

Comparing and Contrasting Rapture Views

This is the second of a series on helping folks understand the Rapture teaching. I thought I would use one of the testing methods when I went to college. Many a final exam was built upon a single exam question, such as the first three words of the title above. This becomes a real test of what one really knew about the course content. 90-percent of my college work was in the form of essay type questions. The rationale for essay questions is to develop one's ability to verbalize and articulate a position on paper. The rationale here is to take a look at the different views but in relationship to the detail particulars revealed in Scripture. All too often those of opposing views are not hearing what each other is saying, and merely talking past each other rather than to compare and contrast important points.

Before examining specific passages that Pre-and Post-Tribulationists use to support their respective positions, it should be helpful to sketch the broad picture that each view paints of the future.

Obviously not all adherents to either view agree on all of the details. Also, Pre-Tribulationists have over the years projected a much more detailed picture of the future than have Post-Tribulationists, who generally have concentrated on countering Pre-Tribulation arguments rather than putting together a chronology of the future. I am not at all being critical of the Pre-Tribulation position, merely stating an important point others neglect in their attack on the Pre-Tribulation position.

Pre-tribulationism sees the Rapture as the next event on God's program. It will occur before the Tribulation begins, the actual beginning being signaled by the signing of the pact between Israel and the leader of the revived Roman empire; the man of sin. This event actually begins the seventieth week of Daniel -(9:25-27), the seven-year Tribulation period, during which the church will be absent from the earth in fulfillment of the promise of Revelation 3:10.

The Tribulation also begins the Day of the Lord, which totally includes that period, the judgments at the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the Millennium. At the beginning of the seven years, 144,000 Jews are sealed, saved, and protected in order to serve God during that time. Also the worldwide church will gain great political power before being destroyed at the middle of the Tribulation. The seal judgments of Revelation 6 (or at least most of them) will be poured out on the earth as part of the wrath during the first half of the Tribulation.

At the midpoint, the two witnesses of Revelation 11 will be killed and raised. The ecumenical church will be overthrown. Satan will be cast out of heaven to begin even more intense persecution of the Jewish people -(Revelation 12:9, 13). The man of sin will break his pact with Israel and seek to extend his dominion both politically and religiously. He will demand that the world worship him.

In the latter half of the Tribulation other horrible judgments will fall on the earth - (Revelation 8-9; 16). Egypt will fall, the great alliance to the north of Palestine will attack, armies from the east will move into Palestine, and the campaign of Armageddon will be ended by the return of Christ.

Then will follow judgments on Jewish people who have survived the Tribulation -(Ezekiel 20:33-44) and on Gentile survivors -(Matthew 25:31-46). Those who pass those judgments will be only those who did accept Jesus Christ, and they will then enter the millennial kingdom in un-resurrected, earthly bodies and will become the parents of the millennial population.

Jesus Christ will then set up His kingdom and reign on this earth for a thousand years. At the conclusion Satan will be loosed to lead one final unsuccessful revolution. All unbelievers of all time will be raised to appear at the judgment of the great white throne and then to be cast into the lake of fire forever.

Post-Tribulationists also view the seventieth week of Daniel as yet future, but the church will not be raptured before it begins. Rather, the church will be present on the earth during the entire seven-year period of the Tribulation. There will be no rapture to signal the imminent signing of a pact between the man of sin and Israel. Rather, in the normal ongoing course of political affairs in the world, that agreement will be signed, and the Tribulation will begin. The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments will occur during that time (concurrently rather than sequentially). Those will not be the wrath of God, however, but the wrath of Satan and man.

The wrath of God will not be poured out until the very end of the Tribulation. The 144,000 will be protected by God from dying throughout the period, but they will not be saved until the second coming. Some Post-Tribulationists consider the 144,000 to be a symbolic representation of the church, rather than a specific number of Jewish people. At the end of the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord will begin, preceded by a peaceful lull in the horrible events that will have been going on (to fulfill 1st Thessalonians 5:2-3). Then the church will experience the fulfillment of Revelation 3:10 and emerge from within the Tribulation period just at its end, missing the battle of Armageddon. Yet the rapture will be a single event with the second coming, the church meeting the Lord in the air and then immediately turning around to descend to the earth.

When the Lord returns there will be no formal judgment of survivors of the Tribulation. The 144,000 will be saved at that point (assuming the view that they are indeed Jewish people and not representative of the church) and will enter the Millennium in un-resurrected bodies. The judgment of the living Gentiles of Matthew 25:31-46 will not occur until the end of the Millennium at the same time as the judgment of unbelievers at the great white throne. Let's now establish the chronology as each view presents their specific points:

Pre-Tribulationism

1. Rapture occurs before the Tribulation.
2. Church experiences Revelation 3:10 before the Tribulation.

3. Day of the Lord begins with the Tribulation.
4. 1st Thessalonians 5:2-3 occurs at beginning of Tribulation.
5. 144,000 redeemed at start of Tribulation.
6. Rapture and second coming separated by 7 years.
7. Living Israelites judged at second coming.
8. Living Gentiles judged at second coming.
9. Parents of Millennial population come from survivors of judgments on living Jews and Gentiles.
10. Believers of church age judged in heaven between rapture and second coming.

Post-Tribulationism

1. Rapture occurs after the Tribulation.
2. Church experiences Revelation 3:10 at end of Tribulation.
3. Day of the Lord begins at close of Tribulation.
4. 1st Thessalonians 5:2-3 occurs near end of Tribulation.
5. 144,000 redeemed at conclusion of Tribulation.
6. Rapture and second coming are a single event.
7. No such judgment.
8. Living Gentiles judged after millennium.
9. Parents of Millennial population come from 144,000 Jews.
10. Believers of church age judged after second coming or at conclusion of Millennium.

Notice there are some points of agreement between these two views.

1. The seventieth week of Daniel is yet future and will begin with the signing of a treaty between Israel and the man of sin.
2. The earth will literally experience the judgments described in the Revelation (though some Post-Tribulationists tend to de-literalize some of them).
3. The second coming will usher in the millennial kingdom of Christ.
4. The great white throne judgment of unbelievers will take place after the Millennium.

Notice there are some points of disagreement. Those are the contrasting chronologies. Now we are ready to examine the pros and cons of the Scriptures on which they are based.

Keep Looking Up!

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