

Parousia

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LEGS TO STAND ON

by
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Cooper


Bible scholars and students alike have wrestled with describing the Prewrath rapture position. Dr. Paul Benware labels it as "A more recent position concerning the time of the Rapture . . ."1 Others call it "the old posttrib position," and some define it as "a modified midtrib" view. The truth of the matter is that Prewrath is a balanced and bibli-

cal synthesis of pre-, mid-, and posttribulationism with a refinement of the timing issue that brings harmony to *all* of the rapture passages in question. A thorough examination of the Prewrath position reveals that the unquestionable truths of each of the three positions are kept while the errors that divide them are discarded. The proponents of these three positions would probably concur that the major area of disagreement concerns the actual *timing* of the rapture which, they would have to admit, also controls their interpretation of many passages that deal with issues related to the rapture question.

Each camp on the rapture question has committed followers of Jesus Christ as adherents. Dr. John F. Walvoord is an advocate of the pretribulation view. Having studied at Dallas Theological Seminary and spent time in his company, I can personally testify to Dr. Walvoord's love for God and His Word. "A giant of the faith in modern time" is a fitting title for this man of God. The fact that he believes the church will be taken *before* Daniel's Seventieth Week makes him no less an honorable man.

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The correct position on the timing of Christ's return is some combination of the three major views

Dr. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. on the other hand follows the midtribulation viewpoint. He argues that Christ returns to rapture His church at the mid-point of the Seventieth Week. I have not personally met Dr. Archer, but I have read and utilized his writings. As an Old Testament professor at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois, Dr. Archer has distinguished himself as a first rate exegete of God's Word. The fact that he believes the church will be

taken at the mid-point of the Seventieth Week, *before* the "great tribulation," makes him no less a serious student of the Bible. Dr. Douglas J. Moo, who also serves at Trinity International University, endorses a posttribulation rapture. As Assistant Professor of New Testament, Dr. Moo has demonstrated an outstanding mind for New Testament exegesis; he is simply brilliant. The fact that Dr. Moo believes Scripture to teach that Christ will return at the end of the Seventieth Week to rapture His church, *after* the "great tribulation" and *after* the six trumpets and six bowl judgments, makes him no less a committed follower

of Christ. The number of faithful followers of Jesus Christ who hold to each of the positions stated above are many. Logically, it makes sense that the correct position on the timing of Christ's return is some combination of the three major views, given that each view is based on the same passages of Scripture. It is arrogant and illogical then to conclude that only one of these positions is absolutely right and the other two are totally wrong.

The question that each position is attempting to answer concerns the timing of the rapture. This continues to be the irreconcilable difference. Countless hours of time and gallons of ink have been spent in order to prove the other two positions wrong. Scholars continue to search for the one argument that will close the debate in favor of their respective position. The sad result is that the discussions have gotten so trivial and the distinctions between words so technical that the average follower of Christ cannot follow the arguments. The price of this continual in-fighting is, on the one hand, an uneducated laity convinced that the truth cannot be

known. On the other hand, committed godly men and women support pre-, mid-, and posttribulationism with fierce devotion to their position. For now, the debate is purely esoteric. No real danger exists, for all things continue as before. However, one day there will be a world full of people that will be called upon to be that final generation of humanity to experience the climactic events of history. The old adage that end time events "will all pan out in the end" will not be taken so lightly by the generation that must see these things begin to happen.

A Starting Point

The Church of Jesus Christ is *exempted* from the eschatological wrath of God. On this point, posttribbers (George E. Ladd and Robert H. Gundry), midtribbers (Gleason L. Archer Jr. and J. Oliver Buswell), and pretribbers (John F. Walvoord and Leon Wood) are in perfect accord. The message of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9² is unmistakable in asserting that believers are promised to be delivered from the eschatological wrath of God. The problems begin in light of this fact. Precisely, what is the wrath of God and when does it occur? What method will God use to deliver His people? Will He remove them out of the world or merely protect them while in the world?

To illustrate the eschatological positions, let's use a chair. This chair has a beautiful place in which the believer sits—the rapture. The problem is: the legs are missing. The correct eschatological position must give the seat the support it needs—four solid legs—for the chair to be complete, reliable, and practical. Let's example pretribulationism first.

The Truth of Pretribulationism

Pretribbers accept the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ is *exempted* from the eschatological wrath of God. However, **every** other element of the pretrib position can be and is debated. The flaw of the position is the insistence that the *entire* Seventieth Week of Daniel is the direct wrath of God, thereby requiring the Church to be raptured out of the world before the Seventieth Week begins. *There is no incontrovertible biblical support that says the entire Seventieth Week of Daniel is the wrath of God.* Perhaps this is why Dr. John F. Walvoord wrote some years ago, "neither posttribulationism nor pretribulationism is an explicit teaching of Scripture. The Bible does not, in so many words, state either."³ Equally, to make this entire time the eschatological

wrath of God necessitates that the people found in Revelation 7:9-17, described as “a great multitude which no one could number,” are the victims of God’s wrath. That’s illogical! In this writer’s opinion, the pretrib position has only one valid leg to stand on.

The Truth of Midtribulationism

Midtribulationism also recognizes that the church is exempted from the wrath of God. But midtribbers also make a fundamental distinction in the nature of the Seventieth Week of Daniel that is different than those of the pretribulationist persuasion. Dr. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. indicates *two sources of wrath* during the Seventieth Week. When speaking of the wrath issue, he writes,

“It simply regards the first three and a half years, during which the Antichrist will increase his power and mount his persecution against the church, as a less tribulation, not nearly as terrifying or destructive of life as those fearsome plagues that will dominate the last three and a half years. In other words, *this interpretation makes a clear division between the first half as the period of the wrath of man, and the second half as the period of the wrath of God.* For the reasons adduced . . . we understand that the final generation of the pre-Rapture church will be subject to the wrath of man, but spared from the wrath of God.” (italics added)⁴

He also adds that,

“. . . when we speak of the ‘wrath of man’ as the distinctive feature of the first half of the ‘week,’ we mean that the wrath of the Antichrist and his associates in government is the dominating feature on the stage of this drama. . . . But as the second half of the week comes into play, with the church safely removed from the scene, the indignation of the Lord breaks forth with overwhelming, supernatural power. . . . Hence we rightly speak of this period as the ‘wrath of God.’”⁵

We agree with Archer in that a distinction must be maintained between the wrath of Antichrist/man and the wrath of God. But like the pretrib position, the “great multitude which no man could number who come up out of the great tribulation” mentioned in Revelation 7 would still become martyrs at the hand of God.

Thus, like pretribulationism, the flaw of this position is Dr. Archer’s incorrect assessment of the nature of the Seventieth Week when it comes to the *timing* of the rapture. Daniel 9:27 indicates three-and-a-half years of tranquillity for Israel followed

by three-and-a-half years of intense persecution at the hands of “the Prince who is to come.” New Testament Scriptures emphasize that Satan, the beast, and the false prophet will execute a reign of terror against the people of God during the second half—42 months—of the Seventieth Week,⁶ and Revelation 12:12-14 explains that this final three-and-a-half years of persecution is “Satan’s wrath.” More specifically, Satan will give his power to Antichrist who will persecute the people of God. Given the intensity and level of Satan/Antichrist’s persecution, it would be hard to understand how God alone will be magnified when His wrath begins (Is. 2:12-22), if Satan/Antichrist is permitted to persecute and kill the children of God at the same time. Revelation 6:12-17 indicates when

God’s wrath begins upon the earth, beginning with the trumpet judgments, and Revelation 15:1 explains that the bowl judgments are the end of His wrath. As we saw earlier, Isaiah 2:12-22 indicates that once the wrath of God begins, nothing and no one will be exalted but the Lord alone. It is clearly the wrath of God that brings Satan/Antichrist’s wrath to an end. Therefore, the wrath of Antichrist and the wrath of God *will both be evident during the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week, but they cannot occur at the same time.* This, in part, contradicts the midtribbers who insist that only God’s wrath will be incurred during the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week.

Continuing the chair illustration, while the pretrib position has only one solid leg to stand on, the midtrib chair has two solid legs to stand on: the exemption from the eschatological wrath of God and the distinction between God’s wrath and the wrath of man.

The Truth of Posttribulationism

The posttrib position takes the rapture question one step further. Like the midtrib position, posttribbers recognize the involvement of both the wrath of God and the wrath of Satan during Daniel’s

A distinction must be maintained between the wrath of Antichrist/man and the wrath of God

The eschatological Day of the Lord and “the great tribulation” cannot be the same event

Seventieth Week.⁷ However, posttribulationism offers a different explanation for the order of events and the timing of the rapture. Dr. Douglas Moo explains that the great tribulation will be the persecution of the saints by Antichrist, and will continue for a large portion of the second half of the Seventieth Week. The wrath of God will be concentrated in the very last part of the Week. The wrath of God is limited to the eschatological Day of the Lord which Dr. Moo argues is “a decisive intervention of God for judgment and deliverance.”⁸ Since the eschatological Day of the Lord involves both the judgment of God⁹ and the deliverance of His people,¹⁰ posttribbers

argue that the eschatological Day of the Lord and “the great tribulation” cannot be the same event. Dr. Moo writes,

“Several factors suggest that it is not. First, no reference to the eschatological ‘day’ in the New Testament clearly includes a description of the Tribulation. . . . Second, Malachi 4:5 (the coming of Elijah) and Joel 2:30-31 (cosmic portents) place what are generally agreed to be Tribulational events *before* the Day. . . . Third, Paul seems to suggest in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the Day cannot come *until* certain, clearly tribulational, events transpire.”¹¹

2 Thessalonians 2:3 indicates that “the man of lawlessness” is revealed before the “Day” begins. Therefore, posttribbers contend that the eschatological Day of the Lord follows the period called “the great tribulation” that occurs at the beginning of the second half of the Seventieth Week. Since Paul teaches that the coming (parousia) of Christ ends the reign of “the man of lawlessness,” the *Parousia* must occur at the very end of the Seventieth Week, i.e., posttribulational. Dr. Moo writes,

“The Parousia is indisputably posttribulational in Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39 and in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. . . . On the other hand, the Parousia of Christ is explicitly stated to be an object of the believer’s expectation in 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; James 5:7-8; and 1 John 2:28. . . . If, then, believers are exhorted to look forward to this coming of Christ, and this coming is presented as posttribulational, it is natural to conclude that believers will be present through the Tribulation.”¹²

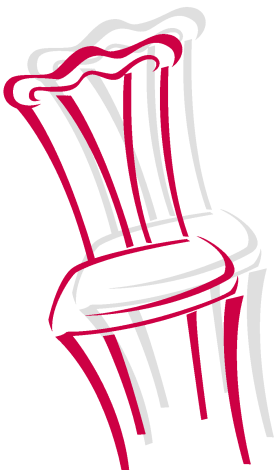
Continuing our chair illustration, posttribulationism is three-legged. Like the first two positions,

posttribbers hold to the Church’s exemption from the eschatological wrath of God. Like the midtribbers, the Seventieth Week of Daniel will evidence both the wrath of God and the wrath of Antichrist. Thirdly and differently from the other two positions, the eschatological Day of the Lord and “the great tribulation” do not cover the same time period during the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week, but the “day of God’s wrath” follows the time of Antichrist’s tribulation. It is our position that all of these leges are *incontrovertible*.

The flaw of the posttrib position is in its timing of the rapture. By placing it at the end of the Seventieth Week there is insufficient time allowed for the trumpet and bowl judgments to occur sequentially (as the text indicates), the Bema Seat Judgment that occurs before the bowl judgments, the Battle of Armageddon, and the salvation of Israel’s remnant and some Gentile converts to populate the millennial kingdom. Another flaw of the posttrib position states that believers will not be removed from earth during the eschatological wrath of God, but rather that they will be protected from it as if under a big umbrella. The rather fancy attempt by Dr. Robert H. Gundry to explain how God’s people can be protected if God’s judgment is selective does not measure up to biblical scrutiny.¹³ Posttribbers’ continual insistence that believers will be caught up to heaven and immediately returned to earth cannot be harmonized without serious problems in sequencing as outlined in Revelation. The correct position must allow sufficient time between the rapture and the second advent. Dr. Paul Feinberg outlines this necessity when he writes,

“To begin with it is important to see the *need* for saints in nonglorified, physical bodies. While the Millennium will see the radical reduction of evil and the flourishing of righteousness, sin will still exist. . . . There will be sickness and death (Isa. 65:20). . . . All of these are not usually thought of as a part of the life of those who have been glorified.”¹⁴

Matthew 25:31-45 indicates that only believers will enter the millennial kingdom. Isaiah 19:18-25 clearly indicates that Gentiles along with Jews will populate the millennial kingdom in nonglorified bodies. Since the fully glorified do not sin, and some earthly kingdom constituents will, the rapture must have an interval between it and the coming of Christ at the battle of Armageddon to allow for the salvation of those nonglorified people who will populate the millennium. While it is certainly true that God has in the past protected His people in the



midst of judgment, Scripture indicates a different type of protection in the last days . . . as in the days of Noah . . . as in the days of Lot.

The Truth of Prewrath

The Sign Ministries believes that the Prewrath position adds the fourth leg to our chair illustration. By taking what is biblically sound from each of the other three positions, the Prewrath position begins with strong supports already in place. As do all the rapture positions discussed, we uniformly believe that the saints will not experience the eschatological wrath of God. Like those who hold to the midtrib position, we see a distinction between the wrath of God and the wrath of Antichrist/man. Like the posttrib position, we believe that the wrath of God will be evidenced only after the persecution of Antichrist is finished. Therefore, like the posttribbers, we believe that the Church will experience the direct persecution of Satan/Antichrist.

This is where the Prewrath position adds the critical fourth leg to the chair. The Word of God teaches that Satan/Antichrist's persecution will be cut short¹⁵ in Matthew 24:22.¹⁶ How? By removing the object of the evil one's persecution—the Church—to heaven and putting the remnant of Israel in hiding.¹⁷ This one refinement makes several things possible: (1) it provides sufficient time for *all* of God's wrath to occur without manufacturing a way for the Church to be present while that wrath rains down all around them; (2) it provides the necessary time needed for the salvation of Zechariah's prophesied one-third remnant of Israel who will be the inhabitants of the millennial kingdom; (3) it provides the time necessary for the salvation of a remnant of Gentiles from the nations who refuse to take the mark of Antichrist; and (4) it provides the platform by which God alone is exalted in the earth once His wrath begins.

Therefore, the Prewrath position stands on four solid legs. One leg involves the Church's exemption from the wrath of God (pretribulationism). One leg consists of a distinction between the wrath of God and the wrath of Antichrist (midtribulationism). One leg constitutes a distinction between the "great tribulation" and the eschatological Day of the Lord (posttribulationism). The last leg shows that the persecution by Antichrist will be cut short,¹⁸ before the end of the Seventieth Week, providing the interval between the rapture and Christ's coming at the battle of Armageddon during which time all of the trumpet and bowl judgments will be played out.

The identification of the wrath of God with the eschatological Day of the Lord is the key. All sides agree that the eschatological Day of the Lord involves both the final judgment of God and the deliverance of His saints. Drs. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock in reference to 1 Thessalonians write,

"Deliverance in the Day of the Lord is a special theme of 1 Thessalonians. At His return, Jesus 'delivers us from the wrath to come' (1:10). Paul teaches the church that the Day of the Lord will not 'over take you like a thief' (5:4). . . . In the context, this deliverance would seem to be the blessing of resurrection and translation into immortality which Christ will grant His own at His coming (1 Thes. 4:13-18), an event which is called the Rapture. . . . This deliverance, or rapture, would appear to coincide with the inception or coming of the Day of the Lord, since that is the focus in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4."¹⁹



*The Parousia
of Christ*

The Rapture

The Church's exemption from God's wrath

Wrath of Antichrist/man v. wrath of God

Day of the Lord and Great Tribulation not the same

Persecution of Antichrist cut short

Both Drs. Blaising and Bock taught at Dallas Seminary during my time of study there. It was from Dr. Blaising that I studied eschatology. Both are solidly pretrib, yet they recognize the importance of the eschatological Day of the Lord at the timing of the rapture. J. Dwight Pentecost writes in his book *Things to Come*,

“The only way this day could break unexpectedly upon the world is to have it begin immediately after the rapture of the church. It is thus concluded that the Day of the Lord is that extended period of time beginning with God’s dealing with Israel after the rapture at the beginning of the tribulation period and extending through the second advent and the millennial age unto the creation of the new heavens and the new earth after the millennium.”²⁰

Pentecost is obviously pretribulational. However, he too recognizes that the eschatological Day of the Lord follows the rapture. The timing issue can be settled if the beginning of the Day of the Lord can be determined within the frame work of end-time events. The Prewrath position acknowledges that the eschatological Day of the Lord will be signaled by a sign given in the sun, moon, and stars, a sign distinctly described in the eschatological book of Joel.²¹ Jesus indicates in the Olivet Discourse that *His Parousia* will immediately follow the sign Joel prophesied, which marks the inception of the eschatological Day of the Lord. Jesus also indicated in His revelation to John that Joel’s sign in the sun, moon, and stars will be the sign that announces the day in which His wrath begins, a sign given in the heavenlies that will be displayed at the breaking of the sixth seal. Therefore, as one compares the six seals to the events outlined in the Olivet Discourse, one quickly sees that the rapture must occur *after* the Seventieth Week of Daniel begins, *after* the midpoint of that same Week has begun, and *after* Satan/Antichrist’s persecution of the Church is cut short (Matt. 24:22) when the sign of the eschatological Day of the Lord and the *parousia* of Christ is given in the sun, moon, and stars. The exact day or hour when the sixth seal will be broken is not detailed in the Scriptures (Matt. 24:36), but when that happens it will announce to all the world the inception of the eschatological Day of the Lord.

Does the timing component offered by the Prewrath position have incontrovertible biblical support? If you search the Scriptures we believe that it does. Our four-legged chair is durable, reliable, and practical. Have a seat, and test it for yourself.

ENDNOTES

1. Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 221.
2. These two passages most clearly refer to the eschatological wrath of God, unlike Romans 5:9, Ephesians 5:6 and Colossians 3:6 which may speak about the wrath of God all unbelievers will suffer at the white throne judgment.
3. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, (Findlay, Ohio: n.p. 1957), 148.
4. Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer and Douglas J. Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 139.
5. *ibid.*, 108.
6. See Dan. 9:27 and Rev. 12:7-13:18.
7. See Mark 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:3; and Rev. 13:1-8 with Rev. 15:1, 7 and 16:1.
8. Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer and Douglas J. Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 183.
9. See Ob. 15; Zeph. 1:15-18 and Is. 13:6.
10. See Is. 27; Jer. 30:8-9 and Joel 2:32.
11. *ibid.*, 182.
12. *ibid.*, 177.
13. Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 44-63.
14. Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer and Douglas J. Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 72.
15. The term *koloboo* in the passive sense refers to that which has been amputated or reduced in size. The LXX used this verb to explain the actions of David’s men in 2 Samuel 4:12 where clearly amputation is the sense. Extant occurrences of the term support a literal interpretation in Matthew 24:22.
16. It is important at this point for the reader to understand that it is the persecution that Christ is referring to, not the second half of the Seventieth Week of Daniel. Antichrist will *reign* for three-and-a-half years, but his *persecution* will not.
17. This position is argued in detail in *The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple* and *The Sign* by Robert Van Kampen.
18. See endnote 14 above.
19. Drs. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993), 263-64.
20. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1967), 230-231. Dr. Pentecost would make the Day of the Lord 1007 years long—a fact that is greatly debated.
21. See Joel 2:28-32; Matt. 24:29-31; Acts 2:14-21 and Rev. 6:12-17.

The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple in Many Languages

Opportunities have become available to translate and publish Robert Van Kampen's book *The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple* into languages other than English.

The growing Church in **Romania** will soon have the book to study as it has been translated and is in the process of being published. It will be a great tool for these Christians, once behind the iron curtain, to have in their study of end time events.

The book has been translated into **Spanish**. Editorial Unilit, the publisher of the Spanish version of *The Sign (La Señal)*, will soon have it available. Over 10,000 copies of *La Señal* have been distributed in the Spanish speaking world and the reception has been encouraging.

Translation work on the book has begun in **Russian, Mandarin Chinese, and Telugu** which is one of the prominent languages in the south of India. Considerations are being given to other languages as interest is expressed by groups and individuals.

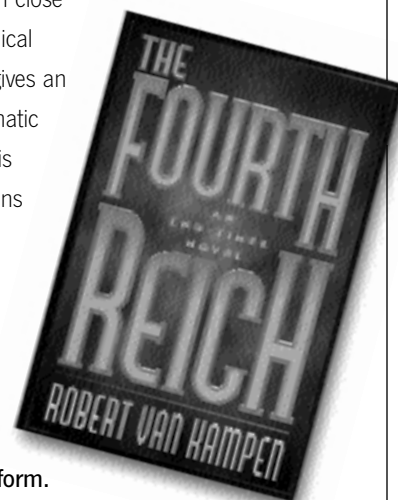
The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple continues to inspire individuals to study the Word of God so that they will have a right understanding of what yet lies before us in the eternal plan of God.

Fact & Fiction

Combining international intrigue and romance with close adherence to biblical prophecy, *The Fourth Reich* gives an intense, fast-paced, and dramatic portrayal of the end-times. It is both a compelling story for fans of apocalyptic fiction and an insightful look at what will happen in the last days.

Available through The Sign Ministries for \$10.00.

To order, use the enclosed form.



SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

The Sign Ministries continues to expand its seminar and conference ministry as requests are coming in from all over the world. 1998 will see us with a series of one-day seminars beginning January 10th in San Diego, California, and January 17th in Houston, Texas. We are also planning to hold three-day conferences with Robert Van Kampen, Marv Rosenthal, Charles Cooper, and Roger Best as speakers. The first of these conferences will be April 30th through May 2nd at Maranatha Bible Conference Grounds in Muskegon, Michigan. Future conferences are tentatively scheduled for June in England and for October in Wheaton, Illinois.

We will continue to hold local church conferences and presentations as requested and have a number of them already lined up for the coming year. Roger Best and Joe Dockery will be traveling to the Cayman Islands, India, the Philippines, and Kenya for conferences as well.

If you would like to have a conference in your area contact our office with your request.

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Email

Just a few of the many email messages we've received (info@signministries.org).

"Hi—I've felt for many years that the 'pretrib rapture' didn't hold up with the way things appeared in the scriptures and with God's ways as I was coming to understand them. It seemed to me more and more that He would come for us before His own judgements on the world, but not necessarily before the beginning of the tribulation period. I just never had time to try and nail down a concise understanding and proof of it from good, solid bible study."

"I attended one [of your seminars] last year. Within days of accepting the challenge of verifying the scriptural authenticity of the prewrath view, I became convinced of its validity. My daily devotional readings and study have flooded my attention with the prophetic ramifications of this sequence of events—hardly a chapter in scripture gets read without reinforcing the wonder of what the Lord will soon be revealing in history as well as prophecy. Thank you for this life-changing ministry."

"I received your [offer] to send a book on the Prewrath rapture. I am neither convinced nor skeptical [concerning the position], but I would enjoy checking out what you have written. I feel secure that the truth will not harm us, and if we know how to study the Bible and the truths contained therein, we won't be harmed by error, but will be able to discern it."

"I have just finished reading both of your books, and they have certainly changed my entire outlook! Have really enjoyed digging into scripture to more fully understand and comprehend. Having always been a pretrib rapture believer, it has been tough to change, but the evidence certainly seems plain! I had an old copy of LaHaye's book *No Fear of the Storm*, so I got it out to compare. Well, there really is no comparison. . . . Blessing on you!"