

Faith Pulpit

The Inhabitants of the Millennium and the Timing of the Rapture, Part 2

Summation of the previous article

The previous issue of the Faith Pulpit established six points regarding the inhabitants of the millennium and the timing of the rapture. First, at the rapture every dead believer “in Christ” will be resurrected and every living believer will be “caught up” to the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Second, every participant in the rapture will receive a glorified, resurrection body. Third, those with glorified bodies cannot die, nor can they procreate. Fourth, people with unglorified bodies, bodies capable of death and procreation, will inhabit the millennium. Fifth, at the beginning of the millennium all its inhabitants will be believers, but many of the descendants of these believers will remain in unbelief so that at the end of the millennium the unbelievers will rebel against God for one final time. Sixth, the posttribulational rapture scheme would take all believers from the earth and give them glorified bodies immediately before Christ’s return to the Mount of Olives; thus, the posttribulational scheme would not allow for the required presence of believers with natural bodies at the beginning of the millennium.

A problem for posttribulationists

Posttribulationists combine the rapture with the second coming of Christ. According to the posttribulational layout, the rapture will take place at the end of the tribulation. This means that all the believers will receive glorified bodies, and they will immediately come back to the earth together with the Lord for His second coming to the earth. This leaves no time for unbelievers to turn to Christ after a posttribulational rapture, and this would preclude the entrance into the kingdom of saved people with natural bodies. Since there would be no people with natural bodies entering the kingdom, there would be no people capable of procreation, and so there would be no possibility for unbelieving descendants to participate in the final rebellion.[1](#)

This presents a serious problem for posttribulationists. Douglas Moo admits that he finds “this argument the most difficult to handle,” and he confesses that “the argument presents a difficulty for the posttribulational view.”² One cannot prove pretribulationism solely by pointing to the weaknesses of other systems, but such argumentation definitely has its merit.

Attempting to move the sheep and goat judgment

Sensing their quandary, posttribulationists have proposed a number of possible solutions. Gundry, Kimball, and Moo move the judgment of the sheep and goats from the beginning of the millennium to the end of the millennium.³ They do this in order to allow unbelieving Gentiles entrance into the kingdom with natural bodies. Walvoord ably argues against this posttribulational solution.⁴ First, he notes that Matthew 25:35–39 pictures the “brethren” (Jews) as hungry, sick, naked, and in prison. These descriptors could not possibly refer to Israel’s condition during the millennial kingdom since at that time the Gentiles will lavish Israel with the wealth of the nations (Isaiah 60:5–7, 11, 13–17). Second, Walvoord observes that Matthew 25:31 expressly states that the judgment of the sheep and goats will take place “when the Son of man shall come in his glory” (25:31). This obviously refers to the second coming of Christ to the earth at the beginning of the kingdom.

Since the judgment of the Gentiles takes place at the beginning of the kingdom, posttribulationists are left with another problem. A posttribulational rapture would negate the necessity of judgments for the Jews and the Gentiles. Walvoord explains: “If a posttribulational rapture took place and the church met the Lord in the air while He was coming from heaven to the earth to set up His millennial kingdom, it is obvious that this judgment would be unnecessary as it [i.e., the rapture] would have already separated the sheep from the goats prior to the arrival of Christ to the earthly scene.”⁵

Thinking that the 144,000 are unbelievers

Gundry tries to allow unbelieving Jews entrance into the kingdom with natural bodies by concluding that “the 144,000 will include both [Jewish] men and women who will populate and replenish the millennial kingdom of Israel.” According to Gundry, the 144,000 will be unconverted throughout the tribulation, but because they are sealed, they will escape God’s tribulational wrath. At the coming of Christ they will be saved and enter the kingdom with natural bodies; then they will beget and bear children.⁶

The book of Revelation, however, clearly asserts that the 144,000 will not be unbelieving Jews but will be “redeemed” Jews (14:4). They will be “servants of our God” (7:3). Given the fact that the 144,000 will be believers, if the rapture were to take place at the end of the tribulation, all the 144,000 would be raptured, and they would enter into the kingdom with glorified bodies, unable to have children.

Allowing additional time for repentance

Moo tries to solve the problem by allowing Jews a time for repentance after the joint posttribulational rapture and second coming event.⁷ However, the prophets consistently envisioned Israel's repentance as taking place before the return of the Messiah. For example, Zechariah predicted that Israel would "look upon" the Messiah whom they had "pierced," and that they would "mourn for him" in repentance (12:10). God will purge Israel of her sinful ways (13:1–4), a remnant will survive the trials of the tribulation (13:8,9), Jerusalem will fall to the armies of the nations (14:2), and then Christ will set foot on the mount of Olives (14:4). The prophet Hosea foretold the same sequence. Messiah would leave Israel ("go and return to my place" refers to His ascension) until the nation acknowledges her offense and seeks His face (5:15). The Lord will smite Israel in the days of the tribulation, and then Israel will repent (6:1). After repentance, the Lord will return, raise the Old Testament saints, and rain His blessings upon Israel during the kingdom (6:2,3). Israel's revival precedes her kingdom experience when she "shall live in his sight" (6:2).

Conclusion

The posttribulational scheme does not allow for the required presence of believers with natural bodies at the beginning of the millennium. Moreover, posttribulational attempts to solve this problem do not conform to Scripture. The nature of the inhabitants of the millennium necessitates the separation of Christ's return into two events (i.e., rapture and second coming), and the biblical evidence supporting this complex solution overrides the philosophical principle of simplicity as ordinarily enjoined by Occam's razor. Therefore, the biblical evidence concerning the nature of the inhabitants of the millennium confounds the posttribulational understanding of the rapture and supports the pretribulational understanding of the rapture.

Works Cited

1. Pretribulationists often use this line of argument: (e.g., Feinberg, *The Case for the Pretribulational Rapture Position*, 72–79; Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* [Toronto: Bantam, 1983]: 143–156; Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* [Chicago: Moody, 1981]: 75–89; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation: a Biblical and Historical Study of Posttribulationism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976]: 52–53; John F. Walvoord, *The Return of the Lord* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955]: 86–87; and Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events: An Introductory Survey of Last-Day Events* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973]: 94.) Midtribulationists also use this argument: (e.g., Archer, *The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position*, 120–122).
2. Moo, Response: Douglas J. Moo, 161.
3. Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973): 166; William R. Kimball, *The Rapture: A Question of Timing* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1985): 93–98; and Moo, Response: Douglas J. Moo, 162–163.
4. John F. Walvoord, *Posttribulationism Today*. Part XI: The Rapture in Relation to End-Time Events, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (July–September 1977): 208.
5. John F. Walvoord, *Christ's Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age: The Judgment of the Nations*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123 (October–December 1972): 314–315.
6. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 82,83. Upon hearing of this attempted solution, one immediately wonders how "virgins" (Revelation 14:4) could beget and bear children. Gundry thinks that their celibacy should be taken figuratively to refer to their spiritual purity. His solution seems self-contradictory, for it would mean that the 144,000 would be spiritually pure, yet unbelieving.

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