

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRE-TRIB STUDY GROUP

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

In the spring of 1992 I received a phone call from Tim LaHaye and we met for the first time on the phone. Dr. LaHaye had read the first book I had written dealing with dominion theology and defending dispensationalism.¹ He was noticing a decline in belief in the pre-trib rapture among evangelicals and wanted to discuss this with me. We agreed to meet later that summer at the National Religious Book Sellers Convention in Dallas, and so we did.

THE PRE-TRIB STUDY GROUP

The two of us hung-out together during NRB and Dr. LaHaye told me about an idea he was thinking about. Since that time, as I have gotten to know Dr. LaHaye over the years, one thing is clear: Tim LaHaye is a person who does something when he perceives a problem. Dr. LaHaye is an amazing servant of God! In fact, Wheaton University recognized this about Dr. LaHaye and gave him an award citing him as the most influential Evangelical of the 20th century. Dr. LaHaye has been used by God to start or come up with the idea to start about 30 institutions and organizations over the years. Everything from the Sunday School Association to a Christian School system, from a Christian University to the Moral Majority, and from the Institute for Creation Research to the Pre-Trib Research Center. I have left out many items from this list, but I hope you get the picture. Our meeting in the summer of '92 resulted in the idea to host the first Pre-Trib Study Group which met December 14–16, 1992 in a hotel inside the DFW airport.

The first meeting was by invitation only because Dr. LaHaye's idea for the first Pre-Trib Study Group was inspired by the prophetic meetings in Great Britain around 1830. The Albury Conference (1826–30) sponsored by wealthy banker Henry Drummond who invited learned evangelical clergy and Bible scholars to his estate where they met and discussed the prophetic issues of the day. The Powerscourt Conference (1831–33), a similar meeting was held by Lady Powerscourt that meet at her castle south of Dublin. J. N. Darby and many of the brethren attended this conference. Therefore, about 35 scholars, pastors and prophecy teachers met to discuss issues relating to pretribulationism. Various individuals presented papers on pressing issues, followed by discussion by the entire group. Some of those attending the first Study Group include: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Ed Hindson, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Kay Arthur, Randall Price, Mal Couch, Gerald Stanton, Charles Dyer, John Master, Stanley Ellisen, David Allen Lewis, Stanley Toussaint, Chuck Missler, the Feinberg brothers, Jim Combs, Joseph Chambers, and others who slip my mind.

One of Dr. LaHaye's stated purposes for the Study Group meeting was to pass on the knowledge and experience that many from the World War II generation had developed to the younger generations. We all agreed that among younger evangelicals there was not the same interest in the prophetic portions of God's Word. Therefore, the Pre-Trib Study Group would endeavor to bolster these issues among schools, churches and ministries. We also tried to come up with a better title than The Pre-Trib Study Group, but were not able to do so. That name has stuck with us over the years. We agreed to meet the following year in the Dallas–Fort Worth area.

THE PRE-TRIB RESEARCH CENTER

During 1993, Dr. LaHaye and I met together a couple of times and began to plan for the establishment of The Pre-Trib Research Center. Also, during that year Dr. LaHaye began work on an important book defending the pre-trib rapture called *No Fear of the Storm*.² At our second annual meeting, Dr. LaHaye proposed, and it was accepted by the Study Group, that I become Executive Director with a full-time position of an organization we still call The Pre-Trib Research Center. In February 1994 our family moved to the Washington, D. C. area and the Center was launched in the offices of Dr. LaHaye's Family Life Seminars, which were housed in the offices of Concerned Women of America. The stated purpose of the Center is for the purpose of encouraging the research, teaching, propagation, and defense of the pretribulational rapture and related Bible prophecy doctrines. We believe the Center and Study Group have had some success in furthering these stated goals.

One of the results of the Center and Study Group has been the fact that it has led to the production of many books, articles, and conferences to further understanding of God's future plans for planet earth. Perhaps the first of possibly about 100 books to have come out of the Center's influence was *Issues in Dispensationalism*³ involving Charles Ryrie and others who clarified dispensationalism in light of the new drift away from it toward so-called "progressive dispensationalism." Another early work that the Center produced was *When the Trumpet Sounds*,⁴ involving about two-dozen members of the Study Group who dealt with issues relating to pretribulationism. Over the years I have heard excellent feedback from many who say that book helped to solidify pretribulationism for them. Many members have told me over the years that our meetings lead to their development of books, audio and video programs, and conferences in which they advocated or defended pretribulationism and Bible prophecy as a whole.

Perhaps the most important development that arose from the Center was Dr. LaHaye's now historic *Left Behind* novel series. In 1994 Dr. LaHaye hooked up with Jerry Jenkins and they began work on an idea that Dr. LaHaye had thought about for years. He first conceived of the *Left Behind* concept while noticing a pretty young flight attendant flirting with a handsome pilot on a flight in the United States. As he considered the scene, he wondered what would happen if the rapture occurred while on an airplane flight. And the rest is history—almost. Even though Dr. LaHaye was a veteran author whose books had sold over eleven million copies before *Left Behind*, he quickly realized that he was not a novelist. He found Jerry Jenkins when he hired his current literary agent who was also Jenkins' agent.

In January 1995, LaHaye first told me about the *Left Behind* project (initially it was to have been a single book, then it grew to three and eventually to a series of sixteen books). He had just talked on the phone with Jenkins and told me that he was excited about prospects for the novel and thought it might sell as many as a quarter million copies. Of course Dr. LaHaye was wrong. It only sold about 83,000 copies its first year, but then it began to take off through word-of-mouth recommendations. Dr. LaHaye hoped that *Left Behind* would have an impact, but had no idea that it would accomplish what it has, both in terms of sales and spiritual results. Preterist and anti-pretribulationist Gary DeMar said on a radio show that he thought dispensationalism was in steep decline and then came the *Left Behind* series that has reversed the trend. No doubt that Dr. LaHaye has been used by God to spread this important last days message of His imminent return, in spite of the opposition.

Even as we prepare for the 20th meeting of the Pre-Trib Study Group in Dallas this December 2011, we can look back and know that Dr. LaHaye's original vision of impacting teachers, pastors and laymen with the good news about our Blessed Hope has impacted many. In fact, believers from foreign countries have told us that they have been inspired by our Center and Study Group and are starting similar efforts in their countries. This year's conference will focus entirely on the rapture of the Church. Over the years our meetings have grown as many realize that we are likely on the verge of the rapture and the subsequent unfolding of tribulation events. The stage has been set like never before during these last 20 years, as the whole world seems on the verge of transforming events. Hey! We are about to see something really big, like the unfolding of God's end-time plan for mankind.

I have been privileged to work with Dr. LaHaye and many others for the last 20 years to research, teach and defend our Blessed Hope and I intend to do this until either I am taken home in death or snatched up at the rapture. I continue to wait for His Son from heaven each and every day. However, the Lord has lead my wife and I to go back into the pastorate, but I will continue to also lead the Pre-Trib Research Center, write a monthly article and plan and oversee our annual Pre-Trib Study Group conference in the Dallas area in the coming years.

Janice and I will be moving to Omaha, Nebraska around the middle of November 2011 to be on staff at Community Bible Church. In the spring of 2013, I will take a couple hundred people from Community Bible and plant a new Church somewhere in the Omaha area. (If you are in the area, stop by and give us a call.) I look forward to a return of teaching the whole counsel of God's Word through a local church ministry and leading this flock in learning about our Lord, growing in His grace, living for Him, spreading the gospel locally and through missionary outreach, as we eagerly wait for the Lord's call of His Bride. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse? An Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1988).

² Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm: Why Christians will Escape All the Tribulation* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1994).

³ Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, eds., with Charles C. Ryrie, consulting editor, *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994).

⁴ Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds., *When the Trumpet Sounds: Today's Foremost Authorities Speak Out on End-Time Controversies* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995).