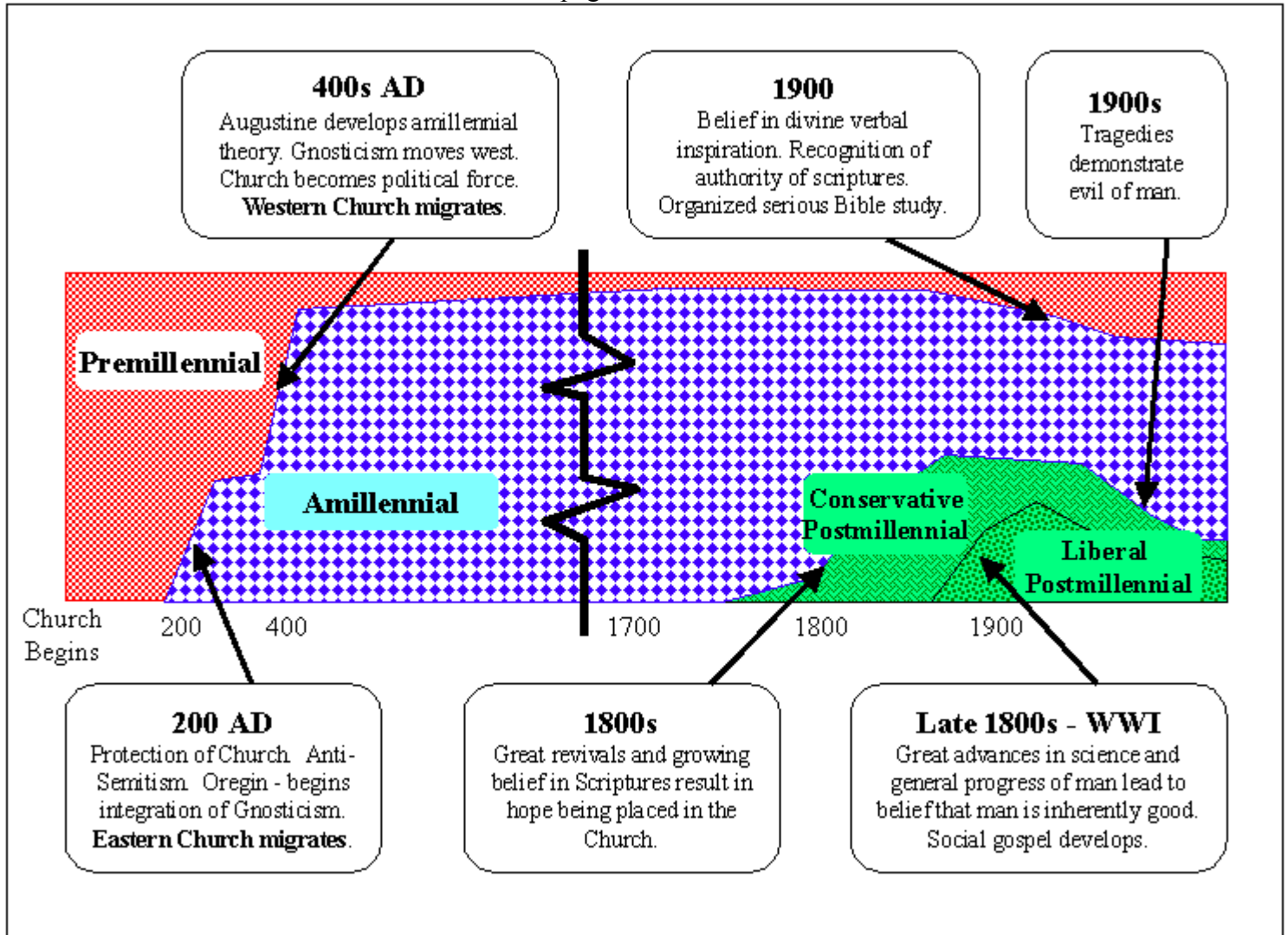


Transitions in Millennial Views

Taken from There Really Is a Difference! By Renald Showers, © 1990, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc. pages 127-144.



<p>~ 200 AD</p> <p>Eastern (Greek) Church migrates to Amillennialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montanistic Controversy (160-220 AD) - Montanists carried premillennialism beliefs to extremes and were rejected as heretics. Cast suspicion on entire premillennial view. (Guilt by association.) • Belief that Christ would crush Roman power created a source of political danger. Expedient to sacrifice the premillennial view in order to avoid more intense persecution. • Premillennial view drew attention away from organized structure and programs being developed. Thus a threat to existence and function of current churches. • Strong anti-Semitic feelings derived from "Christ-killers" attitude led to a strong bias against anything Jewish. Premillennialism was stigmatized as Jewish. • Origen (185-253 AD) and other Alexandrian scholars tried to integrate Greek philosophy (Gnosticism) into Christian doctrine. Developed idea that an earthly political kingdom with physical blessings would be an evil thing. Origen developed allegorical method of interpretation that led to rejecting political kingdom, rejecting physical resurrection, and believing in a universal salvation for all humans and fallen angels. • Church rejected Revelation, more in support of anti-premillennial views.
<p>400s AD</p> <p>Western (Latin) Church migrates to Amillennialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed in part because Revelation was never rejected. • Alexandrian theology brought west by Jerome (345-420 AD) and Ambrose. • Augustine (354-430 AD) developed Amillennialism system. Factors leading to this was Roman Empire now subservient to Church, rejection as carnal any expectation of renewed world to enjoy, and Gnosticism.
<p>1600s</p> <p>Revolt against Amillennialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New world interest in science focused attention upon material universe, clashing with Augustine's view that such was carnal. • European intellectuals became intensely interested in a literal understanding of the universe (e.g., literal measurements, literal quantities, literal calculations). Conflicted with allegorical interpretation of universe. Allegorical approach was seriously discredited when its interpretation of nature and the heavens was proven wrong by telescope. • Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches consistently remain Amillennial even to today.
<p>1700s-1800s</p> <p>Conservative Postmillennialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing belief in Scriptures to be inspired Word of God, and expectations that OT prophecies concerning future age must be fulfilled. Missions work led people to believe that spread of gospel would eventually Christianize world, bring all into subjection of that message. Thus Church will play key roll in bring in the future kingdom of God. • Jonathan Edwards (1703-58, Great Awakening) and Charles Hodge (1797-1878) led the movement that pushed the concept of America as the key part in leading the world into the Millennium. Great impetus to anti-slavery movement. Illustrated by "Battle Hymn of the Republic" which speaks of church progressing triumphantly over a sinful world.
<p>Late 1800s - early 1900s</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rooted in optimism concerning upward progress of man.

<p>Liberal Postmillennialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejected sinfulness of man and asserted that man is inherently good and perfectible. Perfection will be attained through education, improved environment, and natural process of evolution. Total confidence in man and science to correct all problems. • Rejected deity of Christ, but accepted Him as greatest human to ever live. He is example for all to follow. • Rejected substitutionary atonement, since man is not sinful by nature and does not need a substitute to pay penalty for sin. Also rejected gospel of personal redemption, but substituted social gospel (Mission of church is redemption of society from all social evils, accomplished by bringing society into conformity with ethical teachings of Christ.) Teaches universal Fatherhood of God, universal brotherhood of man, and cooperation with science, governmental, educational, charitable, labor, and other institutions of man. • Kingdom of God will be established on earth through Church and other human institutions using totally natural, humanly devised means. (Statue of Liberty was given to recognize US lead in this movement.)
<p>Late 1800s - early 1900s Revival of Premillennialism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Strong belief in divine inspiration and authority of Scriptures. Organized, systematic study of the Scriptures. • Initiated by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) who founded Plymouth Brethern (~1830) in UK. Promoted by D. L. Moody (1837-1899), J. Wilbur Chapman (1859-1918), R. A. Torrey (1856-1928), Billy Sunday (1862-1935), A. B. Simpson (1843-1919, founder of CMA), James Brooks (1830-1897), A. J. Gordon (1836-1895), C. I. Scofield (1843-1921, published Scofield Bible). • Promoted by Bible School movement (Talmage, Simpson, Moody), publications (Truth or Testimony for Christ, Our Hope, Israel My Glory, Moody Monthly, Bibliotheca Sacra), books (The Theocratic Kingdom / Peters, The Basis of the Premillennial Faith / Ryrie, The Millennial Kingdom / Walvoord, Things to Come / Pentecost), and seminaries (Dallas, Grace, Talbot, Western Conservative).
<p>1900s</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tragedies of 20th century demonstrated Postmillennialism does not fit our world. Thus return to Amillennialism. • Theonomy teaches Christians should become more militant and return to Postmillennialism ideals. • Strong non-Christian groups promote Postmillennial-type of social gospel through genetic engineering and other science. They claim that the golden age of history will not come until we admit that God is dead, reverse biblical morality, and acclaim ourselves divine.



The Dispensational Origins of Modern Premillennialism

By Jack Van Deventer

The twentieth century has seen a dramatic paradigm shift in prophetic perspectives, first away from and now back toward its historic roots. This shift away from historic Christianity stemmed from a novel approach to Bible interpretation called dispensationalism which was developed in the 1830s and popularized with the 1909 publication of the Scofield Reference Bible. Dispensationalism, with its unique brand of premillennialism, has been thoroughly pervasive, being prominent in many churches, in bookstores, and among radio Bible teachers.

The distinguishing features of dispensationalism are a rigidly applied literalism in the interpretation of Scripture, a compartmentalization of Scripture into "dispensations," and a dichotomy between Israel and the Church. Dispensationalists believe "this present world system . . . is now controlled by Satan" (not by God) and will end in failure and apostasy.

Dispensational premillennialists claim that their unique doctrines have been held since the early church, but these claims have been soundly refuted. Far from being the historic position of the church, premillennialism was described in 1813 by David Bogue as an oddity of Church history. Postmillennialism was the dominant eschatology from the Reformation until at least 1859.

The doctrine of a secret rapture was first conceived by John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren in 1827. Darby, known as the father of dispensationalism, invented the doctrine claiming there were not one, but two "second comings." This teaching was immediately challenged as unbiblical by other members of the Brethren. Samuel P. Tregelles, a noted biblical scholar, rejected Darby's new interpretation as the "height of speculative nonsense." So tenuous was Darby's rapture theory that he had lingering doubts about it as late as 1843, and possibly 1845. Another member of the Plymouth Brethren, B.W. Newton, disputed Darby's new doctrine claiming such a conclusion was only possible if one declared certain passages to be "renounced as not properly ours."

Sandeen writes, "this is precisely what Darby was prepared to do. Too traditional to admit that biblical authors might have contradicted each other, and too rationalist to admit that the prophetic maze defied penetration, Darby attempted a resolution of his exegetical dilemma by distinguishing between Scripture intended for the Church and Scripture intended for Israel. . . . Darby's difficulty was solved by assuming that the Gospels were addressed partly to Jews and partly to Christians." Thus, the doctrine of the separation of Israel and the Church, the foundation of dispensationalism, was born out of Darby's attempt to justify his newly fabricated rapture theory with the Bible.

Dispensationalists believed justification for carving up the Scriptures came from 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV) "rightly dividing the word of truth." Subsequent dispensationalists divided the Scriptures in terms of categories of people: Jew, Gentile, and Christian. Chafer taught that the only Scriptures addressed specifically to Christians were the gospel of John, Acts, and the Epistles! Pettengill taught that the Great Commission was for the Jews only.

Scofield taught that the Lord's prayer was a Jewish prayer and ought not be recited by Christians. Along with much of the New Testament, the Old Testament was described as "not for today." Ryrie dismissed the validity of the Old Testament commands to non-Jews because "the law was never given to Gentiles and is expressly done away for the Christian." Christians were even mocked as legalists for believing in the Ten Commandments! As other critics have observed, this segmentation of the Bible makes dispensationalism a Christianized version of cultural relativism.

Snowden and others traced the rise of modern premillennialism to a variety of religious splinter groups: the Plymouth Brethren (developed dispensationalism), the Millerites (became the Adventists), Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. Dispensational premillennialism was marketed the same way as the cultic groups.

First, historic Christianity was discredited by the claim that all the prominent commentaries, all the church fathers, and even the Reformers were deluded by "man-made doctrines." Second, new revelation was claimed. Darby claimed to have received "new truth" or at other times "rediscovered truth" that had been lost since the apostles. Third, enthusiasm was whipped up on the pretense that Christ's coming was imminent. Frequent false predictions did not seem to deter this enthusiasm. Snowden cited increasing prophetic fervor in the early 1900's rising from (1) a "fresh interest and zeal" in interpreting the "signs of the times," (2) the Great War (WWI) which started a wave of prophetic speculation, and (3) "the fall of Jerusalem out of Mohammedan into Christian hands [which] has whipped the millenarian imagination up to its highest pitch of foresight and prognostication." This background explains the widespread popularity of the Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909, which had a dramatic influence in spreading dispensationalism. Many well-known scholars warned that the teachings of dispensationalism were "unscriptural" (Spurgeon), "heterodox" (Dabney), "bizarre doctrine" and "grievous error" (Warfield), but the warnings went largely unheeded.

Today, dispensationalism is in a theological turmoil, having declined sharply since the 1970's because of mounting criticism. Grenz notes, "Dispensationalism today is in a state of fluidity. No longer are the rigid distinctives of the past held to with unswerving certainty. Many progressive dispensationalists are no longer certain as to exactly what are the defining tenets of the system that commands their allegiance." [Permission Graciously Given by The Foundation for Biblical Studies]

[Deism and Reason](#)

[Main Page](#)



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Modern Premillennialism Critiqued

a sane look at popular "end-times" thinking in insane times



This Page:

[The Scenario](#)

[Overview of Premillennialism](#)

[Faults of Premillennialism](#)

[Other sites detailing faults of premillennialism](#)

Other Pages:

[Millennial Madness Introduction:](#)

[The Second Coming according to Jesus](#)

[Premillennialism Critiqued](#)

[Apocalyptic Literature, the Rapture, and the Final](#)

[Judgment](#)

[The Revelation](#)

[Our True, Final Hope: Theosis](#)

The Modern Premillennialist Scenario

Some may be unfamiliar with what is now the popular view of the Second Coming. Here is a very brief recap of one of the most common scenarios:

1. The invisible Church (all true Christians) is "[raptured](#),"—instantly caught up in the air and taken to heaven. In the ensuing panic, the world becomes desperate for someone who can bring order. With hundreds of millions of folks suddenly not showing up for work, things will have become quite disorderly.
2. Without God's grace of the Church on Earth, evil becomes incredibly powerful, and God pours out judgments upon mankind (including unprecedented natural disasters and possible nuclear devastation) to urge people to trust in His infinite love. (OK, my bias is showing, but that *is* how the theory goes.)
3. That "someone" who brings order, is "The [Antichrist](#)," and he brings peace to the world for about 3½ years, probably by assuming leadership of the EU, and creating a *de facto* one-world government and one-world religion.
4. After that time, he betrays a special peace treaty made with Israel, and intensifies brutal persecutions upon everyone who will not worship him, and the prophetic stuff hits the fan harder than ever, for 3½ more years.
5. Jesus Christ comes back with the raptured Church, (a "cloud" of Christians) and begins ruling the world in true peace and harmony from Jerusalem for 1000 years. After which the world as we know it will end (The New Jerusalem).

Overview of Dispensational Premillennialism (or dispensationalism)

First, the good news: tons of books are being printed on the second coming of Christ, and people are becoming excited about his return. However, unfortunately, the overwhelming amount of "end-time prophecy" material being published and disseminated today tends to be not just unscholarly, but

slovenly and subjective. It's a product of modern dispensational premillennialism, the belief that Christ will return *physically* to rule the world for for 1000 temporal years. Since that is a "given" in the prophecy industry, not only do these books seldom identify themselves as premillennialist, but they almost never don't even describe non-premillennialist alternatives as valid interpretations for believers (even though these unmentioned positions have actually been more widely-held).

Let's back up a bit. Actually, there are many variations in beliefs about the last things: one broad description of the variety of Christian thought about the "coming" *parousia* (literally "presence") of Christ. There are: **preterist** (already fulfilled), **futurist** (yet-to-be-fulfilled), **historical** (getting fulfilled throughout history) and **spiritual** (fulfillment is largely in a spiritual manner) approaches to these prophecies.

Within the futurist camp, a broad range of descriptions come from positions regarding the "1000 years" in the book of Revelation: **pre-millennial** (1000 years is literally a period of 1000 years, to come in the future), **amillennial** (the 1000 years is symbolic, describing Christ's reign both in the past, now, and in the future), and **post-millennial** (the 1000 years refers strictly to Christ's reign already begun in the Church)

Dispensational premillennialist arguments begin generally with an unspoken assumption that anything other than a mostly futurist approach is wrong, and that anything other than the premillennialist belief in a literal 1000-year period of Christ's reign is not to be taken seriously. Thus, *whole worlds of possible insight* are never investigated, including many areas of possible overlap and much wider agreement.

For instance, would the predominate view of the [Catholic, Orthodox, and other Apostolic churches](#) be considered **preterist** because we generally hold that the Kingdom has begun, **futurist** because it is not yet fully completed, **spiritual** because Christ reigns in our hearts, or **historical** because we are moving toward its consummation? Would it be **premillennial** in that we believe the completion of the Kingdom is in the future, **amillennial** because we believe "1000 years" is likely a symbol of perfection, or **postmillennial** because we believe it has already begun in the Church?

What really sets modern premillennialism apart from the historical premillennialism of the Church Fathers is the introduction of a "seven-year Tribulation period" and a "[Rapture](#)," brought together from many various references to troubles, tribulations, great tribulation, trials, and from promises of deliverance, being "caught up" with the Lord, being "taken" by Him, throughout the Bible.

Conveniently, all the 'trouble' references are considered to be the same thing, as are all the references to deliverance. This is considered another given, so the only serious debate going on in dispensational circles is when the Rapture occurs regarding the Tribulation. Positions are known as pre-Trib, mid-Trib, post-Trib, and pre-wrath (in-between the mid- and post-Tribulation models).

Modern premillennialism, began in the 19th century when William Miller, a Baptist preacher, (see photo) began trying to make sense of [apocalyptic](#) passages in Daniel which speak of a certain numbers of days. He arrived at the conclusion that Christ would return materially in "about 1843," and eventually set the date of October 22, 1844, when thousands of his followers, dubbed "Millerites" sold their properties, and sat on mountains eagerly expecting the Lord's return. His movement eventually became the Seventh-Day Adventists.



However, the idea of puzzling out the future from mysterious numbers in the Bible caught on, and J.N. Darby, a mid-19th century Anglican priest who became one of the founders of the Brethren, is credited with creating "**Dispensationalism**," an elaborate scheme which sought to interpret all Scripture literally, and one of the prime developers of the "**Rapture/Great Tribulation/Second Coming**" paradigm which is almost as universally a "given" among the dispensationalists. Briefly, "[Rapture](#)" is the doctrine that all true Christians will be "airlifted" to Heaven instantly before a seven-year period of "Great Tribulation" occurs, in which the Antichrist takes over the world, and God sends fierce judgments upon the world. "Second Coming" in this scheme, means Jesus coming with the previously raptured believers to rule the world for 1000 years from Jerusalem. From this point on, the dispensational ideas became an inextricable part modern premillennialism, although there would begin unending debates in the premillennial camp about the future chronology of their future fulfillment.

From there, the end-time scheme spread almost as fast as American Fundamentalism. The denomination of the [Assemblies of God](#), for example, makes the Rapture (Point 15, The Blessed Hope) one of its "Sixteen Fundamental Truths," apparently not distinguished in importance from belief in Point 2, The One, True God. (The Bible is Point 1.) In the 1920s, C. I. Scofield published the first "study Bible" intended for laymen, the **Scofield Reference Bible**. It incorporated Darby's schema virtually as a sacred truth, and attempted to give apparently rational answers to every Biblical mystery. (When was the Creation? Simple. 4004 BC.) *I'm not kidding!* Dispensational premillennialism began to spread throughout the young, conservative Protestant denominations, and their missions throughout the world.

In 1970, [Hal Lindsey](#) published **The Late, Great Planet Earth** which sold millions of copies, proving that premillennialism could also be very profitable. It was so popular that it also resulted in many non-Fundamentalists who were poorly versed in traditional understandings of apocalyptic writings adopting the premillennial view; writing off mankind's problems as insoluble, and hoping for a Rapture before anything more alarming than Vietnam War protests could happen in their town. A recent twist

has been Grant R. Jeffries' jumping onto the "[Bible Codes](#)" bandwagon. (Open the link for a page which reveals the fallacies in "Codes" theory.)

Since then, an army of writers has turned "end-times prophecy" into a virtual industry, with hundreds of millions of dollars of books, radio and television shows, newsletters, and tapes being produced annually. Besides Lindsey and Jeffries, there's John Wesley White, Jack Van Impe, John F. Walvoord, Texe Marrs, Dave Hunt, Marilyn Hickey, Pat Robertson, and Charles Ryrie, to name a few. Recently, (1999) Jerry Falwell went so far as to declare the Antichrist to be a Jewish male alive on the Earth today, (he has since retracted that remark), and the sensationally popular *Left Behind* fiction series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins sells the theory wide and far.

Faults of Modern Premillennialism

Yet, in spite of the success the premillennial perspective has had in spreading around the world, its interpretations (which one usually finds in Christian bookstores on a shelves marked "Prophecy," *not* "Bible Commentaries") have a few faults, among them:

- Ignorance of [apocalyptic literature](#) and its historical significance. Apocalyptic writing was a true genre of religious writing that flourished. from about 200 BC to around 200 AD, just as science-fiction is a genre today. Apocalypses had the theme of a secret message of hope to a persecuted people, usually with visions and angels delivering messages to be written, as opposed to "the Word of the Lord" coming to a prophet directly, to be spoken.
- **Proof-texting.** Unbalanced awareness of the Bible's unity to the neglect of the fact that it also a collection of books, leads to using verses in one book to bolster one's interpretation of verses in another book, without regard that the meaning, the intended audience, and the writers' circumstances may have been centuries apart.
- **Insistence on material fulfillment.** If a prophecy in the past was not completely fulfilled *materially* in the past, then its *material* fulfillment must be in the future. Spiritual fulfillment is not allowed. This encourages the next error:
- **Inconsistent use of symbolism.** Premillennialists will insist that they take the Bible literally, but they often go *far* out of the way to decode an apocalyptic symbol—like equating the Beast from the Sea with the European Union, yet still take numbers very literally, perhaps missing their symbolic significance. *Like maybe those 1000 years? Doesn't that number just seem a little too round?*
- **Lack of historical knowledge.** Without knowledge of how a Scripture would've been interpreted originally, there is the urge to search for new interpretations. Also lack of a historical knowledge comes into play when one fails to consider the novelty of modern premillennialism, or movements in Church history, or even the pains the Church took to create, collect, and confirm the canonical New Testament Scriptures over 300 years. Generally premillennial, "end-time" interpretation is favored by new, conservative denominations and their offspring, which have little history.
- **Violating** a cardinal rule of interpretation. **It means what it meant.** The Bible's *applications* to believers, of course, will change as the centuries go on. For example, as a Christian, I apply David's song of repentance to myself (Psalm 51). Yet even when I subjectively personalize it to myself, the objective *meaning* of the Scripture doesn't change, it is still objectively *about* David. *It means now what it meant then.* Personal application does not change objective *meaning*. Premillennialists assume that the "end-time prophecies" (usually apocalypses) had little or no meaning to their addressed audiences, and so the real key is in current events now.
- **Possible indifference to Kingdom building.** A result is sometimes seen, (I repeat, *sometimes*, but too often), among premillennialists that if the world is just going to hell anyway, and they're not going to be

part of it when it gets really rough, then why care about doing anything to change the world except evangelization? When criticized for his indifference to the environment, a former Secretary of the Interior replied that since Jesus was coming again soon, what difference did it make? One of the primary messages of the Gospels is that the Kingdom has already begun in us, so we should be praying and working for the Kingdom to come, and living as stewards of the King waiting for his return.

- **Discord and Factionalism.** Both Miller and Darby ended up founding new denominations, which in turn experienced many different splits. The literalism of a premillennial mindset tends to make doctrinal agreement paramount, even on new doctrines which had been previously unknown!
- **Suspicion, fear and gossip.** The strings of people, countries, and religions under suspicion of being the Antichrist, or False Prophet is endless. This are just a few of the things I've heard: It's Russia, Israel, Libya, Iran, Iraq, America, the European Union. It's a supercomputer in Belgium, the credit-card system, bar codes. It's Khomeini, Saddam, Begin, Netanyahu, Gaddafi, Reagan, Clinton, Kohl, Schroeder. It's the Catholic Church, the Charismatic movement, the WCC, the New Age movement, Baha'i Faith, or Islam. The result of endless speculation, is endless suspicion, endless fear and endless gossip. These are "bad fruits," and these spirits can paralyze many people from experiencing and moving in love, service, fearlessness, and joy.
- **Bad scholarship and false statements.** At the website hawking his tremendously popular *Left Behind* fiction series, [Tim LaHaye](#) states that "This [the Rapture] is expected by most Christians to occur before the seven years of Tribulation..." I have no doubt that most of the Christians of Mr. LaHaye's acquaintance believe in a premillennial, "pre-Tribulation" Rapture, but he states that "most Christians" do, period. Really, Mr. Lindsey? Throughout the world? Catholic, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants of all stripes? No, most of us do not. Check out some better information on "[the Rapture.](#)"

Other sites detailing errors of modern premillennialism:

(**Disclaimer:** I do not in endorse any particular statements on these sites. They are presented here solely for their generally lucid explanations of faults in modern Premillennialism. For instance, most of these sites have little to say about any hope for change in the future, and most seem a little too sure of themselves.)

[Eschatology, anti-Dispensationalism](#)

[The End is Not Near: Bible Prophecy: Faulty assumptions](#)

[Studies in Eschatology](#)

[The Preterist Archive of Realized Eschatology](#) (massive resource)

[Looking for His Appearing](#) (fascinating and huge study on the "spiritual" approach. Recommended)

Next page: [Apocalyptic Literature, the Rapture, and the Final Judgment](#)



[Introduction](#) | [The Second Coming according to Jesus](#) | [Premillennialism Critiqued](#) | [Apocalyptic Literature, the Rapture, and the Final Judgment](#) | [The Revelation](#) | [Our True, Final Hope: Theosis](#)