

KEY AREAS IN ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

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SESSION FOUR: PRE-, MID-, AND POST-TRIBULATIONAL VIEWS

IV. Views of Tribulation

A. Midtribulation / Pre-Wrath Rapture View

1. General Description

Midtribulationism is the view that the church will be present for and go through the first half (3 1/2 years) of the tribulation, but be raptured out at the half-way point and so be absent for the latter 3 1/2 years. The first half is seen as natural tribulation whereas the second half is God's wrath. More recently, the "pre-wrath" view has emphasized that the rapture occurs just prior to the outpouring of God's wrath.

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. The church is seen to be part of the tribulation spoken of in Matt 24. The "elect" spoken of there are not Jews, but saints in the general sense and so includes the church (Matt 24:22).
- b. The seal judgments and trumpet judgments of Revelation are not divine judgments but natural. Therefore, there is no need for the church to be absent for these that take place in the 1st half of the tribulation. But the seventh and final trumpet opens the beginning of the outpouring of the bowls of divine wrath. The seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15 is identified with the trumpets of Matt 24:31, 1 Thess 4:16, and the last trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52.
- c. Jesus statement in Matt 24:29 "after the tribulation of those days" is taken to indicate a shift from the natural forms of tribulation of the first half, to the divine wrath of God to be poured out in the second half. But since God's wrath is not for the church (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10), God will remove the church from the earth just prior to the outpouring of His wrath.

B. Posttribulation Rapture View

1. General Description

The church will go through the tribulation rather than being raptured out before or in the middle of the tribulation. Thus, the rapture of the church and the resurrection of all dead saints occur at the same time at the end of the 7 year tribulation. This unitary event is distinguished by 1st a coming *for* the saints (1 Thess 4:16) and the immediately a coming *with* the saints (Rev 19:11ff). Generally, posttribulationists see the church as having replaced national Israel as the covenant people of God.

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. The church is never told that it is to escape tribulation. The Greek word *thlipsis* ("tribulation") is used 55 x in the NT, and 47 of these relate to tribulation to be endured by the saints. The same word is used in Mt 24:21 of the great tribulation.
- b. 1 Thess. 4:17 describes the church "meeting" the Lord in the air but does not say that the Lord takes the church on to heaven for 3½ or 7 years.
- c. Throughout Revelation 6-18, the people of God are present and this includes the church. There is no reason to exclude the church from these tribulation passages.

- d. 2 Thess 2 describes believers who thought they were enduring the day of the Lord. If they believed in a pre-trib rapture, they wouldn't have thought so. Paul only tells them that their current persecution is not the Day of the Lord, not that they will be spared from it.

C. Pretribulation Rapture View

1. General Description

- a. The church is taken up or raptured just prior to the 7 years tribulation period. This time of tribulation is seen as unique in its intensity or severity, and so is called the "great tribulation" to distinguish it from all other persecutions, trials, and tribulations the church goes through. And the church is exempt from it. Christ's second coming, then, is in two stages, the first when Christ comes for the church and meets the church in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18), and the second when Christ comes with the church to set up His kingdom and usher in the millennium (Rev. 19:11-21; Zech 14:1-8).
- b. The purpose of the tribulation is two-fold: 1) to conclude "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), and 2) to save the Jewish people and prepare for the restoration of Israel in the millennial Kingdom.
- c. Three resurrections are required: 1) The resurrection of the righteous dead to meet the Lord in the air prior to the tribulation (1 Thess. 4:16), 2) the resurrection of martyred tribulation saints who died during the tribulation (Rev. 20:4), and 3) the resurrection of all unbelievers at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5).
- d. Two main judgments are seen: 1) the judgment of believers taking place at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), so that the church is made pure prior to Christ's coming to earth (Rev. 19:7-9), and 2) the great white throne judgment of all the unsaved at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15)

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. God does not intend the church to undergo his wrath (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9), and furthermore that He plans to keep the Church from the tribulation that is to come on the whole world (Rev 3:10). Notice that in Rev 3:10, one is kept from a time, an hour, which affects the whole inhabited earth. To be protected from the hour of testing is best fulfilled if one has been removed altogether from the earth.
- b. The early judgments (e.g. seal judgments, trumpet judgments) are not merely natural judgments but they also are the outpouring of the wrath of God on the earth. After all, it is the Lamb in Rev 6 who breaks the seals and this brings forth judgment upon the earth. Rev 6-19 describes, then, divine judgment of enormous proportions.
- c. The Need For an Interval Between the Rapture of the Church and the Return of Christ.
 - 1) Since Rev 19:7-9 portrays the church as pure before Christ comes, the judgment seat of Christ where works are judged and rewards given has already occurred.
 - 2) The marriage supper of the Lamb also takes place before Christ comes (Rev 19:7-10), and this requires the church is purified ("in white garments") prior to his second coming.
 - 3) Last, there is the need for non-glorified saints to populate the millennial kingdom, to account for death (Isa 65:20) and apostasy (Rev 20:7-9) in the millennium. But if all believers are raptured and glorified at the end of the tribulation, and all unbelievers are killed at the return of Christ (Rev 19:17-21), then there are no people to enter the millennium in non-glorified bodies.
- d. Over and again we are told to be ready, on the alert, watchful, for the coming of Christ (Mt 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35; 1 Thess 5:6 ;James 5:8-9). This only makes sense if there is nothing needing fulfillment that stands between now and Christ's coming.