

The Rapture - Part 23

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My previous articles commenced a series on the rapture of the church. We began with the question, "What is the Rapture?" This question can best be answered by noting ten truths about the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. We then moved to a second main question, namely, when will the rapture take place relative to the coming seven-year Tribulation period? We offered the contention that believers can develop certainty that they will be raptured before the Tribulation period occurs for at least seven reasons. Now that we have dealt with these two questions, we began to explore some of the weaknesses associated with the other competing views that seek to answer the question, "when will the rapture take place relative to the coming Tribulation period?" At least five differing perspectives exist. We noted at the onset that it is important to understand that all of the non-pre-tribulation positions have a difficult time handling the seven arguments favoring **pre-tribulationism** previously discussed in this series. We have already noted the problems associated with **mid-tribulationism**. In the last article we began to scrutinize the arguments favoring post-tribulationism. In this article, we will continue to scrutinize **post-tribulationism**.

Post-Tribulation Rapture

Post-tribulation rapture theory contends that the rapture will take place at the end of the coming Tribulation period. This view typically sees no distinction between the rapture and the Second Advent and thus seeks to harmonize all references to Christ's return as taking place at the end of the future Tribulation period. Those adhering to the post-tribulation rapture typically rely on at least one of *four* arguments to support their position. In our last article, we noted that **post-tribulationism** errs in superficially connecting Paul's depiction of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58) with the events of Matthew 24:30-31. We now move on to the second argument that **post-tribulationists** use to support their view.

2. *According to Revelation 20:4-6, the resurrection of all believers will transpire at the end of the Tribulation period thereby necessitating that the rapture will also take place at this time.* These verses say, "Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." **Post-tribulationist** George Eldon Ladd even goes so far as to assert that these verses represent the only New Testament passage pointing to the time of the rapture.¹

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 165.

The simplest response to this assertion is that the resurrection spoken of in these verses is speaking only of the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs. Revelation 20:4 clarifies exactly which resurrection is in view when it says, "And I saw *the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand*; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (italics added). Thus, Geisler explains, "Revelation 20:4-6 is speaking of the believers who have died during the Tribulation, not those resurrected at the Rapture" (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58).²

Moreover, the superficial points of similarity that seemingly unite Paul's presentation of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58) with Revelation 20:4-6 are outweighed by a vast difference that distinguishes these sections of Scripture from one another. Although Revelation 20:4-6 does speak of a resurrection of deceased saints, it says nothing about a translation and resurrection of living saints as Paul emphasizes in his discussion of the rapture. For example, Paul's rapture presentation uses terminology such as "we who are alive and remain" (1 Thess. 4:15, 17) and "we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:50). Such phrases are not found in Revelation 20:4-6. Thus, Ryrie observes, "...Revelation 20:4 speaks only of a resurrection of the dead, not of a translation of living people, a truth that is prominent and a vital part of the other descriptions of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)."³

If Revelation 20:4-6 is not speaking of the rapture of the church and if the church's rapture already transpired before this resurrection predicted by John takes place, then why is it called "the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5-6)? When John mentioned "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5b, he had in mind merely that this resurrection will occur before the final resurrection for all unbelievers that will transpire at the end of Christ's one-thousand year reign (Rev. 20:5a). He was not referring to the first resurrection ever in human history. Indeed, John could not have in mind the first resurrection ever since such a proposition would also mean that even Christ's resurrection would not count as a bonafide resurrection! John's use of the word "first" in Revelation 20:5-6 was only in reference to the first in a series rather than the first ever. Such a method of communication would be the equivalent of my wife telling me that she was "first" going to go the grocery store and then "last" she was going to drop off the laundry. Here, she would be using the word "first" only relative to "last" going to drop off the laundry. She would not be saying this would be her first time ever that she had gone to the grocery store. John uses the word "first" in the same sense in Revelation 20:5-6.

² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2004), 654.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, Current Christian Issues (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 63-64.

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In sum, having previously answered the question, "What is the rapture?", we noted at least seven reasons that affirm the **pre-tribulation** rapture view. We then began interacting with the other positions on the timing of the rapture. In this article, we have observed that **post-tribulationism** errs in superficially connecting Paul's depiction of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58) with the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4-6.

(To Be Continued...)



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