

The Rapture - Part 29

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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. After dealing 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-pretribulation 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 few articles we began to scrutinize the arguments claiming to favor **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-tribulationism** rapture typically rely on at least one of *four* arguments to support their position. In past articles, 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 either the events of Matthew 24:30-31 or Revelation 20:4-6. Moreover, we noted that contrary to the assertion of **post-tribulationism**, although believers will be exempted from some of the judgments during the Tribulation period, they will still be subjected to many other judgments during this time period. Thus, **post-tribulationism** errs in failing to understand that the divine promise of Revelation 3:10 conveys a complete escape not only from coming Tribulation judgments but also from the very time of those judgments. We further observed that **post-tribulationism's** argument from antiquity errs in appealing to historical sources outside the Bible, failing to acknowledge that imminency was embraced by many Church Fathers, and failing to understand the notion of progressive illumination of prophetic truth.

Having responded to the *four* major arguments advanced by post-tribulationists, let us consider *five* major problems with post-tribulationism. An examination and exploration of the cumulated problems with this view should make unbiased interpreters highly reticent to adopt this perspective. These

five problems include *the mortal population of the millennial kingdom, the Hebrew wedding sequence, the pointlessness of the preparation of the believers' heavenly dwellings* (John 14:2-3), *the lack of time for the Bema Seat Judgment, and the pointlessness of the church being caught up only to immediately return to the earth.* In the last article, we examined the *first* of these five problems, which pertains to the mortal population of the millennial kingdom. In this article we will briefly examine the *second* problem with **post-tribulationism**, which relates to the Hebrew wedding sequence.

2. *The Hebrew Wedding Sequence.* Christ's relationship to His church is analogous to that of a groom to his bride (Eph. 5:22-33; 2 Cor. 11:2). Thus, the New Testament uses the Jewish marriage custom to depict the relationship between Christ and the church. Although this analogy may be obscure to a twenty-first century audience, given the Jewish background of the Scriptures (Rom. 3:1-2)—as well as Christ, the Apostles, and the early church—it is fitting that the New Testament would liken the relationship between Christ and His church to the Hebrew wedding sequence. In other words, because the Bible was written predominantly by Jews who were culturally familiar with these various phases in the wedding sequence and because Christ's relationship to His church is analogized in Scripture to the relationship between a bride and groom (Eph. 5:22-32), each of these distinct Hebrew marriage phases can also be seen in Christ's dealings with His church. There

are at least *ten* distinct phases or aspects to this relationship.¹

First, the groom traveled to the home of the bride's father and paid the *betrothal contract* price for the hand of the bride. This step is the equivalent of Christ's death that paid the price necessary for the church to enter into a relationship with Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Here, the groom was the initiator. Such initiation speaks of the fact that Christ has elected unto salvation members of His church (John 15:16a). During this step the bride and the groom drank from the same cup as a commemoration of the new betrothal contract. Such commemoration is symbolized in the ordinance of Communion that the church is to regularly practice until Christ returns (1 Cor. 11:25).

Second, the *bride was set apart* exclusively for the groom. Namely, she was a woman no longer available to be pursued by other suitors, but rather was a woman already spoken for. Such setting apart of the bride is represented in how the church has been positionally sanctified or set apart from the world unto Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:9-11).

Third, the groom separated from the bride and *returned to his father's house to prepare bridal chamber.* In that case, these dwellings would eventually be occupied by the groom and his new bride. This step represents Christ's Ascension (Acts 1:9-11) and the beginning of the Church Age. Here, Christ is separated bodily from His church while He is preparing dwelling places for His bride in His Father's

¹ Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 164-69.

house (John 14:2). This time of separation represents the last two-thousand years of church history.

Fourth, this time of separation is known as the *betrothal period*. During this time of separation, the fidelity of the groom and the bride was tested. The test, of course, involved whether the bride and the groom would be loyal to each other despite the vast distance between them. If either failed the test during this time of separation, the betrothal contract would be dissolved. This ancient Jewish ritual explains Joseph's dismay and desire to end the engagement upon discovering Mary's pregnancy. The severity of this situation also explains why an angel had to be dispatched from heaven to assure Joseph that Mary's pregnancy had in fact been wrought by the Holy Spirit rather than caused by Mary's unfaithfulness to Joseph during the betrothal period (Matt. 1:18-25). Just as the fidelity of the groom and bride are tested during this time of separation, the church's loyalty to Christ is currently being tested as the church is tempted to succumb to false teaching and worldly conduct (Jas 4:4; 2 Cor. 11:2) during Christ's physical absence. The church demonstrates her loyalty to Christ during this time by maintaining both correct beliefs (orthodoxy) and correct practice (orthopraxy). Apparently, the church will be either given or denied rewards at the Bema Seat Judgment based upon her faithfulness to Christ during this time of separation in the intervening Church Age.²

Fifth, the *groom retrieved the bride*. At an unknown time, the groom returned to the

bride's home, accompanied by escorts and preceded by a shout, to collect his bride and take her to his father's house. This step is the equivalent of the rapture of the church. At the rapture, Christ will be accompanied by deceased Church-Age saints and preceded by the shout of an archangel (1 Thess. 4:16-17). He will come at an unknown time to take the church to His father's house in heaven to the temporary dwellings He has prepared for her (John 14:3).

Sixth, the bridal party returns to the groom's father's home in order to meet wedding guests who have already assembled. A *private wedding ceremony* then took place. This step correlates to the raptured church being taken to heaven in order to greet Old Testament saints who are already in the presence of the Lord.

Seventh, the bride and the groom were then *hidden in the Father's house* for a period of seven days while other events (described in steps eight and nine) transpired. In the same way, the church will be veiled or hidden from world during Daniel's Seventieth Week. Thus, this step is the equivalent of the church after the rapture being hidden with Christ in heaven for seven years (Dan. 9:27), while the events of the Tribulation come to pass on the earth below.

Eighth, the bride then underwent *ritual cleansing*. This step involved the bride experiencing a ritual cleansing prior to the wedding ceremony. This ritual cleansing equates to the Bema Seat Judgment of rewards to be experienced by the church in heaven following the rapture (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). Here, members of Christ's church will have the work that they have

² See step number eight below.

accomplished following conversion tested in order to ascertain their quality. All fleshly motivated activity will be consumed by the refiner's fire. Conversely, works that were done through spiritual motives and power will survive the fire's trying work. Whatever remains after the consuming fire will be part of the Church-Age believer's reward above and beyond salvation (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Ninth, during the *consummation of the marriage* stage the wedding party waited outside the marital chamber while the new couple enters into this chamber in order to physically consummate their new union. The groom emerged from the marital chamber announcing to the wedding party the reality of this new physical union. He then returned to the marital chamber to be with his bride for seven days while the wedding guests continued to celebrate outside the marital chamber. This step pictures the church's marriage to Christ (Eph. 5:27). Thus, at this point, the church is no longer merely the bride of Christ but now has formally been married to Him.

Tenth, the groom and the bride *emerged from the marital chamber unveiled* and in full view of the wedding party. Thus far, the bride had been veiled to the wedding party. At the conclusion of these seven days, the newly married couple were then officially presented to the world as the new "Mr. and Mrs." This step is the equivalent of Christ and the church returning to the earth at the conclusion of the seven-year Tribulation period, both unveiled (Col 3:4) and visible to the entire world (Rev 1:7; 19:7-9).

Knowledge of the Hebrew marriage custom events negates post-tribulationism. This

sequence of events illustrates that the rapture, as represented by the groom returning from his father's house at an unknown time to retrieve the bride, is one event. Moreover, the bodily return of Jesus with His church at the end of the Tribulation period, as represented by the couple being officially presented to the public, is yet another distinct event. These events are separated by an extended period of time, which is represented by the seven day interval in the father's house between the groom returning to retrieve the bride and the new couple officially being presented to the public. The post-tribulation rapture view, which holds that the rapture will occur a split second before the bodily return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation period, ignores the fact that the rapture and the bodily appearing of Christ are two distinct events separated by an extended period of time.

Thus, Ryrie summarizes how the sequence of the Hebrew marriage custom interval injures post-tribulationism:

In Revelation 19:7-9 the wedding feast is announced, which, if the analogy of the Hebrew marriage customs means anything, assumes that the wedding has previously taken place in the father's house. Today the church is described as a virgin waiting for her bridegroom's coming (2 Corinthians 11:2); in Revelation 21 she is designated as the wife of the lamb, indicating that previously she has been taken to the groom's father's house. Pretribulationists say that this requires an interval of time between the rapture and the second coming. Granted, it

does not say seven years' time, but it certainly argues against posttribulationism, which has no time between the rapture and second coming.³

In sum, in this series, 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 prior articles, we have answered **post-tribulationism's** *four* major arguments. In this article, we began examining the *second of five* weaknesses associated with the post-tribulation rapture position. That is, post-tribulationism, which has a tendency to merge the rapture and the Second Advent, has difficulty harmonizing with the Hebrew wedding sequence since this sequence conveys an extended period of time that must elapse between the rapture and the Second Advent.

(To Be Continued...)



Source: SpiritAndTruth.org

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, Current Christian Issues (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 61.