse, attacking particularly the interpretation of prophetic 'days' as 'years', so important for all historicists, including the Catholic Apostolics.... Darby introduced the concept of a *secret* Rapture to take place 'at any moment', a belief which subsequently became one of the chief hallmarks of Brethren eschatology. He also taught that the 'true' Church was invisible and spiritual. Both these ideas were in sharp contrast to Catholic Apostolic teaching, ... There were thus very significant differences between the two eschatologies, and

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<sup>60</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Huebner, *Precious Truths*, p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> See Dave MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III Publishers, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Mark Patterson & Andrew Walker, " 'Our Unspeakable Comfort' Irving, Albury, and the Origins of the Pretribulation Rapture," *Fides et Historia*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 1999), p. 77.



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attempts to see any direct influence of one upon the other seem unlikely to succeed—they had a number of common *roots*, but are much more notable for their points of disagreement. Several writers [referring specifically to MacPherson] have attempted to trace Darby's secret Rapture theory to a prophetic statement associated with Irving, but their arguments do not stand up to serious criticism.<sup>64</sup>

When reading the full message of Irvingite eschatology it is clear that they were still very much locked into the historicist system which views the entire church age as the Tribulation. After all, the major point in Irving's eschatology was that Babylon (false Christianity) was about to be destroyed and then the second coming would occur. Classic historicism! He also taught that the second coming was synonymous with the Rapture.<sup>65</sup> Irving believed that Raptured saints would stay in heaven until the earth was renovated by fire and then return to the earth. This is hardly pre-trib since Irving believed that the Tribulation began at least 1,500 years earlier and he did not teach a separate Rapture, followed by the Tribulation, culminating in the second coming.

## CONCLUSION

F. F. Bruce, who was part of the Brethren movement his entire life, but one who did not agree with pretribulationism, said the following when commenting on the validity of MacPherson's thesis:

Where did he [Darby] get it? The reviewer's answer would be that it was in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy, ... direct dependence by Darby on Margaret Macdonald is unlikely.<sup>66</sup>

John Walvoord's assessment is likely close to the truth:

... any careful student of Darby soon discovers that he did not get his eschatological views from men, but rather from his doctrine of the church as the body of Christ, a concept no one claims was revealed supernaturally to Irving or Macdonald. Darby's views undoubtedly were gradually formed, but they were theologically and biblically based rather than derived from Irving's pre-Pentecostal group.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Columba Graham Flegg, *'Gathered Under Apostles' A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 436.

<sup>65</sup> Edward Irving, "Signs of the Times in the Church," *The Morning Watch*, Vol. 2 (1830), p. 156.

<sup>66</sup> F. F. Bruce, Review of *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, (Vol. XLVII, No. 1; Jan-Mar, 1975), p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, p. 47.

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I challenge opponents of the pre-trib Rapture to stick to a discussion of this matter based upon the Scriptures. While some have done this, many have not been so honest. To call the pre-trib position Satanic, as Rosenthal has done, does not help anyone in this discussion. Such rhetoric will only serve to cause greater polarization of the two camps. However, when pre-trib opponents make false charges about the history of the pre-trib view we must respond. And respond we will in our next issue where **we will present a clear pre-trib Rapture statement from the fourth or fifth century**. This pre-trib Rapture statement ante-dates 1830 by almost 1,500 years and will certainly lead to at least a revision of those propagating The Big Lie.<sup>68 2</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ice, T. (2001). "The Rapture, John 14, and Myths." *Conservative Theological Journal* Volume 5, 5(14), 27–54.