

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

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INTRODUCTION

Truths surrounding the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ are abundant in scripture. The second coming is acknowledged by most Christians as an awe inspiring event. The importance and emphasis upon this time period is evidenced by the amount of space (twenty-five percent) scripture devotes to the matter. The majority of prophecy, Old and New Testament, focuses upon the coming literal kingdom of Christ, generally referred to in the New Testament as the kingdom of God. Alva J. McClain comments concerning the coming kingdom, “The Kingdom of God is, in a certain and important sense, the grand central theme of all Holy Scripture. In approving this affirmation we are not forgetting the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . but as we contemplate Him and His manifold glories as revealed in the Word of God, we shall inescapably come sooner or later to the Kingdom of which He is the divine center. For it is in this Kingdom that the Father’s eternal purpose in the incarnate Son shall be certainly and completely fulfilled.”¹ Thus, the apex of human history is yet future, and a thorough understanding of the events surrounding the apex is paramount. In an effort to provide clarity regarding the coming kingdom of God, this paper will promote a dispensational and premillennial view of eschatology with advocacy for the pretribulational view of the rapture.

DIFFERING VIEWS OF PROPHECY

Three views of prophecy are normally taught in current Christian circles. Amillennialism is a view which does not acknowledge a literal millennial reign of Christ. It understands the kingdom of God as the current reign of Christ in the believer’s heart. This view has very little to say about future events because it spiritualizes or allegorizes the majority of prophecy placing emphasis upon the current state of the kingdom in the believer’s heart. Also, a separation between Israel and the Church is not acknowledged by amillennialism. The two groups are blended together as one people of God. Promises made to the Jews in the Old Testament are spiritualized and applied to believers in the New Testament.

Post-millennialism is taught but has a small following. This view understands the present dispensation of grace to be the kingdom of God and rejects the literal interpretation of one thousand years. It advocates Christ will return after the millennium. According to this view, the gospel will spread around the world and righteousness will gradually change the world into a utopia to which Christ can return. This view has lost favor due to world climate, threat of future world wars, and continued tensions among the nations.

Premillennialism teaches Christ will return prior to the millennium. The return of Christ will start the millennium in which the world will enjoy a restored atmosphere devoid of the curse placed due to Adam’s fall. Joy, righteousness, and peace will characterize Christ’s millennial kingdom. As mentioned before, the millennium will be the climax of human history and the purpose of God for man upon the earth will be fulfilled in and by Israel’s Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ. Among the three differing views of prophecy, the premillennial view is the most consistent with respect to a literal interpretation of scripture. The premillennial view emanates from the dispensational teaching of scripture. The dispensational approach is a natural outcome of the literal approach to interpretation. The difference among the three views lies in the hermeneutics of prophecy. If a literal hermeneutic is accepted, premillennial eschatology will be

¹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1968), 5.

the natural outcome. Feinberg comments, “It can be shown that the reason the early Church was premillennial was traceable to its interpretation of the Word in a literal manner, whereas the cause of the departure from this view in later centuries of the history of the Church is directly attributable to a change in the method of interpretation beginning with Origen in particular.”²

THE RAPTURE

Acceptance of the premillennial view necessitates further clarification concerning the second coming of Christ with respect to the rapture of the Church. Three views concerning the rapture are popular among premillennialists: the pretribulational view, the midtribulational view, and the posttribulational view. The most popular views are the pretribulational and posttribulational with the midtribulational having minority support.

It should be understood no specific passage unequivocally states the timing for the rapture of the Church. Hence, the reason for debate concerning the timing of the rapture. Gerald Stanton remarks, “The Bible does not come out in so many words and say, ‘The rapture of the Church will be pretribulational.’ Nor, for example, does the Bible directly say: ‘Baptism must be by immersion’ nor ‘The representative form of church government is most in accord with the Apostolic Church.’ Most of the major doctrines of the Bible are confirmed by such direct unassailable statements, yet some are not.”³ The remainder of this paper will analyze the strengths and weakness of the pretribulational and posttribulational views and will not consider the midtribulational view.

THE PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE

According to the pretribulational view, the second coming of Christ will be in two phases. The first phase is the rapture of the Church from earth to heaven. The second phase – the revelation – occurs at least seven years⁴ after the rapture. The seven year interval is the tribulation period upon the earth during which God will pour out His wrath upon the earth and judge His people, Israel. The revelation will inaugurate the millennial kingdom of Israel’s messiah. Thus, a two-phase program for the return of Christ to set up His kingdom is understood in the pretribulation rapture view.

The main strength of the pretribulational rapture position is its dedicated adherence to the literal interpretation of scripture. Full adherence to the dispensational scheme revealed in scripture is articulated by the pretribulational rapture approach. Tim LaHaye remarks, “Many details of the second coming must be pieced together from various passages of Scripture, no matter what view you take. The pre-Trib position finds a logical place for every second coming passage. Like a completed puzzle, all the pieces fit.”⁵ The premillennial view of prophecy advocates Christ’s return to set up His literal earthly kingdom and establish Israel once again in their God given land. At the revelation, Christ will defeat Satan, the antichrist, the false prophet, and the rebellious nations with great power. He will come from heaven with the holy angels to establish His righteous rule of one thousand years (cf. Matt 24:29-31; Rev 19:1-20:6). Israel will be resurrected at the beginning of the Millennium to inhabit their land and be the head among the

² Charles L. Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1954), 51.

³ Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From The Hour* (Hayesville, NC Schoettle Publishing CO, Inc., 1991), 43.

⁴ It should be noted that a minimum of seven years will separate the rapture and the revelation. It is possible and most probable that the Church will be raptured and more than seven years pass before the revelation. Hence, the seven-year tribulation period will most likely not start immediately at the rapture.

⁵ Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture* (Eugene, OR Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 135.

nations thus, fulfilling the numerous prophecies revealed in the scriptures. According to the pretribulation view, the Church will be raptured and judged separately from Israel, Satan, and the Christ rejecting world. The pretribulation approach does not mix the two peoples of God – Israel and the Church. God’s dealings with Israel and the Church are separate which is most consistent with the dispensational hermeneutic.

The pretribulation rapture position states the rapture will precede the tribulation, a seven-year period identified in Dan 9:24-27, in which no member of the Church will remain on the earth during the time of the tribulation period outlined in scripture. Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks describes the tribulation period as the last week of the seventy week period determined upon Israel. The seventy week period is understood as a time period of four hundred and ninety years, with each week representing seven years. Sixty-nine weeks have already transpired, and the remaining week is yet future. Jesus describes in great detail eschatological events, including Daniel’s seventieth week, in Matthew, chapters twenty-four and twenty-five (The Olivet discourse), where He makes specific reference to Daniel’s prophecy (cf. Matt 24:15; Dan 9:27). Revelation, chapters six through eighteen further expound upon this time of wrath and judgment. Acknowledgement of the purpose for Daniel’s seventieth week is important to the pretribulation view. The seventieth week is also identified as the time of Jacob’s trouble and is directly related to Israel. The fact this period represents God’s dealings with Israel is a strength for the pretribulation view. The dispensational distinction between Israel and the Church supports the necessity for the rapture prior to the tribulation.

The position further advocates the imminence of Christ’s return for the Church. No sign is given to signify the rapture of the Church. Christ could literally return at any moment to receive the Church into His presence. In the Olivet discourse, Jesus presents His preeminent dissertation concerning eschatological events. Since the Olivet discourse deals with important eschatological events, one would expect to find the Church and Israel mentioned. The occasion of the discourse is in response to His disciples’ questions concerning the future, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matt 24:3b).⁶ He describes the horrors of the tribulation period along with its application to Israel in Matt 24:4-35. In these verses Jesus describes a period of time in which signs of judgment are abundantly evident. The extremely difficult times will culminate in the revelation of Jesus Christ described in verses twenty-nine through thirty-one. Without a doubt, the signs Jesus describes point to the culmination of the age and His return to set up His kingdom. A definite subject matter change takes place in verse thirty-six. The preceding verses were overflowing with signs of Christ’s coming. In verses thirty-six through forty-four Jesus describes the rapture of the Church. In verses thirty-six through forty-four His second coming is a secret and unexpected. Thus, a different event must be in view.

A perceived weakness of the pretribulation position is seen in the chronology of the Olivet discourse. However, it should be noted that the chronology is based upon the disciples’ questions, not on the timing of the actual events. Marty Cauley writes, “In response, it may be pointed out that Jesus’ decision to describe the rapture after the tribulation and revelation does not prove that the rapture happens after the tribulation and revelation. The order of the discussion is based on the disciples’ question, not on chronology. The disciples were interested in two things, signs and the destruction of the temple. The second phase of His coming, rather than the rapture of the first phase, is the one associated with signs and the desolation of the temple, so it is

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the *Authorized King James Version*.

this phase that Jesus describes first.”⁷ The imminence of Christ’s return for the Church – the pretribulational rapture – can be seen in His words,

36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. 37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, 39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Matt 24:36-44)

The time of His coming is unknown, imminent, and without any signs.⁸ These words must refer to the pretribulational rapture for His coming is definitely known and expected in verses thirty-two through thirty-five, which describe the signs declaring the nearness of His revelation to the world. Verses thirty-six through forty-two explain the significance of His return with regard to the Church. He explains to the disciples⁹ that they are to watch and wait for His return – they are to be ready. The idea of being ready goes beyond simply being justified. Ready means living a holy life and ready to give an account of the deeds done in this life.¹⁰ Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and will give an account of their lives. The apostle John admonished, “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28). Being ready means having confidence with reference to the verdict handed down at the judgment seat of Christ.

The primary passages describing the rapture are:

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:

⁷ Marty Cauley, *The Outer Darkness* (Sylva, NC: Unpublished Manuscript, 2006), 470-471.

⁸ According to 1 Cor 1:22, Jews require a sign but Gentiles seek after wisdom. Thus, the dispensational distinction is evident in that the signs are provided for the Jew concerning the revelation. The Church, consisting of mainly Gentiles, does not require signs. Thus, no sign is afforded them for the rapture. The Church is to be ready at any moment for Christ to rapture and subsequently judge them at the Bema.

⁹ The disciples represent both Jew and Gentile in this discourse. They lived during two different dispensations and thus, represent the Jews since they were all Jewish. They also represent Christians because they all were part of the Church after the day of Pentecost.

¹⁰ The parables which follow (Matt 24:45-51; 25:14-30) describe judgment based upon performance. The faithful servant is contrasted with the unfaithful servant. These parables definitely point toward the judgment seat of Christ – a judgment for Christians concerning works.

and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thes 4:13-18)

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:1-3)

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Cor 15:51-52)

The pretribulational view understands these primary passages to speak of rapture from earth into Christ's presence. Those raptured consist of all believers from the dispensation of grace – the Church. The saints of the Old Testament are not raptured at the same time as the Church.¹¹ The following details are observed from the primary rapture passages. Christ will descend from the Father's house to receive believers unto Himself. The Lord will shout as He descends. Believers will hear the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. The dead in Christ will rise first, and those alive at the rapture will follow the dead in resurrection and change. All believers will meet the Lord in the air to be forever with the Lord, thus out of a sinful state. Strength for the pretribulational position is recognized by what is not indicated in the cited passages. Christ is not described as coming to earth in power and glory with the angels to make war. Instead, He comes in the clouds. He does not set up His earthly kingdom nor does He deal with Satan, the antichrist, the false prophet, or the kings of the earth who oppose Him.

In addition to the primary passages which advocate a pretribulational rapture, numerous passages exist which point to a pretribulational rapture understanding (cf. Mark 13:32-37; Acts 1:11; Phil 3:20-21; Col 3:4; 1 Thes 5:9; 2 Thes 2:1-13; Rev 3:10). Again, investigating 1 Thes 5:1-11 (remembering the context of 1 Thes 4:13-18) and examining Rev 3:10 will yield additional support to the pretribulation position.

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we

¹¹ Old Testament saints will be resurrected at the revelation – the beginning of the promised millennial reign.

should live together with him. 11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. (1 Thes 5:1-11)

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Rev 3:10)

These two passages were written to encourage believers to be faithful. Paul tells the Thessalonians to comfort one another twice: firstly, to comfort one another since those who had already died would not be left out of the rapture; secondly, to encourage them because they had not been appointed to wrath. The wrath spoken of is the same as that spoken by John in Rev 3:10, the wrath of the tribulation. Believers from the age of grace have not been appointed to the wrath of the tribulation. This can be readily seen from the context of both passages. The wrath of the tribulation is meant for a Christ rejecting world. The tribulation is also meant as a time of judgment upon Israel for rejection of her Messiah. The Church will not participate in this time of wrath and judgment upon the earth because the Church will be in heaven at the judgment seat of Christ.

The Thessalonian passage reiterates truths revealed in the Olivet discourse. The “day of the Lord” is described as coming like a “thief in the night.” The “day of the Lord,” a well known term in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 2:12; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:7, 14), describes judgment. Judgment for the Church begins at the rapture and the place of judgment is in heaven. Judgment for Israel is upon the earth. The wrath of God expressed during the tribulation is poured out upon the Christ rejecting world. Paul clearly points out that the Thessalonian believers have not been appointed to wrath – the wrath of the tribulation upon the earth. At the rapture, the “day of the Lord” will begin on the earth and will surprise earth dwellers like a “thief in the night.” The meaning “is made plain in verses four through seven where the apostle describes the general stupor of the unsaved world in language suggesting sleep and drunkenness. This must also be combined with the assertion of verse three that ‘while they are saying, Peace and safety! then destruction will come upon them.’”¹² Christians will have been raptured because their appointment is not unto the wrath of the tribulation.

The typology of the Old Testament also points to a pretribulational rapture. Concerning types, J. Dwight Pentecost wrote, “While argumentation from analogy is a weak argument in itself, yet if a teaching is contrary to all typology it cannot be a true interpretation. Scripture abounds in types which teach that those who walked by faith were delivered from visitations of judgment which overtook the unbelieving. Such types are seen in the experience of Noah and Rahab, but perhaps the clearest illustration is that of Lot.”¹³ New Testament truth is amplified by the types in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was given to the New Testament believer as an example from which to learn (cf. 1 Cor 10:6-12). Hence, typology is a God ordained hermeneutic which does not surpass or contradict a normal-literal interpretation of scripture. Typology compliments the normal-literal understanding and amplifies various already revealed truths.

Enoch’s translation typifies the translation of the Church prior to the tribulation in that he did not remain upon the earth during the flood. Arlen Chitwood remarks,

¹² Zane C. Hodges, “The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11,” *Walvoord: A Tribute* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1982), 71.

¹³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 217.

Enoch, as previously stated, is seen being removed from the earth between two points in time — following a blood sacrifice and prior to the Flood. This points to those whom Enoch typifies (Christians) being removed from the earth at a time following that which Abel's death typifies (Christ's death) but preceding that which the Flood typifies (the coming Tribulation).

Thus, both the participants and the timing of the rapture are introduced in the foundational type. The rapture, according to this type, must have to do with *those of the present dispensation* (with Christians). It cannot pertain to any other than the ones who have appropriated the blood of the individual dying in the antitype of Abel's death. And it has to occur *preceding that time typified by the Flood during Noah's day* (i.e., it has to occur before the Tribulation). [Emphasis the author's]¹⁴

Another example of an Old Testament type which teaches a pretribulational rapture is that of Lot. Lot was a saved man (cf. 2 Pet 2:7) and was delivered before the judgment fell upon the wicked of Sodom. Chitwood comments,

Lot, his wife, and his two virgin daughters were removed from Sodom prior to the destruction of the cities of the plain. And the manner in which the New Testament handles this event leaves no room to question that which is in view from a typical standpoint. The destruction of the cities of the plain can point only to the coming destruction of this present world system, and the removal of Lot and part of his family can only point to a removal of certain individuals from this world (from the earth) prior to this destruction (a destruction occurring during the Tribulation).

This account forms a subsequent type of that previously seen in Gen. 5-8, and the account is dealt with in the New Testament in a parallel manner. The destruction of the cities of the plain during Lot's day is dealt with in the New Testament alongside the destruction produced by the Flood during Noah's day, introducing a parallel type. Both destructions in the two types point to the same destruction in the antitype.¹⁵

Thus, Old Testament typology adds strength to the pretribulational view. It can be concluded from this complimentary hermeneutic that God has decided to translate New Testament believers from earth to heaven prior to the tribulation and judge them at the judgment seat of Christ. He will then pour out His wrath upon the world and judge Israel during the tribulation.

The last argument of the pretribulation position is the absence of any mention of the Church from Revelation chapter four through chapter eighteen. Revelation, chapters one through three focus on the Church. In chapter four, John is called to heaven to observe activities surrounding the throne. Not until chapter nineteen of Revelation is any mention made of the Church. The strength of this position is evident in the Church is not mentioned during the wrath portion of Revelation. The weakness of this argument is it is an argument from silence.

¹⁴ Arlen L. Chitwood, *The Judgment Seat of Christ* (Norman OK: The Lamp Broadcast, Inc. 2001), 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 26-27.

Realizing the purpose for the rapture holds the key to recognizing its pretribulational timing. The focus of the dispensational approach is upon the glory of God.¹⁶ Hence, the ultimate reason for the rapture is to glorify God and His plan and purposes for man. More specifically, the purpose for the rapture is essentially twofold. Firstly, to fulfill the promise of Jesus to receive believers unto Himself. Secondly, to make ready the heavenly sphere of Christ's government for His coming kingdom. Determinations concerning assignments for believers in the heavenly portion of the coming kingdom will be made at the judgment seat of Christ. Believers are justified by grace through faith in order to perform good works (cf. Eph 2:8-10). Works of the believer will be the focus at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 Cor 5:9-11). Those believers found worthy of reward will be afforded crowns which denote rulership – rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:11, 21). The positions of rulership are heavenly in nature and represent the replacement of angels who previously held the heavenly thrones (cf. Eph 6:12; Heb 2:5). Comprehending the purpose of the judgment seat of Christ discloses tremendous light upon the need for a pretribulational rapture. Satan and his angels will be deposed; Christ and His co-heirs will assume their earned regal positions.¹⁷ Recognition of the heavenly nature of the positions awarded New Testament believers further delineates the God ordained roles for Israel and the Church and the need for separate judgments.¹⁸

THE POSTTRIBULATION RAPTURE

The posttribulational rapture view advocates the Church will go through the entire tribulation period to be raptured at the second coming. Thus, a single phase of Christ's coming is purported – rapture and revelation at the same time. Christ will rapture the Church as he descends to earth to make war with Satan, the antichrist, the false prophet, and the godless nations. He will then set up His millennial kingdom and begin His righteous rule.

A strength of this position is the testimony given by the historic Christian Church. The early Church was premillennial and posttribulational. Tim LaHaye seeks to answer this point by saying, “Early Christians held the posttribulational view because of their life circumstances. The average Christian did not have the entire New Testament until well into the second century, so comparing scripture with scripture was not possible. . . . Additionally, second- and third-century Christians experienced the severest persecutions of the entire church age. They judged they were already living in the Tribulation and concluded the Lord would rapture His church at the end of that time.”¹⁹ As time progressed, the Church moved from a posttribulational premillennial view

¹⁶ The amillennial view of eschatology stems from a non-dispensational approach which tends to focus upon the grace of God and not the glory of God. Covenant theologians build their system around the covenants of grace. Dispensational theology fully recognizes and appreciates the grace of God, but emphasizes the glory of God as preeminent for its eschatological scheme.

¹⁷ Paul spoke extensively about the subject of reward in his epistles. In 1 Cor 9:24-27 he emphasized the need to run the race – the Christian life – properly so as to obtain the prize. Paul's fear was that he would not run properly and would be judged unworthy of the prize. The prize is a crown which is necessary for rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom. Paul emphasizes the same subject in Phil 3:13-14 where he seeks the “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Again, this is a direct reference to an earned regal position with Christ – a reward for faithfulness.

¹⁸ The promise of reward is different for Israel and the Church. Israel is God's earthly people with earthly promises of a literal geographical nation upon the earth. Israel will serve God as the head of the nations (cf. Deut 28:1, 13; Isa 14:1-2) during the millennial kingdom. The Church will serve God in the heavenly realm during the millennial kingdom.

¹⁹ LaHaye, 119-120.

to an amillennial view of eschatology. Not until the last several hundred years has the premillennial pretribulational view gained serious recognition.

The posttribulational view recognizes the same primary scriptures (John 14:1-3; 1 Thes 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:51-52) to prove its view of the rapture.²⁰ Another strength of the position lies in the fact that no clear indication is made from any of the primary rapture passages as to the timing of the rapture. In an effort to simplify the timing issue, advocacy is made for a single phase of the coming of the Lord Jesus. The details outlined by Jesus in the Olivet discourse, which describe the tribulation period, are attributed to Israel and the Church. Thus, the Church is seen suffering during the tribulation along with Israel with both being raptured at the end (cf. Matt 24:31, 40-41). The argument is made citing the Church has always suffered and the suffering during the tribulation will not be greater than what many believers have experienced through the ages.²¹ The weakness of this position is the promise revealed in scripture to deliver the Church from the wrath of the tribulation (cf. 1 Thes 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10). No clear reason is postulated by the posttribulationalist for the inclusion of the Church during this time of wrath known as Daniel's Seventieth Week. According to Daniel 9:24-27, seventy weeks are determined upon the people of Israel. Since the Church is not Israel, the seventieth week (also described as "the time of Jacob's trouble") does not concern the Church.

Because the second coming is understood to be in a single phase, the timing of the judgment seat of Christ presents a problem for the posttribulational position. It must occur in a "twinkling of an eye" for no other explanation exists for its placement in time. This explanation is tenuous at best. The necessity of the judgment seat of Christ, outlined in the pretribulational view, deals a serious blow to the posttribulational position. Paramount is the need for Christ to have co-heirs in place ready to assume positions in the heavenly orb of His kingdom. A posttribulational argument cannot adequately answer this problem.

A final and severe problem with the posttribulational view concerns the population of the millennial kingdom by humans with natural bodies. If the Church is raptured at the end of the tribulation, then all believers will be changed not having natural bodies to replenish the earth. Unbelievers will be judged by Christ as described in Matt 25:31-46 and sent to everlasting fire. Since the believers were raptured and no longer possess a natural body, no one will be left to populate the millennial earth. This problem is a serious one for the posttribulational position.

CONCLUSION

The rapture of the Church as demonstrated above is a hotly debated topic. The pretribulationalist understands two phases to the return of Christ – one for His Church and the other with angels to establish His kingdom. Posttribulationists assert the two-phase approach as a weakness claiming it is confusing and not supported by scripture. Pretribulationists proclaim the two-phase view as being taught by scripture due to the nature of the tribulation and the corollary events revealed in scripture. The events described in the Olivet discourse clearly reveal a distinction between the rapture and revelation. A single-phase return cannot be both with and without signs. Thus, the eschatological discourse upon Olivet conclusively teaches a two-phase return of Christ – rapture and revelation. The preponderance of evidence certainly indicates the rapture to be pretribulational. The adherence to the literalness of interpretation and the necessity

²⁰ Douglas J. Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulational Rapture Position," *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre, Mid, or Posttribulation?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 178.

²¹ *Ibid*, 176.

of the Church's appointment to rule with Christ in the kingdom show the necessity for adoption of the pretribulational rapture view.

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