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Summary of Problems with Posttribulationism

by Ron Rhodes

The Problem of Imminency

The problem for posttribulationists is that all the Rapture passages seem to indicate an imminent Rapture, while the Second Coming is preceded by specific events. The difficulty is in reconciling these two distinct events into one single event. Posttribs try to solve this problem by redefining imminence as merely indicating that Christ will return soon, and argue against the idea that the Rapture could occur at any moment.

It should be noted that in several instances, Paul exhorted believers on the basis of the imminency of the Lord's return without even the slightest warning of an impending great tribulation (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-58). Every passage that clearly refers to the Rapture has this unusual feature of exhortation which is based on the imminency of the rapture and the absence of any warning of an intervening great tribulation.

The Problem of the Comforting Hope

The problem here is in harmonizing the comforting hope of 1 Thessalonians 4 with a literal great tribulation. The hope of the Rapture was extended to the Thessalonian Christians as a comfort. Paul did not warn them of a coming great tribulation.

Obviously, the Thessalonians would not have experienced much 'comfort' or 'hope' if they had to go through the great tribulation before being translated. Posttribulationists generally try to get around this by minimizing the sufferings of the saints, and somehow insulating them from the judgments of the great tribulation.

The Problem of the Restrainer

Posttribs have not adequately dealt with the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2. They usually argue from silence by stating that Paul surely would have asserted pretribulationism if it were an established truth. Their logic seems to be: 'Since Paul didn't come right out and say that there would be a pretribulational Rapture, posttribulationism (by the process of elimination) must be correct.' However, if the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, as pretribs believe, then Paul in fact did argue for a pretrib Rapture.

The Problem of the Wheat and the Tares

Posttribulationists support their view by citing Matthew 13:30, where the tares are taken up first before the wheat. However, this contradicts the posttrib sequence of events. In their view, the wicked are not dealt with finally before the rapture. Subsequently, Matthew 13:30 does not support posttribulationism.

The Problem of Intervening Events on Earth

The tribulation is a period of preparation for the Millennium. Since all believers are translated at the Rapture, this period of time is necessary to make possible a new generation of believers who will populate the Millennium in their mortal bodies.

The Problem of the Judgment of the Nations

The unbelievers (goats) are cast into everlasting fire by means of physical death whereas believers (sheep) enter the kingdom prepared for them - the Millennial Kingdom. The judgment of the nations is an individual judgment. It results in the purging of unbelievers out from among believers and leaves believers untouched. (Note that no one is translated or resurrected).

If there had been a posttribulational Rapture, then believers would already be separated from unbelievers. This judgment would then be unnecessary.

The Problem of the "First Resurrection"

Posttribulationists call attention to the expression "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:4-6 in support of their argument. They ask how a posttribulational resurrection could be 'first' if a Rapture had actually taken place before the tribulation? The answer is that the resurrection mentioned in Rev. 20:4-6 actually occurs after the second coming of Christ and therefore contradicts the idea that the Rapture (in the posttribulational view) is a

part of the second coming of Christ from heaven to earth. Even a posttribulationist would have to recognize that in his order of events, the resurrection of Rev. 20:4-6 is not 'first.'

The Problem of Terminology

Similar terminology is used for the Rapture and the Second Coming. Posttribs thus conclude that these two events must be one. They use nontechnical terms like coming, appearing, and revelation in a technical way.

The answer to this is simply that the context must always be taken into consideration in determining how these words are to be interpreted. It is faulty logic to assume that a word must always be used in exactly the same way whenever it is used.

The Problem of the Book of Revelation

Posttribulationists have no uniform interpretation of this book. Most posttribs spiritualize the great judgments in Revelation 6-19. The widely conflicting and contradictory interpretations that Posttribs hold to in regard to this book is ample testimony to their inadequate hermeneutics.

The Problem of Transition from the Tribulation to the Millennium

This problem has been touched on earlier. The basic problem is, How can saints go into the Millennium in their natural bodies if, in fact, they were raptured while Christ was coming from heaven to earth? Their bodies would have already been glorified.

Additional Problems which are the Result of an Incorrect and Inconsistent Hermeneutic:

Disagreement on the Millennium

Posttribs do not agree as to whether premillennialism, postmillennialism, or amillennialism is the correct view. Thus posttribulationism does not lend itself to a single eschatological system of interpretation.

Disagreement on the Nature of the Judgments at the Second Coming of Christ

The main disagreement among posttribs is in regard to the time and the order of these judgments. Gundry holds that the judgment of the nations and the judgment seat of Christ take place at the end of the Millennium. However, posttribs usually lump the various judgments together at the Second Coming. If they are premil, they place the judgments before the Millennium.

Disagreement as to a Specific Order of Events at the Time of the Second Coming

Posttribulationists rarely offer a specific sequence of events in connection with the Second Coming of Christ. What little order they do give, they disagree with one another (e.g., compare classic, semiclassical, futurist, and dispensational posttribulational interpretations).

The Problem of Classic Posttribulationism

The problem here is the impossibility of explaining all the predicted events leading up to the Second Coming of Christ as either past or contemporaneous.

The Problems of Semiclassic Posttribulationism

Those who hold to this view are not agreed as to how far to interpret prophecy literally.

Those who hold to this view have failed in attempting to affirm any reasonable sequence of events relating to the Second Coming.

The Problems of Dispensational Posttribulationism

Gundry regards the tribulation as a time of satanic wrath but not a time of divine wrath. However, Rev. 6:16 says it is a time of the "wrath of the lamb."

Gundry places the judgments at the end of the Millennium. The motivation for this seems to be that it is impossible to have a judgment of the sheep and the goats following the Second Coming of Christ if, as a matter of fact, the Rapture has taken place shortly before at the Second Advent itself.

The Problem of the Distinction between the Church and Israel

Most posttribs include in the church the saints of all ages. They must spiritualize scripture to accomplish this. They argue that since "saints" are in the great tribulation, the church must apparently go through it.

Gundry is the exception to this in that he attempts to distinguish between the church and Israel. (Cf. separate handout on Gundry).

The Problem of Daniel

Posttribulationism destroys the unity of Daniel's seventieth week, and also confuses Israel's program with that of the church.

The Problem of Titus 2:13

Posttribulationists have not adequately dealt with this passage where believers are exhorted to look for "the glorious appearing" of Christ to His own. If the Rapture follows the Tribulation, believers would then look for signs instead of His coming.

The Problem of Purification

Believers are exhorted to purify themselves (1 Jn. 3:2, 3) in light of the fact that the Lord could appear at "any moment." It would not make sense for a believer to purify himself for the tribulation (which would be the case if posttribulationism were correct).

The Problem of John 14:1-3

At the Rapture, the church goes to the Father's house, and not back to earth again as posttribulationists hold.

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