

The Importance of Premillennialism

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What is Premillennialism?

Premillennialism is the belief that Jesus Christ will physically return to earth (Zechariah 14:3; Acts 1:11) to set up a throne in Jerusalem (Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 2:2-4; 1 Chronicles 17:14; Matthew 19:28; 25:31), and reign over the whole earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6). The main reason to accept premillennialism is because the Bible explicitly teaches it. This can be seen from simply comparing three verses in the Book of the Revelation: Revelation 5:10: “Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will *reign* upon the earth,” Revelation 11:15: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever,” and Revelation 20:6: “they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” Revelation 5:8 identifies the “priests of God” of verse 10 who will reign on the earth as “saints,” and Revelation 5:9 elaborates that they are saints whom Christ “didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Revelation 11:15 then affirms that “the kingdom of the world” (Daniel 2:35, 39, 44; 7:13-14, 27) is where Christ will reign and Revelation 20:6 confirms that He will reign with these “priests of God” for a thousand years. Applying simple deductive logic to these texts results in only one conclusion: the saints, who will be priests of God, will reign with Christ on earth for thousand years. For these texts to be literally fulfilled, Christ must come before (pre-) the thousand years (millennium) in order to establish His kingdom rule on the earth.

There is a rather disturbing trend today to discount the importance of having a set view on prophecy – or dealing with prophecy at all – but God made prophecy one-third of His Bible and every student of the Bible who follows God’s storyline must include the timing for these events from Creation to the crown. Since there is a definite sequential order for these prophetic events, if one wants to understand the final events of the timeline one must decide on an interpretive position to do so. Shouldn’t it matter how and when and where Christ will return? Shouldn’t a proper understanding of this affect our spiritual lives? Andrew Woods insists that ignorance or confusion in one’s prophetic views has real-world implications for one’s theology and the life of the church, altering its divine purpose and affecting its mission through the promotion of a “kingdom program” that includes a social gospel, humanitarian programs and even ecumenical religious affiliations.¹ However, there are many other important reasons why the biblical teaching of the premillennial return of Christ is important.

¹ Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016), 341-47.

1. Premillennialism employs a consistent literal interpretation of prophecy.

In considering a prophetic view, it is important to adopt a position that most consistently follows the literal historical-grammatical interpretation of the Bible. Premillennialism is based on this hermeneutical (interpretive) method that respects the text of Scripture as being written to a non-technical society who were expected to understand and accept normal human words as God's own Word.² Since Scripture connects events of history and prophecy together, a literal interpretation allows the hearer/reader to connect events from Creation to consummation as events experienced in this world and to connect messianic prophecies from prediction to fulfillment in order to prepare for and receive the Messiah in history (Luke 19:43-44; 21:24c-31; John 1:45). For both Israel, and the nations, the prophecies of judgment need to be literally understood as real warnings of historical disasters and invasions (Isaiah 13-23; 34:2; Jeremiah 46-51). If these prophecies of judgment against Israel (and the nations) were accepted as literal warnings, then the prophecies of restoration that are joined with them (e.g. Ezekiel 36:1-20, 21-38) should be accepted as a future Land-based hope. If the biblical text, and the prophetic texts in particular, were to be understood as a non-literal (spiritualized) way, the hearer/reader could apply them based on their individual understanding rather than in the straightforward way God intended. If this method were applied to biblical accounts such as the Creation, Adam and the Fall then the historicity of these events could be denied. And if the events at the beginning of history could be denied as literally fulfilled, so could those at the end of history. As Kenneth Kantzer once observed "If you adopt a hermeneutic that will exclude a millennium from the Bible, you can just as easily drop the bodily resurrection of Christ out of the Bible."³ However, it is difficult to understand how prophetic promises of restoration such as the former enemy nations of Israel bowing before this people, serving them, learning from them and worshipping with them (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10-12; 60:3,10-14; 61:5-6, 19; 66:18-21; Zechariah 14:16-19). This predicted portrayal of the recognition of Israel's uniquely blessed status (Zechariah 8:13, 21-23) could not be spiritualized and applied to the Church since in this age both Jew and Gentile are on an equal status as "one new man" (Ephesians 2:11-22). Only in the Millennium when there is a reversal of Israel's fortunes (Isaiah 62:4; Jeremiah 31:10-14; Hosea 2:23) could this be realized.

2. Premillennialism guarantees the fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants made to national Israel.

In keeping with the Premillennialism's method of consistent historical grammatical interpretation, the "covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12), the Biblical Covenants (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, New) that demonstrate God's working in history through a Chosen People find an ultimate fulfillment with national Israel. Only Premillennialism guarantees that promise and fulfillment for national Israel's is with the same people (Jews) in the same place (the Land of Israel) and on the same terms (physical and spiritual

² For a discussion of this in relation to Premillennial interpretation see John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 4-6.

³ Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, eds. *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 9.

restoration). Without a Millennium God would break an unconditional Land promise to Abraham (Genesis 13:15-17; 15:18-21; 17:8) and an unconditional throne promise to David (2 Samuel 7:10-13; Psalm 89:34-37). With a Millennium national Israel is returned to their Land forever (Ezekiel 37:25) and King David or David's greater son, Messiah, will continue the eternal throne promise (Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24). This fulfillment occurs in the Millennium after the return of Christ when a regenerate national Israel comes under the provisions of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 33:14-26). Any other view violates the literal fulfillment of these covenants by applying them to the Church and thereby denying God's future plan for Israel at the time of its national repentance (Acts 3:19-21). Since God must be faithful to fulfill His everlasting covenants (Numbers 23:19; Jeremiah 31:34-37; Lamentations 3:21-24; Hebrews 6:13-18), has pledged to do this with Abraham's descendants despite their sin (Exodus 6:4; Leviticus 26:44-45; Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Jeremiah 30:11; Hosea 6:7-11), and has not fulfilled these covenants for national Israel in any time past or present (Isaiah 60:15; 62:4; Romans 9:4), this must take place within the time of Christ's coming Kingdom (Jeremiah 30:24-31:1; Hosea 3:4-5). Christ Himself stated that this would be fulfilled in the "Regeneration" (a term for the Millennium) "when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne" (Matthew 19:28) and the Apostles understood it had not yet happened in their day (Acts 1:6; 3:19-21; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4). Therefore, the unconditional and everlasting nature of the covenants to national Israel have not yet been literally fulfilled and cannot be without the premillennial return and perpetual reign of Christ and Israel's national restoration. As Michael Vlach notes "Does He fulfill them [the promises to Israel] by having them spiritually absorbed into Himself? Or does He fulfill them by being the One through whom the literal fulfillment of God's promises comes true? The latter is the better option."⁴

3. Premillennialism proves there will be a victorious climax to history's conflict between Christ and Satan.

History began in this world in a literal Paradise with a specific geographical location (Genesis 2:8-15). God was present on earth and had personal fellowship with mankind (Genesis 2:15-22; 3:8-9). This was disrupted by the Fall, resulting from the Satan's deception (Genesis 3:1-5). However, in God's judgment on the serpent as the instrument of deception (Genesis 3:13), God revealed that a conflict would henceforth exist between mankind and Satan, but particularly between Satan the woman's "seed," the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). The man and woman were expelled from Paradise never to return (Genesis 3:24). From this experience and that of mankind's ongoing conflict it would seem that Satan won, bringing mankind into the captivity of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14). If a literal Paradise is not restored, then God appears to have lost the earth and its creatures He made to rule as their Creator and Lord (Romans 8:20; Hebrews 2:8). A theocratic kingdom (direct rule by God) was established by God in the Garden and the goal of His prophetic program is its resumption in a restored Creation (Romans 8:20-23) and the LORD as "king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9; cf. Psalm 2:6; Revelation 19:15-16).⁵

⁴ Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017), 562.

⁵ For a full discussion of this concept see Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 7-10.

Only a restoration of this world, reversing the curse and reestablishing God's direct rule over mankind and nature will satisfy this theological dilemma. As Charles Ryrie explains "Why does there need to be an earthly kingdom? Because He must be triumphant *in the same arena* where His was seemingly defeated. His rejection by the rulers of this world was on this earth (1 Cor. 2:8). His exaltation must also be on this earth."⁶ 2,000 years of evangelization by the Church has not led to a global recognition of Jesus Christ. The only time in history in which Christ can be glorified in this world by this world is after His Second Coming but before the end of history that results and ushers in the Eternal State with its creation of a new earth.⁷ The Millennium, then, brings a necessary climax to history and fulfills what the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 predicted - the final conquest of conflict and the Evil One by the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His earthly kingdom (Isaiah 2:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 19:11-20:3). However, Genesis 1:26-28 also revealed that God created man to representatively rule over this earth, but his rule was ruined by sin and Satan assumed dominion (Matthew 4:8-9). Satan's dominion continues in this age (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19) so if God's plan is to have a proper conclusion to history where "all things [are] in subjection under His (Christ's) feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 2:8), Christ must return to "abolish all [earthly] dominion, authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24b) by establishing His kingdom rule on earth (Psalm 110:1-2). Only the Millennial Kingdom can fulfill this and only then Christ "delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24a).

4. Premillennialism promises universal peace on earth with Christ's Millennial reign.

It should be obvious that despite believer's having "peace with God" (Romans 5:1) and having the "peace of God" (Philippians 4:7, 9), there is no peace on earth. However, this was distinctly prophesied in the Old Testament, not only in terms of Israel and Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6; Micah 4:4, 7-8) but in terms of a restored harmony among Israel and the nations (Isaiah 2:2-4/Micah 4:2-3) and within nature itself (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25). The Bible calls for nothing less than a transformation of the nature of mankind and animal life so that the old order of existence that brought fear, hatred, rivalry, hostility, violence and war is removed and only a true and lasting peace prevails. The United Nations sports a statue of a man beating his sword into a plowshare based on the prediction in Isaiah 2:4 that one day nations would no longer learn or wage war again, implying that this idealism could be effected by a league of nations. However, all human efforts to prevent war and produce peace have failed and society's longing for "world peace" is but an unattainable humanistic dream. Premillennialism teaches that Satan is not bound during the Church Age but is "a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8), that believers are engaged in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-12) and that the world is become increasingly more wicked until the return of Christ, culminating in a Great Tribulation (Isaiah 24:1-22; Matthew 24:21-22) characterized by "peace being taken from the earth" (Revelation 6:2) and God's wrath being poured out on mankind (Revelation 6:16; 11:18). Only with the return of the Prince of peace to this

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1999), 511.

⁷ See for a discussion Michael Vlach, *Premillennialism: Why There Must Be a Future Earthly Kingdom of Jesus* (Los Angeles, CA: Theological Studies Press, 2015), 69-85.

world will Satan defeated (Revelation 12:9; 20:2, 10), the curse ended (Revelation 22:3) and universal peace and righteousness established in this world (Isaiah 26:3, 9). This peace will be evident to the world as Israel and Gentile nations come together to worship the LORD (Isaiah 2:3; 11:12, 16; 19:16-25; 27:15; 66:18-21). Thus, the peace which has been promised can only be accomplished by the Premillennial coming of Christ.

Conclusion

As Matt Waymeyer advises “To formulate a thoroughly biblical eschatology, one must allow every passage of Scripture to make its own contribution to the doctrine of last things, including the millennium.”⁸ If biblical students started with the Old Testament and allowed it to guide them as divine revelation progressed into the New Testament, reading each prophetic text related to Israel’s restoration as literally as they do those related to its judgment and understood that Jesus came as Israel’s Messiah “to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (Romans 9:5) and that the national rejection of Jesus only postponed the fulfillment of the unconditional covenants until His return and with it Israel’s salvation (Romans 11:26-27), including its national repentance (Zechariah 12:10-13:1) and regeneration (Ezekiel 36:25-27), they could not avoid seeing the promise of the Millennial Kingdom as an essential part of Israel’s history and the New Testament’s continued expectation (Acts 1:6-7; Romans 11:12, 15; 2 Timothy 4:1; James 2:5).

Premillennialism teaches that Jesus’ Second Coming will end the Tribulation, delivering the righteous (Zechariah 12:7-9; 14:3-5; Mathew 25:31-40; Luke 21:28) and judging the unrighteous (Matthew 25:41-46a; Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 5:21). The righteous (both Jews and Gentiles) will enter the Millennium Kingdom to enjoy the blessings of the New Covenant, with the Gentile nations worshipping alongside a restored Nation of Israel in a world freed from the curse under the peaceful reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Christians who understand the importance of premillennialism pray “*Thy kingdom come. Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10).

⁸ Matt Waymeyer, *Amillennialism and the Age to Come: A Premillennial Critique of the Two-Age Model* (Kress Biblical Resources, 2016), 301.