

The Rapture - Part 31

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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 complete our analysis of **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, we then began to 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 *third* of these five problems, which pertains to the pointlessness of the preparation of the believers' heavenly dwellings (John 14:2-3). In this article we will briefly examine the *fourth* and *fifth* problems with **post-tribulationism**. These relate to *the lack of sufficient time for the Bema Seat Judgment* as well as *the pointlessness of the church being caught up only to immediately return to the earth.*

4. *The Lack of Time for the Bema Seat Judgment.* Second Corinthians 5:8 speaks of the church in heaven. Then, 2 Corinthians 5:10 describes the Bema Seat Judgment. Thus, the Bema Seat Judgment will take place when the church is with Christ in heaven. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the event which will bring the church into heaven will be the rapture of the church. Pentecost explains:

It is scarcely necessary to point out that this examination must take place in the sphere of the heavenlies. It is said in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that "we shall be caught up... in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." Since the bema follows the translation, the "air" must be the scene of it. This is further supported by 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, where Paul is describing events that take place when the believer is "absent from the body, and...present with the Lord." Thus, this

event must take place in the Lord's presence in the sphere of the "heavenlies."¹

Notice that Revelation 19:7-8 portrays the church returning with Christ at the end of the seven year Tribulation period already rewarded. These verses say, "...For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints)." Notice that the bride, who represents the church (Eph. 5:23), is pictured returning with Christ at the end of the Tribulation period already rewarded, as represented by the clean linen.

Let's put all of this together. Because the church will experience the Bema Seat Judgment in heaven, this judgment must take place after the rapture which is the event which will usher the church into heaven. Moreover, the church must experience this judgment before the bodily return of Christ at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period because the church is pictured as returning with Christ already rewarded. In sum, during the seven-year period while the church is in heaven in between the rapture and the bodily return of Christ, the Bema Seat Judgment will take place. Living with the knowledge that at any moment the Christian can be removed from the earth via the rapture and subsequently ushered into the presence of Christ to be rewarded for how his life was

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958; reprint, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1964), 221.

spent since spiritual birth is indeed a powerful incentive for holy living in the present!

Furthermore, Ephesians 5:25, 27 states, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...to *present* her to Himself as a radiant church..." (italics added). When will the church be officially presented to Christ? This event will take place in heaven when the church has been reunited with Christ following the rapture. Scripture refers to this event as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

Why is this name used? When a Jewish couple was united in marriage, a celebration involving feasting usually followed the wedding ceremony.² Similarly, when Christ's bride the church is officially presented to Christ the groom, a wonderful heavenly celebration involving feasting will take place. This is why the designation the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is used to describe this event.

Revelation 19:7 portrays Christ's bride the church returning with Christ to the earth at the end of the Tribulation period immediately after the transpiring of the "Marriage of the Lamb." This verse says, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready." Thus, the Marriage of the Lamb, like the Bema Seat Judgment, will occur while the church is in heaven for seven years between the rapture and the bodily appearing of Christ.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture*, Current Christian Issues (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 60-61.

The eschatological realities of the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage of the Lamb make post-tribulationism unlikely for the simple reason that this view does not allow sufficient time for these heavenly events to transpire. After being removed from the earth through the rapture, the church will experience a period of time with Christ in heaven before returning with Him to the earth at the end of the Tribulation period. Two events involving the church will occur in heaven following the rapture but before the bodily return of Christ called the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

A post-tribulation rapture does not allow enough time for these two events to take place. For example, if the rapture takes place before the Tribulation period begins, then at least seven years between the rapture and the bodily appearing are allotted for the church to experience the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage of the Lamb. If the rapture takes place halfway through the Tribulation period, then only three-and-one-half years between the rapture and the bodily appearing are allowed for the church to experience the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage of the Lamb. If the rapture takes place at the end of the Tribulation period, then only a miniscule amount of time between the rapture and the bodily appearing is allowed for the church to experience the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage of the Lamb. Some have jokingly remarked that under such circumstances, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb would become nothing more than a microwave dinner or a sack lunch!

5. *The Pointlessness of the Church Being Caught Up Only to Immediately Return to the Earth.* As mentioned above, Jesus will return with His previously raptured church at the end of the Tribulation period (Rev. 19:7-8; Eph. 5:23). If the rapture takes place at the end of the Tribulation period as the post-tribulation view teaches, then the church will return with Christ immediately after being raptured. In other words, the church will experience a bizarre "elevator ride" of sorts. After being caught up in the air to meet Christ, the church will immediately and instantaneously return with Him to the earth. If this is so, then what would be the point of God rapturing the church to heaven in the first place? It makes far greater sense for the church to be removed from the earth at a much earlier point in time. In the ensuing interval that follows the rapture, the church will fulfill its heavenly destiny. After spending an extended period of time with Christ in heaven, the church will then return with Him at the end of the Tribulation period to rule and reign upon the earth (2 Tim. 2:11-13; Rev. 5:10). Such a scenario seems far more credible than having the church to be caught up only to immediately return to the earth as post-tribulationism contends.

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 *fourth* and *fifth* 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 allowing for an appropriate amount of time for the transpiring of the Bema Seat Judgment that Christ and also seems somewhat awkward given the pointlessness of the church being caught up only to immediately return to the earth.

(To Be Continued...)



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