

CAESARIUS AND ASPRINGIUS: REFUTING THE FALSE CLAIMS OF PRETRIBBERS

I. DISCOVERING DISPENSATIONALISM

- A. Up until this book, *Dispensationalism Before Darby* was the only book out there to argue that a pretribulational rapture was taught before John N. Darby.
- B. *Discovering Dispensationalism* surveys church history to show that various ideas central to dispensationalism have always been common, and the amount of space and discussion dedicated to the Pretribulational Rapture in the book is relatively minor. Unfortunately, William C. Watson was selected to address this topic, which he does in Chapter 5.
 - 1) as we saw in the last session, Watson is not a careful scholar or theologian. His book has been widely criticized as being filled with historical and category errors and sloppy analysis. He often claims to have found “clear” Pretribulational statements when none exist. In his chapter, he presents more examples in which he claims the writer held to a Pretribulational Rapture. **In this session, we will review each of Watson’s claims and show that not one was actually Pretrib**

II. PSEUDO-EPHRAIM

- A. Watson references the claim of a famous quote found in the writings of Pseudo-Ephraim. In a previous session we saw that Pseudo-Ephraim was simply saying that those who have already been gathered to the Lord **after death** will not see the coming Great Tribulation. He writes about it in his “Sermon on the Separation of the Soul and the Body.” Nevertheless, Watson states that Pseudo-Ephraim has left us a “clear presentation of a decidedly pre-tribulational rapture.”

III. CAESARIUS OF ARLES

- A. Watson claims that Caesarius of Arles taught a Mid-tribulational or Pretribulational Rapture. Here Watson crosses the line from his normal sloppiness into what appears to be dishonesty, editing Caesarius’s

comments to falsely create the impression of Pretribulationism. Watson cites Arle's Exposition of the Apocalypse, Homily 8, but removes the most pertinent sentence.

- 1) "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Come up hither!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud." The apostle spoke of this when he said, "We shall be caught in the clouds to meet Christ."
- William Watson, quoting Caesarius of Arles
 - 2) "Then I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Come up hither!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud." The apostle spoke of this when he said, "We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ." **It is written that this cannot happen to anyone before the coming of the Lord.** - Caesarius of Arles, Exposition on the Apocalypse, Homily 8
 - a) Caesarius is referring to [2 Thessalonians 2](#), where Paul says that the Day of the Lord will not happen until the revealing of the antichrist and the apostacy
- B. Watson makes a statement in place of the line he cut.
- 1) "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Come up hither!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud. The apostle spoke of this when he said, "We shall be caught in the clouds to meet Christ." **He also implied a mid-tribulation rapture was to be expected (or pre-trib if one considers only the last three and a half years as the Tribulation)...**" - William Watson
 - a) in other words, Watson is saying that Caesarius believed the rapture would happen before the 3 ½ years
- C. Elsewhere, Watson ignores several comments that do quite clearly express a Post-tribulation perspective.
- 1) ***When he opened the sixth seal, "there was a great earthquake," that is, the last persecution,*** "and the sun became black as sackcloth, and the full moon became like blood, and the stars fell to the earth." Whether it is the sun and moon or also the stars, ***the church is in view***, although a part is understood from the whole. For it is not the whole church that falls from heaven, but rather those in the church who are evil. ***The text speaks of the whole since the last persecution will occur throughout the lands of the earth. At that time those who are righteous will remain firm in the church as though they were in heaven.*** However, those who are full of avarice, the unrighteous and the adulterers will have consented to give sacrifice to the devil. Moreover, at that time those who call themselves Christians but are so only in name will fall from heaven, that is,

from the church, as though they were stars. “As the fig tree sheds its fruit when shaken by a mighty wind.” *The church is compared with a tree shaken by the wind, for the strong wind refers to persecution. The fruit refers to evil people, who will be cut off from or will leave the church.* - Caesarius of Arles, Exposition of the Apocalypse, Homily 6

- a) Caesarius clearly believed the church would be on the earth and endure the tribulation and he believed many who call themselves Christians will leave the church
- 2) “...*after this the sixth angel blew his trumpet.*” *From this point on the final preaching of the church begins.* “And I heard one of the four horns of the golden altar that is in the sight of God saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’” In the altar that is in the sight of God we are to understand the church. *In the time of the last persecution she will dare to despise the words and commands of that most inhumane of kings and will separate from those who have submitted to him.... “And the four angels were released.” This indicates that the persecution had commenced.* - Caesarius of Arles, Homily 7
- 3) “*And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to sound the trumpets.*” *This means that the church prepared herself for preaching.* - Caesarius of Arles, Exposition of the Apocalypse, Homily 6
- 4) “And the woman fled into the wilderness.” *With good reason we understand the wilderness to be this world, where to the end Christ guides and feeds the church.* - Caesarius of Arles, Exposition of the Apocalypse, Homily 9

IV. ASPRINGIUS OF BEJA

A. Watson’s next alleged pretrib find is in the writings of Aspringius of Beja. Yet again, Watson is seen to be either exceedingly sloppy or outright dishonest. Watson seems to have only done a very cursory reading of Aspringius, citing only his comments on [Revelation 3:10](#), a favorite verse of Pretribbers. First, let us note Watson’s bizarre logic:

- 1) “In his commentary on Revelation, he... anticipated a period when the Church will be removed prior to a period of testing upon the earth: ‘[John] is speaking not only of his own times, but also future ages. Moreover, he promises that [God] will preserve his church in the last times, when the demon, the enemy of the

human race, will come to tempt those who live on the earth.' It is worth point (sic) out that according to Aspringius, God will 'preserve his church' from 'the enemy of the human race' in contradistinction to 'those who live on earth, namely a different class of people who are tempted by the Antichrist. The clear implication is that 'his church' will not be 'on earth' during this horrific period." - William C. Watson

B. Beyond making transparently poor arguments, Watson also selectively ignores other clear Postribulational statements, including (once again) the line that immediately follows the portion he cites. Let's look at the fuller context. The portions that Watson cites are highlighted in yellow and the portions he ignored are emboldened:

1) [3:10] "Because you have kept the word of my patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of temptation that is coming on the whole world to tempt those who dwell on the earth." **Behold, he declares with the utmost clarity that he is speaking not only to his own times but also to future ages. Moreover, he promises that he will preserve his church in the last times, when the demon, the enemy of the human race, will come to tempt those who live on the earth.**

2) [3:11] **Lest they who live at that time be utterly confounded in that temptation, he says,** "Behold, I am coming soon; hold fast what you have; let no one take your crown." He foretells the suddenness of his advent and the quick destruction of Satan in the future. **Moreover, he says that the future temptation will not be long. And for that reason he admonishes them that the enemy not seize their crown...** - Aspringius of Beja, Explanation of the Revelation 3

C. Watson also ignored comments Aspringius had just a few lines previous:

1) [2:10] *He exhorts his church not to fear those "who kill the body, but afterward have nothing which they can do," ... For just as in the early period of the catholic church, after the banishment of the apostle, whose sayings these are, the sufferings continued and many tribulations were inflicted on the church, so we know that also in the future more sufferings will be inflicted when the antichrist arrives...* - Aspringius of Beja, Revelation 2:10

a) as it was in the apostolic period, so will it be in the end times: we will face persecution and the wrath of Satan