

The Second Sunday in Advent

The Collect.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and even holdfast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, thou has given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

The Epistle. Romans xv. 4.

Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again, he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a brute of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Gospel. St. Luke xxi. 25.

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass no ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy
Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant
that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark,
learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience
and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace,
and even holdfast, the blessed hope of
everlasting life, thou has given us in our Savior
Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy
the breath of the Holy Spirit
Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant
understand,
that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark,
memorize inhale to exhale to others,
learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience
and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace,
and even holdfast, the blessed hope of
everlasting life, thou has given us in our Savior
Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

THE RETURN OF CHRIST: WHEN AND HOW?

When and how will Christ return? Could he come back at any hour?

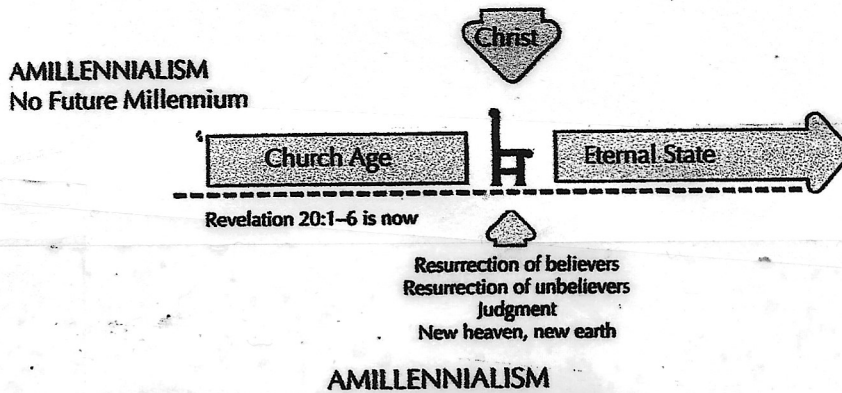
EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

As we begin the final unit of this book, we turn to consider events that will happen in the future. The study of future events is often called "*eschatology*," from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means "last." The study of eschatology, then, is the study of "the last things."

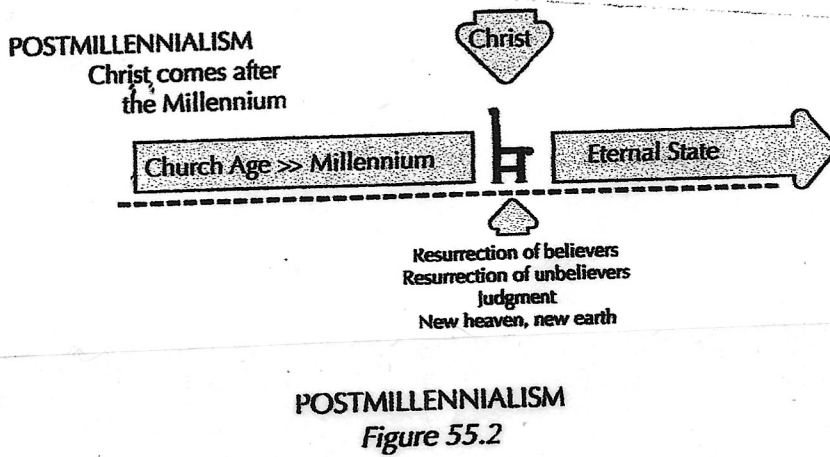
Unbelievers can make reasonable predictions about future events based on patterns of past occurrences, but in the nature of human experience it is clear that human beings of themselves cannot *know* the future. Therefore unbelievers can have no certain knowledge of any future event. But Christians who believe the Bible are in a different situation. Although we cannot know everything about the future, God knows everything about the future and he has in Scripture told us about the major events yet to come in the history of the universe. About these events occurring we can have absolute confidence because God is never wrong and never lies.

Regarding our own personal future as individuals, we have already discussed the teaching of Scripture in chapter 41 (on death and the intermediate state) and chapter 42 (on glorification). The study of these future events that will happen to individuals is sometimes called "*personal eschatology*." But the Bible also talks about certain major events that will affect the entire universe. Specifically, it tells us about the second coming of Christ, the millennium, the final judgment, eternal punishment for unbelievers and eternal reward for believers, and life with God in the new heaven and new earth. The study of these events is sometimes called "*general eschatology*." In this chapter we will study the question of the return of Christ, or his "second coming." Subsequent chapters will deal with the remaining topics in a study of the last things.

1. **Amillennialism.** The first view to be explained here, amillennialism, is really the simplest. It can be pictured as in figure 55.1:



2. **Postmillennialism.** The prefix *post-* means "after." According to this view, Christ will return *after* the millennium. The postmillennial view may be represented as in figure 55.2.

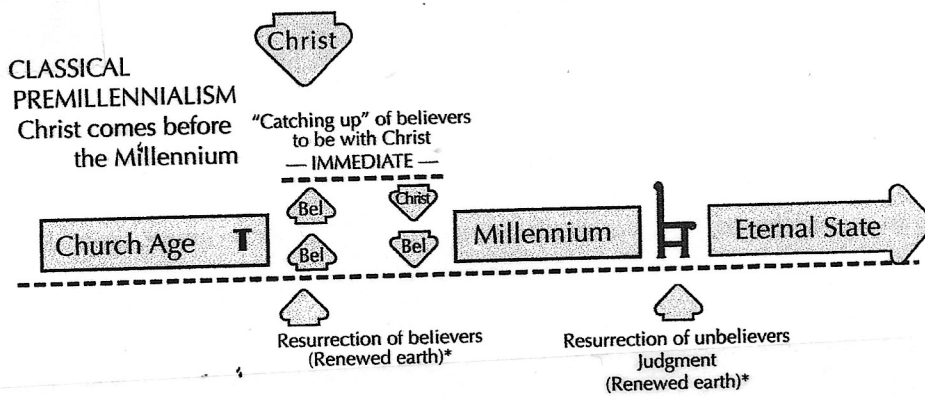


According to this view, the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase, so that a larger and larger proportion of the world's population will be Christians. As a result, there will be significant Christian influences on society, society will more and more function according to God's standards, and gradually a "millennial age" of peace and righteousness will occur on the earth. This "millennium" will last for a long period of time (not necessarily a literal one thousand years), and finally, *at the end of this period, Christ will return to earth*, believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will occur, and there will be a new heaven and new earth. We will then enter into the eternal state.

The primary characteristic of postmillennialism is that it is very optimistic about the power of the gospel to change lives and bring about much good in the world. Belief in postmillennialism tends to increase in times when the church is experiencing great revival, when there is an absence of war and international conflict, and when it appears that great progress is being made in overcoming the evil and suffering in the world. But postmillennialism in its most responsible form is not based simply on the observation of events in the world around us, but on arguments from various Scripture passages, which will be examined below.

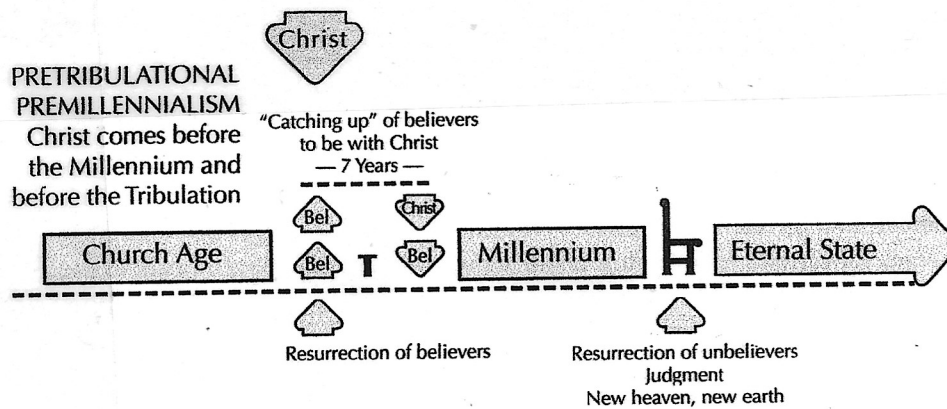
3. Premillennialism.

a. **Classic or Historic Premillennialism:** The prefix "pre-" means "before," and the "premillennial" position says that Christ will come back *before* the millennium.¹ This viewpoint has a long history from the earliest centuries onward. It may be represented as in figure 55.3.



* Classical Premillennialists differ over whether the renewed earth will begin in the millennium or the eternal state.

CLASSIC OR HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM



PRETRIBULATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

Figure 55.4

According to this view, the church age will continue until, *suddenly, unexpectedly, and secretly*, Christ will return part way to earth, and then will call believers to himself: “The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16–17). Christ will then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth. When that happens, there will be a great tribulation on the earth for a period of seven years.⁴

During this seven-year period of tribulation, many of the signs that were predicted to precede Christ’s return will be fulfilled.⁵ The great ingathering of the fullness of the Jewish people will occur, as they trust Christ as their Messiah. In the midst of great suffering there will also be much effective evangelism, especially carried out by the new Jewish Christians. At the end of the tribulation, Christ will then come back with his saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years. After this millennial period there will be a rebellion, resulting in the final defeat of Satan and his forces, and then will come the resurrection of unbelievers, the last judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state.

One further characteristic of pretribulational premillennialism should be mentioned: This view is found almost exclusively among dispensationalists who wish to maintain a clear distinction between the church and Israel. This pretribulational viewpoint allows