

Pre-Tribulation, Mid and Post – Definitions

Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation or Post-Tribulation – What are You?

What do these mean? Or why does your way of interpreting scripture make a difference. Does pre-millennialism mean that Christ will be on the earth when that happens?

Five Interpretations: The interpretation one gives the book of Revelation will obviously determine its message. There are four basis interpretations that are worthy of note.

- **Futurist Interpretation:** The futurist view, which seems to me to be the most satisfactory, accepts the book of Revelation as prophecy that primarily is yet to be fulfilled, particularly from Revelation chapter 4 on. This was the interpretation of the early church during its most evangelistic history, from the apostles until the fourth century. Today it is the accepted position by most pre-millennial Bible teachers. A safe rule to follow in the study of the book of Revelation is to accept the book as literal unless the facts are obviously to the contrary.
- **Historical Interpretation:** The historical view suggest that John was describing the major events that would take place during the history of the Church. It therefore suggests that we can see these events as we look back at history. This of course, calls for the juggling of historical events to fit the prophecy. This is historically unsound and tends to distort the plain or literal meaning.
- **Spiritualizing Interpretation:** There are those who believe everything in the book should be taken figuratively or metaphorically, that John was talking about a spiritual conflict and not a physical experience. This view is held by most Amillennialists and post-millennialists. Until the turn of the century, post-millennialism gained many followers with the idea that the world was getting better and better, and we were about to usher in the kingdom. The perpetual degeneracy of communist dictators has rendered this a most untenable position.
- **Allegory Interpretation:** A symbolic system in a narrative that allows it to generate a second level of meaning, which develops in tandem with the primary narrative. The symbolic system may refer to myth, a historic figure, an earlier narrative, or an abstract idea. The reader understands early on that interpretive possibilities are limited by this structure. Example: A story in which the characters, settings, and events stand for abstract or moral concepts. Another example: An object or scene that is associated with a certain event or time of year. (i.e. Grapes are allegorical of autumn for that is when they are harvested). This is method used by Catholicism.
- **Preterist Interpretation:** The preterist view holds that John wrote the book prior to the destruction of the temple (in 70 A.D.), and was referring to events of his own day. This requires mental gymnastics that are unnecessary if one would apply the Golden Rule of Interpretation. The Roman emperors Nero or Domitian could scarcely fulfill the requirements of this book for the Antichrist, much less the desecration of the temple for 42 months or for the worldwide cataclysms that are yet future.

Pre-Millennialism, The Oldest View: The pre-millennial view is the view that holds that Christ will return to earth, literally and bodily, before the millennial age begins and that, by His

presence, a kingdom will be instituted over which He will reign. In this kingdom all of Israel's covenants will be literally fulfilled. It will continue for a thousand years, after which the kingdom will be given by the Son to the Father when it will merge with His eternal kingdom. The central issue in this position is whether the Scriptures are to be fulfilled literally or symbolically.

In fact, this is the essential heart of the entire question. Generally speaking, one's view of interpreting the Scriptures determines whether or not he or she is a pre-millennialist. For the most part, all who believe the Bible to be literal are pre-millennialists. Some Bible scholars however, separate prophecy from other passages. They interpret the rest of the Bible literally, but whenever they come to prophecy, and particularly the book of Revelation, they tend to spiritualize it. Only in taking the Bible other than literally can a person be anything but a pre-millennialist.

The early Christians were almost unquestionably pre-millennialists. The New Testament itself indicates that the apostles expected the Lord to return and set up His Kingdom in their lifetime. (In Acts 1:6), just before our Lord ascended into heaven, the disciples asked a question that revealed their understanding: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" The Lord did not deny that He would set up a Kingdom, but He told them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

So, we find the disciples and those they taught anticipating the return of Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom. Many of the detractors of the pre-millennial position suggest that it is a relatively new theory, having come on the scene during the days of John Darby and others. The truth of the matter is that pre-millennialism held sway during the first 3 centuries of the early church and was known as "chiliasm". Dr. Pentecost quotes from Lewis Sperry Chafer's Systematic Theology:

Pre-millennialism generally holds to a revival of the Jewish nation and their repossession of their ancient land when Christ returns. Satan will be bound (Rev. 20:2), and a theocratic kingdom of righteousness, peace, and tranquility will ensue. The righteous are raised from the dead before the millennium and participate in its blessings. The wicked dead are not raised until after the millennium.

The eternal state will follow the judgment of the wicked. Pre-millennialism is obviously a viewpoint quite removed from either a-millennialism or Postmillennialism. It attempts to find a literal fulfillment for the prophecies in the Old and New Testament concerning a righteous kingdom of God on earth. Pre-millennialism assumes the authority and accuracy of Scriptures and the hermeneutical principle of a literal interpretation wherever this is possible.

Toward the end of the 3rd century the spiritualizing and allegorizing of Scripture began to take over theological thought, and together with the merging of ecclesiastical and governmental Rome under Constantine, pre-millennialism fell into disrepute. With the advent of Augustine and other Catholic theologians, theology and philosophy supplanted the study of Scriptures.

The Dark Ages are well named, for the Word of God, which is the light of life, was hidden from people by the Church, which had been entrusted with the responsibility of propagating it. As the light of God's Word was extinguished, the hope of the Church, the literal return of Christ to the earth, was eclipsed.

Not until after the Reformation was there a revival of pre-millennialism. The first generation of reformers, such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, did not pursue the study of the Second Coming particularly but were heavily influenced by the theology of Augustine.

Martin Luther had been a priest of the Augustinian order prior to his withdrawal from Rome, and thus his interpretation was affected by his previous training. The second generation of Reformation Bible scholars saw a rise in the literal interpretation of Scripture, which in turn produced a re-emphasis on the ancient "chiliasm", now given the more modern title of "pre-millennialism."

After the turn of the century (1900's), Bible institutes sprang up throughout America with a heavy emphasis on a literal interpretation of the Bible. These schools have overwhelmingly advocated the pre-millennial view, not by premeditation, but because they are biblical literalists. No doubt the most important influence in popularizing the pre-millennial viewpoint has been the Scofield Reference Bible. According to Dr. Walvoord, this edition of the Bible, which has had unprecedented circulation, has popularized pre-millennial teachings, and provided ready helps of interpretation.

It has probably done more to extend pre-millennialism in the last half century than any other volume. This accounts for the many attempts to discredit this work. The reputation of the Scofield Bible is curious because each succeeding writer apparently believes that his predecessors have not succeeded in disposing of this work once and for all. This belief apparently is well founded, for the Scofield Bible continues to be issued year after year in greater numbers than any of its refuters. It is probable that the pre-millennial view, though subject to many attacks, will remain a dominant influence upon the Church until the Lord returns.

Amillennialism: This view holds that there will be no literal Millennium on the earth following the 2nd coming of Christ. It tends to spiritualize all the prophecies concerning the Kingdom and attributes to the Church those prophecies relating to Israel. Its adherents are divided on whether the millennium is being fulfilled now on the earth (Augustine), or whether it is being fulfilled by the saints in heaven (Kliefoth).

It may be summed up in the idea that there will be no more millennium than there is now, and that the eternal state immediately follows the second coming of Christ. This view believes that Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ. Those who hold the amillennial point of view concede that it was first suggested by Augustine, who more than any other Church father "molded the doctrines of the church of the Middle Ages."

Augustine was influenced by Clement of Alexandria and his student, Origen, who trained Dionysus. Together these three established the Alexandrian emphasis on spiritualizing the Scriptures. Although these men did not teach amillennialism, they did condition the brilliant

minded Augustine with the spiritualization of Scripture, and he produced the doctrine. His view of amillennialism became the accepted viewpoint of the Church of Rome, which eventually took over most of the Church and thus propagated his view.

In his book *The City of God*, Augustine presented the present age as a state of continual conflict between the “City of God” and the “City of Satan.” This was ultimately to climax in the victory of the Church over the world. He taught, on the basis (of Luke 10:18), that Satan had been bound on the earth by Christ, and he considered the Roman government’s endorsement of Christianity as a state religion evidence that the Church was winning the conflict in his day.

Augustine is widely regarded as a brilliant theologian and thinker by evangelical Christians. That his teachings have left an indelible mark on the Church cannot be doubted, but that it has been a mark for good can very well be questioned. “His view of what the City of God is, led him into teachings that have given rise to unspeakable misery, the very greatness of his name accentuating the harmful effect of the error he taught”.

He, beyond others, formulated the doctrine of salvation by the Church only, by means of her sacraments.” This doctrine, plus his amillennialism and his conception of extreme predestination at the choice of God, certainly give us a right to question the true value of Augustine’s contribution to Christianity.

Naturally amillennialism during the age of Rome’s dominance of the Christian scene waxed supreme. The early Reformers (such as Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, etc.), took their cue from Augustine and similarly adopted amillennialism. Amillennialism flourished during the early Reformation period, particularly in the formalistic churches, until today it is “without question a majority view of professing Christians.”

Dr. Walvoord points out that the large number of Amillenialists at present come from three sources: those who have become disenchanted with postmillennialism, those who came out of the Church of Rome, and those identified with 20th century liberalism. It is not correct to say that all Amillenialists are liberal, but it is correct that all liberals are Amillenialists. One cannot hold the amillennial point of view without an unusual spiritualization of Scripture, which is a most dangerous interpretation to follow.

Postmillennialism: Postmillennialism, the most recent of the 3 major views concerning the establishment of the Millennium, is almost extinct at the present time. Postmillennialism basically suggests that the world will get better and better until the whole world is Christianized, at which time Christ will return to a kingdom of peace. This view was originated by Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), a Unitarian controversialist in England. Although he was censored for some of his heretical views, particularly on the subject of the Trinity, “many conservative theologians rapidly embraced and propagated his viewpoint on the millennium.

Although this view was popular before the turn of the century and was given some impetus during the great revival movement of the Wesley’s, Finney, Moody, and others, it has been almost eliminated as a result of the two great world wars, the Great Depression, and an overwhelming rise in moral evil. It has made limited resurgence among a group of intellectuals

known as Theonomists. One theological professor I heard years ago explains Tim LaHaye, observed “The postmillennialist does not have a post to lean on.” Many of those who once held the postmillennial view have changed to the amillennial position.

Reasons for Accepting the Pre-millennial View: There are many reasons for accepting the pre-millennial view of our Lord’s return to this earth. Dr. Clarence Larkin, in his masterful book *Dispensational Truth*, offers the following evidence:

- When Christ comes, He will raise the dead, but the Righteous dead are to be raised before the Millennium, that they may reign with Christ during the 1,000 years, hence there can be no Millennium before Christ comes (Rev. 20:5).
- When Christ comes Satan shall be bound, but as Satan is to be bound during the Millennium, there can be no Millennium until Christ comes (Rev. 20:1-3).
- When Christ comes, He will separate the “tares” from the “wheat”, but as the Millennium is a period of universal righteousness the separation of the “tares” and “wheat” must take place before the Millennium, therefore there can be no Millennium before Christ comes (Matt. 13:40-43).
- When Christ comes Antichrist is to be destroyed, but as Antichrist is to come before the Millennium there can be no Millennium until Christ comes (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:20).
- When Christ comes the Jews are to be restored to their own land, but as they are to be restored to their own land before the Millennium, there can be no Millennium before Christ comes (Ezek. 36:24-28; Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10).
- When Christ comes it will be unexpectedly, and we are commanded to watch lest He take us unawares. Now if He is not coming until after the Millennium, and the Millennium is not yet here, why command us to watch for an event that is over 1,000 years off?

These are only some of the reasons why we anticipate the coming of Christ before the Millennium. In addition, it is the clear teaching of the Bible. Revelation 19 pictures Christ coming literally to the earth, slaying Antichrist, and casting him alive into the lake of fire. After Satan is bound, Christ will rule with His saints. A literal interpretation of Scripture will invariably point one to the pre-millennial return of Christ to the earth.

To be able to talk with others and to know why they believe the way they do, you may need to know these things. For instance, a Preterist does not believe John wrote the book of Revelation in 95 A.D.), instead they believe he wrote it around (65 A.D.). What difference does that make you ask? Simply it fulfills their prophecy that the destruction of the 2nd temple fulfilled the prophecy and that Jesus returned after that. Thus, most everything the book of Revelation states has already occurred.

Thank goodness they are in a minority. But are they the only ones with beliefs like that? We will find that out later.

There are some simple rules concerning the understanding of prophecy.

- Do not try to allegorize prophecy.
- Do not try to Spiritualize prophecy.

Preterists believe that all of the prophecies of the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation through midway into chapter 20 have already been fulfilled (most of them around the time of 70 A.D.). Consequently, they consider “this generation” to refer to the generation of those who were alive at the time Christ spoke these words (in 32 A.D.). If we consider the length of a generation to be 40 years, then it would seem that (the date of 70 A.D.), when the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, would support this view.

The futurists, while accepting as fulfilled those prophecies which can definitely be identified in that manner (such as the destruction of Jerusalem (in 70 A.D.)), believe that most of these Scriptures just mentioned are yet to be fulfilled in a future period of time known as the “last days”. They therefore believe that by “this generation” Christ referred to a future generation yet to live on earth.

Some futurists simply say that Christ was indicating that when these signs began to occur, they would all take place within the lifespan of one generation. It seems unlikely, however, that Christ would be indicating that view. Daniel had already told us that everything would have to be fulfilled within a shorter period of time, the seven years of his 70th week. Christ would certainly not extend that seven-year period to a generation, for to do so would contradict Daniel.

Futurists: Believe that virtually all prophetic events will not occur in the current church age, but will be fulfilled through events that will occur in the future seven-year tribulation, second coming, or millennium. Among those who are pre-tribulation futurists, there are three basic approaches taken in interpreting current events. The 3 classifications are in terms of how one relates prophecy for Israel to the Church age. Loose, Moderate, and strict.

- **Loose:** The loose view is characterized by those who claim to be pre-tribulation futurists but often take prophecy written for Israel and suggest that it is being fulfilled today, during the church age. This viewpoint holds that sometimes prophecy relating to the tribulation is being or has already been fulfilled in the current church age. This is a weak, inconsistent application of futurism since it commingles God’s plan for Israel with His plan for the church at specific points of prophetic fulfillment. This view is not in keeping with the dispensational tradition of separating Israel and the Church.
- **Strict:** Strict pre-tribulation futurists are airtight in maintaining a distinction between God’s prophetic plan for Israel and His plan for the church. They tend to say that current events have virtually no significance to today, since the only event a true church age believer is looking for is the Rapture of the Church. That view holds that the Jewish return to the land of Israel may or may not be the beginning of that which was prophesied for the last days. They tend to reason that we really cannot know about the significance of these things until after the Rapture. Thus, current events do not really indicate “signs of the times” in any significant way. Often this view says that Israel could be kicked out of the land, and it would not impact prophecy, since we cannot really confirm whether contemporary events are leading up to biblical fulfillment. This view is very non-speculative about how current events relate to prophecy, and often speaks strongly against those who try to make a correlation between the Bible and current events. Strict interpreters have a significant following within the academic circles of dispensationalism, likely over a concern that improper speculation be avoided.

- **Moderate:** Moderates clearly maintain a distinction between God's plan for Israel and God's plan for the Church. The current Church age is prophetically pictured only by general trends and characteristics, not by specific fulfillment of events, as will be true of prophecy relating to Israel after the Rapture. Therefore, there are no signs or current events which indicate the nearness of the Rapture, which is an imminent, any moment possibility at any time during the church age. Moderates do not date set or think that a current event fulfills prophecy relating to the tribulation or millennium. However, they do tend to think that it is valid to lay out a model or scenario of how things will be after the Rapture, since Scripture gives a clear and detailed picture of the tribulation period. Based upon such a model, we can see preparation and stage setting for those events increasingly fitting together through current events. Since these are not signs for the Rapture, but rather stage setting for events leading up to the Second Coming, our anticipation of the Rapture is quickened. The positioning of players and events related to God's plan for the world during the future tribulation is increasingly casting shadows upon the current church age, thus intensifying anticipation of the any moment Rapture which must take place before the events of the tribulation can unfold.

Idealist: Does not believe either that the Bible indicates the timing of events of that we can know before they mysteriously happen. Therefore, idealist think that prophetic passages mainly teach great ideas or principles about God's general dealings with mankind and are to be applied to anyone, in any era regardless of timing.

Go to Pre-Trib Perspectives to read the entire story on Pre-Trib Perspectives Articles. How signs of the times relate to the Rapture and the Second Coming by Thomas Ice.

By the 19th century the Bible was available and being read by millions in the English-speaking world. At Trinity College of Dublin, Ireland, where John Darby and other Prophecy scholars attended between 1800 and 1830, it was doubtless that some of the faculty had a strong influence on Darby's thinking. Perhaps S. R. Maitland, who developed the case for futurism (the position that most of the Bible is yet future). Maitland wrote his first book on that subject (in 1826).

Darby claimed he got the inspiration for his understanding of a pre-Trib Rapture (in 1828), after he saw the distinction between Israel and the church in his study of the book of Ephesians. Few scholars who do not make that distinction see a pre-Trib Rapture of the church. In fact, separating Israel and the church is one of the major keys to rightly understanding Bible prophecy. Second is the taking the Prophetic Scriptures literally whenever possible.

Grant Jeffrey, a current prophecy scholar and speaker has done extensive research into the writings of many prophecy teachers prior to the 18th century. In his book "Apocalypse", he quotes many who had a definite understanding of the difference between the two phases of our Lord's coming, particularly His coming for His people prior to the Tribulation and the revealing of the "man of sin." His most important contribution was his electrifying discovery of a statement in an apocalyptic sermon from the 4th century. Designated Pseudo-Ephraim, there is some question that it was really written by Ephraim of Nisibis, (306-373 A.D.), a prolific Syrian church father.

Some prefer a later date for this homily, called “Sermon on the End of the World,” and suggest it may not have been written until (565-627 A.D.). The real date is immaterial, for allowing its composition as late as the 7th century proves that even at this early date, 1100 years before Darby, some Christians saw the Rapture occurring before the Tribulation. In challenging Christians to holy living, the ancient author wrote:

Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms all the world? All the saints and elect of God are gathering 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.

During the past century many post or Amillenialists (those who either think the church will convert the world prompting Christ’s return, or that there will be no specific Millennium), suggest that Christ is now on earth in control. Or they have tried to assert that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Nero (about 64 A.D.). They claim that the prophecies of the Apocalypse were fulfilled by the fall of Jerusalem (in 70 A.D.). Such an idea is fraught with all kinds of distortions of history; it contradicts the known statements of Irenaeus and other early church fathers that it was written by John during the reign of Domitian and even ignores internal scriptural evidence to the contrary.

For example, Christ’s message to the first century church of Ephesus was they “had forsaken their first love.” If Revelation were written in 64 A.D. or 65, as they claim, that would mean the early church became cold in their zeal for Christ just 30 years after his ascension, while Peter and Paul were still alive! History confirms that was the very period of enormous evangelistic zeal when the gospel was preached “to every creature under heaven” (Col. 1:23). Such an idea is preposterous!

The only objections offered to the authenticity of the book did not come until late in the 2nd and 3rd century by the Eastern Church centered in Alexandria. This was the headwaters of the Greek inspired allegorical method of interpretation (through Philo and other Greek philosophers), that so influenced the Eastern Church. This method of interpreting Scripture was advanced by the brilliant Origen (branded a heretic by the early church), and ultimately brought into the church of Rome in the 5th century by Augustine, who also came from Alexandria.

There is probably no heresy so harmful in the history of the church as the over spiritualizing or allegorizing of Scripture. Even today the principal excuse by those who ignore the 28-30 percent of Scripture that is prophetic is that it must be taken “allegorically or symbolically.” In truth, prophecy cannot be understood when taken that way. As we have seen, it should be understood literally unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.