

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

B1213 – March 25, 2012
Post-Tribulationism

We've been surfacing some of the eschatological views presently being discussed in the church at large as a part of Christ's teaching curriculum during church history. I can't emphasize too much that prior to eschatology the discussion was ecclesiology. And if you don't clarify the Church as distinct from Israel then your eschatology is going to be molded and shaped around the concept of one people of God, that is Israel and the Church are all the same thing over and against Israel and the Church as two people of God. So the differences in eschatology today are due primarily to how you view Israel and the Church. You could argue it goes deeper than that and gets into hermeneutics; how you interpret, do you stay with a consistent literal interpretation or do you adjust and interpret allegorically when the text doesn't seem to support your position and that's a bona fide issue that is underneath all this. But you'll find down through church history that these discussions will come up, whether they're over the issue of the canon or the deity of Christ or the Trinity or the work of Christ on the cross or justification by faith and over time the Biblical position will emerge because it's scripturally consistent. God is rational and the pieces of His plan fit together in a rational way. That doesn't mean we can always grasp it entirely, sovereignty and human responsibility being a good example, but you recognize there's a rational solution in His mind, that we must hold too.

The first eschatology we discussed was preterism and we introduced it in contrast with what term? If preterism is past then another view is what? If it's not past it's future. So we have preterism and futurism. There's actually another view in between called historicism but it might better be labeled presentism because it looks at prophecy as being fulfilled in the present; the entire church age is when prophecy is stretched out and fulfilled. We're not going into all the details of these things. I'm just giving you some vocabulary

so if you come across these things in your reading you can have a general framework to place them.

So we have the three basic views. First, preterism which means past - all prophecy was fulfilled in and around AD70. Second, futurism which means what it sounds like, future, so all prophecy is future and there are four or five futurist positions. They differ in the details but they all agree that the bulk of prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. And third, historicism which means historic and the basic story there is that prophecies are being fulfilled now during the Church Age. I mention historicism because wherever you have date setting, the latest one was Harold Camping who said the rapture was going to come in May of 2011 or something. Obviously it didn't. So he re-calculated, oops, missed it by six months, so he recalibrated his thermometer and said the end of the world would occur in October of 2011. Fortunately he's not making any more date predictions but the point is that date setting comes out of historicism. Why? Very simple - they believe that prophecy is being fulfilled now. Think about it. If a person believes that the prophecies of the Book of Revelation are being fulfilled in the Church Age, then when you see numbers in Daniel and Revelation like 1,260 days, then you take those and convert the days into years. Then they get a starting point and start plugging in the numbers to come up with mathematical predictions of the return of Christ. What's the fundamental error they're making? They're acting as if those numbers apply to the Church. Well if you do that, what you in effect have done is you have destroyed the distinction between the Church and Israel because those prophecies relate to whom? Israel. Remember we said that Israel is on calendar time. They have a calendar God is associating with them. The Church doesn't have any calendar time attached to it. So you can't take calendar time associated with Israel and just bring the Church into that.

So you have the historicist position and sometimes you will find there are people who are historicist-futurist, they kind of blend these things together. This is popular right now because people look at what's going on in our world and they want to see prophetic significance to what's happening so they rush to identify current events with prophecy being fulfilled. That's a dangerous thing to do because if you ask for specificity, show me exactly what prophecy is being fulfilled here, yeah, there are generalities, similarities, nuances and the like, but the Bible is specific about prophecy, it's not generalities. So I've tried to convince you that it's much better to say what we're seeing now is

stage-setting. There are no prophecies being fulfilled today, there are things occurring that set the stage for prophecy being fulfilled. But saying this is stage-setting is very different than saying prophecy is being fulfilled. Because once you've said prophecy is being fulfilled then you're left with the burden of showing with exact specificity what prophecies are being fulfilled. And I don't think you can do that when you get into any detail in the text. So that's the mixed method, they're trying to dip into historicism and trying to marry it with futurism. It's not a good position.

Having worked with preterism which puts all or most of it in the past we are now coming to the several views that are classified as futurism. We'll look at four views: post-tribulational, pre-wrath, mid-tribulational and pre-tribulational. All four of these are classified as futurist; they all share a common belief that prophecy will be fulfilled in the future. They all agree to that. Where they disagree is when does the rapture of the Church take place and what is the relationship of the Church to Israel? See, we're back to the Church and Israel again. How does the revelation about the Church and Israel get together? How do they synchronize?

We'll start with the post-tribulational position. As you can imagine, the word post-tribulational means "after the tribulation." So their argument is that the rapture will occur after the tribulation. In the future a period of intense tribulation will occur and the people of God will have to go through that but they'll be protected through that and then the rapture and return of Christ will occur simultaneously, the rapture and the return are the same event. Then, if they're premillennial they'll go into an earthly millennium, otherwise if they are a- or post-millennial they'll just go into the eternal state.

I introduced a couple of terms there - rapture and return - and I'm going to use those two terms so we can teach this, but I'm warning you that's just my terminology to communicate these ideas. There are a trio of terms in the Greek here; *apokalupsis*, *epiphaneia* and *parousia*, and these terms can refer to either the rapture or to the return. They're not event specific. So if you like you can say that the second coming of Christ has two stages, the rapture and the return, but I need some vocabulary to distinguish post-tribulationism from pre-tribulationism so I chose to use rapture and return.

We've already introduced the term rapture. In the pretribulational scheme the Church began on the day of Pentecost, that's when believers were first baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. So a new entity was formed that has a distinct character. It's not Israel, it's not an expansion of Israel, it's the Church. The Church then goes on and suddenly is raptured, that term simply means to be seized, to be caught up; the dead in Christ will rise, then those who are alive will be caught up and transformed and we will all meet the Lord in the air and go back to heaven. That will be the end of the Church age and we'll go to the judgment seat of Christ where we'll be judged for the things done in the body, whether they were of the Spirit or of the flesh, it's a judgment of works, and some of it will be wood, hay and stubble, other will be gold, silver and precious stones. We'll be rewarded accordingly and we'll go to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

After the Church is completed there will be other people who believe; salvation is always by grace through faith, but the people that come to faith after the Church is raptured are not Christians, they are saints, believers, whatever you want to call them; Jews and Gentiles who believe, but they aren't Christians, technically speaking because the Church is the body of Christ and the body of Christ is complete at the rapture. So you have other people coming to Christ and they go into a period of intense tribulation. It's that period of intense tribulation that Israel and the nations go through that has nothing to do with the Church. The Church faces tribulations, we face difficulties, sufferings, hard distressing times, but we will not face the intense tribulation first revealed in Deut 4. There is a categorical difference between the tribulation that Jesus said we will face and the tribulation that the OT said Israel and the nations will face. The intense tribulation that is coming is designed to punish the Gentile nations for their treatment of Israel, or mistreatment rather, and to purge Israel to faith in her Messiah. Any Gentiles who want to get out alive better recognize the God of Israel. And Israel must recognize and call on Jesus to return because Jesus said in Matt 23:39, "you're not going to see Me until you say," meaning you Israel, national Israel, will not see Me "until you say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." That's a Messianic greeting. And Jesus is simply not going to return until the nation issues Him that Messianic greeting. That's the pretribulational return story of how history will play out.

The posttribulation story is that the Church, in many cases, is just a synonym for Israel and we all face tribulations but a time is coming when that tribulation will intensify in the sense of scale. It won't be local, it will be global and the Church, which is Israel, will enter into that period of time along with the world and at the end of it, just before Christ comes to annihilate all unbelievers He'll rapture the Church off the earth; we'll go up to Him and come right back down with Him in His return and so the rapture and the return are practically at the same time, we go up to Him and meet Him and come right back down with Him.

“What post-tribulationism needs to prove is that the rapture and the return” can be considered the same event, that the differences in the passages are not sufficient enough to split them apart and consider them two distinguishable events. So to be a posttribulationist you have to show that passages that are often split into rapture and return passages should not be split but are describing one and the same event.

So we're going to spend a lot of time with this table because we need to be acquainted with these Scriptures. I've taken this chart from Charles Clough's work and if you go through pre-tribulation materials you'll find similar charts doing a compare and contrast. If you look at the table you'll see that what I've attempted to do is list features that refer to the Rapture over and against passages that refer to the Return of Christ. So if you want to clarify in the column where the word “Rapture” is, you might want to put a parenthesis next to it that says something like (the destiny of the Church), because that's the spirit of those verses. All those verses that you see in the left column are addressing the end of the Church. It's what the apostles said was the destiny of the Church. In the other column you have the “Return” and to clarify you may want to put in parentheses (the destiny of Israel). It may help you to add that to the chart. And notice, all the Scriptures under the “Rapture” column are exclusively NT. But if you glance through the passages listed under the “Return” column you see they are both NT and OT. So the left column is passages that describe the destiny of the Church and the right column describes the destiny of Israel. Now we're going to through the table row by row.

Rapture	Return
Only and all of those “in Christ”	OT resurrection reference speaks

are resurrected or translated (I Thess. 4:16-17)	of resurrected of “some” dead OT saints but not of transformation of OT living saints (Dan. 12:2)
Physical union with Christ in the air with all Church-age believers in resurrection bodies; no mention of inauguration of the Kingdom on earth with natural bodies (I Cor. 15:50-57; I Thess. 4:16-17)	Judgment of nations with everyone in natural bodies and inauguration of the Kingdom on earth (Matt. 25:31-46)
Christ comes in blessedness to deliver His Body into eternity (John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:50-57; I Thess 4:16-17)	Christ comes in judgment against all nations, including Israel, and to save the elect remnant of Israel and the “sheep” among the Gentiles for entry into the Kingdom on earth (Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31-46—OT imagery from Joel 3:12-16; Zech 14:3-5)
Believers removed; unbelievers left (see above references)	Unbelievers removed; believers left (Baptism of Fire motif in Matt. 3:12; 24:40-41 cf 25:30,41)
Christ comes for His globally-dispersed Church (see above references)	Christ comes with His Church back to the Mt. of Olives (Zech 14:4; Acts 1:11; Rev. 19:7-14)
Church delivered from the wrath of God (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10)	Entire globe, including believers dwelling on it at the time, experience the wrath of God (Rev. 6-19)
Church to look forward to physical union with Christ with no mention of anticipatory “signs” (I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil 3:20; 4:5; I Thess 1:10; II Thess. 3:10-12; Titus 2:13; Jas 5:7-9; I John 2:28; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12,20)	Numerous signs associated with the Tribulation and Day of the Lord (OT prophecies; Matt. 24:3-44; Rev. 5-19)

Partial listing of the differences between the Rapture for the Church and the Return of Christ to earth to establish the Kingdom. Post-tribulationism must show that these two events cannot be distinguished.

Let's turn to the first one in the Rapture column, "Only and all of those "in Christ" are resurrected or translated. 1 Thess 4:16, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." So there's the rapture. Posttribulationists say this happens at the same time as Christ's return. So their explanation is that as Christ is returning to earth, the Church is caught up to meet Him in the air and then they come right back down with Him; just like people go out of the city wall to meet an arriving dignitary and welcome him back to the city. That's how the post-tribulationist views that passage.

Here's the problem: if the Church, which is the same as Israel, it's just all believers on earth at that time that live through the tribulation, are suddenly raptured, caught up in the air, put in resurrection bodies and then come right back down to earth, who is going to be left alive in mortal bodies on earth to populate the millennial kingdom? By definition only believers can enter the millennial kingdom. But if every believer is in a resurrection body then they can't re-populate the earth, so who is left behind in mortal bodies to re-populate the earth for the millennium? No unbelievers will be left, they'll all be annihilated. So who's there? That's a very serious problem if you're a posttribulationist.

Now let's go to the right column, the Return, the "OT speaks of the resurrection of "some" OT saints but not of transformation of OT saints. Resurrection is not mentioned in Olivet Discourse. Dan 12:2, here's the resurrection, one of the few resurrection, explicit resurrection, texts out of the OT. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." It was that verse that Jesus referred to in John when He said there will be a resurrection unto life and a resurrection unto damnation. So He continues that motif. The OT clearly taught resurrection; but it doesn't teach anything about a transformation like the 1 Thess 4 passage.

There's another passage on resurrection in the OT. Turn to Isaiah 26. In Isaiah 26:1, "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah," it's looking forward to the time of the Kingdom. Isaiah 26 is sometimes called a little apocalypse of the OT. But the context of this OT passage is looking forward in time to that kingdom to come, to the nation Israel. Included in this is verse 19, "Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits."

So the resurrection is explicit and implicit in the OT. This is talking about Israel and you can place this because clearly these passages are talking about something that happens prior to the Kingdom. So the resurrection that is being discussed happens right here. The post-tribulationist says yeah, see, the rapture is just part of that and he mixes these two together and says that there's no difference between them. Well, if you put the rapture and the return all together then who is left alive on earth to re-populate the kingdom?

The next row, turn to 1 Cor 15:50. This is a major passage on the rapture and resurrection. "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, remember the case when Thomas doubted, and what did the Lord Jesus ask Him to do? Touch Me, for spirit has not flesh and... He didn't say blood; He said "flesh and bones." Here's the mystery, physiologically now, we're talking bodies here; a health lesson. Every person over 30 can get a bang out of this one. That body you are in is going to be replaced; the health care system won't be an issue for the resurrection body. Medicare won't be an issue for a resurrection body, but the resurrection body has a strange composition to it because the only empirical historical evidence we have of what it looks like is the Lord Jesus' body. There are no other bodies around like that. So we have to go based on the eye witness account of what that body looked like.

That body looked something like the Lord Jesus, but it was different. Maybe it was because it was perfect and the last time they saw the Lord Jesus He wasn't in too good a shape. But whatever it was, He said touch Me, Thomas, touch my flesh. So you can just see Thomas sitting there, you're not a spirit, you came through the wall there, I think you're a spirit. No, I'm not a spirit, I materialized right in front of you Thomas and here I am. Over and over the

text explicitly mentions how he sat down and ate food. Can a ghost eat food? I think not, so the resurrection body can eat food, but apparently it doesn't need it, and it can appear and disappear, go through walls. That's an amazing future that every person that accepts Christ will have. And it's a body that guarantees most of all, not just perfect health, but it's a body that doesn't have this sin nature embedded in it that tempts us to sin, all that burden will be removed, you don't have to sit there and fight with the flesh all the time, it's gone. And the resurrection body is what makes eternity perfect because there is going to be no repeat history. There is not going to be another fall a billion years from now. No, that's all over. So the resurrection body has this characteristic.

So in verse 50 when He says "I say this, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable," or corruptible some translations read. The idea there is that our bodies with flesh and blood are born corrupt. The moment you're conceived you're dying already. It's interesting. Did you ever notice a newborn baby's skin and you compare it with yours, especially if you're older, gee, all these wrinkles. And you see that newborn baby, not a wrinkle on it, just perfect. But as that baby gets older the scars and hard knocks and that skin begins to age and age and age; it's not a pretty sight. But that's because God built our bodies corruptible. Do you know that was an act of His mercy that He did that? Had He not done that and had He given us bodies that were incorruptible, let me ask a question. What would have happened when Adam and Eve sinned and they could never die? They would be doomed forever to live in a fallen body. So in one sense when you see your body dying around you and you are losing your body parts one by one, or their functioning, just be thankful that it's just a process to get rid of the thing so we can get the next one. That's the resurrection body.

That's what's going to happen, but in this passage in Corinthians look at the emphasis in verse 50 and following. After He gets through making this radical distinction in bodies He says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," so there everyone alive gets a resurrection body. Verse 51, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," so evidently this happens very, very rapidly, it's not a slow thing. The Greek means a chunk of time that can't be divided in half. I thought you could just divide and divide and divide. Not if you know calculus and if you've taken

calculus there is a point where you can't divide something any further. So here in an undividable moment of time when every believer alive on earth is changed. You talk about a transforming moment in history, I mean, can you imagine that on every continent, simultaneously there's this event that happens. All of a sudden people disappear, nobody can explain it, it is totally unpredictable. Do you see any sign here? Notice in verse 51, "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 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 shall be changed. 53For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality." You hear this all the time at Christian funerals. Notice the trumpet there in v 52, "the trumpet will sound" and turn to Matt 24. What do you think posttribulationists do? They start linking trumpets; anywhere they see a trumpet that must be the same trumpet. Matt 24:30, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." So this is obviously dealing with the Return of Christ, notice verse 31, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." Ahh, here they say is the rapture and clearly the rapture is occurring in conjunction with the return.

Now if you look at Matt 25 because we're contrasting row 2 of Table 9; we've just done the left side of row 2, now we're looking at the right side of that same row. Matt. 25:31, observe the text, observe the details. This is still being addressed to the disciples; it is still being addressed to Israel, and it goes on and involves certain things. "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in. 36naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 38And when did we see

you a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” Verse 40, “And the King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”

41Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink.’”

You’ll notice several things about this judgment that’s happening. This is a passage on judgment and this is talking about when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again to the earth, and He’s going to set up His kingdom, it’s got a gate, visualize a gate, and He’s going to let some people through the gate and He’s going to reject others. What is the basis of the acceptance or rejection just based on the *prima facie* view of the text? It’s their response. First of all, who’s gathered together? It’s not Israel. What does it say? Who is gathered together? It says the nations; here the nations are gathered together for this great judgment. These are Gentiles. These Gentiles are gathered together and they are judged, Gentile groups, judged on whether or not they visited these people who are identified as the Lord’s brothers, these brothers of mine. So it’s a judgment of Gentiles based on their responses to whoever these people are. And they’re going to be judged on the basis of whether they helped them, were they sympathetic.

It’s a case where during the Tribulation you have this... a good example, can you imagine living under the Iranian regime tonight and you may be a very well educated person, you may be a high officer in IRGC, but you dare not turn against Ahmadinejad because he’s got his guys all around. If you get out of line, he’s going to take care of your wife; your daughter, your son and finally you. So are you going to revolt against the guy? I don’t think so, because He’s got you. It’s that kind of totalitarian power when the antichrist rules the world like Ahmadinejad and Khomeini rule Iraq, that the test comes. Are you going to help the insurrectionists? Who are the insurrectionists during the reign of the antichrist? They are people who refuse to bow their knee to antichrist. In that totalitarian environment how would you demonstrate your faith? By aiding the insurrectionists, rebelling against the totalitarians that are in charge.

So there's a judgment based on this, but what's missing from this passage? Resurrection! You'll notice what He says here is He says inherit the kingdom; there's no mention of resurrection. These people are in natural bodies and they go into the kingdom, because the Millennial Kingdom is made up of people in natural bodies. Let's turn to the OT to see this. Turn to Isaiah 65, here's one of many passages we could cite but we want to close out on this one because we want to see the nature of this kingdom into which these people are invited to come. The kingdom in the OT is a blend of an earthly mortal kingdom as well as eternal state.

In Isaiah 65:20, this is in the middle of a kingdom passage. "No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days, for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed." Are people dying in the Millennial Kingdom? Obviously, they're dying later in life but there is mortality there. How can that be if they're made of resurrection bodies? They have to be natural bodies. The Millennial Kingdom is made up of people in natural bodies, otherwise you wouldn't have dying. It's less dying than it is now but nevertheless it is dying. And verse 23 points out there is reproduction, there's procreation going on, people are having babies. In the Millennial Kingdom they're reproducing, natural bodies. There's no marriage in resurrection.

So the picture that we have of this Kingdom necessarily involves natural bodies. And that fits with Matt 25 because the Gentile nations who will be admitted into this Kingdom are those who have shown themselves by their treatment of the believers during the Tribulation period, the insurrectionist party and they are admitted to the Kingdom. It doesn't mean, necessarily, that they are all believers at this point. They may be people who are unbelievers but the Lord is going to admit them based on their response to the insurrectionist movement during the Tribulation.

We've got down two rows on the chart and we are going to go through the others and I know, if you've never gone into this it's kind of hairy, complicated, but let me assure you that what we are doing here is showing some very real differences. The rapture and the return look different and you've got to respect the differences. And I'm going to at least make you familiar with the passages involved and with the overall arguments.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2012

