

The Rapture of the Saints (1)

At the Lord's first coming, He was the Sower to sow Himself as the seed of life into the believers (Matt. 13:3-8, 24). Since that time, all those who have been regenerated are God's cultivated land to grow a produce of Christ (1 Cor. 3:6-7, 9). By receiving, enjoying, and assimilating the elements of the divine life, the believers are perfected and completed to become mature, full-grown, in Christ (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:13). This process of growth unto maturity progresses in each believer until the end of his life. Then those who die in Christ pass into Paradise in the pleasant part of Hades and, in the state of maturity in which they died, await the resurrection and glorification of their bodies, the resurrection of life, at the end of this age (John 5:28-29). However, those who live unto the end of this age, until the second coming of Christ, will be raptured into His presence. Thus, the appearing of Christ in glory and our glorification and rapture at His coming are the blessed hope of the saints, the hope of glory (Titus 2:13; Col. 1:27).

When Christ returns at the end of this age, He will judge rebellious mankind and clear up the negative situation on the earth. At the same time, Satan will be cast down out of heaven, and in his anger he will persecute God's people and bring destruction to the earth (Rev. 12:9, 17). This period of time is foretold in the prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24-27. In particular, the last of the seventy weeks signifies the final seven years of this age. At the end of this age, Antichrist will make a firm covenant with the Jews for one week, that is, for seven years. In the middle of the week he will break the covenant, destroy the worship of God, blaspheme God, persecute His people, and destroy the holy city, Jerusalem. This second half of the week is the final three and a half years of this age, which is also known as "a time and times and half a time" (7:25; Rev. 12:14), "a thousand two hundred and sixty days" (v. 6), and "forty-two months" (11:2; 13:5). Concerning this period, the Lord Jesus said, "At that time there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred from the beginning of the world until now, nor shall by any means ever occur" (Matt. 24:21). Prior to this time of great tribulation, the overcoming, watchful, and mature believers who are living on the earth will be raptured to the throne of God in the heavens. However, those immature believers, who are genuinely saved but who are consumed with the anxiety and enjoyment of this age, will remain on the

earth to pass through the great tribulation for their discipline and perfection. In this way the rapture prior to the tribulation should be considered one aspect of the reward or discipline of the believers, based on their maturity in life at the Lord's coming.

In this article we will consider basic issues concerning the rapture of the saints and deal primarily with the book of Revelation. In the following installment we will consider the rapture in the Gospels and the Epistles.

The Expectation of the Early Church Fathers

Although believers throughout the entire church age have looked for the second coming of the Lord, many of the riches of the truths concerning His coming, the rapture, and the coming millennial kingdom have been unveiled progressively.¹ Among many church fathers who affirmed the premillennial coming of Christ, the common expectation was that the believers in the last generation of the church age would endure the sufferings of the end times, after the manifestation of Antichrist and before the open coming of Christ. Irenaeus of Lyons, the first significant theologian of the early church fathers, speaks very clearly of the coming thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints. In Book 5 of *Against Heresies*, he also speaks concerning the coming of Antichrist and the tribulation at the end of this age. He says,

When in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said "There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be." For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption. (558)

It is apparent that he expected the believers to pass through the time of tribulation in order to overcome in the "last contest." This matches his feeling in general that, "tribulation is necessary for those who are saved" for the purpose of their purification and to be "fitted for the royal banquet" (557). Similarly, Tertullian interprets the sequence in Luke 21:25-28 as applying to the New Testament believers, indicating that our redemption at the coming of the Lord will take place only after the supernatural signs at the end of the great tribulation, that is, "after all these things have been previously transacted"

(560-561). Hippolytus, a student of Irenaeus and the greatest of the early Roman fathers, interprets the woman in Revelation 12 as the church, and the sun, moon, and stars as the Father's word, heavenly glory, and the twelve apostles, respectively. He sees the thousand two hundred and sixty days as the time during which "the tyrant is to reign and persecute the Church" (217). In the same vein, Commodianus predicts that Antichrist will "rage against the Christians three years and a half" (Coxe 219). Applying the terminology of modern eschatology to the writings of the first centuries, George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Seminary concludes,

Every church father who deals with the subject expects the Church to suffer at the hands of Antichrist. God would purify the Church through suffering, and Christ would save her by His return at the end of the Tribulation when He would destroy Antichrist, deliver His Church, and bring the world to an end and inaugurate His millennial kingdom. The prevailing view is a posttribulation premillennialism. (*Blessed Hope* 31)

Using more guarded language, John F. Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary, concedes,

The postapostolic Fathers tended to identify their contemporary persecutions with the great tribulation immediately preceding the second advent. Although they usually linked this with the view that

Christ's coming could occur at any time, they do not seem to have contemplated a period between the translation of the church and the second advent of Christ to set up His thousand-year kingdom. (*Hope* 16-17)

Practically speaking, this means that, in the view of prominent early fathers, the church will pass through the great tribulation and be raptured only at the second coming of Christ. Again, Walvoord says, "The preponderance of evidence seems to support the concept that the early church did not clearly hold to a rapture as preceding the endtime tribulation period" (24). Although this concept lacked the structure of a systematic eschatology, it was the common expectation of the early church. As we shall see, however, this is an incomplete understanding of the nature and purpose of the rapture. Although the majority of the church still living at the end time will pass through the tribulation, a minority—the overcomers—will be delivered from it.

The Loss and Rediscovery of Precious Truths

Beginning in the third century, the belief in a literal millennial reign of Christ subsided, due in great part to the

teachings of Origen and his allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures. Then in the following century, the systematic writings of Augustine dispelled this belief almost altogether, and amillennialism, together with the doctrine of purgatory, became the predominant eschatology for many centuries. In the context of this void of truth, the details of the rapture of the saints with respect to the great tribulation lost their significance. Even the reformers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries failed to recover much truth related to the Lord's second coming, and the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were most often interpreted historically, that is, in terms of past or then present figures and events. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Brightman, John Owen, Daniel Whitby, and others popularized postmillennialism, the belief in a thousand-year latter-day glory on earth in the present age, which again minimized the importance of the teaching of the Lord's second coming. However, beginning at least in the seventeenth century with the writings of Johann Alsted and Joseph Mede, the truth of the premillennial coming of Christ began to be recovered in a clearer way, and in

the course of that century a renewed study of Hebrew and the prophecies of the Old Testament revived an interest in the eschatological position of the Jews and the salvation of Israel. Finally, around the turn of the nineteenth century, the prophetic word of the Scripture began to shine more brightly (2 Pet. 1:19), and the recovery of the truths concern-

ing the Lord's personal, premillennial return and the establishing of His kingdom began to be intensified.

This revival of prophetic study provided the basis for a systematic doctrine of premillennialism, which was more fully developed by John Nelson Darby and the British Brethren, beginning at the latest in the 1830s. Darby's eschatology emphasized a literal, futurist interpretation of prophecy and the dual coming of Christ—His imminent, "any moment" coming to rapture the church prior to the great tribulation and His open coming in power to establish His kingdom at the completion of the tribulation. Thus, the pretribulation rapture is an essential element of Darby's prophetic system. Although in disagreement on this latter point, Ladd concedes in general,

Darbyism to many Christians meant the rediscovery of the precious Biblical truth of Christ's glorious second coming...Once more, as in the early church, the return of Christ became a living and vital expectation in the lives of Christian people and in the pulpit ministry of many a preacher...Darbyism in fact restored something precious which had long been lost. (*Blessed Hope* 43)

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The premillennial interpretation of prophecy was further developed and propagated in Bible conferences, the chief of which met at Niagara on Lake Ontario from 1883 to 1897. These were attended by many prominent teachers, who may be considered as the founders of modern fundamentalism. These included James H. Brooks, Arthur T. Pierson, Nathaniel West, William J. Eerdmans, A. J. Gordon, J. Hudson Taylor, Robert Cameron, Arno C. Gaebelein, and C. I. Scofield, although not all of these accepted the details of Darby's system. As a result of the Niagara conference and the later Sea Cliff conference on Long Island, Scofield published his Reference Bible in 1909, the standard of North American evangelicalism and the most influential channel for the dissemination of the eschatology of Darby's dispensationalism. In the twentieth century, through the teachings of Scofield, Gaebelein, R. A. Torrey, Harry A. Ironside, and Lewis Sperry Chafer, the pretribulation rapture became the position held by most Bible conferences and Bible institutes (Reiter 23-24).

Nevertheless, many prominent attendants of the Niagara conference—including West, Erdman, Gordon, and Cameron—came to believe and teach that the rapture of the saints would take place after the tribulation. West, the founder of the first prophetic Bible conference and later a teacher at Moody Bible Institute, believed that there would be no appreciable interval between the rapture and the judgment of Antichrist and that the remnant of the woman in Revelation 12, who will endure persecution during the great tribulation, is the “surviving portion of the Gentile Church” (242). He writes, “The Christian Church will not be removed from the earth, or become extinct under persecution, but, reduced and suffering, will also live to see the Advent,” that is, the second coming of Christ in power at the end of the tribulation (245). Another attendant at Niagara, Henry W. Frost, who served as home director for the China Inland Mission, writes, “Living Christians will go into and through the tribulation” (69).

A More Complete Recovery of the Truth

It is clear from the foregoing that the time of the rapture was a matter of significant debate, each side of which has been represented by reliable scholars and notable teachers who claim proof from many passages in the Scriptures. As in the case of the great debate between Calvinism and Arminianism in the seventeenth century, the truth can be found neither entirely in one school nor in the other but in a proper synthesis of both views. The measure of grace to see this synthesis was given to several teachers contemporary with Darby and the later Bible conferences, beginning especially with Robert Govett in England. Charles Spurgeon considered Govett one of the foremost teachers of the futurist view of Revelation and included his writings in Spurgeon's own *The Sword and the Trowel* periodical. Wilbur M. Smith of Fuller Seminary states that Govett's

exposition of Revelation is one of the most profound works of its kind, bringing “to his interpretation a more thorough knowledge of the Scriptures in their bearing on the last book of the Bible than any other writer of his generation” (28). In *Entrance into the Kingdom*, written in 1853, Govett begins to unveil that the believers' enjoyment of the coming millennial kingdom is conditioned on their life and work in the present age, for which they will give an account at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10), and in subsequent writings he concludes that the rapture prior to the tribulation will be a reward to a minority of believers for their watchfulness. He tells us that many believers, the “remnants of the churches,” will be “left behind to pass through the Great Tribulation” (*Revelation* 313, 319). He writes, “The majority of Christians, as neither watching nor praying so to escape, are *left to pass through the Great Trouble of that day*...The rapture takes place, not in the day of grace, but in the day of reward according to works” (*Studies* 54, 65).

Govett's successor at Surrey Chapel, Norwich, was David M. Panton, founder and editor of *The Dawn* magazine. He argues that both saving faith and the work of a believer are two essential requisites for rapture. “All the passages dealing, technically and expressly, with requisites for rapture,—and which therefore must be decisive on the question—assert personal watchfulness and worthiness as essential” (52). This personal responsibility related to the rapture is the “just balance between two sharp extremes” (53) and reconciles the two opposing views concerning its timing: “Truth ever flies on two wings; and no prophecy is of *isolated* interpretation...It is in the union, not in the antagonism, of these apparently conflicting Scriptures that the truth is to be found” (20).

George H. Pember, one of the most respected prophetic scholars of the late 1800s, compared the situation of believers at the time of the Lord's coming to that of Lot and his wife in Genesis 19. He writes,

If any man hesitates but for a moment, he may, like Lot's wife, be involved in the destruction, even though his conveyance out of danger should be already in progress...For when the unknown time arrives, the Lord will, without a moment's warning,...take to Himself those only whom He finds faithful and watching. (138-139)

If believers will mingle with the world and seek after its pleasures, if, despite warnings, they will suffer their affections to become rooted in it, they must certainly, so far as this life is concerned, be involved in its ruin. Weighted by earthward desires, they will be unable to ascend to their Lord, when He calls them: therefore, He will not deliver them from the hour of temptation which is coming upon the whole world [Rev. 3:10]; but will leave them to be purified in the furnace of affliction...Every believer who

is found striving to obtain pleasure from this world, will be left below. (162-163)

A Failure to Recognize an Advance in the Recovery of the Truth

The recovered scriptural understanding concerning the rapture being both before and at the end of the tribulation is based on the recognition of the twofoldness of the divine truth. Govett notes,

The Scripture is twofold in character, like the God who gave it...From this twofoldness of truth *designed* difficulties arise. Thus does God try mankind. Thus does He try His people. Will they receive both His statements on His simple assertion? Most will not, for they are one-sided. (*Twofoldness* 19-20)

Concerning the sharp dissension between Darby and Benjamin Newton on the rapture, Pantou explains that these two great men simply, “imbibed and expressed complementary halves of the truth...This sharp severance of prophetic students is a remarkable proof that the whole truth was not recovered and reconstructed on the first revival of prophetic study” (20).

The writings of Govett, Pantou, Pember, and others concerning the twofold truth of the rapture should be considered as a portion of the Lord’s recovery of truths that were lost and hidden from the church for many centuries. However, these truths were never properly received by the Brethren and their successors. Rather, under the name of a “partial rapture” theory, they are commonly rejected (*Question* 98). Walvoord claims, “The view is limited to a few adherents who are generally treated as heterodox by other pretribulationists” (98), and he adds that this view “has not been recognized by any evangelical Protestant group” (113). This attitude is regrettable, and it is inappropriate for the followers of Darby’s teaching, because Darby himself also suffered this kind of accusation. Newton considered Darby’s dispensational teaching to be “the height of speculative nonsense” (Ladd, *Blessed Hope* 41). Samuel Tregelles, an early Brethren and noted New Testament philologist, purports to trace Darby’s teaching to the ecstatic utterance of a mystic in the church of a heretic, concluding, “It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God” (35).² Since that time, Darby’s teachings have sometimes been labeled as novel, unheard of, and a new invention not known previously in the church.

Walvoord replies in defense of recovered truth, “The fact is that the development of most important doctrines took centuries, and it is not surprising that even in the twentieth century new light should be cast on our understanding of Scripture” (*Question* 50). Charles Ryrie says similarly, “Discovery and refinement of doctrine does not mean at all that such doctrine is extra-Biblical” (*Basis* 18). He compares the recovery of the truth of the premillennial coming of Christ to the recovery of the great doctrines of the Reformation, concluding, “Neither is there any reason to reject recent findings in the field of eschatology” (18). Nevertheless, these very men reject the findings of Govett and others on the basis of novelty and minority opinion, the same way in which accusations against Darby’s teachings were made.

Watchman Nee considered the Brethren of the early to later 1800s to be the prophetic fulfillment of the church in Philadelphia, about whose gifts and ministries he has much to say. He commends the Lord’s move among the Brethren as having been more significant than the Reformation and a source of help to all who have since known the Lord. Concerning John Darby in particular, he adds, “When Darby joined [the Brethren], the light of heaven poured down like a torrent” (*Orthodoxy* 65). However, Nee goes on to recount the decline of the Brethren into the condition of the church in Laodicea, due in great part to the self-satisfaction of previously attained knowledge. He says, “Because these brothers were stronger than others in conduct and in truth to the point that even a cook among them knew more than a missionary in the Protestant churches, they became proud” (84), claiming that they are “wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17).

The tragic error repeated many times since the Reformation is that once a group of believers is blessed by the Lord to receive a portion of His recovery of the truth, they may, in time, become closed to subsequent revelations and recoveries of the truth and may even oppose them. It is in such a closed spirit that the truth of the Scriptures concerning the believers’ accountability to the Lord and His judgment for reward or punishment has been refused as novel and heterodox. Concerning this recovered truth, Govett notes, “It is a novelty too; though old on the page of Scripture” and observes very truly, “It is not expected that these truths will ever be popular. They boast no great names; they flatter not. They rest only on the proofs of God’s word” (*Entrance* preface). May we guard against the failure of the church in Laodicea and

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remain open to the twofold truth in God's Word concerning the rapture of the saints.

The Dispensational Demand on Eschatology

It is crucial to understand that the system of dispensationalism developed from Darby's original teachings is much more than a school of eschatology. Rather, it is an entire theology, based on certain leading tenets, including (1) that history is divided into ages, each characterized by a distinguishable governmental economy of God; (2) that in the dispensation of the law in the Old Testament, the church was entirely unknown and unforeseen; (3) that the church is a parenthesis, an intercalation, in God's plan for Israel; (4) that Israel, although once rejected, will be restored to be the "central vehicle of the manifestation of God's grace" in the theocratic millennial kingdom (Walvoord, *Kingdom* 136); (5) that to this end the Lord will preserve a remnant of the Jews to be saved at His coming; and (6) that the literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutic is the only reliable method to discern these truths in the Scriptures.³ It is the ecclesiological component of the above tenets that most often comes to the forefront of dispensationalism. Lewis Sperry Chafer says, "Throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved" (448). Ryrie concludes, "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church" (*Dispensationalism* 41). Because of this, Walvoord writes, the rapture and the tribulation are a "major *theological* problem...The doctrine of the church is, then, determinative in the question of whether the church will go through the Tribulation" (*Question* 14, 165).

The sharp distinction between Israel and the church as the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism has very practical ramifications for the understanding of the disposition of the church at the end of the age. The Scriptures clearly promise that at the time of Christ's coming, Israel as God's covenanted people will turn to Him and be saved (Dan. 12:1; Zech. 13:8-9; Rom. 11:26-27). This requires that a remnant of the Jews remain on the earth as the recipients of God's promises in the Old Testament. Until Israel is restored, the church will have borne the testimony of the Lord on the earth. However, Darby argues that the blessing to Israel cannot be brought in until the church age has come to a completion and the entire church has been removed from the earth. For Darby, the denial of the rapture of the entire church prior to the salvation of the remnant of Israel is tantamount to a denial not only of the existence of that remnant but also of the nature of the church itself:

The great object of the enemy in denying the rapture of the saints before the appearing of the Lord, and in the

consequent rejection of a distinct Jewish remnant, with Jewish hopes and Jewish piety, is to deny and destroy the proper faith of the church of God, and to set the church itself aside. (11:122)

Thus, the mutual exclusion of the church and Israel is a matter that touches "the whole order of the dispensations of God" (11:119). Just as the church had its beginning on the day of Pentecost, it must have its end on the day of the Lord's secret coming prior to the tribulation. Only in this way can the remnant of Israel be saved and the order of the dispensations maintained. By this we can see that the entire theology, ecclesiology, and eschatology of dispensationalism demand a pretribulation rapture of the entire church. This is the meaning of Walvoord's rule that the "doctrine of the church is...determinative" in understanding the rapture. This indicates that the dispensational treatment of prophecy cares first for the subsuming, governing theology and second for the normal rules of interpretation. However, the flaw in this system is that not all the Scriptures pertinent to this issue support a universal pretribulation rapture, and even when a proper exegesis of these passages would otherwise yield a contrary result, the demand of dispensationalism becomes an overriding external hermeneutic to force an *a priori* conclusion. We will see examples of this as we consider several portions of the Scriptures.

A Misconception of Rapture in Revelation 4

The rapture of the saints is revealed in several portions of the book of Revelation. In considering this matter, we come to one of the strongest examples of the demand of dispensational theology on the view of the rapture. The question focuses on whether or not the church can be seen between Revelation 4:1 and 19:4. Darby proposes, "The only places in which the church is seen in its Christian affections and position is in the beginning and at the end of the book, before the subject of it is opened and after it is closed" (5:233). Again he says, "The church is seen exclusively in heaven in the prophetic part of the Revelation" (8:74). The theological foundation for this conclusion is the dispensational paradigm, which insists that the tribulation is distinctly for the Jews. It will be a "time of distress for Jacob" (Jer. 30:7), a time of distress for "your [Daniel's] people" (Dan. 12:1), as confirmed by Matthew 24:1-31 (but not, as we shall see in the following installment of this article, by verses 32 through 44). To Darby, the passages that speak of the tribulation

apply it distinctly to Jacob, Jerusalem, and Judea, and the Jews, not to the church. It is entirely another order and sphere of things from the church, and professedly so...The passages which speak of the tribulation first apply it directly to the Jews on one side, and then exclude the church from it on the other. (11:111, 113)

In Revelation the practical foundation for this conclusion is found partly in chapter 4. Verse 1 says, "After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you the things that must take place after these things." Darby and his successors see the rapture of the entire church in the phrase *come up here*. Gerald B. Stanton is representative of this view, stating,

With the words "come up hither," the scene moves into the future and shifts from earth to heaven...Chronologically, the rapture most probably occurs between the third and fourth chapters. The Tribulation section of the Revelation presumes that rapture is past, and neither *rapture* nor *Church* find mention at all in it...From this point on, the redeemed are seen in glory...From the viewpoint of Revelation 4:1, John looks down upon a world torn by Tribulation judgments, from which the Church and the restraint of the Holy Spirit have already been removed. (198-200)

That *come up here* is taken to imply the rapture is a clear indication that dispensational theology, not clear exegesis, is the rule of interpretation. Revelation is composed of four major visions, each being introduced in similar ways. The vision of the churches in chapters 1 through 3 begins with, "I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet" (1:10). The vision of the destiny of the world in chapters 4 through 16 begins with, "Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven" (4:2). The vision of Babylon the Great in chapters 17 through 20 begins with, "And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness" (17:3). Lastly, the vision of the New Jerusalem in chapters 21 and 22 begins with, "And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain" (21:10). In order to see the things on earth and in heaven, present and future, John was in his regenerated spirit and was carried away not only to heaven but also to a wilderness and to a great and high mountain. Moreover, as the seer of divine revelation, he was carried away to these places "not that he might abide there, but that he might be *instructed* there" (Newton 63-64). This is indicated in 4:1 by the phrase *come up here, and I will show you*. John's experience is similar to that of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, in which he was caught away to the third heaven and again into Paradise, not to remain there but to receive "visions and revelations of the Lord."

In addition, in each instance in which John received spiritual realization and a divine view, it was apart from any

human accompaniment. If John's being carried to heaven implies the company of the entire church, then we must also conclude that the entire church was also carried into the great wilderness, the abode of the harlot in Revelation 17. This is not logical.

The Twenty-four Angelic Elders Not Signifying the Church

Another reason put forth to justify that the entire church is translated to heaven at the beginning of chapter 4 is the presence of the twenty-four elders. Ryrie says, "Most identify the twenty-four elders as representing the church, and since they are seen in heaven in Revelation 4:4 and 5:8-10, the church is mentioned as in heaven" (*Rapture* 60), and Walvoord completes the logic: "The fact that they are in heaven would support a pretribulation Rapture" (*Question* 259). This is a clear case of what Watchman Nee called the "presumptions and assumptions" of this school of teaching (*Works* 19:517). To say that the twenty-four elders represent the entire church is unreliable for several reasons.

First, the twenty-four elders sit on thrones and wear golden crowns (Rev. 4:4). The New Testament overcomers, however, are not rewarded to co-reign with Christ until the time of the seventh seal, which is opened near the end of the great tribulation (11:18), and it is only in the coming millennial kingdom that they will sit with Christ on His throne to

participate in His authority as co-kings to rule over the whole earth (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4). In Revelation 4 and 5, however, the twenty-four elders sit on thrones before the Lord's second coming.

Moreover, that the twenty-four elders are clothed in white garments and have a harp and golden bowls full of incense (4:4; 5:8) indicates that they are now priests before God. It will not be until the millennial kingdom that the reigning overcomers will be the priests of God and of Christ (20:6). In addition, Christ Himself is not seen with a crown on His head until 19:12. To be sure, the church cannot reign before Christ does. Hence, the twenty-four elders cannot be representatives of the church. When one of the elders asks John concerning the great multitude in 7:9-10, John replies, "My lord, you know" (vv. 13-14). *My lord* (κύριέ μου) is not an appropriate address from John, who was an elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1), to another elder. If the elder had been simply an elder in a church, his position of status and superior knowledge cannot be explained.

In 4:11 the twenty-four elders say, "You are worthy, our

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Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created,” and in 5:9 and 10 they sing, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.” The praise of the elders in 4:11 is related to the created universe, which is not characteristic of the praise of the redeemed New Testament believers. The song in 5:9 is a song of redemption, but it is not the elders themselves who are the redeemed ones. The King James Version reads, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God.” Most versions, however, acknowledge that the object of *purchased*, or *redeemed*, is omitted from the Greek text. This is reflected by Darby’s New Translation, which reads, “Thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.” Other versions supply *men* rather than *us*, based on verse 10 which says, “Made them a kingdom” and “they will reign,” in the third person plural. The twenty-four elders sing a song of praise for God’s redemption of men, who are to them a third party.⁴

The Elders in Heaven Not Implying the Rapture of the Church

Twenty-four is not the number of the church. In Revelation the church is represented by the number seven (1:4, 11-12, 20; 2:1). Since seven is the number for completion in God’s operation, the seven churches are for God’s move in completion. Twenty-four is the number of the divisions of the priests and Levites to carry out God’s administrative service (1 Chron. 24:1-19; 25:1-31). In the same principle, the twenty-four elders are angelic elders who carry out God’s administration in the universe. Among God’s creation the angels are the most ancient ones, and their elders are the elders of the whole creation of God. Before the creation of man, the leading angels were His priests and ruling instruments. According to Ezekiel 28:13-14, before Satan fell, he was a priest and a king before God. When Satan tempted the Lord Jesus, he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, “To You I will give all this authority and their glory, because to me it has been delivered, and to whomever I want I give it” (Luke 4:5-6). Jesus did not dispute that the kingdoms of the world had been given to Satan, the primeval archangel (John 12:31; Dan. 10:13). This confirms that the angels are ministering spirits in God’s administration of the universe (Heb. 1:13-14), and their elders hold the place of authority over creation until redeemed man has been perfected and glorified to be the proper priests and kings (Gen. 1:26; Rev. 20:6).

It is reasonable to conclude that the twenty-four elders are neither members nor representatives of the church.

For this and other reasons, the dispensational argument for a pretribulation rapture between Revelation 3 and 4 does not stand.

The Church in the Great Tribulation

According to the dispensational paradigm, the church cannot be present on the earth when God turns His attention to the salvation of Israel. This is the theological motivation for asserting the pretribulation rapture of the entire church. Ryrie writes,

The question boils down to whether or not the church is a distinct entity in the program of God...Is the church distinct from Israel? If so, then the church will not be a participant in the Tribulation, since during that time God will be dealing primarily with Israel once again. (*Rapture* 62)

The gap between the premise and conclusion in the above statement is bridged only if one first accepts dispensationalism in its totality. Douglas J. Moo rightly critiques this assumption:

A total and consistent separation of Israel and the church does not *necessarily* entail *any* specific view of the time of the Rapture. Since this is the case, an approach to the topic that assumes no particular view on this ecclesiological question cannot be deemed illegitimate. Furthermore, such an approach is to be preferred because it paves the way for more objective exegesis of the relevant texts. (Reiter 172)

If we do not allow dispensational ecclesiology to become an overriding demand on our exegesis, we will be able to see that Revelation portrays New Testament believers as being on the earth during the tribulation. First, we must consider the fact that the word *church* is not found between Revelation 3:22 and 22:16. Darby believes this to be an indication that after chapter 3 the church remains on the earth only in appearance and not in reality: “There is no candlestick which God owns, nor light at all. The carcass may be there which hindered and corrupted; the soul is fled...There is nothing which God owns in the earth as a corporate testimony” (5:235). However, that the word *church* is not utilized does not preclude the fact of the presence of the church. Several portions of Revelation point to the church without referencing the term itself. We have seen, for example, that the church of the redeemed is indicated in the song of the twenty-four elders, but the redeemed are not called the church. Similarly, those who have washed their robes in 7:14 are clearly the church, but they are not called by that name. Likewise, the bride of Christ in 19:7 is called “His wife,” and those who follow Christ from heaven at His coming back are simply called “the armies” (v. 14). In fact, *church*

is found neither in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53, which speaks of the saints' resurrection at the Lord's coming, nor in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, which speaks of rapture. The absence of the word *church* is not a determinative point. The fact of the church is found throughout Revelation, including those portions that speak of the great tribulation. This indicates that at least some in the church will be left on the earth during that time.

The "Brothers" and Those Who Have the Testimony of Jesus

The presence of believers in the tribulation can be seen in several passages. Revelation 12:17 says, "The dragon became angry with the woman and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus." Those who keep the commandments of God are the sealed Israelites (7:1-8) who will keep the commandments during the great tribulation, including the first and second commandments, which forbid the worship of a false god and the erection of an idol (13:4, 14-15). However, those who have the testimony of Jesus must be New Testament believers. A passage parallel to 12:17 is 14:12, which says, "Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." The testimony of Jesus in 12:7 is the faith of Jesus in 14:12. The faith of Jesus is possessed uniquely by New Testament believers for their justification and life in Christ and is in contrast to the works of the law, which characterize Israel of the old covenant (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). Concerning the "faith of Jesus," Govett says, "This may mean either their belief in Jesus, or the articles of faith delivered by Jesus. Either way it seems to prove, that there are those once members of the church of Christ still on the earth" (*Revelation* 305).

In Revelation 19:10, the one speaking with John says, "I am your fellow slave and a fellow slave of your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus." Here the testimony of Jesus belongs to "your brothers." Verses 9 through 11 of chapter 6 say,

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Master, holy and true, will You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And to each of them was given a white robe; and it was said to them

that they should rest yet a little while, until also the number of their fellow slaves and their brothers who were about to be killed, even as they were, is completed.

The fifth seal discloses Christian martyrdom from the first century to the time near the end of this age. In figure, the altar is in the outer court of the tabernacle and the temple, and the outer court signifies the earth. Hence, the area underneath the altar is the region underneath the earth, where the souls of the martyred saints are, the Paradise to which the Lord Jesus went after His death (Luke 23:43). According to the context of Revelation 6, the cry of the martyred saints should take place just prior to the great tribulation, indicating that the fellow slaves and brothers who were about to be killed are the martyrs in the tribulation (20:4).

Brothers is a designation not only of believers in the church but also of the church itself. Hebrews 2:11 and 12 say, "Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You.'" In Revelation the testimony of Jesus is the testimony of the "brothers," that is, the testifying church. The lampstands in chapter 1, the great multitude of the redeemed in chapter 7, the bright woman with her man-

The fact of the church is found throughout Revelation, including those portions that speak of the great tribulation. This indicates that at least some in the church will be left on the earth during that time.

child in chapter 12, the harvest with its firstfruits in chapter 14, the overcomers on the sea of glass in chapter 15, the bride ready for marriage in chapter 19, and the New Jerusalem in chapters 21 and 22 are all the testimony of Jesus. Christ is the Witness of God (1:5), the testimony and expression of God, and the church is the testimony and the expression of Christ. As such, the church is the reproduction of the testimony and the expression of God in Christ (Lee, Recovery Version, Rev. 1:2, note 1).

Stanton expresses the dispensational viewpoint that the "brothers" and the remnant of Israel, who are about to be saved, cannot be on the earth at the same time. He asks,

When before did God ever have two separate witnessing bodies upon earth? God is not a God of confusion. Does He not terminate a former course of action before establishing a new one?...We need not put God in such a dilemma. (68-69)

Nevertheless, the presence of both Jews and believers on the earth during the great tribulation cannot be denied. The repeated mention of those who have the testimony

of Jesus, the “brothers,” is a clear indication that some believers will still be on the earth during that time.

A Parenthesis: The Great Multitude before the Throne

The seven seals, which begin to be opened in Revelation 6, are the contents of God’s economy concerning the church, Israel, the world, and the universe. The first four seals signify the preaching of the gospel, war, famine, and death, that run like riders on four horses throughout the course of the church age until Christ comes back (vv. 1-8). The fifth seal (vv. 9-11) is the cry of the souls underneath the altar, the prayer of the martyred saints from Paradise for vengeance; this cry will take place just prior to the beginning of the great tribulation. The sixth seal (vv. 12-17) is the shaking of the earth and heaven, the beginning of supernatural calamities, to initiate the great tribulation, the “great day of Their wrath.” Following this, chapter 7 is a vision inserted between the sixth and seventh seals, showing how God cares for His people while He is about to execute His judgment on the earth. Verses 1 through 8 unveil the sealing of the 144,000 of the twelve tribes, the chosen Israelites who will keep the commandments of God during the great tribulation (12:17; 14:12). Following this, 7:9-17 gives us a vision of a great multitude, composed of the redeemed ones from the nations, throughout all generations, as the constituents of the church. That they stand before the throne indicates that they are raptured to the heavens, to the presence of God. In order to preserve His earthly people, the Jews, God will seal them and keep them on earth, but in order to preserve His heavenly people, the church, God will take them away from the earth by rapture. This indicates that the rapture of the believers must begin near the time of the sixth seal, before the great tribulation, but it will not conclude at this time. Although the portion of all the believers who live until the Lord’s coming is to be raptured into God’s care and the Lamb’s shepherding, the entire book of Revelation shows that some believers will first pass through the great tribulation. Thus, the vision inserted in 7:9-17 gives us an overall view, in a general way, from the beginning of the rapture until eternity. Accordingly, it provides no details as to the specific timing of the rapture.

The Saints in the Great Tribulation

In chapter 8 the seventh seal is opened, and the first four trumpets of that seal are sounded, intensifying the supernatural calamities as God’s more severe judgments on man’s environment. At this point, verse 3 says, “Another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and much incense was given to Him to offer with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” This indicates that at the opening of the seventh seal, there still will be saints praying on the earth.

Chapter 13 speaks of the coming of the two beasts, signifying Antichrist and his false prophet, who receive authority for forty-two months, that is, the entire duration of the great tribulation. Verse 7 says, “Permission was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them,” and verse 10 continues, “Here is the endurance and the faith of the saints.” The saints here constitute the rest of the woman’s seed mentioned in 12:17, which consists of the Jews, who keep God’s commandments, and the believers, who bear the testimony for Christ. Again, 14:12 says, “Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” These passages provide more proof that in the great tribulation there will still be believers on the earth who are not yet raptured.⁵

The dispensational argument against the presence of the church in the great tribulation is primarily an ecclesiological one. Darby comments, “I am aware, as to the remnant of her seed, difficulty has been raised from the expression, ‘the testimony of Jesus Christ’...It will be a prophetic, not a church, testimony—a very different thing” (11:163). To Darby, what is very different about the saints in the tribulation is that they will bear a kind of individual, prophetic testimony, not the testimony of the church. After the commencement of the great tribulation, he says,

There are yet saints on the earth in whom heaven is interested...We now enter on the scene in which those saints are placed who had learned to look up to heaven...not the church, as we have seen, but yet heavenly in the source of their hopes...It is the Lamb who opens the course of judgments to which men themselves are exposed, so that for the saints found there there is a sure warrant of guardian care through the trial. (5:239-240)

Stanton insists, “The very nature of the Church demands exemption from the Tribulation” (68), and suggests that phrases such as *those who dwell on the earth* (Rev. 6:10) indicate that only the earthly people, Jews and Gentiles, will pass through the great tribulation. However, Darby clearly acknowledges that a heavenly people, the saints, will remain on the earth during the tribulation, although he argues that this does not make them the church. Walvoord expands on this latter thought:

Posttribulationists have to face not only the fact that the body of Christ, or the universal church, is not mentioned but also that there is no local church on earth...There is really no way to explain the total absence of any mention of either a local church or the universal church in a detailed account of end-time events. The description of the saved as saints of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds is quite in contrast to the reference to them as combined in one body, the church, in most of the New Testament. (Question 261)

It is a matter of fact, as Walvoord points out, that no local church is named after Revelation 2 and 3; this cannot be disputed. However, we cannot presume a clear conclusion as to the reasons behind this fact. It is important to understand that the arguments of Walvoord and others are directed primarily against posttribulationism, the teaching that the entire church should, must, and will pass through the tribulation. We cannot agree with this school of thought, since 3:10 promises that the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia will be kept out of the hour of trial. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged by all that there will be saints on the earth during the tribulation, as Walvoord says, “of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.” To insist that every one of these, without exception, will be saved only after the beginning of the tribulation is an *a priori* conclusion of dispensationalism. There is no clear evidence in the Scriptures as to the time of the salvation and regeneration of these saints. Rather, the clear statement of the Bible is twofold: first, that some believers will be raptured prior to the beginning of the great tribulation, and second, that some believers, “saints,” will be on the earth during the hour of trial.

The Woman and the Man-child

The central portion of Revelation, from 4:1 to 22:5, is divided into two sections. Chapters 4 to 11 provide a general view of the things to come, from Christ’s ascension to eternity future, and 12:1 through 22:5 gives details of the important things and crucial matters occurring from the last three and a half years of the present age, the period of the great tribulation, to the eternal age of the new heaven and new earth. The first of these important matters is the universal, bright woman with her man-child in chapter 12. Verses 1 and 2 say,

A great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon underneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child, and she cried out, travailing in birth and being in pain to bring forth.

The woman in chapter 12 has been interpreted both as Mary, the mother of Jesus, and as Israel, and the man-child (v. 5) has been thought to be Christ. According to Scofield, the man-child being caught up signifies the ascension of Christ (1341, margin), but here the man-child is caught up to heaven as soon as he is born, which was not the case with Christ. Moreover, the sign of the woman is seen in heaven (v. 1); neither Mary nor the nation of Israel have this position. After this woman bears the man-child, she flees into the wilderness, but Mary did

not flee into the wilderness after Christ ascended, as we know from Acts 1:9 and 14. Likewise, neither is it accurate to say that Israel fled into the wilderness after the ascension of Christ. None of the subsequent signs in Revelation 12—including the thousand two-hundred sixty days, the great red dragon (who is associated here with Antichrist, 13:1), the casting of Satan down to the earth, and the persecution of the woman—can be said to have followed the ascension of Christ. Rather, the bright woman signifies something universal, not local, as the nation of Israel is.

In Genesis 37:9 Joseph in his dream saw the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars, signifying his father, his mother, and his eleven brothers. There the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars, plus Joseph himself, signified the totality of God’s people on the earth. Based on the principle of that dream, the sun, the moon, and the twelve stars in Revelation 12 signify the totality of God’s people on earth. The sun signifies God’s people in the New Testament age. The coming of Christ was the visit of the rising sun from on high, a great light to shine upon the people in darkness (Luke 1:78-79; Matt. 4:16). That the woman in Revelation 12 is clothed with the sun means that “when the sun shines the brightest, it is shining upon her,” the one through whom God reveals Himself in the present age (Nee, *Glorious Church* 72). The church composed of all the believers, symbolized by the sun, shines collectively in the day with the glory of God (Phil. 2:15; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thes. 5:5).

Accordingly, the time before the coming of Christ was the time of darkness. Hence, the moon signifies the people of God in the Old Testament, the age of the law. The light of the moon is a reflecting light; it has no light of its own. All the things in the age of the law merely reflect the things in the age of grace. The law as “the testimony” (Exo. 25:16; 31:18; Psa. 19:7) was God’s expression, a revelation of God to His old covenant people, and was merely a type of Christ, who is God’s Word and God’s testimony, His expression in reality (John 1:1, 18; Rev. 19:13). Thus, the law, as a reflecting light, has a subservient role in God’s economy, as signified by the fact that the moon is under the woman’s feet in 12:1. The woman wears on her head a crown of stars, which signify the patriarchs, God’s people before the law was given. All God’s people in these three ages—the age of the patriarchs, the age of the law, and the age of the church—who together constitute this woman, are light-bearers. Hence, she is the bright woman shining throughout all generations, the greatest portion of whom is the church (Lee, *Revelation* 402).

The clear statement of the Bible is twofold: some believers will be raptured prior to the beginning of the great tribulation, and some believers, “saints,” will be on the earth during the hour of trial.

The Man-child Signifying the Overcomers throughout History

Verse 5 says, “She brought forth a son, a man-child, who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod.” In the Bible, woman signifies the weaker vessel, and man, the stronger one (1 Pet. 3:7). According to this principle, the man-child signifies the stronger part of God’s people. On the one hand, he is fully a part of her, having been hidden within her and nourished by her. On the other hand, he is distinguished from her by reason of his strength. This matches the principle of the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3. From among all of God’s people in the seven churches, the overcomers are those who maintain their first love for Christ and partake of Him as their life supply (2:4, 7), are faithful even unto death (vv. 10-11), and are not drawn away by empty teachings but rather are nourished by Him in the most private and intimate way (“hidden manna”) to be transformed for His building (“white stone” and “a new name”; vv. 14-15, 17). The overcomers are also those who refuse demonic and heretical teachings, keep the Lord’s works until the end (vv. 20, 24, 26), and have a walk and living that are unspotted by death (3:1, 4). They serve the Lord by utilizing the power He gives them, keep His word, and do not deny His name (v. 8), and they also pay the price (“buy”) to gain operating faith and the divine nature of God (“gold”), conduct that can be approved by the Lord (“white garments”), and the anointing Spirit for spiritual sight (“eyesalve”; v. 18). Such excelling virtues and diligent exercises distinguish—not divide—the man-child from the woman as a whole. From experience and observation, we cannot honestly say that all believers in the church throughout all the foregoing centuries have been characterized by the above qualities. On the other hand, neither can we say that no believers have demonstrated these virtues, for throughout the generations there have been stronger ones among God’s people. It is apparent that only some among God’s people, a minority, are worthy of the designation of “overcomer.” These are signified by the man-child, the stronger part of the woman, in Revelation 12.

Verse 5 says, “She brought forth a son, a man-child, who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod.” When Christ returns in power, He will shepherd the nations with an iron rod; that is, He will rule with strong power those nations who remain after He smites them with His judging word (19:15). However, 2:26-27 uses the same language to describe the reward of the millennial kingdom to the overcomers: “He who overcomes and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces, as I also have received from My Father.” The overcomers will sit with Christ on His throne, as He sits with the Father on the Father’s throne, to rule with Christ over the whole earth

in the coming millennial kingdom (20:4; Matt. 19:28). For this reason, it is incorrect to identify the man-child as signifying Christ alone. The man-child consists of the overcomers, who are one with Christ in His victory over the enemy and who will share His rule over the earth.

The Man-child Caught Up and the Woman Fleeing

Revelation 12:5 says, “She brought forth a son...and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.” *Brought forth* signifies resurrection (Acts 13:33-34). The man-child is composed of the overcomers who have died and been resurrected, as indicated by the words *unto death* in Revelation 12:11. These are the “brothers” in verse 10 who have been opposed and accused by Satan, the dragon, the enemy of God, but have overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by not loving their soul-life even unto death. To be caught up in verse 5 is to be raptured. After being resurrected prior to the great tribulation, all the overcomers of the past generations will be caught up, raptured, to the throne of God.

Following this, verse 6 says, “The woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place there prepared by God so that they might nourish her there a thousand two hundred and sixty days.” After the rapture of the man-child, the woman is left on earth to suffer persecution (v. 13). Verse 17 says, “The dragon became angry with the woman and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.” *The rest of her seed* signifies the weaker part of the woman, the people of God other than the man-child. Among them, some are Jews, who keep the commandments of God, and some are the believers, who have the testimony of Jesus. Both will pass through the great tribulation and suffer the dragon’s persecution and attack. That the woman will be preserved and nourished by God for a thousand two hundred and sixty days (the three and a half years of the great tribulation) is a strong proof that the rapture of the remainder of God’s people will take place on the last day of the tribulation.

Revelation 12 is one of the most outstanding portions of the Bible that speak of the rapture. George H. Lang, who met with the Open Brethren in the middle of the twentieth century, calls this the *crux interpretum* of Revelation. He adds,

It is here that the two principal schools of futurist expositors have both failed; the one insisting that all Christians must be taken from the earth before the time of the Beast, and the other by insisting that no saints can escape that period. Neither school has been able to deal accurately and fully with this chapter. (*Revelation* 219)

In this chapter a stronger portion—the man-child—will be

caught up to the throne of God prior to the great tribulation, and that the weaker portion—the woman and the “rest of her seed,” who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus—will be left on earth to pass through the three and a half years of the tribulation and be raptured only at the end of that time.

The Scene on the Heavenly Mount Zion

Revelation 14 is another significant chapter, showing how God in His wisdom, righteousness, and sovereignty will deal with all the people on earth in the proper way and at the proper time during the great tribulation. (Israel is not dealt with in this chapter, because it has already been covered in chapter 7 with the vision of the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand chosen Israelites.) Verse 1 of chapter 14 says, “I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” The one hundred and forty-four thousand in chapter 14 is in contrast to the one hundred and forty-four thousand in chapter 7 (Nee, *Works* 16:124-125; Govett, *Revelation* 266-268). First, the group mentioned in 7:4 is composed of those selected from “every tribe of the sons of Israel,” but the group in chapter 14 is “purchased from the earth” and “purchased from among men” (vv. 3-4). Those in chapter 7 are marked out with the “seal of the living God” (v. 2), but those in chapter 14 have the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father written on their foreheads (v. 1). This corresponds to the promise to the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia that Christ will write upon them the name of His God (3:12). Thus, the one hundred and forty-four thousand in chapter 14 are taken from the church.

Moreover, the multitude in 7:3 are “slaves” of God, but those in chapter 14 are sons of God, as implied by the name of “Father,” which in Revelation is revealed only in relation to the church (1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21). The group in chapter 7 is related to Christ as the Angel (v. 2; Gen. 22:11-12), but the group in Revelation 14 is related to Christ as the Lamb (v. 4), the title of Christ in His redemption. The Jews will not accept Jesus as the Lamb prior to seeing Him in glory (Zech. 12:7-12; Matt. 24:30). In addition, Revelation 14:4 tells us that the firstfruits are virgins. To the Lord’s New Testament disciples, virginity is a gift (Matt. 19:12; 2 Cor. 11:2). On the contrary, to be a virgin among the Israelites was a curse, whereas to marry and bear children was a blessing (Exo. 23:26; Deut. 7:14; Judg. 11:38; 1 Sam. 2:5; Psa. 113:9). Thus, the one hun-

dred and forty-four thousand in Revelation 7 are distinct in several ways from those in chapter 14. By all indications, those in chapter 14 are New Testament believers.

The traditional argument that these are Jews who are saved after the beginning of the great tribulation is with the view to proving that the church will not be on the earth during this time. Stanton claims,

While it is evident that Israel’s national conversion will not be complete until the revelation of Christ [that is, at the end of the tribulation]..., nevertheless a remnant from among Israel shall be redeemed and become God’s primary witnessing body during the Tribulation. (259)

Although it is not unreasonable that individual Jews will be saved prior to the salvation of the entire house of Israel at the coming of the Lord in power, to claim that these will become God’s primary witnessing body is simply an assumption of dispensationalism and is very weak ground upon which to build a major ecclesiological doctrine. In any case, the argument that 14:1-5 depicts saved Jews upon the earth is unnecessary, since the scene is in heaven, not on earth. The multitude is seen standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. According to the chronology of events depicted from 14:6 to 16:21, the description in 14:1-5 is that of the situation at the beginning of the great

tribulation. At this point, the Lamb is already standing on Mount Zion. Therefore, this cannot be the physical Zion in Israel, since the Lord does not return to it until chapter 19, at the end of the tribulation. At the time of chapter 14 the earthly Zion is still in the hands of the Gentiles (11:2). Moreover, the firstfruits in chapter 14 are before the throne of God, where the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are (v. 3). This indicates strongly that the scene here is on the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22), denoting God’s habitation and the center of His universal administration before the descent of the New Jerusalem to the earth in Revelation 21:2. This is also indicated by *purchased from the earth* in 14:3. What we see in chapter 14 is a number of believers from the church age raptured to the heavens before the great tribulation.

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The Firstfruits and the Harvest

Verse 4 says, “These were purchased from among men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” The firstfruits are the first ripe ones in a field. Exodus 23:19 says, “The first of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of Jehovah your God,” and Leviticus 23:10 says, “You

The woman and the “rest of her seed,” who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus will be left on earth to pass through the three and a half years of the tribulation and be raptured only at the end of that time.

shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest." The first ripe portion of the land was to be offered in God's house for His satisfaction. The type of the firstfruits was initially fulfilled in Christ on the day of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). In John 20:17 Jesus said, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." The freshness of Christ's resurrection was first for the Father's enjoyment, and His ascension early in the morning of the day of resurrection, prior to His return to the disciples late in the evening (vv. 19-20), was for the Father's satisfaction. Whereas the man-child in Revelation 12 meets God's need by fighting against His enemy (vv. 9-11), the firstfruits in chapter 14 meet His need for enjoyment and satisfaction. Moreover, the number one hundred and forty-four thousand is twelve times twelve times one thousand. Since twelve is the number of completion in God's eternal administration, the firstfruits are for the ultimate completion of God's administration to fulfill His economy for eternity. These firstfruits are the overcoming believers of the New Testament age who are still living at the time of the Lord's return and who are raptured to the throne of God in the heavens prior to the commencement of the great tribulation.

The subsequent portion, from 14:6 to 16:21, depicts the events of the great tribulation. In 14:6 and 7, the eternal gospel is preached to the inhabitants of the earth, in verse 8 Babylon the Great falls, and in verses 9 through 12 an angel issues a warning against the worship of Antichrist. Concerning this time, verse 12 says, "Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," and verse 13 adds, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them." The dead here are those who are martyred under Antichrist, as mentioned in 20:4.

Following this, verses 14 through 16 of Revelation 14 say,

I saw, and behold, there was a white cloud, and on the cloud One like the Son of Man sitting, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, Send forth Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He who sat on the cloud thrust His sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped.

In 10:1 Christ is hidden, being clothed with a cloud, whereas here He is on the cloud. His being on the cloud corresponds with 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which says, "Then we who are living, who are left remaining, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." At this point the Lord's coming back is made public in the air. Thus, it is near the time of the Lord's open coming that the majority of the harvest is reaped.

The firstfruits of the good land were gathered in the spring or early summer. A certain time after this, when the field was completely ripe, the remainder of the harvest was reaped. The harvest of the earth is God's people on earth, the believers in Christ. First Corinthians 3:9 says, "You are God's cultivated land, God's building." The believers, who have been regenerated in Christ with God's life, are a farm in God's new creation to grow Christ. At His first coming to the earth, the Lord sowed Himself into His believers (Matt. 13:3-8, 24). All the believers since that time, who have received Him as the seed of life, have become God's crop on the earth. The first-ripe of this crop will be reaped as the firstfruits to God before the great tribulation, just as the firstfruits of the good land were reaped and brought into the temple of God before the harvest. However, the majority of God's crop will ripen only with the help of the sufferings in the tribulation, and they will be reaped, that is, raptured, at the end of the tribulation.

The Firstfruits' Rapture Being Conditioned on Maturity and Readiness

Revelation 14:15 says, "Send forth Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe." *Ripe* here is "dried" (ξηράνθη), signifying that God's harvest must be "dried" of all the earthly water in order to ripen. Speaking of the ripening of the harvest, Govett notes,

The dryness of the wheat is its perfection, and marks its time of *removal* near. Thus the Christian's *deadness to the earth* is indicative of his removal...But this deadness to earth is as yet far from being characteristic of Jesus' disciples: it will require severe persecution to effect it...There is more than one rapture...At the first rapture, some disciples were unready. They were left behind to pass through the Great Tribulation. They were not accounted worthy to escape that scene of sin and trouble. But they have now withstood the seductions and compulsion of wickedness, and their trial is over. The heat of persecution has been blessed to wean them from the love of this present evil world. (*Revelation* 318-319)

J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, compares the unprepared believers at the end of the age to the "daughters of Jerusalem" in Song of Songs, those who do not properly care for their need to love the Lord and to grow in the divine life (1:5; 2:7). He says,

We never find them occupied with the *person* of the Bridegroom; *He* is not all in all to them; they mind outward and earthly things...They will not form part of the 144,000, "the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:1-5). They have forgotten the warning of our Lord in Luke 21:34-36; and hence they are not

“accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man”... We wish to place on record our solemn conviction that not all who are Christians... will thus meet the Lord in the air. (94-95)

Lang similarly sees that the early rapture of the saints is conditioned on their living after they are saved. He writes, “Translation, both of the living, as of the dead by the first resurrection, is consequent upon a life of faith which seizes upon the offer of the heavenly calling and shapes its course and conduct accordingly” (*Firstfruits* 11). Concerning the firstfruits and the harvest he writes,

The agricultural figure wrought into this chapter by the Holy Spirit is the key to its teaching... The First-fruits *cannot* be a picture of the whole of the redeemed as they will finally appear at the end of the drama of those days, for first-fruits *cannot* be more than a portion of the whole harvest... As between the gathering of the sheaf of first-fruits and the ingathering of the harvest there came the intense summer heat, so between the removal of the First-fruits and the reaping of the Harvest there is placed (ver. 9-13) the Great Tribulation, that final persecution which... ripens the matured grain. It is ripeness, not the calendar or the clock, that determines the time of reaping (Mk. 4. 29). The Heavenly Husbandman reaps no unripe grain. (42-44)

As we have seen, the firstfruits stand upon the heavenly Mount Zion before the throne of God for His enjoyment and satisfaction. The majority of the harvest, however, is taken to meet Christ in the air (1 Thes. 4:17), not the heavens. This again corresponds to the picture of the firstfruits and harvest in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were taken to the house of God in Jerusalem to be offered there, but the harvest was stored in barns, which typically were placed between the field and the house. Concerning the timing of the harvest and the place to which it was taken, Lang notes,

The Firstfruits and the Harvest are from the same sowing, grown in the same field, and are of the same class of grain. There is no distinction between them, save that the former, having ripened earlier, did not need the intense summer heat and so were gathered before it set in... As the End Times approach one company of the redeemed—the smaller portion, as firstfruits are less than the whole subsequent harvest, and as a man-child is less than the remainder of the family—reach the upper heavens prior to the arising of the Beast, whilst a second company are taken

to the clouds on the descent of Christ thereto, after the Tribulation under the Beast, and prior to the descent of the Lord to the earth to destroy him. (*Revelation* 236-237).

The Organic Aspect of the Rapture

A crucial matter concerning the firstfruits is the principle that among the believers living on earth at the time of the Lord's coming back, some will ripen earlier and, being the first to mature, will become the firstfruits in God's field. The principle of ripening indicates that there is an organic aspect of the rapture of the saints. The full salvation of the Triune God, which the believers enjoy, is in three stages (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Pet. 1:5, note 5). The initial stage, the stage of regeneration, is composed of redemption, positional sanctification, justification, reconciliation, and regeneration (1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 3:24; 5:10). This is the sowing of Christ as the seed of life into our human spirit, our innermost being (Matt. 13:3-4; John 3:6; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9). The second stage is the progressing stage, the stage of transformation, which is composed of freedom from sin, dispositional sanctification, growth in life, transformation, building up, and maturing (Rom. 8:2; 6:19, 22; 12:2; Eph. 4:13, 16). This is the full growth of the seed of life in our soul—our mind, emotion, and will—for our maturity in the divine life for the fulfillment of God's

eternal purpose (1 Cor. 3:6-7; Col. 1:28). The final stage of our salvation is the completing stage, the stage of glorification, which includes the transfiguration of our body, the redemption of our body, full conformity to the Lord, and glorification (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23, 29-30). This is the harvest of the full-grown seed in the future for the full expression of the Triune God (Rev. 14:4, 15).

The eschatology of the universal rapture of the church prior to the great tribulation is according to the theology of judicial, forensic redemption, in which a pretribulation rapture is considered an entitlement of all the redeemed ones, and it is also according to the theology of dispensationalism, which interprets prophecy according to the need to maintain a strict distinction between Israel and the church. However, the proper, biblical theology is that of God's economy, which begins with objective, judicial redemption and proceeds through subjective, organic salvation. In the light of God's economy for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose, the biblical eschatology defines rapture as the glorification of the body, the culmination of the believers' transformation and conformation to the image of Christ in their experience of God's full

Biblical eschatology defines rapture as the glorification of the body, the culmination of the believers' transformation and conformation to the image of Christ in their experience of God's full salvation.

salvation. In Matthew 13 the Lord Jesus revealed that He came to sow seed into the field. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul tells the Corinthians that they are growing as God's farm. Finally in Revelation 14 there are the firstfruits and the harvest. This gives us the basic concept with respect to the rapture. In figure, the rapture is depicted as the harvest of mature, ripened grain. Thus, our growth in life unto maturity is the prerequisite for partaking in the early rapture, since, as Lang says, "The Heavenly Husbandman reaps no unripe grain."

Kept from the Hour of Trial

Because the dispensational theology and eschatology of John Darby, the Brethren, and their doctrinal successors are the basis for the prevailing, popular view of the rapture among many fundamental, evangelical Christians today, we have devoted much of this article to demonstrating that there will be many believers from the church age who remain on the earth during the great tribulation. However, we must emphasize that we do not agree with the school of posttribulationism, which teaches that the entire church at the end of the age will pass through the tribulation. Representing this school, Ladd writes,

God's people have always suffered persecution, tribulation; why then should we expect God to change the divine order which has marked the entire course of redemptive history? Why should God do something for the Church at the end of the age when He has never done it before?...God will not deliver His people *from* such tribulation, but He will preserve them *in* it. (*Blessed Hope* 128-129)

In this view, the suffering of the entire church will be not only salutary for the believers but will also result, through the church's victory, in greater glory to God, as persecution has always done. However, this interpretation neglects the promises to the overcomers of an early rapture prior to the great tribulation. Perhaps the clearest statement of this promise is Revelation 3:10, which says, "Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth." *Trial* denotes the great tribulation, composed of the supernatural calamities of the sixth seal, the seven trumpets of the seventh seal, and the seven bowls of the seventh trumpet. Although *keep* sometimes denotes the keeping power of God within a situation (John 17:11-12; 1 Thes. 5:23; Jude 1), the preposition *out* adds special force, as in John 17:15, in which the Lord prayed that the disciples would be kept "out" of the hands of the evil one, not preserved while in his hands. Moreover, the Lord promised Philadelphia, the recovered church, that He would keep her not only out of the trial—"spiritual preservation," as Douglas J. Moo claims (Reiter 198)—but out

of the hour (ἐκ τῆς ὥρας) of the trial. Henry Clarence Thiessen comments,

We should note that the promise is not merely to be kept from the *trial*, but from the *hour* of trial, i.e., it holds out exemption from the period of trial, not only from the trial during that period...When it would have been so easy to write ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ, if the writer had meant preservation *in* that hour, why should he write ἐκ τῆς ὥρας, as he did? Surely, this is no accident. (202-203)

A Promise to the Church in Philadelphia

The exemption from the hour of trial that is promised to the church in Philadelphia will be accomplished by an early rapture of the overcomers prior to the commencement of the great tribulation. However, dispensationalism assumes too much from Revelation 3:10. Walvoord concludes, "Here the promise given to Philadelphia is addressed to the *entire* church" (*Question 257*, emphasis added). This is the case only if the church in Philadelphia represents the entire church, that is, all the churches on the earth at the time of the Lord's coming. Although the seven epistles in chapters 2 and 3 are the record of the actual situation existing on the earth at the time these epistles were written, they are also signs (1:1), signifying prophetically the progress of the church in seven stages. In addition, they also signify the seven kinds of churches in church history: the initial church, the suffering church, the worldly church, the apostate church, the reformed church, the recovered church, and the degraded recovered church. By any means of interpreting the seven churches, it cannot be said that one church stands for the entire church on the earth, including every believer. At no point in history, for example, can we say that the entire church was worldly, for even when the church as a whole was characterized by worldliness, there was still Antipas, the faithful witness (2:13). Likewise, we cannot say that at any time in its history the entire church was in a recovered state, and all the more we cannot expect this to be the case just prior to the Lord's coming. Nevertheless, this is the implication of those who insist that the entire church will be raptured before the great tribulation, such as Stanton, who says, "This promise is given to the entire Church of Jesus Christ, not merely to one local assembly existing in the days of the Apostle John" (47). In 3:16 the Lord tells another church, "Because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth." Should we say that this verse also is spoken to the entire church? That verse 10 is promised to the entire church is untenable. The promise is given not to the entire church but only to the church in Philadelphia.

Having a Little Power, Keeping the Lord's Word, and Not Denying His Name

The church in Philadelphia had its historical fulfillment in

the recovery of the proper church life in the early part of the nineteenth century, when the Brethren were raised up in England to practice the church outside all denominational and divisive systems. In principle, however, the characteristics of the Philadelphian church are best identified by the Lord's description in 3:7 through 13. First, the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia have a little power (v. 8). This indicates that what pleases the Lord is not our doing much for Him but our doing our best for Him with what we have, as Mary did in grasping the opportunity to pour upon the Lord the best that she had (Mark 14:8). This is according to the principle of the Body of Christ, in which even the smallest members must function according to the measure of faith apportioned to them (Rom. 12:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:14-22; Eph. 4:7), and it is reminiscent of the Lord's charge to the believers as His slaves, to whom He gives as little as one talent yet still expects that they would trade with His gift and make a profit (Matt. 25:15, 23). The Lord's appraisal and reward are not related to the size and quantity of our work but to our faithfulness in using His gift to the fullest extent. To faithfully utilize the Lord's gift is the characteristic of the church in Philadelphia. However, some believers usurp and neglect the Lord's grace, are negative and passive concerning the gift He gives them, and hide their Lord's talent in the earth (vv. 24-25). Since these do not properly possess their "little power," how can they be included with the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia, to whom the Lord promises an early rapture?

The overcomers in the church in Philadelphia also keep the Lord's word (Rev. 3:8). To keep the Lord's word is to not turn away from the word of the apostles' teaching, the healthy teaching of God's economy (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; cf. Rev. 2:14-15) but to be nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching, receiving the God-breathed Scripture by means of all prayer to be men of God with the breath of God (1 Tim. 4:6; Eph. 6:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:14-17). This is to receive not only the word of God's judicial redemption but also the truth of His organic salvation and even the highest peak of the divine revelation, the truth that in Christ, God became man to make man God, that is, the same as He is in life and in nature but not in the Godhead (Rom. 1:3-4; 1 John 3:2; 5:12; 2 Pet. 1:4). However, the believers and churches in Asia, who were under Paul's ministry, forsook him; that is, they turned away from his teaching (Acts 19:9-10; Rev. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:15) to teach things other than God's economy, which is the dispensing of God in Christ into His chosen people to produce the church as His Body. Because the churches turned away from Paul's ministry, they declined into a situation full of degradation as indicated by the Lord's rebukes in Revelation 2 and 3. In their degradation the churches received the false teachings of Balaam, the Nicolaitans, and Jezebel (2:14-15, 20), and they fell into deadness, lukewarmness, and Christlessness

(3:1, 16, 20). To be sure, the believers and churches in this condition at the end of this age will not share in the rapture before the great tribulation.

The overcomers in the church in Philadelphia also do not deny the Lord's name (v. 8). The Lord's word is the Lord's expression, and the Lord's name is the Lord Himself. To not deny the Lord's name is to abandon all names other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ and to belong to Him absolutely. It is also to exalt Christ Jesus as Lord and call upon the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:9-10, 12-13), openly confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 12:3). However, history tells us that the church has denied the Lord's unique name by denominating itself with many other names, such as Lutheran, Wesleyan, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and others (1:12-13). Many times even the debate over the millennium and the rapture is exemplary of this degraded condition, in which Christians strictly denominate themselves by the names of certain "-isms" according to their various schools of teaching.⁶ To deviate from the Lord's word is apostasy, and to denominate the church by taking any name other than the Lord's is spiritual fornication, the denial of the church's nature as a pure virgin espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). The deviation from the Lord's word to heresies and the exalting of many names other than that of Christ are the most striking signs of degraded Christianity. To deny the Lord's name in this way will disqualify many from sharing in the early rapture with the church in Philadelphia.

Being Infused by God to Love Him and All the Brothers

The characteristic of the overcomers in Philadelphia is also their brotherly love. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); love is the nature of God's essence. To abide in love is to be infused by and constituted with the essence of God Himself in order to live a life in which we love others habitually with the love that is God Himself so that He may be expressed in us, particularly in our love for the brothers. However, the expression of God is often lost in doctrinal debate among Christians, and not the least in the debate over the millennium and the rapture, in which opponents turn the arguments against one another and deal devastating blows to each other's teachings. Contrary interpretations of prophecy are called aggressive sophistry, fanatic exegesis, rubbish, and delusions, and their teachers are contemptuously styled as enemies, fools, cowards, heretics, and mystics, who dishonor God, wrest the Scriptures, grasp at straws, engage in cover-ups, and lack common honesty.⁷ This caused Wilbur M. Smith to lament, "If there is any body of people in this country prone to divide bitterly, it is the students of prophecy" (Ladd, *Crucial* 12). Among the overcomers, however, love prevails. They are built together in love, and they shepherd one another out from their

love for the Lord and for the brothers (1 Cor. 13:4-8; Eph. 4:16; John 21:15-17). For this most excellent attribute, the Lord calls them Philadelphia, and He promises them that He will deliver them from the hour of trial. On the contrary, to those who beat their fellow slaves rather than give food to His household at the proper time, the Master will come at a time they do not expect to give them a rebuke, not a reward (Matt. 24:45-51).

Keeping the Word of the Lord's Endurance and Being Pillars in the Temple of God

Those who are kept from the hour of trial are the overcomers who keep the word of the Lord's endurance (Rev. 3:10). The word of the Lord's endurance is the word of the Lord's suffering. The believers are joint partakers not only of His kingdom but also of His endurance (1:9). To keep the word of His endurance, we must bear His rejection and persecution. However, not all believers are willing to suffer with Christ; for example, even Demas, once a fellow worker with the apostle Paul, abandoned him, having loved the present age (Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Finally, Revelation 3:12 says,

He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

That the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the name of the Lord are written upon the overcomer indicates that what God is, the nature of the New Jerusalem, and the person of the Lord have all been wrought into him. Moreover, 21:22 says, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." For the overcomers to be pillars in the temple means that they will be pillars in the Triune God; that is, God is built into them, and they are built into God, subjectively and organically. This is to be mingled with the Triune God in our human spirit and constituted of Him through a lifelong process of transformation in our soul. To be sure, those who are pillars in the temple of God are the overcomers, who, being mature and intrinsically built into God, will be reaped as firstfruits by the Lord and taken to the heavenly Mount Zion for His enjoyment prior to the great tribulation.

A Conditional Promise and a Great Reward

The Lord promised the Philadelphian overcomers that before the great tribulation begins, He will take them away and keep them not only from the trial but even from the time of trial. This is a great promise and a great reward. As we have seen, however, not all believers will

bear the characteristics of Philadelphia at the time of the Lord's return. Not all will be full-grown in Christ, mature and ready to be presented to Him as His bride (Col. 1:28; Rev. 19:7). Not all will be the man-child, the stronger ones among the Lord's people, who meet the Lord's need by overcoming His enemy and are caught up to God and to His throne (12:5, 10-11). Likewise, not all will be the firstfruits, the first-ripe ones, as a fresh enjoyment to God and Christ, who are raptured to stand before the throne on the heavenly Mount Zion (14:1, 4). Not all will use their "little power" to the fullest, keep the Lord's word, and not deny His name (3:8). Moreover, not all will live by the essence of God, who is love, to habitually and spontaneously love all the brothers. Not all will keep the word of Christ's endurance, and not all will be transformed and mingled with God in their entire being to be pillars in His temple (vv. 10, 12). These excellent attributes and overcoming characteristics have never been the possession of all the believers universally, and it is not reasonable to believe that all will be in such a condition at the time of the Lord's return. It is only to the Philadelphian overcomers that the Lord says, "Because you have..., I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth" (v. 10). The Lord's great promise is conditional, and as such, it is a great reward.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹For a history of millenarian beliefs, please see "The Millennial Age," *Affirmation & Critique*, X.1 (Apr. 2005): 47-63, and X.2 (Oct. 2005): 74-92.

²The heretic was Edward Irving, who predicted that the coming of Christ would take place in 1868 and was later deposed from the Church of Scotland for his false teachings on the nature of Christ. The mystic was Margaret Macdonald, a chronically ill adolescent who prophesied ecstatically concerning the Lords' coming. The name of Macdonald is still invoked, even up to the present time, to discredit differing views on the rapture, as Charles Ryrie does, for example, in claiming that the young mystic held "elements of partial rapturism, posttribulationism, perhaps midtribulationism, but never pretribulationism" (*Rapture* 70-72). To wield an unfounded charge of heresy and mysticism to discredit a school of thought in scriptural debate is as unworthy today as it was in Darby's day.

³This, of course, is a sampling of leading features of dispensational doctrine. Charles Ryrie's *Dispensationalism* gives a systematic overview of this subject.

⁴In Revelation 5:9, the Alexandrinus text in particular omits the object and reads simply, ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ (redeemed to God). Sinaiticus renders ἡμᾶς (us) in verse 9, but in verse 10 it agrees with Alexandrinus to render ἐποίησας αὐτοῦς (made them) and βασιλεύσουσιν (they will reign) in the third person.

Walvoord concedes, "Inasmuch as there is division among scholars as to which version is correct, the matter remains debatable" (*Question* 259). Hence, the argument from these verses that the twenty-four elders include themselves among the redeemed is a weak one.

⁵The reference to the saints in Revelation 16:6, 17:6, and 18:20 and 24 may be more general, denoting the saints throughout the ages, as implied by *prophets* in 16:6 and 18:24 and by *apostles* in 18:20. However, the context of chapters 12 through 14 is clearly restricted to the great tribulation.

⁶After arguing under the name of "pretribulationism" or "posttribulationism," debaters on this subject sometimes deliver a call for both kinds of premillennialists to not forget their common faith. This faith, however, is still restricted, excluding those who take the name of "postmillennialism" or "amillennialism."

⁷All these terms are taken from the common literature on the rapture.

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