

Premillennialism and the Tribulation

Chapter XX: Conclusion

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“The Rapture Question”

Conclusion: Fifty Arguments for Pretribulationism

In previous discussion of premillennialism in relation to the tribulation, the respective arguments for pretribulationism, partial rapture, posttribulationism, and midtribulationism have been examined, and the pretribulational position in general sustained. By way of conclusion and summary, some fifty arguments for pretribulationism can now be proposed. It is not presumed that the statement of these arguments in themselves establishes their validity, but rather that the previous discussion supports and justifies this summary of reasons for the pretribulational view.

For the sake of brevity, the term *rapture* or *translation* is used for the coming of Christ for His church, while the term *second coming* is uniformly used as a reference to His coming to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom, an event which all consider posttribulational. While the words *rapture* and *translation* are not quite identical, they refer to the same event. By the term *rapture* reference is made to the fact that the church is “caught up” from the earth and taken to heaven. By the term *translation* the thought is conveyed that those who are thus raptured are transformed in their physical bodies from natural and corruptible bodies to spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal bodies. Strictly speaking, the dead are raised while the living are translated. In common usage, however, this distinction is not normally maintained.

In the discussion the posttribulational view is considered the principal contender against pretribulationism and is primarily in mind in the restatement of the arguments. The other positions, however, are also mentioned in so far as they oppose pretribulationism on some special point. The preceding discussion has pointed to the preponderance of argument in support of the pretribulational position, and the following restatement should serve to clarify the issues involved.

I. Historical Argument

1. The early church believed in the imminency of the Lord’s return, which is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism.

2. The detailed development of pretribulation truth during the past few centuries does not prove that the doctrine is new or novel. Its development is similar to that of other major doctrines in the history of the church.

II. Hermeneutics

3. Pretribulationism is the only view which allows a literal interpretation of all Old and New Testament passages on the great tribulation.

4. Only pretribulationism distinguishes clearly between Israel and the church and their respective programs.

III. The Nature of the Tribulation

5. Pretribulationism maintains the Scriptural distinction between the great tribulation and tribulation in general which precedes it.

6. The great tribulation is properly interpreted by pretribulationists as a time of preparation for Israel's restoration (Deut. 4:29-30; Jer. 30:4-11). It is not the purpose of the tribulation to prepare the church for glory.

7. None of the Old Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church (Deut. 4:29-30; Jer. 30:4-11; Dan. 9:24-27; Dan. 12:1-2).

8. None of the New Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church (Matt. 24:15-31; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Thess. 5:4-9; Rev. 4—Rev. 19).

9. In contrast to midtribulationism, the pretribulation view provides an adequate explanation for the beginning of the great tribulation in Revelation 6. Midtribulationism is refuted by the plain teaching of Scripture that the great tribulation begins long before the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11.

10. The proper distinction is maintained between the prophetic trumpets of Scripture by pretribulationism. There is no proper ground for the pivotal argument of midtribulationism that the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the last trumpet in that there is no established connection between the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52, and the trumpet of Matthew 24:31. They are three distinct events.

11. The unity of Daniel's seventieth week is maintained by pretribulationists. By contrast, midtribulationism destroys the unity of Daniel's seventieth week and confuses Israel's program with that of the church.

IV. The Nature of the Church

12. The translation of the church is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the second coming of Christ after the tribulation.
13. The church is not appointed to wrath (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Thess. 5:9). The church therefore cannot enter “the great day of their wrath” (Rev. 6:17).
14. The church will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1-9) which includes the tribulation.
15. The possibility of a believer escaping the tribulation is mentioned in Luke 21:36.
16. The church of Philadelphia was promised deliverance from “the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10).
17. It is characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers before a divine judgment is inflicted upon the world as illustrated in the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc. (2 Pet. 2:6-9).
18. At the time of the translation of the church, all believers go to the Father’s house in heaven, and do not remain on the earth as taught by posttribulationists (John 14:3).
19. Pretribulationism does not divide the body of Christ at the rapture on a works principle. The teaching of a partial rapture is based on the false doctrine that the translation of the church is a reward for good works. It is rather a climactic aspect of salvation by grace.
20. The Scriptures clearly teach that all, not part, of the church will be raptured at the coming of Christ for the church (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:17).
21. As opposed to a view of a partial rapture, pretribulationism is founded on the definite teaching of Scripture that the death of Christ frees from all condemnation.
22. The godly remnant of the tribulation are pictured as Israelites, not members of the church as maintained by the posttribulationists.
23. The pretribulationist view as opposed to posttribulationism does not confuse general terms like *elect* and *saints* which apply to the saved of all ages with specific terms like the *church* and those *in Christ* which refer to believers of this age only.

V. The Doctrine of Immensity

24. The pretribulation interpretation is the only view which teaches that the coming of Christ is actually imminent.

25. The exhortation to be comforted by the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:18) is significant only in the pretribulation view, and is especially contradicted by posttribulationism.

26. The exhortation to look for “the glorious appearing” (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.

27. The exhortation to purify ourselves in view of the Lord’s return has most significance if His coming is imminent (1 John 3:2-3).

28. The church is uniformly exhorted to look for the coming of the Lord, while believers in the tribulation are directed to look for signs.

VI. The Work of the Holy Spirit

29. The Holy Spirit as the Restrainer of evil cannot be taken out of the world unless the church, which the Spirit indwells, is translated at the same time. The tribulation cannot begin until this restraint is lifted.

30. The Holy Spirit as the Restrainer must be taken out of the world before “the lawless one,” who dominates the tribulation period, can be revealed (2 Thess. 2:6-8).

31. If the expression, “except the falling away come first, be translated literally, “except the departure come first, it would plainly show the necessity of the rapture taking place before the beginning of the tribulation.

VII. The Necessity of an Interval between the Rapture and Second Coming

32. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, all believers of this age must appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven, an event never mentioned in the detailed accounts connected with the second coming of Christ to the earth.

33. If the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:1—Revelation 5:14 are representative of the church, as many expositors believe, it would necessitate the rapture and reward of the church before the tribulation.

34. The marriage of Christ and the church must be celebrated in heaven before the second coming to the earth for the wedding feast (Rev. 19:7-10).

35. Tribulation saints are not translated at the second coming of Christ but carry on ordinary occupations such as farming and building houses, and shall bear children (Isa.

65:20-25). This would be impossible if all saints were translated at the second coming to the earth as posttribulationists teach.

36. The judgment of the Gentiles following the second coming (Matt. 25:31-46) indicates that both saved and unsaved are still in their natural bodies, which would be impossible if the translation had taken place at the second coming.

37. If the translation took place in connection with the second coming to the earth, there would be no need of separating the sheep from the goats at a subsequent judgment, but the separation would have taken place in the very act of the translation of the believers before Christ actually came to the earth.

38. The judgment of Israel (Ezek. 20:34-38) which occurs subsequent to the second coming indicates the necessity of regathering Israel. The separation of the saved from the unsaved in this judgment obviously takes place sometime after the second coming and would be unnecessary if a translation of the saved had taken place previously.

VIII. Contrasts between the Rapture and the Second Coming

39. At the time of the rapture the saints meet Christ in the air, while at the second coming Christ returns to the Mount of Olives to meet the saints on earth.

40. At the time of the rapture the Mount of Olives is unchanged, while at the second coming it divides and a valley is formed to the east of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4-5).

41. At the rapture living saints are translated, while no saints are translated in connection with the second coming of Christ to the earth.

42. At the rapture the saints go to heaven, while at the second coming to the earth the saints remain in the earth without translation.

43. At the time of the rapture the world is unjudged and continues in sin, while at the second coming the world is judged and righteousness is established in the earth.

44. The translation of the church is pictured as a deliverance before the day of wrath, while the second coming is followed by the deliverance of those who have believed in Christ during the tribulation.

45. The rapture is described as imminent, while the second coming is preceded by definite signs.

46. The translation of living believers is truth revealed only in the New Testament, while the second coming with its attendant events is a prominent doctrine of both Testaments.

47. The rapture concerns only the saved, while the second coming deals with both saved and unsaved.

48. At the rapture Satan is not bound, while at the second coming Satan is bound and cast into the abyss.

49. No unfulfilled prophecy stands between the church and the rapture, while many signs must be fulfilled before the second coming.

50. No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the second coming in either Testament ever mentions a translation of living saints at the same time.