

THE224 Christian Narrative 2 Redemption

Unit 6b The Reign of Christ

Presented by the



For Use by the

Blue Letter Bible Institute

[Web: Study.Bible](http://Study.Bible)

A Ministry of the

Blue Letter Bible

[Web: BlueLetterBible.org](http://BlueLetterBible.org)

Hello and welcome to Session 6B of Christian Narrative 2. Today we'll continue our discussion of the consummation of all things by discussing the reign of Christ. Our main teaching point for this session is that Scripture teaches us that when Christ does in fact return, he will reign on earth. So let's talk about the three subjects in this unit that we'll be discussing and the relationship between them. In the first session, we looked at the return of Christ and we looked at how the Bible really talks about the reality that Christ, like he ascended to heaven, will descend again, that he will in fact return. We talked about the idea that this has always been part of God's plan, that God understands and knows when Christ will return, and that the church is called to be ready, to anticipate Christ's return. When Christ returns, the Bible talks about the reign of Christ and how he will bring a kingdom with him. That's what we'll be discussing today. And then in our final session, we'll look at the judgment of Christ which will occur also in his return.

So we have these three pieces of the consummation: the return, the reign, and the judgment of Christ. Now, the timeline of these three events are related and they're significant theological canons that have been staked out based on a certain ordering and understanding of Scripture. What I'd like to do is talk about four different views on the reign of Christ. And so let's recognize something from the get-go. First of all, in a course like ours, we're not going to be able to dive into all of the nuances of end time theology. That's just too much. What we can do, however, is kind of look at some of the high level questions or high level differences that exist as we talk about creation narrative or just this whole idea of what it means to see the narrative of the Bible from beginning to end.

And so let's talk about these four positions and what they agree on. And really, remember, this is relating to the reign of Christ. And so, we often hear it called the millennial reign of Christ. Millennial or millennium simply is a word meaning a thousand years that comes to us from Scriptures that Christ tells us that his reign will be a thousand years. So here's what the four camps, amillennialism, postmillennialism, classic pre-millennialism, and pre-tribulational or dispensational pre-millennialism, here's what they all agree on. First, they all agree that there will be a resurrection and judgment of both the just and the unjust. We can read in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil." Now, we'll talk more about judgment tomorrow. Recognize these different camps may disagree on how the judgment will occur and may look at it differently, each one of them. They do all agree that both the just and the unjust, Christians and non-Christians will be resurrected and judged before God.

All of these camps will also agree that Christ's kingdom is a real thing in some way. Now, amongst themselves, they're going to vary. They're going to define Christ's kingdom differently. But they all take seriously Revelation 20, recognizing that there will be a kingdom of some sort of Christ. So we read in Revelation 20:2-5, "And he seized the (ancient) dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection." So we have this conversation about a thousand-year reign of Christ.

And each one of these positions, again, are going to hold slightly different views on these two things, but they all agree on this. There is some form of a kingdom of God that will come and the resurrection of both the just and the unjust will occur.

So let's try and take a high level view of these four positions and see if we can better understand their view of the reign of Christ. So we'll start with amillennialism. And simply, we can define this as they believe that there is no future millennium to come. Rather, they believe that it's already here. There's some key passages to each one of these that I'll share, and you're free to look over them. The key points to this particular view is that the kingdom of Christ occurs during the age of the church and that the Scriptures note only one resurrection. These are key points to this position. I'll read to you from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology because I believe he explains each one of these positions very well. Here is Grudem's description of the amillennial position.

"According to this position, the passage from Revelation 20:1-10 describes the present church age. This is an age in which Satan's influence over the nations has been greatly reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world. Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years are Christians who have died and are already reigning with Christ in heaven. Christ's reign in the millennium, according to this view, is not a bodily reign here on earth but rather a heavenly reign he spoke of when he said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' in Matthew 28:18. This view is called amillennial because it maintains that there is no future millennium yet to come. Since amillennialists believe that Revelation 20 is now being fulfilled in the church age, they hold that the millennium described there is currently happening. The exact duration of the church age cannot be known, and the expression 'thousand years' is simply a figure of speech for a long period of time in which God's perfect purposes will be accomplished. According to this position, the present church age will continue until the time of Christ's return. When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. The body of believers will rise to be reunited with their spirits and enter into the full enjoyment of heaven forever. Unbelievers will be raised to face the final judgment and eternal condemnation. Believers will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ, but this judgment will only determine the degrees of reward in heaven, for only unbelievers will be condemned eternally. And at this time, also the new heavens and new earth will begin. Immediately after the final judgment, the eternal state will commence and continue forever."

So again, this is the description of the amillennial position. So when we look at the order of events, and you heard me describing it as we read Grudem, here is kind of the order of events that will occur. First, we are currently living in the millennial reign of Christ. We take that from Revelation 20:1-10. And simultaneously, those who were reigning with Christ are those that have died and have already been taken to heaven. At some undetermined point in the future, Christ will return. And when he returns, the resurrection and judgment of both the just and the unjust will occur. In many ways, the amillennial position is the most simple. And again, I'm going to try and avoid making too many judgment calls about which one you'll want to hold on to. I would encourage you to look through the passages. I will offer my final opinion at the end, but again, you're really going to have to wrestle with which position makes most sense to you according to your faith tradition. At this point, what we want to do is kind of lay out the four main ideas and give you the right information to be able to make some decisions.

The next view about the reign of Christ is called postmillennialism. We can define this as Christ returning after the millennium. The progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will grow until the whole

world believes. And the key points for this particular position is that the church age and the millennium are different, but one will gradually lead to the other. They also argue that the Scriptures note only one resurrection. Some of the key passages for this particular view are Matthew 13 and Matthew 28. Again, I'll read to you from Grudem as he describes the postmillennial position. "The prefix post means after. So according to this view, Christ will return after the millennium. Accordingly, this view argues that the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase, so that a larger and larger proportion of the world's population will be Christians. As a result, there will be a significant Christian influence on society. Society will be more and more functioning according to God's standards, and gradually, a millennial age of peace and righteousness will occur in the earth. This millennium will last for a long period of time, not necessarily a literal 1000 years. And finally, at the end of this period, Christ will return to earth. Believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will occur, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. We will then enter the eternal state. The primary characteristic of the postmillennial is that they are very optimistic about the power of the gospel to change lives and bring about much good in the world. Belief in postmillennialism tends to increase in times when the church is experiencing great revival and when there's an absence of war and international conflict and when it appears that great progress is being made at overcoming evil and suffering in the world. But postmillennialism, in its most responsible form, is not based simply on the observation of events in the world around us, but on the arguments from the various Scripture passages which are suggested above."

So again, the postmillennial position argues that the gospel will take hold in the world and grow and grow and grow until it ushers in an age of peace and righteousness. And so, the change from the church age to the millennial reign of Christ will not be vivid and stark, but rather, it will be gradual and will transition from one into the other. So, if we look at the order of events according to the postmillennial view, we first understand that we are in the church age. And second, we see that the earth will ease finally into the millennium. At the end of the millennium, Christ will return. And when Christ returns, the resurrection and judgment of both the just and the unjust will occur.

Now let's turn our attention to classic pre-millennialism. We're going to talk about two forms of pre-millennialism, and they're going to share much in common. The classic form of pre-millennialism and the dispensational form of pre-millennialism are the two that we'll discuss. And we'll try and highlight the differences between the two, but recognize that they do share much in common. Defined, it simply is that Christ will come back, he will return prior to the millennium. There's key passages and there's a number of them, both from the Old Testament and the New Testament. And here are some of the key points for this position. There are passages this position argues that describe neither the current age nor the eternal age, but an age in between which must be the millennial kingdom of Christ. Furthermore, this position argues that there are passages that discuss the future earthly reign of Jesus Christ. And this position also argues that believers will in fact rule with Christ in this kingdom.

Again, we turn to Grudem for a good description of the classic pre-millennial position. "The prefix pre means before, and the pre-millennial position says that Christ will come back before the millennium. This viewpoint has a long history from the earliest centuries onward." In other words, it's one of the oldest positions. "According to this viewpoint, the present church age will continue as it nears the end and will experience a time of great tribulation and suffering that will come upon the earth. After that time of tribulation, at the end of the church age, Christ will return to the earth to establish a millennial kingdom. When he comes back, believers who have died will be raised from the dead, their bodies will

be reunited with their spirits, and these believers will reign with Christ on earth for 1000 years. During this time, Christ will be physically present on the earth in his resurrected body and will reign as king over the entire earth. The believers who have been raised from the dead and those who are on earth when Christ returns will receive glorified resurrection bodies that will never die. And in these resurrected bodies, they will live on the earth and reign with Christ. Of the unbelievers who remain on earth, many but not all will turn to Christ and be saved. Jesus will reign in perfect righteousness and there will be peace throughout the earth. Many pre-millennialists hold that the earth will be renewed and we will in fact see the new heavens and the new earth at this time. But this is not an essential pre-millennialist position. At the beginning of this time, Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit so that there will be no influence on the earth during the millennium from him. Now, according to the pre-millennial viewpoint, at the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit, will join forces with many unbelievers who have submitted outwardly to Christ's reign but have inwardly been seething and rebelling against him. Satan will gather these rebellious people for battle against Christ, but they will be decisively defeated. Christ will then raise from the dead all of the unbelievers who have died throughout history and they will stand before him for final judgment. After the final judgment has occurred, believers will enter into the eternal state."

So here's kind of the basic description of the classic pre-millennial position. If we take a look at the order of events, they lay out as such. First, we are in the church age. At the end of the church age, the church will experience a great tribulation. At the end of the tribulation, Christ will return. Now, this brings us to the resurrection of the just, and then the millennial reign of Christ, and finally the resurrection and judgment of the unjust. This position is a little bit more complex than the first two, but it is also one of the oldest positions held. In fact, of the four positions, it has been held the longest. That doesn't necessarily mean anything, but when we look into the past, this is one that has been argued since very early in Christianity. So classic pre-millennialism.

Now, we need to differentiate between classic pre-millennialism and pre-tribulational or dispensational pre-millennialism. Again, this one can be defined as that Christ will come back before the millennial reign, but here a distinction is made that not only will Christ return before the millennium, He will also return before the tribulation. There are many key passages, much of them the same as the classic pre-millennial position in that this is a position that shares much in common with classic pre-millennialism. So we see another key point. Similar to classic pre-millennialism, with the understanding that this position, dispensational pre-millennialism or pre-tribulational pre-millennialism, distinguishes that Christ will return prior to the great tribulation. And this position sees two distinctive judgments within Scripture: one for the just and one for the unjust.

We turn once again to Grudem for a description of pre-tribulational or dispensational pre-millennialism. "Another variety of pre-millennialism that has gained widespread popularity in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, is pre-tribulational pre-millennialism. According to this position, Christ will not only return before the millennium, but also, his return will occur before the great tribulation. This position is similar to classic pre-millennialism, as mentioned earlier, but with one important difference: It will add another return of Christ before his return to reign on earth in the millennium. This return is thought to be a secret return of Christ to take believers out of the world. The pre-tribulational pre-millennial view can be understood in this way. The church will continue until the sudden, unexpectedly, and secretly return of Christ in which when he returns to Christ, he will call believers to himself. This comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. 'The dead in

Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.' Christ will then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth. What then happens is that there will be a great tribulation on the earth for a period of about seven years. During the seven-year period of tribulation, many of the signs that were predicted to precede Christ's return will be fulfilled. The great ingathering of the fullness of the Jewish people will occur and they trust Christ is their messiah. In the midst of great suffering, there will also be much effective evangelism especially carried out by the new Jewish Christians. At the end of the tribulation, Christ will then come back with the saints to reign on earth for 1000 years. After this millennial period, there will be a rebellion resulting in a final defeat of Satan and his forces, and then will come the resurrection of unbelievers, the last judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state."

"One further characteristic of pre-tribulational pre-millennialism should be mentioned. This view is found almost exclusively among dispensationalists who wish to maintain a clear distinction between the church and Israel. This pre-tribulational viewpoint allows the distinction to be maintained since the church is taken out of the world before the widespread conversion of the Jewish people. These Jewish people therefore remain a distinct group from the church. Another characteristic of pre-tribulational pre-millennialism is that its insistence is on interpreting biblical prophecies as literally whenever possible. This especially applies to prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Israel. Those who hold this view argue that those prophecies of God's future blessing to Israel will yet be fulfilled among the Jewish people themselves. They are not to be spiritualized by finding their fulfillment in the church. Finally, one attractive feature about pre-tribulational pre-millennialism is that it allows people to insist that Christ's return could occur at any moment and therefore does justice to the full force of passages that encourage us to be ready for Christ's return while it still allows for a very literal fulfillment of these signs preceding Christ's return since it says that these will come to pass during the tribulation." So here we have a great description, and I hope for you a good differentiation between classic pre-millennialism and pre-tribulational or dispensational pre-millennialism.

So let's take a quick look at the order of pre-tribulational or dispensational pre-millennialism. First, we are in the age of the church. Second, the first return of Christ will come to rapture the just. Then comes the tribulation. Then we see the second return of Christ with his believers. Then we enter the millennial reign of Christ. And finally, there will be a resurrection and judgment of unbelievers. Now, we've done a lot of talking in this session about these four views. Again, let me stress, however, that while there are differences among the four, they all hold to the fact that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust for judgment before God, the just for their works and reward, the unjust for the penalty for their rejection of Christ. And they all agree to some extent that God's kingdom will come, that Christ's kingdom will occur. Now, it occurs very differently among some of them. Many great godly people hold these positions and hold different positions among themselves. The goal for us is to argue which one best interprets the Scripture to a place where we feel comfortable. Most evangelicals, not all, most evangelicals will fall into classic pre-millennialism or pre-tribulational pre-millennialism as it seems to offer the most scriptural defense and the most literal approach to understanding Scripture.

However, as I said at the beginning, I want to make you aware of the positions in this session rather than try and argue one position over the other. As students of the word of God, it is our responsibility to look faithfully to the text, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, interpret the Scriptures as best as possible. I hope that this has been an encouragement to you as you seek to understand again our main teaching

point, which is that the Scriptures teach us that when Christ returns, he will reign on earth. Again, reminding you of the order, we see first that Christ will return, then he will reign, and as we'll look at in our final session in this unit, he will then judge.