

SYNOPSIS

What are the logical and advantages and strengths of the pretribulational position? In this essay, Dr. Feinberg carefully evaluates the major strengths and weaknesses of the pre-, mid-, and posttribulational perspectives. If there is going to be meaningful discussion of the rapture positions there must be agreement on the proper methodology. Clear thinking enhances clear conclusions and must prevail if the pretribulational rapture is going to be seriously proclaimed.

Arguing for the Rapture: Who Must Prove What and How? by John S. Feinberg

Some years ago the symposium on the rapture of the church entitled *The Rapture--Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* by Gleason Archer, Paul Feinberg, and Douglas Moo was published. The book is intriguing and helpful from a number of standpoints. It offers not only position papers but a chance for each author to interact with opposing views. It is generally quite well argued and hence makes a genuine contribution in that respect.

Many who read the book come away thinking that no one won this debate. I think there are various reasons for that, but one of the most important is that the three authors use different strategies in arguing their positions. As a result, one sees two or three different sets of arguments which do not necessarily address one another. And, the average reader has difficulty evaluating who has made the best case, since the argument strategies are so different. Though some might think this unfortunate, I think it extremely important, for it vividly highlights different strategies and methodologies in arguing for one's views on the rapture. In so doing, I think it sheds light on what we all ought to be doing as we confront this issue.

In what follows I want first to make two methodological points and a theological and logical one. As to the former, I wish to 1) lay bare the strategies that are typically used in arguing for one's views on the rapture and 2) make a suggestion as to who is right and who is wrong. As to the latter, after clarifying methodology, I wish to apply the meth

odological points to the theological question of what one would have to prove in order to establish his position as correct. In so doing, I hope to set an agenda for discussing this issue which I think will help us make greater headway than we have before. Finally, I want to give a general assessment of which position is best able to make its case.

Methodologies and Strategies

I think the difference in methodology is most strikingly illustrated by comparing Moo's piece with Feinberg's. Moo's discussion, as with many posttribulationists, proceeds by going to the passages which speak about the coming (parousia) of the Lord. Such passages typically deal with the second advent, which, of course, occurs at the end of the tribulation. No clear, undisputed rapture passage (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Cor 15:51ff.) tells us whether the event under discussion is pre-, mid-, or posttribulational. Consequently, Moo offers a careful exegesis of parousia and rapture passages to show that the similarities between the two passages are so great that one must see the events of which they speak as occurring at the same time.¹ Typically, posttribulationists have relied heavily on an exegesis of such passages to support their position. See, for example, the work by J. Barton Payne (*The Imminent Appearing of Christ*) as well as the lengthy exegetical sections on Thessalonians, Revelation, and the Olivet Discourse in Robert Gundry's *The Church and the Tribulation*.

On the other hand, Feinberg's procedure is different. Since true propositions accurately reflect the world, and since in the world there are no contradictory states of affairs, it is understood that if a view is correct, it will not contradict other known truths. Thus, not only must a viewpoint fit the facts, but its implications must not contradict any other known truth. Feinberg takes this point seriously and structures an argument which takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. Granting the assumption that post- or midtribulationism is correct, let's see how they fit with other theological/biblical principles we know to be true. But, those accepted truths do not fit with posttribulationism and (in some cases) fit only slightly better with midtribulationism. Therefore, those views are w

rong and pretribulationism, which does fit those other trues, must be correct. Such is a *reductio* type of argument.

Let me illustrate in regard to Feinberg. Feinberg's procedure is not to go to parousia passages and test them in the way Moo does. Instead, he appeals to such biblical teachings as the Church's promised exemption from God's wrath and the biblical teaching that there will be people who enter the millennial kingdom in non-glorified bodies. Granting these biblical and theological trues, Feinberg argues that the former point really doesn't square with either a mid- or posttrib position, and the latter really doesn't fit a posttrib view. But, since a truth cannot contradict some other known truth, post- and midtribulationism must be wrong. Pretribulationism, on the other hand, has no problem, Feinberg argues, with these theological trues. They actually provide support for pretribulationism.ⁱⁱ

Feinberg's general strategy (focus on theological and biblical trues and see how they square with the various views on the time of Christ's coming, is fairly typical of pretribulationist handlings of the rapture question (cf. Walvoord's *The Rapture Question*). There are, of course, some notable exceptions to these pretrib and posttrib strategies. For example, Allan Beechick (*The Pretribulation Rapture*), a pretrib, includes an extended exegesis of parousia passages. On the other side of the question, Gundry, having started out as a pretrib and well aware of their arguments, includes many chapters which address the theological ramifications of his views.

Archer's strategy is a bit different yet. He spends most of his time presenting arguments as to why pre- and posttrib views either cannot be correct or are at least very improbable. His arguments appeal both to theological and biblical trues other than direct teachings about the rapture and second advent and to some specific exegesis of parousia passages. His basic strategy is to show that opposing views are at best highly improbable, whereas his own view is the most satisfactory in regard to the issues he raises. Archer then raises several brief lines of positive support for his view.ⁱⁱⁱ As an interesting sidelight, t

he strategy of Norman B. Harrison (another midtribulationist) in *The End is Different Again*. Harrison offers his approach to the book of Revelation. In the process he raises the rapture issue and attempts to show how passages like Revelation 4 do not support pretribulationism, whereas passages such as Revelation 11 do support midtribulationism.

The reason for noting different strategies is not to suggest that pretribulationists do not care about exegesis or that posttribs do not care about theology or that midtribs are, as we might suspect, in the middle on this methodological point. The reason is to point out the different methodologies used and to ask which one is correct. That brings me to a second methodological point.

Granting what I have said about the methodologies generally used in this discussion, which is correct? In order to answer that question, we must address a more fundamental question, namely, how should one formulate any doctrine? The answer is rather clear. Go first to those portions of Scripture which directly speak to the topic. For example, if one is formulating his doctrine of God, he should go to passages that directly speak of the nature of God, not passages that speak, for example, about the nature of the Church or of Scripture. If one is structuring his notion of creation, he should not go to passages that speak about a future kingdom. In regard to the rapture issue, the principle is equally applicable. Go first to those passages which speak directly about the rapture and return of the Lord.

Proper methodology does not stop at this point, however. While one should begin with passages that speak directly about the doctrine under consideration, one must also pay attention to the implications of the doctrine. This is especially important if, as in the case of the rapture issue, the passages about the rapture and return of the Lord under determine the question of the timing of the rapture in relation to the time of the tribulation. If one is working, for example, on the doctrine of divine sovereignty, he cannot merely look at passages that speak about the control of God. He must also consider passages on the freedom of man. A doctrine of divine sovereignty which contradicts biblical teaching

g on human freedom is unwanted. Implications and relations of doctrines to one another, then, are crucial. If one's position on a given theological issue is correct, it will fit with other known theological and biblical truths rather than contradict them.

As a reminder of this important methodological point, remember how many inerrantists respond to those who reject inerrancy on the grounds that the phenomena of Scripture contradict inerrancy. Methodologically, the appropriate response is that one must begin to formulate the doctrine of Scripture on the basis of passages that really address the nature of Scripture (like 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21; John 17:17; etc.), rather than starting with passages about mustard seeds and cocks crowing, for example. Inerrantists stress that the former, since they directly address the nature of Scripture, must be normative while the latter must be interpreted in the light of the former. But, then, we need to follow the same methodology when handling other doctrines like the rapture.

The relation of the foregoing to the rapture issue should be obvious. Methodologically speaking, it is most appropriate to begin with the passages that directly speak about the event(s) in question--rapture, second advent, and tribulation. Having formulated the clearest notion we can about the rapture and its relation to the second advent and tribulation on the basis of careful exegesis of rapture and second advent passages, we must then look at the implications of our position on the rapture. If it does not square with other biblical teachings, then there is error somewhere. And, since the rapture is nowhere clearly and explicitly dated in Scripture, it is probably more likely than not that the mistake is in relation to our view of the timing of the rapture. The key point, though, for all sides to remember is that proper theological methodology dare not allow us to ignore *either* the rapture and parousia passages or the doctrines which have implications for one's views on the rapture and second advent. Although one should begin his study with the passages that speak directly to the topic at hand, both are equally important. It is surely no victory to uphold one's views on the timing of the rapture at the expense of denying

what God's word says, for example, about the relation of the Church to God's judgmental wrath.

What lessons should we learn from this methodological point? Ones which should drive us all of us to do work which we may not heretofore have done as carefully as we should. For the pretrib (and probably midtribs as well), there is a need to get at the task of exegesis in regard to rapture and second advent passages. If posttribs are right that the similarity between the two types of passages is so great as to render them identical, then the battle is lost before the discussion ever can turn to the theological implications of the positions. What pretribs must do is squarely face those passages and see whether there is enough dissimilarity between rapture and second advent passages to warrant the possibility that the two events could occur at significantly separate times (like seven years apart). Midtribs need to do the same thing. And, both pretribs and midtribs should begin at this point, not ignore it or come to it at the end of the discussion. I doubt that pretribs and midtribs have much hope of convincing posttribs of very much so long as they shy away from that exegetical task.

For the posttrib, the lesson is a bit different but equally important. Posttribs must take more seriously questions about non-glorified bodies to populate the millennial kingdom and the question of God's wrath. Too often such issues have simply been ignored or relegated to a position of virtual insignificance. There is nothing wrong with beginning with the parousia passages as the posttrib wants; in fact, I am willing to grant that such is preferable in terms of proper theological method. But, the posttrib needs to wrestle much more seriously than he has with the theological issues that pretribs and midtribs raise for him. And, I doubt that posttribs have much hope of convincing pre- and midtribs of very much unless they start viewing these issues as more than minor problems for their view. To their credit Feinberg does talk about dissimilarities between rapture and second advent passages, and Moo does somewhat address theological issues (especially i

n his responses), but in both cases the respective issues are treated as somewhat secondary.

All of this really amounts to two important points. In regard to whose methodology is right, I am suggesting that in a way no one is entirely right or entirely wrong as we look at the way the respective positions argue their cases. Everyone needs to modify his methodology to some extent. The other point grows out of this. If the positions ever hope seriously to engage one another in dialogue and even come to an agreement on this issue, they must take more seriously one another's strongest arguments (and the methodological points I have made about how to formulate doctrines, which points undergird the strongest arguments of the respective positions). It only stands to reason that if you tell me your strongest arguments for your view, and I basically shift the ground of the debate to my strongest arguments, we are not likely to convince one another of much.

What Must Be Proved?

One could grant my methodological points and still be puzzled about what he should attempt to prove with respect to his position. The pretrib might promise to look more closely at the exegesis of rapture and parousia passages, but he may wonder what he must prove about them. That brings me to the logical/theological part of this study. If one takes my methodological points seriously, what would it take, using the suggested methodology, to establish a particular position on the rapture as most probable (or even, perhaps correct)? In what follows, I am not suggesting that nothing else could be offered as an argument for the three positions, I am only noting the issues that must be handled, regardless of whatever else is discussed.

What, then, must pre-tribs prove? Pretribulationists first should handle the parousia and rapture passages. Since second advent passages refer to the end of the tribulation, and since clear rapture passages give no indication as to the time of the rapture, pretribulationists cannot expect to prove their position solely on the basis of these passages. Instead, all they can hope to show (and what they had better show) from an exegesis of these

passages is that their view is not impossible. But, what would make their view impossible? If it should be discovered that the similarity between clear second advent and clear rapture passages is so great as to warrant the conclusion that the events spoken of in both kinds of passages are identical, then pretribulationism would be impossible. As already noted, this is precisely what posttribs try to establish.

With this in mind, then, the pretribulationist must show that there is enough dissimilarity between clear rapture and clear second advent passages as to warrant the claim that the two kinds of passages *could* be speaking about two events which *could* occur at different times. The pretribulationist does not have to prove at this point (and probably cannot, anyway) that the two events must occur at different times, but only that the exegetical data from rapture and second advent passages do not make it impossible for the events to occur at different times. If he can do that, the pretribulationist has shown that his view is not impossible. And, he has answered the posttribulationist's strongest line of evidence.

After handling exegesis of rapture and second advent passages, the next move is to discuss various theological and biblical issues that have implications for the rapture issue. The pretrib must try not only to show that his position fits with those other biblical truths, but also that his opponents' views either cannot be synthesized with those other issues or at least not so well as his views can. In particular, the pretribulationist should raise the following four issues: 1) the wrath of God issue; 2) the non-glorified bodies to enter the millennial kingdom issue; 3) the timing of the marriage supper of the lamb; and 4) the timing of the bema seat judgment for the Church. With regard to the first, the Church is promised exemption from God's judgmental wrath (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). But, God's judgmental wrath is poured out during the tribulation. How, then, can God's tribulation wrath be avoided? Each rapture position has an answer. The pretribulationist needs to show that his is the most likely and that the others are either clearly false or very unlikely.

As to non-glorified bodies, Scripture shows that some people will enter the millennial kingdom in natural bodies and then give birth to children (Isa 65: 20). Some of those children will rebel against the Lord (Rev 20:7-10). But, people in glorified bodies cannot give birth, nor do they sin. Thus, there must be some people who enter the kingdom in non-glorified bodies. But, everyone who is raptured is glorified. So, if the rapture occurs posttribulationally, it seems that no one is left to enter the millennial kingdom in a non-glorified body. All rapture positions must confront this problem and all have an answer. The pretrib must show his to be the best, if he can.

Third, given the context of the marriage supper of the lamb as heaven (Rev 19:1-10), followed by the second advent at the end of the tribulation, and given semitic customs surrounding marriage^{iv} which John most likely would have had in mind as he wrote Revelation 19, it appears that the Church must be in heaven for this event somewhat prior to the end of the tribulation. But, how is one to explain the Church's presence in heaven prior to the second advent? The rapture seems the most likely answer, but such an answer appears to create some problems for posttribulationism, even if not for midtribulationism. The pretrib needs to discuss the timing and location of this event and to show, if he can, why his view can handle this issue better than other views can.

Finally, Paul states that all believers must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. At that time our works will be evaluated by Christ and rewarded. But, when is that event most likely to occur? If during the kingdom, that needs to be proved. If during the tribulation while the Church is in heaven, that needs to be proved. The former position surely fits better with posttribulationism than does the latter. The former view also fits either pre- or midtribulationism. The latter view fits equally well with pre- or midtribulationism, but seems to create problems for posttribulationism. The pretrib needs to offer his answer and show why it is the best of the possible answers.

If the pretrib can establish what I have suggested about the parousia and rapture passages, and if his answers to the theological issues can be shown to be the best of the three

positions, then in essence he has won the debate. But, what must the midtrib prove to establish his position as best? In regard to the parousia and rapture passages, he must by careful exegesis demonstrate the same thing the pretrib hopes to establish. That is, he must show that his position is not impossible, because the passages are not so similar as to rule out any possibility that the rapture could occur at a different time from the second advent.

Second, midtribulationists sometimes argue their case by associating the rapture trumpet with the seventh trumpet of Revelation and arguing that all occur at the midpoint of the tribulation. Midtribs might even associate the last trump of the rapture with the trumpet of Matt 24: 31. All of this suggests several things the midtrib must do if he uses this line of argument. He must, for instance, demonstrate that the trumpet judgments of Revelation end at the middle of the tribulation. Moreover, he must give exegetical reasons for associating the rapture trump with the seventh judgmental trump of Revelation. And, if he associates all of these trumps with Matt 24:31, he must address the following problem: he must explain how he has avoided posttribulationism (since Matt 24:31 is posttribulationist), and if he maintains that the seventh trumpet and the rapture trumpet are the last trump, he must explain in what sense it is the last trump since there is still one more trumpet (Matt 24:31) that is blown at the end of the tribulation. This does not per se prove that the problems are unanswerable, but only that they must be confronted by a midtrib who wishes to argue his case by associating the various scriptural trumpets. As a sidelight, if the pretrib wants to correlate the trumpets of Scripture, he must also explain how the rapture trump can be the last trump when he believes it is blown seven years prior to the trump at the end of the tribulation (Matt 24:31). Since he doesn't associate the rapture trump with any of the trumpet judgments of Revelation, he need not show that the seventh trumpet judgment (regardless of when it occurs in the tribulation) is the same as the rapture trumpet.

Finally, the midtrib must confront some theological issues. In addition to the four raised already, he must, if he is a dispensationalist, explain why the Church was not present in the first 69 of Daniel's 70 weeks, but now is both in and taken out of Daniel's 70th week. Non-dispensational midtribs need not worry about this issue, but dispensational midtribs must address it. Midtribs must not only address these issues, but show their answers to be better than their opponents' answers.

What about posttribulationists? What must they prove to establish their view? They should begin with an exegesis of parousia and rapture passages, but their task is not to prove that a rapture *could* be posttribulational just as the second advent is. Since there is no passage which explicitly dates the rapture at some other time, *prima facie* there is no impossibility about the rapture and second advent occurring at the same time. Instead, the posttrib needs to show that the rapture and second advent passages are so similar as to warrant the conclusion that they are actually speaking of the same time and the same event. The posttrib needs to do this for three reasons: 1) if he can do this, he has automatically eliminated the other views as incorrect, 2) this line of evidence clearly is the posttrib's best argument for his position, so he needs to make the most of it, and 3) when he gets to the theological implications of his view, he faces the pretribs' strongest arguments against his position.

Having established whatever he can by means of this exegesis, the posttrib must still confront the theological issues. Even if he thinks he has established by exegesis that rapture and second advent passages speak about an identical time, proper theological method demands that he not ignore the implications of his view for other biblical and theological truths. If his view does not square with them, then despite what he thinks he has proved by his exegesis, there is still some problem with his views. Specifically, the posttrib must address the four theological/biblical issues raised earlier. In addition, if he is a dispensationalist (as Gundry claimed to be), he must explain why it is appropriate to see the Church as absent from the first 69 of Daniel's 70 weeks but then present during the 7

10th week. The posttrib must not only show that he can answer these theological issues, but as with pre- and midtribs, he must show that his answers are better than his opponents' responses.

By raising just the exegetical and theological issues I have mentioned, I do not mean to suggest that nothing else could be discussed in regard to the rapture issue. My point is merely that these seem to be the issues that are most at the core of the debate, regardless of what one holds on other matters. For example, some may think imminency is crucial to the debate and must be discussed, but I do not. On the one hand, even if one can prove that the Bible teaches imminency, I am not convinced that there is no way for midtribs or posttribs to synthesize such a notion with their positions. As we all know, there are a number of different ways to define imminency. On the other hand, even if one could prove imminency wrong, that still would not preclude the rapture from occurring pretribulationally whenever it does occur. Consequently, though I believe in an imminent rapture and think the matter of imminency is relevant to this debate, I do not see it as at the core of the debate.

Assessing the Positions

In regard to the central issues at stake in this debate, which side is best able to demonstrate what it needs to establish? A detailed answer is the subject of future study, but let me offer some initial words of assessment. As might be expected, I believe pretribulationism fares the best, and I need to explain why.

As to the exegesis of rapture and second advent passages, I do not think the posttribulationist can make his case that the two types of passages are so similar as to conclude that the events of which they speak are identical. There are some differences between the passages that seem to make a difference. I mention three in particular. First, in the clear rapture passages (1 Thess 4: 13-18; 1 Cor 15:51-55; John 14: 1-3), the Lord's coming is presented as a coming in blessing for the saints. Nothing is said about his coming for judgment. On the other hand, passages that speak of the second advent speak of the Lord's c

coming in judgment upon the enemies of the Lord (cf. Rev 19: 11 ff.; Joel 3: 12- 16; Zech 14: 3-5). Even Matt 24: 30-31 which occurs at the end of the tribulation invokes Zech 12: 10, but the context of the event in Zech 12: 10 is one in which the Lord goes forth to fight for his people Israel and to destroy her enemies (see the whole context of Zech 12 and 14 which speak of the same events). Of course, even though the clear rapture passages do not mention any divine judgment when Christ comes for his people, it is surely possible that there might be judgment, anyway. But it is just as possible that the reason no judgment is mentioned along with the coming at the rapture is that there is none. Not only is this possible, but it seems likely in that when the posttribulational coming of the Lord is mentioned, invariably the biblical writer tells us that Christ is coming to meet out judgment on the nations. Clearly, the second advent is a coming in judgment. But, it seems that the rapture is not a coming in judgment at all, and that means that it is possible that the two events are two separate events occurring at two separate times.

A second difference is that second advent passages invariably are followed by talk of setting up the kingdom after the return of the Lord (e.g., Matt 24: 31 -Matt 25: 31 ff; Zechariah 14; Joel 3; Revelation 19-20). So, the second advent is preparatory to the establishment of the millennial kingdom. On the other hand, clear rapture passages give no hint that after the rapture the Lord establishes the kingdom. Granted, it is possible that the kingdom will follow the rapture, but it is also possible that the reason for the silence on the matter of the kingdom is that the kingdom does not immediately follow the rapture. At any rate, this is a significant difference between rapture and second advent passages, and it is a difference that makes it possible for the events to be at two separate times, and all the pretrib needs to show from exegesis of rapture and second advent passages is that it *is possible* that the events occur at different times.

Third, it is very clear from 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:51ff. that at the rapture those gathered to the Lord will be glorified. On the other hand, second advent passages say nothing about anyone (living or dead) receiving a glorified body. The closest we come to

this is in Matt 24: 31, but all that verse says is that the elect will be gathered together. The imagery of the four winds and one end of heaven to another is clearly poetic imagery suggesting that wherever the elect are scattered, the Lord will gather them at that time. It does not have to mean that any of the elect involved are literally in heaven at the time of the gathering (which would, I take it, necessitate being resurrected and glorified when they are gathered), so there is no indication that this verse necessitates giving the elect a glorified body. So, again we see a difference. One event involves resurrection of dead saints and glorification of living and dead saints. The other event necessitates no resurrection of anyone, and there is no hint in passages speaking about that event that anyone is glorified. Is it possible that someone gets a glorified body at the second advent, anyway? Possible, yes, but where is the evidence for it? The lack of mention of any resurrection and any glorifying of bodies at the second advent surely makes it *possible* that this does not happen. And, that makes it *possible* that the second advent and the rapture are two separate events occurring at separate times. And, as we have said, all that is necessary for pretribs and midtribs is that the exegesis of key rapture and second advent passages not make their positions impossible.

One further word is in order on Matt 24:31. Some will say that it is clearly posttribulational, and it clearly mentions gathering the elect. Doesn't this gathering of the elect with a trumpet call automatically equate this event with the gathering at the rapture? Not at all, for several reasons. As already mentioned, there is no indication that this gathering includes resurrecting and glorifying anyone, but the rapture includes those events. Second, just because a trumpet is mentioned in Matt 24:31 and 1 Thess 4:16 does not mean the events are the same. If we followed the logic that says the events are the same because there is a trumpet, then we would have to equate these passages with all seven trumpet judgments which is, of course, absurd. Of course, some will say, it is not just that a trumpet is mentioned, but the fact that a trumpet is used to gather the elect. That makes the Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 passages different from the trumpet judgments. In

deed, it does, but I have already explained several respects in which the gatherings in 1 Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 24 still differ from one another, so gathering believers by a trumpet blast is not enough to guarantee that the events are the same. A final point of difference between the Matt 24: 31 gathering and the 1 Thessalonians 4 gathering is that the gathering in Matt 24: 31 appears to be preparatory to the judgment of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:3 1ff), and that judgment is preparatory to beginning the kingdom. Though there are many verses between Matt 24:31 and 25:31, they are parables speaking primarily about the need for readiness at the return of the Lord. Chronologically, there is no indication that the events of Matt 25:3 1ff come long after Matt 24:31. The Matt 24:31 gathering seems to precede the judgment of the nations. On the other hand, the gathering to the Lord mentioned in the clear rapture passages does not say this event is preparatory to the judgment of the sheep and goats or to the start of the kingdom. It could be the prelude to those events, but it need not be. Lack of mention of those events in conjunction with the rapture makes it at least *possible* that those events are not connected with the timing of the rapture. And, if they are not connected with the rapture's timing, then it is possible that Matt 24: 31 and 1 Thessalonians 4 speak of different times and different events. And, all the pretrib needs to show from his exegesis is that it *is possible* that these passages speak about two different events that occur at two different times.

I conclude, then, from this brief comparison of clear rapture passages with clear second advent passages that the similarities do not make either pretribulationism or midtribulationism impossible.^v Among other things, that means that posttribulationism cannot make a conclusive case for its position solely on the basis of an exegesis of these passages. The posttribulationist's handling of those passages is, of course, a possible way to interpret them, but as we have seen, it is not the only possible way. What the posttrib needed to show was that its handling of those passages was the only possible way to interpret them. That is not so, so pre- and midtrib positions are still alive.

What happens when we turn to the theological issues? Which position handles these the best? Let us turn first to the need for non-glorified bodies to enter the millennial kingdom. According to pretribulationism, after the rapture of the Church, the tribulation begins. The gospel is preached throughout the tribulation and there are some who believe. Though many who believe are killed (e.g., Rev 13:7, 15), not all believers are killed during the tribulation. Those who live through the tribulation without being killed go into the kingdom in natural bodies. In addition, there are some people who accept the Lord when he returns at the end of the tribulation (e.g., see Zech 12:10). Many of these people do not die at that point, and there is no evidence that they are given a glorified body when they receive Christ. So, these people are also available to go into the kingdom in natural bodies. For a pretrib position, there is seven years to get people saved prior to the kingdom, and some of those can go into the kingdom in natural bodies.

A midtrib position can also handle this problem. According to a midtrib, anyone saved in the first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation is a member of the Church and goes to be with the Lord at the midtribulational rapture. But, there are still 3 1/2 more years of tribulation left for other people to be saved. And, it is likely that some of those saved in the last 3 1/2 years make it to the end of the tribulation without dying, especially since many are saved at the second advent. So, midtribs have 3 1/2 years after the rapture to account for some believers who can go into the kingdom in natural bodies.

The position that is really in trouble with respect to this issue is the posttribulation rapture view. If everyone who goes at the rapture is glorified, and if the rapture occurs at the end of the tribulation, who is left to enter the kingdom in a natural body? All believers will be raptured and glorified by that time. Most posttribs don't even seem to recognize the problem. To his credit Gundry does, but he actually offers four different answers. Let's see whether any work.

First, Gundry says that maybe the 144,000 who are protected throughout the tribulation are those who go into the kingdom in natural bodies.^{vi} The main problem with this

is that Scripture says they are all men, and they are all celibate (Rev 14:4). So, even if the 144,000 go into the kingdom in natural bodies, since they are all men, no children will be forthcoming from just them!

Gundry's second answer is that perhaps between the second advent and the start of the kingdom not all rebels will be destroyed. Maybe, then, some non-believers will be the ones who enter the kingdom in natural bodies and give birth to children.^{vii} In some ways, this is the most amazing of all of Gundry's suggestions. When John the Baptist preached the coming of the kingdom, he announced the need to repent. When Jesus came and offered himself as King, he demanded a right spiritual relationship with God in order to enter the kingdom. No one can be a member of the Church (and hence a member of the kingdom, now or later) unless he meets the spiritual entrance requirements of the kingdom. Dispensational pretribulationists typically say that Christ offered the full-blown kingdom at his first coming and postponed it, because Israel as a nation refused to meet the spiritual entrance requirements of the kingdom. Yet, despite all of this, Gundry wants us to believe that when the earthly kingdom actually arrives, God will change the rules for entrance. I find that hard to believe. If Christ will begin his earthly reign with inhabitants of the kingdom who reject him, then why not just begin the earthly reign 2000 years ago, despite his rejection by Israel as a whole? If some people can get into the kingdom at its outset who don't meet the spiritual entrance requirements, then why not the Jews of Jesus' own day? This suggestion by Gundry simply doesn't make sense.

Gundry offers a third solution. He suggests that Jews saved during the tribulation will be raptured with the Church posttribulationally. However, at the second advent many Jews will turn to Christ when they look on him whom they have pierced (Zech 12:10). It is these Jews who will enter the kingdom in natural bodies.^{viii} Though this may sound promising, it runs into significant problems in light of Gundry's understanding of Matthew 24. According to Gundry, the rapture occurs at Matt 24: 31,^{ix} and this is what we would expect him to say. However, one page later^x he explains that Matt 24:30 is an allus

ion to Zech 12: 10, the salvation of Israel at the end of the tribulation. The problem should be obvious. If Matt 24: 30 refers to the salvation of Israel, then at the rapture (v. 31), those saved in Zech 12: 10/Matt 24:30 will be raptured and glorified. So, the problem of unglorified bodies to enter the kingdom still remains. There is another problem with this suggestion. Early in his book (p. 24) Gundry speaks of the salvation of Israel at the end of the tribulation when Jesus returns at the second advent. He says these saved Israelites will not be raptured, because the rapture has already occurred before they turn to Christ. So, the order of events is rapture, salvation of Israel, and second advent. However, his later claim that Matt 24: 31 is the rapture and 24:30 is the salvation of Israel means that Israel's salvation must precede the rapture. Now, the problem should be obvious. Early in the book, Gundry says the salvation of Israel is after the rapture, whereas later he says it is before the rapture. You cannot have it both ways, and you surely cannot appeal to the salvation of these Jews as the answer to how to get unglorified people into the kingdom if you aren't sure exactly whether their salvation comes before or after the rapture!

Gundry's final suggestion stems from what we find in Dan 12: 11-12. There is a time gap of some 75 days, according to Gundry, between the return of the Lord at the second advent and the start of the kingdom. Gundry wonders whether maybe during this time gap some of the rebels will turn to Christ, and they will be the ones who go into the kingdom in natural bodies^{xi} (they are the sheep at the judgment of the sheep and goats). In some ways this is the most promising of Gundry's suggestions. There is little question that there is a time gap as indicated by Dan 12: 11-12. Moreover, the sheep and goats judgment seems to occur prior to the setup of the kingdom, and there are both sheep and goats present at that judgment. Where would the sheep come from? If they had been saved *during* the tribulation, on a posttrib position they would have been raptured at the second advent, so there would be no tribulation saints left in non-glorified bodies. But, anyone saved *after* the second advent would not be raptured and hence, would not get a gl

orified body at that time. So, all of this is possible, but of course, we want to know which position has the most probable synthesis of this issue with the timing of the rapture. And, it is at this point, that Gundry's view runs into trouble.

An initial problem is that Gundry says that the judgment of the sheep and goats comes at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (he associates it with the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev 20: 11-15). But, if that is so, then appeal to the judgment of the sheep and goats will prove nothing about how many people may or may not have gotten saved during the 75 days between the second advent and beginning of the kingdom. But, perhaps the major difficulty with this suggestion is that there is no Scripture anywhere that says evangelism will occur during the 75 day interval. It is possible, but where is the evidence that it is actual? It is hard to make a case for any position from silence, since silence is consistent with everything and thus proves nothing.

I conclude, then, that so far posttribulationists have not offered an adequate answer to how their view on the rapture allows time for people to be saved and enter the kingdom in natural bodies. But, how do the various rapture positions fit with the marriage supper of the lamb and the bema seat judgment? Here pretribs must admit that midtribs can handle these truths just as easily as can pretribulationism. Whether the gap between rapture and second advent is 3 1/2 years or 7, there is still plenty of time for the Church to be in heaven, appear at the bema seat judgment, and attend her wedding feast (Rev 19:7-10). On the other hand, these two issues do appear to be a problem for the posttrib position. Most likely, posttribs will claim that these events (at least the bema seat judgment) could occur after the return of the Lord at the second advent and the set up of the kingdom. But, since the Lord returns to earth and sets up the kingdom on earth, it is hard to see how the marriage supper occurs at that time since the scene of that event is clearly heaven (cf. Rev 19: 1ff) and since after that event we see the Lord riding out of heaven with the armies of heaven to destroy the wicked at the end of the tribulation. So, it is hard to see how the marriage supper can occur on earth after the second advent. And, if th

e marriage supper is in heaven before the second advent, then the Church must have been raptured prior to the end of the tribulation. Posttribulationism faces a significant problem with this issue.

Can the posttrib make a case for the bema seat judgment occurring after the second advent? Here again there are problems. If the posttrib says the judgment of the sheep at the sheep and goats judgment is the bema seat, that is possible, but not likely. Neither 1 Cor 3:12-15 or 2 Cor 5:10 even vaguely hint that there will be non-believers present at this event, but at the Matthew 25 judgment, there are clearly non-believers (goats) present. But, even if one wants to read non-believers into 1 Cor 3:12-15 and 2 Cor 5:10, there is a further problem with seeing the bema seat judgment either at the second advent or early in the kingdom. In Rev 19:7-10 we see the church at the marriage feast. We see her adorned in her wedding gown, and we are told that her gown represents the righteous deeds of the Church. I take it that the fact the bride is wearing the gown means she has already received her recognition/rewards for her righteous deeds. Moreover, in Rev 19:11ff. when the Lord rides out of heaven, he is accompanied with the armies of heaven. Revelation 19:14 says the armies were clothed in linen, white and clean. This is the same way the bride is described at the marriage supper (Rev 19:8). Now, it is surely likely that the armies of heaven include angels, but it is just as probable that some of those clothed in linen, white and clean are not angels, but members of the Church. But, if that is so, the Church as it rides out of heaven at the *end of the tribulation* to do battle with the enemies of God has already received its reward and recognition for its faithful deeds of service. When would that have occurred? At the bema seat judgment. But, then, that means the bema seat judgment cannot occur after the return of the Lord at the second advent (either at the judgment of the sheep and goats or early in the kingdom), but before the return

I conclude, then, that posttribulationism is in serious trouble with respect to fitting both the marriage supper of the lamb and the bema seat judgment into its framework. In

regard to the three theological issues we have discussed, so far pre- and midtribulationism seem to fare equally well. Though I think midtribulationism and posttribulationism are both in trouble with respect to the wrath of God issue, before turning to that matter, let me address some other items that are problems for midtribulationism. First, how can a midtrib who is a dispensationalist justify keeping the church out of the first 69 of Daniel's 70 weeks and then putting it in only to take it out in the middle of the 70th week?

Non-dispensational midtribs need not worry about this problem, but there are other problems midtribs must face. A lot, of course, depends on how the midtrib argues his position, but many do so by associating the last trump of 1 Cor 15:52 and 1 Thess 4:16 with the seventh trump of Rev 11:15.^{xii} Archer does not agree (he thinks the rapture more likely occurs at Revelation 14^{xiii}), but other midtribs do. But there are several concerns with this identification. The midtrib appeals to Rev 11:18 which says of the events surrounding the seventh trump that the day of God's wrath has come. Now all of this fits with divine wrath not beginning until the midpoint in the tribulation, so long as the seventh trump actually occurs at the midpoint, rather than later on in the tribulation (or even earlier). What makes it difficult to prove that the seventh trump falls at the midpoint of the tribulation is something else that midtribs are likely to hold. According to Scripture, the seal judgments precede the trumpet judgments. But, note that at the end of the sixth seal judgment, we read in Rev 6:17 that the day of God's wrath has come. If the day of God's wrath does not begin until the midpoint of the tribulation as midtribs say, then there is a major problem for midtribulationism. Put simply, Rev 6:17 says the day of God's wrath arrives with the sixth seal judgment. But, that means, on a midtrib view, that the sixth seal is at the middle of the tribulation. If the trumpet judgments *follow* the seal judgment, it is hard to see how the seventh *trump* begins God's wrath at the midpoint of the tribulation, since the sixth *seal* began God's wrath, and midtribs say God's wrath begins at the middle of the tribulation. In other words, God's wrath is said to begin one seal and seven trumpets too early for the midtrib to say the seventh trump is blown at the midpoi

nt of the tribulation. And, if the seventh trumpet judgment is the last trump of the rapture, then the rapture trump is blown later than the midpoint of the tribulation. Posttribs may applaud this problem since, if they identify the last trump of the rapture with the seventh tribulation trumpet judgment, that seems to fit better with posttribulationism, but, of course, this is a problem for midtribulationism. All in all, this is why I say that if the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the last trump of the rapture, the midtrib will have a hard time proving that it is blown at the midpoint of the tribulation.^{xiv}

All of these seem to be significant problems for midtribulationism to surmount, but there is a final problem that neither mid- or posttribulationism seems able to handle adequately. It is the problem of the Church's exemption from divine wrath. In 1 Thess 1:10 and 5:9, Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers that members of the body of Christ are exempt from divine wrath. Paul never guarantees exemption from afflictions and problems for believers, but these passages guarantee that God's judgmental wrath will not fall on members of the Church. Though some wonder if Scripture really teaches this since at other times in history believers (OT saints or tribulation saints who are not members of the Church) are present on earth when God pours out his judgmental wrath, generally speaking, pre-, mid-, and posttribulationists agree that this is so, since all three positions offer an explanation as to how the Church will escape God's judgmental wrath of the tribulation. Pretribs argue that the Church will be raptured before the tribulation and in that way escape the wrath of God (Rev 3:10). Mid- and posttribs have other answers. We must look at those answers and see how well they square with biblical teaching.

Fundamentally, mid- and posttribs have dealt with the problem of the Church's escape from divine wrath in one of two ways. The first suggestion is that God will simply protect the Church from divine wrath while she is in the tribulation. Even as God protected Israel in Egypt when he brought the plagues upon Egypt, so God will protect the Church when he pours out his judgmental wrath upon the world. Let me suggest two problems with this suggestion. First, in the case of Israel and Egypt, it appears that when the

ten plagues fell, they only fell upon the Egyptians, so the Jews did not get caught in the judgments. However, the Book of Revelation speaks about many people losing their lives during the tribulation as God pours out his judgments on the world. Are we to assume that no believer will lose his life in these judgments? That's what is necessary if the Church is present during the tribulation when these divine judgments come, and if mid- and posttribs are right that God will protect the Church from these judgments. But, when you look at the nature of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, many of them appear to fall upon the whole earth indiscriminately of whether the inhabitants are believers or non-believers. It is possible that God protects believers in the midst of these judgments, but where is the evidence that this is so?

A second problem with this suggestion is that it does not square with Matt 24:21-22. Those verses speak of great tribulation such as has never before been experienced. Jesus then says that for the elect's sake God will shorten those days (how much, no one knows). In fact, he says that if it were not for that shortening, no one would survive. But, the tribulation spoken of seems to refer to at least the last 3 1/2 years of the tribulation, and surely divine wrath is poured out at that time. But, it should be clear that Matt 24:22 is very odd if we accept the idea that God will protect his people from divine wrath during the tribulation. If God protects his people like he did with Israel in Egypt, why is there any need to shorten the days of the tribulation "for the elect's sake?" If they are protected, let it last 70 years or 700 hundred, not just 3 1/2 or 7 years. None of it will touch the elect if they are protected.

From these considerations, I conclude that the claim that God protects his people in the tribulation from divine wrath is not a satisfactory explanation of how the Church in the tribulation avoids divine wrath. Incidentally, if any midtrib seriously proposes this resolution to the problem of divine wrath, then posttribs should respond that if God can protect his Church in the tribulation for 3 1/2 years, he can do it for 7 years, so one surely

y should not see any necessity to remove the Church at the midpoint of the tribulation in order to escape the divine wrath of the second half of the tribulation.

There is a second way that midtribs and posttribs have handled the issue of divine wrath. This proposal says that we must distinguish divine wrath in the tribulation from Satanic and human wrath. Gundry, for example, says that "the tribulation of the seventh week has to do, then, not with God's wrath against the sinners, but with the wrath of Satan, the Anti-christ, and the wicked against the saints."^{xv} On the other hand, divine wrath only is to be poured out on the unregenerate, and it is not until Armageddon when Jesus descends that God will do so.^{xvi} So long as believers are raptured before the winds of divine wrath begin to blow, they can stay in the tribulation and undergo Satanic and human wrath without contradicting the promise that the Church will not experience divine wrath. Midtribs who handle the problem of escape from God's wrath in this way say the same sort of thing, except that they believe divine wrath begins at the midpoint of the tribulation. Hence, the Church is raptured prior to that.

What shall we say to this proposal? I find it deficient for several reasons. First, this proposal's underlying assumption is that in order for an act to be God's act or even under his control, he must do it immediately, i.e., totally by himself without using any intermediary agents. Anyone who is a Calvinist should be very uncomfortable with that idea. Moreover, anyone (Calvinist or Arminian) who has read the Book of Job, especially the first two chapters where we see God's sovereign control over Satan's affliction of Job, should be uncomfortable with this suggestion. In addition, if we follow this logic, then acts like Assyria's attack on the Northern Kingdom of Israel must be human wrath, not divine wrath, in spite of the fact that Scripture clearly indicates (Isa 7:1-8ff) that the attack was God's judgment upon Israel.

This logic creates even further problems for prophecies of the end times. Many posttribs would agree that Armageddon (and the events surrounding it) is the pouring out of divine wrath. If that is so, then there is a real problem if God cannot do something un-

ss he does it entirely himself. Zechariah 12 and 14 speak of the attack of a worldwide confederacy against Israel. They also show that Israel is empowered to fight back and that she participates in the destruction of her enemies. Zechariah 14 shows that the enemy will be so disoriented that it's soldiers will start to attack one another. Since Zechariah 12 and 14 speak of Armageddon, there is a real problem for the assumption that an act can only be God's if he does it entirely himself. On the one hand, since human beings are involved in the attack and counterattack, Armageddon must be an expression only of human wrath (given the logic of the divine wrath/human and Satanic wrath distinction). But, posttribs and midtribs agree that Armageddon sees the pouring out of God's judgmental wrath upon Israel's enemies. When you put this together you come to the conclusion that Armageddon both is and is not divine wrath. Obviously, this is absurd, and I would suggest that the absurdity arises because of the assumption that an act can only be attributed to God or controlled by God if he does it entirely by himself. And, since this assumption underlies the divine wrath/human and Satanic wrath solution to the problem of the Church's exemption from divine wrath, that solution is in deep trouble.

There is a final problem with trying to solve the problem of exemption from divine wrath by distinguishing divine from human and Satanic wrath. All sides agree that the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments span the whole course of the tribulation. But, notice how these judgments begin. As Revelation 5 begins, we see the book with seven seals. The opening of the first seal begins the sequence of judgments that last throughout the tribulation. Scripture tells us that there was a search to find someone who was worthy to open the first seal. No one was found worthy except the Lamb, and he opened the first seal. But, who is the Lamb? None other than Jesus Christ.

What does all of this mean? Some may reply that this is all symbolic, so we shouldn't make too much out of it. Granted, there is symbolism, but the symbolism cannot mean just anything, and it must mean something. And, the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are not just symbolic of something else; they are real judgments. What does the symboli

sm mean? It seems clear that it means that the sequence of judgments that spans the whole tribulation begins with an act of Jesus. That seems clearly to suggest that all these judgments result from the instigation of God himself. And, that only suggests that attempting to distinguish tribulation judgments that are human and Satanic wrath from those that are divine is doomed to failure. It's all divine wrath. Not just Armageddon, and not just the last 3 1/2 years. If this is so, then it seems that the only way to be exempt from this time of divine wrath is either to be there but protected through it (and we have seen why that doesn't work), or not be there at all because raptured prior to it. Given all the evidence and argument I have offered, it seems that the best option for handling the Church's exemption from divine tribulational wrath is the option that says she escapes because she is not there at all.

CONCLUSION

The preceding evaluative section explains some of why I believe that the pretribulation rapture position is the most successful of the three positions in making its case.^{xvii} All sides must argue their case inferentially since no passage sets the exact time of the rapture in relation to the tribulation, and inferential reasoning is notoriously slippery. Having admitted that, for the reasons offered above, it seems that of the three rapture positions, pretribulationism can make the best inferential case. There are other arguments one might adduce in favor of the position and against the other views, but that is another study. My primary intent in this chapter has been to clarify proper methodology for handling the rapture issue and to point out what each side must do in order to establish its view as most probable. My hope is that we all will take seriously these matters of method and the logic of what needs to be established in this discussion. The net result, I think, would be both a better grounding of each position in sound argument and exegesis and a better addressing of one another's arguments. And, that would surely be a positive step forward in this discussion.

ⁱSee Douglas J. Moo, "The Case For The Posttribulation Rapture Position," in Gleason, Paul Feinberg, Douglas Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 169-211.

ⁱⁱSee Paul D. Feinberg, "The Case For The Pretribulation Rapture Position," in Gleason Archer, Paul Feinberg, Douglas Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 45-86.

ⁱⁱⁱSee Gleason L. Archer, "The Case For The Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position," in Gleason Archer, Paul Feinberg, Douglas Moo, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post Tribulation al?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 113- 145.

^{iv}There were three stages to the Semitic wedding. The first was the betrothal. This might happen even when the husband and wife-to-be were children. In the eyes of the Mosaic Law, the two were legally married. Second, there eventually came the day when man and woman could actually begin to live together as husband and wife. On that day, the groom went from his home to the home of the bride, and took her to his home. When they arrived at his home, they celebrated with the marriage feast (the third stage in the process). As this relates to Christ and the Church, the marriage would be initially "contracted" by Christ's payment on Calvary for the sins of the Church. The taking of the bride to the home of the groom would occur at the Rapture, and then, the wedding feast would be celebrated in heaven as we see it occurring in Revelation 19.

^vFor further handling of the similarities and dissimilarities of rapture and second advent passages, see Feinberg, pp. 80-86.

^{vi}Robert Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), p. 82.

^{vii}*Ibid.*, pp. 137, 164, 166-167.

^{viii}*Ibid.*, p. 24.

^{ix}*Ibid.*, p. 135.

^x*Ibid.*, p. 136.

^{xi}*Ibid.*, p. 164.

^{xii}See, for example, J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 2: 397.

^{xiii}See Archer in Archer, Feinberg, Moo, p. 142-144. For responses to this view see Feinberg in same work, pp. 149-150.

^{xiv}Any midtrib who associates the last trump of the rapture with the trumpet of Matt 24: 31 will have another problem. As already noted, Matt 24:31 speaks about events at the end of the tribulation. So, if the last trump for the rapture is blown at the middle of the tr

ibulation as midtribs say, then it can't be the same as the trump of Matt 24:31, since that occurs at the end of the tribulation.

^{xv}Gundry, p. 49.

^{xvi}Ibid., p. 48.

^{xvii}For further amplification of some of these arguments, plus other arguments supportive of the pretribulational position, see Feinberg, pp. 4-86.