

The Case for the Pretribulational Premillennial View of Prophecy

Reasons why Christians shy away from studying prophecy:

- Complexity of the subject
- Disagreement among Christians
- Abuse by those setting dates and erroneously calling many current events 'fulfillment of Scripture'

Reasons why we should study prophecy:

- Major part of Scripture (25%)
- God's story with the world should interest us
- Motivation for believers to live expectantly for Christ
- Purifying effect (1 John 3:2-3)
- Puts perspective on current trouble and trials
- Warns the unbeliever about coming judgment

Read **Daniel 9:24-27** God's prophetic program is centred around what He does with Israel, which affects the whole world.

John 14:1-3 (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-57) Main passages on the Rapture.

Revelation 19:6-8, 10c-16-21; 20:1-11; 21:1 The chronology of events here reads like the Pretribulational Premillennial view of prophecy.

Premillennialism ("Pre-mill") is that view, which holds that Jesus will return to the earth to establish a literal kingdom, over which He will rule supreme for a period of a literal 1000 years. The "pre" designates the belief that Jesus will return *before* the 1000-year kingdom begins. This was the view almost unanimously held by the Church during the first three centuries.

Amillennialism ("A-mill") is that view which holds that Jesus is presently ruling in Heaven where proponents claim He is seated on the throne of David. According to the amillennial view, Jesus will at no time rule on the earth. The 1000 years recorded by John in Revelation 20 is suggested to be symbolic of Jesus' present heavenly reign, that extends from the Resurrection of Christ into the Eternal Age. Thus the term amillennial (no millennium) holds that the 1000 years is understood to be symbolic of a long period of time rather than a literal duration of a 1000 years.

Augustine became the main proponent of amillennialism, but there were exceptions, such as Peter Waldo and the Waldensians (1200), William Tyndale, Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer (16th century).

Amillennialism was able to take hold because of:

- * Failure to distinguish the difference between the Church and Israel. Antagonism between Jews and Christians grew in the first few centuries, which resulted in Replacement Theology (Supersessionism) taught as early as 160 by Justin Martyr.
- * Abandoning the historical-literal interpretation of Scripture in favour of the allegorical-spiritualizing method of interpretation introduced by Origen (c. 185-254). The Bible, of course, does use figures of speech and symbolic language, but this doesn't change the literal-historical intention of the text.
- * The end of persecution against Christians in 313 AD under Constantine the Great. It was felt by many Christian leaders, notably Augustine, that the Roman Empire had now become a Christian empire. Before, persecution made Christians long for Christ's return, but now, Christianity was accepted.

These events became disastrous for the spiritual condition of the professing Church and resulted in mixing pagan ideas and militarism with Christianity, and losing the true understanding of the calling of the Church.

In 431 the Council of Ephesus declared the belief in a literal millennial reign of Christ on earth to be superstitious.

Augustine became the main proponent of Amillennialism, which became the dominant view of prophecy during the Middle Ages. The expectancy of the Lord's return was greatly diminished during this time. Amillennialism is still the accepted belief of the Roman Catholics, Orthodox and most mainline Protestants, such as Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans and a minority of Evangelicals.

However, there were exceptions during the Middle Ages, such as Peter Waldo and the Waldensians (1200), William Tyndale, Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer (16th century), who were premillennialists.

Postmillennialism ("Post-mill") is that view, which holds that Jesus is presently ruling in the Church (especially in the hearts of believers), who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will Christianize the world and usher in a golden age of peace, prosperity, and health. The 1000 years of Revelation 20 is understood symbolically to represent this utopian age, which will last a long period of time, after which, Jesus will return to initiate the Eternal Age. "Post" then means that Jesus will return *after* the golden age is established by the Church. This view was proposed after the Reformation and has many similarities with Amillennialism. Postmillennialism was a dominant view during the great missionary movement of the 19th century, but its optimism lost popularity among Christians after two devastating world wars in the 20th century.

Preterism is that view which holds that the Biblical prophecies concerning the “end times” have already been fulfilled—in the past (Latin *praeter*). It teaches that all the end-time prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans attacked and destroyed Jerusalem. It considers that Jesus’ return to earth was a “spiritual” return, not a physical one. Partial Preterists do believe in the return of Christ to earth and a future resurrection and judgment, but they do not teach a millennial kingdom or that Israel as a nation has a place in God’s future plan.

"History has no consensus more unanimous for any doctrine than is the consensus of the Apostolic Fathers for the pre-millennial advent of Christ." (Nathaniel West, a Presbyterian pastor, in the late 1800s).

Hippolytus (170-236) wrote about the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 and said the first 69 were followed by Christ’s first coming and the 70th will begin after a time gap just before Christ’s second coming.

Among those who believe the Premillennial View of prophecy there are differing views about the timing of the Rapture of the Church:

-Pretribulational Rapture (The Church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation, so that it will not experience God’s coming judgments on the world).

-Posttribulational Rapture (The Church will go through the Tribulation and will be delivered by Christ shortly before, or simultaneously at, His return to earth).

-Midtribulational Rapture (The Church will be raptured at some point during the Tribulation. This is a minority view).

While the so-called **Early Church Fathers** placed strong emphasis upon the imminent and literal coming of Christ, and a literal 1,000-year kingdom to follow, they have not left us a clear statement of how they viewed the timing of the Rapture relative to the 7-year Tribulation period. However, an early form of Pretribulationism has been detected in the following historical documents:

Apocalypse of Elijah (3rd century)

Apocalypse of Ephraem of Nisibis (306-373)(or Pseudo-Ephraem 4th-8th century)

History of Brother Dolcino (14th century).

“All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the Tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.” (Ephraem of Nisibis (306-373) or someone associated with him).

These men also taught a Pretribulational Rapture:

Peter Jurieu (1637-1713) in his book "Approaching Deliverance of the Church" (1687)

Philip Doddridge's commentary on the New Testament (1738)

John Gill's commentary on the New Testament (1748)

James Macknight (1763)

Thomas Scott (1792)

Morgan Edwards (1744 & 1788)

Joseph Mede (1586-1638)

Increase Mather (1639-1723)

John N. Darby (1800-1882) who preached and wrote extensively on this subject

"Peradventure it may come in my days, old as I am, or in my children's days ... the saints "shall be taken up to meet Christ in the air," and so shall come down with Him again. "He will put down Satan, that old serpent, under our feet." (Hugh Latimer, c. 1485-1555)

Arguments in support of Premillennialism and the Pretribulational Rapture View:

* This view is the outcome of a historical-literal interpretation of Scripture. "Has God indeed said..." (Gen. 3). The prophecies concerning the First Coming of Christ were fulfilled literally, which is a clear indication of how the prophecies concerning His Second Coming will be fulfilled.

* This view is in keeping with the promises to Israel in the Old Testament. The progressive revelation of the New Testament does not cancel God's promises to Israel and transfer them to the Church. Jeremiah 31:37 - *"Thus says the Lord: 'If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord.'"*

* The 70 weeks of Daniel 9 are pivotal to a proper understanding of prophecy. Matthew 24:15 encourages us to pay attention to this passage.

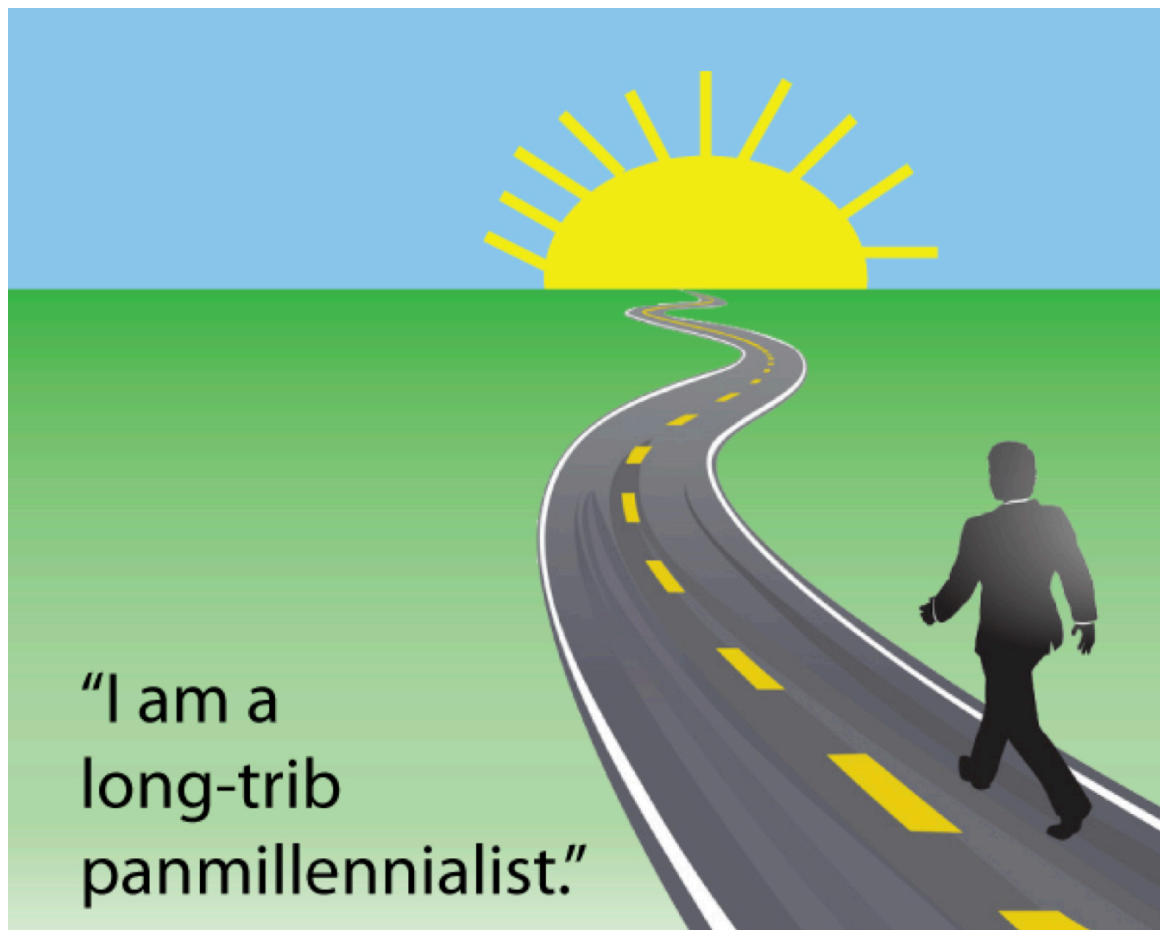
* The expectation of the Rapture before the Great Tribulation is the only view that does justice to the imminency of Christ's return. The NT has an abundance of verses telling us to be ready at all times for His Return.

* The Church is not mentioned as being on earth in Revelation 6-18.

* If the Rapture were to happen after the Great Tribulation, Christians would have to expect God's judgments of the Great Tribulation first, something that we would have to dread. The Lord's Coming is always taught as an event Christians long for, not dread. It's important to distinguish God's judgment of the 7-year Great Tribulation from persecution and tribulation caused by men during the whole Church age.

The Differences Between the Rapture & the Return of Christ

RAPTURE	RETURN OF CHRIST
Christ will come in the air for His people (1 Thess. 4:16-17).	He will come with His people to the earth (Zech. 14:1-5; 1 Thess. 3:13).
The Rapture is for believers only (1 Cor. 15:51).	His Return on the clouds of heaven affects the whole earth (Zech. 14:4).
The Rapture is imminent; it can happen any moment (Titus 2:13; Phil. 3:20).	His Return is preceded by signs (2 Thess. 2:2-8; Matt. 24:29-31).
The Rapture is a revealed mystery in the New Testament (1 Cor. 15:51).	The Return is much prophesied about in the Old Testament.
The Church is waiting for the Rapture to be carried into heaven (John 14:1-3).	The expectation of the remnant of Israel is to be carried into the Kingdom of God.
Christ will come as the Morning Star before the Day breaks (Rev. 22:16).	Christ will come as the Sun of righteousness and appear to all men (Mal. 4:2)



PROPHECY TIMELINE

by Leonard VandenBerg

