

Faith Pulpit

The Inhabitants of the Millennium and the Timing of the Rapture, Part 1

Introduction

Pretribulational theologians contend that the rapture of the church is the next event on the eschatological calendar and that it will occur before the tribulation (also known as Daniel's seventieth week). Pretribulational theologians also assert that the rapture is imminent, since no prophetic event need take place before the rapture can occur. Additionally, they affirm that Christ's return for the church at the rapture will be separated from His second coming to the earth by the tribulation period. The doctrinal statement of Faith Baptist Theological Seminary is pretribulational.[1](#)

Posttribulational theologians contend that the rapture will take place at the end of the tribulation in conjunction with Christ's return to the earth. They believe that Christ will rapture the church from the earth as He makes His descent to the Mount of Olives. Posttribulationists might contend that pretribulationists unnecessarily complicate the return of Christ by dividing it into two parts (i.e., the rapture and the second coming) separated by the tribulation.

Posttribulational theologians can appeal to the philosophical principle of Occam's Razor which states that the best explanation of an event tends to be to the one that is the simplest.[2](#) In response, pretribulational theologians must show from Scripture that the division of Christ's return into two events is a necessary departure from simplicity. This article attempts to show that the separation of the rapture from the second coming is a biblically required complexity. This article claims that the nature of the inhabitants of the millennium requires a separation of the rapture from the second coming and

thereby refutes the posttribulational position.

The inhabitants of the millenium

Premillennial theologians, whether pretribulational or posttribulational, agree on at least two points concerning the inhabitants of the millennium.³ First, they agree that people with natural, i.e., unglorified, bodies will inhabit the earth throughout the millennium. Second, these theologians agree that large numbers of unbelievers will inhabit the earth at the conclusion of the millennium. Douglas J. Moo, a posttribulational premillennialist, admits that “a premillennial scheme must provide an explanation for the presence of unglorified saints and unbelievers in the Millennium.”⁴

The book of Isaiah and the book of Revelation demonstrate the validity of these two points of concord. First, one of Isaiah’s prophecies proves the presence of unglorified people during the kingdom age with two lines of evidence: the occurrence of death and the occurrence of birth in the millennial kingdom. At least some of the millennial populace will die during the time of Messiah’s earthly kingdom. Isaiah envisions a humanity marked by its longevity (65:22). In fact, sinners will die prematurely at the relatively young age of one hundred years, much like a child dying without having fulfilled his days (65:20). Death would not be possible during the millenium if all of its inhabitants were people with glorified bodies.⁵ Additionally, citizens of Messiah’s earthly kingdom will beget and bear “offspring” (65:23). Procreation would not be possible during the millenium if all of its inhabitants were people with glorified bodies (for biblical proof, see the section on the rapture).

Second, the book of Revelation predicts that at the end of the one thousand years, Satan will be released. Satan will then gather a vast number of unbelievers (“as the sand of the sea”) in one final, unsuccessful rebellion (20:7–10). This prediction of an ultimate insurrection proves the existence of many unbelievers during the final days of the millennium.

The participants in the rapture

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers that at the rapture of the church “we shall all be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51). The resurrection of the dead and the transformation (or “translation”) of the living at the rapture (15:42) will impact “all” believers. At the rapture, Christ is coming back to “receive” (John 14:3) those who have believed (14:1). Those who will be resurrected at the rapture will be the “dead in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and those who will be translated will be the living who “believe that Jesus died and rose again” (4:14).

The “mystery” of the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51), then, is the revelation that not every believer of this church age will die. The believers who are alive at the very end of this age will receive their

glorified bodies through transformation, without needing first to experience death. The 1 Corinthians passage is especially noteworthy since it was written to a church where carnality carried the day. The “explicit teaching of Scripture points to the conclusion that the translation includes all living saints and the resurrection includes all the ‘dead in Christ.’”[6](#)

The rapture will entail the “translation of living believers from earthly mortality to heavenly immortality.” It will also entail the “resurrection of the corrupted bodies of believers to heavenly incorruption.”[7](#) Therefore, the rapture will deprive every believer “in Christ” of the potential to die. When our Lord answered the Sadducees, He said, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:29b,30). We may infer from His answer that those with glorified bodies do not procreate. Thus, believers who will experience the rapture will not be able to have offspring. In summary, then, at the rapture every believer “in Christ” will “be changed,” and this change will deprive its participants of their mortality and of their procreative abilities.[8](#)

Limited access into the kingdom

The Bible also teaches that unbelievers will not be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom. Only believers will initially populate the kingdom. Biblical support for this conclusion comes from several passages. After Christ returns to the earth and destroys the armies at Armageddon (Jeremiah 25:30–33; Revelation 19:15, 18), He will convene two judgments and destroy every unbeliever who has survived His tribulation wrath and His victory at Armageddon.

At one judgment, Christ will gather together the house of Israel (Ezekiel 20:39), and He will cause the people to pass under His rod of judgment (20:37). Believers will return from the lands of the diaspora, will enter into the new covenant with Christ, and will be sanctified in the promised land (20:37, 41). Also, Christ “will purge out from among” the house of Israel “the rebels, and them that transgress” (20:37-38). As a result, at least at the beginning of the kingdom, “all the house of Israel” shall “serve” Christ (20:40). Isaiah also anticipated this future time of regathering for Israel (60:8,9) when “all” the people will be “righteous” (60:21). At the other judgment, Christ will judge “all nations,” and He will divide them “as sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31–33). He will set believers on His right, and they will “inherit the kingdom” (25:34). He will sentence the unbelievers on His left to “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (25:41, 46). Every nation and kingdom that does not serve the Lord will “perish” and will be “utterly wasted” (Isaiah 60:12). Every one that survives shall go up to Jerusalem annually to worship the King (Zechariah 14:16).

Therefore, as a result of these two judgments, every unbeliever who survives Christ’s second coming will be eliminated from the earth and will not be granted access into the kingdom. This means that the first generation of millennial inhabitants will all be believers. This also means that the unbelievers of the final millennial generation who participate in the great rebellion must be descendants of the first generation believers.

Works Cited

1. The doctrinal statement of Faith Baptist Theological Seminary upholds the pretribulational understanding of the rapture of the church. Our statement reads: “We believe that the rapture of the Church will be followed on earth by Israel’s seventieth week,” which will be a time of great judgments and tribulation. Our doctrinal statement also reads: “We believe that following the tribulation Christ will return to the earth with His glorified saints to establish the millennial kingdom; that during the 1,000 years of peace and prosperity Satan will be bound and Christ will reign with a rod of iron; that at the end of the millennium Satan will be released for a short time, deceive many and lead them in final rebellion, but be defeated along with his armies” (FBTS 2001-2004 Catalog, p. 10).
2. Named after William of Okham (d. 1349), the philosopher-theologian who utilized the principle in his Summa totius logicae.
3. Paul D. Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulational Rapture Position,” in The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulational?, by Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer, and Douglas J. Moo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 72; and Douglas J. Moo, “Response: Douglas J. Moo,” in The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulational?, p. 162. Midtribulationists also agree; ; Gleason L. Archer, “The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position,” in The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulational?, pp. 120–22.
4. Moo, “Response: Douglas J. Moo,” p. 162.
5. Isaiah 65 cannot be speaking of eternal blessedness on the new earth because there will be no death in that state (cf. Isaiah 65:20 with Revelation 21:4).
6. John F. Walvoord, The Rapture Question, revised and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979): p. 99.
7. Ryrie also notes that, strictly speaking, the rapture refers only to the translation of living saints. However, general usage includes both resurrection and transformation (Charles C. Ryrie, Basic Theology [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986]: 478).
8. As an aside, it is also noteworthy that the full participation of all living believers in the event of the rapture argues against the partial rapture theorists.

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