

Escape by Rapture or by Hiding?

A Critical Examination of Lee Brainard's Use of Pseudo-Ephraim

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Introduction

In recent years, Pretribulationists have pointed to the writings of *Pseudo-Ephraim* as alleged evidence for belief in a pretribulationist rapture in the early church. The most widely circulated claims come from Lee Brainard, who presents select lines from Pseudo-Ephraim's *Sermon on the Advent, the End, and the Coming of the Antichrist*.

However, a careful reading of the text shows that Brainard's representation is misleading. By omitting key phrases and ignoring the broader sermon, Brainard creates the illusion of a pretribulationist statement where, in fact, the sermon clearly envisions the church enduring the tribulation of the Antichrist.

The Text in Question

Brainard cites the following passage as proof of pretribulationist thought:

“Watch always, praying continually, that you may be worthy to escape the tribulation ... if anyone has tears and compunction, let him pray the Lord that he might be delivered from the tribulation which is about to come upon the earth, that he might not see it all, nor the beast himself, nor even hear of its terrors.”

At first glance, this seems to suggest a “rapture” before the tribulation. Yet, the actual sermon reads differently when the omitted portion is restored:

“...always be awake, watching constantly, so that you may be found worthy to escape the tribulation and stand before God, for the time is near. *For we will all face this evil together, yet we do not believe.* Let us continually be found in tears and prayers, night and day, falling upon God, so that we sinners may be saved. If anyone has tears and grief, let us pray to the Lord, that we may be saved from the future sorrow coming to the earth; that he may not see this beast at all, nor hear his terrors again.” (*Pseudo-Ephraim, Sermon on the Advent, the End, and the Coming of the Antichrist*)

The omitted line—“for we will all face this evil together”—completely changes the meaning. Far from envisioning a secret escape before tribulation, Pseudo-Ephraim insists that he and his audience would face it together.

The Broader Context of the Sermon

The deception becomes even clearer when the entire sermon is considered. Pseudo-Ephraim explicitly describes the church enduring the horrors of the Antichrist’s reign:

“Then the whole earth and sea will mourn... the heavenly lights will mourn because this generation of man have all turned away from the Holy God and believed in the deception, receiving the mark of defilement and enmity with God rather than the life-giving cross of the Saviour... *All the churches of Christ will mourn with a great cry because holiness and sacrifice are no longer conducted.* Now after three and a half years of the power and practice of pollution are fulfilled... our holy, undefiled, terrible, and glorious God shall come as lightning flashing from heaven.”

Here, the church is plainly pictured as present on earth during the tribulation, suffering under the Antichrist.

Escape Through Hiding, Not Rapture

Pseudo-Ephraim repeatedly explains that the faithful will be preserved not by rapture, but by fleeing into hiding places—deserts, caves, and mountains:

“Many of you, at that time, will be found pleasing to God. *You will be strong and find salvation in the wilderness and in desert places,* through many prayers and unbearable tears. Because the holy God considers their unfathomable cries and sincere faith, and will have compassion on them, as a loving father, and he will preserve them in their hiding.”

“Many of the saints who then find themselves at the end of those days, will shed rivers of tears in groans to the Holy God because of the many murders of the Dragon. *And they will flee in great fear into deserts, and hide themselves in mountains and caves with fear... the Holy God will by His grace lead them to their hiding places where they will be saved, hiding in the pits and caves, not seeing the signs or the terrors of the Dragon.*”

The hope offered is survival by God’s mercy during the tribulation—not removal from it.

Warnings of Suffering and Perseverance

Pseudo-Ephraim emphasizes that believers must endure suffering with steadfastness and perseverance:

“When the Dragon comes, you will not have rest on earth, but you will have great sorrow, turmoil and confusion. There will be death and famines to the ends of the earth; of these things, the Lord our God spoke by his mouth, saying that such things have not happened since the creation of the world.”

“In peace, our Lord will come to us, in order that we may overcome the deception of the beast, sincerely striving for the steadfast faith of Christ, allowing us to overcome the power of the tyrant. We will maintain our testimony, standing firm, enduring patiently, thus leaving him with nothing in us.”

Clearly, Pseudo-Ephraim believed the church would confront the Antichrist’s persecution head-on.

Conclusion

Brainard’s selective editing of Pseudo-Ephraim’s sermon is misleading. By omitting a key phrase—“for we will all face this evil together”—he creates the illusion of a pretribulational rapture text. Yet the full sermon is filled with explicit post-tribulational teaching: the church enduring persecution, saints fleeing into hiding, and believers persevering until the return of Christ.

Rather than teaching escape through rapture, Pseudo-Ephraim envisioned survival through hiding and patient endurance. His voice joins the chorus of early Christian thought, which overwhelmingly understood that the church would suffer under the Antichrist before the glorious return of Jesus.