

Systematic Theology, Lesson 39: Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things, Part 5

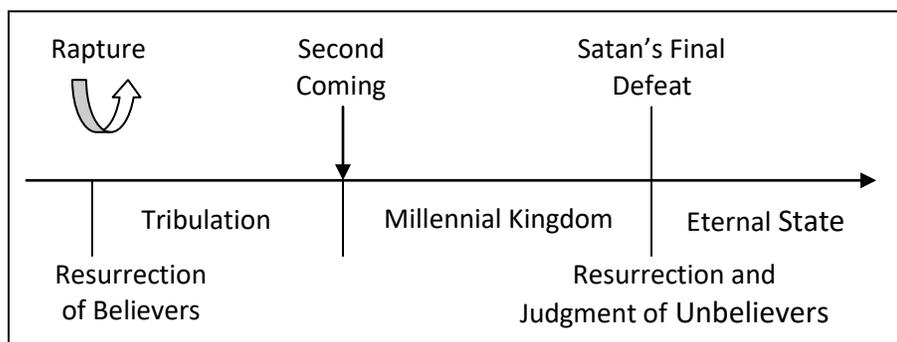
1. Review

- a. Purpose of eschatology: Eschatology is not an end in itself but should stimulate growth in Christ.
- b. Division of eschatology: Eschatology is divided into two major sections: personal eschatology and general eschatology.
 - i. Personal (or individual) eschatology
 1. Physical death
 2. Intermediate state
 - ii. General (or cosmic) eschatology
 1. Return of Christ (second advent)
 2. Millennium
 3. Rapture
 4. Resurrection and judgment
 5. Eternal punishment and new heavens and earth (eternal state)

2. Rapture

- a. Where does the concept of Rapture come from?
 - i. The concept comes from . . .
 1. **1 Thess 4:17**: Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.
 2. **1 Cor 15:51-52**: Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

- ii. Rapture means the church being carried away from earth into heaven.
 - iii. The question at issue is when does the Rapture take place?
- b. What are the major positions with respect to the Rapture? There are _____ major positions with respect to the Rapture. Each position derives its name based on the *timing* of the relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation. (Note: each of the three positions holds to a Premillennial view. This does not mean that Amillennialists or Postmillennialists do not believe in the Rapture; they view the Rapture and Second Coming as a composite of one event.)
- i. Pre-tribulation: the Rapture occurs _____ the Tribulation (the prefix pre- means before). This is the view commonly called “Dispensational Premillennialism” because it is embraced by most dispensationalists.¹



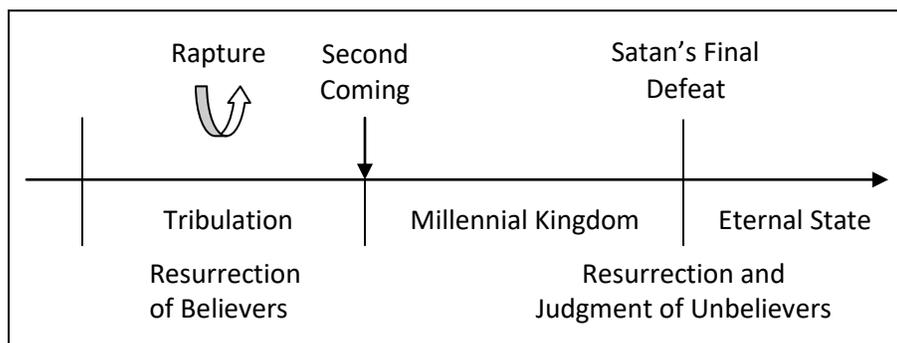
1. Christ resurrects believers and raptures the church at the beginning of the seven year Tribulation.²
2. Christ does not fully return to earth at this point, although some see the Rapture as the first phase of his Second Coming.
3. At the Second Coming, Christ returns to earth with the resurrection saints who are ushered into the Millennial reign.
4. At the end of the Millennial kingdom, Satan is finally defeated, unbelievers are resurrected and judged, and the eternal state is ushered in.

¹ This view is also sometimes called the “Secret Rapture” because it occurs prior to Christ’s bodily return to earth.

² The Rapture does not necessarily occur at the beginning of the Tribulation. Scholars debate if there is a “gap” between the Rapture and beginning of the Tribulation.

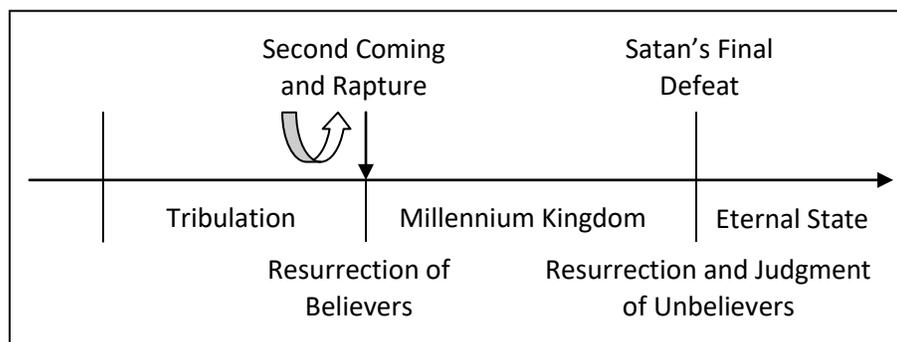
5. Representatives: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Feinberg, John MacArthur

- ii. Mid-tribulation: the Rapture occurs at the _____ point of the Tribulation (the prefix mid- means *middle*).



1. Christ raises believers and raptures the church at the middle point of the seven year Tribulation.
2. The remaining events are basically the same as those of Pre-tribulationism.
3. Representatives: Norman B. Harrison, Oswald J. Smith, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., Gleason L. Archer

- iii. Post-tribulation: The Rapture occurs _____ the Tribulation (the prefix post- means *after*). This view is commonly called "Historic Premillennialism."



1. Christ raises believers and raptures the church at the end of the seven year Tribulation so that the Tribulation and Second Coming are a composite of one event.

2. The remaining events are the same as those of Pre-tribulationism.
 3. Representatives: George Eldon Ladd, Alexander Reese, Robert H. Gundry, Wayne Grudem, Milliard Erickson, Douglass Moo
 - iv. Summary: Like it or not, the timing of the Rapture is not clearly and explicitly revealed in a passage(s) of Scripture. To quote one scholar: “[T]he *time* of that Rapture with respect to the Tribulation is *nowhere plainly stated*. No Old Testament or New Testament author *directly* addresses that question or states the nature of that relationship as a point of doctrine.”³ In other words, you cannot simply quote a Bible verse or two to prove the timing of the Rapture. Thus, logic, inference, and theological arguments must be used to defend a position.
- c. What are the main arguments for each position?
- i. Pre-tribulationism
 1. The promise of exemption from divine wrath during the Tribulation.
 2. The church is promised exemption not only from divine wrath but also from the time of wrath, according to **Rev 3:10**.
 3. The necessity of an interval between the Rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ.
 4. The differences between Rapture passages and Second Coming passages.
 - ii. Mid-tribulationism
 1. Certain words in the Olivet Discourse are also used in the Rapture passages.
 2. The emphasis of the last three-and-a-half years in Daniel and Revelation.

³ Douglas Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, Post-Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984, 1996), 211, italics in original.

3. The seventh trumpet of **Rev 10:7** corresponds to the last trumpet of **1 Cor 15:52**, which means the Rapture will take place at the time of the mid-point of the Tribulation.

iii. Post-tribulationism

1. The nature of the Tribulation period does not necessitate the church being removed.
2. The biblical authors use several words to describe the Second Coming, so if the Rapture was a different event, why not use a different word for the Rapture?
3. The church is not said to be in heaven but on earth during the Tribulation according to Revelation 4-18 during which time the Tribulation takes place.

d. Response and evaluation to the arguments:

i. Pre-tribulationism

1. Some argue that divine wrath only occurs at the very end of the Tribulation period, so the church can go through the Tribulation period without experiencing God's divine wrath.
2. Even if the church is to go through a time of divine wrath, **Rev 3:10** is better seen as *spiritual preservation*, argue some, during this time of wrath, rather than *physical removal*.
3. The necessity of an interval between the Rapture and Second Coming is the strongest argument. This interval will allow some human beings to survive the Tribulation to enter the Millennial kingdom in non-resurrected bodies.
4. The differences between Rapture passages and Second Coming passages can be explained; but more importantly, does not imply a time difference.

ii. Mid-tribulationism

1. The fact that key words are used in both the Olivet Discourse and Rapture passages does not mean that the events are the same. It just means that there is similarity in events.

2. While prophetic passages emphasize the last three and one half years of the Tribulation, no convincing evidence suggests the church experiences Rapture at this point.
3. The evidence that **Rev 10:7** corresponds to the last trumpet of **1 Cor 15:52** is speculative and therefore not conclusive.

iii. Post-tribulationism

1. The argument about the nature of divine wrath hinges on the commencement of divine wrath. It can be argued that divine wrath commences at the beginning of the Tribulation period not at the very end.
 2. The fact that key words are used in both the Olivet Discourse and Rapture passages does not mean that the events are the same. It just means that there is similarity.
 3. Some argue that the church cannot be on earth during the Tribulation because the word church is not used once in Revelation 4-18.
- e. An evaluation of one key text: **Rev 3:10**: “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” The main question is: what is the nature of keeping?
- i. Arguments for Pre-tribulationism and Mid-tribulationism:
 1. The word “from” in “I also will keep you from the hour of testing” means “out of, out from within” in all lexicons. If John wanted to say that we are protected *through* the Tribulation (but not removed), he could have used a better word than the Greek word for “from” (ἐκ).
 2. To “keep from” (τηρέω ἐκ) is used only one other place in the Scriptures in **John 17:15**: “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.” What does Jesus mean? He means that the disciples are not in the Evil One. In other words, they are kept from him by removal.
 3. The believers will be kept from the hour of testing “that hour which is about to come upon the whole world.” The only way

believers could be exempt from world-wide Tribulation is that they be removed from the earth.

4. “To test those who dwell on earth” has a negative connotation, which means the failure of those that oppose God. The testing is for those that oppose God—“earth dwellers.”

ii. Arguments for Post-tribulationism:

1. The word “from” in “I also will keep you from the hour of testing” means “out of, out from within” in all lexicons. If John wanted to say that we are *physically removed* from the Tribulation, he could have used a better word than the Greek word for “from” (ἐκ).
2. To “keep from” (τηρέω ἐκ) is used only one other place in the Scriptures in **John 17:15**: “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.” Since the disciples will remain in the world, Jesus’ promise is to “keep them from the evil one” while they remain in (and are not removed) from the world.
3. In three other place in the New Testament, the word “keep” (τηρέω) is used (**John 17:11, 12, 15**), and in all three cases God or Christ is the subject and believers are the object. In all three cases, spiritual protection is in view.
4. To test those that dwell on the earth does not necessarily mean believers are removed, just that they aren’t tested.

- iii. Evaluation: arguments for both sides are answered by the opposing view. Therefore, **Rev 3:10** does not conclusively settle the issue of the timing of the Rapture.

3. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“Last Things” subsection “Rapture of the Church”)

We teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven year tribulation to translate His church from this earth and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works.

4. Summary of Millennial and Rapture positions

- a. We have presented three views on the Millennium and three views on the Rapture.

- b. In summary, however, we could say there are essentially—with respect to time—two basic views to the Millennium and two basic views to the Rapture.
 - i. For the Millennium, either the Millennium is now (Amillennialism or Postmillennialism) or future (Premillennialism). If future then . . .
 - ii. For the Rapture, either the Rapture is before Christ's Second Coming (Pre-tribulationism and Mid-tribulationism) or at the same time of Christ's Second Coming (Post-tribulationism).
- c. Therefore, there are essentially three Millennial and Rapture combination positions:
 - i. Amillennialism or Postmillennialism
 - ii. Premillennialism, Post-tribulationism
 - iii. Premillennialism, Pre tribulationism or Mid-tribulationism