

Reviewing Five Rapture Positions, Part 2

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

IV. The Post-Tribulational View

The fourth view to be considered is the Post-Tribulational view, which teaches that the rapture and the second coming are aspects of a single event occurring at the end of the Tribulation period. Christ returns to the clouds, the church meets him in the air, and together they return to the earth. Perhaps the best known contemporary post-tribulational writer is Robert Gundry. His main argument is that, "Direct, unquestioned statements of Scripture that Jesus Christ will return after the tribulation and that the first resurrection will occur after the tribulation, coupled with the absence of statements placing similar events before the tribulation, make it natural to place the rapture of the Church after the tribulation" (The Church and the Tribulation, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation. 1973, 10).

The Post-Tribulational view claims three additional proofs, the first of which says that, since identical terms are used for the rapture and second coming, this single event must refer to the coming of Christ after the tribulation. The terms *parousia*, usually translated "coming," *apokalupsis*, translated "revelation," and *epiphaneia*, translated "appearing," must relate to the same event. Second, this view objects to the recent origin of the pretribulational rapture view. J. N. Darby formulated the pretribulational position in the 1830's, at least partially based on Margaret MacDonald's revelations. Since the view is recent, the post-tribulational view claims that it must be wrong. Third, because the church is promised persecution and tribulation this view claims that it is impossible to say that believers will be raptured prior to the tribulation. Rather, the view claims that believers will be protected and preserved in the tribulation.

Four problems with this view are as follows: 1.) The three words used in connection with the Lord's return, coming, revelation, and appearing, are not technical terms but can refer to either the rapture or the second coming. As stated before, similarity does not prove identity. 2.) The rightness or wrongness of a position does not depend on how recent it is but on whether it is scriptural or not. Although the systematic study of prophecy, including the rapture, is fairly recent, evidence can be found throughout church history of a belief in a pretribulational removal of Christians from the earth. For example, Pseudo-Ephraim, in his Sermon on the End of the World, wrote before A.D. 627 that "all the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation which is to come and are taken to the Lord" (Mal Couch, ed., Dictionary of Premillennial Theology, 329). 3.) Although the church must endure tribulation in a general sense, the New Testament clearly teaches that it will be delivered from the future tribulation which is world-wide in scope (Rom 5:9, 1 Thess 1:10, 5:9). Indeed, Christians are

promised not protection in the tribulation (when numerous believers are martyred, Rev 20:4), but deliverance from the very time of tribulation (Rev 3:10). 4.) As all the other aberrant rapture views, post-tribulationism denies that Christ's coming is imminent. Truly, it could be today. To deny that is to deprive the church of the blessed hope—□a serious matter indeed.

V. The Pretribulational Rapture

The fifth and final view that we will examine is the Pre-Tribulational Rapture View, which espouses the return of Christ to the atmosphere to resurrect the dead church age believers and to translate the living saints before the 70th week of Daniel. In accordance with Scripture, this view teaches that the rapture is the next event on God's prophetic calendar. No prophecy needs to be fulfilled before it occurs. The rapture is therefore the imminent or any-moment return of Christ for His own.

This view points to two applicable Scripture passages containing predictions concerning the Rapture. First, Christ's return is promised in John 14:1–6. The night before His crucifixion, Christ made the first disclosure of the rapture to His disciples. He promised to return for His own and take them to the Father's House. In the post-tribulational scheme of things, believers would meet the Lord in the air at the end of the tribulation and then immediately return with Him to earth. Christ would thus have uttered a falsehood in John 14. Second, His return is pictured in I Thessalonians 4:13–18. The Apostle Paul graphically portrays a series of events surrounding the return of Christ: the resurrection of the dead, the rapture of the living, the reunion with the Lord and our loved ones in the air, and finally the blessed reassurance, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess 4:17b–18). In the immediate context Paul assures believers that God has not appointed them unto the wrath of the tribulation but unto salvation (1 Thess 5:9, cf. 1:10; Rom 5:9).

The Proof for the Pretribulational Rapture is found in Revelation 3:10, in the Lord's clear promise: "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." It should be observed that the believers are not promised preservation in or during the hour of trial, but protection out of (ek) it. On the other hand, tribulation saints are not promised exemption from suffering (Rev. 6:9–11; 7:9–14; 14:1–3, et cetera). As Charles Ryrie observes, "If the church will not be raptured before the hour begins, then the promise will not be fulfilled because many saints simply will not be preserved in the tribulation but will suffer and die along with unsaved people" (Revelation , 1996, 34).