



RECENT PRE-TRIB RAPTURE FINDINGS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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WHY INVESTIGATE & PRESENT PRE-TRIB RAPTURE IN EARLY FATHERS?



- Apologetics!
- Defends **historical fact** that **revelational truth** of the pre-trib rapture had strong testimony in early church
- Answers reproach that the pre-trib rapture is new teaching

CHAIN OF EVENTS ON MY PATRISTIC FINDINGS



- Research — *apostasia* research relative to 2 Thess. 2:3
- Discovery — stumbled upon pretrib passage in Ephraim
- Verification — Checked lists of known pre-trib references
- Initial search — select pool of prophetic works
- Full search — entire body of 150+ works
- Communication — couldn't keep news to myself

THREE CLASSES OF FATHERS BEING SEARCHED

- Known premillennialists and pretribulationists
 - Irenaeus, Cyprian, Chrysostom
- Eastern/Antiochian fathers
 - Ephraim of Syria, Theodore of Mopsuestia
- Provocative amillennialists not in lockstep with “Orthodoxy”
 - Eusebius, Origen

MAIN SEARCH TERMS



- harpazō (to seize)
- apantēsis (meeting)
- analambanō (take up)
- paralambanō (take)
- parousia (royal entrance)
- sunagō (gather)
- anabainō (ascend)
- petomai (fly)
- nephelai (clouds)
- salpingx (trumpet)
- kibōton (ark)
- antichristos (antichrist)
- thērion (beast)
- drakōn (dragon)
- ōra (hour)
- peirasmōs (trial)
- orgē (wrath)
- thumos (anger)
- thlipsis (tribulation)
- tēreō (keep)
- sōzō (save)

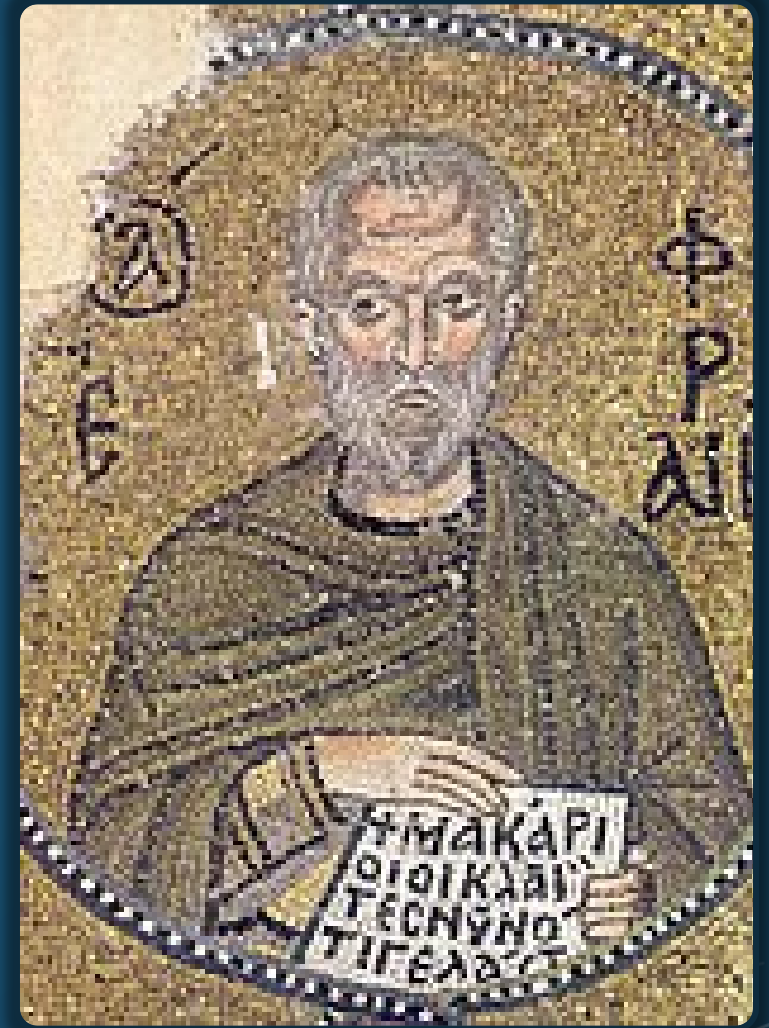
RECENT DISCOVERIES



- Ephraim the Syrian — 10 crystal-clear pretrib rapture passages
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.29.1 — Greek frag. clearer than Latin
- Eusebius — several very provocative passages

EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

- aka Ephraem or Ephrem
- born in 306 and died in 373
- born in Nisibis, lived in Edessa
- important & prolific Syrian father 4th cent.
- pretribulational testimony
- three million lines of hymns, sermons, prose
- wrote in Syriac, translated into Greek
- Greek translations were accurate
- admired for centuries after death



“

*Blessed is he who unceasingly remembers the fear of Gehenna and hastens to sincerely repent ... for he shall be **delivered from the great tribulation.***

”

Ephraim the Syrian

Fifty-Five Beatitudes

“

*For the elect shall be gathered **prior to the tribulation**, so they **shall not see the confusion and the great tribulation** coming upon the unrighteous world.*

”

Ephraim the Syrian

Sermon on Repentance and Judgment and
the Separation of the Soul From the Body

“

*The righteous ... shall be **seized up in the clouds** to meet him.
While those who are lazy and timid like me shall **remain on
earth trembling.***

”

Ephraim the Syrian

On the Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ

“ Again, when we see **the saints in glory flying off** in light in the clouds of the air to meet Christ, the king of glory, but see **ourselves in the great tribulation**, who shall be able to bear that shame and terrible reproach? ”

Ephraim the Syrian

On the Fathers Who Have Completed Their Course

*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.*

Ephraim the Syrian

Sermon on the Advent, the End,
and the Coming of the Antichrist

“

*Let us take up ... the full armor ... that we may be able to fight the good fight ... that we might be **delivered from the wrath** coming upon the sons of disobedience.*

”

Ephraim the Syrian

On Patience and the Consummation of this Age,
and on the Second Coming

“

*Count us worthy, Lord, of **the rapture of the righteous,** when they meet you the Master in the clouds, that we might **not be tried by the bitter and inexorable judgment.***

”

Ephraim the Syrian

Sermon on the Resurrection of the Dead

“

*Take us out from the coming fear, and count us worthy of that **rapture (snatching away)** when the righteous are **raptured (snatched)** in the clouds to the air to meet the King of glory.*

”

Ephraim the Syrian

The Destruction of Pride

“

*Blessed are those who cry day and night that they should be
delivered from the coming wrath.*

”

Ephraim the Syrian

How the Soul Ought to Pray God with Tears

“

*Blessed are those who cry day and night because they shall
be **delivered from the coming wrath.***

”

Ephraim the Syrian

On the Blessed and the Cursed

OBSERVATIONS ON EPHRAIM'S RAPTURE POSITION

- Great tribulation, tribulation, wrath, judgment, confusion = synonyms
- No quibbling distinction between tribulation and wrath
- False Christians left behind at the rapture
- Rapture terms: gather, fly, seize, deliver, remove, meet in the clouds
- Prepositions *ek* (out) and *apo* (from) emphasize exclusion from wrath
- Expected rapture before (not at) beginning of tribulation

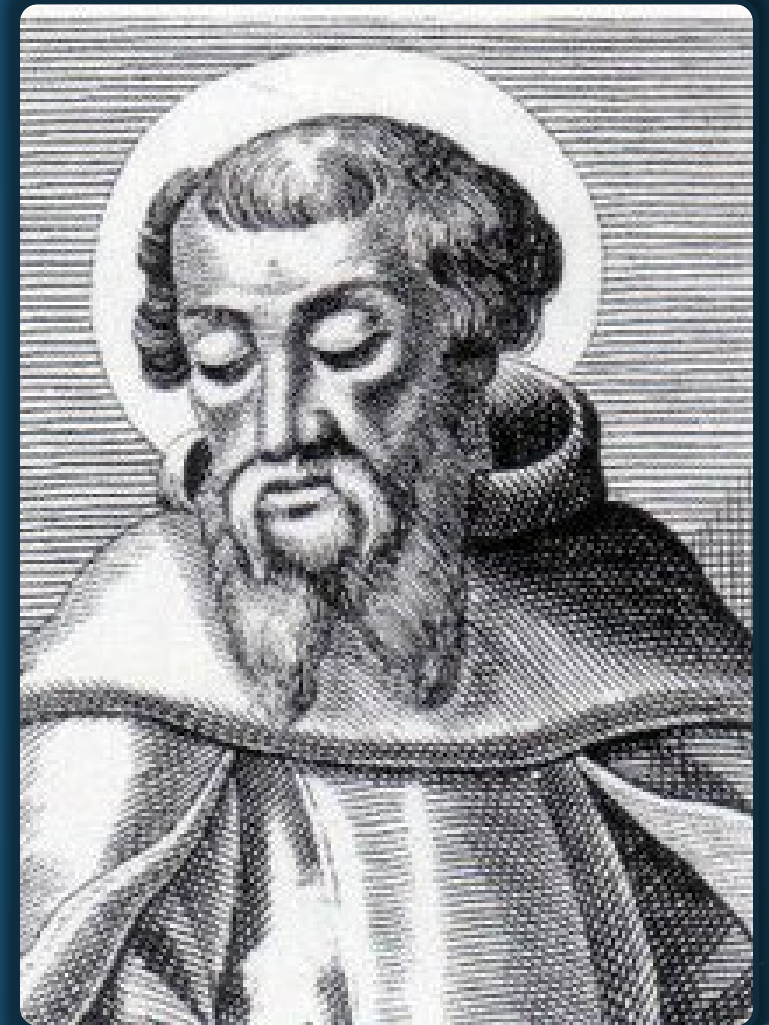
LATIN EPHRAIM AND GREEK EPHRAIM COMPARED



- Latin Ephraim prophecy work, *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*, and Greek Ephraim — same terms and eschatology
- three and a half year “great tribulation” with literal antichrist
- use “confusion” as a term for the tribulation
- use “dragon” for the antichrist as well as for Satan
- tribulation both persecution of saints and judgment on world
- plagues, famines, droughts, and earthquakes in the tribulation
- Elijah and Enoch return in the tribulation
- church returns with Christ at the second coming

IRENÆUS

- born c. 130 and died c. 202
- born in Smyrna (Izmir, Turkey)
- bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon, France)
- premillennial and pretribulational
- knew Polycarp, Polycarp disciple of John
- premier work was *Against Heresies*
- most of his works have not survived
— most chiliast works suppressed





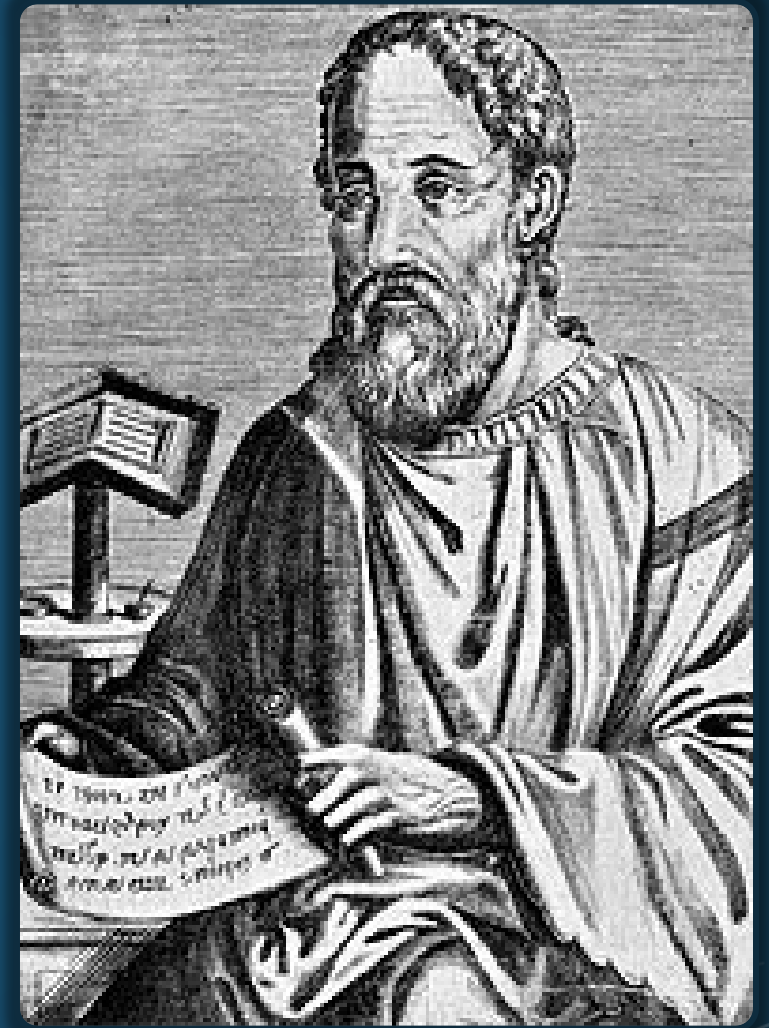
- Latin — “**When** in the end the Church **shall be** suddenly **caught up** from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation.’” ~ Irenaeus
- Latin — **cum** ... Ecclesia **assumetur:**
when ... church **shall be caught up**
- Greek — τῆς ἐκκλησίας **ἀναλαμβανομένης**
of the church **being caught up**
- Latin has “**when**” with regular verb “**shall be caught up**”
- Greek has participial phrase “**being caught up**”



- Greek — τῆς ἐκκλησίας **ἀναλαμβανομένης**, ἔσται ... **θλίψις**
of the church **being caught up**, there shall be ... **tribulation**
- ἀναλαμβανομένης = pres. pass. part. = “being caught up”
 - circumstantial participle contextualizes “there shall be tribulation”
 - “the church being caught up” = “once the church is caught up”
- The Greek paints contrast more emphatically than the Latin
 - instead of ambiguous “when,” have “once rapture happens, trib shall happen”
 - clarifies the temporal distinction between the rapture and the tribulation
 - clarifies distinction between church and trib saints in last contest of righteous

EUSEBIUS

- born 260-265 and died 339-340
- bishop of Caesarea by the Sea
- influential scholar, very learned
- best-known work is *Ecclesiastical History*
- suspected of Arianism, influenced by Origen
- enjoyed the favor of Constantine
- allegorical method, apparent amillennialist



FRAGMENTS IN DANIEL, FRAG. ε



- “The apostle Paul was moved to write in this manner on the second coming of Christ. «For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a command, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God,» and so forth. But the same apostle also **set forth in order** in his prophetic writings the **ultimate** coming of the antichrist and his depravity, and **after this** the glorious appearing of our Saviour.” ~ Eusebius
- Notice Paul **set forth in order**:
 - the rapture, the antichrist, the glorious appearance
- Notice the **ultimate** coming of the antichrist:
 - antichrist follows the rapture, is the endgame of mystery of iniquity

COMMENTARY IN PSALMS, 75



- Then they shall be exalted when they shall reign with their own king according to the apostle who said, «For the **first fruits** is Christ, **then** those who are Christ's in his parousia, **then the end**, when he shall deliver the kingdom to his God and Father, when he shall destroy all authority and power.” ~ Eusebius
- Note Eusebius' near verbatim citation of Paul, God's prophetic order — Christ first fruits, then Christ's church at his coming, then the end
- Factor in Eusebius is amillennial — general resurrection at second coming
- Bible order + Amillennialism = pretrib rapture distinct from second coming

FRAGMENTS IN LUKE, LUKE 17:26 ff



- As all perished then except those gathered with Noah in the ark, so also at his coming, the ungodly in the season of apostasy ... shall perish ... while ... according to the pattern of Noah ... all the righteous and godly are to be separated from the ungodly and **gathered into the heavenly ark of God**. For in this way [comes the time] when not even one righteous man will be found any more among mankind. And when all the ungodly have been made atheists by the antichrist, and the whole world is overcome by apostasy, the wrath of God shall come upon the ungodly. ~ Eusebius
- Gathered into the ark! Not one righteous man left! Season of apostasy. Wrath.

INSIGHT ON PATRISTIC AMILLENNIALISM



- In our day amillennialism and rejection of pre-trib rapture go hand in hand.
- Early church, millennium was different issue than tribulation and rapture.
- Eusebius was amillennial, yet appears to hold pre-tribulation rapture.
- So far, evidence in Greek works suggests that Ephraim was amillennial, yet indisputable pretribulation rapture passages in his works.
- This aspect of patristic eschatology needs to be investigated thoroughly
Perhaps we will find more pre-trib amillennialists if we do more digging.

CONCLUSION



- These passages greatly enlarge the known body of evidence for a pre-trib testimony in the early church.
- These passages suggest that the pre-trib testimony in the early church was deeper and broader than most of us suspected.
- The works of Ephraim and Eusebius add a significant body of material for framing a theology of pre-tribulational eschatology in the early church.
- These works suggest that the eschatology of Ephraim preserved in the Latin is not a fluke, but indicative of a lively and extensive pre-trib testimony in the 4th century.



One short life
to be a good soldier;
One long eternity
to be a fulfilled human being.

— LWB

— endure hardship as a good soldier
(2 Tim. 2:3)

— do exploits
(Dan. 11:32)