

In the closing words of the book of Revelation (22:18,19) John warns of dire consequences if anyone dares to add to or take away from the "words of the book of this prophecy." Of course he refers only to the book of Revelation. If the rest of the Bible is equally God's Word and one adds to or subtracts from its message through faulty interpretation, from whatever motivation, one may not suffer the precise penalty threatened but one may be putting oneself into a position he will live to regret.

Tim LaHaye in his book, "The Beginning of the End", says on p.78: "It is dangerous to hypothesize in areas where the Scriptures are not specific." But apparently he is not afraid of danger, for on the preceding page he quotes Ezekiel 39:6 ("I will send a fire on Magog and among those who dwell securely in the isles...") He then says the "isles" such as America, Canada, Britain etc. contain Communist spies. Some day they may be struck by a ball of fire that will destroy them while it sets free the slaves of worldwide Communism! The last sentence on the page starts out: "But when Russia is destroyed just before crushing Israel..." How a destroyed Russia can crush Israel, or anyone else for that matter, is a greater mystery than any mystery contained in the Bible! LaHaye is right. It is dangerous to hypothesize!

CONFUSION

If there is one word the pretribulation theorists have nearly worn out to characterize posttribulationists is it not that word "confusion"? While all of us are subject to error, I believe the word more accurately describes pretribulationists. Examples?

Dr. Gerald B. Stanton in his "Kept From the Hour" states on p.81 that "The Day of the Lord...has no application whatsoever to the church saints." But what does Paul say about this? In 1 Thes.5:2 he states: "For yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." What day is he talking about? V.1 makes it crystal clear it is the day just mentioned in the preceding 4 verses where the term "Lord" is used 5 times - a passage that is quoted more frequently than any other by pretribulationists when speaking of the rapture of Christians! In spite of the fact that Paul in 5:1 and 5:4 addresses his readers as "brethren", namely Christians, we are told this day of the Lord has nothing to do with Christians! And then to add to confusion, Stanton on p.175 states that "Christian watchfulness is based on verses such as 1 Thes.5:6!"

Frankly, I do not like to appear as a critic of Stanton - and obviously there is nothing personal involved here - particularly in the light of a personal compliment he bestowed upon me in a footnote on p.213 in which he compares me with Alexander Reese as follows: "MacPherson, a close follower of Reese, speaks of himself... as making no profession of being a scholar or theologian although he shows considerably better spirit." (Stanton is referring to my first book, "Triumph Through Tribulation", which is now out of print. On the preceding page he says that Reese had made a similar admission although I believe his book, "The Approaching Advent of Christ", was the outstanding defense of the posttribulation view for many years.)

Now, let's continue our hunt for confusion among the non-confusionists! Dr. Henry C. Thiessen in his book, "Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?" says, on p.52: "The early Church lived in the constant expectation of her Lord." But on pp.13-14 he says the 7 churches of Revelation 2 and 3 "represent the professing Church from the Day of Pentecost to the time of the Lord's return in seven successive epochs." How can one reconcile two such obviously contradictory statements?

In one of Dr. Harry Ironside's books - a book of reminiscences - he expresses gratitude to my father, George MacPherson, who, he says, got him started in his wider ministry to the evangelical world. Harry had been confined to small Plymouth Brethren assemblies. My father invited him to speak in his Tent Evangel in New York City - a gospel ministry he operated for more than 25 years using men of world renown from England and America. Of course I knew Dr. Ironside and so I sent him a copy of my

in 1944 he said to me, among other things: "You have not grasped to any degree the real position of those of us who are certain the Church will not go through the Great Tribulation...Manifestly, the remnant of Israel who will be delivered at the time of the Great Tribulation, and the Church, the body of Christ, cannot be upon earth at the same time, as they are two altogether different companies, one a heavenly and one an earthly company."

May I comment that Israel and the Church have both been on earth about 19 centuries already! Who are confused - the Pre's or the Post's?

In 1937 Dr. Charles G. Trumbull, editor of the Sunday School Times, wrote a book entitled, "Prophecy's Light on Today". (I wrote book reviews for this paper while a student at Princeton Theological Seminary). On p.108 he recalled the first prophetic conference he ever attended, arranged by Dr. James Gray for February 1914 at Moody Bible Institute. One of the speakers, Dr. Scofield, said that all Europe was an armed camp and that "a great European war might break out at any moment." He added that newspapers ridiculed this prophecy of Dr. Scofield's. He reported that earlier that same year Dr. John Clifford, a British Nonconformist leader, stated that militarism is on its way out. And Dr. Trumbull commented: "Set in contrast, these two predictions of two great Christian leaders, one of whom ignored the Bible and gave man's prophecy, the other, holding close to the Word, gave God's prophecy." But where does the Bible predict the first world war? Scofield's prophecy was clearly a man's prophecy. But men all down the centuries have assumed the role of prophet, some even going so far as to set the year or day of the second advent.

One of these self-appointed prophets was Dr. W.H. Rogers, former pastor of the Hinson Memorial Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon and, before that, pastor of First Baptist of New York City. The Hinson church mailed out copies of sermons preached there to friends across the country. Dr. Rogers in a sermon given on April 6, 1930 said: "I have the profound conviction, beloved, (and I sincerely say it), that He is going to come during my Portland ministry. I never had that conviction in any pastorate before, but somehow I have the conviction that the Son of God is going to come and take His Church out of the world during my Portland ministry, and we are going to meet Him in the air!" Then he gave the final invitation: "Just at this moment if you will surrender to Him, take Him as your Savior, you can share in the blessed hope of His coming again!" That was 44 years ago. And he left that pastorate many years ago.

Who are we to claim we know He is coming soon? According to Mark 13:32 Jesus stated that no man knows the day or hour of His return, nor do angels or even Jesus Himself but only God the Father. He had just stated that His coming would be after the great tribulation and immediately after the cosmic signs (vv.24-26) that follow the tribulation. He also stated in v.10 that the Gospel must be preached to all nations. Obviously we cannot be sure just when the last nation will have had the Gospel preached to them. And then Jesus concludes in v.33: "Take ye heed; watch and pray; FOR YE KNOW NOT WHEN THE TIME IS." To be sure, we are to watch for the fulfillment of the signs He has mentioned - the wars, earthquakes, famines, persecution of believers, and we are to be ready at all times for His glorious advent. But nowhere does Scripture justify our playing the role of divine prophet concerning an event, the time of which was even withheld from Jesus Himself.

I am now embarrassed to confess that in my first pastorate in the city of Norwich, New York I gave a series of 11 messages on prophecy from the pretribulational standpoint. I distributed a tract in the form of a newspaper called CITY DAILY NEWS, published by Faithful Words Publishing Co. of St. Louis in 1933. The paper supposed the rapture of the church had just taken place, and it reported the disappearance of many people, showing pictures of a railroad wreck and an air disaster. On the last page appeared the words: "Startling headlines like those on p.1 may appear in tomorrow's papers. We know not the day nor the hour but WE KNOW HE IS COMING SOON."

In using this I was guilty of being a prophet of God just 40 years ago! Admittedly, preachers have long used fear of the consequences of rejecting Christ as one means of getting decisions, and justifiably so, but is it right to claim that Christ is coming soon when one has not received a specific revelation from God and before the final God-given signs of His coming have appeared?

Men all down the centuries have made similar predictions. (See 20 listed on pp.10-12 in my book, "Tell It Like It Will Be", from the second to nineteenth centuries). The distinguished scholar, H.G. Guinness, in his huge book, "Light For the Last Days", published in 1888, stated: "Bid the Church lift up her head because her great redemption is now close at hand... Trim your lamps and be ready; we have not long to wait... The last sands are running in the hour-glass of this evil age." (p.389). 86 years ago! Is it only the Posttribulationists who are confused?

Typology is often a means of reading into the Bible whatever one wants to. We are often told the fig tree is a type of Israel. Even if in at least one passage it is used to illustrate some truth concerning the Jews, there is no proof that the fig tree is always so used. For example, in Matt. 24:32-33, we read: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Some tell us the fig tree here is a type of Israel. But look at the more complete record of the same in Lk. 21:29-31 which states "...Behold the fig tree and all the trees..." Obviously, the fig tree here is not a type of Israel at all! It is a simple story to illustrate the role to be played by the signs which will indicate Christ's coming is near. If the fig tree is a type of Israel, what shall we say about its first reference in the Bible - in Genesis 3:7 - where Adam and Eve used the leaves to make clothes? That was before there were any Jews on earth, although Jews today are in the clothing business in a big way!

In typology human imagination really runs riot. In the Scofield Bible we find a note on Daniel 3:17 to the effect that the three Jews in the fiery furnace are "a fit type of the Jewish remnant who will be faithful in the furnace of the Great Tribulation." How can they be a type of Jews who suffer terribly in "the time of Jacob's trouble" when Daniel says "they have no hurt"?

In Dr. John W. Bradbury's foreword to the book of prophetic messages given at the New York Congress on Prophecy in 1942 he says: "Confusion is increasing among Christians with regard to trustworthy teaching of prophecy." So he adds that the committee chose "trusted Bible teachers." Of the 27 speakers I recognized one who now is a posttribulationist. What he was then I do not know. "Trusted" in this context usually means one who is a pretribulationist! But even their views were not always "trustworthy." Dr. W.H. Rogers said: "His coming for the Church is her only hope in these desperate days of apostasy." But Dr. Harry Ironside stated: "The apostasy will never come as long as the Christ-built Church is in the world." Yes, Dr. Bradbury was right. "Confusion is increasing."

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer at the same conference said that entire nations will be sent into everlasting fire if they have been unfriendly to Israel! Would that include Russia which surely contains some Christians? Would that include Syria which is killing Jews today? Surely there are Christians in Syria. Is that your conception of a God of justice? Just who are the "trustworthy" teachers of prophecy?

At the same conference Albert Lindsey, speaking about 1 Cor. 15:51-52 (...we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed...in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump...) remarked that the Bell Telephone Co. measured the wink of an eye at 11/100th of a second. He adds: "That reveals the speed and secrecy of the coming of Christ to the Church." Anyone with only one eye can see there is no reference here whatsoever to the speed or secrecy of Christ's coming. It plainly states how quickly

our earthly body , whether dead or alive, will be changed to a heavenly body. Even if it did speak of the speed of Christ's return, it would not be secret or unseen, for it is possible to see a wink. So who is confused?

Dr. Oswald J. Smith of Toronto is a man whom God has mightily used in his huge church and as a promoter of world missions. At least one thing we have in common. He started out as a pretribulationist and later became an ardent posttribulationist. He distributed many of my "Triumph Through Tribulation" in his church.

Quite a different reaction to this book came from Dr. John Bradbury, former editor of the Watchman-Examiner, to whom my father sent a copy. I quote from his reply to my father: "In our book reviews it is not possible for us to discuss controversial contents...Norman's argument touches so many controversial issues that it would take a book the size of his and perhaps larger to deal with them all. I do appreciate his mental capacities and research abilities but I am in complete disagreement with his posit that the ecclesia will pass through the Tribulation or even a part of it. It violates the doctrine of grace, every piece of typology in the Bible which relates to the subject, doctrinal consummations, and it is as exegetically unsound as post-millennial interpretation, employing similar arguments and temporizations. It leads to confusion of truth rather than its simplification. It serves no spiritual or moral exhortation. It divides Christians of like faith, without helping them." (Notice the wordy and dogmatic generalizations with not even one verse of proof).

A copy of "Triumph Through Tribulation" was sent to The King's Business in December of 1944. Their reply: "We make it a rule to accept only such advertising as we can endorse; and inasmuch as a review of your book would need to call attention to some points on which we differ seriously, it would seem best to omit the review and decline the advertising."

A San Diego pastor, Orson P. Jones, wrote me as follows: "Enclosed find 50 cents for which send me your book, 'Triumph Through Tribulation.' I expect to be swindled but you deserve something for heroism." He is still pastor of Grace Baptist Church though in his eighties. He has authored some very excellent posttribulation material. But I was not the one who "converted" him over!

In 1944 I published "Triumph Through Tribulation" when a pastor in New York. The names of the church and town were on the cover. In 1963 a man in Michigan, having heard of the book, wrote to the pastor of that church to ask for my new address. The pastor replied: "You wrote to me asking about a book which was written by a Norman Spurgeon MacPherson. The book, TRIUMPH THROUGH TRIBULATION, deals with a post-tribulation rapture of the Church. Therefore we do not agree with it. As a matter of fact we believe that the Bible teaches a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the believers in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now that you know our stand on this matter, this is the address of the writer...." Was the pastor's warning intelligent and effective? The Michigan friend ordered six copies, and later ten more!

A pastor in Lansing, Michigan who swung over to a posttribulation view wrote me: "It seems as though those brethren who know we believe the Church is to go through the Tribulation are determined to give us a foretaste of it now...I didn't realize that apparently godly men could lose all semblance of sanctity when one objects to their theory of pretribulation-rapturism. It has proved to me that their so-called 'purifying hope' has done little to purify their lives."

When I moved from South Dakota to Albuquerque 8 years ago an Illinois manufacturer who had already bought several hundred copies of "Triumph Through Tribulation" ordered 500 more, leaving me only about 50 and soon another person took the last 19. The recent book, "Tell It Like It Will Be", has not enjoyed as good sales. Frankly, I do not have the means to advertise it. Those who have read it and like it are my best advertisers!

Just recently a professor in a midwestern university who has widely recommended the book was a speaker at an interdenominational prophetic conference and arranged to have 100 copies of this book on the book table. Later he wrote me: "No doubt you will be pleased to learn that I recommended your book as the most accurate ever written, to my knowledge, in regard to the second advent of Christ." I replied that I considered this a gross exaggeration although it was obvious he considered it worthy of recommendation.

Now in closing this paper I would like to share with you the remarks of two very eminent authors who are not members of the confused-club to whom I have referred!

The first is Alexander Reese who wrote a masterful defense of posttribulationism entitled, "The Approaching Advent of Christ." This was the book that led me to abandon pretribulationism. I made several quotations from it in my first book. Reese's book was published by Marshall, Morgan and Scott of London, a favorable review of which appeared in The Life of Faith (London) in 1937. Many have asked me how they can secure a copy. I just learned that Kregel of Grand Rapids plans to republish it.

Let me quote from a letter from Reese written May 21, 1946 in Brazil where he was a Presbyterian missionary. Commenting on my book, "Triumph Through Tribulation", he said: "You were extremely happy in the choice of a title to your book, for it gives a positive ring to all you say; and I go all the way with you in your lucid and cogent treatment of the subject. When I published my own book I had the modest hope that I might influence teachers who in turn would write smaller and better books for the churches. Yours will do a great deal of good, for it is written in a fine spirit, and uses very close reasoning. May the Lord use it to guide His people in very difficult days."

Now may I quote from another missionary, James R. Graham, now in Taiwan after many years in China. Someone has said he is the most brilliant missionary who ever served in China. For a number of years before going to Taiwan he headed a fellowship in Los Angeles called Ambassadors for Christ at which time (1946) he wrote me a long letter, acknowledging receipt of a copy of "Triumph Through Tribulation" sent to him by pastor Jones of San Diego. Permit me to quote from his letter:

"I am greatly interested in the rising tide of revolt against the unscriptural doctrine of pretribulation rapture. We are yet a feeble few that stand against the current of American fundamentalism that is overwhelmingly in the saddle and continues to inject into the minds of God's simple ones this 19th-century invention, but we are increasing.

"I have been through your book this morning, and feel that you have done a thorough and admirable job of showing the utter fallacy of this theory. The reasons that you assign for the insistence of its proponents upon it are true and courteous to the last degree. It may be that my strictures upon this 'Ephraim that is joined to its idols' are a little more severe, or a little too severe. I confess I have no patience with these fellows like Ironside, Barnhouse, Chafer, the late Gaebelein, Pettingill etc....Thiessen I have much more respect for as a scholar and a Christian. I was associated with him in the Bible department of Wheaton College...

"True honesty, humility, and selflessness are the indispensable requisites of coming to this view. If one has a desire for popularity in fundamentalist circles, he signs his death-warrant when he embraces this view. It ceases therefore to be merely a matter of the head, but becomes a matter of the heart and the will. I hardly know an exception to the rule, that one who desires only the truth regardless only of the cost, and has no axe to grind, will heed what we have to say and come to it.

"The flaming anger that this view incites among those who hold it with unworthy motives is a proof of the weakness and falsity of it. I have never seen a business-like attempt to reply to a booklet such as yours on the part of any of the rapturists;.... I have come to the conclusion that the fiction of pretrib rapture is just one of the parts of the fabricated house of dispensationalism. When one becomes debunked on one part of it and goes on to study all parts of it, he finds that the rest is almost or altogether as fictitious or unfounded...I am sending you some of my other booklets which I would appreciate if you would look over prayerfully seeing whether these things are so...God make us voices that cry in the wilderness, alone if need be.. I would like to have a number of your books, 'Triumph Through Tribulation'. The people in our assembly here are very alert to these matters and read with great care all such material..."

I would add that he wrote a number of excellent pamphlets, his "Watchman, What of the Night?" being specially helpful to me. It may be out of print. He closes it on p.85 as follows: "If the Word says Antichrist must first appear and that he is himself a sign of the near advent of Christ, we must accept it. But our hope, our joyful anticipation is in 'the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ', even though like Paul and Peter we see an intervening valley of testing and tribulation. May God keep us faithful even unto death, that we may receive His crown of life."

In the earlier prophetic conferences the tribulation was no sharply divisive issue and men holding opposite views were speakers at the same conference. Distinguished posttribulation scholars like Dr. W.J.Erdman were on the same platform with Gaebelein and Scofield, in fact Dr. Erdman was a consulting editor of the Scofield Bible. But later those sponsoring such conferences wouldn't think of including posttribulational speakers. Men who believe the Bible is inspired should be able to cooperate in carrying out the great commission, remembering our Lord's word in Matt.24:14 ("And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come.") I agree with Paul there is but one gospel, and not 4 as Scofield taught, and God's people who believe that Gospel should be busy proclaiming it if they really want to see the "end", when Christ returns, arrive soon. A school that refuses a degree to a student who cannot subscribe to the school's view of the tribulation is a school that needs prayer.

Finally, I can do no better than quote from a message by Dr. Vance Havner given at Colonial Hills Prophetic Conference in Atlanta in 1944.

"Much as we believe prophetic truth, too often we have an argument but not a testimony...We are often starched and ironed but not washed...Our Pilgrim's Progress, too often includes Vanity Fair on its approved itinerary...If there is any Bible truth that walks hand in hand with prophecy, it certainly is God's call to holiness, and if we profess the Blessed Hope we should practise the Blessed Holiness...Many broken-hearted pastors...have gone to pieces trying to keep together groups of professing fundamentalists who remind us of that brand of matches that won't strike anywhere except on their own box; who write "JESUS ONLY" over their churches but have "US ONLY" written in their hearts... One reason why I want the Lord to come is that I may really have the joy of seeing brethren dwell together in unity...Many of us... occupy ourselves calling down fire on all Samaritans who do not dot all their i's and cross all their t's according to our private system. I have read of two war vessels that met in a fog and, after firing at each other for hours, discovered, when the fog lifted, that both flew the same flag! We are not pleading for unanimity on one hand, or for unification on the other.

"We are pleading for unity, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...Prophetic truth calls us to EVANGELIZATION. We are to hasten the coming of the day of God...It is possible to sit on the shore discussing the signs of the times when we ought to be driven by the signs of the times to launch out into the deep and let down our nets for a draught...Too many Christians come to church to rest at ease in Zion, while across their faces one can almost read that sign often seen on hotel room doors: 'Please do not disturb.' The power of the Spirit is a stimulant, not a sedative... During the reign of Oliver Cromwell the government ran out of silver coinage. Cromwell sent his men to a cathedral to see if they could find any silver. They reported: 'The only silver we can find is in the statues of the saints standing in the corners.' 'Good,' he replied, 'We'll melt down the saints and put them into circulation!' Certainly today the need of the hour is that the saints be melted down in revival fires and put into circulation winning the lost."

Finally, let me add what may sound self-contradictory. IT WILL COST US A PLENTY TO PROCLAIM A GOSPEL THAT IS FREE! In the early days Satan thought he could put out the fire by pouring upon it the blood of martyrs. But such use of force was futile and the blood of martyrs became the seed of the Church. Today he is more subtle and more successful by dividing believers over issues that are less than major. The world turns away in disgust when it sees Christians battling each other. Too many want a rosy pathway before us and therefore proclaim that the great tribulation is no blessed hope. No posttribulationist ever claimed that it is! But some pretribulationists give the impression that taking up a cross was alright for Christ but.....

Here is something that I read the other day:

WHEN EVERYTHING IS COMING YOUR WAY
YOU ARE PROBABLY IN THE WRONG LANE

Yours, hoping we'll be found faithful when He comes,

Norman S. MacPherson

WANT MORE COPIES OF THIS?

\$.35 a copy, postpaid, or 4 for \$1.00.

Our book, "Tell It Like It Will Be" - still \$1.00, postpaid

Send \$2.75 for this \$4.00 book to Heart of America Bible Society, 5528 Lydia St., Kansas City, Mo. 64110.

Our son, Dave MacPherson, just published a book entitled "The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin", the result of careful research on both sides of the Atlantic. Prof. J.Barton Payne of Covenant Theological Seminary, author of Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, in a review of Dave's book, said: "MacPherson's small book is the most in-depth study yet to be made available on the historical origins of pretribulationism."

For N.S.MacPherson's material, write to

N.S.MacPherson - 516 Doe Lane S.E. - Albuquerque, N.M. 87123