

The Posttribulational Rapture Error

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SOME SHALL BE TAKEN

The posttribulational rapture view might be “The Comedy of Errors” apart from its sad consequences. But even more sad is the fact that the view is based on an honest, careful attempt to interpret the Scriptures in the light of the context. The posttribulational view is not a primary error in interpretation, but rather a secondary error. That is, the view results from a former error as its inevitable consequence. The basic hermeneutical error is this: “Similarity is Identity.” Unconsciously, by working on this principle, the student wrongly equates similar passages that appear to teach concerning the rapture. The classic example of this error is the conclusion that both Matthew 24:37-41 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 impart truths on the rapture because of their marked similarities. These both involve:

1. Christ’s coming. Mt. 24:38-39; 1 Thes. 4:14-17.
2. Decadent Times. Mt. 24:37-38; 1 Thes. 5:3
3. Unknown Time. Mt. 24:39; 1 Thes. 5:3
4. Some Taken-Some Left. Mt. 24:40-41; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; 5:3-4.

PROBLEMS PRODUCED

On the assumption that the similarity indicates identity of the two passages, many sermons have been preached apart from the context of these two passages. Now most agree readily that I Thes. 4:13-18 does indeed present the rapture, and I agree. But note the unavoidable consequence of preaching Matthew 24:37-41 as the rapture. The passage would teach that [at] the rapture:

1. Some are to be *cut asunder!* (Mt. 24:51).

2. Some *servants* are appointed with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51).
3. This takes place immediately after the tribulation (Mt. 24:29).

Obviously these conclusions (a few of Many) are directly in contradiction with the argument of 1 Thes. 4:13-5:11, where the rapture clearly involves escape from the wrath of the Day of the Lord (1 Thes. 5:1, 2, 9).

THE PASSAGES CONTRASTED

Where was the primary error made that produces these errors? The conclusion that Matthew 24:37-41 pertains to the rapture at all is the error. In spite of similarities, note the differences of these two passages.

1. The Time Element
 - a. Rapture before tribulation (1 Thes. 4:13-18 contrast 5:1-2).
 - b. In Matthew, taking away after tribulation (Mt. 24:38-39, 29).
2. The Destination
 - a. In the rapture, blessing with God (1 Thes. 4:16-17).
 - b. In Matthew, like in the flood, unto judgment and death (Mt. 24:39-43, 51).
3. Those Taken Away
 - a. In rapture, the dead in Christ and living believers (1 Thes. 4:16-17).
 - b. In Matthew, like in the flood, those sinning (Mt. 24:39-41).

The two passages, though similar, teach concerning the two totally different comings of Christ, the one in the air for us, the other seven years later “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God...” (II 1:8). It is in many such fields of errant exegesis that the seeds of the posttribulational rapture view have grown.

THE POSTTRIBULATIONAL RESURRECTION

A second source of the confusion producing the posttribulational rapture view is the fact that a

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posttribulational resurrection is clearly taught in the Word of God. This is a rarely recognized eschatological factor, even though it is directly presented in at least ten Old and New Testament passages. See Dan. 12:1-3; 12:12-13; Isa. 25:8; 26:17-19; Job 19:25-27; Ezek. 37:12-14; Rev. 6:9-11; 11:11-12; 11:18; 20:4-6.

One false assumption here quickly leads the interpreter into an erroneous view of the rapture of the church. That is: "Since resurrection is mentioned with the rapture in 1 Thes. 4:13-18, and since several passages *do* speak of the posttribulational resurrection, then the rapture must be a posttribulational event." But this is not so! The few corresponding areas of similarity between the resurrection of the Church age saints and that one which follows the tribulation are greatly overshadowed by their differences. They are not the same event.

DISTINGUISHING THE RESURRECTIONS

Now some faithful believers have attempted to avoid the error by proclaiming that all saints of the past dispensations are raised before the tribulation. But this requires a very studied blindness to the above passages. Furthermore, in 1 Thes. 4 Paul clearly limits those resurrection to those "which sleep through ($\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$) Jesus," that is, "the dead in Christ." Only those who are placed in the Church, the Body of Christ, by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit while the church, His body, is being formed, relate to this resurrection. (Note that erroneous ecclesiology, based on weak dispensational distinctions, aggravates the problem for many commentators). Certainly the Old Testament saints were not placed in the body of Christ, His church, by the work of the Spirit in that unique age! No, the denial or the mislocation of the posttribulational resurrection for Old Testament and tribulational saints is not the answer. It is no more correct to include the Old Testament saints in our rapture and resurrection than it is for one to include the church in the posttribulational resurrection of the Old Testament saints after the

tribulation. Each of the two groups has its own resurrection unto its own peculiar portion.

Herein lies the error of the posttribulational rapture view; not in their recognition of a posttribulational resurrection, but in the false assumption that the resurrection of the righteous is a *single act*. But the resurrection of the righteous is no more a single event than the judgment of the unjust (or of the righteous, for that matter). The resurrection itself is a two-fold event, with the resurrection of the righteous and of the unrighteous separated by 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4, 5, 7, 12-13). Furthermore, within the resurrection of the righteous there are states:

1. "Christ, the firstfruits,"
2. "Afterward they that are Christ's at His coming,"
3. "Then cometh the end" (resurrection, probably a reference to the resurrection of the unsaved dead (1 Cor. 15:23-24). The Important factor in resurrection is "Every man in his own order" (1 Cor. 15:23).

What then is the *order* of resurrections? Simply put, it is this:

1. Church saints only are resurrected at the rapture.
2. After the tribulation Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs are raised to enter the kingdom.
3. After the 1,000 years the unsaved in hades are resurrected unto their judgment and cast into the lake of fire.

ISRAEL'S RESURRECTION EXAMINED

Can this be supported? Readily. A clear understanding of the nature of the church and of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in this age immediately unfolds the phrase "in Christ" in 1 Thes. 4:16. This limits the rapture and resurrection to the church. The posttribulational view becomes a patent error when one sees the difference between the nation Israel and the church in their origin, na-

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ture, purpose, and future. But failure to recognize Israel's distinctive time of resurrection apart from the church has caused many to swing from a pretribulational rapture to a post tribulational rapture upon observing those Scriptures teaching Israel's posttribulational resurrection. Awareness that both a pretribulational and a posttribulation resurrection is taught in Scripture helps one avoid applying the Scriptures teaching Israel's posttribulational resurrection to the church and misplacing the rapture.

The passages which follow teach concerning a real posttribulation resurrection. Denying this truth accomplishes nothing in the way of avoiding the error of posttribulationalism. For an erroneous position is never a truly defensible position. Rather, one should understand the truth of Israel's resurrection, and then distinguish it from our own resurrection.

Isaiah 25:8 and 26:19 look through the tribulation to the time when Israel's dead would rise from the dust of the earth. Job 19:25-27 records a pre-Israelite Old Testament saint anticipating resurrection when his redeemer's feet *would stand upon the earth*. Though Ezekiel 37:12-14 refers to national and spiritual resurrection of Israel, it also implies her physical believer's resurrection in order to be placed back in the land. Note that "I shall place you in your own land" is literal. *Resurrected* David is mentioned in verse 24, for he will administer Israel under Christ. Cf. also Ezekiel 34:23-24.

Four passages in Revelation further bear on this posttribulational resurrection. Revelation 6:9-11 records the informing tribulation martyrs (in temporary bodies, vs. 11), that they were to *rest* yet for a little season (3 ½ yrs.) *until* their fellow servants and their brethren...be killed. Revelation 20:4 clarifies this, "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus...(in the trib.), and they rose from the dead (Alford) and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Revelation 11:15-18 shows that after Christ takes the kingdom there is a resurrection of the dead when the

prophets and saints are rewarded. These have already been identified.

All of these passages are clear testimonies of the posttribulation resurrection of Israel. The student must not erroneously transfer them to the Church. To do so is to flout the witness of their contexts and to flounder in the error of posttribulationalism.

THE POSTTRIBULATIONAL RESURRECTION IN DANIEL

Yet there remain two often confused, yet utterly conclusive witnesses to the fact that Israel has its own posttribulational resurrection in its own order. Daniel 12 twice teaches this truth, and explicitly dates to the month and day when that event will take place. The chapter is preceded by a chapter filled with information on the political movement of the tribulation period. Historians recognize that much of this has occurred already in the intertestamental period. Because of compenetration of prophecy, similar events will crowd the horizon in the tribulation period. The abomination of desolation once performed by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian Greek, will again be perpetrated by the vile person who shall "do according to his own will."

Against this background, Daniel is first given a broad outline of the progression of events as they relate to his nation Israel (12:1-4). This outline includes the three most important details in their chronological order:

1. "A time of TROUBLE such as never was" (12:1).
2. "At that time thy people (i. e. Israel) shall be DELIVERED" 12:1).
3. "Many (not all) of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall AWAKE" (i. e. resurrection, 12:2).

We must sadly admit that many staunch, pretribulational, premillennial commentators have fearfully turned here to a non-literal interpretation to try to annul the errant argument of the posttribulational rapturist.

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Not only does Daniel 12 reveal a posttribulational resurrection of Israel; it also reveals the precise time elements involved in each of the three chronological details given above. This should not be surprising after a consideration of the explicit chronological details revealed in Daniel 9 about the time of the coming of Israel's Savior to be cut off for sin. Daniel 12 gives the chronological details in the same order as the events listed in verses 1 and 2.

First, "how long will these wonders last for Israel?" The question is phrased in Daniel 12:6. It is partially answered in Daniel 12:7-8 where Daniel is told that the length of time to break the power of Israel (the time of Jacob's trouble) would be three and one-half times (v.7). This has previously been revealed (7:25) as the length of time Israel would be in the hands of the Roman horn. Since Revelation 13:5 gives this as 42 months and the period is described as both 42 months and 1260 days in Revelation 11:1-3, the three and one half times can only refer to the three and one half years called the Tribulation, the great one, the last half of the seven year period. Thus this is the period of breaking Israel's resistance to the Lord Jesus. This corresponds with Daniel 12:1, "a time of trouble."

Secondly, "What shall be the end of these things?" (12:8). The answer now continues, revealing that from the middle of the seven year period (and the abomination) until the *purification of living Israel* (and the separation of the obstinately wicked in Israel) in Israel's judgment would be accomplished in 1290 days, i. e. within the month after the end of the period of trials. Cf. Zechariah 12:10-13:1 for the beginning of the process and Ezekiel 20:33-40 for the judgment scene.

Thirdly, a period of 75 days beyond the end of the tribulation (i. e. 1335 days) is the conclusion of the question, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" Here Daniel is told exactly when he would be resurrected. He was to "REST (cf. Rev. 6:11 of the tribulation saints) until the end of the days (i. e. 75 days after the tribu-

lation) and then stand IN THY LOT." What was Daniel's lot? It was the promise of the resurrection and entry into the *earthly* Messianic Kingdom:

- a. With the pre-Israelite saints when the redeemer would stand on the earth (Job 19:25-27),
- b. with Tribulation saints after the little season when their brethren were yet being killed (cf Rev. 6:11),
- c. And with the rest of the Old Testament saints when earth casts forth its (saved) dead (Isaiah 26:19) to worship with the returned outcasts of Jerusalem (Isa. 27:13).

And the Church? Ah, beloved, she will have spent seven years with her bridegroom, already resurrected and raptured, arrayed in fine linen, readied and returning with Him when He returns to earth to prepare for the fullness of Israel on earth (Romans 11:12).