

The Paradox of Paradise Regained in the *Left Behind* Series

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Centuries after the popularity of the ancient “golden age” utopias, Tim LaHaye conceived the idea for the enormously popular *Left Behind* books. Rather than focusing on the idea of a lost earthly paradise, *Left Behind* depicts the creators’ interpretations of the apocalypse and ensuing millennial period that are put forth in the biblical Book of Revelations. Conservative evangelical Christians such as LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, his partner in the production of the series, believe that the apocalypse is destined to ultimately come. They define the apocalypse as the end of life on earth and the beginning of the battle between Christ and Satan for the souls of humans. The end of the apocalypse is believed to usher in the millennium, a 2000-year period of peace and paradise on earth before humans are again forced to make the choice between Christ and Satan.

Published between the years 1996 and 2004, the twelve-book *Left Behind* series follows the experiences of those “left behind” following Christ’s Rapture of the Church, with a focus on the “Tribulation Force,” a growing collection of people who become born-again Christians after being left behind. The members of the Tribulation Force use multiple means to fight the Antichrist, from attempting to subvert his evil plots to taking active measures to convert so-called “non-believers” to Christianity.

Jenkins, the author of the series, juxtaposes classical elements of utopian and dystopian thought in creating the world after the Rapture. The post-Rapture world becomes a dystopian nightmare, thrown into the seven-year period referred to in the Bible as the Tribulation, in

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which Christ and the Antichrist battle for the souls of those left behind. The irony of the series is that the terror of the Tribulation comes from the side of good as well as evil: the totalitarian rule of the Antichrist on one side, and the often horrifying biblical judgments that are visited upon the Earth by an allegedly praiseworthy God on the other. This is the paradox that consistently runs through the series and is particularly apparent in *Armageddon* and *Glorious Appearing*, the final two books which constitute the conclusion of the series as well as the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Christian millennium. Although LaHaye and Jenkins purport the conclusion and the ultimate effects of the Tribulation to be paradise, they fail to deal effectively with the contradictions within the series. In reality, the millennial period is only paradise for an extremely small group of believers. The books are marked by unremitting violence from all areas, and it is difficult for the reader to digest the concept that all of this violence is truly necessary for the much-anticipated Glorious Appearing to occur. Even Christ himself is not an entirely sympathetic figure, because just like his foil, the Antichrist, he comes across as a deity who is to be feared rather than loved.

The “believers” who have proclaimed their faith in Christ endure these ordeals because of the utopian promise of paradise regained: Just as the chapter of Revelations on which the series is based forewarns against the Rapture and the events of the Tribulation, it promises that after those seven years of Tribulation have passed, Christ will return and bring with him a millennium of heaven on Earth. For the believers from whose perspective the story is told, there is never a question of whether or not this will actually happen; everything else predicted in the Bible has, so of course Christ will come, defeat the Antichrist, and establish his kingdom on Earth.

Indeed, all of the events in the series materialize just as the authors’ literal reading of Revelations foretold they would, including the “Glorious Appearing,” the instance in the final book of the same name in which Christ appears for the first time. The questions which many readers will ask of *Glorious Appearing* are, is this really paradise and, even if it is, does it really make all of the horrifying events of the Tribulation worth it? Ultimately, Jenkins and LaHaye’s conclusion to the series is problematic because they fail to provide satisfactory answers

to these questions. Although the believers who survive to see the Glorious Appearing uniformly testify that being held by Jesus made everything they endured during the Tribulation worthwhile, the reader may not forget the endless violence of the previous years quite as easily. There is also the consideration of the relativist nature of their “utopia,” which turns out to be a dystopia for everyone who isn’t a Christian.

In Jenkins and LaHaye’s conception of the Tribulation, the Antichrist is a young politician from Romania named Nicolae Carpathia. Immediately following the Rapture, he quickly ascends the ranks of power, beginning with his appointment as Secretary-General of the United Nations and rising to the position of Supreme Global Community Potentate. Throughout his rule he wields promises of peace and harmony for all citizens, regardless of their race or nationality, but the Global Community he presides over quickly proves to be a dystopian totalitarian entity. The far-reaching organization supplants the U.N. as well as all independent states and brings all of the nations in the world under the auspices of Potentate Carpathia and his appointed “ten kings,” regional sub-potentates. By the time of *Armageddon*, the eleventh book in the series, which takes place during the final year of the Tribulation, the Global Community has evolved into a cross between George Orwell’s Big Brother and the Third Reich, with Carpathia as a figurehead. The single world currency is “the Nick”; the worldwide anthem is “Hail Carpathia.” The Global Community controls all legal media outlets, and the television news espouses endless and brazen propaganda.

Carpathia is the absolute, unrivaled ruler of the world and is recognized as a supreme political and religious figure: Following his assassination and the subsequent indwelling by Satan, which allows him to rise from the dead, Carpathia and his second-in-command, Leon Fortunato (in the role of the biblical False Prophet), proclaim him a deity to be held above and in lieu of all others. He is portrayed as the ultimate evil, a man symbolizing the opposite of Christian virtue.

Carpathia’s godlike powers are used as justification for his ensuing despotism. Christianity, along with all religions other than “Carpathianism,” is outlawed as every citizen is mandated to take “the mark of the beast” on their forehead as a visual representation of

their allegiance to the Potentate and the Global Community. Even after receiving the mark, the citizens are mandated to pray to a giant statue of their leader a minimum of three times a day. Those who refuse to take the mark and vow their allegiance to Carpathia, including the believers, are forced to live underground as fugitives and can be captured and violently beaten or executed for their beliefs on those grounds alone. The penalty for being discovered to have faked a mark is public torture to the point of death. Iris-scan technology is used by the Global Community to aid in the pursuit and prosecution of its opponents, in yet another ode to classic conventions of totalitarian governments in dystopian novels.

The world under the Global Community is depicted as an amoral dystopia within a dystopia. Within a few years after the Rapture, all major cities have become urban wastelands, complete with de facto legalized prostitution and rampant drug use. The implication is that it is the very absence of Christians that has caused society to degenerate so much in such a short period of time. Even the formerly conservative regions of the Middle East, now the center of the world, have become copies of Amsterdam's Red Light District.

Al Basrah was no better, but [Abadan] had to be what Sodom and Gomorrah had been like before God torched them. Every form of sin and debauchery was displayed right on the street. What was once the seedy side of town now was the town. Row after row of bars, fortune-telling joints, bordellos, sex shops, and clubs pandering to every persuasion and perversion teemed with drunk and high patrons. Hashish permeated the air. Cocaine and heroin deals went down in plain sight. The GC Peacekeepers and Morale Monitors had once made a noisy bust or two weekly to keep up appearances. But with their ranks shrunk, they now concentrated on crimes against the government. (2003, 86)

Television, too, has descended into miserable nefariousness. The daily public executions have become the most popular show on television:

The bloodlust was apparently insatiable. It had come to the

point where the most popular of the live-execution shows were those that lasted an hour and included slow-motion replays of the most gruesome deaths. When guillotines malfunctioned and blades stuck, victims were left mortally wounded and screaming but not dead...This was what the public wanted to see, and the more the better. (2003, 243)

Much of the tyranny of the Global Community is clearly modeled after that of Adolf Hitler's Nazis; in fact, Jenkins even alludes to the Nazis as being the precursors to the Global Community leaders, perhaps even a prior incarnation of the Antichrist. Most obviously, Potentate Carpathia lashes out against the Jewish population, sending them to like-named "concentration camps" where they are brutally tortured to the brink of death, yet not killed until their scheduled public executions. The Global Community also boasts a regime of "Peacekeepers" and "Morale Monitors," police whose primary role seems to be capturing any citizen who doesn't bear the mark, and a "Junior GC" organization that is modeled on the Hitler Youth.

The Judah-ites (the name given to the opposition force of believers, which is taken from the name of their spiritual leader, a former Jewish theologian, now born-again Christian named Dr. Tsion Ben-Judah) bear the brunt of Carpathia's tyranny and are publicly declared to be terrorists who are challenging the worldwide "peace" promised by the Global Community. In *Armageddon*, a core member of the Tribulation Force, a young woman named Chloe meets her untimely end at the guillotine in one of the Global Community's much lauded "daily executions." These executions are occasions for great celebration and public fervor, to the point of being almost patriotic displays. A government spokesman promises an eager audience, "Our daily executions here will be held tomorrow at 10 a.m....We do not foresee having the full house they did yesterday, with every machine busy for nearly half an hour, but the latest count is thirty-five on the docket, so five for each machine" (2003, 202).

Although the believers who are depicted in the novels are endlessly stalwart in their faith, they still have some fear, primarily of dying during the Tribulation and not surviving to the Glorious Appearing:

They were destined to be with Christ when they died, and should they survive, they would be with him on earth for a thousand years. But the prospect of dying was still a fearful thing. It was likely that any of the Tribulation Force who died during the next year would be martyrs to the cause of Christ, but their loved ones would still mourn them, still miss them. Worst of all, Rayford realized, he didn't want to think about how his loved ones might die. (2003, 74)

However, they typically pacify this fear with prayer. Prayer is the most frequently used tool of the Tribulation Force, and the satisfaction the members get from using it seems to replace any need they have for rational explanation for why God has mandated the Tribulation. It seems to work; for example, when Chloe prays on the night before her scheduled execution, an angel appears to her and returns the following day to protect her during her execution. They seem to take further comfort in the knowledge of their own virtue. As Tsion explains and many characters echo throughout the series, "This is a dangerous time, and many will be killed. Many of our own loved ones have lost their lives in the pursuit of righteousness. But we will do what we can until the end to keep fighting for what is right. For in the end, we win, and we will be with Jesus" (2003, 281-2).

Although it motivates the characters, this foreknowledge detracts from the sympathy the reader has for the plights of the believers. If they know for a fact that they will go to Heaven and be with Christ if they die, and then get to return to Earth following the Glorious Appearing, they really don't have anything to be afraid of. This is a major problem with the series as a whole: because the readers know all along how the grand cosmic battle between good and evil is destined to end, any dramatic tension a more ambiguous novel would have is lost.

The irony of the violent events of the Tribulation is that they are perpetrated by God as well as the Antichrist. Just as Potentate Carpathia is terrorizing the world's people through political means, God is using his infinite power to visit a series of brutal judgments onto all of the nonbelievers, the direct effects of which the confirmed believers are always spared. After taking the mark, sores suddenly appear on the

bodies of non-believers; numerous plagues scourge the Earth, mostly in the form of natural phenomenon, including earthquakes and hailstorms. The believers justify God's actions; T'sion preaches:

Some have legitimately questioned how a loving and merciful God could shower the earth with such horrible plagues and judgments. Yet I ask you, what else could he have done after so many millennia to shake men and women from their false sense of security and get them to look to him for mercy and forgiveness? (2003, 280)

T'sion goes on to urge his audience to consider God's many previous acts of mercy, in the form of the many signs he sent before the mark. Cruellest of all, those who take the mark of the beast subsequently lose their ability to choose Christ. The reason for this is never fully explained. At several points in the latter books, the believers encounter people who have taken the mark and now realize they made the wrong decision, but who no longer have the ability to choose correctly. One woman explains, "This hurts. It hurts worse than the pain from the darkness. Just learned it too late, I guess, that you don't mess with God" (2003, 40).

In these scenarios, even the believers have brief moments of questioning God's actions. Clearly, it contradicts many of the Bible verses which the characters are constantly quoting, such as, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (2003, 286). While watching all of the nonbelievers stumbling around in pain during the extended period of darkness which God visits upon the city of New Babylon, the seat of the Antichrist's government, Tribulation Force leader Rayford thinks, "These poor people! Yes, they had made their choices, and yes, they had had their opportunities to turn to God. But what a price!" (2003, 34).

However, one wonders what kind of a choice these people really had, if they truly had the free will and the opportunity to put their faith in Christ rather than Carpathia. Carpathia's terror extends beyond the believers onto the entire world population. Like any great tyrant, much of his power and ability to oppress comes from fear. Therefore, it is likely that a majority of the people who bear the mark are not

active supporters of or believers in Carpathia, but merely average citizens who were too afraid to rise up against him and lose the ability to legally buy and sell, which everyone must have the mark in order to do. Furthermore, while the Tribulation Force has made information about Christ and Revelations available via their website, which is run by the great spiritual leader Tsion Ben-Judah, this website is legally banned and accessing it is a high crime. Those who chose Carpathia most likely viewed their choice as a logical one between the lesser of two evils. But because Jenkins and LaHaye focus their story almost exclusively on the post-Rapture believers, providing us with little information about the majority of people who stand by Carpathia, we cannot understand their choices, and we are not expected to feel any sympathy for them.

The Glorious Appearing absolutely does not bring about “paradise on Earth” for the nonbelievers. When it comes time for judgment day, Christ grants them neither sympathy nor clemency.

With anger and yet sadness, He said, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me...Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. You will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (2004, 379)

After enduring God’s judgments for seven years, they are all unceremoniously dumped into Hell when Christ finally returns.

Rayford watched, horrified despite knowing this was coming, as the “goats” to Jesus’ left beat their breasts and fell wailing to the desert floor, gnashing their teeth and pulling their hair. Jesus merely raised one hand a few inches and a yawning chasm opened in the earth, stretching far and wide enough to swallow all of them. They tumbled in, howling and screeching, but their wailing was soon quashed and all was silent when the

earth closed itself again. (2004, 380)

It is easy for the reader to accept that Christ would mercilessly send Carpathia, the Antichrist; Fortunato, the False Prophet; and their leader Satan to hang alive in the Lake of Fire for their actions. After reading stories of their treachery for twelve books, the reader can even take satisfaction in the description of the archangel Michael pushing Fortunato and Carpathia into the “raging pillar of fire” (2004, 311). As one of the believers explains while observing their sentencing, “This wasn’t about winning. This was about justice” (2004, 308). But when the fate of the other nonbelievers is revealed, it is an extraordinarily uncomfortable surprise. Again, LaHaye and Jenkins want their readers to believe that these people had innumerable signs that they were following the wrong path, and multiple opportunities to proclaim their faith in Christ, but this seems to be an assumption that is not adequately backed up with facts. True, God sent multiple signs in the form of cruel judgments, but Carpathia and Fortunato used their control of the media to spin them into either random, inexplicable occurrences that were nonetheless unrelated to religion, or acts of terrorism by the Judah-ites. There is no rationale given for Christ’s final condemnation of these people, other than His frustration with their failure to take note of the signs they were sent.

Meanwhile, the members of the Tribulation Force and the other believers claim that for them, the experience of being present for the Glorious Appearing and hearing Christ speak to them individually overrides all of the misery they have undergone in the previous seven years since the Rapture. Even before Christ defeats Carpathia in the Battle of Armageddon and establishes his kingdom on Earth, the believers take great pleasure in the chaos the Global Community is falling into. Watching the events over the Internet, two young members of the Tribulation Force “couldn’t decide what was more entertaining — the myriad camera feeds from all over the dark world, or the racing meter giving evidence of the fulfilling of the prophecy that a third of the Jewish remnant would come to believe in Jesus as their Messiah by the time of the end” (2004, 132). They react to the horror of Carpathia and his followers with what can only be described as smugness.

Jenkins and LaHaye’s Christ has the awesome power to appear to

all believers at once, speaking to each in his or her native language and addressing each by name simultaneously. When He finally appears He can be seen by everyone on Earth at the same time. While Carpathia is always described as haughty and overdressed in ridiculous black clothing, atop a black horse, the first appearance of Christ is white, bright, and heavenly, bringing with him an all-encompassing and ubiquitous light.

Heaven opened and there, on a white horse, sat Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Rayford could not explain how he could see his Savior so clearly. It was as if He appeared within inches of Rayford, and he knew that had to be the experience of everyone everywhere. Jesus' eyes shone with a conviction like a flame of fire, and He held His majestic head high. He wore a robe down to the feet so brilliantly white it was incandescent and bore writing...On His robe at the thigh a name was written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Jesus was girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow. His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace. (2004, 203)

The irony of this description is that while LaHaye and Jenkins are clearly setting up a contrast between the dark evil of Carpathia and the righteous purity of Christ, the characters are actually more alike than they seem at first. Like Carpathia, Christ shows himself to be shockingly vengeful against those who defy him. Despite his peaceful appearance, Christ is a mighty warrior. The very sound of his preaching kills many of Carpathia's soldiers. Based on Jenkins's description, these soldiers do not die pacifically, either; their deaths are so violent that Rayford and the other believers are shocked that the soldiers continue to fight.

Amazingly, there was not even a battle transpiring at the moment, yet thousands of Unity Army soldiers were slain simply by the Lord's words as He passed by. They were not even fighting, not threatening, not advancing or even moving. But they had long since made their decision. They had pledged

their loyalty to the god of this world, had willingly taken the mark of the Antichrist and bowed the knee to him. For them there was no recourse. Rayford thrilled to the powerful words of the Master and was horrified by the carnage that resulted from them. His heart was full and yet he found it difficult to tear his eyes away from the bloodshed on the ground. Oh, what this portended for the army as a whole when the actual fighting ensued! How any of the surviving men and women could see their compatriots die such horrible deaths — simply from the words pronounced from the sky — and still be willing to stay in the fray was beyond Rayford. (2004, 240)

Christ openly proclaims this to be his act of vengeance:

For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment. The sword of the Lord is filled with blood. It is made overflowing with fatness. For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated with fatness...For today is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion. (2004, 226)

Inherent in Jenkins and LaHaye's depiction of Christ is one major contradiction: On one page, Christ is an understanding and sympathetic figure with endless patience. He loves all of His children and is constantly trying to reach out to them, even when they ignore Him. Yet on the next page, Christ is unforgiving, even spiteful. The believers in the story frequently praise His patience, but it is clear that even the patience of Christ has a limit. They seldom question God's actions at any point in the series, and on the rare occasions they do, they typically brush off the questions with a blithe explanation, along the lines of, "God has his own timetable. All this has been prophesied, scripted. It's going to happen when it's supposed to happen" (2004, 251). With such circular reasoning — it will happen because it was written, and it was written because it had to happen — this seems like a cheap explanation, along the lines of a parent telling a child, "Do it because

I said so.”

Both the believers and the readers are discouraged from asking God “why,” because to do so would tend to signify a lack of faith. All of the characters have their doubts relieved, first through prayer and then through their individual conversations with Christ at the Glorious Appearing. However, this does little to alleviate the doubts of the reader. This device is problematic, therefore, in that the books fail in their key purpose: to answer and quell any doubts readers may have about Christianity and, in particular, the apocalypse. Instead, the reader is encouraged to suppress his or her doubts. Questioning God in any way is depicted as a sin, an evil action reserved almost exclusively for Satan, the Antichrist, and their followers.

For the believers, at least, there is no real need to ask the question of “why”: In spite of everything that has transpired in their world up to this point, they are with Christ now and the world is an earthly paradise. Humans are uniformly kindhearted and altruistic. All of the former battlegrounds of the Earth, devastated by war and earthquakes, are restored to perfection overnight. Fattened animals, rare creatures during the Tribulation, randomly appear at butcher shops, offering themselves up for slaughter. Fruit trees ripen as quickly as ripe and delicious fruit falls from them. Even the weather is stunningly beautiful, “hot, clear, refreshing, as if they were breathing new air” (2004, 333).

All of the believers who survive the Tribulation are awed by Christ’s ability to make everyone feel He is addressing them individually at the same time. When Christ speaks, they are all overcome with a feeling of pride: “He used my name” (2004, 212). The knowledge that the same thing is happening to everyone around them in no one mitigates the pleasure of hearing Christ say their names. “It came with such love, compassion, and knowledge that it was as if no one had ever uttered it before or would again” (2004, 213). Christ brings each believer towards him and welcomes them into his kingdom individually:

[Rayford] dropped to his knees at Jesus’ feet, sobbing, reminded of every sin and shortcoming of his entire life. Loving hands gathered him in, and he was drawn to Jesus’ bosom. “Rayford, Rayford, how I have looked forward to and longed for this

day.” Rayford could not speak. “I knew your name before the foundation of the world. I have prepared a place for you, and if it were not so, I would have told you.” (2004, 297)

Christ goes on with this intimate dialogue, recounting to individual believers the stories of their lives and their discoveries of Him. To each believer he concludes, “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I am the lover of your soul. You were meant to be with Me for eternity, and now you shall be” (2004: 298). Each individual in Christ’s kingdom has a personal relationship with Him. He even answers believers’ prayers before they have the chance to pray them. The believers who have survived the Tribulation unanimously agree that their new lives more than make up for everything they have suffered. As one of them thinks after his audience with Christ, “The message his Savior imparted was definitely for him alone, and the fearful, ugly things that had happened over the last few hours did nothing to temper the thrill of it” (2004, 326).

All of the believers who died during the Tribulation are honored as martyrs and allowed to reunite with their loved ones when Christ establishes his kingdom on Earth, although Jenkins notes that they are still prevented from helping to repopulate the world. Because of all the people who have died during the series, either in the numerous plagues before the Glorious Appearing or in Christ’s ensuing purge of the nonbelievers, less than one-quarter of the population remains to repopulate. The reason for the lowness of this figure is never explained, except that it is foretold in the Bible — a typical, catch-all explanation for everything in the series.

The conclusion of the *Left Behind* series raises an important (though unintended) point about the relativist nature of utopia and dystopia. In contrast to the unadulterated perfection of the ancient “golden age” utopias, the world depicted after the Glorious Appearing is a utopia for the believers, but a dystopia for everyone else. The series is clearly written with a religious agenda. Both conservative Christians, Jenkins and LaHaye constructed the series with the hope of converting readers to their faith and making them aware of the Rapture, which they have both said they believe will come within the next few decades. The *Left Behind* books are representative of one side of a debate that

is currently going on within the conservative Christian community in America, concerning the true nature of the Book of Revelations and the biblical rapture and tribulation. Another Christian author, Hank Hanegraaff, has spoken out against the model of the End Times depicted by Jenkins and LaHaye. Hanegraaff's own biblical-themed novel, *The Last Disciple*, argues that Revelations in fact describes the persecution of early Roman Christians under Emperor Nero. The author has spoken out against the *Left Behind* series in several mainstream news articles, describing them as sensationalistic (24). A similar criticism has been put forth by Robert W. Lowry, the minister of a First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 2004, Lowry wrote a column in *Christian Century* magazine criticizing the last two books in the series for their lack of hope. "Even the Book of Revelations is full of imagery and hope that defies the hellfire and brimstone of the *Left Behind* series and its companion theology. Christ promised hope, and I see no reason to let bad fiction bring that promise into doubt" (44).

Outside of the Christian community, a number of journalists and intellectuals have attacked the series: for example, New York *Times* editorial writer Nicholas D. Kristof accused LaHaye and Jenkins of perpetuating the same kind of dangerous fundamentalism and bigotry that Americans have criticized Eastern religions, particularly Islam, of spreading. Referring to the events of *Glorious Appearing*, Kristof writes sarcastically, "Silly me. I'd forgotten the passage in the Bible about how Jesus intends to roast everyone from the good Samaritan to Gandhi in everlasting fire, simply because they weren't born-again Christians" (A23).

Like many effective dystopias, the *Left Behind* series succeeds in awakening a consciousness in its readers through fear. Initially, the shock of having been left behind — and, in many cases, having their loved ones be taken — after the Rapture prompts most of the core members of the Tribulation Force to discover Christ. The fear of the series of judgments foretold in Revelations, which is read by various characters throughout the series, leads still others to put their faith in Christ. The very character of God, as portrayed throughout the series, is someone to be feared rather than loved.

The authors' perpetual use of fear seems to act at least partially as

a replacement for any genuine analysis of the events to the readers. Jenkins and LaHaye intentionally shy away from answering most questions raised by their God's actions: their somewhat trite fallback explanation for everything that happens, both in the Tribulation and immediately following the Glorious Appearing, is that it was decreed in the Bible. None of the characters ever asks why it had to be written in the first place, and what purpose, if any, the violence perpetuated by God ultimately serves. The implication of this is that to ask such a question, or to even think such a thing, would be heresy, even blasphemy. Jenkins and LaHaye are clearly appealing to their readers' immediate instinctual response — "Lord, please don't let this happen to me!" — rather than their intellect. Perhaps the clearest lesson in the convoluted *Left Behind* series is that being a devout Christian means accepting, without question, the word of God.

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