

Examining Premillennialism

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Premillennialism, the doctrine that Christ will soon return to set up an earthly kingdom for 1000 years, is a popular idea these days. In this month's Feature, Wayne Jackson examines this theory.

A flood of paper-back books, advocating the theory of premillennialism, has invaded the religious market in recent years. One of the first widely-popular efforts was titled, **The Late Great Planet Earth**, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). It was authored by Hal Lindsey, a graduate of the School of Theology at the Dallas Theological Seminary.

The thrust of Lindsey's book is two-fold. First, it espouses the premillennial theory of Christ's second coming. Second, it interprets present world political trends as signs of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. A more recent production, advocating the same general theory, is the fictional **Left Behind** series. The popularity of this effort has enabled the originators to develop a parallel film series as well. No doubt, there is great interest in the religious world of "end times" events.

The Issue Defined

The premillennial concept is the result of literalizing a few symbolic verses in the book of Revelation, coupled with a considerable disregard for scores of Bible passages of clearest import. The word "premillennial" itself is derived of two components: "Pre" signifies *before*, and, "millennium" denotes a period of *1,000 years*. The theory thus suggests that Christ will return to the earth *just prior to a 1,000 year reign*.

The premillennial theory is advanced in several different ways. It is, therefore, not an easy task to generalize regarding this system of doctrine. We will focus mainly on that branch of millennialism that is known as dispensational premillennialism. The following quotations are introduced to bring some of the main points into focus:

"It is held that the Old Testament prophets predicted the re-establishment of David's kingdom and that Christ himself intended to bring this about. It is alleged however, that because the Jews refused his person and work he postponed the establishment of his kingdom until the time of his return. Meanwhile, it is argued, the Lord gathered together 'the church' as a kind of interim measure" (Ernest F. Kevan, **Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology**, E.F. Harrison, G.W. Bromiley, C.F. Henry, Eds., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999, p. 352).

"Generally, premillennialists believe that shortly before the second coming the world will be marked by extraordinary tribulation and evil and the appearance of the Anti-Christ. At his coming, Christ will destroy this anti-Christ and believers will be raised from the dead. There will then follow a millennium of peace and order over which Christ will reign with his saints. At the close of this time, Satan will be loosed and the forces of evil will once again be rampant. The wicked will then be raised, and a final judgment will take place in which Satan and all evil ones will be consigned to eternal punishment" (Van A. Harvey, **A Handbook of Theological Terms**, New York: Macmillan, 1964 p. 151).

"For centuries the Jews have been scattered among many nations. In preparation for the return of Christ and the beginning of the millennium, they are being gathered back to their own land, according to prophecy, in a national restoration. David's throne will be re-established at Jerusalem, and through these restored people as a nucleus Christ will reign with his immortal saints over the whole world" (James A. Nichols, Jr., **Christian Doctrine - A Presentation of Biblical Theology**, Nutley, NJ: Craig, p. 279).

To summarize, the premillennial view asserts that Christ came to this earth for the purpose of setting up his kingdom. He was, however, surprisingly rejected by the Jews. Hence, he postponed the kingdom plans, and set up the church instead – as sort of an emergency measure. When he returns, he allegedly

will raise only the righteous dead, restore national Israel, sit upon David's literal throne in Jerusalem, and then reign for a span of 1,000 years – after which comes the resurrection of the wicked and the judgment. One of the primary fallacies of the premillennial concept is a *materialistic* view of the reign of Christ. This same notion was entertained by the ancient Jews, and actually, was responsible for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. The fact is, this mistaken Jewish expectation of a literal, material kingdom spawned the millennial doctrine that was taught in the early post-apostolic age. As one historian observed:

“The idea of a millennial reign proceeded from Judaism, for among the Jews the representation was current, that the Messiah would reign a thousand years on earth, and then bring to a close the present terrestrial System. This calculation was arrived at, by a literal interpretation of Psalm 90:4, ‘A thousand years are in thy sight as one day.’ It was further argued that as the World was created in six days, so it would last six thousand years, the seventh thousand would be a period of repose, a sabbath on Earth to be followed by the destruction of the World” (Augustus Neander, **History of Christian Dogmas**, London: Bohn, 1858, Vol. I, p. 248).

The necessary implications of the premillennial doctrine are grave indeed. This teaching strikes treacherously at numerous facets of Biblical truth. Let us consider some of these crucial matters.

Christ's Rejection by the Jews

The premillennial view implies that the Jewish rejection of Christ was an unexpected miscarriage in the plans of God. Whereas, the truth is, His rejection was plainly foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah had prophetically asked:

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” (Isa. 53:1).

In the New Testament, when describing the rebellion of the Jews, John wrote:

“But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him: that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Jn. 12:37,38).

Again, it was prophesied:

“The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner” (Psa. 118:22; cf. Mt. 21:33-46).

Having been foretold centuries before, the Jewish rejection of Christ was no surprise.

Implications Regarding the Kingdom

Nothing in the Scriptures is any clearer than the fact that the kingdom of God was established shortly after the death of Christ. Note the following:

1. The prophet Daniel declared: “And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . .” (Dan. 2:44). The “kings” of the prophecy were Roman kings (the fourth part of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream - Dan. 2:31ff). The Roman empire came into dominance in 63 B.C., and it fell in A.D. 476, hence, it follows that the kingdom of God was established at some point between those two dates – or else Daniel was a false prophet! There is no evidence that the Roman empire will be revived to accommodate Daniel's prediction.

The assertion that the kingdom was *not* set up in the first century, but is yet to come, strikes at the very heart of the inspiration of the prophets.

2. John the Baptizer, Jesus himself, and the twelve disciples all preached that the kingdom was “at hand,” literally meaning “is come near” (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; cf. Lk. 21:30 for the meaning of “at hand”). Thus, they preached the nearness of the kingdom of God, and such can scarcely be harmonized with the notion that it hasn't come. While it is true that the expression “at hand” can be used prophetically of that which is yet in the distant future, other contextual considerations – either immediate or remote – must indicate that

fact. The term is used figuratively in James 5:8 to reflect an intense “expectation” – regardless of the time factor.

3. Christ exclaimed, “Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power” (Mk. 9:1). Either the kingdom came within the lifetime of those to whom he referred, or they are getting very old! Observe, please: Jesus promised that the kingdom would come with power (Mk. 9: 1). But that power would accompany the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Thus, the kingdom would come with the arrival of the Spirit. But the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost – some 50 days after Christ’s death (Acts 2:4). Therefore, the kingdom was established at that time.
4. On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached the inaugural discourse and thereby used one of “the keys of the kingdom” (Mt. 16:19), to admit the obedient into the church. If Peter used the kingdom’s key to open the church, when they were not the same institution, he stands convicted of burglarizing the church of the Lord!
5. Shortly before his death, the Savior promised his disciples, “. . . ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom . . .” (Lk. 22:30). The Lord’s table was placed within the kingdom. If one can find disciples partaking of that table, it will be a demonstration of the kingdom’s existence. When Paul wrote to “the church . . . at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2), he rebuked them for their perversion in partaking of the “table of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:21); it thus is evident that the Corinthian Christians were in the kingdom.
6. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he affirmed that God “delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love . . .” (1:13). The term “translated” (*methistemi*) means to “remove from one place to another” (Arndt & Gingrich, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967, p. 500). The tense of the verb reveals that their entrance into the kingdom had already occurred at some point in the past.
7. When John wrote to “the seven churches that are in Asia,” (Rev. 1:4), he stated that Christ had loosed them from their sins by his blood and made them “to be a kingdom” (1:6). Further, he was a *with them* in that kingdom (1:9).

How could such have been, if the kingdom had been postponed?

8. The existence of God’s kingdom on earth is further demonstrated by the fact that the same process which moves one into the kingdom also puts him into the church. Jesus taught that the “new birth,” consisting of being born of “water and the Spirit,” enables one to “enter the kingdom” (Jn. 3:5). This is simply receiving the Spirit’s message (the gospel), and being baptized in water – the very thing which puts one into the “one body” (1 Cor. 12:13), which is “the church” (Col. 1:18). Hence, to enter the church, is equal to becoming a citizen of the kingdom.

The doctrine that the kingdom was postponed because of the Jews’ rejection of Christ is not in harmony with the Scriptures.

Implications Regarding the Church

The claim that the church was set up as an “interim measure” due to Christ’s postponement of the kingdom, actually suggests the idea that the church is but an accident which was no part of God’s original plan.

One could scarcely exaggerate the error in this proposition. The Bible clearly teaches that “the manifold wisdom of God” is made known “through the church,” and this was “according to the eternal purpose [plan] which he purposed in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 3:10-11) Hence, the church was in God’s plan from *eternity*.

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Further, the death of Christ was known before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19-20; Rev. 13:8), and the shed blood of that death “purchased the church” (Acts 20:28). If the death of Christ was known for ages, it is certain that the *result* of that death was known as well – namely, the establishment of the church.

Actually, the church is simply a body of baptized believers who have been saved from their past sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13). The church is the saved! (Eph. 5:23). If the church is but an accident, that implies an accidental salvation!

That the church was a part of God’s original plan for human redemption is further seen in the “types” of the Mosaic age. The tabernacle (specifically the holy place), and subsequently the temple, were *types* of the church (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21; Heb. 9:9). These Old Testament symbols pictured the church’s future establishment, and its integral part in the plan of Jehovah.

God’s Promise to Abraham

The doctrine of premillennialism asserts that God *unconditionally* promised Canaan to the descendants of Abraham. Further, it is contended that the promise has never been completely granted, hence, the claim is made that the Jews eventually will be restored to Palestine in order that the Abrahamic covenant might be fulfilled. Indeed, some are declaring that, with the establishment of Israel as an independent government in 1948, the Jewish restoration was begun, and this is a signal of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Again, we must kindly note that this notion is not consistent with biblical teaching. Concerning Canaan, Jehovah promised Abraham, “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (Gen. 12:7). This land-covenant with the patriarch involved all that land “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates,” (Gen. 15:18), and it was pledged to his seed “for ever” (Gen. 13:15).

Several questions here are of great concern:

- Was the promise ever totally fulfilled?
- What is the meaning of “for ever”?
- Was the promise in any sense conditional?

Was the Promise Ever Totally Fulfilled?

An understanding of these queries is crucial to this discussion. Note the following: When the law of Moses was given, provision was made for the establishment of “cities of refuge” where the manslayer who had killed without premeditation might flee for the preservation of his life. Initially, three cities were to be set aside for this purpose. Moses declared, however, that:

“. . . if Jehovah thy God enlarge thy border, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; if thou shalt keep all his commandment to do it, which I command thee this day, to love Jehovah thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, besides these three . . .” (Dt. 19:8-9).

Thus, six cities of refuge would be evidence of the substantial fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham’s seed.

A reading of Joshua 20:7-8 reveals that the cities of Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan were assigned as havens of refuge – six cities. Thus, “all the land” had been given; the land covenant has been fulfilled! This is further demonstrated by Joshua 21:43. “So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.”

This refers principally to Canaan. There was to be some expansion later. Scripture specifically states of Solomon’s time:

“And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt . . .” (1 Kgs. 4:21; 2 Chron. 9:26).

Finally, Nehemiah rehearses the fact that God brought Abraham from Ur of Chaldees to give him the land of Canaan, and, says he, you “have performed your words: for you art righteous” (Neh. 9:7-8). It is tragic that the premillennial theory implies the opposite.

What Is the Meaning of “For Ever”?

But millennialists contend that Palestine was promised to Israel “for ever” (Gen. 13:15). This fails to recognize, of course, that the term “for ever” is not always used in the Bible in a completely unlimited sense.

For instance, circumcision was an “everlasting covenant,” (Gen. 17:13); the Passover was an ordinance “for ever,” (Ex. 12:14); and the Levitical system had an “everlasting priesthood” (Num. 25:13). These Old Testament institutions, however, passed away with the abrogation of the Law, thus demonstrating that “for ever” sometimes has a temporary significance.

Was the Promise Conditional?

The truth of the matter is, the Old Testament clearly indicates that Israel’s possession of Palestine was conditioned upon their faithfulness to God – a condition which they violated repeatedly; hence, it was foretold:

“When ye transgress the covenant of Jehovah your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods, and bow down yourselves to them: then will the anger of Jehovah be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you” (Josh. 23:16).

That time eventually came, and the Jews lost their “deed” to the Promised Land!

Jeremiah’s Visual Aid

In the 19th chapter of the book that bears his name, the prophet Jeremiah was instructed of Jehovah: “Go, and buy a potter’s earthen bottle.” Subsequently, he was told to go to the valley of Hinnom, and to prophesy to the inhabitants of Jerusalem concerning their sins, and their eventual destruction. As a symbol of this promised punishment, Jeremiah was commanded to “break the bottle” and to proclaim its meaning,

“Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter’s vessel, that cannot be made whole again . . .” (Jer. 19:11).

This prophecy was partially fulfilled with a siege of the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25), but was completely and ultimately fulfilled with the destruction of national Israel by the Romans in 70 A.D. (see: Adam Clarke, **Commentary on the Bible**, Nashville: Abingdon, n.d., Vol. IV, p. 305).

After the Jewish nation was destroyed, it was so permanently scattered by the providence of God that it *cannot be made whole again*. Regardless of the fact that some Jews are migrating back to Palestine, they will never be restored as *God’s nation!*

The Pronouncement of Christ

Further evidence that national Israel will never be restored is found within the teaching of Christ himself. In Matthew 21, Jesus told what is called the parable of the wicked husbandmen, the design of which was to emphasize how wretchedly the Jews had treated God’s prophets, such rebellion reaching its zenith with the crucifixion of Christ. Because of their rejection of Jehovah’s precious stone, the Lord said to the Jews:

“Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God [i.e., their reign as God’s special people] shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mt. 21:43).

The inspired apostle Peter unquestionably declares that the “nation” to be henceforth so blessed, is God’s “holy nation,” the church (1 Pet. 2:7-10). The Bible is exceedingly clear; Christians are the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:26-29), the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

Restoration “Proof Texts”

The millennialist purports to have a whole repertoire of proof texts to substantiate his claim of Israel’s restoration. An examination of several of them will reveal misappropriation of the Word of God.

1. It is argued Isaiah 2:2-4 will be fulfilled with the establishment of the “millennial kingdom.”

For further study, see: [Archives](#), “God and the Nation of Israel” ([December 14, 1998](#)).

“And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Actually, it is a prophecy of the establishment of the church, which is the “house” under consideration (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which was the beginning of the “last days” (Acts 2:16-17).

The truth is, if there is a dispensation yet to come, namely the millennium, then Peter was wrong, and we are not in the “last days” but in the “next-to-the-last-days.” Isaiah 2:4 does not predict a time of universal world peace, rather, it characterizes the peaceful disposition of those formerly hostile nations which “flow unto” the house of God.

2. In chapter 11:1-16, Isaiah prophesies regarding Christ (1-5), and the establishment of his divine government in the church. Again, the peaceful atmosphere thereof is beautifully described (6-9), as being in God’s “holy mountain” which is the church (Dan. 2:35,44). And to cinch the matter, verse 10 is quoted in the New Testament (Rom. 15:12) by an inspired writer, and shown to be applicable to the reception of the Gentile nations into the church.

To suggest that it applies to some future age is to totally disregard the inspired interpretation of the prophecy and to reflect upon the credibility of a New Testament writer.

3. Hosea’s prophecies (2:14-23; 3:5) are frequently said to point to Israel’s restoration in the “millennium.”

Again, however, an inspired New Testament writer says otherwise. Paul quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 in his letter to the Romans (9:25-26), and thereby shows that the restoration foretold by Hosea was of a spiritual nature, including both Jews and Gentiles. Such is accomplished in the church.

Hosea 3:5 speaks of Israel returning and seeking Jehovah and “David their king” (certainly not David literally) “in the latter days.” This is another indication that the Christian era, the reign of Christ, is in view (cf. Lk. 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-36; 2:16-17; see Theo Laetsch, **The Minor Prophets**, St. Louis: Concordia, 1956, p. 40).

4. Amos 9:11-15 is a favorite Old Testament prophecy of the premillennialists. C.I. Scofield, alluding to James’ citation of this passage in Acts 15, called this “the most important passage in the N.T.” for dispensationalists (**Scofield Reference Bible**, New York: Oxford Press, 1945, p. 1169). It is argued that the rebuilding of the “tabernacle of David” refers to the restoration of national Judaism in the “millennium,” at which time Solomon’s temple literally will be rebuilt, and the Jewish economy reinstated.

In Acts 15 a question was raised among the early disciples as to whether Gentiles were obligated to circumcision. Peter, who had preached first to the Gentiles, denied such. James utters an inspired oracle corroborating Peter, and in connection, he cites the words of Amos concerning the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. The rebuilding of David’s tabernacle was the enthronement of Christ and the establishment of his church! And a part of this design was that the Gentiles might have the privilege of seeking the Lord. It thus would follow, if the tabernacle of David is yet in the future (as premillennialists contend), that all Gentiles are still lost! (Acts 15:16-17).

The claim that Judaism will someday be restored, in view of the books of Galatians and Hebrews, is, quite honestly, absolutely incredible.

There are, of course, many additional prophecies which, according to the premillennialists, predict Israel's restoration; but none of these demonstrate a restoration of national Israel in a future millennium. It may be suggested in summation that the Old Testament prophecies which speak of a restoration for Israel pertain either to:

- a. A return to Palestine from the confines of the Babylonian Captivity (605-536 B.C.), in the time of Cyrus of Persia (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23). For example, a number of passages in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are of this nature. Or,
- b. The restoration of Israel to Jehovah's favor spiritually through the church. Peter affirmed that a major thrust of Old Testament prophecy was concerning salvation, which "the prophets sought and searched diligently," and which has now been announced through the preaching of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:9-12).

The Throne of David

The premillennial doctrine virtually ignores the *spiritual* emphasis of Old Testament prophecy. It holds that Christ will return to this earth to be seated on the literal throne of David in Jerusalem. The underlying fallacy of this view is its materialistic approach to the reign of Christ.

The Lord's kingdom is not a worldly, political economy, as was David's, for Jesus plainly said: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). Remarkably the premillennialists contend it will be. Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be heir to the throne of David.

"Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. 9:7).

Additionally, the angel Gabriel informed Mary concerning her expected Son:

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Lk. 1:32-33).

The question is not whether Christ was to sit on the throne of David; the controversy is concerning the *nature* of that throne, that is, was it to be a *material* throne? Or was it to be the *spiritual* throne of David?

That Christ's reign on the throne of David is of a heavenly, spiritual nature is manifestly evident from the following considerations.

1. The last king to reign on the Davidic throne of the Old Testament era was Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah, or in an abbreviated form, Coniah). In Jeremiah 22:24-30, it was prophesied that he and his seed (Judah) would be delivered into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and cast into a foreign land (Babylon). Specifically, concerning Coniah it was said:

"Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah" (v. 30).

The issue is clear – no descendant of Coniah would ever again prosper, ruling from the literal throne of David. Now, the fact is, Christ *was* of the "seed" of Jechoniah, both from a *legal* standpoint (through Joseph - Mt. 1:12,16), and from a *physical* vantage point (through Mary, via Shealtiel - Lk. 3:27). It thus follows that Christ could never reign on David's earthly throne – and prosper!

2. The prophet Zechariah prophesied regarding the Christ thusly:

"Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build the temple of Jehovah; even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he

shall bear the glory, and he shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech. 6:12-13).

This passage positively affirms that Christ would function as *priest* and reign as *king* on his throne – simultaneously. But, according to Hebrews 8:4, Christ could not act in the role of a priest *while on the earth* – for he was not descended from the priestly tribe (Heb. 7:14). Since the Lord could not be a priest on earth, and since he is priest and king jointly, it necessarily follows that *his reign as king cannot be earthly* in nature. Rather, it is heavenly.

The heavenly nature of the reign of Christ is readily apparent in that narrative known as the parable of the pounds recorded in Luke 19:11-27. The parable involves a certain nobleman (Christ) who went into a far country (heaven) to *receive a kingdom*, and to return. Some citizens, however, sent a message to him, saying, “We will not that this man reign over us.” Finally, having received the kingdom, the nobleman returns to render judgment.

From this account it is perfectly clear that:

- a. the kingdom was received in heaven (not on earth);
- b. the reign was from heaven (not from Jerusalem); and
- c. the return of the nobleman was *after* the reception of the kingdom (not prior to it).

All of these facts are strikingly at variance with the premillennial concept.

3. King David was informed by the prophet Nathan:

“When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, that shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my time, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

That this is a prediction of the reign of Christ upon David’s throne is beyond question. In view of this promise, David was told: “your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:16). Note the application of this context to Christ by an inspired New Testament writer (Heb. 1:8).

It is extremely significant to note in this connection that Christ is to be seated on David’s throne, over his kingdom, while this illustrious Old Testament king is *still asleep with the fathers*, i.e., in the grave. In glaring contrast to this, the premillennial notion contends that Christ will sit upon David’s throne *after* the resurrection of all the righteous – including David.

4. In harmony with the foregoing is Peter’s declaration:

“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ . . .” (Acts 2:29-31, NASB).

Of special importance here is the infinitive “to seat,” suggesting the design of Christ’s resurrection. As N. B. Hardeman so wonderfully expressed it:

“[G]rammatically, ‘to sit’ is an infinitive with the construction of an adverb, carrying the idea of purpose equivalent to the following expanded form, viz.; He raised up Christ that He should sit, that He might sit, for the purpose of sitting upon David’s throne. If Christ is not on David’s throne, the resurrection might have been deferred until this good hour, or for ages yet to come” (**Hardeman’s Tabernacle Sermons**, Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1928, III, p. 37).

5. The reign of Christ on David’s throne is not an event awaiting future fulfillment. The Son of God has been reigning over his kingdom since the day of Pentecost. Hear his promise to early saints:

“He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

Notice the past tense “sat down.” Clearly, Christ is *now* on the throne.

If it be contended that this passage speaks of Christ on the Father's throne – and not David's, it need only be replied that the Father's throne and David's are biblically the same. Solomon sat upon the throne of David (1 Kgs. 2:12), which was in reality Jehovah's throne (1 Chron. 29:23). Hence, when Christ sat down on the Father's throne, he was on the throne of David! He is presently reigning, and will continue such until all his enemies are destroyed, the last of which will be death (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

To speak of Christ on David's throne is simply to affirm that our Lord has "all authority"; that to him has been given "all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion" (Eph. 1:21); indeed, that he exercises a regal reign characteristic of the great King that he is. Compare Matthew 23:2, where the *authority* of the scribes and Pharisees who taught the law is symbolically described as sitting on "Moses' seat."

The Resurrection

Based mostly upon a misunderstanding of Revelation 20:1-6 (to be discussed later), premillennialists urge that there will be two resurrections of the dead. The first will occur at the time of Christ's coming, and will consist of the righteous only. Following this, it is contended, will be the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. Terminating this will be the second resurrection (of the wicked), followed by the judgment.

There is no real support for this view; in fact, it contradicts numerous verses of clearest meaning. The Scriptures teach that when the Lord Jesus comes: time will end; all of the dead will be raised at the same time; the judgment will occur; eternity will commence. Consider the following:

The End

In 1 Corinthians 15:23, Paul speaks of the "coming" of Christ. With reference to that event, he says, "Then cometh the end . . ." (24). It is obvious that the return of Christ is not to *begin* an earthly reign; rather, it will *bring an end* to earthly affairs! Some contend that the adverb "then" (Grk. *eita*) demands an interval which allows time for a millennium. Such is not the case, however. Note the use of *eita* in connection with *eutheos* (immediately) in Mark 4:17.

The Day

Jesus spoke of "the day" in which he would be revealed, i.e., the day of his coming. In presenting this truth, the Lord referred to two divine destructions of former ages (see Lk. 17:26-30). Observe that on "the day" that Noah entered the ark, the antediluvian world was destroyed. Further, in "the day" that Lot departed Sodom, the people of the plain cities were destroyed.

So also, contends Christ, "in like manner shall it be in *the day* that the Son of man is revealed." The clear implication of this passage is that the wicked will be destroyed in "the day" of Christ's coming; certainly there is no room for a 1,000 year interval here (cf. Mt. 13:40,49; 25:31-46; 2 Thes. 1:7-9).

The Hour

"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" (Jn. 5:28-29).

This passage thoroughly negates the "two resurrections" theory. Professor David Brown wrote:

"It is hardly possible to conceive a plainer statement of the simultaneousness of the resurrection of both classes" (**Christ's Second Coming**, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1882, p. 190).

See also Acts 24:15, where Paul makes it clear that their "shall be a resurrection [singular] both of the just and unjust." Thus, a single resurrection involving two groups.

Certainly there are contexts in which only the resurrection of the righteous is under consideration (cf. Jn. 6:54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18, etc.), but these do not cancel the plain force of verses affirming a general resurrection.

Additionally, the symbolic language of the book of Revelation (20:1-6) must be brought into harmony with these literal New Testament declarations of the coming of Christ, the resurrection and the judgment. It most definitely is not a sound hermeneutical principle to force numerous lucid verses into harmony with a solitary symbolic reference.

What about Revelation 20:1-6?

The twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation, verses one through six, is the very heart and soul of the theory of premillennialism. It is what George Murray calls “the very citadel and bulwark of premillennial eschatology” (**Millennial Studies**, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948, p. 175). Indeed it may be said, were it not for these half dozen verses, the theory would not even have a semblance of suggestion in the New Testament.

As Albert Barnes observes:

“It is admitted, on all hands, that this doctrine, if contained in the Scriptures at all, is found in this one passage only. It is not pretended that there is, in any other place, a direct affirmation that this will literally occur, nor would the advocates for that opinion undertake to show that it is fairly implied in any other part of the Bible. But it is strange, not to say improbable, that the doctrine of the literal resurrection of, the righteous, a thousand years before the wicked, should be announced in one passage only” (**Commentary on Revelation**, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954, pp. 428-429).

Earlier it was stressed that it is foolish to attempt a forced harmony between the *figurative* elements of Revelation 20:1-6, and the premillennial theory – with the latter being contradicted by so many plain passages of scripture. Making this very point with reference to Revelation 20:1-6, noted scholar Charles Hodge wrote:

“It is a sound rule in the interpretation of Scripture that obscure passages should be so explained as to make them agree with those that are plain. It is unreasonable to make the symbolic and figurative language of prophecy and poetry the rule by which to explain the simple didactic prose language of the Bible. It is no less unreasonable that a multitude of passages should be taken out of their natural sense to make them accord with a single passage of doubtful import” (**Systematic Theology**, London: James Clarke & Co., III, p. 842).

Finally, note this significant quotation from Geerhardus Vos, concerning the relationship of the book of Revelation to the premillennial view:

“In regard to a book so enigmatical, it were presumptuous to speak with any degree or dogmatism, but the uniform absence of the idea of the millennium from the eschatological teaching of the New Testament elsewhere ought to render the exegete cautious before affirming its presence here” (**International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, James Orr, Ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, II, p. 987).

The Book of Revelation: Its Purpose and Form

Preliminary to this discussion should be a few observations concerning the purpose and form of the Apocalypse. The church of the apostolic age was being severely persecuted. Indeed, in subsequent years, it was subjected to a veritable blood-bath.

The design of Revelation is thus to show that the relatively infant church would be heir to much persecution and suffering. Too, the saints must persevere, and by their faith overcome these trials. Finally, the document affirms that Christ would ultimately be victorious over all his enemies.

That the book of Revelation is highly symbolic is evidenced not only by its content, but also by the introduction. Christ "signified" the message by his angel unto John (1:1). The question naturally arises as to why the Lord chose symbols to be the vehicles of these truths. Symbolism frequently serves a two-fold purpose, to reveal and to conceal. Occasionally, the Lord's parables functioned in this capacity, that is, they portrayed certain truths to the disciples, while withholding the same from those who were spiritually dull (cf. Mt. 13:10-15).

The theme of victory within the book of Revelation was largely couched in the imagery that adorned the Old Testament. The Christians were undoubtedly familiar with this sort of language; so the message of hope would be grasped by those early disciples. At the same time, the defeat of the persecuting powers was veiled to those not discerning the figures. One can well imagine, for example, how trials for the Christians might have been intensified had they been discovered circulating a document which literally predicted the overthrow of their persecutors.

And so, as George Ladd points out:

"In the apocalypses, symbolism becomes the main stock in trade, particularly as a technique for outlining the course of history without employing historical names" (**Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology**, p. 52).

It is thus a serious error to literalize the book of Revelation, and this is precisely what the premillennialists have done with the first six verses of chapter twenty.

The Symbols Employed

An examination of the first half-dozen verses of Revelation 20 evidences the following symbols: a key, a chain, a dragon or serpent, an abyss, a thousand years, thrones, a beast, marks on foreheads and hands, and a resurrection.

It is certainly a strange interpretation which contends that a *figurative* serpent was bound with a *figurative* chain and thrown into a *figurative* abyss which was locked with a *figurative* lock that had a *figurative* key, to be confined for a *literal* thousand years! It ought to be manifestly obvious that no literal reign of Christ upon the earth is here alluded to. Even if one does not understand the specific design of the symbols, he can see the symbolic import of the thousand years.

Significant Omissions

Perhaps this context is more significantly devastating to the premillennial theory for what it does not say, but which, if the theory were true, it surely would have mentioned. Nothing is said of:

- a. Christ's second coming;
- b. the establishment of a kingdom;
- c. an earthly regime;
- d. a bodily reigning;
- e. the throne of David; or
- f. the Jews being regathered to Palestine.

All of these elements are vitally important to the millennial view, yet they are conspicuously absent from this narrative!

It is certainly a strange interpretation which contends that a figurative serpent was bound with a figurative chain and thrown into a figurative abyss which was locked with a figurative lock that had a figurative key, to be confined for a LITERAL thousand years!

The Gist of the Narrative

Obviously the context of Revelation 20:1-6 is a part of the design of the book as a whole. Many scholars believe that this section is a symbolic description of the revival of Christianity from a period of bloody persecution. For example, note that earlier (6:9-11) John had seen the “souls” of the martyrs “underneath the altar” crying, “How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

In chapter 20, however, the apostle views the “souls” on “thrones” reigning with Christ. For a while, Christianity appeared to have been buried in tribulation, but ultimately, it emerged. It was, figuratively speaking, resurrected.

The Scripture speaks of figurative resurrections as well as literal ones (see Isa. 26:19; Ezk. 37:12; Rom. 11:15).

“It would, therefore, not be inconsistent with analogy of prophecy if we should understand the Apostle as here predicting that a new race of men were to arise filled with the spirit of the martyrs, and were to live and reign with Christ a thousand years” (Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 842).

That this “resurrection” alludes to the triumphs of persecuted saints is further borne out by the fact that “the second death hath no power” over the reigning ones, which harmonizes perfectly with chapter 2, verse 11 – “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” Thus, the “resurrection” of 20:6, is a figurative way of saying “overcome.”

The one thousand years, of course, also would be symbolic in scope, suggesting either that the victory of God’s cause – as considered in this context – would be *lengthy* in span, or possibly the one thousand years may denote the completeness of the saints’ triumph. One may confidently say that the term “thousand” is *never* used in the book of Revelation in a literal sense.

Conclusion

There is no support for the theory of premillennialism – not in the book of Revelation, nor elsewhere in the Bible. It certainly is difficult to abandon a theory that has been entertained for many years, but when one discovers that a religious view is false, he should reject it in deference to truth.

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