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LEFT BEHIND: FROM ROOT TO RIPENED FRUIT

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SYNOPSIS

Prior to the nineteenth century, all Christians—including all premillennialists—believed the rapture or the resurrection of believers and the visible bodily return of Christ were simultaneous events. By the twenty-first century, however, Christian beliefs had experienced a radical transformation. Due in part to the popularity of the Left Behind novels—now a big-budget apocalyptic action-thriller movie—multiplied millions are convinced that Jesus will come back secretly and silently to rapture His church. Not long after the church's glorious rapture, however, a numberless multitude of Jews, who have been systematically herded back into Palestine, will be slaughtered in a bloodbath vastly exceeding the horrors of the Holocaust. Then approximately seven years following the rapture, Christ will come again with His church to establish a thousand-year semi-golden age replete with temple sacrifices. According to Dr. Tim LaHaye, although the Rapture doctrine was not a major focus of our Lord except in John 14:1–3, the pretribulational rapture is clearly taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. We must determine whether dispensationalists beginning with John Nelson Darby have rightly interpreted the Word of Truth through faithful exegesis or whether they have wrongly divided the Word of Truth through faulty eisegesis. For nineteen hundred years of church history, no one had any concept of the pretribulational rapture that LaHaye claims is so clearly taught in Scripture. This is not the stuff of ivory-tower debates. Ideas have consequences! And the consequences of the Darbian dogma play

out in the caldron of real life. Darby's subjective spin on Scripture leads inexorably toward the nightmarish ending for Jews graphically portrayed in Left Behind theology.

One of the most compelling prophetic events in the Bible is called the "rapture" of the church. It is taught clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, where the apostle Paul provides us with most of the available details.

—Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins,

Are We Living in the End Times?

No single verse specifically states, "Christ will come before the Tribulation." On the other hand, no single passage teaches He will not come before the Tribulation, or that He will come in the middle or at the end of the Tribulation. Any such explicit declaration would end the debate immediately.

—Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*

Glossary

apocalyptic/apocalypse: (Greek *apocalypsis*, an unveiling) a literary genre used to describe prophetic literature composed in the highly metaphorical and symbolic language system used within postexilic Judaism and early Christianity. The book of Revelation is an apocalypse—not just in the sense of an unveiling but in the sense of what might best be described as a language system or matrix that is deeply embedded in the Old Testament canon. To comprehend Revelation, one must first understand well the rest of the Bible.

dispensationalism: a system of interpreting the Bible involving a strict literalism according to which God has two distinct peoples (the church and national, ethnic Israel) with two distinct plans and two distinct destinies. Dispensationalism (especially

dispensational eschatology) is distinctive for its teaching that the church will be “raptured” from the earth in the first phase of Christ’s second coming so that God can return to His work with national Israel, which was put on hold after Israel’s rejection of the Messiah. God’s renewed working with Israel is thought by many dispensationalists to include a seven-year period of tribulation under Antichrist in which two-thirds of the Jewish people will be killed, followed by the second phase of Christ’s second coming in which Christ and the martyred “tribulation saints” will rule for a thousand years from a rebuilt temple with a reinstated sacrificial system. Dispensationalism was first conceived by John Nelson Darby in the nineteenth century and popularized by prophecy pundits such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye in the twentieth century.

eschatology: (Greek *eschatos*, meaning “last, farthest,” and *logos*, “speaking, word”) the study of last things or end times. Far from being a mere branch in the theological tree, eschatology is the root that provides life and luster to every fiber of its being. To study Scripture is to study eschatology, for all of God’s work on earth—past, present, and future—moves toward eternal redemption. Put another way, eschatology is the thread that weaves the tapestry of Scripture into a harmonious pattern.

exegesis: (Greek *exegeisthai*, meaning “to explain, interpret, tell,” from *ex-* “out,” and *hegeisthai* “to lead, guide”) the method by which an author’s intended meaning is understood. In sharp contrast, **eisegesis** is reading into the biblical text something that simply isn’t there.

great tribulation: according to many dispensationalists, the great tribulation refers to a future seven-year period of incomprehensible horror following a secret rapture of the church. During this period, two-thirds of the Jewish people will die under the rule of an Antichrist. Biblically, however, the term “great tribulation” refers to the horrific persecution of Christians by the Beast beginning in AD 64 prophesied in the book of Revelation (see Rev. 7:14; cf. Matt. 24:21).

millennium: a metaphor used by John in Revelation 20:1–10. While some biblical exegetes interpret “a thousand years” literalistically, those who interpret Scripture in light of Scripture invariably recognize the number as figurative. For example, God increased the number of the Israelites a thousand times (Deut. 1:11); God keeps His covenant to a thousand generations (7:9); God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps.

50:10). (And a thousand more examples—metaphorically speaking—could easily be added to the list.)

Protocols of the Elders of Zion: a thoroughly discredited conspiracy theory in which sinister Jews secretly scheme to seize global control by destabilizing civil governments, disrupting world economies, and destroying Christian civilization. The *Protocols* significantly stoked the embers of anti-Semitism.

rapture: (Latin *rapio*, meaning “caught up”) this word was used in Latin translations of the Bible to express Paul’s teaching that believers living at the time of Christ’s return would be “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). As typically used by evangelical Christians today, however, the word “rapture” communicates the idea of a divine disappearing act in which Jesus Christ secretly returns to earth to take faithful believers out of this world just prior to a seven-year period of great tribulation. This understanding of rapture is referred to, for obvious reasons, as *pretribulational rapture*. If the question “Will there be a rapture?” is taken to mean, “Will believers be ‘caught up’ to meet the Lord as Paul taught?” the answer is a resounding “yes.” Conversely, if the question is “Will there be a pretribulational rapture as described above?” the answer is unambiguously “no.” Far from teaching a pretribulational rapture of the church, the Bible teaches that the glorification of believers living at the time of Christ’s return is a single event that will happen concurrently with the general resurrection of the dead (see esp. John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4).

resurrection: the raising of a body from death to eternal life; used to refer to the general resurrection of the dead—the just to eternal life and the wicked to eternal separation from God—that will occur at the time of Christ’s future bodily return to earth (see John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4); also used to refer to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead as “the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).

ROOT

In 1831—the same year that Charles Darwin left England and sailed into evolutionary infamy aboard the HMS *Beagle*—another nineteenth-century dogma with profound consequences for the history of humanity was birthed in the British Isles. That year John

Nelson Darby, a disillusioned priest, left the Church of England and joined a separatist millenarian group called the Plymouth Brethren in the English city of Plymouth.

In general, Darby accepted the premillennial perspective of the Brethren movement. Like Darwin, however, Darby was a trendsetter. In much the same way that Darwin imposed a speculative spin on the scientific data he encountered along the South American coasts of Patagonia, Darby imposed a subjective spin on the scriptural data he encountered in the city of Plymouth.

Darby contended that God had two distinct people with two distinct plans and two distinct destinies. Only one of those peoples—the Jews—would suffer tribulation. The other—the church—would be removed from the world in a secret coming seven years prior to the second coming of Christ. Darby’s distinctive twist on Scripture would shortly come to be known as *dispensational eschatology* (an end-times theory destined for twenty-first-century stardom in the apocalyptic action-thriller *Left Behind: The End Begins* starring Nicholas Cage and Chad Michael Murray¹).

Beginning with Darby, dispensationalists held that due to the murder of their Messiah, Jews were in for a time of unprecedented suffering variously referred to as the time of “Jacob’s Trouble” or the “Great Tribulation.”² Early dispensationalists such as Arthur W. Pink and Arno C. Gaebelein underscored the contention that Jews were under a “national blood-guiltiness” for “the murder of Christ.”³

In *Conflict of the Ages*, Gaebelein described Jews as “infidels” and “a menace” and contended, “The greater part of Jewry has become reformed, or as we call it, ‘deformed.’”⁴ Historian Dr. Timothy Weber notes that despite such unguarded remarks, Gaebelein’s *The Conflict of the Ages* received rave reviews in dispensational oracles such as Moody Bible Institute’s *Moody Monthly* and Dallas Seminary’s *Bibliotheca Sacra*.⁵

In his seminal volume, *On the Road to Armageddon*, Weber chronicles a formidable list of dispensational luminaries who were on the vanguard of promoting baseless, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Some hailed *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as proof positive that Jews were masterminding a global conspiracy to destroy Christian civilization.⁶

James M. Gray of Moody Bible Institute called the *Protocols* “a clinching argument for premillennialism.”⁷ And Arno Gaebelein praised Serge Nilus, who first published the *Protocols*, writing that he “was a believer in the Word of God, in prophecy, and must have been a true Christian.”⁸ Even after it became painfully obvious, Gaebelein remained unwilling to acknowledge the *Protocols* as an outright forgery and continued to advertise *The Conflict of the Ages* until his death in 1945.⁹

Charles C. Cook of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles likewise pronounced the *Protocols* authentic and stereotypically described the “accompanying traits” of Jews as “pride, overbearing arrogance, inordinate love for material things, trickery, rudeness and an egotism that taxes the superlatives of any language.” In the institute’s magazine, *King’s Business*, Cook opined that the reason Jewish people were “*persona non grata* at resorts and in the best society” is that “the unregenerated Jew usually has a very unattractive personality.”¹⁰

Such remarks impelled the venerable Harry A. Ironside to say that it grieved him “to find that the *Protocols* are being used not only by godless Gentiles, but even by some fundamentalist Christians to stir up suspicion and hatred against the Jewish people as a whole.”¹¹ Despite the embarrassment, dispensationalists (including Ironside) persisted in predicting a future period of unprecedented tribulation for Jews.

In their view, history hinged on herding Jews back into Palestine where two-thirds of them will die in an apocalyptic Armageddon. As dispensational luminary Dr. John Walvoord explains, “Israel is destined to have a particular time of suffering which will eclipse anything that it has known in the past.” Walvoord underscored this reality by adding that Jews returning to Palestine were “placing themselves within the vortex of this future whirlwind which will destroy the *majority* of those living in the land of Palestine” (emphasis added).¹²

In keeping with Walvoord’s ominous prediction, Hal Lindsey told Christian devotees that not long after their glorious rapture “a numberless multitude” of Jews would be slaughtered in a bloodbath that would exceed the horrors of the Holocaust. Lindsey went on to predict that the brutality of the Beast would make the Nazi butchers “look like Girl Scouts weaving a daisy chain.”¹³

For his part, Dr. Tim LaHaye uses biblical monikers such as “The Day of Israel’s Calamity” to codify what he eerily described as Antichrist’s “final solution” to the “Jewish problem.”¹⁴ Like Lindsey, he is convinced that this time of national suffering for Jews will “be far worse than the Spanish Inquisition of the sixteenth century or even the Holocaust of Adolph Hitler in the twentieth century.”¹⁵

According to LaHaye, the time of Jewish Tribulation will be a nightmarish reality beyond imagination: “Take the horror of every war since time began, throw in every natural disaster in recorded history, and cast off all restraints so that the unspeakable cruelty and hatred and injustice of man toward his fellow men can fully mature, and compress all that into a period of seven years. Even if you could imagine such a horror, it wouldn’t approach the mindboggling terror and turmoil of the Tribulation.”¹⁶

THE HEART OF DISPENSATIONALISM

The early 1800s found a broad range of premillennialists naively seeking to time the approaching terror and turmoil of the Tribulation with the Second Coming by correlating current events with biblical prophecy.¹⁷ On the cultic fringe, Mormon founder Joseph Smith was propagating the notion that his generation was living in the very shadow of Christ's return. Smith alleged that God had told him the return of Christ would take place before he was eighty-five years of age, prompting historians such as Ernest Sandeen to characterize Joseph and his contemporaries as being metaphorically drunk on the millennium.¹⁸

In more mainstream premillennial circles, the gifted Baptist orator William Miller was also circulating the conclusion that his generation was living on the very edge of the Millennium. In 1831 he publicly identified the year of Christ's return as 1843. Using millennial mathematics, Miller calculated a day in prophetic parlance as equivalent to a year in prophetic history. He reckoned that according to Daniel 8:14, exactly 2,300 "days" after Artaxerxes' decree (457 BC), the millennium would commence.

Nineteenth-century historic premillennialists used millennial mathematics not only to date the time of Christ's descent, but also to determine such details as the time of the Antichrist's demise. They began by supposing that the Roman pontiff was the Antichrist depicted in Revelation 13. Furthermore, they speculated that according to Revelation 11, precisely 1,260 "days" after the rise of the Roman papacy (AD 538), the reign of the Beast would come to an abrupt end.

Thus, the exile of the Roman pontiff by the French in 1798 was hailed as validation of their date-setting prowess.

In 1831—the year Miller announced that he had discovered the time of Christ's return—Darby added a unique twist to the dating game by introducing the concept of a secret coming seven years prior to the second coming of Christ. Thus one could only determine the time of Christ's second coming after the time of Christ's secret coming. Initially this proved a damper to the dating game. Later dispensationalists such as LaHaye, however, found a variety of new rules to ensure that the dating game could continue to be played. LaHaye demonstrated an unusually fertile imagination by forwarding the notion that the generation who heard the Austrian declaration of World War I in 1914 would not pass away before Christ's second coming.¹⁹

While dispensationalism has evolved into the poster child for biblical literalism, the Plymouth Brethren initially exposed to Darby's unique twist on the text considered it exegetically indefensible. Thus, Darby's system of dividing the Bible divided the Brethren.²⁰ The Brethren scholar Samuel P. Tregelles, recognized for his historical analysis of the Greek text of the New Testament, dismissed Darby's eschatological

musings as speculative nonsense. In his considered opinion, the sophistry of a secret return of Christ, seven years before the second coming of Christ, had its origin in an ecstatic utterance in the London congregation of Edward Irving, not in biblical exegesis. As Tregelles put it, "It was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose. It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God."²¹

According to Darby himself, however, his dispensational doctrines originated neither from an ecstatic utterance in Edward Irving's London congregation nor from the vision of a Scottish lassie named Margaret MacDonald. Rather, they evolved from the hypothesis that Scripture is replete with two distinct stories concerning two distinct people for whom God had two distinct plans.²² Thus, to Darby, reading the Bible for all it is worth meant deciding in advance which Scriptures applied uniquely to Israel and which Scriptures applied unequivocally to the church.

Premillennialist luminary George Eldon Ladd explained that "this principle has frequently been called '*Rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*' It is the method of deciding in advance which Scriptures deal with the Church and which Scriptures have to do with Israel, and then to interpret the passages concerned in the light of this 'division' of the Word."²³ B. W. Newton, "one of the earliest and most learned of the Brethren," however, dubbed Darby's method the "height of speculative nonsense."²⁴ C. I. Scofield, who followed Darby as dispensationalism's quintessential authority for biblical interpretation, thought otherwise. In 1888 Scofield published *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, which became a primary defense of Darby's two people of God theory.²⁵

In our generation, LaHaye is on the forefront of defending and disseminating Darby's "two people" dogma. In fiction and nonfiction, and most recently through the big budget film *Left Behind: The End Begins*, LaHaye underscores the nonnegotiable necessity of dispensationalism's distinctive doctrine. In his words, "The distinction between Israel and the church is important because the church's present distinctiveness in the plan of God provides the theological basis for the pretribulation Rapture."²⁶

While LaHaye's prowess in marketing Darby's dogma is breathtaking, we must ultimately ask whether it is biblical. Indeed, we must determine whether dispensationalists beginning with Darby have rightly illumined the Word of Truth through faithful exegesis or whether they have wrongly divided the Word of Truth through faulty eisegesis. For nineteen hundred years of church history, no one—including historical luminaries such as Ephraim, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Knox, Zwingli, and Wesley—had any concept of the pretribulation rapture that LaHaye claims is so "clearly taught" in Scripture. Were they all biblically blind? Or is it LaHaye and the Left Behind crowd who cannot see?

This is not the stuff of ivory-tower debates. Ideas have consequences! And the consequences of the Darbian dogma play out in the caldron of real life. Darby's subjective spin on Scripture leads inexorably toward the nightmarish ending graphically portrayed in Left Behind theology. If LaHaye is right, the time of Jewish Tribulation will indeed be a nightmarish reality beyond imagination.

Two Distinct People

We begin by turning our attention to the heart of the dispensational dogma, namely, that God has two distinct peoples—one of whom must be raptured before God can continue his plan with the other. In LaHaye's words, "Jacob had 12 sons, who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. They began the Jewish nation, and since then the human race has been divided into *Jews and Gentiles*....Israel began with 'Father Abraham' and will continue as a distinct entity throughout the rest of history" (emphasis added).²⁷

One of the ways by which LaHaye distinguishes between these two classes is temperament: "As a student of human temperament for many years, I have been intrigued by the Jewish temperament. After carefully analyzing the temperament of the first Israelite as he is described in the Bible, I have found Jacob to be a 'dead ringer' for the twentieth-century residents of Israel."²⁸ Therefore, according to LaHaye, the two classes can rightly be distinguished and divided on the basis of personal characteristics.

The good news for Jews is that LaHaye believes that on the basis of their race, they have a divine right to the land of Palestine. The bad news is that, as a direct result of the crucifixion of Christ, twenty-first-century Jews will soon die in an Armageddon that will make the Nazi Holocaust pale by comparison. So, before "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26), a majority of Jews must be slaughtered.

According to *The End Times Controversy*, edited by LaHaye, when Jacob's descendants rejected and crucified Christ, they suffered two distinct consequences. The first consequence was that "the flock of Israel was dispersed." The second consequence will be "the death of two-thirds of the flock. This will be fulfilled during the Great Tribulation when Israel will suffer tremendous persecution (Matthew 24:15–28; Revelation 12:1–17). As a result of this persecution of the Jewish people, two-thirds are going to be killed."²⁹

Does the illumination of Scripture reveal that God has two categories of people, one that will be raptured, the other ravaged? Or does Scripture reveal only one chosen people who form one covenant community, beautifully symbolized by the apostle Paul as a single cultivated olive tree?

First, far from communicating that God has two distinct peoples, the Scriptures from beginning to end reveal only *one chosen people* purchased “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).³⁰ As Paul explains, the “mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of *one* body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6).

Indeed, the precise terminology used to describe the children of Israel in the Old Testament is ascribed to the church in the New Testament. Peter calls them “*a chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are *the people of God*” (1 Pet. 2:9–10, emphasis added). Ultimately, they are the one chosen people of God, not by virtue of their genealogical relationship to Abraham, but by virtue of their genuine relationship to “the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God” (1 Pet. 2:4). The true church is true Israel, and true Israel is truly the church.

Further, just as the Old and New Testaments reveal only one chosen people, so too, they reveal only one covenant community. While that *one covenant community* is physically rooted in the offspring of Abraham—whose number would be like that of “the stars” of heaven (Gen. 15:5) or “the dust of the earth” (Gen. 13:16)³¹—it is spiritually grounded in one singular Seed. Paul makes this explicit in his letter to the Galatians: “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his *seed*. The Scripture does not say ‘and to *seeds*,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). As Paul goes on to explain, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (v. 29).

To suggest that Israel must “fulfill her national destiny as a separate entity after the Rapture and Tribulation and during the Millennium”³² is an affront to the One Seed in whom all the promises made to Abraham have reached their climax. As Keith Mathison has well said, “The promises made to literal, physical Israelites were fulfilled by a literal, physical Israelite, Jesus the Messiah. He is *the Seed of Abraham*” (emphasis in original).³³ The faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel and New Testament Christianity are together the one genuine seed of Abraham and thus heirs according to the promise. This remnant is not chosen on the basis of religion or race but rather on the basis of relationship to the resurrected Redeemer. Clothed with Christ, men, women, and children in every age and from “every tongue and tribe and nation”³⁴ form one and only one covenant community.

Finally, the one chosen people, who form one covenant community, are beautifully symbolized in the book of Romans as one cultivated olive tree (see Rom. 11:11–24). The tree symbolizes national Israel, its branches symbolize those who believe, and its root symbolizes Jesus—“the Root and the Offspring of David” (Rev. 22:16).

Natural branches broken off represent Jews who reject Jesus. Wild branches grafted in represent Gentiles who receive Jesus. Thus, says Paul, “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children....In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Rom. 9:6–8).

Jesus is the one genuine seed of Abraham! And all clothed in Christ constitute *one* congruent chosen covenant community connected by the cross. “There is neither Jew nor Greek [Arab or Armenian, American or African, Australian or Asian, etc.], slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28–29).

In the end, there simply is no biblical warrant for the dispensational notion that God has two distinct people. And if God has always had only one people, the dispensational dogma that God has two distinct plans for these two distinct peoples collapses under the weight of Scripture.

Two Distinct Plans

Just as there is one chosen people who form one covenant community characterized in Scripture by one cultivated olive tree, so too there is only *one distinct plan* for what Ephesians 2:15 characterizes as “the one true humanity” of God. The pretext that God postponed the original plan for Israel and initiated a parenthetical plan for the church that abruptly ends with a pretribulational rapture entirely misses the point.

First, far from the dispensational *postponement* of God’s original plan *for* Israel, Scripture reveals the distinct *progression* of the divine plan to establish *through* Israel a new humanity (Eph. 2:15) in a new homeland (Rom. 4:13; Heb. 12:18, 22). From Adam’s rebellion to Abraham’s Royal Seed, the Scriptures chronicle God’s one unfolding plan for the redemption of humanity. Far from a postponement in God’s plans because the Jews crucified Jesus, Scripture reveals the fulfillment of God’s plans in the crucifixion. For only through faith in Christ’s death and His subsequent resurrection can God’s one covenant community find rest from their wanderings (Heb. 4:1–11). In Christ—“the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45)—God’s promises find ultimate fulfillment. As Paul so elegantly put it, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

Further, as there is no dispensational *postponement* in the plan of God, so too there is no *parenthesis* in the purposes of God. The pretext for a parenthesis during which there is a postponement in God’s plans for Israel and the commencement of a plan for a church age is the product of a peculiar reading of prophecy. The main focus

of the dogma is Daniel. As LaHaye explains, “It is impossible to understand Bible prophecy without understanding the book of Daniel. Much of the information about the key players and the time sequence of the last days is given in Daniel.”³⁵ Of particular note is Daniel’s “seventy weeks” (Dan. 9:24–27).

To expound on the “key players” and “time sequence,” LaHaye reads a number of presuppositions into Daniel’s seventy weeks. First, he infers a gap of two thousand years between Daniel’s sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Furthermore, he injects into the gap of two thousand years a “parenthetical period” he calls the “Church Age.”³⁶ Finally, he imagines that “the church was an unrevealed mystery in the Old Testament (Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 3:2–10; Col. 1:25–27)” and that “Israel, *and not the church*, will fulfill her national destiny as a separate entity after the Rapture and Tribulation and during the Millennium” (emphasis added).³⁷

As should be self-evident, this invention is not the product of the faithful interpretation of the biblical text, but is the by-product of a fertile imagination. The very notion that the Old Testament prophets did not see “The Valley of the Church,”³⁸ which “did not exist before its birth at Pentecost” and “will come to an abrupt end at the Rapture,”³⁹ is flatly false. The Old Testament prophets not only saw the “Valley of the Church,” they *announced* it! Peter—speaking after the birth of the church at Pentecost—could not have said it any more plainly: “*All the prophets* from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have *foretold* these days” (Acts 3:24, emphasis added). What is neither seen nor announced by the prophets is the notion that the New Testament church that was birthed at Pentecost would “come to an abrupt end at the Rapture.” Plainly put, the notion that the church is merely a parenthesis in the plan of God has no biblical backbone.

Finally, as there is no postponement or parenthesis in the plan of God, so too there is no *pretribulational rapture*. For nineteen hundred years, the idea of a pretribulational rapture was completely foreign to mainstream Christianity. Prior to Darby, the Plymouth Brethren believed that the rapture and the return of Christ were simultaneous events. Darby’s innovative invention gave birth to the notion of a pretribulational rapture. As historian Timothy Weber explains, “Before Darby, *all* premillennialists, futurists included, believed that the rapture would occur at the end of the Tribulation, at Christ’s second advent. But Darby understood the rapture and the second coming as two separate events. At the rapture, Christ will come *for* his saints, and at the second coming, he will come *with* his saints. Between these two events the great tribulation would occur.”⁴⁰

No such notion had ever been considered within historic orthodox Christianity before Darby. Harry Ironside—himself a pretribulational rapturist—challenged those who doubt this assertion to “search, as the writer has in measure done, the remarks of

the so-called Fathers, both pre- and post-Nicene; the theological treatises of the scholastic divines; Roman Catholic writers of all shades of thought; the literature of the Reformation; the sermons and expositions of the Puritans; and the general theological works of the day. He will find the 'mystery' conspicuous by its absence."⁴¹ Ironside—who LaHaye dubbed "one of my preacher heroes"—would frequently add the following warning as well: "Whenever you hear something *new, examine it carefully* because it may not be *true*" (emphasis added).⁴²

An appropriate place to begin is Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, for it is in this passage that dispensationalists claim to find indisputable proof for Darby's pretribulational rapture theory. Says LaHaye, "One of the most compelling prophetic events in the Bible is called the 'rapture' of the church. It is taught *clearly* in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, where the apostle Paul provides us with most of the available details" (emphasis added).⁴³

Even a cursory exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 4, however, reveals that Paul does not have pretribulational rapturism in mind. Far from unveiling a new teaching concerning a secret coming during which Christ will rapture the church, Paul's message is focused on the great and glorious hope of resurrection. As Bible scholars have duly noted, Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4 runs directly parallel to his teachings in 1 Corinthians 15. Together they communicate the blessed hope that at Christ's second appearing the end will come. He will hand the kingdom over to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. When the trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ will be changed—in a flash in the twinkling of an eye. And so we will be with the Lord *forever*.⁴⁴

Nowhere does the text say that when Christ comes down from heaven "with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thess. 4:16) that Christ will hover with us in midair, suddenly change directions, and escort us to mansions in heaven while all hell breaks out on earth. Nor would the Thessalonians have understood Paul this way. As Dr. N. T. Wright has aptly noted, "Paul conjures up images of an emperor visiting a colony or province. The citizens go out to meet him in open country and then escort him into the city. Paul's image of the people 'meeting the Lord in the air' should be read with the assumption that the people will immediately turn around and lead the Lord back to the newly remade world."⁴⁵

Moreover, there is no warrant for supposing that the pretribulational rapture theory is supported by a "similarity" between Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and Christ's teaching in John 14:1–3: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be

also” (John 14:1–3 KJV). To put it bluntly, Left Behind theology is off base in taking these precious words of our Savior and pretending they represent the first teaching on the pretribulational rapture of the church in Scripture.⁴⁶

To read into 1 Thessalonians 4 or John 14 a paradigm in which two-thirds of the Jewish people will shortly be eradicated in a holocaust massacre while Jesus’ people relax in heavenly mansions is a frightful imposition on the integrity of our Savior and the Scriptures. Neither Paul’s portrait of paradise nor the Master’s mansion metaphor is intended to convey a temporary safe haven in heaven away from a seven-year holocaust on earth. Rather, they represent a glorious picture of “a new heaven and a new earth” in which “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:1–5).

Two Distinct Phases

Like the presupposition that God has two distinct people for whom he has two distinct plans, the pretext that there are two distinct phases in the second coming of Christ is little more than the product of a fertile imagination. Indeed, the faithful interpretation of Scripture reveals neither a secret coming of Christ followed by a seven-year Tribulation, nor a second chance for sin and salvation following the second coming of Christ. To the contrary, when Christ appears a second time, the kingdom that was inaugurated at his first appearing will be consummated in “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

First, the very notion of a *secret coming* is without biblical precedent. As LaHaye himself has acknowledged, “no single verse specifically states, ‘Christ will come [secretly] before the Tribulation’” to rapture the church.⁴⁷ Nor is there a collection of verses that can be construed to communicate a secret coming prior to the second coming of Christ. Instead, the notion of a secret coming, as pretribulational rapturists readily admit, is “a deduction from one’s overall system of theology.”⁴⁸

The Left Behind deduction is that there is a secret coming during which *only* the church will be raptured. Conversely, as our Lord declares, “a time is coming when *all* who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28–29, emphasis added; cf. Matt. 25:31–46; Luke 12:35–48). Left Behind theology therefore stands in stark contrast to Jesus’ teachings. The plain and literal sense of our Lord’s words suggests a moment in the future when both the righteous and the unrighteous

will be resurrected and judged together. The notion that believers will be raptured during a secret coming of our Lord 1,007 years prior to the resurrection of unbelievers is thus an imposition on the biblical text.

Even given pretribulational presuppositions, the literal sense of the parable of the weeds suggests that the wicked will be judged prior to the wheat being gathered, not the other way around (Matt. 13:24–30). Likewise, in the Olivet Discourse, the unjust are “taken” in judgment while the righteous are left behind, not vice versa (Matt. 24:36–41). During His earthly sojourn, our Lord fervently petitioned His heavenly Father not to rapture His bride out of the world, but to protect them from the evil one while they were in the world (John 17:15).⁴⁹

Furthermore, search as you may, you will not find in the biblical text a *future* seven-year Tribulation during which a vast majority of Jews will die. In fact, the future seven-year Tribulation trumpeted by Left Behind is conspicuous by its absence in the whole of Scripture. That, of course, is not to suggest that Jews have not faced tribulation in the past. Who can forget the terrible seven-year tribulation suffered by Jews during the beastly reign of the Old Testament antichrist—Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The annual Hanukah celebration ensures the world will ever remember this horrific abomination. Had God not supernaturally intervened through Judas Maccabeus, the epicenter of Jewish spiritual and sociological identity would have been not only desecrated but manifestly destroyed.

Moreover, two centuries later, the Jewish Jesus looked back on this very abomination to warn His followers that another seven-year tribulation was in store. In the fullness of time Jesus’ prediction became a graphic reality. Roman infidels destroyed the temple fortress and ended the daily sacrifice. This time the blood that desolated the sacred altar flowed not from the carcasses of unclean pigs but from the corpses of unclean Pharisees. This time the Holy of Holies was not merely desecrated by the defiling statue of a pagan god, but was manifestly destroyed by the greed of despoiling soldiers. On August 30, AD 70, seven years after the beginning of tribulation, the unthinkable had taken place. The very date on which the former temple had been destroyed by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar—the second temple was set ablaze. And by September 26, all Jerusalem was in flames.⁵⁰

While from the perspective of history the Jews have suffered tribulation, there is no biblical warrant for the Left Behind obsession to drive past tribulations into the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, LaHaye avows that “there is little doubt as to when this Tribulation occurs or how long it will last.”⁵¹ Oddly, he provides precious little by way of evidence. He posits a single proof text from the prophecy of Daniel,⁵² and from Revelation he produces no proof text at all. Instead, he simply pontificates that John’s revelation divides the Great Tribulation “into two periods of three and one-half years

each or 1,260 days each, a total of seven years. During the first three and one-half years more than one-half the world's population dies. During the second half, conditions get even worse after Satan is cast out of heaven and indwells the Antichrist's body and demands the world worship him."⁵³

Despite evidence to the contrary, LaHaye persists in dragging the seven-year tribulation into the twenty-first century and describing it as the time of "Jacob's Trouble" or the time of "Jewish Tribulation."⁵⁴ What he fails to disclose is the seminal fact that neither Jeremiah's reference to "a time of trouble for Jacob" (Jer. 30:7) nor Jesus' reference to a time of "great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (Matt. 24:21) refer to a holocaust in the twenty-first century that was precipitated by a Jewish rebellion against Jehovah in the sixth century BC or a Jewish rejection of Jesus in the first century AD. Both references incontrovertibly point to times past in which the very temple that gave Israel its spiritual and sociological identity was decimated.

Jeremiah explicitly communicates that "Jacob's trouble" takes place during the Babylonian exile—some six centuries before Jesus is even born!⁵⁵ And Jesus emphatically places the time of "Jewish tribulation" in the first century.⁵⁶ In the end, there simply is no biblical warrant for Left Behind's fatalistic preoccupation with a future seven-year tribulation.

Finally, as there is no biblical warrant for a secret coming and a seven-year tribulation, so too there is no biblical basis for believing in a *second chance for salvation after the second coming of Christ*. Christ is clear: "all" given to Him by the Father will be raised up on the last day (John 6:37–40). In sharp distinction to such faithful interpretation, LaHaye presents a fictitious interpretation in which people are saved after both the secret and second comings of Christ. The implications of his theology are as bizarre as they are blasphemous. If Christ and the church are married between the secret and second comings, "the bride of Christ" must continue to "grow to include other redeemed people in the days of the kingdom."⁵⁷ If, on the other hand, God has both a bride (church) and a wife (Israel), those who are saved after the second coming must be added to "the wife of God" rather than "the bride of Christ." Both scenarios are unthinkable. It is bizarre to suggest that the bride whom Christ married during the Tribulation is incomplete and thus imperfect. Moreover, it is blasphemous to hold that the *one* whom God revealed in three persons has both a bride and a wife.⁵⁸

Paul points out that the liberation of creation goes hand in hand with the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:18–25). Thus we can be certain that no one will be saved during a mythological semi-golden age following the second coming of Christ. The notion that our bodies are redeemed at the rapture and the earth is liberated from its bondage to decay approximately 1,007 years later is without biblical precedent. At

the second coming, the bride of Christ—the church universal—is complete. No one else can be saved. The eschaton has come.

THE UTTER IMPLAUSIBILITY OF LEFT BEHIND THEOLOGY—IN THEATER OR IN TEXT

While LaHaye boldly asserts that the rapture is “one of the most compelling prophetic events in the Bible” and that it is clearly taught “in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, where the apostle Paul provides us with most of the available details,” in truth the pretribulational rapture is the ripened fruit of a fertile imagination.

Only in fiction does Christ come back secretly and silently to rapture the church some seven years prior to His second appearing. After meeting somewhere in the air, Jesus allegedly reverses direction and ushers the church into mansions on high. There the church is joined with Christ in holy matrimony. Says LaHaye, “The church (‘the bride of Christ’) and our Lord Jesus Christ will be officially married in heaven.”⁵⁹

Thus, “while the earth is suffering through the last throes of the Tribulation, the church will enjoy a heavenly wedding. And then a feast!”⁶⁰ Guests at the festivities are “faithful Old Testament saints” and “those who died or were martyred in the Tribulation.”⁶¹ LaHaye identifies one of the guests as John the Baptist.⁶² Though beheaded on earth, and not yet in his immortal body, the disembodied Baptist enjoys the feast and festivities in heaven along with a bridegroom and a bride already in flesh.

Meanwhile, down on earth, the Jews who have gone to bed with the Beast experience a holocaust of mythic proportions. In short order, two-thirds are reduced to bloody corpses. Concurrent with the carnage, a “soul harvest” emerges—partly due to a video left behind by the now raptured T. D. Jakes (if the first Left Behind movie is to be believed)⁶³ and partly due to the proselytizing prowess of 144,000 Jewish virgins who “did not defile themselves with women” (Rev. 14:4).

As festivities continue in heaven, the world is struck by “an earthquake so massive that ‘every mountain and island was moved out of its place.’”⁶⁴ The sun becomes “black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood” (Rev. 6:12). All the while, crashing “meteorites” and “huge mushroom clouds of undetermined origin” ravage the planet.⁶⁵

And that’s just the beginning! The trumpet judgments of the first twenty-one months of tribulation represent merely the work of the Antichrist. Next, the wrath of the Almighty is unleashed. “In the first period of the Tribulation the earth has known the wrath of the Antichrist; now it will begin to feel the wrath of God Almighty.”⁶⁶ The opening salvo includes ice, “fire rain,” and blood that fall from heaven, creating “an

ecological disaster without parallel to this point *in the history of mankind*" (emphasis added).⁶⁷ The previous earthquake that moved every mountain and every island out of its former place on the planet and the meteorites slamming into the earth and the mushroom clouds are insignificant compared to this ecological disaster. Not even Noah's flood, which wiped out all but eight people, approaches the carnage of this catastrophe (little wonder Hollywood salivates).

In short order, another enormous meteorite strikes the earth and turns a third of the sea into blood. Yet another turns a third of the rivers and springs bitter and poisonous. Then the Almighty reduces "by a third the amount of radiant energy reaching the earth from the sun and all other celestial bodies"⁶⁸ and releases locusts with "scorpion-like power to sting and torment unbelievers."⁶⁹ After the locusts come two hundred million horsemen—or as LaHaye prefers, *horsedemons!*⁷⁰ (LaHaye chastises "prophecy preachers" who take the text literally, because, as he puts it, "the logistics of moving an army of two hundred million from the Orient across the Euphrates and the Arabian Desert to the little land of Israel seems impossible."⁷¹ Evidently, moving every mountain and island out of its former place is eminently more feasible than moving an army from the Orient to Israel.) The horsedemons physically "kill one third of the world's population," fatally stinging some with their mouths and tails and scaring others to death.⁷²

Says LaHaye, "In the first half of the Tribulation, vicious plagues sweep the earth, flaming meteorites poison a third of its water, warring armies kill millions, demonic beings torture the unredeemed, darkness swallows a third of the sun, and half the world's post-Rapture population dies horribly. *And then it gets worse*" (emphasis added).⁷³

The cultural elite move from New York, London, and Brussels to villas in the Beast's new headquarters in Babylon,⁷⁴ which, despite the ongoing carnage on earth, has been restored to greatness by none other than the late Saddam Hussein.⁷⁵ There they make the "irreversible decision" to take the "mark of the beast."⁷⁶ Before long Antichrist has control of the legions left behind. "International Big Brother—the number of his name is 666!"⁷⁷—along with the "Trilateral Commission, CFR, and other secret and semisecret organizations" finally realize their dream of an "interdependent world economy" and a "cashless society."⁷⁸

The Beast is now in position to break his "covenant" with Israel. As he initiates the "final solution" to the "Jewish problem," God begins to afflict those who have received the mark of the Beast with "foul and loathsome sores."⁷⁹ Then "He commands that the entire sea become 'blood as of a dead man'—that is corrupt, decaying, stinking, putrid" and turns all the rivers and springs to blood. ("If Jesus could turn water into

wine at the marriage feast of Cana,” explains LaHaye, “surely He would have no problem turning water into blood.”⁸⁰

After the earth is deprived of drinking water, God causes the sun to “scorch” it with “great heat.”⁸¹ Even this, however, is but the prelude to the grand finale. And “what a finish it is! The most severe earthquake the world has ever known ‘since men were on earth’ shakes the planet to its foundations.”⁸² “And that is not all,” says LaHaye. “Enormous hailstones weighing about 135 pounds each rain out of the sky, striking men all over the planet.” Finally, the stage has been set for “the most famous battle in history.”⁸³

Jesus returns with His bride dressed in wedding white. He touches down on the Mount of Olives and splits the mountain (which presumably along with every other mountain has been moved out of its place) wide open.⁸⁴ He slays every last person who resists him,⁸⁵ binds Satan, and initiates “a time of peace that men and women of goodwill have yearned for throughout the centuries.”⁸⁶

One might think that after the secret coming of Christ, seven years of carnage, and the second coming of Christ, the problem of Satan and sin would be fully and finally resolved. But alas, in Left Behind theology there is a second chance for salvation during the millennial reign of Christ. Men, women, and children have another thousand years during which to accept or reject the Savior.⁸⁷ While multiplied millions are saved, millions more fall under Satan’s spell. Their numbers, says LaHaye, are as “the sand of the sea.” Thus, after a time of peace and prosperity, once again the planet is plunged into a time of “massive destruction.” “And that’s it—” says LaHaye, “in a ball of celestial flame” that falls from heaven, “human rebellion will have been wiped out of existence.”⁸⁸

Like Darwinian evolution, this dispensational eschatology continues to morph from its humble beginnings in the British Isles—with the Left Behind series leading the charge. The two people, two plans, and two phases dogma of Darby is now the norm, not the abnormality. Dispensational doctrines are propagated through major educational institutions and have penetrated the highest realms of influence and power. Billion-dollar television conglomerates, such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), daily churn out the prophetic speculations of dispensationalism. Even Hollywood has joined the fray.

Those who dare question the notion of a pretribulational rapture followed by a Holy Land holocaust in which the vast majority of Jews perish are shouted down as peddlers of godless heresy. The ultimate pejorative phrase has been coined for those who deny the heart of dispensational eschatology. They are dubbed “Replacement theologians” and are said to be guilty of spreading “the message of anti-Semitism.”⁸⁹

Popular dispensationalists, such as John Hagee, are blunt in their denunciations. “Replacement theologians are now carrying Hitler’s anointing and his message.”⁹⁰

One can only pray for the courage to stand in the face of vilification and to do all that is permissible to see that this pseudoeschatology will one day fade into the shadowy recesses of history.⁹¹

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NOTES

- 1 *Left Behind: The End Begins*, directed by Vic Armstrong (Stoney Lake Entertainment, 2014). Both Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, co-authors of the Left Behind novel series upon which the movie is based, have given the film “a big thumbs up.” “‘I believe it does justice to the novel and will renew interest in the entire series,’ author Jerry B. Jenkins said. ‘It is the best movie I have ever seen on the rapture,’ added Tim LaHaye. Jenkins provided very useful notes to the script during pre-production and visited the set during principal photography.” It’s also worth noting that the new film is a remake of *Left Behind: The Movie* (Cloud Ten Pictures, 2000) starring Kirk Cameron, but unlike the earlier film it is intended to appeal to a much broader, non-Christian audience, depicting “the immediate aftermath of what the day of the Rapture might look like in realistic bold and graphic detail” (<http://www.leftbehindmovie.com/faq/>). In addition to its \$16 million production budget, the new film boasts an \$18 million budget for print and advertising (<http://variety.com/2014/film/news/nicolas-cages-christian-drama-left-behind-set-for-oct-3-release-exclusive-1201149715/>).
- 2 Dispensationalists cite Jeremiah 30:7 and Matthew 24:21.
- 3 Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 136, 146; see 129ff.
- 4 Arno Clemens Gaebele, *The Conflict of the Ages: The Mystery of Lawlessness, Its Origin, Historic Development, and Coming Defeat* (Vienna, VA: The Exhorters, n.d., uncensored reprint ed.), 147.
- 5 Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 135–36.
- 6 See *ibid.*, 130ff.
- 7 James M. Gray, “The Jewish Protocols,” *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* 22 (October 1921): 598, quoted in Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 132.

- 8 Gaebelein, *Conflict of the Ages*, 99; see also discussion in Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 134.
- 9 Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 142.
- 10 Charles C. Cook, "The International Jew," *King's Business* 12 (November 1921): 1087, quoted in Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 132.
- 11 Harry A. Ironside, "Are the Jews as a People Responsible for the So-Called Protocols of the Elders of Zion?" *Chosen People* 39 (March 1934): 5–7, quoted in Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 138.
- 12 John Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 107, 113–14, quoted in Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 149.
- 13 Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970 [40th printing May 1974]), 110; and in Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 151.
- 14 Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting the End Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001), 63.
- 15 Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 146.
- 16 LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, 58.
- 17 My principal sources for the following discussion are Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983 ed.); Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).
- 18 Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 42, 47–48.
- 19 See Tim LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1972), 38–39; also see the whole of chapter 3, "The First Sign of the End," and chapter 15, "Is This the Last Generation?" LaHaye argued that World War I uniquely fulfilled the prophecy of Matthew 24:7, which in his mind was the sign to indicate "the beginning of the end." In 1999 LaHaye coauthored with Jerry B. Jenkins *Are We Living in the End Times?* in which he had not yet ruled out the possibility that the generation that saw World War I would not pass away until the Lord returns, saying that scenario "should not be ruled out for another five years or so" (59)..
- 20 Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 41.
- 21 S. P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming: How Is It Taught in Scripture? And Why?* (Chelmsford, Eng.: The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 6th ed., n.d. [1st ed. 1864]), 35; and in Ladd, *Blessed Hope*, 41.
- 22 According to historian Timothy Weber, Darby himself explained that "the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture virtually jumped out of the pages of the Bible once he understood and consistently maintained the absolute distinction between Israel and the church in the prophetic plans of God" (*On the Road to Armageddon*, 25).
- 23 Ladd, *Blessed Hope*, 130.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 25 Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 39.
- 26 LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, 81.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 46. LaHaye believes there are essentially three classes, namely, Israel and the church, with the church subdivided into true believers and "Christendom." In his words, "Scripture speaks of three classes of people throughout prophecy and history. We find all three in 1 Corinthians 10:32." The second class is composed of "two aspects of the church—true believers and Christendom." From LaHaye's perspective, true believers are "the body of Christ, which began on the Day of Pentecost and will go to heaven in the Rapture." "Christendom, by contrast, will be left behind to enter into the Tribulation period and is being prepared to serve as Satan's harlot" (*ibid.*, 46–50).
- 28 LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End*, 45.
- 29 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "The Little Apocalypse of Zechariah," in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice,

eds., *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 262. It should be noted that Fruchtenbaum here points out that it may well be that the judgment of God against two-thirds of the Jews involves the slaughter of not only those in the land of Israel but two-thirds of all Jews worldwide.

- 30 All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the NIV1984.
- 31 The prophet Nehemiah extolled the trustworthiness of God in fulfilling His promises by making Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky (Neh. 9:23; cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17).
- 32 LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, 48.
- 33 Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 29.
- 34 See Rev. 5:9; 7:9.
- 35 LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, 87.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 40 Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, 24, first emphasis only is added.
- 41 H. A. Ironside, *The Mysteries of God* (New York: Loizeaux, 1946), 50–51, quoted in Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 20.
- 42 As in Tim LaHaye, "Introduction: Has Jesus Already Come?" in LaHaye and Ice, eds., *The End Times Controversy*, 11.
- 43 LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* 95–96.
- 44 See 1 Cor. 15:51–52; 1 Thess. 4:14–17.
- 45 N. T. Wright, "Farewell to the Rapture," *Bible Review*, August 2001, http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_BR_Farewell_Rapture.pdf (accessed January 26, 2007).
- 46 The *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* is explicit in saying that Jesus in John 14:1–3 does not have His second coming but rather His secret coming in mind. See Tim LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2000), 1151.
- 47 LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 188.
- 48 Thomas D. Ice, "The Origin of the Pretrib Rapture: Part II," *Biblical Perspectives*, March–April 1989, 5, quoted in Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 20; cf. Thomas Ice, "Why I Believe the Bible Teaches Rapture before Tribulation," <https://www.raptureready.com/featured/ice/RaptureBeforeTribulation.html> (accessed August 6, 2014).
- 49 Our Lord's use of the Flood illustration makes it clear that the unrighteous are taken in judgment while the righteous are left behind. The force of this argument is such that even Tim LaHaye acknowledges that Luke 17:34–36 "is not a reference to the Rapture" and that the "taken" are unbelievers experiencing judgment, not raptured saints (see LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, 1113).
- 50 For further study concerning "the abomination of desolation" spoken of by the prophet Daniel as well as "the abomination of desolation" spoken of by the Lord Jesus, see Hank Hanegraaff, *Has God Spoken? Memorable Proofs of the Bible's Divine Inspiration* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 145–65.
- 51 LaHaye, "The Tribulation," in LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, 1374.
- 52 The single phrase that LaHaye presents is Daniel 9:27 — "He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven" (see *Ibid.*). For a far more plausible interpretation of Daniel's prophecy, see Hanegraaff, *Has God Spoken?* 153–62.
- 53 LaHaye, "The Tribulation," in LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, 1374.

- 54 For an extensive list of titles, including “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble,” “The Great Tribulation,” “The Day of Israel’s Calamity,” “The Day of Clouds,” “The Hour of Judgment,” which LaHaye assigns to this future seven-year tribulation, see LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, 56.
- 55 See especially Jer. 29:28–30:9; cf. Dan. 9:2–3.
- 56 See Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says about the End Times...and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), especially chapter 4.
- 57 Paul Benware, “The Marriage of the Lamb,” in LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, 1395.
- 58 Cf. Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2004), 138.
- 59 LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* 231.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid., 231–32.
- 62 Ibid., 231.
- 63 This was the incredible scenario depicted in *Left Behind: The Movie* (Cloud Ten Pictures, 2000)..
- 64 LaHaye and Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* 185–86. LaHaye and Jenkins are quoting Revelation 6:14 and interpreting it literally.
- 65 Ibid., 186.
- 66 Ibid., 187.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid., 188.
- 69 Ibid., 189.
- 70 Ibid., 191–92.
- 71 Ibid., 191.
- 72 Ibid., 192.
- 73 Ibid., 193.
- 74 Ibid., 195.
- 75 Ibid., 138–42.
- 76 Ibid., 198.
- 77 Ibid., 201.
- 78 See *ibid.*, 198–203.
- 79 Ibid., 206.
- 80 Ibid., 207.
- 81 Ibid., 208.
- 82 Ibid., 218.
- 83 Ibid., 219.
- 84 Ibid., 226–27.
- 85 Ibid., 229.
- 86 Ibid., 231.
- 87 Citing Isaiah 65:20, LaHaye and Jenkins write, “We believe this means that believers will live throughout the entire period but that the unregenerate will be given one hundred years to repent and accept Christ as their Lord; if they refuse to do so, they will die. This will result in an enormous population by the end of the Millennium, the vast majority of whom will be saved. In fact, we believe that because of the Millennium, there may be more people in heaven than in hell” (*ibid.*, 240).
- 88 Ibid., 245.
- 89 John Hagee, *Should Christians Support Israel?* (San Antonio, TX: Dominion, 1987), 1, 73. In truth, of course, the term “replacement” best fits those like Hagee who believe Israel will replace the church as the focus of God’s plans during the Tribulation. The reality is this: the church has not replaced Israel

nor has Israel replaced the church. As noted, the precise terminology used to describe Israel in the Old Testament is ascribed to the church in the New Testament (see 1 Pet. 2:9)—the true church is true Israel and true Israel is truly the church.

90 Hagee, *Should Christians Support Israel?* 132.

91 Article adapted with modification from Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, chapter 3.