

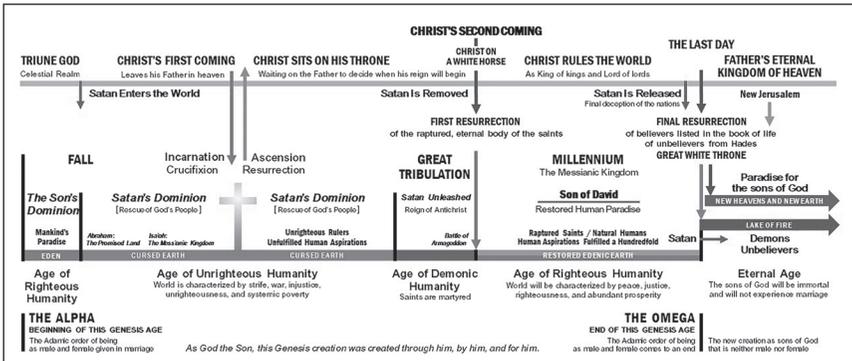
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A Critique of Premillennialism

Review

Note: This critique is best understood by watching a 45-minute video presentation online at www.godsendgame.net. The following chart is also available on the website to download and print.



Premillennialists believe in a literal millennium. They insist that the Old Testament promises of a messianic kingdom centered in Israel are not null and void because the first-century Jews rejected their Messiah. They believe that since Christ did not establish his kingdom the first time he came to this earth, he must return a second time at the beginning of the millennium to accomplish this mission. Thus, the name *premillennialism*. At the end of this 1,000-year messianic kingdom, Christ will take the saints to the eternal new heavens and new earth.

The following description by John Walvoord demonstrates how this view affirms the messianic kingdom:

Premillennialism is founded principally on interpretation of the Old Testament. If interpreted literally, the Old Testament gives a clear picture of the prophetic expectation of Israel. They confidently anticipated the coming of a Savior and Deliverer, a Messiah who would be Prophet, Priest, and King. They expected that He would deliver them from their enemies and usher in a kingdom of righteousness, peace and prosperity upon a redeemed earth. . . . The Premillennial interpretation offers the only possible literal fulfillment for the hundreds of verses of prophetic testimony.⁸

The basic tenants of premillennialism are as follows. Christ returns at the beginning of the 1,000-year restoration of this Genesis creation to rule the world. Satan will be totally removed from the world, and Christ will return to the earth on his white horse. He will then sit on the throne of David and will physically reside in Israel when he establishes his reign.

For the departed saints to reinhabit the restored Edenic earth during the millennium, they will experience the resurrection of their immortal bodies at the first resurrection. The first resurrection will be of the raptured, eternal bodies of the saints. In their eternal bodies, they will no longer experience marriage and reproduction.

The final resurrection on the last day will be primarily for unbelievers. But it will also include people who do become Christians during the millennium. They will be given eternal bodies for the eternal kingdom. On the last day of this Genesis creation, the saints will inherit the eternal new heavens and new earth. This is the eternal paradise for the immortal sons of God.

Some premillennialists believe the Genesis earth perishes on the last day, will literally cease to exist, and will be replaced with a totally new earth. Others believe the earth will be purified by a surface fire on the last day and the eternal new earth will be a renewed and restored Genesis earth. These premillennialists are known as progressive premillennialists, for they see the millennium as the first phase

8 John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 114.

of the eternal earth. Regardless of how premillennialists understand the nature of the eternal new earth, premillennialism is defined by its belief that Christ returns to this earth with the raptured saints at the beginning of the millennium.

The rapture is when the sons of God are resurrected into eternal bodies like Christ's and caught up into the sky to meet the Lord. Paul taught:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven [the second coming] . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air [raptured], and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:16–17)

Dispensational premillennialists believe the rapture can happen at any moment and the church will escape the Great Tribulation. Others believe the rapture will occur midway through the Tribulation, before God's wrath is poured out on the followers of the Antichrist. Historic premillennialists believe the rapture will occur simultaneously with Christ's return to this earth. The saints are caught up into the clouds, but then turn around and descend to this earth with Christ. Therefore, the church will endure the Great Tribulation.

All premillennialists believe the first resurrection represents the saints in their glorified bodies that reinhabit the restored earth. The world's population will be made up of the raptured saints *and* natural human beings who survive the Tribulation.

This comingling of billions of raptured saints in their glorified bodies with men and women in their natural bodies exposes a major problem with premillennialism. The prophets clearly describe the messianic kingdom as a restoration of the Adamic order of being. It is a restored human paradise where men and women marry, reproduce, and fill an Edenic earth. How are the raptured saints going to experience a restoration of their humanity if they are in their glorified bodies? Are these billions of celibate glorified children of God going to live next door to married couples with children or are they going to live in huge dormitories? The glorified sons of God belong in the eternal paradise in heaven, not on the restored earth.

Zechariah

Premillennialists quote several key verses to support their view of God's endgame. Some are found in Zechariah, in which the prophet describes the changes that will take place on this earth when the Messiah rules the world:

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. . . . Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. . . . And the LORD will be king over all the earth. (Zech. 14:4-9)

This seems to indicate a literal and physical return of Christ to the Mount of Olives. That is one way this prophecy can be interpreted.

But Zechariah is full of similar symbolic language that should not be interpreted literally. For example, flying scrolls are sent out to enter the houses of thieves and destroy them (5:1-4). Women with wings fly around carrying baskets to gather up all the wickedness in the land of Israel (5:5-10). Angels riding on chariots with red and white horses are sent out to the four corners of the earth to establish peace (6:1-8). Although the messianic kingdom that the prophet depicts may be quite real, the description of Christ's feet standing on the Mount of Olives to initiate his reign can also be interpreted as a figurative description of his reign.

Psalms 110 teaches that Christ sits at the right hand of God waiting for the Father to put all his enemies under his feet. God does not literally have a right hand, and Christ will not literally have enemies sitting under his feet. The idea of subjecting one's enemies to one's feet is a common metaphor in the Old Testament that symbolizes the Lord as a warrior and conquering king with human rulers subject to him.

Even today we use the expression "put your foot down" figuratively to mean to bring an end to unruly conduct and to establish order. Changes in behavior take place because of this use of our authority, but the description of our foot being put down is obviously metaphorical.

In like manner, the prophets foresaw an actual reign of the Messiah, but these verses in Zechariah do not necessitate a literal return of Christ to the Mount of Olives so that he can put his foot down and restore his divine rule over this disobedient world. Zechariah further wrote:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. . . . On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (12:10; 13:1)

A water fountain will not literally cleanse the Jewish people from sin. Rather, it will be the Holy Spirit who will cleanse the repentant Jews. And unlike doubting Thomas, we can see the resurrected Christ through the eyes of faith without him physically appearing to us. So, too, when the Jews repent in the future, through the Holy Spirit they will see the Christ their people crucified, and they will be cleansed from their sin.

Some theologians hyper-spiritualize these verses when they interpret them as only having an internal spiritual meaning without any external ramifications in this world. Other theologians interpret them in a hyper-literal manner. When properly interpreted, however, these metaphors envision a real messianic kingdom when the Jewish Messiah rules the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This does not rule out any contact between Christ and this world at the beginning of the millennium. Christ appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus when Saul was converted, but that did not represent Christ's second coming. It may be that in a similar way, Christ will touch the Mount of Olives in a moment in time to regenerate this cursed earth into a restored Edenic earth as he begins his reign over this world from his throne in heaven. But this would not be his second coming.

Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians

To support their eschatology, premillennialists also reference Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. This church was experiencing significant persecution by the Roman authorities. But Paul admonished them not to retaliate and to wait for God's vengeance on their persecutors on Judgment Day, which occurs when Christ returns to rapture the saints:

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God [on Judgment Day] . . . They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord [in the lake of fire] . . . *when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints* [a reference to the rapture], . . . And then the lawless one [the Antichrist] will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming [on Judgment Day]. (2 Thess. 1:7—2:8)

Paul connected Christ's second coming to the destruction of the Antichrist. This would conceivably put the second coming at the end of the Great Tribulation, when the Antichrist is destroyed at the battle of Armageddon. Premillennialists claim that Christ returns to this earth at that time to set up his millennial kingdom. But Paul also connected Christ's second coming and the rapture to Judgment Day at the end of the world, when these unbelievers persecuting the Thessalonians will experience eternal destruction in the lake of fire, which is described in Revelation as occurring *after* the millennium. Is the second coming on Judgment Day at the battle of Armageddon *or* at the end of the world? How do we resolve this apparent contradiction?

To solve this problem, premillennialists move Judgment Day to the end of the Great Tribulation. Instead of Judgment Day occurring at the Great White Throne judgment on the last day, it is at the beginning of the millennium. Unbelievers are resurrected from hades, judged, and sent to eternal destruction along with Satan and the demons. The saints are raptured, rewarded for their good deeds, and inherit the messianic kingdom for a thousand years. But this creates far more problems than it resolves, for John clearly places Judgment Day at the

Great White Throne judgment, which occurs at the end of the world—not at the beginning of the millennium. Attempts by premillennialists to circumvent these contradictions cause unnecessary confusion.

The book of Revelation contains a great deal of complicated recapitulation, but the events surrounding the millennium occur in a straightforward, linear progression. The Great Tribulation comes to an end at the battle of Armageddon. This is followed by the binding of Satan and the millennial reign of Christ. There is the first resurrection so that the saints can inherit the earth during the millennium. Toward the end of the millennium, Satan is released for one final deception of mankind that is referred to as the gathering of Gog and Magog. Afterward, Satan is sent to the lake of fire never to escape again. Then there is the final resurrection. The current Genesis earth perishes and is replaced with the eternal new heavens and new earth. Christ sits on his Great White Throne and judges the world. The end of the Tribulation is not Judgment Day.

There is a better solution to reconciling Paul's sequence of events to those in Revelation. Notice in Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians that he does not mention the earthly messianic kingdom whatsoever. Nor does Paul inform them about the two resurrections, one at the beginning of the millennium and another at the end of the millennium. Paul taught the Thessalonians about the coming Antichrist and the Great Tribulation, but it is likely that he had not taught them about Christ's 1,000-year messianic kingdom that would follow the defeat of the Antichrist.

The church was still very young, and the book of Revelation was not written until almost forty years later. At this embryonic stage of the church's growth, Paul had good reasons to keep the Jewish-led messianic kingdom under wraps. The Roman authorities would have surely seen Christ's earthly kingdom as a geopolitical threat. Paul kept the young church focused on inheriting eternal life in heaven when Christ returns on Judgment Day. Thus, in his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul gave them a highly condensed version of the future, omitting the first resurrection and the messianic kingdom altogether.

In fact, Paul associated the second coming and the rapture with the saints inheriting their citizenship in heaven, not with their inheriting Christ's earthly kingdom. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote:

But our citizenship is in heaven [where Christ has ascended]. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ [to take us to join him in heaven], who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body [the rapture]. (3:20–21 NIV)

Paul taught that Christ has the power to control this world, but he did not expand on what that entails. But Paul was certainly referring to the second coming of Christ from heaven: “And we eagerly await a Savior from there.” He was also referring to the rapture: “will transform our lowly bodies” to be like Christ’s resurrected body. The raptured saints then inherit the Father’s kingdom, or their “citizenship” in heaven.

According to Paul, when Christ comes again, the saints will be raptured and transformed into their eternal bodies and will inherit their citizenship on the eternal new earth. At the same time, unbelievers will be resurrected from hades, judged at the Great White Throne judgment, and sent to eternal destruction in the lake of fire. This would place the second coming, the rapture, and Judgment Day at the final resurrection on the last day—not at the first resurrection at the beginning of the millennium.

The Destiny of the Raptured Saints

When Christ approached his impending resurrection and ascension, he began telling his disciples that he was about to return to his Father in heaven. He said that someday he would return, resurrect them, and take them to join him and his Father in heaven for eternity:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. . . . And if I go and prepare a place for you [in heaven], I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also [in heaven with his Father]. (John 14:1–3)

Christ ascended in the clouds to return to his Father in heaven. When he comes again in the clouds, he will take the raptured sons of

God to dwell with him in the Father's kingdom—not to dwell with him on this earth in his millennial kingdom.

This sequence can be outlined as follows:

Christ's second coming ("I will come again")

+ rapture ("take you to myself")

= ascend to heaven in our eternal bodies and join him in his "Father's house."

Peter never gave up hope for the messianic kingdom, but he also learned from Jesus that the destiny of the raptured saints on Judgment Day is the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven, not the restored earth during Christ's reign.

Peter and the disciples eventually understood what Christ meant by his resurrection and ascension to heaven to be with his Father. They began to hope for their own resurrection of immortal bodies like Christ's and their ascension to join him and his Father in heaven. Peter wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [we hope for a resurrection of an immortal body like Christ's resurrected body], to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time [on the last day]. . . . at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3–7)

Peter's teaching can be outlined as follows:

"The revelation of Jesus Christ"

+ "to be revealed in the last time" on the last day

+ "hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (a reference to the resurrection of an eternal body like Christ's resurrected body)

= inherit the imperishable kingdom "kept in heaven for you."

Premillennialists have overlooked this reference to the rapture in this section of Scripture. But when we hope for a resurrection like Christ's resurrection from the dead, we are looking forward to having raptured, eternal bodies like his. When this occurs, the raptured saints are clearly destined for the imperishable kingdom of heaven, not the perishable earth.

Let's compare Peter's teachings concerning the destiny of the raptured saints to Paul's and Christ's:

Peter: "at the revelation of Jesus Christ" + "hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" of an eternal body = "an inheritance that is imperishable" in heaven.

Paul: "we eagerly await a Savior" + "will transform our lowly bodies" into eternal bodies = our "citizenship is in heaven."

Christ: "I will come again" + "will take you to myself" when raptured = the "Father's house" in heaven.

Christ's second coming and the rapture signal the beginning of the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven on the last day—not the beginning of the millennium. Again, these verses contradict the premillennial assertion that Christ returns to rapture the saints at the beginning of the millennium so that they can inherit the perishable earth for a thousand years. The raptured saints are destined for the Father's imperishable kingdom when Christ returns, not for the restored earth for a thousand years.

Christ on His White Horse

Probably the most important sections of Scripture used by premillennialists to make their case for God's endgame can be found in chapters 19 and 20 of Revelation. Premillennialists assume that the appearance of Christ on his white horse at the battle of Armageddon represents the second coming of Christ in the clouds. In his vision, John saw the celestial realm of heaven open and Christ riding on a white horse. If you read this passage closely, however, John never describes Christ as leaving the celestial realm of heaven and descending to this earth on his horse to destroy the Antichrist and his armies and establish his millennial reign. Instead, John portrays Christ as remaining in

the celestial realm when he simply says the word and the Antichrist and his armies are destroyed and his reign over this earth begins:

Then I saw heaven opened [a vision of the celestial realm], and behold, a white horse [in the celestial realm]! . . . From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations [he merely says the word], and he will rule them with a rod of iron. . . . And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered [on the earth] to make war against him who was sitting on the horse [still depicted as being in the celestial realm] . . . And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet . . . These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest [of his soldiers] were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse [spoken from the celestial realm]. (Rev. 19:11–21)

The Antichrist and his false prophet are so evil that they bypass hades and the Great White Throne judgment and are sent directly to the lake of fire. The soldiers killed by Christ's spoken word, however, remain in hades during the millennium until the final resurrection and Judgment Day, when they, too, will be sent to the lake of fire. Most important, notice that John made no reference whatsoever to Christ on his white horse coming down from the celestial realm to this earth to engage and destroy the Antichrist and his army. Rather, John consistently pictures Christ remaining in heaven when he says the word and destroys the Antichrist, bringing the Great Tribulation to an end. Therefore, contrary to what premillennialists assert, John is not describing the appearance of Christ on his white horse as the second coming of Christ in the clouds.

Let's compare John's vision of Christ in the celestial realm to Stephen's vision of Christ when Stephen was about to be stoned to death. Stephen had been preaching the gospel when he was arrested and brought before the high priest and the Sanhedrin for interrogation. In his defense, he delivered a convicting sermon, which infuriated the Jewish leaders. Stephen then saw the ascended Christ in the celestial realm at the right hand of the Father:

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, *I see the heavens opened*, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:54–56)

Stephen could see into the celestial realm, where he saw Christ in heaven at the Father's right hand. Stephen was then unjustly stoned to death. Christ, of course, had the authority and power to prevent this injustice. From his throne in heaven, Christ could have easily intervened to prevent Stephen's murder. He could have used his divine power and struck the unrepentant rulers with blindness the moment they picked up the first stone. But the time was not right for Christ to overthrow these unrighteous rulers and establish his reign of justice on the earth.

Notice the similarities between Stephen's vision of Christ in the celestial realm and John's vision:

Stephen said: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

John said: "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse!"

Christ did not intervene to prevent Stephen's death. In John's vision, however, Christ does intervene against his enemies. But John portrays him as doing so from his celestial position in heaven at the right hand of God. He destroys the Antichrist and his armies by just saying the word. He also sends a powerful angel down to earth to lock up Satan for the next one thousand years. Stephen saw Christ waiting on the Father to decide when his reign of justice will begin, whereas John saw Christ when the time has come for Christ to rule the world as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Therefore, contrary to what premillennialists assert, John did not describe Christ leaving heaven on the clouds and descending to the earth on his white horse, dismounting, and walking on this earth again to establish his millennial kingdom.

John's vision was also similar to Elisha's and his frightened servant's vision when they were being threatened by a Syrian army:

Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha [in the celestial realm]. And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, “Please strike this people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha. (2 Kings 6:17–18)

Elisha and his servant could see into the celestial realm of heaven, where they saw the angelic powers of God surrounding them. In this case, from his throne in heaven God chose to intervene with supernatural power to protect his people. But God did not have to come to the earth to accomplish this mission. Likewise, John saw Christ on his throne in heaven using his supernatural power against the Antichrist and his armies. Christ merely said the word, but instead of being blinded, they were killed.

John also portrayed the binding of Satan as the work of an angel sent by Christ from his throne in heaven:

Then I saw an angel *coming down from heaven*, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:1–2)

Again, Christ is not portrayed as coming down from heaven to the earth when Satan is bound by an angel. Only the angel comes down to this earth to bind Satan so that Christ’s millennial reign can begin.

Human Thrones

When John saw thrones set up on the earth after the first resurrection, nowhere does he describe any of these thrones as being Christ’s throne. They are all portrayed as human thrones:

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. . . . They came to life [on the earth] and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. . . . This is the first resurrection. (Rev. 20:4–5)

These are all human thrones, and the resurrected saints seated on these thrones will reign with Christ while he remains in heaven, just as we walk with Christ today while he remains in heaven. Even John Walvoord, a pillar in the premillennial camp, admits in his commentary on Revelation that this section of Revelation does not specifically identify any of these thrones as being Christ's throne:

The interpretation of verse 4 is complicated by a lack of specificity. . . . Who are these sitting on the thrones and what is meant by the judgment given to them? One possibility is that the subject of the verb "sat" includes Christ.⁹

Since the text does not identify Christ as sitting on one of these thrones, premillennialists have to resort to mere speculation.

If Christ does come back to this earth as premillennialists claim, then one would be able to report that Christ was physically somewhere on this earth after his descent. He could be in Jerusalem one day and in New York City the next. In the Olivet Discourse, however, that is precisely what Christ said one would not be able to do when he comes again:

Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There he is!" do not believe it. . . . For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24:23–27)

Christ taught that he will not physically return to earth at his second coming so that one could find him over here or over there. Christ has already come in the flesh and dwelt among us. When he comes again, it will be to take us to his Father's heavenly kingdom. Therefore, any man who claims to be God operating physically on this earth is a false Christ, no matter how many signs and wonders he performs.

These verses in chapters 19 and 20 of Revelation are a critical section of Scripture for premillennialists, who are known for their literal interpretation of the text. But nowhere in these verses is Christ described as

⁹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1966; Moody Paperback Edition, 1989), 296.

returning to this earth to establish his millennial kingdom. Rather, John portrayed Christ as remaining in the celestial realm of heaven when he says the word and destroys the Antichrist, has Satan bound by an angel, and rules the world as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Wrath of God on Judgment Day

Judgment Day also presents a major problem for premillennialists. They recognize that there is a strong connection between the second coming of Christ and the wrath of God executed against mankind on Judgment Day. Paul wrote:

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, . . . *who delivers us from the wrath to come* [on Judgment Day]. (1 Thess. 1:9–10)

Premillennialists equate this wrath of God at Christ's second coming to the wrath of God poured out on the Antichrist and his armies described in Revelation: "He will tread the winepress of the fury of the *wrath of God* the Almighty [against the armies of the Antichrist]" (Rev. 19:15). But this wrath of God is not the wrath of God that Paul is referring to. Paul is alluding to the second death, when unbelievers are resurrected from hades on the last day, judged at the Great White Throne judgment, and sent to the lake of fire for eternity. Christians are delivered from this wrath because they are in Christ and clothed with his righteousness.

In contrast, the wrath of God poured out at the end of the Great Tribulation is like the wrath of God executed against Pharaoh and his armies during the Exodus. The Egyptian soldiers who were killed by the flooding of the Red Sea experienced the first death of their mortal bodies. Their souls or spirits were then sent to hades, where they remain until the final resurrection, when they will be resurrected in body and soul and will experience the second death in the lake of fire.

Likewise, at the battle of Armageddon, the armies of the Antichrist will simply be killed, and their departed spirits will remain in hades until the last day when they, too, will be resurrected and judged at the

Great White Throne and will experience the wrath of God when they are sent to the lake of fire. The wrath of God at the end of the Tribulation is temporal, whereas the wrath of God on Judgment Day is eternal. In short, the battle of Armageddon is not Judgment Day.

Revelation teaches that Judgment Day occurs on the very last day of this Genesis creation when the books are opened and every man is judged by what is recorded in the books. The saints will be judged by what is written in the Book of Life, and unbelievers will be judged by another unnamed book because their names are not in the Book of Life:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them [the end of this Genesis creation]. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened [two sets]. . . . And the dead [believers and unbelievers] were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done [rewards and punishments]. . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (Rev. 20:11—21:1)

John did not specifically state that this event is the second coming of Christ. But in a subsequent section of Revelation, John does connect Christ's second coming to the Great White Throne judgment on the last day of this creation, when the books are opened and mankind is judged:

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me [rewards and punishments], to repay each one for what he has done [believers and unbelievers]. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates [New Jerusalem]. (Rev. 22:12–14)

These events in chapter 22 of Revelation describing Christ's second coming on Judgment Day correspond to the events surrounding the Great White Throne judgment described in chapter 20:

“Behold, I am coming soon”

- “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end [of this creation]” (Rev. 22) = “From his presence earth and sky fled away” (Rev. 20)
- “bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one *for what he has done*” (Rev. 22) = “And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, *according to what they had done*” (Rev. 20)
- “enter the city by the gates” (Rev. 22) = “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 20)

According to Revelation, the second coming and the rapture take place *after* the millennium when this Genesis earth is destroyed at the final resurrection of all mankind at the Great White Throne judgment.

Let’s continue to let Scripture interpret Scripture. John wrote Revelation, but he wrote the gospel of John, too. In his gospel, he also records Christ teaching that his second coming occurs on Judgment Day, when believers and unbelievers are resurrected at the same time to inherit either eternal life or eternal death. Jesus taught:

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming [on Judgment Day] when all who are in the tombs [believers and unbelievers] will hear his voice [at the second coming] and come out [they are resurrected], those who have done good to the resurrection of life [believers], and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment [unbelievers who are held in hades]. (John 5:28–29)

The “resurrection of life” of “those who have done good” occurs on Judgment Day, when they are resurrected into eternal bodies, judged according to their recorded good deeds, and sent to the eternal new earth. The “resurrection of judgment” of “those who have done evil” occurs at the same “hour,” when they are resurrected from hades, judged according to their recorded evil deeds, and sent to the eternal lake of fire.

In the gospel of Matthew, Christ described believers as his sheep and unbelievers as goats. Notice the destiny of the sheep and the goats when he comes again on Judgment Day:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne [the Great White Throne]. Before him will be gathered all the nations [at the final resurrection], . . . And he will place the sheep on his right [the saints will be raptured into their eternal bodies], but the goats on the left [unbelievers will be resurrected from hades]. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” [a reference to the Father’s eternal kingdom]. . . . Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment [the lake of fire], but the righteous into eternal life. (Matt. 25:31–46)

These events can be outlined as follows:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory”

- + the final resurrection of believers (the sheep) and unbelievers (the goats)
- + Judgment Day when Christ “will sit on his glorious throne”
- = resurrected believers inherit “eternal life” in the Father’s eternal kingdom of heaven
- = resurrected unbelievers inherit “eternal punishment” in the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Christ’s second coming and Judgment Day will occur at the end of the world when the sheep are raptured to inherit eternal life in the Father’s eternal kingdom—not at the beginning of the Son’s millennium kingdom, as claimed by premillennialists. The parable of sowing good seed among weeds, also in the gospel of Matthew, teaches this same concept:

And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age [the Omega], and the reapers are angels. Just

as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age [the Genesis age]. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace [the lake of fire]. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father [in heaven]. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matt. 13:36–43)

Jesus taught in this parable that when he comes again on Judgment Day, the saints (the good seed) are resurrected to be taken to the Father’s kingdom at the same time that unbelievers (the weeds) are raised to be judged and sent “into the fiery furnace.” Note that this harvest is “at the end of the age,” not at the beginning of another thousand years of the Genesis earth’s existence.

Peter also placed the second coming and the rapture of the saints on the last day. He did not place the rapture at the beginning of the Tribulation, at the middle of the Tribulation, or at the end of the Tribulation. Rather, he connected the rapture to Judgment Day, when Christ comes again at the end of the world and the saints inherit the eternal new earth. Peter taught that this Genesis creation will be destroyed by fire and will pass away when the books are opened on Judgment Day. The raptured saints then inherit the eternal new heavens and new earth.

Scoffers will come in the last days . . . They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” . . . But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved [the Omega], and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed [when the books are opened]. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, . . . But according to his promise [of an eternal body like Christ’s ascended body in the Father’s kingdom] we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:3–13)

Notice that Peter places the second coming, the rapture, *and* Judgment Day at the end of the world when the saints inherit the eternal new earth, not at the beginning of the millennium. Christ cannot physically return to the earth with the raptured saints at the beginning of the millennium because the earth will be destroyed when he returns. It would be difficult to reign on the earth for a thousand years if it no longer existed! Peter plainly teaches that the resurrected saints are destined for the new earth when Christ returns on Judgment Day.

Peter's teaching can be outlined as follows:

“The promise of his coming . . . like a thief”

- + the people of God, who are living holy and godly lives, are waiting for “the coming of the day of God”
- + the end of this Genesis creation: “will be burned up and dissolved”
- + Judgment Day: “the works that are done on it will be exposed”
- = the saints inherit the “new heavens and a new earth.”

The book of Hebrews includes this same concept:

So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many [the first coming], **will appear a second time**, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him [believers on Judgment Day]. . . . For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries [unbelievers on Judgment Day]. . . . But now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens [as John says, “earth and sky fled away”].” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made [the Genesis creation]—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken [an eternal heavenly kingdom], and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire [when he returns on Judgment Day to save his people]. (Heb. 9:28; 10:26–27; 12:26–29)

This sequence of events can be outlined as follows:

“Will appear a second time”

- + Judgment Day for faithful believers: “to save those who are eagerly waiting for him”
- + Judgment Day for unbelievers: “a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire”
- + end of this Genesis creation: “the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made”
- = the saints then inherit “a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”

Like Peter, the writer to the Hebrews places the second coming on Judgment Day when the Genesis earth is destroyed, all mankind is judged, and the saints inherit the eternal kingdom of heaven.

This Age and the Eternal Age to Come

Another major problem with premillennialism is that the Scriptures portray Christ’s second coming in terms of the end of this Genesis age and the beginning of the eternal age to come. After Christ warned the disciples about the temple’s impending destruction, they asked him how they could recognize the signs leading up to its destruction as well as when his second coming would occur: “Tell us, when will these things be [the temple’s destruction], and what will be the sign of *your coming and of the end of the age* [the Genesis age]?” (Matt. 24:3). Christ’s second coming is linked to “the end of the age,” or the Omega. Jesus also taught, “The harvest is *the end of the age*, and the reapers are angels” (Matt. 13:39). The harvest, or Judgment Day, is also linked to “the end of the age.”

Jesus further taught:

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life [in the Father’s eternal kingdom], and I will raise him up [into an eternal body like his] *on the last day* [at the end of the age]. (John 6:40)

The rapture is linked to the final resurrection “on the last day.” Christ’s second coming, the rapture, and Judgment Day are all linked

to the end of this age and the beginning of the eternal age to come. When Christ comes again on Judgment Day, unbelievers are gathered up by angels, judged by Christ, and sent to the lake of fire. The saints are raptured, judged for their good deeds, and inherit “eternal life” in the Father’s kingdom. This places Christ’s second coming at the Omega when he ushers in the eternal age.

But premillennialists believe the second coming and the rapture occur at the beginning of the millennium, which presents a dilemma. How can Christ’s second coming usher in the eternal age to come if humanity and the Genesis earth last for another thousand years? Premillennialists attempt to make sense of this obvious contradiction by arguing that the millennium is a preliminary first phase of the eternal age to come. None of these attempts, however, make sense. If Christ’s second coming ushers in the Father’s eternal kingdom and the eternal age to come, then it ushers in the eternal age to come—*not* another thousand years of the earth’s existence! Premillennialists are simply confusing events that will occur in this Genesis age with the events that will occur when Christ comes again to usher in the eternal age.

Paul taught the following order of events at Christ’s second coming:

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits [the first man to be resurrected into an eternal body and to ascend to heaven], *then at his coming those who belong to Christ* [the saints are raptured]. *Then comes the end* [of this age], *when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father* after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he [Christ] must reign [over this world] until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:23–26)

Paul’s teaching can be outlined as follows:

“Then at his coming”

- + “those who belong to Christ” [the saints are raptured]
- + “then comes the end” [of this age]
- = “when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father.”

Throughout his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul connects the rapture to the second coming on Judgment Day:

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come [the lake of fire on Judgment Day]. . . . For the Lord himself will descend from heaven [the second coming] . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air [the rapture], and so we will always be with the Lord [in his Father's eternal kingdom]. (1 Thess. 1:9–10; 4:16–17)

These verses can be outlined as follows:

“Wait for his Son from heaven”

- + the rapture: “caught up together with them in the clouds”
- + Judgment Day: “delivers us from the wrath to come”
- = inherit the eternal kingdom: “so we will always be with the Lord.”

Nowhere in these verses does it state that Christ is returning with the raptured saints to this earth on Judgment Day to reign on the earth for another thousand years, as claimed by premillennialists.

Coming on the Clouds

When Christ ascended in the clouds to heaven to return to his Father, angels appeared and said that his return would also be visible in the clouds:

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes [angels], and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9–11)

Premillennialists claim that when Christ returns in the clouds, he will return to this earth. But notice that the angels did not say Christ would return to this earth. Rather, Christ said he would return in the sky on Judgment Day to rapture his people into the clouds and take them to the Father's eternal kingdom:

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn [on Judgment Day], and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt. 24:30–31)

Christ's return on the clouds can be outlined as follows:

- At Christ's second coming on the last day of this age, he will visibly return in the clouds.
- Christ will send his angels to gather all unbelievers from the earth and from hades.
- The saints will be raptured into the sky to join Christ.
- The Genesis creation then perishes, and Christ will create the new heavens and new earth as the eternal habitat for the glorified sons of God.
- Christ will sit on his Great White Throne to judge all mankind.
- Unbelievers will be judged according to their sinful deeds and will be sent to the lake of fire.
- The saints will be purified by fire to burn off their bad deeds and will be rewarded for their good deeds that survive the fire.
- Christ and his glorified saints will descend to the eternal new earth to dwell with the triune God in all their glory.

Summary

Premillennialists have a noble objective. They are attempting to affirm the Son's messianic kingdom. They believe that because Christ ascended to heaven without establishing his messianic kingdom while he was on this earth, he must return to this earth a second time to

accomplish this mission before he ushers in the Father's eternal kingdom. There is overwhelming biblical evidence, however, that Christ's second coming occurs *not* at the beginning of the millennium, but on the very last day of this creation to usher in the eternal age to come.

Christ's return occurs at the final resurrection of all mankind when he sits on his Great White Throne to judge the world. The saints, or the sheep, will be raptured into their eternal bodies and will inherit eternal life in the Father's eternal kingdom. Unbelievers, or the goats, will be resurrected from hades and will inherit the eternal lake of fire.

For those who want to affirm Christ's millennial kingdom, another solution other than premillennialism must be found. Postrestorationism proposes that instead of Christ returning to this earth to establish his kingdom, he rules the world during the millennium from his throne in heaven. John never described Christ on his white horse returning to this earth to establish his kingdom. Christ is portrayed as remaining in the celestial realm of heaven when he rules the world.

And instead of the first resurrection being of the raptured saints, it will be a resurrection of the departed saints into their natural bodies—restored natural bodies for a restored natural earth. Therefore, Christ returns *after* (post-) his 1,000-year restoration of this Genesis creation at the final resurrection on Judgment Day to usher in the Father's eternal kingdom in the eternal age to come. The saints are raptured into their eternal bodies to inherit the new heavens and new earth, and unbelievers are resurrected from hades to inherit the lake of fire.

Amillennialists agree that the second coming is on the last day. They do not believe, however, in a future millennial age of righteous humanity before the eternal age. In the next chapter, we will examine amillennialism and postmillennialism.