

Pretribulationist Revisionism

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In his 1992 book "Apocalypse," Grant Jeffrey made the astounding claim that some Early Church writers taught an imminent pretribulation rapture. He then selectively quoted several early Christian authors in an attempt to bolster his claim. For many years, posttribulationist authors have quoted these very same authors to illustrate that the early Christians were posttribulationists! Other pretribulationist authors and scholars have acknowledged that the early Christians were entirely posttribulationists. Grant Jeffrey is the first to my knowledge to make the outrageous claim that the Early Church Fathers taught an imminent pretribulation rapture.

Jeffrey's revisionist technique was to selectively quote short excerpts that allow him to apply a pretribulation "spin," while omitting sentences in the immediate context that show belief in a posttribulation rapture/resurrection. In chapter four, Jeffrey stated the following.

"The Early Church's Belief in an Imminent Rapture

*Some of the early Church writers wrote about the persecution of the tribulation as if the saints will be present. However, a number of early Christian commentaries suggested that the Church will be delivered supernaturally before the Great Tribulation. Some posttribulation writers declare that the hope of a pretribulation Rapture and deliverance from the Great Tribulation was never taught until the Plymouth Brethren began to emphasize this around 1820. As this chapter will show, there is a great deal of evidence to illustrate that some writers in the first few centuries of the Church believed in Christ rapturing the saints to deliver them from this coming Tribulation. The doctrine of the imminent Rapture was clearly taught in the New Testament and by some writers in the first centuries of the early Church. There was a difference of opinion within the early Church about the timing of the Rapture just as we find today. However, the hope of the imminent Rapture clearly existed in the writings of the early Church."*¹

The above statements by Jeffrey are dead wrong. None of the early Christian writers indicated a belief in an imminent pretribulation rapture. There is no evidence whatever of a debate in the early Church regarding the timing of the rapture! Posttribulationism was the only rapture view espoused by any of the writers of the Ante-Nicene period (from the Apostles until the council of Nicea in 325AD). The only eschatological debate that developed concerned the Millennium, and whether the blessings associated with it were to be literally understood. The early Christians believed in a future, literal 70th

week, a literal Antichrist, and a single coming of Jesus after the tribulation to raise the dead saints, rapture the living saints, and destroy the Antichrist. Jeffrey boldly manipulated these authors in an attempt to portray them as pretribulationists. His treatment of this issue is the most blatant pretribulationist revisionism I have ever seen.

The Didache (1st or Early 2nd Century)

On page 87, Grant Jeffrey commented on the Didache, an anonymous Christian document. Jeffrey actually quoted most of the chapter, but omitted key sentences which show the author of the Didache was not teaching a pretribulation rapture at all. The way Grant Jeffrey presents his quote, it appears to imply a pretribulation rapture. But, if you include the parts he omitted, it is quite clear that the author of the Didache was not a pretribulationist, but was warning Christians about their testing in the tribulation. Below is the quote from page 87 from Jeffrey's 'Apocalypse.' Following that, I have included the same quote, but with the words Jeffrey omitted re-inserted in red type.

"A Church manual from approximately A.D. 110, called the "Didache," confirms the belief of these Christians in the imminent return of Christ for believers. This was written less than fifteen years after John wrote the Revelation. In the Didache 16, we find the following instructions.

'1 Be ye watchful for your life! Let not your lamps be extinguished, nor your loins ungirded, but be ye ready! For ye know not the hour in which your Lord cometh. 2. Assemble yourselves frequently, seeking what is fitting for your souls. For the whole time of your faith will not be profitable to you, if you are not made perfect in the last time...then the world deceiver shall appear as a son of god and shall work signs and wonders... 6. And then shall the signs of the truth appear, first the sign of a rift in heaven; then the sign of the sound of a trumpet, and the thirdly, a resurrection of the dead. 7. But not of all, but as it was said, 'The Lord will come and all His saints with Him. 8. Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.'...

*After warning Christians to prepare for "the hour in which your Lord cometh," the Didache said, "Then, the world-deceiver shall appear." This order of events suggests the Rapture will precede the appearance of the world-deceiver, the Antichrist."*²

In Jeffrey's truncated version of the Didache, and his analysis of it, the illusion of a secret rapture is developed from the exhortation to "watch" for the coming of the Lord (if one supposes, as Jeffrey does, that "watching" automatically implies an any-moment advent). Jeffrey points out that the "watching" is prior to the appearance of Antichrist, and so infers a pretribulation rapture, even though the passage never mentions a

pretribulation coming. Now, here is the same quote, with the portions Jeffrey omitted reinserted in red type.

*"Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh. But often shall ye come together, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if ye be not made perfect in the last time. **For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increaseth, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another,** and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, **and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself.** And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first, the sign of an out-spreading in heaven; then the sign of the sound of the trumpet; and the third, the resurrection of the dead; yet not of all, but as it is said: The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him. Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven."*³

I find the first omission very interesting. Notice, the word "for" beginning the omitted part. When the author of the Didache wrote, "... the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if ye be not made perfect in the last time. **For, in the last days ...**" he was explaining the preceding phrase, "the last time," during which Christians would be "made perfect." Obviously, he was saying that Christians will encounter what he calls "the last time." Then he gave an explanation of what he meant by "the last time." The omitted portion is a paraphrase of Matthew 24:9-15, where Jesus warned of the coming tribulation. The author of the Didache was saying that Christians' faith will be tested during "the last time," which he derived from Matthew 24's tribulation.

The second omission is just as bad because the last sentence shows that those whom the author was exhorting to "watch" will indeed encounter this period of persecution under Antichrist. "They that endure in their faith" during the persecution of Antichrist are the same ones he exhorted to be "watching" for the coming of the Lord, and who would be "made perfect in the last time" (which consists of the events of the tribulation that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24)! Also, notice in the last sentence that the author of the Didache placed the trumpet sound, and the resurrection of believers, **after** the time of Antichrist. Yet, Jeffrey thinks nothing of claiming the author of the Didache as a pretribulationist! His use of the words "for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh" to imply an imminent pretribulation rapture is an old trick. The author's paraphrase of Matthew

24:9-15 shows that he was following the Olivet Discourse. And this quote from which Jeffrey derives his pretribulation rapture comes from the same passage. Jesus said, "but of that day and hour knows no man" (Matt. 24:36). The question is, WHAT "day or hour" was Jesus (and the Didache) referring to? The answer is found in verses 29-31, "immediately after the tribulation ... they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Jesus clearly had His posttribulation coming in view when He said that no one knows the "day or hour." So, when the author of the Didache quoted these words, there is no reason to assume that he meant something other than what Jesus said! Jeffrey interpreted these words of Jesus as modern pretribulationists do, rather than in their context. By injecting the modern pretribulationist concept of "any moment" imminence into this statement, and omitting the parts that expose his scheme, Jeffrey was able to give an illusion of a pretribulation rapture.

The Epistle of Barnabas (2nd Century)

In the same chapter, Jeffrey also claimed the Epistle of Barnabas teaches an imminent, pretribulation rapture. True to form, he omitted the sentences that show the writer expected Christians to go through the tribulation, giving the appearance of an imminent rapture.

"This epistle clearly conveys the writers hope of the imminent return of Christ to take the saints to heaven.

"The final stumbling-block 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. We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger, as becometh sons of God.'"⁴

Here is how this passage reads with the portions Jeffrey omitted.

*"The final stumbling-block 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 the like manner Daniel says concerning the same, "And I beheld the fourth beast, wicked and powerful, and the 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 ten horns. ... We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole time of your*

*faith will profit you nothing, unless now in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger, as becometh sons of God. **That the Black One may find no means of entrance, let us flee from every vanity, let us utterly hate the works of the way of wickedness.***"

Notice that Grant Jeffrey omitted the part that clearly speaks of the tribulation, the ten kings, and the Antichrist. The sentence following, which Jeffrey included, is actually referring to the tribulation just described, which Jeffrey omitted. "We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole [past] time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless **now in this wicked time** we also withstand coming sources of danger..." In context we see that Barnabas was warning Christians about withstanding the onslaught of the Antichrist, which later he calls "the Black One." The whole force and intended meaning of Barnabas' warning is lost because of Grant Jeffrey's omissions. His editing job leaves the impression that "this wicked time" meant the days they were living in. When in reality, it referred to the tribulation Barnabas had just described (but omitted by Jeffrey)! By omitting this description of the trial of the Church by Antichrist, Jeffrey gave the illusion that Barnabas was indicating an pretribulation rapture which they could expect at any moment. Yet, in context we see that Barnabas was doing nothing of the kind. Rather, he was exhorting the believers to be watchful, because the whole tribulation scenario could unfold soon. And like Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 24, Christians should be watching His posttribulation coming with their lamps trimmed, (Matt. 24:29-33 & 25:1-13).

The Shepherd of Hermas (2nd Century)

On page 90, Grant Jeffrey claimed the Shepherd of Hermas teaches a pretribulation rapture. He quoted the following passage to prove his point, and then gave his assessment.

"Thou hast escaped a great tribulation because thou hast believed and at the sight of such a huge beast hast not doubted. Go therefore and declare to the Elect of the Lord His mighty deeds and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation which is to come. If ye therefore prepare yourselves and with your whole heart heart turn to the Lord in repentance, then shall ye be able to escape it, if your heart is pure and blameless.'

"After explaining to him that 'the golden colour stands for you who have escaped from the world,' the virgin concluded her message with, 'Now ye know the symbol of the great tribulation to come. But if ye are willing, it shall be nothing.' Despite the unusual details of this so-called vision, it clearly conveys the understanding of this early Christian writer that the faithful Church is promised a supernatural escape from the great tribulation."⁵

Jeffrey's out of context quotation may fool the average unsuspecting reader. But, for those who bother to look up and read the entire vision of Hermas, something entirely different awaits. It is quite apparent that Hermas did not mean total exemption or removal from the tribulation when he used the word "escape." Instead he meant survival, making it through the tribulation without succumbing to Satan's deception and attack, and without denying the Lord.

Consider Jeffrey's quote of Hermas in its context. The following are excerpts from the end of the Third Vision, and the Fourth Vision. Jeffrey's quotations are in black type, and the important parts he omitted I have again inserted in red type.

[Third Vision] *"**Happy ye who endure the great tribulation that is coming on, and happy they who shall not deny their own life. For the Lord hath sworn by His Son, that those who denied their Lord have abandoned their life in despair, for even now these are to deny Him in the days that are coming.**"*

[Fourth Vision] *"Has nothing crossed your path? I say, I was met by a beast of such a size that it could destroy peoples, but through the power of the Lord and His great mercy I escaped from it. Well did you escape from it, says she, because you cast your care on God, and opened your heart to the Lord, believing that you can be saved by no other than by His great and glorious name. On this account the Lord has sent His angel, who has rule over the beasts, and whose name is Thegri, **and has shut up its mouth, so that it cannot tear you.** 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 ye 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 ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly. ... I asked her about the four colors which the beast had on his head. And she answered, and said to me, Again you are inquisitive in regard to such matters. Yea, Lady, said I, make known to me what they are. Listen, said she: the black is the world in which we dwell: but the fiery and bloody points out that the world must perish through blood and fire: but the golden part are you who have escaped from this world. **For as gold is tested by fire, and thus becomes useful, so are you tested who dwell in it. Those, therefore, who continue steadfast, and are put through the fire, will be purified by means of it. For as gold casts away its dross, so also will ye cast away all sadness and straitness, and will be made pure** so as to fit into the building of the tower. ... This then is the type of the great tribulation that is to come. If ye wish it, it will be nothing."⁶*

It could not be clearer that Hermas expected Christians to go through the tribulation. Notice the beatitude, "Happy ye who endure the great tribulation that is coming on." In his vision he had to face the beast head on. Yet because of his faith, God did not allow the

beast to harm him. Clearly then, to "escape" the great tribulation means emerging from it safely, not being removed prior to it.

Grant Jeffrey's use of this out-of-context quotation from the Shepherd of Hermas, to infer a pretribulation rapture, recklessly misrepresents this passage.

Hippolytus (3rd Century)

Grant Jeffrey briefly alluded to the writings of Hippolytus as well. Here is what he wrote in its entirety.

*"Hippolytus, who lived from A.D. 170 to 236, was the most brilliant of the early Church writers. Writing in his Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, (section 66) about the Rapture he quoted extensively and approvingly from Paul's writing in 1 Thessalonians 4:12: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.' He reminds his readers of the hope of Christ's imminent return. He wrote that we should be 'looking for that blessed hope and appearing of our God and Savior' when having raised the saints among us, He will rejoice with them glorifying the Father."*⁷

The portion Jeffrey quoted above, in his attempt to turn Hippolytus into a pretribulationist, was the closing statement of a work which gave a great deal of information regarding the early Church's view of the rapture. It is unfortunate that Jeffrey only mentioned the closing statement. He incorrectly claimed that Hippolytus taught an imminent rapture. This is nowhere taught or implied in the writings of Hippolytus. Apparently, to Jeffrey, Hippolytus' quote of 1 Thessalonians 4 is an automatic indication that Hippolytus was a pretribulationist! But, this man, of whom Jeffrey says "was the most brilliant of the early Church writers," was as strong a posttribulationist as you can find today. Jeffrey's claims about this writer are not backed up by his quotations. There is nothing in Hippolytus' statement or quotation of 1 Thessalonians 4 that indicates he believed the rapture was pretribulational or imminent! Consider a few other quotes from Hippolytus.

*"When the times are fulfilled, and the ten horns spring from the beast in the last (times), then Antichrist will appear among them. When he makes war against the saints, and persecutes them, then may we expect the manifestation of the Lord from heaven."*⁸

"[I]t 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 that impious one shall be revealed; and whence and from what tribe (he shall

come); and what his name is, which is indicated by the number in Scripture; and how he shall work error 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.”⁹

“With respect to his name, it is not in our power to explain it exactly, as the blessed John understood it and was instructed about it, but only to give a conjectural account of it; **for when he appears, the blessed one will show us what we seek to know.** ... Wherefore we ought neither to give it out as if this were certainly his name, nor again ignore the fact that he may not otherwise be designated. But having the mystery of God in our heart, we ought in fear to keep faithfully what has been told us by blessed prophets, in order that **when those things come to pass, we may be prepared for them, and not be deceived.** For when the times advance, he too, of whom these things are said, will be manifest.”¹⁰

“Now concerning **the tribulation of the persecution which is to fall upon the Church from the adversary,** John also speaks thus, “And I saw a great and wondrous sign in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, ... And to the woman were given two wings of a 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** These things then, being come to pass, beloved, and the one week being divided into two parts, and the abomination of desolation being manifested then, and the two prophets and forerunners of the Lord having finished their course, and the whole world finally approaching the consummation, **what remains but the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from heaven, for whom we have looked in hope.**”¹¹

One of the things that really bothered me about Jeffrey's Apocalypse book, was his comment at the end of the section where he quoted the Church Fathers. “Note that none of the writers quoted here suggests that the Church will experience the Great Tribulation and Mark of the Beast system of Antichrist.”¹² Anybody with one good eye can see that this statement is blatantly false. The quotes above from Hippolytus, as well as many others, prove this beyond dispute. Yet, Jeffrey continues to promote blatant lies.

Cyprian (3rd Century)

Grant Jeffrey also attempts to use Cyprian's writings to bolster his claim that the Church Fathers believed in an imminent rapture. His comments, and a brief quote from Cyprian, are as follows.

“Cyprian lived from A.D. 200 to 258, and wrote extensively on Christian doctrine. In his Epistle 55, chapter 7, he wrote about the belief in Christ’s ability to deliver the Church from the Antichrist’s tribulation.

‘Nor let any one of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by the fear of future persecution, or the coming of the threatening Antichrist, as not to be found armed for all things by the evangelical exhortations and precepts, and by the heavenly warnings. Antichrist is coming, but above him comes Christ also. The enemy goeth about and rageth, but immediately the Lord follows to avenge our sufferings and our wounds. The adversary is enraged and threatens, but there is One who can deliver us from his hands.’

Cyprian’s declaration that Christ ‘is One who can deliver us from his [Antichrist’s] hands’ suggests the possibility of the Church being raptured before the Tribulation period. It is significant that he did not write about enduring the persecution of the Antichrist. Rather, Cyprian promised that Christ ‘is One who can deliver us from his hands.’”¹³

Jeffrey's brief quote, and his analysis of Cyprian's writings, show a blatant disregard for the context in which this passage is found. Jeffrey's claims, *“he did not write about enduring the persecution of the Antichrist. Rather, Cyprian promised that Christ is One who can deliver us from his hands”* is gross misrepresentation. The *“delivering out of Antichrist’s hands”* clearly **does not** mean a pretribulation rapture, but safely emerging from the time of tribulation, without denying the Lord. Consider the quote Jeffrey used, this time in its context. As before, the parts Jeffrey quoted are in black, and the rest I have reinserted in red. I have included Cyprian's remarks a few paragraphs before the passage in question because it clearly establishes the fact that he was speaking of the great tribulation. Please forgive the long quotation, but I think it is necessary to get the whole picture.

“For you ought to know and to believe, and hold it for certain, that the day of affliction has begun to hang over our heads, and the end of the world and the time of Antichrist to draw near, so that we must all stand prepared for the battle; nor consider anything but the glory of life eternal, and the crown of the confession of the Lord; and not regard those things which are coming as being such as were those which have passed away. A severer and a fiercer fight is now threatening, for which the soldiers of Christ ought to prepare themselves with uncorrupted faith and robust courage,

considering that they drink the cup of Christ's blood daily, for the reason that they themselves also may be able to shed their blood for Christ. For this is to wish to be found with Christ, to imitate that which Christ both taught and did, according to the Apostle John, who said, "He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked." Moreover, the blessed Apostle Paul exhorts and teaches, saying, "We are God's children; but if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."...

"Nor let any one of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by the fear of future persecution, or the coming of the threatening Antichrist, as not to be found armed for all things by the evangelical exhortations and precepts, and by the heavenly warnings. Antichrist is coming, but above him comes Christ also. The enemy goeth about and rageth, but immediately the Lord follows to avenge our sufferings and our wounds. The adversary is enraged and threatens, but there is One who can deliver us from his hands. He is to be feared whose anger no one can escape, as He Himself forewarns, and says: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." And again: "He that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." And in the Apocalypse He instructs and forewarns, saying, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, mixed in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments shall ascend up for ever and ever; and they shall have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image." For the secular contest men are trained and prepared, and reckon it a great glory of their honor if it should happen to them to be crowned in the sight of the people, and in the presence of the emperor. Behold a lofty and great contest, glorious also with the reward of a heavenly crown, inasmuch as God looks upon us as we struggle, and, extending His view over those whom He has condescended to make His sons, He enjoys the spectacle of our contest. God looks upon us in the warfare, and fighting in the encounter of faith; His angels look on us, and Christ looks on us. How great is the dignity, and how great the happiness of the glory, to engage in the presence of God, and to be crowned, with Christ for a judge! Let us be armed, beloved brethren, with our whole strength, and let us be prepared for the struggle with an uncorrupted mind, with a sound faith, with a devoted courage. Let the camp of God go forth to the battle- field which is appointed to us. Let the sound ones be armed, lest he that is sound should lose the advantage of having lately stood; let the lapsed also be armed, that even the lapsed may regain what he has lost: let honor provoke the whole; let sorrow

*provoke the lapsed to the battle. The Apostle Paul teaches us to be armed and prepared, saying, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against powers, and the princes of this world and of this darkness, against spirits of wickedness in high places. Wherefore put on the whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand in the most evil day, that when ye have done all ye may stand; having your loins girt about with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Let us take these arms, let us fortify ourselves with these spiritual and heavenly safeguards, that in the most evil day we may be able to withstand, and to resist the threats of the devil: let us put on the breastplate of righteousness, that our breast may be fortified and safe against the darts of the enemy: let our feet be shod with evangelical teaching, and armed, so that when the serpent shall begin to be trodden and crushed by us, he may not be able to bite and trip us up: let us bravely bear the shield of faith, by the protection of which, whatever the enemy darts at us may be extinguished: let us take also for protection of our head the helmet of salvation, that our ears may be guarded from hearing the deadly edicts; that our eyes may be fortified, that they may not see the odious images; that our brow may be fortified, so as to keep safe the sign of God; that our mouth may be fortified, that the conquering tongue may confess Christ its Lord: let us also arm the right hand with sword of the Spirit, that it may bravely reject the deadly sacrifices; that, mindful of the Eucharist, the hand which has received the Lord's body may embrace the Lord Himself, hereafter to receive from the Lord the reward of heavenly crowns. **Oh, what and how great will that day be at its coming, beloved brethren, when the Lord shall begin to count up His people, and to recognize the deservings of each one by the inspection of His divine knowledge, to send the guilty to Gehenna, and to set on fire our persecutors with the perpetual burning of a penal fire, but to pay to us the reward of our faith and devotion!"** ¹⁴*

For the life of me, I can't understand how Grant Jeffrey can get an imminent pretribulation rapture out of this passage. Even the out of context quote he provided does not suggest an imminent rapture, as Jeffrey claims. His riding roughshod over these ancient witnesses demonstrates a calloused disregard for context. The context is all about Christians being spiritually prepared to endure the tribulation.

Victorinus (3rd Century)

Grant Jeffrey also claims that Victorinus' Commentary on Revelation supports a pretribulation rapture. Jeffrey's comments, from Apocalypse pg. 89, are as follows;

“Victorinus, bishop of Petau, lived from A.D. 240 till his martyrdom during the last great persecution in A.D. 304. In His Commentary on the Apocalypse he interpreted chapter 6 of the Revelation to promise the deliverance of the Church from the tribulation period.

“‘And the heaven withdrew as a scroll that is rolled up.’ For the heaven to be rolled away, that is, that the Church shall be taken away. ‘And the mountains and islands removed from their places; that is, that the good will be removed, seeking to avoid the persecution.”

In his comments on chapter 15, Victorinus wrote,

‘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.’

These comments reveal that this second century pastor also understood that the saints would be “removed” to escape the wrath of God “when the Church shall have gone out of the midst” of the coming tribulation.”¹⁵

Like most posttribulationists today, Victorinus did not interpret the seals, trumpets, and vials, chronologically (as pretribulationists do). He believed they overlapped, the last of each series converging on the coming of Christ. He believed the sixth seal would occur at the end of the tribulation.

*“[A]lthough the same thing recurs in the phials [vials], still it is not said as if it occurred twice, but because what is decreed by the Lord to happen shall be once for all; for this cause it is said twice. What, therefore, He said too little in the trumpets, is here found in the phials [vials]. **We must not regard the order of what is said, because frequently the Holy Spirit, when He has traversed even to the end of the last times, returns again to the same times, and fills up what He had before failed to say. Nor must we look for order in the Apocalypse; but we must follow the meaning of those things which are prophesied.**”¹⁶*

The cosmic signs associated with this seal, the darkening of the sun and moon, are the same signs Jesus said would occur “immediately after the tribulation” (cf. Matt. 24:29 & Rev. 6:12-14). So, when Victorinus wrote; “the Church shall be taken away,” at the sixth seal, he is confirming what Jesus said in Matthew 24:29-31. When the sun and moon are

darkened, Jesus will gather together "His elect." But, this is clearly in a posttribulation context. Below is the context of Jeffrey's quote. The portion Jeffrey quoted is in black, and the relevant parts he omitted are again in red.

12. *"And I saw, when he had opened the sixth seal, there was a great earthquake." In the sixth seal, then, was a great earthquake: this is that very last persecution. "And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair." The sun becomes as sackcloth; that is, the brightness of doctrine will be obscured by unbelievers.*

"And the entire moon became as blood." By the moon of blood is set forth the Church of the saints as pouring out her blood for Christ.

13. *"And the stars fell to the earth." The falling of the stars are the faithful who are troubled for Christ's sake. "Even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs." The fig-tree, when shaken, loses its untimely figs — when men are separated from the Church by persecution.*

14. *"And the heaven withdrew as a scroll that is rolled up." For the heaven to be rolled away, that is, that the Church shall be taken away. "And every mountain and the islands were moved from their places." Mountains and islands removed from their places intimate that in the last persecution all men departed from their places; that is, that the good will be removed, seeking to avoid the persecution."¹⁷*

Victorinus was using a bit of allegorical interpretation in the above passage (something that began to be widespread in the fourth century - leading to a-millennialism). But, it is clear that he did not expect the Church to be raptured before the tribulation. He spoke of the persecution of the Church, pouring out her blood **during the tribulation**. I wonder why Grant Jeffrey omitted this part?

The final portion Jeffrey quoted from this author, deals with the bowls of wrath, which occur at the extreme end of the tribulation, just prior to Armageddon.

"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."¹⁸

Unfortunately, the ancient manuscripts of Victorinus' commentary are missing the pages that follow this comment. So, it is impossible to place this quotation in a context. But, since Victorinus is clearly speaking about the bowls of wrath, which posttribulationists believe occur at the extreme end of the tribulation, perhaps covering only the last few days or hours, his comments could not in any way imply a pretribulation rapture. At best, they could support a pre-wrath rapture. But even that is

a bit of a stretch, because Victorinus did not interpret the seals, trumpets, and vials sequentially, as both pretribulationists and pre-wrathers do. He viewed them as overlapping, and converging at the second coming. So, even with the above statement that seems to imply that the Church would be removed during the vials, in no way can we get a pretribulation rapture from Victorinus! I think a few other quotes from this same commentary are in order, to show Victorinus' belief that the Church will go through the tribulation.

*"He speaks of Elias the prophet, who is the precursor of the times of Antichrist, for **the restoration and establishment of the churches from the great and intolerable persecution.**"¹⁹*

*"The woman clothed with the sun, and having the moon under her feet, and wearing a crown of twelve stars upon her head, and travailing in her pains, **is the ancient Church of fathers, and prophets, and saints, and apostles.**"²⁰*

*"Moreover, he himself shall contrive that his servants and children should receive as a mark on their foreheads, or on their right hands, the number of his name, lest any one should buy or sell them.... [T]he Lord, admonishing **His churches concerning the last times** and their dangers, says: "But when ye shall see the contempt which is spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place, let him who readeth understand."²¹*

*"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.**"²²*

The last quote, from chapter 20, shows that Victorinus did not interpret the Millennium literally. He apparently believed the 1,000 years spoken of in Rev. 20 meant the age in which we live. (This view is held by amillennialists today, which was being developed about the time of Victorinus). Nevertheless, Victorinus clearly indicated in this passage that he believed the Church would be persecuted by the Antichrist. Victorinus' words do not indicate a belief in a pretribulation rapture, as Jeffrey suggests.

On page 91, Jeffrey listed another quotation he said comes from "Lactantius' Commentary on the Apocalypse." He then proceeded to quote the very same passage he had previously attributed to "Victorinus' Commentary on the Apocalypse" on page 89! I don't know how this mistake was made, but, Lactantius did not write a commentary on Revelation. Was Jeffrey trying to make it appear that he had even more ancient "pretribulation" writers? One might suspect that this was just an editing error. But, Jeffrey made another identical major blunder, by listing the "Didache" on page 87, and his quote from it, and then on page 91, listing "The Teaching of the Twelve

Apostles,” and the very same quote again, but from a different translation! These are exactly the same document. (The word “Didache” is the Greek word for “Teaching” and is the abbreviated name for “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.” Jeffrey quoted both of these passages twice, both times using different names or titles, as though this added more to his pile of evidence! Are these simply editing errors? Or, is there something more going on here?

Grant Jeffrey has forced his own ideas into the writings of the Church Fathers. He was determined to find evidence that a pretribulation rapture was taught prior to the 19th century. Here are Jeffrey’s own words which are very revealing of his motives.

“Over the last decade I came to the conclusion that the pretribulation rapture is taught so clearly in the New Testament that it is virtually impossible that no one ever taught this doctrine in the 18 centuries before 1830.”²³

It looks like Grant Jeffrey was so determined to find his evidence, he manufactured it.

Notes:

1. Jeffrey, Grant, Apocalypse, pp. 86, 87
2. Jeffery, Apocalypse, p. 87
3. Didache, 16
4. Jeffery, Apocalypse, p. 92
5. Jeffrey, Apocalypse, p. 90
6. The Shepherd of Hermas, Vision III, IV
7. Jeffrey, Apocalypse, pg. 88
8. Hippolytus, Fragments from Commentaries, II, 7
9. Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 5
10. Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 50
11. Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 60, 61, 64
12. Jeffrey, Apocalypse, p. 91
13. Jeffery, Apocalypse, p. 88
14. The Epistles of Cyprian, LV, 1, 7-10
15. Jeffrey, Apocalypse, pg. 90, 91
16. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 7
17. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 6
18. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 15
19. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 19
20. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 12
21. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 13
22. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, 20
23. Ice, Thomas & Demy, Timothy, When the Trumpet Sounds, pg. 108