

Testing claims of Pretribulationism in the early Church

Part 1

Irenaeus

In 2021, Lee Brainard, an author and Bible teacher, presented a paper at the Pre-Trib Research Center with the bold title: “THE DEFENSE OF THE HISTORICAL FACT THAT THE REVELATIONAL TRUTH OF THE PRE-TRIB RAPTURE HAD STRONG TESTIMONY IN THE EARLY CHURCH”

In his presentation, Brainard claims that “the clear testimony of the early church” supports pre-tribulationism. He further stated that, “There is clear patristic ... testimony for the pre-trib rapture...”

Brainard specifically lists the early church writer Irenaeus as a “known” Pretribulationist. In all of my years of studies on this topic, I have never seen any scholar or authority make such a claim. Until Brainard’s presentation, it has been nearly universally recognized that Irenaeus expected the Church to face the Antichrist.

Consider a few examples:

“The Church Fathers believed that the Church would be on earth during the tribulation period. This is seen in the earliest writers and there is nothing in the other writers to contradict this. They speak of the persecution of the Church by the Antichrist and of the Church being on earth at the second advent of Christ.”

– Charles August Hauser, Jr., *The Eschatology of the Early Church Fathers*

“...the early fathers largely held to a period of persecution that would be ongoing when the return of the Lord takes place and most would see the church suffering through some portion of the tribulation period.”

—James Stitzinger, (Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Master’s Seminary), *The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation*

“The preponderance of evidence seems to support the concept that the early church did not clearly hold to a rapture as preceding the endtime tribulation period.... the early church fathers ... should be classified as posttribulational.”

—John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and The Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976)

“One of its (the early Church) distinctive features is that it places the Rapture of the Church at the end of the Tribulation, combining it with the Second Coming as one event”

—David Reagan, *Wrath and Glory: Unveiling the Majestic Book of Revelation* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2001), p. 112

“When taken within the context of all of Irenaeus’ writings, it appears that he was not teaching pretribulationism.”

—Tommy Ice

Irenaeus' testimony:

“And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet, but shall receive power as if kings one hour with the beast” ... 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.

(Against Heresies, V, 26, 1)

**Irenaeus sought to prepare his readers
to be able to identify the Antichrist
when he arrived:**

It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy [concerning the revealing of the Antichrist], than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. . . . But he indicates the number of the name now, so that when this man comes WE may avoid him, being aware who he is. (Against Heresies, V, 30, 3, 4)

**Irenaeus stated that the resurrection
of the just happens after the
Antichrist:**

“For all these and other words were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in which the righteous shall reign in the earth, waxing stronger by the sight of the Lord”

(Against Heresies, V, 35, 1)

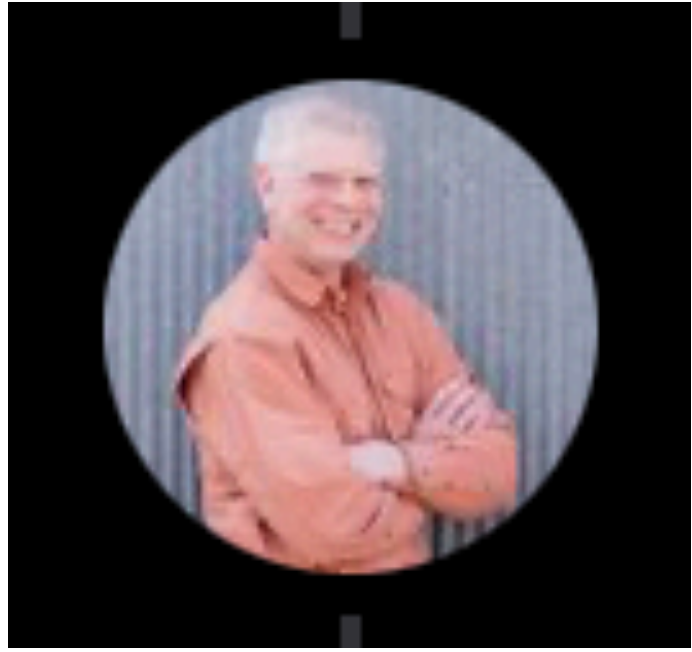
Irenaeus refers to the tribulation as the last contest of the righteous, which they will overcome and be crowned with life.

“When in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’ For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome they are crowned with incorruption.”
(Against Heresies, V, 29, 1)

Brainard's responses:

“And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet, but shall receive power as if kings one hour with the beast” ... 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.

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“This must be understood in light of his generic use of the word ‘church’.”

Irenaeus uses the word “Church” in the range of 200 times. Every single time, it refers to the Church proper. It is never used generically to refer to Israel, etc.

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**“When he comes, all believers will recognize him.
All agree this is true.”**



Joel Richardson @Joel7Richardson · 3h



Replying to [@soothkeep](#) [@Joel2_Gen](#) and [@BrandanBabineau](#)

You cannot, nor would you need to recognize someone if you're not here. Irenaeus expected the Church to face the Antichrist and was preparing his flock to identify him when he came, not to be raptured before he came. I appeal to you to be honest here, Lee.

“When in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’ For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome they are crowned with incorruption.”
(Against Heresies, V, 29, 1)

“This is one of the strongest pre-trib rapture passages in the early fathers.”

There is no reason of course, to see this statement as contradicting any of Irenaeus' other very clear post-tribulational statements! Does Irenaeus have split personalities from one chapter to the next? Or is Brainard simply attempting to rip one comment out of its context and twist it in an effort to create the illusion of Pretribulationism?

In all of Brainard's presentations, he never once mentioned that these other statements exist to his audience. Certainly they're incredibly relevant to his claims. So I asked Brainard directly:

“Please explain why in your presentation and notes shared at the Pre-Trib Research conference you didn't mention Irenaeus' very clear post-tribulationist comments.”

“In short, because I see clear second coming passages in his writings, and two pretrib passages, but no clear post-trib rapture passages.”



Joel Richardson @Joel7Richardson · 4h



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Can you name a single other theologian or reputable teacher who agrees that Irenaeus was "clearly" a pre-tribber? Can you find just one?



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Lee W. Brainard



@soothkeep

Replying to [@Joel7Richardson](#) [@Joel2_Gen](#) and [@BrandanBabineau](#)

Joel, this argument doesn't have that much merit. Can you find a single reputable theologian at the time that Martin Luther nailed his Theses to the door of the Wittenburg chapel that believed that salvation was by faith alone?

What should concern the greater body of Christ is that Brainard has been given a platform by Tommy Ice of the Pre-Trib Research Center and various Christian TV programs. Many others are now repeating his demonstrably false claims. Some with very large audiences such as Mike Golay, partner to Amir Tsarfati of Behold Israel Ministries has been passing on Brainard's false claims and ultimately deceiving the greater body of Christ.

**In the next series of presentations, we will
continue to investigate Mr. Brainard's
misrepresentation of the eschatology of the
early Church.**