

Premillennialism and the Second Coming of Christ

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Introduction

The three great themes of the Bible may be stated as follows (allowing for some overlapping between the New Testament sections listed below):

1. The theme of the Old Testament is “Christ Is Coming”
2. The theme of Matthew through John is “Christ Has Come”
3. The theme of Acts through Revelation is “Christ Is Coming Again”

The Second Coming of Christ is one of the most persistent themes of the New Testament, with scarcely a book thereof omitting it. In each of the Gospel accounts the Lord Himself plainly taught that following His return to the Father, He would at some time thereafter reappear to mankind. A good summary of what He taught in this regard is found in His words to the apostles:

I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2b-3).

Most men react in one of two extreme ways to this Biblical teaching:

- **First**, widespread atheism, humanism, and skepticism exist in various forms, all of which deny the very existence of God and His Son. Some rabid atheists not only deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the Only Begotten Son. They go so far as to assert that Jesus of Nazareth is a mythical character, denying that He ever lived except in the fertile imagination of fanatics and deceivers. Those who deny either the existence of the Sonship of the Christ (and therefore His **first coming**) most certainly reject any claim of His Second Coming.
- **Second**, most professed believers in God, His Son, and the Bible have been ensnared by wild speculations about the “what,” “when,” “why,” and even the “where” of Christ’s return. These theories are part of the system of theology generally called “Premillennialism.”¹ Since much of the Premillennial system revolves around misconceptions concerning the Second Coming of the Lord, it is axiomatic that a correct conception of the Second Coming will thereby preclude Premillennial dogma and expose it for the gross error it is.² Were there no other demonstration of the significance of the subject of this chapter, this fact would suffice.

Not only does the New Testament teach the fact of the Second Coming of Christ, but it also teaches what will occur when this glorious event transpires. We will first notice what the

Lord will find among men when He returns, followed by consideration of the events that will transpire at His coming.

What Will the Lord Find in Mankind When He Returns?

Everyone Will Be Surprised at the Time of His Coming

Even in the first century there were time-guessers and pseudo-prophets willing to predict the time. Paul addressed and (we assume) corrected this problem among the Thessalonians:

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise (2 Thes. 2:1-3a).

It appears from the foregoing statement that someone had decided he had figured precisely when the Lord would reappear and had sent such information to the brethren over a forged signature (as if from Paul). Whatever the exact circumstance, if the Thessalonians accepted the prognostications of this man, they would have allowed themselves to be “beguiled.”

Church history is littered with the failed predictions of the time of Christ’s Second Coming. There has been an especially steady stream of such in the past two centuries. Prominent among them have been the following:

1. In 1833 William Miller, a Baptist preacher, began predicting the Second Coming between March 21, 1843 and the same date in 1844. When He did not come on or between these dates, Miller set October 22, 1844 (to coincide with the Day of Atonement) as the date. Obviously, this date also failed. Later, some who picked up the pieces of these utter failures (such as Ellen G. White) introduced Sabbath day worship and renamed the group “Seventh Day Adventists.” They are no longer so bold to announce specific dates, but still prophesy the “imminent” advent of Christ.
2. In 1877 Charles Taze Russell, father of the Jehovah’s Witness cult, began teaching that Christ came invisibly in 1874. Later, near the end of his life (d. 1916) he repudiated his former date, predicting that the Second Coming would occur at the end of 1914. He was certain that World War I was going to certify his dating scheme, but when the world survived it, he settled for another “invisible” advent! Despite teaching that the Lord came secretly in 1914, they have continued to herald every international conflict since then as the Lord’s coming. Their last specific date was September 5, 1975, which also miserably failed, and which reportedly cost them a few hundred thousand adherents. Now, like the Adventists, about all they will say is that Jesus’ Coming will be “soon.”

3. In the past three decades men from various denominational backgrounds and with varying levels of influence have continued to make the same prophetic blunders as the aforementioned radical cultists. However, with the almost universal adoption of Dispensational Premillennialism by denominational bodies (major and minor), the speculators have multiplied and have gained a far wider hearing than Miller, Russell, or Rutherford ever commanded in their lifetimes. Fortunes have been made by men such as Hal Lindsey and John Walvoord who have produced numerous books, tapes, videos, seminars, and in some cases, even movies that excite the speculative appetites of millions of people.

Let me state it plainly: If the Son of God knew what **He** was talking about, **none** of the time-guessers about the Second Coming know what **they** are talking about! They know no more about when the Lord will return than their pet cats or dogs know about it. They all make many egregious exegetical errors in arriving at their conclusions, but one of the most pronounced is their mistake of misapplying Jesus' Olivet discourse concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Mat. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). **None**—let me repeat—**none** of the signs and warnings given to prepare and alert His people apply to His Second Coming!³

Upon reading what some of these fellows write, one wonders if they are even aware of some of the clear statements of the Lord in the aforementioned chapters. Speaking of the time when He will return, Jesus said: "But of that day and hour **knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son**, but the Father only" (Mat.24:36; emph. DM). In verses 37–41 He taught that the world will be operating on a "business as usual" basis and mentioned several ordinary daily activities in which men and women will be engaged when He comes without warning. Then He stated:

Watch therefore: for **ye know not** on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready; **for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh** (vv. 42–44; emph. DM).

In effect, the time-guessers claim to know more than any other men, more than the angels, yea, more than the Lord Himself (at least at the time He issued these warnings). Now does it seem reasonable that God would withhold this information from His Son, from the angels, and from all others except Hal Lindsey or some of his fellow false prophets?

These fellows all claim to use the Bible, which does not contradict itself because it is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17). However, these fellows all come up with contradictory computations about the time of the Lord's return. This fact is enough to prove that they are misinterpreting the Scriptures, even if the Lord had not plainly and repeatedly told us that no

man can know the time. Jesus drove home His plain teachings that “no man knows” by telling the parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants, followed by the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mat. 24:45–51; 25:1–13).

Christ was addressing the apostles in the Olivet discourse. Obviously, they had no knowledge of when He would return at that time. Did He give them any inside information when He returned to Heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to guide them into all the Truth (John 16:13)? Evidently not. The apostle Peter wrote his two letters several years after the church was established. Some brethren had apparently begun to doubt that the Lord would return (2 Pet. 3:4). What a golden opportunity for the apostle to say, “I not only know that He **will** return, but I can tell you the **exact day**. He will come back on _____.” Instead, he shamed them for their lack of faith and their forgetfulness of history and told them, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief” (2 Pet. 3:10a), that is, at a time when no one is expecting His return. Peter’s statement is essentially a summary of some of the words he heard the Lord speak on the Mount of Olives, as previously quoted (Mat. 24:43–44).

What about Paul? Did he give any indication of the time of the Lord’s return? Hardly! As noted above, he wrote to the Thessalonians that they should not be disturbed by some who were predicting the time of the Second Coming (2 The. 2:1–3a). In this context he in effect said he knew when the Lord **would not** come. Certain things had to take place first and those things had not occurred (v. 3b). Saying that he knew when the Lord **would not** come is hardly tantamount to saying when He **would** come! In fact, Paul gave the same warning the Lord gave in Matthew 24:43–44 and that Peter gave in 2 Peter 3:10a: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape” (1 The. 5:2–3).

Mark it down! If the angels, the apostles, and the Lord Himself did not know when He will return, Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, Billy Graham, or any other man or woman most certainly do not—nor can any mortal ever know.

When He Comes Most Will Not Be Ready

According to the Lord, most mortals will be traveling on the broad way that leads to destruction when He comes (Mat. 7:13). Atheists and infidels who have denied His existence and His Deity will suddenly (but to no avail) become believers. John may have been thinking of this very fact when he wrote, “Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him,

and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). For certain, at the time of the Judgment (which the Lord's return will usher in), there will be no infidels: "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, And every tongue shall confess to God" (Rom. 14:11).

False prophets and teachers will be dumb struck in the realization that the Truth of God's Word mattered after all, and that God meant what He said. These blind guides with their blind followers will meet their doom in the pit of damnation (Mat. 15:14). Those who had intended to surrender their lives to Christ, but who never "got around" to obeying the Gospel will beg for one more minute of time, one more verse of an invitation song, one more opportunity, but to no avail. When the Lord is revealed from Heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, He will render "vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thes. 1:7-9).

Those once redeemed who became too busy, were unwilling to suffer for their Savior, or who felt that His demands were too restrictive and narrow will never be bothered with another plea for their return. When the Lord returns there will be no second chance or further opportunity. Mercy's door will be closed, never to be reopened, by Him who "shutteth and none openeth" (Rev. 3:7).

When He Comes Some Will Rejoice

By comparison, few will have entered the narrow gate and will be walking in the straitened road that leads to life (Mat. 7:14). These faithful saints are those who have listened to the Lord's warnings and have continued in a state of readiness and watchfulness. With great anticipation and joy, they will greet their coming Lord, having no cause for shame or fear. John typifies their attitude in his final words of the Bible: "Amen: come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). They know what awaits them at the coming of the Lord:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thes. 4:16-17).⁴

We should all carefully heed the words of the apostle John: "And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28). When the Lord returns it will be a time

of sweet fulfillment and consummation for those who are prepared. Whatever suffering and affliction they have endured for the Lord's sake will be forgotten in a moment as they are swallowed in eternal glory: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward" (Rom. 8:18).

What Events Will Transpire When the Lord Returns?

The New Testament sets forth the events that will accompany the Lord's return. These will occur in a certain order.

When the Lord Returns, He Will Raise All the Dead

First, note that the Lord taught clearly that when **any** of the dead are raised, **all** will be raised: "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). Note that He specifies good and evil persons and says that they will all "hear his voice" in the same hour. (This one passage is sufficient to utterly destroy the doctrine which says that only the righteous will be raised when a mythical "Rapture" occurs, and the unrighteous dead will not be raised until after the alleged millennial reign of Christ – 1,007 years later!)

Second, note that which will precipitate this great universal resurrection. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul provides some insight:

But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming (15:20-23).

Christ must first be resurrected (which occurred the third day after His death). **At His coming** He will raise those who belong to Him (v. 23). Paul makes the same connection between the Lord's return and the resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, a passage earlier quoted: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thes. 4:16).

Unmistakably, Paul cites the Second Coming as the grand event that will precipitate the resurrection. Most modern Premillennial adherents claim that Paul is here describing their "Rapture" claims which feature a limited Second Coming and the resurrection of none but saints. They argue as follows:

1. Paul mentions only the righteous
2. He says the righteous dead will rise “first”
3. This must mean that the unrighteous will be raised at some later time.

Both foregoing premises are true, but the conclusion is utterly false. Paul does not mention the unrighteous dead because the Thessalonians were not concerned with them. Their concerns were for their brethren alone who had died (v. 14). Apparently, they feared that the righteous dead would somehow miss the blessings Christ will bring His people at His coming. When Paul says, “the dead in Christ shall rise first,” he is not saying “first” in relation to the unrighteous dead, as Premillennialists insist, but “first” before the Lord blesses the living saints by calling them up to be with Him forever. Only then will all the saints, both living and resurrected, together be called to glory (v. 17).

In a brief digression from the subject of the resurrection, please notice that the verse under present consideration says that the saints will be **caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. This is the nearest the Lord comes to the earth upon His return in all the New Testament accounts—He does not set foot on earth but stays in the air. This destroys the Premillennial tenet that Christ will touch down on the Mount of Olives and set up a literal political Millennial Kingdom seated in Jerusalem. He can hardly reign in a physical earthly kingdom without being on earth. The Rapture devotees claim this context for their false doctrine, but it is not their friend! They like the part about the saints being caught up in the air to meet the Lord, but they fix the visit with Him at a mere seven years. However, Paul is not talking about any such temporary period, but about our going to be with Him in eternity: “And so shall we **ever** be with the Lord” (v. 17b, emph. DM). This parallels his teaching in 1 Corinthians 15. After speaking in verse 23 of the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, he states: “Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power” (v. 24). Obviously, when the Christ comes it will not be to **set up** His kingdom, to last a mere one thousand years, per Premillennialism. When He returns, He will **deliver up** to the Father His kingdom for all eternity. He has been reigning over this kingdom from Heaven ever since His ascension in the first century (Acts 2:33–36; Eph. 1:22–23; Heb. 1:1–4; et al.). That kingdom is His church (Mat. 16:18–19; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:23, 28; et al.).

As in 1 Thessalonians 4, also in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul mentions only the resurrection of the righteous dead (“they that are Christ’s,” v. 23) upon the Lord’s return. He does so because

he is writing to Christians and discussing the resurrection as it pertained to them, rather than to all men in general. It is a gross misuse of Scripture to conclude that Paul's omission of the unrighteous dead in his discussion of the resurrection is proof that these two classes will be raised separately. Jesus has already and forever settled this issue – for all who respect Him – in His statement earlier quoted from John 5:28–29. Whenever the righteous are raised, the unrighteous will also be raised. Therefore, if the righteous dead are raised at the Lord's coming, it is evident that the unrighteous dead will be raised at the same time, **whether or not both groups are specifically mentioned in the context!**

Another incidental falsification of Premillennial doctrine is seen in Paul's 1 Thessalonians description of the Lord's return cited above. As previously indicated, Charles T. Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses cult, claimed a "secret" coming of Christ (both in 1874 and 1914!), seen by only a few. The Rapture cult also teaches that the coming of Christ described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is at least limited, if not secret, known only to the righteous. However, Paul's description allows for no such idea. The Lord's coming will be accompanied by "a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." How could such be secret? In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that the resurrection will take place "at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised..." (v. 52). There is more:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10).

The "day of the Lord" in this context is the time of His coming (v. 4). Notice this will not only be accompanied by a "great noise," but by the utter dissolution of the material universe! Does this sound like a "secret" coming? There is still more: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him..." (Rev. 1:7).

The New Testament knows nothing of any "secret", "limited," "first," "second," or "third" Second Coming of our Lord, which Dispensational Premillennial theology demands. Rather, Scripture consistently describes only one return of Christ at which all the dead will be simultaneously raised so that all who have ever lived will be utterly aware of this grand event!

When the Lord Returns, He Will Change Everyone

In the context of discussing the resurrection, Paul wrote the following:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:50–53).

All human beings have mortal bodies that are subject to disease, decay, and death—“corruption.” The Heavenly state of God’s kingdom is an eternal realm where death and corruption are forbidden. Thus, for humans to inhabit Heaven (or the eternal realm of Hell, for that matter) they must somehow “put on immortality.” Obviously, only the Lord can accomplish this change. When will the Lord thus change us? In verse 52 of the passage just cited, *the dead shall be raised, and we shall be changed*, Paul distinguishes between (1) the resurrected dead (2) and those who are alive at His coming. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul wrote concerning the death of one’s physical body and its subsequent resurrection:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body....

And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (vv. 44, 49).

It is apparent from these statements, therefore, that the Lord will accomplish this *mortal-to-immortal* change in the “process” of raising the dead. Since they will have already been changed in their resurrection, *we shall be changed* can hardly refer/apply to them. Rather, this phrase only applies only to those who are alive at the Lord’s coming. These He will instantaneously change their mortal bodies into immortal ones.

Sober minds are naturally curious about this changed state. The Scriptures, however, never pander to man’s mere curiosity (a compelling argument for their inspiration, incidentally!). They tell us, according to the wisdom of Omniscient Deity, just what men need to know, not necessarily what men would like to know. The subject of our immortal state is given only sparse treatment in the New Testament.

There is a brief statement in the Philippian letter on the nature of our changed state. Paul wrote that the Lord “...shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself” (Phi. 3:21). This change will give us a body comparable to the “body of his glory,” which seems to suggest that it will be like the body our Lord was given after His resurrection and in which He was able to ascend into Heaven.⁵ A brief statement from John is almost an echo of Paul’s statement to the Philippians: “Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, **if he shall be manifested, we shall be like**

him; for we shall see him even as he is" (1 John 3:2; emph. DM). Thus far we have seen the following order of events:

1. The Lord will return.
2. All the dead will be raised, possessed of immortality.
3. All who are alive at His coming will be changed to an immortal state.

When the Lord Returns, He Will Dissolve the Material Universe

Earlier, in connection with the fact that the Lord's coming will not be secret or even limited to only certain ones, we mentioned the destruction of the universe. Now we turn our attention more fully to this New Testament doctrine. The apostle Peter sets it forth in clear, literal language:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

We remind the reader (as emphasized earlier) that there is **only one** Second Coming. This is obviously the same return "as a thief" the Lord described (Mat. 24:42-44) and Paul described (1 The. 5:2-3). Peter leaves no maneuvering room for anyone who would like to deny that all of God's material creation will be brought to nonexistence. Some might even argue that material things are indestructible – that they can only be converted to a different material state (e.g., wood that burns appears to no longer exist, but it actually is changed into smoke, gases, and ashes). If those who thus argue claim to believe in God, have they forgotten that He, through the preincarnate Word, created all material things out of nothing (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-2; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:1-2; et al.)? The same God who can make something out of nothing through His Son can just as surely make nothing out of something through Him. If Peter is not describing the utter annihilation of all material things in his statement quoted above, what further or better words could the Holy Spirit have given him by which to do so? Peter's three-fold itemization covers every ingredient of the material existence:

1. *The heavens* refers to space and all of the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies that occupy it, all of which shall "pass away with a great noise." *Pass away* is a verb form of *parerxomai*, which Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich define as "pass away, come to an end, disappear" as used in 2 Peter 3:10.⁶ Peter basically repeats verse 10 in verse 12, only he says the heavens will be "dissolved" by fire. "Dissolved" is from *luo*, meaning to break up, destroy, or tear down. This word is used "Of the parts of the universe, as it is broken up and

destroyed in the final conflagration (2 Pet. 3:10-12).⁷ Peter employs this same word in verse 12 to describe what will happen to the material elements, discussed next.

2. *The elements* is from *stoixeia*, which, depending on context, can mean elements (of learning), fundamental principles, letters of the alphabet, or heavenly bodies. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich offer the following comment: “*Elemental substances*, the basic *elements* from which everything in the natural world is made, and of which it is composed..., to disappear in the world conflagration at the end of time (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).”⁸ The means of destruction of the elements will be “fervent heat,” from *kausomena*, upon which R.H. Strachan comments as follows: “A medical term, used of the heat of fever (*kausos*). This is the only known use of the word applied to inanimate objects.... In any case it denotes a violent consuming heat.”⁹ As noted above, in verse 12 Peter says the elements will be “dissolved.”
3. *The earth and the works that are therein* refers both to the planet itself and to all the things that mankind, in his ingenuity, has been able to fashion from the earth’s base elements. Included are all the inventions, power structures, fortunes, great cities, and everything else of a material nature that men have made. All these things shall be “burned up.”¹⁰ This is but a summary of Peter’s earlier statement: “But the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (v. 7).

The implications of Peter’s statement are devastating to Premillennial theology. If what Peter teaches in the passage above is true, there is no time for a millennial reign of Christ in His “Second Coming Program.” There would be little point in warning people to be watchful and ready for His coming at any moment (as He did in Mat. 24:36-51; 25:1-13) if they were going to have a millennium to get ready **after** He comes! No! The whole idea is that there will be not be even one minute, much less one thousand years, to repent and obey the Lord when He appears. There is simply no **time** for a millennial kingdom on earth after the Lord appears. Another crucial blow to Premillennial dogma in 2 Peter 3:10-12 is that there will be no **place** for such a kingdom because the entire material universe, the earth included, will be snuffed out of existence at the Lord’s return.

No one will miss, fail to see, or be able to ignore that great and terrible Day! Imagine the sound and fury of galactic upheavals and collisions of the heavenly bodies. The heavens themselves will be on fire in the ultimate fireworks exhibit. Try to conceive of heat so intense that the very base elements of our universe melt, dissolve, disintegrate, and finally vaporize and vanish. The earth and all that men have built will cease to exist. Then, if not before, men will forget their mad striving for carnal pleasures and mere material baubles as they are all utterly destroyed. Only eternal, spiritual verities and realities will remain. Then will men understand

the teaching of the Bible that the only true and lasting treasures are those that are laid up in Heaven by faithful service to God and His Son (Mat. 6:19–21; 1 Tim. 6:9–10, 17–19).

The schedule of events of the Second Coming now includes:

1. The appearance of the Lord,
2. The resurrection of all the dead,
3. The changing of all from mortal to immortal bodies, and
4. The utter destruction of the entire material universe. There is yet one other great and grand event.¹¹

When the Lord Returns, He Will Gather All Mankind for Judgment

God, the Father, is sometimes spoken of as the One to Whom we must give a final accounting (e.g., Rom. 14:10b–12). However, numerous passages plainly declare that He will judge us through the agency of His Son. The Father thus empowered Him: “For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; ...and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man” (John 5:22, 27).

The Savior taught concerning the Judgment over which He will preside:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21–23).

Among the features of the final Judgment, we learn from this passage are that mere professed faith and/or sincerity of belief or practice will be completely inadequate in that Day. Such will only bring upon us the rigors of eternal separation from Him.

The Lord gave us a preview of this great Judgment in Matthew 25:31–46. The beginning of this passage reads:

But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats (vv. 31–32).

After telling us some of the bases of judgment, Jesus tells us that the unrighteous “shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (v. 46).

From this passage we learn that the Judgment will be universal. *All the nations* is a reference to the resurrected dead and all who will be alive when Christ returns. The Judgment will be a time of awful separations. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and

sisters, dearest friends on this earth will be parted from each other for eternity. One will have lived a life of faithfulness and devotion to God, His Son, and His Word, while the other will have rejected all the loving overtures of Heaven and of the Lord's people on earth. The Judgment will be a time of supreme joy for some, but one of unutterable dread, remorse, fear, and anguish for others. Unfortunately, most will be in the latter class, with a comparative few in the former (Mat. 7:13-14).

Paul's address to the citizens of ancient Athens includes a dramatic statement concerning the Judgment:

He [God] hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Here we learn that God has determined a time for the universal Judgment, even as He has ordained that it be executed by His Son. The warranty of this Judgment is the resurrection of Christ.

There will be no escape from the Day of Judgment, as men sometimes are able to avoid their court trials on earth:

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

Not only will we be unable to escape the appointment of the Judgment, neither shall those who can claim innocence through the cleansing blood of Christ be counted guilty, nor shall a single one who is guilty go free. The Judgment-seat of Christ will be the only tribunal where perfect justice will prevail in every case because the Judge sees all and knows all about everyone who shall stand before Him. Such are the descriptions of the Judgment ushered in by the Lord's return.

Conclusion

We now have before us the full schedule of events that will occur when the Lord returns:

1. He will return, and all shall see Him when He appears.
2. He will raise all the dead, good and evil alike.
3. He will change the mortal bodies of all humankind to immortal ones.
4. He will destroy all the material universe and its contents.
5. He will call all men before Him in the Great and Final Judgment.

Notice some things that, according to the Bible, will **not** occur when the Lord returns, but which, according to Premillennial theology will occur:

1. He will not be seen by only the righteous per the “Rapture” myth.
2. He will not raise only the saints from the dead initially, followed by non-saints later.
3. He will not call the saints up to Him in the air for seven years.
4. He will not allow the material world to continue another one thousand years.
5. He will not set foot on earth or establish a political kingdom.

We do not question the honesty or sincerity those who believe that the Lord will come again for the purpose of establishing a kingdom on earth. However, neither do we question the fact that they are deceived and deluded. To hold such a view is to invest in the “gospel of the second chance”—in fact a millennium of second chances! Premillennialism has Christ coming as a Savior when He returns, but this doctrine is contrary to His plain declaration:

I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:47-48).

Note that He came as the Savior, rather than the Judge of men, the first time, pouring out His blood as the sufficient sin-offering and calling all men to salvation who would hear, believe, and obey His Gospel (Mark 16:15-16). Said obedience more specifically includes belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and an oral confession of this belief before others (John 8:24; Mat. 10:32; Rom. 10:10). It also includes repentance of one’s sins and baptism in water for forgiveness of those past sins (Acts 2:38). One must then live in faithful service to Christ in His church (Mat. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 15:58).

The Lord’s salvation will remain available as long as He remains in Heaven. However, He makes it clear that He will come as the Judge of all men the second time, and all will be judged “in the last day” by that portion of inspired Writ under which he lived. For those who have lived since His death on the cross, the Judgment standard will be His Word, the New Testament. There will be neither time nor opportunity for sinners to be saved nor for apostate impenitent saints to repent when He appears in the clouds. For those who do not know God and have not obeyed the Gospel, there will be the awful fiery wrath of and separation from God (2 Thes. 1:7- 10). And for fallen, impenitent saints, there will be “a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire” (Heb. 10:26-27).

The admonition of Peter after his description of the destruction of the universe ought to be absolutely sobering to all men:

Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness.... Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight (2 Pet. 3:11, 14).

Endnotes

1. Premillennialism is often described as a “doctrine.” However, it is far more than merely a doctrine. It is a full-blown system of theology that, when imbibed, causes one to view and interpret the entire Bible in its peculiarly warped fashion. It basically insists that (1) the 1,000-year period (a millennium) mentioned in Rev. 20:2-7 must be literal, and (2) Christ will return before the millennium begins (thus the “pre-” syllable of “Premillennialism”). This highly figurative passage (in what is arguably the most symbol-laden book of the entire Bible) thus becomes the “tail” that “wags the dog” of an entire theological system. For a fuller definition and description of Premillennialism see the chapter elsewhere in this volume titled, “Is the Premillennial Theology Fatal Error?” by Andy McClish.
2. Generally, our brethren have historically (and Scripturally!) stood against Premillennial theology, although a few have dared through the years to advocate it as an innocent (thus non-fellowship) issue. In the past those who persisted in it were correctly marked and isolated as false teachers and, deprived of pulpits and school lecterns, and they “went out from us.” A different approach is being advocated by modern Change Agents. While not admitting they themselves hold Premillennial views, they aver that said views are of an innocent and peripheral nature in regard to fellowship and unity. ACU Professor of New Testament, Carroll D. Osborn, argues as much explicitly (*The Peaceable Kingdom* [Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993], pp. 90-91). However, a host of other liberal “luminaries” and “wanna be’s” are clearly in agreement with Osborn. Their agreement is implied by their affirmation of a “Core/Bull’s Eye” approach to fellowship and an eager and cordial fellowship with Premillennial denominationalists. A partial list of these brethren includes Rubel Shelly, Bill Love, Max Lucado, Mike Cope, Lynn Anderson, Bill Banowsky, Randy Harris, Denny Boultinghouse, Joe Beam, Calvin Warpula, Larry James, John Clayton, Jeff Walling, Steve Flatt, Royce Money, Marvin Phillips, and Jim Woodroof (See two works by Curtis A. Cates, *The “Core/Bull’s Eye Gospel” Concept Refuted* [Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1994] and “Does God Command or Authorize Religious Unity for the Sake of Unity?” *Studies in Ephesians*, ed. Dub McClish [Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1997], pp. 572-632). Present-day Premillennial sympathizers are being allowed to remain in the church and are being given major platforms for their views. Their warped view of fellowship is a tacit invitation to Premillennialism to fasten itself upon the church.
3. Misapplying the Words of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem merits a note concerning the song in many hymn books, “Jesus Is Coming Soon.” The second verse reads:

Love of so many cold, losing their home of gold,
This in God’s Word is told, evils abound.
When these signs come to pass, nearing the end at last,
It will come very fast, trumpets will sound.

Although this is exactly contrary to Jesus’ teaching, many brethren continue to have no concern about singing error which they would never consider teaching themselves nor tolerating were they taught it from the pulpit. Some may still do so in ignorance, but some continue to sing the song and defend their right to do so even after its false doctrine is exposed and explained.

4. This passage is a favorite with advocates of the “Rapture” (a principal doctrine of Dispensational Premillennialism). However, the Rapture (the word or the doctrine) is not found in Paul’s words to the Thessalonians, nor elsewhere in the Bible. Since it is not in the purview of this chapter to discuss this doctrine in detail, the reader is referred to the chapter in this book entitled “What Does the Bible Teach Concerning ‘The Rapture?’” by Don Walker.
5. If this inference is correct, it would seem to imply that we will have the same appearance and features in the changed/immortal state that we had in the mortal state, as was apparently true of the Lord (John 20:20, 27).
6. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 631.
7. Ibid., pp. 484–485.
8. Ibid., p. 776.
9. R. H. Strachan, *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980 reprint), 5:145.
10. There is a textual problem on the last word of verse 10. The ASV has a fn. as follows: “The most ancient manuscripts read *discovered*.” This is a reference to the Sinaiitic and Vatican MSS. However, it has long been understood that the appearance of a reading in these works does not necessarily mean it is the most reliable reading. This very fact caused the ASV translators to place “burned up” in the text and “discover” in the fn., instead of vice versa. Even if *discovered* is conceded to be the correct reading, it will hardly help the Jehovah’s Witnesses or anyone else who argues for a “renovated earth” on which to spend eternity.
B.C. Caffin suggests that “discovered” may “give a good sense” in light of 1 Cor. 3:13: “Each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is.” He further suggests that “the clause may be regarded as interrogative, ‘Shall the earth and the works that are therein be found?’” After these comments he concludes: “But the reading, ‘shall be burned up’ is well supported, and suits the context best” (*The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950], 22:2:68).
11. Some may think it inconsistent to aver that there will be no earth for a millennial kingdom and then affirm that the Judgment will occur after the universe is destroyed, requiring some place for this event to occur. However, the universe (at least the earth) must exist for there to be an earthly millennial reign after the return of Christ. No such requirement of a material/physical place exists concerning the Judgment. **Before** the final conflagration the Lord will have already raised all of the dead to immortality and will have fitted all of the living with immortal, spiritual bodies, as previously noticed. Only by such means, it would seem, will we be able to avoid being consumed with all other material and physical things in the consummate destruction. But someone may remind us that the Lord said He and His angels would come in glory and sit upon His glorious throne for the Judgment. True, as we have emphasized, but nowhere did He say that His **Judgment throne or the Judgment would be on earth**. Where then will it be if there is no material universe? This was apparently not necessary for us to know, for, so far as this writer has been able to learn, the Bible does not tell us, and there is certainly no other possible source for such information. As human beings we are bound by time and by physical laws of a material world. We can scarcely think in any other concepts due to the limitations of finite minds and experiences. However, we rest in the full confidence that this will not be a major problem for the Son of God Who:

1. Created our world and us
2. Has the power to raise all the dead from Adam to the time of His return,
3. Can change all mortal bodies into immortal ones, and
4. Can destroy the entire universe.

Never fear: God will furnish a suitable place for the Judgment!

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and I presented a digest of it orally at the Houston College of the Bible Lectures, hosted by the Spring, TX, Church of Christ, June 15–18, 1997. It was published in the book of the lectures, *Premillennialism*, ed. David P. Brown (Spring, TX;Bible Resource Pub.)].

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