

THE RAPTURE IN AN ELEVENTH-CENTURY TEXT

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ABSTRACT

An eleventh-century Bulgarian text titled Narration of Isaiah teaches that at the end of the world, when the Antichrist is persecuting Christians, God will lift his elect into the air. After that rapture the earth will burn for three years and then lie dormant for another three years followed by its renewal. Then Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. The timing, subjects, and purpose of the rapture in this text show similarities to and differences from modern pretribulationsim. Because of these similarities, the text merits a place in present discourse on the history of the rapture.

INTRODUCTION

MANY WRITERS HAVE CLAIMED that the pretribulation rapture was invented in the 1830s by John Nelson Darby (d. 1882) and that such teaching did not exist before the modern era.¹ Those claims, however, have been challenged continually

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¹ Craig L. Blomberg, “The Posttribulationism of the New Testament: Leaving ‘Left Behind’ Behind,” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, ed. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 62; Hank Hanegraff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says about the End Times . . . and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 40, 55; Gary L. Nebeker, “The Ecstasy of Perfected Love: The Eschatological Mysticism of J. N. Darby,” in *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880*, ed. Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 94; Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004), 20–22; John E. Young, *The Rapture Examined* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress, 2003), 16, 22; Felton Shoults, *Errors of Pretribulation Rapture Theory: Exposing False Teachings Concerning the Second Coming* (Eugene, OR: ACW Press, 2003), 10, 24, 33, 44, 103.

by researchers who have found many authors and texts before Darby containing elements of, and similarities to, pretribulationism. This article first briefly surveys these texts, which date from the early nineteenth century to as far back as the medieval era. It then introduces the *Narration of Isaiah*, a text from medieval Bulgaria, in which the saints are lifted up six years before the last judgment. Its content and eschatology will be compared and contrasted with modern pretribulationism.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRETRIBULATION TEXTS

A brief review is fitting, starting with authors from the early nineteenth century and working backward to the medieval era. William Cunninghame, in his 1832 edition of *A Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse*, set forth a two-stage Second Coming. Concurrent with the first appearance of Christ in the air before the battle of Armageddon would be a gathering to Christ of the palm-bearers of Revelation 14.²

Emanuel Lacunza's 1816 *Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty* taught that the Second Coming of Christ will be in two stages. Christ will first appear to catch up the faithful to heaven, after which there will be a period of at least forty-five days before the final coming of Christ.³ Bernard Lambert's 1806 *Expositions des predictions et des promesses* also taught an intermediate coming of Christ at which time the Lord gathers his saints to himself.⁴

From the 1700s, Morgan Edwards's 1788 *Two Academical Exercises* and Grantham Killingworth's 1761 *Immortality of the Soul* have Christ appearing in the air years prior to the Second Coming to take away the saints from the earth, which afterward experiences the tribulations of the book of Revelation.⁵

² William Cunninghame, *A Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse, and the Prophetical Period of Twelve Hundred and Sixty Years*, 3rd ed. (London: Thomas Cadell, Strand, Hatchard & Son, and James Nisbet, 1832), 461, 468, 477–82, 492–99, 503–4.

³ On the rapture teaching of Emanuel Lacunza, see Columba Graham Flegg, "Gathered under Apostles": *A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 305, 310; John Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, 1982).

⁴ On the rapture teaching of Bernard Lambert, see Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code* (Costa Mesa, CA: The Word for Today, 2007), 30; Timothy C. F. Stunt, "Influences in the Early Development of J. N. Darby," in Gribben and Stunt, *Prisoners of Hope?*, 63–64.

⁵ On the rapture teaching of Morgan Edwards, see Hitchcock and Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 28–30; Thomas Ice, "Morgan Edwards," in *Dictionary of Pre-*

From the 1600s, John Brown's 1654 *Brief Survey of the Prophetical and Evangelical Events of the Last Times* and John Birschensha's 1660 *History of the Scripture*, have the saints being taken up to heaven before the tribulation and destruction of Babylon on earth.⁶

From the Middle Ages, *The History of Brother Dolcino*, written in 1306, tells of the eschatology of a leader of a religious community in northern Italy who believed that when the time of the Antichrist will arrive, he and his followers will be taken up to Paradise to escape the tribulation, and then later, after the Antichrist is killed, they will descend to the earth.⁷

A Venetian version of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, dated between the years 1250 and 1350, taught that at the end of the world when the persecution of the Antichrist will begin, God will give refuge to his beloved by taking them to paradise.⁸ Another *Life of Brendan of Clonfert*, dated 1536, foretells that at the end of the world Brendan and his followers, together with all of the saints of Ireland, will go to the Land of Promise seven years before the last judgment.⁹

Yet a fairly recent book on the rapture claims: "The Middle Ages found some distortion [in eschatology] but *nothing* to do with the pretribulation rapture system of theology."¹⁰ It is readily acknowledged by the present writer that the eschatology in all of the aforementioned writings does not match modern pretribulation thought in every detail. But these texts absolutely do contain elements that are corollary with, and that bear striking similarity to, tenets of modern pretribulationism, most notably a significant amount of time between the translation of the saints to heaven or paradise and the coming of Christ to earth for the last judgment.

millennial Theology, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 100–102. On Killingsworth's views, see William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism* (Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2015), 257–59.

⁶ On the rapture teaching of John Brown and John Birschensha, see Watson, *Dispensationalism before Darby*, 148–55.

⁷ Francis Gumerlock, "A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July–September 2002): 349–62.

⁸ Mark Davie, "The Venetian Version," in *The Voyage of St Brendan*, ed. W. R. J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 229.

⁹ Charles Plummer, ed. and trans., *Bethada Náem Nérenn: Lives of Irish Saints*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 2:76.

¹⁰ Jim Brown, *The Rapture . . . But When?* (Palm Coast, FL: Christian Awareness Ministries, 1992), 8, italics added.

THE ELEVENTH-CENTURY NARRATION OF ISAIAH

To this list can be added the *Narration of Isaiah*, a work originally written in Old Bulgarian and found in two manuscripts. Its author is anonymous. Its full title is *Narration of the Holy Prophet Isaiah about the Years to Come and the Kings and the Antichrist*. It is a short work; its twenty paragraphs comprise only five pages of English translation. The text, discovered in the 1980s, was edited in Bulgarian script in a 2011 book titled *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria*. That book also includes a lengthy introduction to the *Narration of Isaiah* and an English translation.¹¹

DATE

Internal evidence provides a clue as to the date of the *Narration*. It describes an invasion of non-Christian people from the north, which has been identified as the invasion of the Usi people in 1064. The treatise, therefore, was most likely written in the 1070s.¹²

SOURCES

The *Narration of Isaiah* contains quotations from and allusions to passages in the Old and New Testaments, mainly the Psalms and Matthew's Gospel. Its description of a battle between the Antichrist and Enoch and Elijah alludes to the vision of the two witnesses in chapter 11 of the book of Revelation.

The author used the fourth-century *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian* and seems to have been familiar with traditions contained in the seventh-century *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* about a last king and an ascension to heaven of Christ's cross.¹³ There are also parallels with, but no direct dependence on, other eleventh-century Bulgarian apocalyptic literature, such as *The*

¹¹ Vassilka Tapkova-Zaimova and Anissava Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria* (Sofia, Bulgaria: East-West Publishers, 2011), 186–217.

¹² The Usi people, 600,000 in number, crossed the Danube and were defeated at Thessalonica. Anissava Miltenova, "Historical Apocalypses in Medieval Bulgarian Literature (10th–14th Centuries)," in *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Kevork B. Bardakjian and Sergio La Porta (Boston: Brill, 2014), 713.

¹³ On the dating of the apocryphal *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian*, see John M. Court, *The Book of Revelation and the Johannine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 25–29. On the dating of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, see Benjamin Garstad, ed. and trans., *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), vii.

*Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle, Vision of Daniel, and Interpretation of Daniel.*¹⁴ Finally, the *Narration of Isaiah* may have been influenced by the belief, common in Bulgaria in that time, that the second coming of Christ would occur in the year 1092.¹⁵

SUMMARY

Paragraphs 1–7 speak of three kings who will rule Bulgaria in the end times prior to a last king named Michael, during whose reign the Antichrist will be born. The reign of King Michael is described in paragraphs 8–13. Finally, paragraphs 13–20 narrate the persecution inflicted on Christians by the Antichrist, Antichrist's battle with Enoch and Elijah, the rapture of the elect, the burning up of the earth, and the last judgment six years after the rapture and conflagration.

THE RAPTURE IN THE *NARRATION OF ISAIAH*

Paragraph 13 says that the Antichrist will torture Christians in a variety of ways. The faithful will cry out to the Lord, and in response God will send Elijah and Enoch to fight the Antichrist. Paragraph 14 describes the Antichrist putting Elijah and Enoch on an altar and strangling them. Next is the rapture passage. For context, the entirety of paragraphs 14–16 is cited below. Paragraph numbers, Scripture references, and a few words have been added for clarity, and these are placed in brackets. Short statements relevant to the subjects and timing of the rapture are italicized.

[14] Then Elijah will start arguing with the Antichrist, saying: 'You are a deceiver.' And the latter will be enraged in fury and will make a copper altar and will put Elijah and Enoch upon it and will jugulate [them], like Prophet David said: 'then shall they offer bulls upon thine altar' [Ps 51:19]. *Then God will summon the true cross and the apostles and the gospels and all the elect who've pleased God, and the holy churches, and the christened graves all over the earth. God will lift them into the air and will set the earth afire. And the earth will burn, and also the mountains, and the mountains [sic], and the houses, as Prophet David said: 'touch the mountains, and they shall smoke' [Ps 144:5]. Then the sea will boil as though in a pot and, as the sea will be burnt violently, thus everything [will be burnt] for three years. Only the land from where the Jordan takes its source will remain.*

¹⁴ Tapkova-Zaimova and Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature*, 187–95.

¹⁵ That is, the year 6600 from Creation. See Tapkova-Zaimova and Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature*, 197.

[15] Afterwards God will send the four great winds and they will scatter the dust far and wide. Then God will make two sources whiter than snow—one in the east and the other—in the west. And they will gush forth all over the earth. And the earth will become flat like paper and more beautiful than this world and seven times whiter. And the earth will lie for three years. And the earth will cry out to God, saying: ‘Take care of me, my Lord, for I’ve been lying for many years, but I am like a seven-year-old girl, purer than the creation itself. I’ve cleansed from all impurity.’

[16] Then with great strength and glory God will come down from heaven by the clouds in a place called Huki. And the saints will assemble in the churches, and they will shine like stars—each one at their place. And there will flock many angels and archangels, thousands and thousands more, twelve legions, carrying God’s throne, and they will shine seven times brighter than the sun. And God himself will appear from heaven to judge the living and the dead.¹⁶

The next paragraph (17) describes the resurrection of those sleeping along with the separation of the good to the right and sinners to the left, at which time Christ will say to those on his right, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom” (Matt 25:34), and to those on his left, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire” (v. 41). Paragraph 18 depicts the casting of the Antichrist and Jews into outer darkness. Paragraph 19 treats the judgment of those who will be deceived by the Antichrist. The last paragraph of the treatise (20) mentions the judgment of the twelve tribes and depicts God’s everlasting reign where there will be perfect joy and love, no death, and where everyone will appear to be thirty years old.

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE *NARRATION OF ISAIAH*

An analysis of the timing, subjects, and purpose of the rapture in the *Narration of Isaiah*, along with some unusual features of its eschatology, reveals similarities and differences from modern ideas of the pretribulation rapture.

THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

After the elect are lifted into the air, the earth is burned “for three years” (para. 14). “Afterwards,” which seems to mean “after that three years,” God will send wind to scatter the dust and ashes left from the consumption of everything on earth. Then God will make two great fountains of water to gush forth over the earth to cleanse it from impurity. It then will become “more beautiful than this

¹⁶ Tapkova-Zaimova and Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature*, 214.

world and seven times whiter." Then the earth will lie for three more years (para. 15).¹⁷

Much of paragraphs 14 and 15 depends on a patristic eschatological writing titled the *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian*. That apocryphal work says that before the Lord will burn up the earth, angels will lift up into the air everything venerable on earth, including crosses and the sacred books. Only then will the Lord burn the earth. After the conflagration, four great winds will sweep sin from the earth and make it white like snow. At that time the earth will be flat like paper without hills or mountains. Then the earth will cry, "I am a virgin," after which the Lord will come from the clouds for the last judgment, bringing everything with him that was lifted up into the air.¹⁸ The *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian* did not specify the duration of the burning up and cleansing of the earth. The *Narration of Isaiah*, though, specifies that the burning and the cleansing of the earth will each last three years, for a total of six years before the Second Coming.

After those six years, "God himself will appear from heaven to judge the living and the dead" (para. 16). By "God" is meant the Lord Jesus Christ: paragraph 17 identifies him as "the king who will say to those standing at his right hand: 'Come, ye blessed,'" clearly an allusion to Matthew 25:31–36: "But when the Son of Man . . . will sit on his glorious throne. . . the king will say to those on his right." Modern pretribulationism has Christ returning to earth seven years after the rapture. In this text, it is six years after the rapture. Also, in modern pretribulationism, the rapture occurs before the Antichrist has come to power; in the *Narration of Isaiah* the Antichrist is already on the world scene, persecuting the saints, when the elect are lifted up into the air. Despite these differences, the rapture six years before the Second Coming does have a certain affinity with the timing of the rapture in modern pretribulationism.

THE SUBJECTS OF THE RAPTURE

According to paragraph 14 of the *Narration of Isaiah*, all of the elect will be raptured, along with certain sacred objects. These ob-

¹⁷ Because paragraph 15 begins with "afterwards," it seems most likely that the three years in which the earth lies dormant in paragraph 15 follow the three years in which the earth burns in paragraph 14. However, if the mention of the three years in paragraph 15 is simply a recapitulation of the three years mentioned in paragraph 14, then the author of the *Narration of Isaiah* believed that the rapture would take place three years, not six years, before the last judgment.

¹⁸ *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian*, 13–17, translated in Court, *The Book of Revelation and the Johannine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 23–65, especially 37–41.

jects include the true cross, “the apostles and the gospels” (that is, the sacred books), the holy churches, and the christened graves all over the earth. As stated above, this is clearly dependent on the *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian*, which reads:

I will send my angels over all the earth’s surface; they will take up from the earth all that is wonderful and valuable, the revered and holy images, the glorious and precious crosses, the *church’s holy things*, and the divine and sacred books; everything valuable and holy will be taken up with clouds in the air. Then I will give orders for the lifting up of the great and *venerated scepter* (cross) on which I stretched out my hands.¹⁹

The rapture of objects along with the elect seems strange to modern ears, but to early and medieval Christians it made perfect sense. While contemporary premillennialists generally believe that the burning up of the earth will take place after the millennium,²⁰ medieval Christians generally believed that it would occur before the Second Coming. This belief was based especially on Psalms 50:3 and 97:3, which say that fire devours “before him,” as well as Daniel 7:10, Isaiah 66:15, and 2 Thessalonians 1:7–8. If the purpose of the fire going before the returning Lord is to destroy the earth’s impurity, questions arise: What will become of the things on the earth that are pure and sacred, like the Scriptures? Will they be burned up too? The authors of the *Narration of Isaiah* and the *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian* said no. Rather, the sacred things will be spared from that conflagration by being lifted into the air above the fire.

The teaching that the true cross, on which Christ was crucified, would ascend to heaven was also not unusual for some medieval Christians. It was actually necessary in their eschatological scenario. Many medieval theologians interpreted “the sign” of the Son of Man mentioned in Matthew 24:30 as an appearance in the sky, before his second coming, of the cross on which the Lord Jesus was crucified.²¹ Therefore, if the cross will appear in the sky short-

¹⁹ *Revelation of Saint John the Theologian*, 16, in Court, *The Book of Revelation and the Johannine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 37–39.

²⁰ For example, see John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 1999), 512: “‘The elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.’ . . . This will occur not at the beginning but at the end of the Day of the Lord which will be the end of the millennial kingdom (Rev 20:11; 21:1).”

²¹ The interpretation of the “sign” of the Son of Man in the sky as the cross shows up very early in Christianity, even from the beginning of the second century. It is in the *Epistula Apostolorum*, 16 and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, 1 (Wilhelm

ly before the second coming of Christ, at some point earlier that cross must ascend from earth to heaven. *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, written in Syriac in the late seventh century and distributed throughout Europe in a variety of languages, clearly taught that in the last days the true cross would ascend to heaven. It reads, “And the cross will be assumed into heaven. . . . That same cross will begin to appear before him in his coming.”²²

The rapture of entire church buildings and graves, mentioned in the *Narration of Isaiah*, also seems unusual to modern ears. However, the concept of a rapture of a building is not unique to this text. There was a belief among some Roman Catholics that the house in Nazareth in which Mary the mother of Christ had lived was miraculously translated to Loreto, Italy, carried there in flight by angels.²³ Today also some members of the quasi-Christian *Iglesia ni Cristo* community in the Philippines believe that when the rapture of the saints occurs, not only their members, but their church buildings will ascend to heaven.²⁴

THE PURPOSE OF THE RAPTURE

In the *Narration of Isaiah*, the elect are lifted up so that the faithful will escape the burning up of the earth. This differs from modern pretribulationism, where the purpose of the rapture is to keep the church safe from the tribulation and divine wrath, as revealed in the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven vials in the book of Revela-

Schneemelcher, ed., trans. R. McL. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha* [hereafter *NTA*], vol. 1 [Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 1991], 258). Other references to it include the Sibylline Oracles 8:242–46 (*NTA* 2:733); Apocalypse of Elijah 3:2 (James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 [New York: Doubleday, 1983], 744); the Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (Paul J. Alexander, ed., *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985], 50); Isho'dad of Merv, *Commentary on Matthew* (Margaret Dunlop Gibson, ed. and trans., *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv*, vol. 1 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911], 93, comment on Matthew 24:30); and Sedulius Scottus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Bengt Löfstedt, *Sedulius Scottus: Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Matthäus* [Freiburg: Herder, 1991], 534, comment on Matthew 24:30).

²² “Et adsumetur crux in caelum . . . ipsa crux incipiet apparere ante eum in adventum ipsius.” *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 14.4, in W. J. Aerts and G. A. A. Kortekaas, eds., *Die Apokalypse des pseudo-Methodius die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 189.

²³ *Loreto: The Mystery of the Holy House* (Janson Media, 2010), DVD. Today it is more commonly believed that the house was moved to Loreto by Christians in the age of the Crusades.

²⁴ This is not, however, official teaching in *Iglesia ni Cristo*. Anne C. Harper, *Understanding the Iglesia ni Cristo* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 183–84.

tion. The rapture in modern pretribulationism also signifies the change from the dispensation of the “church age” to the dispensation of the Tribulation, identified as the “time of Jacob’s trouble” and correlated with the seventieth week of Daniel. None of these purposes are evident in the *Narration of Isaiah*. However, the text does suggest that in the end time God’s dealings with the church and the Jewish people will change. A passage in paragraph 13 reads: “And in those days the Jewish kingdom will rise, and the Christians will diminish. Then the last will become first and the first will be last.” Paragraph 20 contains an enigmatic statement that God “will judge about the twelve tribes,” possibly indicating a special judgment unique to the Jewish people.

The idea that the rapture will allow the saints to escape the burning up of the earth is nothing new in Christianity. Theologians throughout the two millennia of Christian history have stated as much. They include Augustine (d. 430), Julian of Toledo (d. 690), Bede (d. 735), an Irish version of the *Apocalypse of Thomas* (c. 800), Alcuin (d. 804), Joseph Mede (d. 1638), and John Gill (d. 1771).²⁵ But those writers never defined the amount of time that would elapse between the rise of the saints and the last judgment. In their writings the rapture seems concurrent with, or just prior to, the second coming of Jesus. Gill wrote, “These living saints, changed, shall be caught up together with the raised ones, to meet the Lord in the air; where it seems as if he and they should stop awhile,” but again the time between the rapture of the saints and the Second Coming (“awhile”) is vague.²⁶ This eleventh-century *Narration of Isaiah*, however, specifies the time it takes for the

²⁵ Quotations and references to these authors, with the exception of the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, are in Francis X. Gumerlock, “Apocalyptic Spirituality in the Early Middle Ages: Hope of Escaping the Fire of Doomsday through a Pre-conflagration Rapture,” in *The Pure Flame of Devotion: The History of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G. Stephen Weaver Jr. and Ian Hugh Clary (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2013), 101–14. The Irish version of the *Apocalypse of Thomas* 13, reads: “And afterwards the elect will have gone out from the world of the creation. Then a great fire will spew forth from the east and the west, and it will shake all the globe of the whole world, and it will bear away all filth and all the dregs of this world.” John Carey, Emma Nic Cárthaigh, and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh, eds., *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, 2 vols. (Oakville, CT: Celtic Studies, 2014), 2:591.

²⁶ John Gill, “The Glory of the Church in the Latter Days,” *Sermons and Tracts* 1:111, cited in John L. Bray, *The Second Coming of Christ and Related Events* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministries, 1985), 49. “This being done, these living saints, changed, shall be caught up together with the raised ones, to meet the Lord in the air; where it seems as if he and they should stop awhile, until an after-event is accomplished. . . . The precious dust of the saints being collected out of the earth, and their bodies raised and united to their souls, and living ones changed, and both taken up from hence, and with the Lord, the general conflagration will begin.”

earth to burn up and be renewed. In this text it is also the time between the rapture and the Second Coming: six years.

CONCLUSION

The notion that the ideas that make up pretribulationism were invented out of thin air by J. N. Darby in the early nineteenth century is historically narrow. For when one examines the entire history of Christian eschatology, similarities to the ideas that compose modern pretribulationism are found in the decades and centuries preceding Darby, all the way back into the medieval period.

The *Narration of Isaiah*, an eleventh-century Bulgarian text, contains an account of the last days in which the elect are lifted into the air to escape the burning up of the earth. That conflagration lasts three years. The earth will begin to be renewed and will lie dormant for another three years. Then the Lord will appear from heaven to judge the living and the dead. The *Narration of Isaiah* does not contain all of the features of modern pretribulationism. In its description of the lifting up of the saints, there is no mention of a coming of Christ. The subjects of the rapture in the *Narration of Isaiah* include not only the elect but also churches, christened graves, sacred books, and the true cross. In the years between the rapture and the Lord's coming for judgment, the earth does not experience the opening of the seals, the blowing of the trumpets, and the pouring out of the vials of Revelation 6–19; rather, it undergoes the conflagration and renewal of the earth described in 2 Peter 3:10–13. Nevertheless, because of its portrayal of a temporal interval of six years between the rapture and the Second Coming, the *Narration of Isaiah* merits a place in the discussion of the history of ideas related to pretribulationism.