

PART III

ARGUMENTS CONCERNING SIGNS

...that two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonored, and crucified; but the other, in which He will come from heaven with glory, when the **man of apostasy**, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do **unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians...** (Justin Martyr)

And that the city of fornication may receive from the ten kings its deserved doom, and that the beast **Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God...** (Tertullian)

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and **signs**, which have been **predicted** by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled (consummated), and **there is not another which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom**. Why therefore are we occupied with worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or the anxieties of the ages? (Ephrem)

I believe that **all the signs** which are to precede the last days **have already appeared**. Let us **not think that the Coming of Christ is far off**; let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer's coming with longing and cheerful minds. (Martin Luther)

The Scripture declares plainly that the **Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostasy shall have taken place, the Man of Sin, the son of perdition shall have been revealed as seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5**. Many other portions also of the Word of God distinctly teach that **certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ**. (George Muller)

Even most of those who **looked for Antichrist's appearance** prior to the second advent, saw that event as occurring suddenly and just as suddenly **being followed by the rescue and rapture of the saints** by Christ. (Conservative Theological Journal)

We are **surrounded by so many obvious signs** that one would have to be blind not to see them – yet some fail to recognize them even when they are called to their attention. (Timothy LaHaye)

Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the **signs** – chief among them the **rebirth of Israel**. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then **within forty years** or so **of 1948, all these things could take place**. **Many scholars** who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives **believe that this is so**. (Hal Lindsey)

The Lord has not left us in spiritual darkness concerning the **approximate time** of Christ's Second Coming. Although we are specifically warned that we cannot know "*the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*" (Matthew 25:13), the **fulfillment of dozens of specific prophecies in our generation strongly suggests** that Jesus Christ's Second Coming will occur in our lifetime. (Grant Jeffrey)

SIX

THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

The early Church fathers were not experts on prophecy and the major doctrines of Scripture. Most of them did not have access to all the books in the Bible. It took them a few hundred years to come to a consensus on the major doctrines. The doctrine of the Trinity was not confirmed until the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD). Athanasius (293-373 AD) properly formulated it, and in 381, at the First Council of Constantinople, the doctrine was finalized. It is folly to base any doctrine, or to derive support for a doctrine on the teachings of the early Church fathers. All doctrines must be based solely on Scripture. Yet we can learn by studying what they wrote for us.

The early Church fathers did not believe in the doctrine of *imminence*, which teaches that Jesus Christ can return at *any moment* to rapture the Church. Some of them expected Him to return in their lifetime because they thought the signs of His return were being fulfilled. The last sign they awaited for was the rise of the Antichrist. The consensus among the early Church fathers was that the Antichrist would rise to power before the Rapture.

Larry V. Crutchfield, writing in the *Conservative Theological Journal*, admitted that the early Church fathers looked for the coming of the Antichrist before the Rapture:

Even most of those who **looked for Antichrist's appearance** prior to the second advent, saw that event as occurring suddenly and just as suddenly **being followed by the rescue and rapture of the saints** by Christ. (*Conservative Theological Journal*, August 1999, p. 195, emphasis mine)

And Irenaeus still spoke of Antichrist's "sudden coming," **and** the church "suddenly" being caught up. (Ag. Her. V, XXX, 2 and V, XXIX, *Conservative Theological Journal*, August 1999, p. 195, emphasis mine)

Crutchfield understood that the early Church fathers looked for the appearing of the Antichrist, and taught that the Church would be raptured after he rose to power, just as the Bible says (2 Thessalonians 2.3).

Dr. John Walvoord admitted that the view of the early Church fathers concerning eschatology does not "correspond to what is advanced by pretribulationists today except for the one important point that both subscribe to the imminency of the rapture" ("The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation," p. 25, *Conservative Theological Journal*, August 1999, p. 196).

Walvoord also stated in his book, *The Rapture Question*, that the early Church fathers believed in the *imminence* of the return of Jesus:

The early church believed in the imminency of the Lord's return, which is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism. (p. 192, 11th printing, 1973)

Roland Rasmussen refuted that claim by Dr. Walvoord, which is clearly not true.

This is what he wrote in his 1996 book, *The Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath Rapture*:

In our chapter, “Posttribulationism Is the Historical Position,” we will show that Walvoord, Stanton, and Pentecost all try to convince their readers that the early church fathers taught imminency. They did not teach imminency; they taught expectancy. It is one thing to eagerly expect Christ’s coming, but it is an entirely different thing to believe that Christ may come at any moment. (pp. 275-276)

The view of the early Church fathers does not agree with today’s doctrine of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture, because they did not believe the Rapture was an *imminent* event. They taught that the Antichrist had to rise to power before the Rapture.

If the early Church fathers were correct, and the Antichrist comes before the Rapture, then his appearing is a *sign*. Christians should not overlook the rise of the Antichrist, along with the formation of a ten-nation confederacy which is formed before the Antichrist comes to power. It is possible we may see that confederacy come into being. (It is not edifying to try to identify the Antichrist before the confederacy is formed.)

According to the book of Daniel, a world government will be established. Then the leaders of the ten most prominent nations will form a confederacy and take control of it:

Thus he said, “The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom upon earth, which will be diverse from all the kingdoms, and will devour the whole earth, and will tread it down, and break it in pieces. And as for the ten horns, out of this kingdom will ten kings arise: and another will arise after them; and he will be diverse from the former, and he will put down three kings.” (Daniel 7.23-24)

Shortly after the ten rulers form this coalition, another national leader will rise up. This eleventh prominent ruler is the Antichrist, who will then become a member of this ruling coalition. The early Church fathers understood and they taught that the Antichrist would come first, then the Rapture.

The Didache (110 AD)

The *Didache* was a Church manual written around 110 AD. It clearly taught that the Antichrist would rise to power before the Rapture:

Be you watchful for your life; let your lamps not be quenched and your loins not ungirded, but be ready; for you know not the hour when our Lord comes. And will gather yourselves together frequently, seeking what is fitting for your souls; for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you be not perfected at the last season. For in the last days the false prophets and corrupters will be multiplied, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. For as lawlessness increases, they will hate one another and will persecute and betray. And then the **world-deceiver will appear as a son of God**; and will work signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands; and he will do unholy things, which have never been since the world began. Then all created mankind will come to the fire of testing, and many will be offended and perish; but **they**

that endure in their faith will be saved by the Curse Himself. And then will the signs of the truth appear; first a sign of a rift in the heaven, then a sign of a voice of a trumpet, and thirdly, a resurrection of the dead; yet not of all, but as it was said: The Lord shall come and all his saints with Him. Then will the world see the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven. (Lightfoot, J.B., *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 129, emphasis mine)

These early Church fathers understood the Antichrist would come to power before the Rapture takes place. Notice the statements they make about “*false prophets*” being multiplied (Matthew 24.5, 11, 24) and that “*lawlessness increases*” (Matthew 24.12). They also say that believers will “*hate and persecute and betray one another*” (Matthew 24.10), and then the “*world-deceiver will appear*” (Matthew 24.15). The context shows that the early Church fathers who wrote the Didache believed Christians of the Church Age would go through the entire Tribulation.

Some eschatologists argue that the phrase – “*for you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming*” – means that Jesus could return at *any moment* since Pentecost. The context shows that they used it to tell believers that they must be “*alert*” and living holy lives or they would not see the events taking place before the Tribulation. These things are: the rise of false prophets, the increase of lawlessness, believers betraying each other, and the rise of the Antichrist. Christians who are living backslidden lives, and not studying their Bibles will not see the clear *signs* that will precede the Tribulation. The most notable *sign* will be the rise of the Antichrist.

Clement of Rome (?-99 AD)

Clement was the bishop of Rome from 88 until his death in 99 AD. Tradition says he is the Clement that Paul mentions in Philippians 4.3 as a fellow laborer in Christ. In a letter to the church at Corinth in 95 AD, Chapter 23, “Be humble and believe that Christ will come again,” he briefly discusses the return of Christ:

Ye perceive how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, “Speedily will He come, and He will not tarry;” and, “The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look.” (Roberts, Alexander, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 11)

The so-called *Second Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians* was written by an unknown author around 120-140 AD. It is titled, *An Ancient Homily*, of which a small section deals with the return of Christ:

If therefore we will do what is just in the sight of God, we will enter His kingdom, and will receive the promises, which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man. Let us therefore await the kingdom of God betimes in love and righteousness, since we know not the day of the God’s appearing. (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 48)

The context of the paragraph from which the first quote above is taken, and those

following, are about the resurrection. A careful study of the surrounding passages makes it clear that the author did not believe in the *imminent* return of Christ. Instead, he believed in the certainty of His return.

The second quotation does not support the doctrine of *imminence*. The context is about living a holy life. The statement “Let us therefore await the kingdom of God betimes in love and righteousness, since we know not the day of the God’s appearing” is similar to a statement by James:

Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5.7-8)

Both statements were given to inspire Christians to live holy lives. They are not doctrinal statements, nor are they clear enough to build a doctrine on.

Why are we commanded to “wait” for the return of the Lord? No believer in the Church Age can know the exact day of His return (Matthew 24.36), but we can know the approximate time by “waiting” and “watching.” The way we “wait” and “watch” for His return is by “looking” for the *warning signs* of the Tribulation. The commands to “wait” and “watch” cannot be construed to mean that the Rapture has been an *imminent* event since Pentecost.

Justin Martyr (100-165 AD)

Justin Martyr was born at the end of the 1st century. He knew people who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He was the first Christian apologist whose works survive. He believed that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was still to come. This is important because it refutes the belief that Christ returned in 70 AD, as Full-Preterism teaches. He also agreed with the other early Church fathers that the Antichrist would rise to power prior to the Rapture. This is what he wrote in *Dialogue with Trypho* (chapter 110):

...that two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonored, and crucified; but the other, in which He will come from heaven with glory, when the **man of apostasy**, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do **unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians**, who, having learned the true worship of God from the law, and the word which went forth from Jerusalem by means of the apostles of Jesus, have fled for safety to the God of Jacob and God of Israel... (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 253-254, emphasis mine)

Justin Martyr believed the Antichrist would rise to power and persecute Christians before the return of Jesus Christ. The key is the phrase “us the Christians.” The use of the word “us” means that he believed Christians of the Church Age would be persecuted by the Antichrist.

The General Epistle of Barnabas (130 AD)

The General Epistle of Barnabas was written around 130 AD, allegedly by Barnabas, the disciple who traveled with the apostle Paul (Acts 13.1-5). It was quoted by Clemens of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and other Church fathers. Although Origen and Jerome considered it to be part of the canon of Scripture, most Church historians disagree and they do not believe it was written by Barnabas. The author did not believe the Rapture was an *imminent* event. Rather he believed it would not take place for another 2000 years. He writes in Chapter XV (“The False and the True Sabbath”):

Further, also, it is written concerning the Sabbath in the Decalogue which [the Lord] spoke, face to face, to Moses on Mount Sinai, “And sanctify ye the Sabbath of the Lord with clean hands and a pure heart.” And He says in another place, “If my sons keep the Sabbath, then will I cause my mercy to rest upon them.” The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation [thus]: “And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it.” Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, “He finished in six days.” This implieth the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, “Behold, to-day will be as a thousand years.” Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, **in six thousand years, all things will be finished.** “And He rested the seventh day.” This meaneth: When His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day. (Ibid., vol. 1, p. 146, emphasis mine)

The author believed the Rapture would take place about 1900 years after the time of his writing. There had been about 4000 years of human history from Adam to the birth of Jesus Christ, and there must be about 2000 more years until the return of Jesus. The final thousand years will be the Millennial Kingdom. The writer of this letter agreed with the early Church fathers that the Rapture was not an *imminent* event.

The author of this epistle also wrote in Chapter IV, “Antichrist is at Hand: Let Us Therefore Avoid Jewish Errors,” the following warning to Christians:

It therefore behooves us, who inquire much concerning events at hand, to search diligently into those things which are able to save us. Let us then utterly flee from all the works of iniquity, lest these should take hold of us; and let us hate the error of the present time, that we may set our love on the world to come: let us not give loose reins to our soul, that it should have power to run with sinners and the wicked, lest we become like them. **The final stumbling-block** (or source of danger) **approaches**, concerning which it is written, as Enoch says, “For this end the Lord has cut short the times and the days, that His Beloved may hasten; and He will come to the inheritance.” And the prophet also speaks thus: “**Ten kingdoms shall reign upon the earth, and a little king shall rise up after them, who shall subdue under one three of the kings.**” In like manner Daniel says

concerning the same, “And I beheld the fourth beast, wicked and powerful, and more savage than all the beasts of the earth, and how **from it sprang up ten horns**, and **out of them a little budding horn**, and how **it subdued under one three of the great horns.**” Ye ought therefore to understand. And this also I further beg of you, as being one of you, and loving you both individually and collectively more than my own soul, to take heed now to yourselves, and not to be like some, adding largely to your sins, and saying, “The covenant is both theirs and ours.” (Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 138-139, emphasis mine)

This warning was given to Christians of the 2nd century. They were warned to live holy lives so they would recognize the Antichrist (little horn). The writer believed Christians would recognize the Antichrist, and be persecuted by him. He understood that “ten kingdoms” would rise up, and that the Antichrist would subdue three of them. He was wrong in thinking the Antichrist would rise to power in his lifetime.

The Shepherd of Hermas (150 AD)

The Shepherd of Hermas contains claims of visions, mandates and similitudes from the Lord to Hermas. It was written around 150 AD. From “Book One, Vision Fourth, Chapter II”:

You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the **great tribulation that is coming**. If then you prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and you spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly. Cast your cares upon the Lord, and He will direct them. Trust the Lord, ye who doubt, for He is all-powerful, and can turn His anger away from you, and send scourges on the doubters. Woe to those who hear these words, and despise them: better were it for them not to have been born. (Ibid., Vol. II, p. 18, emphasis mine)

This statement by the Shepherd of Hermas teaches that Christians who live holy lives will be preserved through the Tribulation, and backslidden Christians will not be preserved. Note that he writes to Christians who had already been preserved “through” (escaped) persecution. It can mean nothing else. The beast that they faced is a type of the beast to come. This writing also refutes Full-Preterism as all of the writings of the early Church fathers do.

Irenaeus (140-202 AD)

Irenaeus was Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, which is now Lyons, France. He was an early Church father and apologist. His writings were formative in the development of Christian theology. He was said to be, but most likely not, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. He briefly touched on the subject of the

Antichrist, the Tribulation and the Church in his treatise, *Against Heresies*:

It is manifest, therefore, that of these [potentates], he who is to come shall slay three, and subject the remainder to his power, and that he shall be himself the eighth among them. And they shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the beast, and **put the Church to flight**. After that they shall be destroyed by the coming of our Lord. (Ibid., vol. 1, vol. v, chap. 26, emphasis mine)

Irenaeus believed that the Church would be here when the Antichrist rises to power in the future, and that the Antichrist would persecute the Church.

Tertullian (160-220 AD)

Tertullian was the first to write Christian literature in Latin. He was a notable early Christian apologist who helped develop the theology of the early Church. The most famous term he coined was “Trinitas” (Trinity), setting out the formula “three Persons, one Substance.” He also coined the terms “Vetus Testamentum” (Old Testament) and “Novum Testamentum” (New Testament). He taught that the Church would go through the entire Tribulation period in Chapter 25 of his work, *Anti-Marcion, On the Resurrection of the Flesh*:

In the Revelation of John, again, the order of these times is spread out to view, which “the souls of the martyrs” are taught to wait for beneath the altar, whilst they earnestly pray to be avenged and judged: (taught, I say, to wait), in order that the world may first drink to the dregs the plagues that await it out of the vials of the angels, and that the city of fornication may receive from the ten kings its deserved doom, and that the beast **Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God**; and that, after the casting of the devil into the bottomless pit for a while... (Ibid., vol. 3, emphasis mine)

Tertullian taught that the “Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God” after the angels pour out their vials of plagues on the world. The seven vials are poured out in Chapter 16 of Revelation at the end of the seven-year Tribulation.

Hippolytus (170-236 AD)

Photius, an Eastern Orthodox Church patriarch of Constantinople from 858 to 867 AD, and from 877 to 886 AD, described Hippolytus in his *Bibliotheca* (cod. 121) as a disciple of Irenaeus, who was said to be a disciple of Polycarp. It is highly unlikely that Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp. Hippolytus became an enemy of the Church leaders and for some time led a separate group. Finally reconciled to the Church leaders, he eventually died as a martyr of the faith. Concerning the Antichrist, the Tribulation and the Church, he has this to say in his work, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*:

It is proper that we take the Holy Scriptures themselves in hand, and find out from them what, and of **what manner, the coming of Antichrist is**; on **what occasion and at what time the impious pious one shall be revealed**; and whence and from **what tribe (he shall come)**; and **what his name is**, which indicated by the number in the Scripture; and how he shall work terror among the people, gathering them from the ends of the earth; and (how) **he shall stir up tribulation and persecution against the saints**; and how he shall glorify himself as God; and what his end shall be; and how the sudden appearing of the Lord shall be revealed from heaven; and what the conflagration of the whole world shall be; and what the glorious and heavenly kingdom of the saints is to be, when they reign together with Christ; and what the punishment of the wicked by fire. (Ibid., vol. 5, p. 205, emphasis mine)

“And the dragon,” he says, “saw and persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child. And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.” That refers to the one thousand two hundred and threescore days (the half of the week) **during which the tyrant is to reign and persecute the Church**, which flees from city to city, and seeks concealment in the wilderness among the mountains, possessed of no other defense than the two wings of the great eagle, that is to say, the faith of Jesus Christ, who, in stretching forth His holy hands on the holy tree, unfolded two wings, the right and the left, and called to Him all who believed upon Him, and covered them as a hen her chickens. For by the mouth of Malachi also He speaks thus: “And unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” (Ibid., p. 217, emphasis mine)

Hippolytus believed the Church was to look for the appearing of the Antichrist. He said that Christians will be able to identify him: by his tribe, by his name, by his gathering the people together from around the world, by his persecution of the saints, and by claiming to be God. The above quote by him leads one to believe that he was certain that the Church would go through the entire Tribulation.

Cyprian (200-258 AD)

Cyprian was bishop of Carthage and an important early Christian writer. He was born around the beginning of the third century in North Africa, received a classical education for that time, became a bishop after converting to Christianity around 249 AD, and died a martyr at Carthage. Cyprian wrote many volumes on Christian doctrine, and he stated emphatically that the Antichrist would persecute Christians and then they would be rescued by Christ. This is what he wrote in *Treatise XI. Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus*:

You have desired, beloved Fortunatus that, since the burden of persecutions and afflictions is lying heavy upon us, and in the ending and completion of the world **the hateful time of Antichrist is already beginning to draw near**, I would

collect from the sacred Scriptures some exhortations for **preparing and strengthening the minds of the brethren**, whereby I might animate the soldiers of Christ for the heavenly and **spiritual contest**. I have been constrained to obey your so needful wish, so that as much as my limited powers, instructed by the aid of divine inspiration, are sufficient, some arms, as it were, and defenses might be brought forth from the Lord's precepts for **the brethren who are about to fight**. For it is little to arouse God's people by the trumpet call of our voice, unless we confirm the faith of believers, and their valor dedicated and devoted to God, by the divine readings. (Ibid., Vol. V, p. 496, emphasis mine)

Cyprian believed the Antichrist would rise to power in his time. He wanted to prepare Christians for the coming conflict. Agreeing with the teaching of the *Didache*, he believed the Antichrist would persecute Christians before they are delivered by Jesus Christ.

Victorinus (???-304)

Victorinus of Poetovio was a Church writer who was martyred during the persecutions of Emperor Diocletian. He wrote commentaries on several books of the Bible, with only portions of Revelation surviving. This is a short passage, written around 270 AD, concerning the last days, from his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 15.1:

“And I saw another great and wonderful sign, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is completed the indignation of God.” For the wrath of God always strikes the obstinate people with seven plagues, that is, perfectly, as it is said in Leviticus; and these shall be in the *last time, when the church shall have gone out of the midst*. (Ibid., vol. 7, p. 357)

The passage, from the commentary on the book of Revelation, does not prove that Victorinus or any of the early Church fathers knew or believed in the doctrine of *imminence*. Instead, the passage confirms that the early Church fathers believed the Antichrist would come to power before the Rapture.

According to the above statement, Victorinus believed Christians would escape the judgment on the unsaved that begins at the mid-point of the Tribulation. We know this because the passage that he was commenting on takes place at this time of the Tribulation. Chapters 6-9 cover the events of the first 3½ years of the Tribulation, and Chapter 10 describes what is taking place in Heaven at the mid-point. Chapter 15 announces the final judgment of God upon the unsaved that also starts at the mid-point of the Tribulation.

In another writing on the book of Revelation, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, (20.1-3), he said that the Church would suffer persecution at the hands of the Antichrist during his last 3½ years of rule:

And he shut him up, says he, and put a seal upon him, that he should not deceive the nations until the thousand years should be finished. “He shut the door upon him,” it is said, that is, he forbade and restrained his seducing those who belong to Christ. Moreover, he put a seal upon him, because it is hidden who belong to the

side of the devil, and who to that of Christ. For we know not of those who seem to stand whether they shall not fall, and of those who are down it is uncertain whether they may rise. Moreover, that he says that he is bound and shut up, that he may not seduce the nations, **the nations signify the Church**, seeing that of them it itself is formed, and which being seduced, he previously held until, he says, the thousand years should be completed, that is, what is left of the sixth day, to wit, of the sixth age, which subsists for a thousand years; after this he must be loosed for a little season. The little season signifies three years and six months, in which with all his power the **devil will avenge himself under Antichrist against the Church**. Finally, he says, after that the devil shall be loosed, and will seduce the nations in the whole world, and will **entice war against the Church**, the number of whose foes shall be as the sand of the sea. (Ibid., vol. 7, p. 358, emphasis mine)

Victorinus believed the Antichrist will persecute the Church. His timing of this persecution is different than what the men who quote him say it is. He was certain the devil will be released from the abyss after the thousand years are completed, and then “avenge himself under Antichrist against the Church.”

In his commentary on Revelation (12.7-9), he says the Antichrist will rise to power after the two witnesses of Chapter 11 have completed their 3½ years of ministry:

“There was a battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon warred, and his angels, and they prevailed not; nor was their place found any more in heaven. And that great dragon was cast forth, that old serpent: he was cast forth into the earth.” This is the beginning of Antichrist; **yet previously Elias must prophesy**, and there must be **times of peace**. And afterwards, when the **three years and six months are completed** in the preaching of Elias, he also must be cast down from heaven, where up till that time he had had the power of ascending; and all the apostate angels, as well as Antichrist, must be roused up from hell. Paul the apostle says: *“Except there come a falling away first, and the man of sin shall appear, the son of perdition; and the adversary who exalted himself above all which is called God, or which is worshipped.”* (Ibid., vol. 7, p. 356, emphasis mine)

When this passage is compared with the previous one, we see that Victorinus believed the Antichrist would reign for 3½ years prior to the Second Coming of Christ. During that short period he will persecute the Church.

No Pre-Tribulationist should quote Victorinus, and claim he taught the doctrine of *imminence* and the Pre-Tribulation Rapture; he did not. His eschatology is unusual, to say the least.

Ephrem of Syria (306-373 AD)

Ephrem was a hymnographer, theologian, and prolific writer (said to have written one million lines), of the 4th century. The following section includes key passages from a text written near the end of his life entitled, *On the Last Times, the Antichrist and the End of the World*:

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and **signs**, which have been **predicted** by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled (consummated), and **there is not another which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom**. Why therefore are we occupied with worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that He may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms the world? Believe you me, dearest brothers, because the coming (advent) of the Lord is nigh, believe you me, because it is the very last time. Or do you not believe unless you see with your eyes? See to it that this sentence be not fulfilled among you of the prophet who declares: "*Woe to those who desire to see the day of the Lord!*" **For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins**. And so, brothers most dear to me, it is the eleventh hour, and the end of the world comes to the harvest, and angels, armed and prepared, hold sickles in their hands, awaiting the empire of the Lord. And we think that the earth exists with blind infidelity, arriving at its downfall early. Commotions are brought forth, wars of diverse peoples and battles and incursions of the barbarians threaten, and our regions will be desolated, and we neither become very much afraid of the report nor of the appearance, in order that we may at least do penance; because they hurl fear at us, and we do not wish to be changed, although we at least stand in need of penance for our actions! (*Vanished Into Thin Air*, pp. 115-116, emphasis mine)

Some eschatologians have used the writings of Ephrem to support their doctrine of *imminence*. They also claimed he believed in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. The statement below, taken from the quote above, shows that he expected the Antichrist would rise to power before the Raptures:

Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and **signs**, which have been **predicted** by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled, **and there is not another which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom**.

Ephrem and the early Church fathers awaited the rise of the Antichrist before the Rapture. The key is the word "except." Ephrem had seen what he thought were the fulfillment of prophecies (*signs*) of the "last days." He was looking for the rise of the Antichrist. Clearly he did not believe in an *imminent* Rapture that has no *signs* preceding it. According to Ephrem, the Church will be here to watch the rise of the Antichrist, followed by the Rapture.

Conclusion

The early Church fathers believed that all of the *warning signs* of the return of Christ had been fulfilled, except the rise of the Antichrist. The consensus among them

was that the Antichrist would rise to power before the Rapture and persecute Christians. They did not teach the doctrine of *imminence*, and none taught a clear Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine. They admonished Christians to “watch” for the rise of the Antichrist before the return of Jesus Christ.

The claim by eschatologists that the early Church fathers believed in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, and in the modern doctrine of *imminence* is not based on the historical record. All were Mid-Tribulationists and Post-Tribulationists. Not even Ephrem taught a Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine. He clearly said the Antichrist would rise to power after the conclusion of the 70th week of Daniel, and the Rapture would take place before his 2½ or 3½ year reign. He taught the Post-Tribulation Rapture doctrine, and that the reign of the Antichrist will start at the conclusion of the seven-year Tribulation. It is a bit confusing, but Ephrem did not teach the modern doctrine of *imminence*, and he believed Christians of the Church Age would go through the entire 70th week of Daniel.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 6

1. Why did some of the early Church fathers mistakenly think they were living in the “last days,” and that the Tribulation was just over the event horizon?
2. Who did most of the early Church fathers that wrote about prophecy say would ascend to a position of power before the Rapture?
3. What did they say this person would do to Christians of the Church Age?
4. Why did some of the early Church fathers believe Christ could not return at *any moment*?
5. Did some of the early Church fathers “*look*” for the return of Christ by “*watching*” for the rise of the Antichrist?
6. Did any of the early Church fathers quoted in this chapter believe in the modern-day doctrine of *imminence*.

SEVEN

REFORMERS

The Reformers wrote very little about eschatology. We gleaned a few of their statements from the monumental work, *Systematic Theology*, by Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Martin Luther, considered to be the father of the Protestant Reformation, was a dedicated Catholic priest in Germany before he realized that some of the church's doctrines were wrong. He also knew that some of its practices were not biblical, such as the selling of indulgences. On October 31, 1517, he wrote to Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg, protesting the sale of indulgences. He enclosed a copy of his "Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," which came to be known as *The 95 Theses*. On the same day, he also nailed a copy of *The 95 Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He eventually broke from the Catholic Church and became the leader of the Reformation. He thought the return of Christ was near in his day:

I believe that **all the signs** which are to precede the last days **have already appeared**. Let us **not think that the Coming of Christ is far off**; let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer's coming with longing and cheerful minds. (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, p. 279, emphasis mine)

He noted in his commentary on Second Peter that he was living in the "last days" and that the "day of judgment" was "now before the door" (*Commentary on Peter and Jude*, p. 280).

Luther exhorted believers to "not think that the Coming of Christ is far off," because he believed "all the signs which are to precede the last days" had "already appeared." He believed there are *warning signs* of the Lord's return, and he looked for them, but mistakenly thought they had "all" been fulfilled.

Hugh Latimer (1485-1555)

Hugh Latimer was a devoted Catholic priest in England before converting to Protestantism. Thomas Bilney played a significant role in bringing him out of Catholicism. When King Edward VI's sister, Queen Mary I, came to the throne, Latimer was tried for his beliefs and imprisoned. In October of 1555 he was burned at the stake outside Balliol College, Oxford, beside Nicholas Ridley. He said to Ridley, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a

candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out." This is what he wrote concerning the "last days":

All those excellent and learned men whom, without doubt, God has sent into the world in these **latter days** to give the world **warning**, do gather out of the Scriptures that the **last days can not be far off**. Peradventure it may come in my day, old as I am, or in my children's days. (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, p. 279, emphasis mine)

Latimer was also mistaken in believing he was living just before the "last days." He thought that God had sent certain men, whom he did not name, "to give the world warning," and that these men had determined from "the Scriptures that the last days can not be far off." He went on to say that he was certain that Jesus would return "in my day, old as I am, or in my children's days." Latimer was wrong about the timing of the Rapture and Second Advent, as some of the other Reformers were, but he was correct in understanding that one can know the time of the "latter days" by studying Scripture.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

John Calvin, a French theologian, broke from the Catholic Church by assisting Nicholas Cop escape after Cop gave a message on the need for reformation on November 1, 1533. They fled to Basel, Switzerland, where Calvin began his ministry as a Reformer. He published his most famous work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536. He is best-known for his development of the doctrine of election, which is commonly called Calvinism. He went on to become equal to Martin Luther as a father of the Reformation and like Luther he "looked" for the return of Christ:

Scripture uniformly enjoins us to **look** with expectation for the advent of Christ. (Ibid., emphasis mine)

The statement by Calvin, "Scripture uniformly enjoins us to look with expectation for the advent of Christ," does not mean he believed in *imminence*. He was "looking" for the return of Jesus, as all Christians are commanded to do (Titus 2.13). He was doing what the early Church fathers did, and what the other Reformers were doing – "looking" for the fulfillment of the *warning signs* of the Lord's return. They were not experts in eschatology, and they mistakenly thought that many of the *warning signs* had been fulfilled.

John Knox (1510-1572)

John Knox, considered to be the founder of the Presbyterian denomination, joined the Reformation to reform the Scottish church. He wrote numerous volumes on religion, the last being, *The Historie of the Reformation in Scotland*. The return of Christ was foremost in his thoughts:

The Lord Jesus shall return, and that with expedition. What were this else but to reform the face of the whole earth, which never was nor yet shall be, till that righteous King and Judge appear for the restoration of all things. (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, p. 279)

Knox believed Christ would return with “expedition” (promptness in doing something), because he mistakenly thought that he was living in the last days.

None of the Reformers that Dr. Chafer cited believed in the doctrine of *imminence*. They “watched” for *signs* of the return of Jesus. They were wrong in thinking that most of the *signs* had been fulfilled, and that Christ would return in their lifetimes.

Everyone who has taught that Christ would return in his lifetime believed it, because they thought the *warning signs* of His return had been fulfilled! The early Church fathers and the Reformers “watched” for the fulfillment of *warning signs* as all Christians should do today.

Conclusion

Some of the Reformers mistakenly thought that most of the *signs* of the return of Christ had been fulfilled in their lifetime just as some of the early Church fathers did. They were not given understanding concerning the “last days” because they were not living in them. We have far more knowledge and understanding about eschatology because we are living in the “end times.” We know what major Bible prophecies will be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts. All we have to do is “watch” them be fulfilled. When the last few *warning signs* are about to be fulfilled we will know the Tribulation and the Rapture are upon us.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 7

1. Did Luther, Calvin, Latimer and Knox recognize there are *signs* of the return of Christ?

2. Why did some of the Reformers think the Tribulation and the Rapture were very near?

3. Why were the Reformers not given proper understanding concerning the fulfillment of “end times” prophecies?

4. Have Christians today been given the proper knowledge and understanding to know the approximate time of the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation?

5. How can we know when the approximate time of the Rapture has come?

6. Are you diligently “*watching*” for the remaining *warning signs* to be fulfilled?

EIGHT

MODERN ERA

A large number of the prophecy teachers of the Modern Era believe that specific *signs* would be fulfilled before the Rapture.

Morgan Edwards (1722-1795)

Morgan Edwards was the first Protestant preacher of the Modern Era to teach the Rapture would take place before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He wrote only one essay concerning it, but it is clear from that writing that he believed there would be at least one *sign* before the return of Christ:

Another event previous to the millennium will be the appearing of the son of man in the clouds, coming to raise the dead saints and change the living, and to catch them up to himself, and then withdrawing with them, as observed before. This event will come to pass **when the antichrist be arrived at Jerusalem in his conquest of the world**; and about **three years and a half before his killing the witnesses**, and assumption of godhead. (*Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the Following Titles: Millennium, and Last-Novelties*, p. 21, emphasis mine)

Edwards believed the Rapture would take place before the Tribulation starts. Yet because he thought the Tribulation would last only 42 months he is considered to be a Mid-Tribulationist.

George Muller (1805-1898)

George Muller was an evangelist and coordinator of orphanages in Bristol, England. Well-known for providing an education for children, he cared for more than 10,000 orphans in his lifetime. He was criticized for raising the poor above their natural station in life. Though not known for his teaching on eschatology, he nevertheless made a powerful statement concerning it shortly before he went home to be with the Lord:

I know that on this subject there is great diversity of judgment, and I do not wish to force on other persons the light that I have myself. The subject, however, is not new to me; for having been a careful diligent student of the Bible for nearly fifty years, my mind has long been settled on this point and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Scripture declares plainly that the **Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostasy shall have taken place, the Man of Sin, the son of perdition**

shall have been revealed as seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5. Many other portions also of the Word of God distinctly teach that **certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.** It does not, however, alter the fact that the coming of Christ, and not death, is the great hope of the Church and, if in a right state of heart, we (as the Thessalonian believers did) shall ‘serve the living and true God, and wait for his Son from heaven’. (Jones, Martyn-Lloyd, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 140, emphasis mine)

Muller believed 2 Thessalonians 2.1-5 teaches “the Apostasy” must take place prior to the Rapture. He also believed, as some early Church fathers did, that the Antichrist would rise to power before the Rapture.

Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921)

The notes in the original Scofield Bible say the Day of the Lord is preceded by seven *signs*:

The day of the LORD is preceded by seven signs: (1) The sending of Elijah (Mal. iv.5; Rev. xi.3-6); (2) cosmical disturbances (Joel ii.1-12; Mt. xxiv.29; Acts ii.19,20; Rev. vi.12-17); (3) the insensibility of the professing church (1 Thes. v.1-3); (4) the apostasy of the professing church, then becomes “Laodicea” (2 Thes. ii.3); (5) the rapture of the true church (1 Thes. iv.17); (6) the manifestation of the “man of sin,” the beast (1 Thes. ii.1-8); (7) the apocalyptic judgments (Rev. xi.-xviii.). [The citation for #6 should be 2 Thes. ii.1-8, R.W.K.] (*First Scofield Study Bible*, p. 1349)

Scofield believed four things would take place before the Day of the Lord starts – Elijah would come, there would be cosmic disturbances, the professing church would become spiritually asleep and indifferent and the professing church would become apostate. He knew there are *signs* for which we must “watch.”

(E. Schuyler English, chief editor of the New Scofield Bible, did not include the notes on the seven *signs* from the Old Scofield Bible in the New Scofield Bible. He may have understood the notes cited above destroy the doctrine of *imminence*, which he defended.)

Scofield also believed the seven churches of Revelation are symbolic of seven periods of the Church Age (Ibid., p. 1331). Therefore, he could not have reasonably believed the Rapture was an *imminent* event.

Arno Clemens Gaebelein (1861-1945)

Dr. Arno Gaebelein was a Methodist minister, a teacher and a conference speaker. Being a dispensationalist, he was a developer of the movement in its early days. Two of his books, *Revelation, and Analysis and Exposition* and *Current Events in the Light of the Bible* explain the dispensationalist view of eschatology. He was a consulting editor for the Scofield Bible and a close assistant of Cyrus Scofield. In his book, *Things to Come*, he listed six things that would take place before the Rapture. They

were the denial of: faith, sound doctrine, the power of godliness, Jesus came in the flesh, Jesus Himself and the authority of the Bible. He commented on these 6 denials saying:

And now we come to the most solemn fact. We **behold about us the complete fulfillment of all these predictions**. Not one of them is unfulfilled. It is true in the past there have been false teachers, departures from the faith and delusive teachings, but never before has the fulfillment of these predictions been so intense, so persistent, so widespread as in our days. Nothing more remains to be fulfilled...

Again we say it is a most significant fact that we behold about us the **literal fulfillment of all these predictions concerning the last days**. What an evidence this is that the Bible is the Word of God... The next great event is nothing less than the Coming of the Lord for His Saints. (*Things to Come*, p. 8, citing Harold Lindsell, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 126, emphasis mine)

Gaebelein saw numerous prophecies concerning the “last days” fulfilled. He mistakenly thought the “next great event” was the return of Christ. He did not know that other prophecies would be fulfilled before the Rapture, such as the return of the Jews to Israel.

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952)

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary, formed a traveling evangelistic music ministry with his new bride, Ella Case, in 1896. He sang and preached while she played the organ. He then became an evangelist in the Presbytery of Troy in Massachusetts and was mentored by Dr. Cyrus Scofield. Chafer became the pastor after Scofield’s death in 1921. In 1924 he founded the Evangelical Theological College (Dallas Seminary), with help from William Henry Griffith Thomas. This is what he wrote in his monumental work, *Systematic Theology*, concerning the fact that the Bible teaches there are clear *signs* of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture:

THE ANTICIPATION OF THE ELEMENT OF TIME. It will be recognized that no prediction could be made of the events within this age without a veiled intimation that the element of time would intervene. The problem is not one engendered by man; it is wholly of God. Therefore, it is, as other problems of a like nature, solved only in the mind of God. Both things are true – the Lord has always been at hand; **yet certain times and events are predicted**. Peter would grow old and die (John 21:18). The nobleman would delay a long time in a far country (Luke 19:11) – which parable teaches more the requirement that service is to continue than that time intervenes. The gospel is to be preached to all the world; but had it been commanded to convert all nations the case would have been different. (Vol. IV, p. 368, emphasis mine)

Chafer understood that specific prophecies (*warning signs*) must be fulfilled before the Rapture can take place.

Henry “Harry” Ironside (1876-1951)

Dr. Harry Ironside was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, pastor, and author of the late 19th- and early 20th centuries. He began preaching for the Salvation Army in Southern California at the age of 16. He moved to San Francisco and started preaching there 4 years later after taking 2 years off from preaching. He became associated with the Plymouth Brethren, and by 1929 he had preached to over 1 million people. In 1924 he began preaching under the direction of the Moody Bible Institute and in 1929 he became pastor of the Moody Church. He turned down a full-time faculty position at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1926. He was called the “archbishop of fundamentalism” and he firmly believed there were *signs* of Christ’s return. He thought two of them were being fulfilled in his day:

Reader, let me press my point again. – The world-wide Gospel proclamation and world-wide apostasy at the same time are **clear proofs** that the **end is close upon us.** (*The Midnight Cry*, p. 28, citing Lindsell, p. 123, emphasis mine)

Laodicea is the closing period of the Church’s history, and who can doubt that we have now reached the very time predicted? It behooves us to act as men who wait for their Lord, knowing that His coming cannot be much longer delayed (Ibid. p. 35, citing Lindsell, p. 124)

Dr. Ironside thought, in 1915 when he wrote the book cited, he was living in the “last days” because of the apostasy of the Church. It has been 94 years since he wrote that the return of Christ “cannot be much longer delayed.” He saw some *warning signs*, but not all of them. No one can know the nearness of the Rapture without knowing all of the major *warning signs*.

Herbert Lockyer (1886-1985)

Dr. Herbert Lockyer was a prominent pastor in England and Scotland who spent 20 years of ministry in America (1935-1955), and served Jesus faithfully for over 70 years. He was the author of *All the... of the Bible* series, *Seasons of the Lord*, and many more books. He taught the doctrine of *imminence* and firmly believed that Jesus Christ could return at *any moment*. When he returned to England he devoted himself to writing books about the Bible. He believed he was living in the *last days* because of the numerous *signs* he saw all around him. He listed several *signs* in a booklet published in 1979. By way of introduction he said:

While we do not believe that the Church is to pass through the Great Tribulation, we do affirm that coming events have the power to cast their shadows beforehand. And, if we have any discernment of the **signs of the times**, we must see in them a preview of the terrible drama about to be unfolded. (*Rapture of the Saints*, p. 62, emphasis mine)

Lockyer then said the world was moving toward a consolidation of commerce,

politics and religion. He saw a movement to create a world economy that would fulfill the prophecy in Revelation:

And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name (Revelation 13:17). (Ibid., p. 63, KJV)

He believed there was a movement to unite all the nations of the world into a world government, and he saw a move to unite all of the religions of the world into “one universal Church, apostate and Romish in character that will control all things religious” (Ibid., p. 63).

Lockyer moved on to other *signs* that made him believe he was living in the “end times.” He cited natural catastrophes, war, famine, pestilences, earthquakes, increasing worldliness, restrained lawlessness and Jewish activities. He noted *signs* within the Church – spiritual declension, powerless religion, apostate teaching and seductive doctrines (Ibid., pp. 64-69).

His conclusion was that he was “living in the closing period of the wonderful Church Age and signs abound that her translation is near.” He believed in the *imminent* return of Jesus Christ, but also in *signs*:

In all our study of Prophecy we must not forget that Christ may be here at any moment. It is within the range of possibility that the saints may be called away before another sunrise. **The troubled condition of the world indicates that the Lord is at hand.** We are living in the **closing period of the wonderful Church Age and signs abound that her translation is near.** While no man has any knowledge of the exact day of Christ’s return, all the saints believing such an evident New Testament truth, realize that the blissful event **cannot be far away.** (Ibid., p. 62, emphasis mine)

Lockyer believed that Christ could return at *any moment* yet he looked for *signs* of His return. Lockyer firmly believed he was living in the *end times* and that Jesus would return in his lifetime. Some of the early Church fathers and some of the Reformers believed the same thing. They saw general *signs* that made them think the end was near. Instead, they should have been looking for specific *warning signs*.

One of his last books, *All About the Second Coming*, was edited by his son, Herbert Lockyer, Jr. In the introduction he made a list of the order of events. He divided the period from the appearing of the Antichrist unto the Eternal Age. Here are the first two divisions:

1. The present age will culminate in apostasy and a period of unprecedented trial. The “man of sin” will be fully manifested, will assume political supremacy, and will claim religious homage.
2. The true church of Christ will be raptured to heaven, and the man of sin will establish a covenant with the Jews. But he will violate his agreement with the Jews, gather forces against them from other nations, and seek to destroy God’s ancient people. (p. xxiv)

Lockyer not only showed that the “signs of the times” are all around us, he stated clearly that the Antichrist will rise to power and be “fully manifested” (identified as

the Antichrist) before the Rapture. He agreed with the early Church fathers that the Antichrist would be revealed before the Rapture.

John Walvoord
(1910-2002)

Dr. John Walvoord believed Jesus could return at *any moment* since Pentecost. Yet he believed there are *signs* of the return of Christ. In his 1974 book, he had this to say about *signs*:

As **signs** that we may be moving into this period **multiply**, the **direction of present world events** also points to the conclusion that the coming of Christ for His Church, promised in John 14, may occur any day. (*Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, pp. 96-97, emphasis mine)

He then elaborated on the *warning signs* of the end times:

Prophecies about Israel, and especially Jerusalem, provide important reference points for all of prophecy. The **most significant prophetic event** in the twentieth century has been the **restoration of Israel**. All the prophecies of the end age indicate that at the time the Jews will be back in their land and in precisely the same situation in which they find themselves today.

All areas of prophecy combine in the united testimony that history is preparing **our generation for the end of the age**. In each area of prophecy a **chronological checklist of important prophetic events** can be compiled. In each list in regard to the church, the nations, or Israel, **the events of history clearly indicate that the world is poised and ready for the rapture of the church** and the beginning of the countdown to Armageddon. (Ibid., pp. 199-200, emphasis mine)

He then went through a “prophetic checklist for the Church,” listing 13 signs. He gave 22 signs of a “prophetic checklist for the nations” and 17 signs of a “prophetic checklist for Israel” (Ibid., pp. 200-204). (See our chronological checklist of important prophetic events in Appendix A.)

In the conclusion of his book, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, Walvoord said that “all the necessary historical developments have already taken place.” He noted the move for a world government and world church, that Israel is back in the Holy Land, that Russia is ready to attack and “Red China” can field an “army as large as that described in the book of Revelation” (pp. 206-207).

In another book, *The Church in Prophecy*, Walvoord recognized that there was a problem with the doctrine of *imminence*. He said the most important *sign* of the 20th century – the establishment of the nation of Israel – had to be fulfilled because “Israel had to be in their ancient land and had to be organized into a political unit” to be able to make the covenant with the Antichrist that Daniel prophesied (Daniel 9.27). He said this fulfillment of prophecy is “striking evidence that the rapture itself may be very near” (pp.173-174).

It is obvious that Israel had to be in existence before the Antichrist could make a covenant with her. This is the *super-sign* that all Pre-Tribulationists have talked and written about since May 14, 1948.

Harold Lindsell
(1913-1998)

Dr. Harold Lindsell firmly believed in *signs* of the return of Christ. In his book, *The Gathering Storm*, he explained why *signs* of the Tribulation are also *signs* of the Rapture. He noted that the “overwhelming verdict of those who hold to a pretribulation rapture is that this so-called *signless event* is followed immediately by the seven-year tribulation period.” He went on to explain that “there could be no rapture until the Jews come back to Palestine and Jerusalem is in their hands so they can rebuild the temple.” He concluded by saying that “it becomes plain that the signs having to do with the tribulation are pertinent to the rapture and that these signs make an any-moment rapture from the days of the apostles an invalid thesis” (p. 137).

J. Dwight Pentecost

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost firmly believes in the doctrine of *imminence*, yet he believes that specific prophecies will be fulfilled before the Rapture takes place. The primary prophetic *sign* is a period of “peace and safety.” Quoting from his best-known book, *Things to Come*:

The announcement of peace and safety. In 1 Thessalonians 5:3 Paul tells the Thessalonian church that the Day of the Lord will come **after** the announcement of “peace and safety.” This false security will lull many into a state of lethargy in relation to the Day of the Lord so that that day comes as a thief. This announcement that has produced this lethargy **precedes** the Day of the Lord. If the church were in the seventieth week there would be no possibility that, during the period when believers are being persecuted by the beast to an unprecedented degree, such a message could be preached and find acceptance so that men would be lulled into complacency. All the signs would point to the fact that they were not in a time of “peace and safety.” The fact that the visitation of wrath, judgment and darkness is preceded by the announcement of such a message indicates that the church must be raptured before that period can begin. (pp. 209-210, emphasis mine)

Pentecost makes it clear that there must be a time of “peace and safety” before the Rapture. We must note that Pentecost does not believe in a *gap* between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation (Chapter 10). Since this time of “*peace and safety*” takes place prior to the start of the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) it also precedes the Rapture, as he explained. This is what Paul taught:

When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they will in no wise escape. (1 Thessalonians 5.3)

Paul told them, after saying that there will be a time of “peace and safety” before the Rapture, to not be caught by surprise by the Rapture:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a

thief: for you are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober.
(1 Thessalonians 5.4-6)

Christians who do not know the **What** will be caught by surprise by the **When**. If you want to follow the advice of Paul, learn what the *warning signs* are, and then “*watch*” closely as they are fulfilled.

Jack Van Impe

Dr. Jack Van Impe believes in the doctrine of *imminence*, and that there are *signs* of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is what he wrote in 1989:

These signs of Christ’s Second Coming are in evidence worldwide, and increasing both in frequency and intensity. (*Your Future*, p. 120)

He went on to list numerous *sign* events that must take place before the Second Coming:

Old Testament Signs of the end times:

- Horseless carriages or automobiles (Nahum 2:3-4)
- Airplanes (Isaiah 31:5)
- Desert blossoming as a rose (Isaiah 35:1)
- Alignment of a ten nation western confederacy (Daniel 2, 7)
- Knowledge explosion (Daniel 12:4)
- Great Increases in travel (Daniel 12:4).

New Testament Signs of the end times:

- False Christs and False Prophets (Matthew 24:5, 24; 2 Peter 2:1)
- Wars and rumors of wars (Mark 13:7; Matthew 24:6)
- Famines, earthquakes in divers places, pestilences (Luke 21:11)
- Iniquity abounding (Matthew 24:12)
- Gospel of the kingdom preached to all the world (Matthew 24:14)
- Signs in the sun, moon, and stars, sea and waves roaring (Luke 17:26-30; 21:25-27)
- Introduction of evil spirits which control cults and false religions (1 Timothy 4:1-2). (*Your Future*, p. 121)

Van Impe stated in his study Bible that *signs* were given to the nation of Israel concerning the return of Christ, but “no such signs were ever given to the Church concerning the Rapture” (p. 45). He understands there are *signs* of the return of Christ. He calls them *signs* of the Second Coming.

The importance of *signs* is emphasized in his book, *11:59 and Counting*. This is what he wrote in the introduction of that 1983 book:

Never in the annals of world history have we witnessed such a proliferation of the **signs** Jesus predicted to be in effect immediately prior to His return. No longer are the days of simultaneous war, famine, pestilence, earthquakes and cultic activity limited to the pages of Holy Writ. One need only pick up the evening newspaper

or tune to his favorite news broadcast to realize that these **signs** of Christ's second coming are in evidence worldwide, and increasing both in frequency and intensity. No wonder the scientists who control the famed "doomsday clock" are moving its hands ever closer to midnight! (p. 5, emphasis mine)

On television show (Trinity Broadcasting Network 2.02.2009), he said 500 Rapture prophecies have been fulfilled. It is obvious that the fulfilled prophecies of the Rapture are *signs* of that blessed event. He also stated on his May 18, 2009, broadcast that the 7 final *signs* were – the creation of the European Union, development of the mark of the Beast technology, Israel being reborn, Jerusalem being retaken, and the prominence of Iran, Russia and China.

He implied in his 1990 video "A.D. 2000 – the End?" that crop circles appearing all over the world was a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. He believes it fulfills the "*signs in sun and moon and stars*" (Luke 21.25).

In that same video he argued vehemently that even though no one can know the "day or hour" of the Rapture Christians can know the "times and seasons" and "we will know when it's near."

Arnold Fruchtenbaum

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum devoted Chapter 4 of his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (1993 edition), to explain what events will take place prior to the start of the Tribulation. He also devoted Chapter 5 to "Other Pretribulational Events."

In Chapter 4 he said that the first two world wars were *signs* of the approaching Tribulation. He also said that the establishment of the nation of Israel and the taking of the holy city of Jerusalem were *signs*. The formation of the northern alliance that attacks Israel, the formation of a world government, the formation of 10 kingdoms, the rise of the Antichrist, a period of "peace and safety" and the signing of the seven-year covenant will be other Pre-Tribulation *warning signs*.

In Chapter 5 he argued that there will be 3 other Pre-Tribulation events: the sun will be blacked out (Joel 2.31), Elijah will appear (Malachi 4.5-6) and the third temple may be rebuilt (pp. 129-138).

Texe Marrs

Texe Marrs was a professor of aerospace studies, teaching American Defense Policy, strategic weapons systems and related subjects at the University of Texas at Austin from 1977 to 1982. He has also taught international affairs, political science, and psychology for two other universities. He is the founder of Power of Prophecy Ministries in Austin, Texas, and a frequent guest on radio and television talk shows throughout America and Canada. He understands there are *signs* of the Tribulation, and that Christians should look for the fulfillment of these *signs*. He explains the importance of looking for *signs* in an essay, "The Night Cometh!" In it he explains the rise of Mystery Babylon (the coming world church) and how it will martyr Christians in large numbers. He also touches on the subject of "A Great Falling Away":

When will all these things take place? Jesus told us that no man knows the day nor the hour, but He also said that when you see **certain signs**, you can look up because you know redemption is drawing near.

The whole purpose of Bible prophecy is to let us know that **the time is short** – to let us know that night cometh when no man can work. But some people today refuse to believe the prophecies of Scripture.

The apostle Peter wrote that in the last days scoffers would come walking after their own lusts, *“And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”* (2 Pet.3:4).

My friends, when somebody mockingly asks you where is the sign of His coming – saying, in effect, I don’t see these signs; I don’t believe Jesus is coming again for His saints; I don’t believe in the Rapture; I don’t believe in Bible prophecy – they are in reality bringing to pass Peter’s prophecy that in the last days scoffers would come on the scene.

Because this **sign** of prophecy – the scoffers – is so prevalent today, we know that **Jesus Christ is coming soon**. Where in the history of the Christian church has prophecy been so scoffed at and scorned? God warned us that this would be so. (James, William T., *Storming Toward Armageddon*, pp. 128-129, emphasis mine)

Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith, founder of the Calvary Chapel movement and author of numerous books on Bible prophecy, told a caller to his radio talk show “Pastor’s Perspective” (December 18, 2008), was asked if it would be a good idea to compile a list of prophecies that will be fulfilled before the Tribulation starts. He said it should be done quickly. Co-hosts Brian Brodersen and Don Stewart also said it is a good idea. Here are some key statements by them:

Smith: I would think it would be **very fine to do it**. It sounds like a very interesting way to sort of create some sort of a **time-table**, and, of course, you better **do it fast** because, the way things are moving today, you know, we’re still, we could be at an extremely critical point with Israel; and Iran and Israel...

Brodersen: Well, you know, I think that a lot of the, you know, books, Chuck, of course, has a couple of books out on essentially what has happened. You take the prophecies and lay them out, sort of, you know, systematically, and then you look at what is going on in the world, and you **see how close we are**.

Stewart: Right. The general themes that the Old Testament give, and the New Testament, about the coming of Christ, we can look at, and we **see these things happening today**. Chuck and I, again, we did the four-part series on His Channel on the signs of the coming of Christ. But basically, we just talked about **twelve signs** that, you know, fifteen hundred years ago were not signs, because they were not here yet. Now they’re here. So now it’s a **great idea** to look at that and say, here we are, and **check it off**. Now, there are no signs – now, let’s make it clear...

Smith: The Rapture.

Stewart: The Rapture. Yes, we want to make it clear before the Rap...it could happen at any time. Before we finish this program, the Rapture of the Church could happen. But **the point is – the signs of the times are definitely there.**

Brodersen: And the **signs**, as you were saying, Don, the **signs** point to the Second Coming. And we know the Rapture precedes the Second Coming; so, Chuck, as you said so many times, if we're seeing the **signs** of the Second Coming...

Smith: Christmas and Thanksgiving, you know, at the malls and so forth, they have the Christmas decorations up; you can say, "Hey, Thanksgiving is getting close. Look at that, you know. That's Santa Claus." But we know that the Rapture precedes the Second Coming. So **signs** of the Second Coming only mean that the **Rapture is that much closer.**

Stewart: Alright, **great question there.** Appreciate it. (Pastor's Perspective, 12.18.2008, KWVE, emphasis mine)

Smith clearly taught that there are *signs* of the return of Christ in his book, *Snatched Away*. He partially quoted 1 Thessalonians 5.1-4, which says Christians of the Church Age should not be taken by surprise as the unsaved will when the Rapture takes place. He then wrote:

The Bible is saying that it shouldn't come to you as a surprise – "that day" shouldn't overtake you as a thief. Why? Because God has given to us the **signs** and the **evidences** that would **precede the coming of Jesus Christ.** (pp. 15-16, emphasis mine)

Smith also noted in his "Pastor's Perspective" radio program that there could be a period of "*peace and safety*" before the Rapture:

But if indeed they are successful that will surely be the time when we really you know, the Bible says when they say "*peace and safety*" then comes sudden destruction. So you're sorted concerned if they are able to force a peace treaty... (1.20.2010)

That is one of the last *warning signs* that all students of Bible prophecy should look for just as Paul commanded (1 Thessalonians 5.3-4).

John MacArthur, Jr.

Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. is certain that "nothing in the New Testament ever suggests we should defer our expectation of Christ's appearing until other preliminary events occur" (*The Second Coming*, p. 54). Yet he notes that there is an exception:

The one **apparent exception** is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, which says, "that Day [the Day of the Lord] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed." (Ibid., emphasis mine)

MacArthur realizes the passage teaches that prior to the Rapture two *signs* will be

fulfilled – the “*falling away*” of the Church from the faith, and the revealing of the “*man of sin*.” He says that the day Paul was speaking of is the “Day of the Lord and its apocalyptic judgment, not the Rapture” (Ibid., p. 56). He concluded his argument on this point saying:

So the consistent teaching of the New Testament is that Christians should be looking for the imminent coming of Christ for His church, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 is no exception. (Ibid.)

Dave Hunt

Dave Hunt says there are *signs* of the approaching Second Coming of Christ, but says those *signs* are not *signs* of the Rapture. The reason why *signs* are not for us are given in his book, *How Close Are We?* He believes that, since the Rapture takes place 7 years prior to the Second Coming, they are “not for us.” Yet he understands that Jesus “commanded His own to watch for His coming and warned against being caught by surprise at His return – and surprise could only apply to the Rapture.” He emphasized the importance of not ignoring “Christ’s warnings about being caught by surprise. We are responsible, as every generation before us has been, to know the signs of His coming and to determine whether they are applicable to our day. No matter that others have misinterpreted Scripture and mistakenly set a time for Christ’s return, only to be proved wrong. We are responsible to know the signs and to apply that knowledge biblically” (p. 116).

Hunt is correct in stating that Christians are “responsible to know the signs.” The following statement by him is very insightful:

Though past generations have so consistently misinterpreted the Scriptures, is it possible that we now possess the insight they lacked? Isn’t such a suggestion the very height of conceit? It could be, except for one obvious but overlooked fact, which we will also discuss later. As we shall see, **ours is the first generation to whom certain special signs Christ foretold could possibly apply!** (*How Close Are We?*, p. 116, emphasis mine)

It is significant that he believes there are “definite signs” that will “herald the nearness” of the return of Christ:

One cannot escape the fact that Christ and His apostles gave **definite signs** to **watch for** that would herald the **nearness of His return**. Why give these **signs** if some generation at some time in the future was not expected to recognize them and know that His Second Coming was, as He Himself said, “near, even at the doors”?

Yes, but if the **Rapture occurs seven years prior to the Second Coming**, then those signs are not for us. (*How Close Are We?*, p. 115, emphasis mine)

He argues that those “definite signs” are not for Christians, but for those who go into the Tribulation. Yet he made a startling confession about a significant *sign* that will be fulfilled before the Rapture:

The **Rapture comes in the midst of peace** (I Thessalonians 5:3); the Second Coming in the midst of war (Revelation 19:11-21). (Ibid., p. 204, emphasis mine)

This time of “peace and safety” is a *super-sign*. It is one of the last *warning signs* before the Tribulation, and it will be unmistakable. It must be a special period of peace never seen before. If Hunt is correct Christians will see this period of false “*peace and safety*” just prior to the Rapture.

In Chapter 11 of *How Close Are We?*, he says there are *signs* of the return of Christ. He noted that wars, famines and earthquakes would precede the Second Coming, and that “Jesus is apparently revealing that these signs will begin to occur substantially ahead of the Second Coming” (p. 116). “It would seem that these signs *begin* prior to the Rapture” (p. 116). He also said that every generation is responsible “to know the signs of His coming” and that “we are responsible” to “apply that knowledge biblically” (p. 116).

All students of Bible prophecy should learn what the *warning signs* are so they can know nearness of the Tribulation, and therefore the nearness of the Rapture.

Timothy LaHaye

Dr. Timothy LaHaye believes in the doctrine of *imminence*. Yet he also believes there are *signs* that prove we are living in the “last days.”

In his first book on prophecy, *The Beginning of the End* (1972), he said a primary sign of the “last days” was the fulfillment of Matthew 24.7:

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in various places. (NKJV)

What war was the fulfillment of that prophecy? LaHaye went on to write:

Now we are ready to ask: Has there ever been a war, started by two nations, which grew into a worldwide war by the kingdoms of the world, followed by unprecedented famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places (perhaps simultaneously)? I am of the opinion that we can discern such. Though reluctant to be dogmatic on the subject, I believe there is one event that fulfills all four parts of this prophecy. That terrible event has been labeled by historians as World War I, which took place between 1914 and 1918. (*The Beginning of the End*, pp. 35-36)

In this book, he devoted Chapter 4 to the “Infallible Sign.” This “infallible sign” was the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in its ancient homeland. The opening paragraph of that chapter reads thus:

On May 14, 1948, an historical phenomenon appeared which traces its beginning to World War I. Against all human reasoning, a nation that had been dead for nineteen hundred years suddenly came to life. On that day the world unknowingly took a giant step closer to the end of the age, for Israel became a self-governing nation just as the prophets had foretold. (Ibid., p. 43)

He believes a third significant *sign* was the taking of the ancient city of Jerusalem by the Israeli army on June 8, 1967:

The hands on Israel's prophecy clock leaped forward on June 8, 1967, when the Israeli troops marched into the Old City of Jerusalem and took it with little or no destruction. For the first time in 2,500 years the Jews had gained complete control over the most important area in the entire world. Suddenly the world was aware of what Bible teachers have been saying for centuries, that Mount Moriah, the site of then Temple of Jesus' day, was to the Jews the most coveted ground in the world. For the first time in nineteen centuries Israel controlled the site of the old – and new – temple! (*The Beginning of the End*, p. 50)

LaHaye listed the 12 most important *signs* of the Second Coming and signified how close we are to it by giving the time of the night for each *sign*:

- 1-World War I (10:30pm)
- 2-Rebirth of Israel (10:35pm)
- 3-Russia and the Middle East (10:40pm)
- 4-Capital and Labor Conflicts (10:45pm)
- 5-Skyrocketing Travel (10:50pm) & Knowledge (11:00pm)
- 6-Apostasy (11:15pm)
- 7-Occult Shadows and Realities (11:20pm)
- 8-Perilous Times (11:30pm)
- 9-A Flood of Wickedness (11:30pm)
- 10-Scoffers Have Come (11:40pm)
- 11-The Ecumenical Church 11:50pm)
- 12-The Disunited Nations/World Government (11:58pm). (Ibid., pp. 162-163)

In the essay, “The Signs of the Times Imply His Coming,” published in, *Ten Reasons Why Jesus Is Coming Soon* (Van Diest), he explained why *signs* are important (p. 192). Since the disciples equated *signs* with “the end of the age” (Matthew 24:3), he said, “it is equally legitimate today” for Christians to look for them. “Many wild speculators have sensationalized signs, and so brought confusion to the church,” yet this should “not prohibit us from using them at all.” Instead, “it should make us more careful in ‘*rightly dividing the Word of Truth*,’ so we do not add to the confusion.”

He believes there are clear *signs* of the “last days.” He also sees the danger of date-setting, citing the mistake of Edgar Whisenant, who thought Jesus Christ would return in 1988, and Harold Camping, who predicted that Jesus would return in 1994 (and now May 21, 2011). He understands that date-setting can cause many to become disillusioned. Yet, even though he does not believe a date can be set, he thinks his generation will be the one that sees the Rapture. He bases this belief on the 12 *signs* that signal the soon return of Jesus Christ:

Together, they give us a basis for concluding that this generation has more reason to believe that Christ could come in our lifetime than at any time before it. (*The Beginning of the End*, p. 196)

In his essay, “The Signs of the Times Imply His Coming,” he mentions other *signs* of the “soon at hand” coming of Jesus Christ. He noted that in the Olivet Discourse Jesus said, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come*” (Matthew 24.14). He believes that this prophecy will be fulfilled by the 144,000 during the Tribulation, but it is very close to being fulfilled by the Church around the year 2000. In 1998 he wrote:

While we know this prophecy will be fulfilled during the Tribulation, the fact that so many effective groups are working for the same target date, at a time when such an effort is technologically possible, does indeed suggest **the coming of Christ for His church may soon be at hand.**

It is safe to say that Matthew 24:14 will **soon be fulfilled**, which means, **the coming of Christ could be at hand.** (Van Diest, John, *Ten Reasons why Jesus is Coming Soon*, pp. 201-202, emphasis mine)

Several other *signs* made him believe we may be the last generation: the implantable computer chip being the mark of the beast (in his opinion); the Revelation-type plagues that already exist (AIDS, STDs); unprecedented earthquakes and natural disasters and worldwide satellite television.

Another proof that he gives is the 6-day, 6000-year theory that says Jesus Christ will return to set up His Millennial Kingdom (the day of rest) after 6000 years of human history. There were about 4000 years from Adam to Christ, so Jesus should return about 2000 years after His birth. (The 6000-year theory destroys the doctrine of *imminence*.)

In their 1999 book, *Are We Living in the End Times?*, Timothy LaHaye, and co-author Jerry Jenkins, continued to emphasize the importance of *signs*. In the opening of their book they write:

We are **surrounded by so many obvious signs** that one would have to be blind not to see them – yet some fail to recognize them even when they are called to their attention. So many **signs** exist today that you could write a book about them. In fact, I did (LaHaye), *The Beginning of the End*, first published in 1972 and then again in 1991. Many changes in the twenty-seven years since that book’s first publication have only brought further confirmation that we are indeed living in **“the times of the signs.”** Never in history have so many **legitimate signs** of Christ’s return existed. (pp. 26-27, emphasis mine)

LaHaye made a very interesting statement in his study Bible concerning the timing of the Rapture. In his note on 1 Thessalonians 5.3 he stated:

The sudden destruction or Tribulation which follows the Rapture will occur at a time when the world is obsessed with a false sense of “peace and safety.” Paul is reiterating Jesus’ teaching to “watch and be ready” lest **that day [Tribulation]** should overtake them “as a thief” (v. 4). (*Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, p. 1287, emphasis mine)

He noted there is no *gap* between the Rapture and Tribulation, and that the Rapture/Tribulation event takes place during a time of “*peace and safety*.” From other statements and writings he thinks Christians will not be here on the day that the Tribulation starts. 1 Thessalonians 5.4 clearly teaches that Christians of the Church

Age will be on Earth when the unsaved think they have achieved a time of “*peace and safety*”:

When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them [Tribulation], as travail upon a woman with child; and they will in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. (1 Thessalonians 5.3-4)

Paul warns Christians to not be caught by surprise like the unsaved will be when “*that day*” (the Tribulation) breaks the period of “*peace and safety*.”

LaHaye continues to teach that Christians should be watching for *signs* of the return of the Lord. He emphasized this in his monthly newsletter:

Some would have us believe it is wrong for Christians to pay heed to the “Signs of the Times,” particularly those that herald (or proclaim) the **soon** coming of our Lord. Admittedly, there are some in the past that have made a fetish out of the subject and see “signs” in Scripture that really do not exist. The truth is the disciples asked such a question of the Lord Himself just before He died for our sins and rose again, and He did not rebuke them! This leads us to believe that it is **good for us to examine the signs** to spiritually motivate us and those we would lead to Christ to help them hasten their decision to accept Him and thus prepare for His coming. (Pre-Trib Perspectives, Vol. VIII, Number 70, October 2009, emphasis mine)

All Christians should be “*looking*” for the *warning signs* that the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ and the Apostles gave us. To fail to “*watch*” for those *warning signs* is an act of disobedience because our Savior commanded us to “*watch*,” “*be ready*,” “*watch*” and be “*looking*” for His return (Matthew 24.42, 44; 25.13 Titus 2.13).

Hal Lindsey

Hal Lindsey firmly believes there are *signs* of the Rapture even though he believes in the doctrine of *imminence*. In his first book on prophecy he says this about three important “signs of the time”:

To be specific about Israel’s great significance as a **sign of the time**, there are three things that were to happen. First, the Jewish nation would be reborn in the land of Palestine. Secondly, the Jews would repossess old Jerusalem and the sacred sites. Thirdly, they would rebuild their ancient temple of worship upon its historic site. (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, pp. 50-51, emphasis mine)

He then explained how one can pinpoint the *time of this restoration*, using a verse from the book of Ezekiel:

“After many days you shall be visited and mustered for service; in the latter years you shall go against the land that is restored from the ravages of the sword, where people are gathered out of many nations upon the mountains of Israel, which had

been a continual waste; but its people are brought forth out of the nations...” (Ezekiel 38:8 Amplified).

The clues are that the restoration comes in the “latter years,” the land had been “a continual waste,” and the Jewish people return from exile “out of the nations” (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 51).

Lindsey summarized his understanding of the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland:

It cannot be emphasized enough. This restoration would take place after a worldwide dispersion and long-term desolation of the land of Israel. However, it would occur shortly before the events which will culminate with the personal, visible return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to set up an everlasting Kingdom and bring about the spiritual conversion of Israel. (Ibid., p. 52)

Lindsey realizes the Bible teaches the Jews would be dispersed and that the land of Israel would be desolate for a “long time.” We now know that this “long-term desolation” was nearly 1900 years. Therefore, it is impossible for the Rapture to take place at *any moment* since Pentecost. He then asked what generation would see the return of the Lord?:

Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the **signs** – chief among them the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like **forty years**. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, **all these things could take place**. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so. (Ibid., p. 54, emphasis mine)

Lindsey makes it clear that the generation that sees the “signs – chief among them the rebirth of Israel” – will see the return of the Lord.

In his second book on prophecy, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey described 7 *signs*, which he called “birth pains” – “religious deception, international revolution, war, famines, earthquakes, plagues and strange events in the skies” (pp. 19-33). This is what he had to say about these “birth pain” *signs*:

Over the past 10 years the appearance of Jesus’s **signs** has accelerated, and today, we find them occurring one on top of the other. Let me report on the **signs** I see and maybe we can learn what is in store for us. (Ibid., p. 20, emphasis mine)

Lindsey has continued to emphasize the importance of *signs* throughout his writing career. He did so in an essay entitled, “The Armageddon Scenario,” which was published in the 1995 book, *Steeling the Mind of America* (Perkins, Bill). He is convinced that we are living in the *general time* of the return of Jesus, and forcefully explained why:

I’m not a date setter because I don’t know the day or the hour when Christ is coming back, but I know He commanded us to **know the general time of His return and we are in it**. We are drawing **very near** to the time when we’ll hear the footsteps of Christ at the very threshold of heaven, ready to return for us. And so much has happened since I wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth* that I feel an update is in order. (pp. 103-104, emphasis mine)

Lindsey then took several pages to explain how the *signs* that Jesus told His disciples to look for in the Olivet Discourse were being fulfilled in the 20th Century and concluded:

As I look at these things, it's unmistakable I believe that **Christ's coming must be very near** because we see these things in an advanced state of fulfillment. But these are **general signs**. (Perkins, Bill, *Steeling the Mind of America*, p. 111, emphasis mine)

He continued to deal with *signs*, and went from general *signs* to specific *signs* that could only be fulfilled in our generation due to technological advances. This what he said about the mark of the beast:

There are some technical realities hidden in prophecy that **couldn't be possible until this present time**... In Revelation 13:7, it talks about the whole world being brought under control of this person. Those in past generations who looked at this must have wondered, "How could one man cause every person – man, woman, and child – on the face of this planet to be numbered and then be able to keep track of them." It was impossible in other generations, but now, just at the time when **all of the other predicted events are happening**, we have the technical ability for this Antichrist to come in and number every person on earth and have instant access to those that have violated it. We're talking about a total control of the world through economics... and it's child's play. With today's technology it is now easy for computers to not only identify every person on earth, but to also keep a dossier, a history, on every person. Technically, a chip can be placed under the skin of the forehead or the forehead, and it will have much more than a number. (Ibid., pp. 111-112, emphasis mine)

If Lindsey is correct, that our generation is the first one with the technology that will enable the Antichrist to force everyone on Earth to take his mark, then the Rapture could not possibly have been an *imminent* event since Pentecost. He made a strong argument against the hypothesis that Christ could return at *any moment*, and a powerful argument that there are *warning signs* of the return of Christ.

Lindsey was certain, in 1995, when he wrote the essay "The Armageddon Scenario," that the Antichrist was alive:

When the Antichrist comes on the scene (and **he's already alive somewhere in Europe**; I'm sure of it), you will have to swear allegiance to him as the supreme ruler and deity in order to buy, sell, or hold a job. (Ibid., p. 112, emphasis mine)

If the Antichrist was alive in 1995, then, according to Lindsey, our generation is the last generation. After giving several other reasons why he is convinced that we are the terminal generation, he quoted the parable of the fig tree, and commented on it:

Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. (Matthew 24:32-34, KJV)

We are that generation without a shadow of a doubt. The leaves on the fig tree were symbolic of the events of prophecy that I've just described to you. (Ibid., p. 129)

In this essay he made a powerful argument that numerous *warning signs* of the return of Christ have been fulfilled, and that we are the “terminal generation” that will see the return of the Lord. He also argued forcefully that Jesus could not have returned at *any moment* since Pentecost because the mark of the beast technology had only recently been invented.

In his book, *Vanished Into Thin Air*, published in 1999, Lindsey taught that the Antichrist must rise to power prior to the start of the Tribulation, just as the early Church fathers did:

Events Just before the Tribulation

It is apparent that **sometime before the seven-year Tribulation begins, the Antichrist will receive a mortal wound**, be miraculously healed, be indwelt by Satan, and take over the ten nations out of what we now know as the European Union (Revelation 13:3). These things must first occur in order to give him the political position and power base from which to sign the protection treaty with Israel, which officially begins the Tribulation.

A False Prophet, or pseudo-Messiah to Israel (Revelation 13:11-17), **will be manifested before the Tribulation begins**, for he is the leader of Israel who will make the covenant with the Roman Dictator (the Antichrist).

The great falling away or **apostasy of the professing false church also takes place before the beginning of the Tribulation** which is sometimes called “*the Day of the Lord*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). (p. 214, emphasis mine)

Lindsey agrees with the apostles and early Church fathers that the Antichrist must rise to power before the Tribulation. It is unlikely the Antichrist will receive a mortal wound before the Tribulation. The Bible says he receives the mortal wound at the mid-point of the Tribulation, and then he rules under the power of the devil for 42 months (Revelation 13.3-5).

The False Prophet must rise to power, and the apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2.3) must also take place before the Tribulation. Lindsey speculates there will be a *gap* of “several weeks” between the Rapture and the Tribulation (*Vanished Into Thin Air*, p. 387), but if there is no *gap*, the rise of the Antichrist and False Prophet are important *warning signs* for Christians to “watch” for just as the early Church fathers taught. (The question about a gap between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation is explained in Chapter 10.)

Another significant *sign* that Lindsey says occurs before the Tribulation is the time of “peace and security”:

Throughout Europe and the rest of the world there is a kind of euphoria of peace. So what's the prophetic connection? It's interesting that in I Thessalonians, Chapter 5:1-3, it talks about a time “*When people say, 'There is peace and security.' then sudden destruction will come upon them... and there will be no escape.*”

The Bible is very clear that there will be a **period of time** in the **last days**

when the **whole world lets down its guard**. It will be a time of great hope, but it will be a very **false hope and false peace**. (*Planet Earth-2000 A.D.*, p. 241, emphasis mine)

The people of the world will think they have entered a time of world-wide “*peace and security*” just before the start of the Tribulation. It is during this time of false peace that the Rapture takes place, as Dave Hunt noted. This means there will be a period of so-called universal “*peace and safety*” before the Rapture. It is one of the last *warning signs* for which we are to “look.”

It is significant that Lindsey says there are four major *warning signs* that will take place before the Tribulation: the rise of the Antichrist, the rise of the False prophet, the great apostasy and the time of false “peace and security.”

Peter Lalonde

Peter Lalonde, a Canadian televangelist and author of several books on prophecy, founded Cloud Ten Pictures in 1994. Along with his brother, Paul, they have produced several Christian films, including three “Left Behind” films. He believes that “end times” prophecies have been fulfilled: Israel in her homeland, Jerusalem retaken, revived Roman Empire, rise to power of the Soviet Union, mark-of-the-beast technology, earthquakes, pestilences and hatred of Christians (*One World Under Antichrist*, pp. 259-276; 291-300). He also sees a move to create a “New World Order.” In his book noted above, he explained in two chapters entitled, “Toward the New World Order” and “The Blueprint” why he believes the new world order described in the Bible is being established.

John Hagee

John Hagee is founder and senior pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, a non-denominational charismatic church with more than 19,000 members. He is the chief executive officer of his non-profit corporation, Global Evangelism Television (GETV). He believes that Jesus can return at *any moment*, yet he believes there are specific *signs* that prove we are living in the “end times.” In his 1996 book, *Beginning of the End*, he gave several significant *signs*:

1. Explosion of knowledge
2. Plague in the Middle East
3. Rebirth of Israel
4. The Jews will return home
5. Jerusalem no longer under Gentile rule
6. International instant communication
7. Days of deception
8. Famines and pestilence
9. Earthquakes
10. As in the days of Noah. (pp. 85-100)

Hagee, like many prophecy teachers, did not see all the Biblical *signs* of the *last days*. (We do not agree with his doctrines, some are unusual, but cite him to show what some of the leading prophecy preachers in America teach.)

David Webber and Noah Hutchings

David Webber, son of Dr. E.F. Webber, founder of the Southwest Radio Church (SWRC), published a booklet in 1978 with Noah Hutchings, the current president of SWRC. They speculated that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ might be in 2001. They based their belief of the timing of the Second Coming upon *signs*. Even though they have taught the doctrine of *imminence* for a few decades, they believe in the importance of looking for *signs*. This is what they wrote in 1978:

A vital question that affects every man, woman and child living today is: “Will Christ come by 2001?” This impending possibility looms ominously on the human horizon and confronts each of the nearly 4.5 billion people on this planet. A time of unparalleled affliction, tyranny, and destruction must occur before the most shattering event in all history of man – the physical return of Christ to the earth, in real, visible, and overwhelming power.

The irrefutable evidence of prophetic Scripture indicates that Jesus Christ may very well be here by 2001! The **general signs** in the heavens and on earth, plus the **specific signs** occurring in Israel (God’s dramatic timepiece), all point to **His soon return**. (*Will Christ Come by 2001?*, p. 2, emphasis mine)

Webber and Hutchings went on to point out specific *signs* that made them believe that Jesus would soon return:

With the first non-Italian Pope in 455 years now at the helm in Rome, and the first peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 3300 years in the offing, the world is **swiftly moving toward its rendezvous with destiny**; the coming of Israel’s Messiah to smash the Antichrist, roll back the Tribulation tides of evil, and establish His righteous rule from Jerusalem, the future capital of the world. (*Will Christ Come by 2001?*, p. 2, emphasis mine)

The two *signs* they gave in the “Foreword” are not Biblical *signs*. A non-Italian Pope and a treaty between Egypt and Israel are not found in the Bible.

They began the first chapter with a chart of past and future dates:

- A.D. 1917-1921 - Balfour Declaration
- A.D. 1918-1922 - The Beginning of Sorrows
- A.D. 1948-1952 – Israel’s Rebirth After the Flesh
- A.D. 1967-1971 - Jerusalem Restored
- A.D. 1974-1978 - Jewish Temple Rebuilt?
- A.D. 1981-1985 - Beginning of the Tribulation
- A.D. 1985-1989 - Middle of Tribulation
- A.D. 1988-1992 - End of the Tribulation
- A.D. 1995-1999 - Completion of Millennial Temple
- A.D. 1996-2000 - The Jubilee, a rest
- A.D. 1997-2001 - Beginning of the Kingdom Age. (Ibid., p. 3)

Even though no man can know the “*day or hour*” of the return of Christ, they say Christians will be able to determine how near the Rapture is:

The Prophetic Word is clear and forthright. The nearer the time for Christ’s return, the more evident the **fulfilling of prophetic signs**, until Christians can be sure that **His coming is not only near, but at hand**. (Ibid., p. 5, emphasis mine)

There are many *prophetic signs* that we should look for, but we disagree with their date-setting. As *signs* are fulfilled, we can know that the Rapture is getting closer, but we cannot predict years in advance when the Rapture will take place. They were looking at some events that were not true *warning signs*, and they were making predictions based on intuition.

They noted that Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the Pharisees for not knowing the “*signs of the times*” of their day (Matthew 16.3). Then they accuse people today, who have no interest in the Second Coming, of being hypocrites. The “self-righteous hypocrites of our day scoff at the message of His soon return” (*Will Christ Come by 2001?*, p. 5).

(Many Christians have no interest in Bible prophecy because of the men who have claimed that the return of Jesus Christ is “very near” and “at hand” for the past 40 years.)

Webber and Hutchings went on to emphasize the importance of looking for *signs* by writing:

But He indicated that when the **signs** that He gave began to come to pass, then believers in those days could know by way of investigation that **His coming was near, even at the doors**. Today, if you were to ask any number of well known prophetic scholars if Christ would **come by the year 2000 A.D.**, most would reply that it was not only possible, **but probable**. The closer we get to the time of Christ’s return, the nearer prophetic observers can come to arriving at the **approximate date**. (Ibid., p. 6, emphasis mine)

They concluded their chapter on the *signs* of the times by writing this harsh statement:

Scripture indicts ministers and pastors who refuse to investigate the **signs of the time** leading to Christ’s return, and warn the unsaved to prepare, as being ignorant, hypocrites, and false prophets (Matthew 16:3; II Peter 3:3-5). (Ibid., p. 6, emphasis mine)

Most pastors who ignore prophecy are not false prophets or hypocrites. They do not teach Bible prophecy because they have been turned off by the teachers of *imminence*. The myriad false predictions of the return of Christ have diminished their interest in prophecy. The majority of Christians have no interest in prophecy, and many do not want their pastors to teach it.

Later in the booklet, Webber and Hutchings describe general *signs* that make them believe the Rapture is just over the event horizon – apostasy within the Church, Satanic infiltration of the Church, spiritual impotence of the Church, the rise of humanism and materialism in Christendom, ecumenism in the Church, the Roman

Catholic Church, the world church headquarters, and the rise of scoffers within the Church (Ibid., pp. 32-36).

None of these *signs* that they were looking at were specific *signs* of the return of Christ (Appendix A). If they knew the right *warning signs* to “look” for, they most likely would not have thought the Rapture might take place by 2001. They focused on general *signs*, rather than on specific *signs*.

The most interesting *signs* that Webber and Hutchings gave to prove that we are living in the “end times” were the invention of the automobile, the airplane, space vehicles, the computer, radio and television. They cited Scripture for each of them and then concluded their booklet by writing:

We would ask, ARE YOU READY FOR THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST? **It’s almost here, according to the signs of our time. The Word of God admonishes us to be observing the signs of the time** for the return of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:33). (Ibid., p. 84, emphasis mine)

Noah Hutchings has continued to teach that there are numerous *signs* of the Rapture. In his annual prophecy calendar for 2009 entitled, “Signs that Jesus May Come Today” he listed several signs – economic upheaval, rapid travel, increase of knowledge, the re-founding of the nation of Israel, alignment of nations, modern inventions, Jewish and Christian numerics, the days of Noah, the great falling away, wars, rumor of wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences and delusions.

Believers should be “watching” the *signs* of the *end times* that we are living in to know how near the Rapture is, but we need to know what those *signs* are.

Grant Jeffrey

Grant Jeffrey believes there are dozens of *signs* of the Second Coming. He devoted an entire book, *Final Warning*, to these *signs*:

FINAL WARNING will explore the economic agenda of the elite globalist groups that are conspiring to force America and Canada to join the coming one-world government. We will examine the financial strategies that will allow us to survive the economic roller coaster awaiting us in the years ahead. FINAL WARNING reveals the fascinating biblical prophecies that warn us about a series of breathtaking political, economic, and military crises that will unfold as we rush toward the new Millennium. (p. 7)

Jeffrey explained in detail how the elitists have been working to establish a world government, economy and church. He even named a few of the financial organizations that are being used to create a world economic system: the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Ibid., pp. 219-224). Organizations that he says are working to create a world government are: the Federal Reserve Corporation, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderbergers, the Council of Europe, the Club of Rome, the World Federalist Movement and the Asian Pacific Economic Community (*Final Warning*, pp. 74-88).

(Some other organizations that should be included are: the Bohemian Club, the Fabian Society, the Freemasons, the Illuminati Order, the Knights of Malta, the

Knights Templar, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Skull and Bones Order, the Theosophical Society and the Thule Society.)

Jeffrey explained that the Antichrist will need some recently developed technology to compel everyone to take his “mark” to be able to buy or sell (Revelation 13.16-17). Some of these technologies are: computers, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Transmission and smart cards.

Since we understand that these developments must be in place before the Antichrist can take absolute control of the world, how could the return of Jesus Christ have been *imminent* for the last 1900 years? It would not be possible.

In his 2001 book, *Triumphant Return*, Jeffrey devoted Chapter 9 to *general signs*, and Chapter 10 to *unique signs* of the Second Coming. The *general signs* are: false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, the AIDS plague, the preaching of the gospel and perilous times (pp. 201-216).

The *unique signs* that he listed are:

The rebirth of Israel, the restoration of the Hebrew language, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the return of Ethiopian Jews, the astonishing fertility of Israel, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the plan to rebuild the temple, the rediscovery of the “oil of anointing,” the revived Roman Empire, the massive increase of the male population in Asia, the building of a highway from China to the Middle East, the damming of the Euphrates River, the plan to rebuild the ancient city of Babylon, the plans for global government, the mark of the beast technology, satellite television, and the increase in knowledge. (Ibid., pp. 219-263)

Jeffrey has found many *unique signs*. These *signs* that point to the nearness of the Tribulation are also *signs* of the approaching Rapture. He says these *signs* are for the generation of the “last days”:

The Scriptures teach that the final last days’ generation, the population who are living when Christ returns, will witness the **fulfillment of numerous prophecies pointing to the soon return of the promised Messiah**. Our generation of Christians has **witnessed more fulfilled prophecies than any other generation** in the two-thousand-year history of the Church. The visions of the Old Testament prophets, together with the New Testament’s prophetic words of Jesus and His apostles, testify with one united voice that the generation that sees the fulfillment of these prophecies will also witness the triumphant victory of Jesus the Messiah over Satan. The establishment of the long-awaited Kingdom of God is **at hand**. In light of the **incredible fulfillment of so many prophecies in our lifetime**, we need to heed the prophetic words of Jesus Christ that speak especially to our generation. “*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21:28, KJV). (Ibid., pp. 262-263, emphasis mine)

Jeffrey also believes that students of Bible prophecy will know the approximate time of the Second Coming and the Rapture:

The Lord has not left us in spiritual darkness concerning the **approximate time** of Christ’s Second Coming. Although we are specifically warned that we cannot know “*the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*” (Matthew 25:13),

the **fulfillment of dozens of specific prophecies in our generation** strongly suggests that Jesus Christ's Second Coming will occur in our lifetime. (Ibid., p. 263, emphasis mine)

The prophecies should come to pass in the lifetime of those who saw the first fulfilled prophecy, the re-birth of Israel (Matthew 24.34). Jeffrey is correct that Christians do not live in spiritual darkness. If believers know the **What** (*warning signs*) they can know the **When** (approximate time of the start of the Tribulation).

Conclusion

The men who teach *imminence* also teach there are *signs* of the return of Christ agree with Scripture that several *warning signs* of His return have been fulfilled. Scripture says that many more will be fulfilled. We urge all Christians to learn what those *warning signs* are (Appendix A), and then “*watch*” for their fulfillment, just as our Savior commanded us to (Matthew 24.42-44).

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 8

1. Did Cyrus Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer and John Walvoord, and do J. Dwight Pentecost, Jack van Impe, Chuck Smith, Dave Hunt, Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey and Grant Jeffrey see *signs* of the return of Christ?

2. Are disciples of Jesus Christ commanded to “*watch*” for His return?

3. How do they “*watch*” for the return of Christ?

4. Are *signs* of the Tribulation also *signs* of the Rapture?

5. Was all of the information about the Antichrist placed in the Bible so Christians would be able to identify him before the Rapture or was it given for the unsaved to identify him after the Rapture?

6. Will the False Prophet rise to power before the Tribulation?

7. Will the Antichrist rise to power before the Tribulation?

8. List some of the *warning signs* that will be fulfilled before the Tribulation.

9. Did the following eschatologists believe and teach that there are *signs* of the Tribulation and also of the Rapture? – George Muller, Cyrus Scofield, Arno Gaebelein, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Henry Ironside, Herbert Lockyer, John Walvoord, Harold Lindsell, J. Dwight Pentecost, Jack Van Impe, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Texe Marrs, Chuck Smith, John MacArthur, Jr., Dave Hunt, Timothy LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, Paul LaLonde, John Hagee, David Webber, Noah Hutchings and Grant Jeffrey.