

# ***The Blessed Hope***

*A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture*

George Eldon Ladd

Review by Barbara Buzzard

“The second coming of Jesus Christ is an absolutely indispensable doctrine in the Biblical teaching of redemption. Apart from His glorious return, God’s work will forever be incomplete.”<sup>1</sup> Prof. Ladd’s premise is set out early on, thoroughly and non-negotiably throughout this amazing little book. George Ladd was a Professor of New Testament Theology at Fuller Seminary. With the current confusion among churchgoers, I should think that this book should be required reading, as it provides opportunity not only to bless yourself, but your neighbor as well. Even just a little time perusing this book could be an amazing experience, clarifying, challenging, and even revealing of the rather desperate measures to avoid the reality of the second coming. While I shall have to quote widely and also to summarize factual statements, it is also my desire to tell the story, for there is an amazing story here, accompanied by international intrigue. Let the story begin.

## **Serious Matters**

“The second coming of Christ is thus both the Blessed Hope of the Church and the hope of human history....The central thesis of this book is that the Blessed Hope is the second coming of Jesus Christ and not a pre-tribulation rapture.”<sup>2</sup> Reams and reams have been written to persuade us that the church will be removed from the earth prior to the Great Tribulation. Persuasive, says Ladd, but if it happens not to agree with Scripture, it is dangerous for that very reason. And also, of course, because this notion appeals to our desire to be “out of here.”

To put this matter in perspective. Prof. Ladd takes us on a survey of the historic hope of the church and finds this: “The hope of the Church throughout the early centuries was the second coming of Christ, not a pretribulation rapture. If the Blessed Hope is in fact, a pretribulation rapture, then the Church has never known that hope through most of its history, *for the idea...did not appear until the nineteenth century*” (emphasis mine).

Ladd carefully records the feelings and expectations of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Lactantius, and Hippolytus; every church father expects the church to be on the earth when the Antichrist is exposed. The first three centuries were characterized by this futurist, pre-millennial vision. “The prevailing view is a posttribulation premillennialism. We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early church; and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century.”<sup>3</sup>

He then examines the Middle Ages. It is imperative that we understand that it was Augustine’s amillennial view that the thousand years began with Jesus earthly life which came to be the dominant interpretation, his “spiritualizing” of Revelation. As with drama, we are lost without knowing who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. Did Augustine add light or did he do away with Scripture as written?

## **The Rise and Spread of Pretribulationism**

The story continues in the nineteenth century with increased interest in prophecy in England and from this arose several conferences and a movement to study prophecy. (And it is good to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Blessed Hope*, George Eldon Ladd, p. 6

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 11

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31

remember that it is every word of Scripture that is critical, not just those happy texts.) “It was at Powerscourt that the teaching of a pretribulation rapture of the Church took shape. Tregelles...tells us that the idea of a secret rapture at a secret coming of Christ had its origin in an ‘utterance’ in Edward Irving’s church, and that this was taken to be the voice of the Spirit...It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God.”<sup>4</sup>“It was at Powerscourt that the teaching of a pretribulation rapture of the Church took shape. Tregelles, a member of the Brethren in these early days, tells us that the idea of a secret rapture at a secret coming of Christ had its origin in an ‘utterance’ in Edward Irving’s church, and that this was taken to be the voice of the Spirit. Tregelles says, ‘It was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose. It came not from Holy Scripture, but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God.’”<sup>5</sup>

### **The Incredible Cover-Up**

This is more fully documented in *The Incredible Cover-Up*: “Marvelous light was shed upon Scripture, and especially on the doctrine of the second Advent, by the revived spirit of prophecy. In the following account by Miss M.M--, of an evening during which the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her for several successive hours, in mingled prophecy and vision, we have an instance; for here we first see the distinction between that final stage of the Lord’s coming, when every eye shall see Him and his prior appearing in glory to them that look for Him.”<sup>6</sup> The author - quoting this points out two *astonishing admissions*: 1) a two-stage coming, and 2) *the first time this was revealed*. He also points out that Margaret Macdonald at first felt there was great darkness and error about it, but suddenly a glorious light convinced her. Each truth-seeker must decide whether this was marvelous light or at best, wishful thinking. 2 Thess. 2:2b warns against believing those who have had visions which don’t tally with what they have been taught.

### **From Scotland to England to America**

J. N. Darby came to America from the UK several times in the 1800s. He is responsible for Darbyism, or dispensationalism, which had its beginnings in the Brethren Church. He presented a system of basic futurism which was widely and eagerly adopted because it seemed to be a recovery of sound biblical truth. But with it came the pretribulation rapture. Some accepted it; some accepted it at first, only to give it up upon further study. In fact, it was widely accepted at first and later given up by many of the most prominent leaders of the prophetic movement. Prof. Ladd’s answer as to why this was so: a simple historical fact, i.e. “The two doctrines were thought by most of the teachers to be synonymous; but the emphasis was placed on the Lord’s return, not on such details as the relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation. Pretribulationism was accepted ‘uncritically’ along with a sound premillennialism.”<sup>7</sup>

One who reversed his opinion on the matter had this to say: “It is mortifying to remember that I not only held and taught these novelties myself, but that I even enjoyed a complacent sense of superiority because thereof, and regarded with feelings of pity and contempt those who had not received the ‘new light’ and were unacquainted with this up-to-date method of rightly dividing the word of truth...*The time came...when the inconsistencies and self-contradictions of the system itself, and above all, the impossibility of reconciling its main positions with the plain statement of the Word of God, became so glaringly evident that I could not do otherwise than to renounce it.*”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> S.P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ’s Second Coming*, 1864

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 40, 41, quoted from *The Hope of Christ’s Second Coming*, S. P. Tregelles

<sup>6</sup> *The Incredible Cover-Up*, Dave MacPherson, p. 37

<sup>7</sup> *The Blessed Hope*, p. 51

<sup>8</sup> *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, Philip Mauro, emphasis mine.

This courageous act of repenting of error and unscriptural teachings is tragically rare. In fact – the very fact that someone can change their mind on something so important makes them great in my book. The act of renouncing Scriptural error is a wonderful and necessary act of conscience and courage. All too common is the philosophy of not rocking the boat, not causing a disturbance, just moving on and the casualty is Truth – *and character*.

This pretribulation rapture, did not sweep England in the same way as it did in the U.S. This writer and family came to the U.S. from England in 1981 and were most perplexed when seeing a bumper sticker which read: “In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned.” Coming from England where we had never heard of such a thing, we thought it was some sort of joke.

### **How Do We Get to Be with Jesus?**

Though the Scofield Reference Bible promotes the pretribulation rapture and speaks of two comings, a consulting editor, W.G. Moorehead said this: “What becomes of (the saints) and of the Lord whom they encounter in the air (at the Rapture)? Do they abide there? No, their stay in the air is but brief, --momentary. There are only two other places in the New Testament where the phrase ‘to meet’ occurs...and in both of them the party met continues to advance still in the direction in which he was moving previously. Augustine perceived this: ‘It is as He is coming, not abiding, that we shall go to meet Him.’ Christ does not return to heaven with His saints; He comes on with them to the earth.”<sup>9</sup>

Prof. Ladd: “Certainly if one can make anything of language at all, no distinction can be made between the parousia, the apocalypse, and the epiphany of our Lord. They are one and the same event.”<sup>10</sup> He views the distinction between the return and the second coming as unwarranted, unbiblical, artificial, and impossible. His findings are that “The Word of God nowhere says that the Rapture will precede the Tribulation.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Moving the Resurrection?**

“According to pretribulationism the resurrection of the righteous will occur before the Great Tribulation takes place.”<sup>12</sup> This would demand two stages of the resurrection, a fact unknown in Scripture, an assumption as Ladd says, completely unsupported by Scripture and a contradiction of Rev. 20.

Ladd is quick to explain that the church will never experience the wrath of God. He speaks of being “divinely sheltered.” It is a godless society who are to suffer this wrath. Deliverance is what we are to pray for, and also it is what is promised when we are told that: “I will keep you out of the hour of trial.” God never would confuse His judgments.

### **Truth or a Well-Established Tradition?**

Ladd’s conclusion of the matter is this: “The one question ultimately must be, What does the Word of God actually teach? And not, What have men taught?”<sup>13</sup> Yes, Ladd acknowledges that a pretrib rapture is well entrenched in our society. He urges us to look at its roots, its origins, and compare it critically with Scripture. Ask how and when we get to be with Jesus. The answer is profoundly obvious: when Jesus comes with all splendor and power and authority, with commanding shouts and trumpets, and calls of archangels, and dead being raised. (1 Thess. 4:15, 16). We don’t look forward to a secret coming for we are to love his appearing (Titus 2:13).

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<sup>9</sup> *The Blessed Hope*, p. 50

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137

### Consider

This is my own analysis. Consider just exactly what it is a Christian would have to subscribe to in order to accept a pretribulation rapture:

- 1) That *it is not* the Revelation of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:7) that we are waiting for, but the rapture. “Dis-assembling” is required here!
- 2) The resurrection/ Second Coming is divided into two.
- 3) The 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet *is not* the same as the last trumpet. More dis-assembling.
- 4) This rapture is *secret*, despite trumpets, dead being raised, angels calling, flaming fire, etc.
- 5) We receive our relief *not* according to 2 Thess. 1:7, 8, but at an earlier time.
- 6) It is *not* true that the antichrist must come first, as in 2 Thess. 2:2, 3.
- 7) Jesus is only speaking to Jews in Matt. 24, Luke 21 and Mark 13.
- 8) Acceptance of the fact that this pretribulation rapture was not known until the 1800s.
- 9) Two “second” comings (Parousias).

### Conclusion

Ladd’s summary statement: “The idea of a pretribulation rapture was not seen in the Scriptures by the early church fathers. They were futurists and premillennialists but not pretribulationists. This of itself indicates that pretribulationism and premillennialism are not identical and that the Blessed Hope is not the hope of a rapture before the Tribulation. Pretribulationism was an unknown teaching until the rise of the Plymouth Brethren among whom the doctrine originated. From this source, it has come to America where, although warmly received by some, it has been rejected by other devout students of the Word, or has been at first accepted and later rejected by others...The vocabulary of the Blessed Hope knows nothing of two aspects of Christ’s coming, one secret and one glorious...Scripture says nothing about a secret coming of the Lord.”<sup>14</sup> I say - let it be “left behind”!

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 162