

Here readers are told that “lament helps us embrace two truths at the same time: hard is hard; hard is not bad” (p. 184). The book provides four useful appendixes, including one identifying the psalms of lament by category, a bibliography, a general index, and a Scripture index. These, along with the footnotes, are unusual but valuable features in a popular work such as *Dark Clouds*.

The only portion of the book in which this reviewer had difficulty were examples that Vroegop gave of a prayer gathering with other pastors in which one pastor “called on God with an authority that was strangely refreshing” (p. 57). He was attracted to such bold authority when calling on God and transferred this attraction to the Psalms. At this point, Vroegop is confusing biblical confidence with questionable boldness that demands God to act. No one, including the biblical authors, dare command God (cf. pp. 60, 66 where he confused confidence and boldness again). One may also question a prayer meeting at his church for parents of wayward children to return to the Lord. While the grief of some parents seemed to be eclipsed by the boldness of the prayers of others, there was no indication in the story that any of the prayers were answered. The point is not for one to pray without confidence, but that it is a step too far when boldly telling God what He should do. Perhaps this is not what Vroegop was implying, but this section appeared excessive. At any rate, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* is a valuable and accessible study of lament drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures. Many will be comforted by what is written here.

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Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture by Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener. Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2019. 236 pp., paper, \$15.99.

Adherence to the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture is something that is overwhelmingly found among conservative evangelicals. These, after all, are the groups most associated with dispensationalism and the literal interpretation of the Bible. However, it is a doctrine that is increasingly under attack, hence the necessity for this review.

Michael Brown is the founder and president of FIRE School of Ministry in Concord, North Carolina, and host of the daily radio program,

The Line of Fire. Born and raised a Jew, he converted to Christ as a teenager. He holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Literature from New York University. He has written more than thirty books, contributed to major scholarly reference works, been a visiting or adjunct professor at seven seminaries, and debated Jewish rabbis. His website says that he "is widely considered to be the world's foremost Messianic Jewish apologist." However, Brown is also a noted proponent of the Charismatic movement. He is remembered from time living in Pensacola, Florida. For four years, he was a leader in the Brownsville Revival headquartered at the Brownsville Assembly of God church in Pensacola. The revival was the Charismatic movement on steroids, and featured religious ecstasy, claims of miraculous healings, and people lying on the floor for hours after being "slain in the Spirit." The church dismissed Brown in 2000. He claimed in *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* that he has prayed "one hour straight in tongues" (p. 43), but that there is "no such thing as pre-Trib rapture" (p. 46).

Craig Keener is the F. M. and Ada Thompson professor of biblical studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He was previously professor of New Testament for fifteen years at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. Keener holds a Ph.D. in New Testament studies and Christian origins from Duke University. He too has written more than thirty books, and five of them have won awards in *Christianity Today*. Keener is a genuine biblical scholar, as his massive commentaries on John and Acts attest. He is the editor of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* and has served as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. He is also a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, and this reviewer has spoken with him several times at meetings. However, Keener is a huge proponent of women in ministry and the continuation of "spiritual gifts" until the end of the age. Like Brown, he has spoken in tongues. Both Keener and Brown have penned responses to John MacArthur's book on the Charismatic movement, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (2013). Nevertheless, Keener maintains that "every single verse used in support" of the doctrine of the pre-trib rapture "is loose—that is, out of context" (p. 25).

After a foreword by Denver Seminary's Craig Blomberg, acknowledgments, a preface apparently written by both authors, and an introduction "penned mainly by Craig" (p. 15), *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* is divided into three parts: (1) "Why Many Doubt 'Left Behind' Theology; (2) "What Does the Bible Say?"; and, (3) "Implications for Us Today." Each part contains four chapters. The book concludes with endnotes, a Scripture index, and an untitled page with information regarding the authors. There

is no bibliography. Scripture quotations are from nine different English versions in addition to the authors' own translations. Although there are occasionally references to "Michael" or "Craig," it is not always clear which author wrote which chapter. None of Brown's books have been read, yet this reviewer owns many of Keener's works. They are scholarly, academic, and important works, even if one does not agree with everything in them. *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* is a big change for Keener. Not only does he have a co-author, his style is very condescending. The style is definitely *not* academic, as he acknowledged in the preface, and the 49 endnotes are indeed "few and far between" (p. 15). The book is "addressed to a wide audience" (p. 36) and "meant to educate *and* encourage, to inform *and* inspire" (p. 15).

Both Brown and Keener, in their "earliest days as believers" (p. 14), attended churches that taught a pretribulational rapture. Although they are now "convinced that this teaching is not found in Scripture," they "never divide from others over the subject" (p. 14). The authors have "friends and colleagues who hold to it" (p. 14), and they acknowledge "some of the finest believers on the planet hold to a pre-Trib Rapture" (p. 187). However, these fine believers make "extra assumptions beyond what any passage says" (p. 23), take all verses to prove a pre-trib rapture "out of context" (p. 25), "construct secondary arguments" (p. 36), and are "cult-like" because they "discount the clear testimony of hundreds of Scriptures because of a questionable system of interpretation" (pp. 187-88).

Keener addressed the crux of the issue in his introduction. Based on their reading of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the authors do believe in a rapture. However, the question is "whether this catching up happens before or after the final time of Tribulation" (p. 24). From that point the book is just recycled George Ladd and Robert Gundry, but with a new twist: it just simply is not fair that the last generation of Western believers escape the tribulation when previous generations of Christians have suffered persecution in this life. In the first section of *Not Afraid of the Antichrist*, the authors raised some questions concerning the pretribulational rapture, explained why they abandoned their "left behind" theology, explored views of the end times throughout church history, and dispensed with dispensationalism. Section two examines support for a pretribulational rapture in the Old Testament, makes the case that the rapture and the second coming are one and the same, evaluates some pretribulational arguments, and presents some posttribulational passages. Section three discusses the coming tribulation, tells how to live in light of posttribulationalism and the return of Christ, and reminds one that even in experiencing the tribulation, he or she should "live in expectation of God's

promise for a renewed world where suffering and death will be no more" (p. 219).

The authors continually maintain that the doctrine of a pretribulational rapture began with John Nelson Darby approximately 1830, but there is no interaction with the works to the contrary of Morgan Edwards, William C. Watson on dispensationalism prior to Darby, or R. A. Huebner on Darby. Keener mentioned the work of Dave MacPherson and his claim that Darby got his idea for a pretribulational rapture from Edward Irving who got it from Margaret MacDonald who got it in a vision. However, then he acknowledged that MacDonald's prophecy "sounds more post-Tribulational" (p. 61). So why mention it? Sadly, the guilt by association does not stop there. Readers are told that "The Way International, a cult that denies Jesus' deity, is pre-Tribulational" (p. 63). "Some prophecy teachers" hailed "the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* circulated in the 1920s" (p. 66). Pretribulationalism is termed "Left Behind" theology to identify it with the novels and movies of that name. Edgar Whisenant's book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, which all serious pretribulational advocates repudiated when it was published, even garnered a mention.

In his chapter on Old Testament support for a pretribulational rapture, Brown failed to mention the great type of Enoch, a living man taken by God from earth to heaven who never died. He viewed God protecting the children of Israel from the death of the firstborn as confirming "the post-Tribulation position, namely, that God can preserve His people *here on the earth* while He pours out His wrath *on the very same earth*" (p. 89). Of course he can but the question is not what God *can* do, it is what God *will* do. God is able to "multitask" (p. 98), said Brown. He can deal with "the Church and Israel at the same time" (p. 98) during the tribulation period. So the argument that the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer 30:7) is for Israel is "specious" (p. 98). So which is it? Does God want the last generation of Western believers to experience tribulation or does he want to preserve them on earth while others experience tribulation? Brown's "most decisive Old Testament text in our discussion" is Isaiah 26:20-21 and the larger context of "the Apocalypse of Isaiah" in chapters 24—27 (p. 94) but there he equated Israel with all believers.

Chapter six of *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* states, "the idea that the Rapture and the Second Coming are two distinct events is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures" (p. 101). However, even the authors believe "there is one Second Coming, and it has different aspects to it" (p. 107). Those aspects are quite different, so different in fact that the rapture of believers and the return of Christ must be distinguished. There are no

signs prior to the rapture; there are signs preceding the return. At the rapture, Christ comes for his saints; at the return he comes with his saints. Christ meets Christians in the air at the rapture; Christ returns to earth at the return. Unbelievers remain at the rapture; unbelievers are taken at the return. At the rapture, only believers see Christ; at the return, everyone sees Christ. At the rapture, no changes occur on the earth; at the return, great changes occur on the earth. At the rapture, there is no mention of Satan; at the return, Satan is bound. After the rapture, the tribulation begins; after the return, the millennium begins. Much ado is made over the fact that the same Greek words (like *parousia*) “are used to describe two supposedly separate and quite different events” (p. 102). Brown raised a similar point in the previous chapter as well when he discussed the same Greek word (*thlipsis*) being used to refer to everyday tribulation that Christians will experience as well as the “great tribulation” (p. 92). However, the coming of Titus (2 Cor 7:6-7), the coming of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:9), and the coming of Christ (4:15) — which are all “separate and quite distinct events” — are all described by the same Greek word (*parousia*). Readers are also told that “the word *parousia* refers to someone’s actual presence in a place or, more commonly, to their arrival to a place” (p. 113). Therefore, it cannot refer to the rapture because Jesus “never arrives here on earth” and “is never *present* on earth” (p. 113). An appearing (*epiphaneia*) and a revealing (*apokalupsis*) “must be visible” (pp. 114-15), so these words cannot possibly refer to a pretribulational “secret” rapture. The authors believe that Christians will meet the Lord in the air, but then they descend to earth together with Him as He “defeats his enemies and establishes His Kingdom on the earth” (p. 107). The authors misrepresent pretribulationism. Christ meeting believers in the clouds (1 Thess 4:17) is certainly an actual presence and arrival that is a visible appearing and revealing *to believers*. The pretribulational rapture is no more secret than any other view of the rapture; it will be no secret that millions of people have been raptured. Furthermore, regarding the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, Old Testament saints are not “in Christ” (v. 16) and neither do they “sleep in Jesus” (v. 14). However, in the posttribulational system, saints of all ages are raptured to meet Jesus as He returns to earth.

In the chapters on “evaluating some pre-trib arguments” and “post-tribulational passages,” the authors are hopelessly confused because they made no distinction between Israel and the church and attempted to synchronize Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4. In addition, Keener got rid of the rapture in John 14:2-3 by making it noneschatological. Jesus brings believers “into the Father’s presence by His coming after His resurrection” (p. 158). The authors believe that “the view that Christians are raptured

and thus resurrected prior to the tribulation makes biblical prophecy far more complex than it needs to be" (p. 29). To the contrary, rejecting a pretribulational rapture and forcing all prophetic events together is what makes biblical prophecy far more complex than it needs to be. Things that are different are not the same. Things that are similar are not the same. Tribulation is not the great tribulation. The rapture is not the second coming. The church has not replaced Israel. The judgment seat of Christ is not the white throne judgment. The wrath of man is not the wrath of God. The dead in Christ is not all the saved.

Chapter 10 of the book, "How to Live in Light of Post-Tribulationalism," reads instead like "How to Live in Light of Postmillennialism." The chapter closes with the statement that "the Gospel is spreading through the world at an ever-increasing pace, *with* the Spirit's help, not *without* the Spirit's help, and in the midst of great darkness and evil and apostasy, God's light is shining brighter by the day" (p. 199). The chapter also contains some very dubious statistics taken from Brown's 1997 book, *The Revival Answer Book*, and from The Prayer Foundation (pp. 196-98): two hundred million people "have indicated decisions for Christ" after viewing *The Jesus Film*, twenty thousand Africans "come to Christ" every day, Africa "is now over 50 percent Christian," "every day now the average number added to the body of Christ worldwide averages 174,000."

One should also note that the authors believe "Jesus' true followers must persevere to the end" (p. 206). *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* can only be recommended to seasoned and grounded pretribulational pastors and teachers who need to see what opponents of the pretribulational rapture are currently saying. The work is not one of which Craig Keener should be proud.

— Laurence M. Vance
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