

## PREMILLENNIALISM

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### *About the author...*

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In Matthew 3:2 we find John the Baptist was going about Judea *“And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* In Matthew 4:17 we find that *“...Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* In Matthew 10:7 we see Jesus sending His twelve disciples (later known as apostles) to the Jews of their day with the instruction that *“...as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* This was a true and noble message for the kingdom surely was at hand and men needed to ready themselves. However, many today are continuing to preach that message when it is neither true nor noble. Looking longingly to the future for what has already been delivered, they, in misbegotten expectation of a man-conceived panacea, reject the kingdom our Lord established. This rejection of God’s provision for man’s salvation is at the very core of premillennialism.

Since this lectureship centers on being able to give an answer on a variety of Bible topics, I have decided to fulfill my assignment by first asking a question and then answering it. As is the case with all profitable answers, we will appeal to God’s Word as the sole authority on all matters religious and spiritual. I have chosen these particular questions for three reasons. For the most part, these are question I have been asked by others during discussions of the tenets of premillennialism. These questions naturally guide us into much of the subject matter to be considered. Based on the current false teaching most people hear on this matter, these are questions any Christian is likely to be asked during a discussion of premillennialism.

### **What is Premillennialism?**

This is a much easier question to ask than it is to answer. The difficulty stems from the fact that premillennialism has taken so many different forms over the years and even among its staunchest adherents there remains significant disagreement of belief. The disagreement arises from, and is continued by, the contradictory conclusions their teachers draw from their self-serving interpretations of prophetic and often highly symbolic passages. For the sake of our discussion, we will define premillennialism as: the belief that at some point in the future Jesus will (1) return to this earth, (2) establish an earthly kingdom, and (3) rule from the throne of David in Jerusalem for 1000 years. This definition, of course, is not comprehensive, but, even while debating many of the finer aspects of

premillennialism, most who hold this false doctrine do agree with these three points.

### Will Jesus Return To The Earth?

Many would answer with an emphatic “Yes!” Some would say, “I’m not sure.” The Bible says, “No!” In Matthew 26:64 as Jesus stands before the injustice of the Jewish High Priest, He tells them that they will “*see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*” This is a warning that at the end of time He, the Christ, would see them again in judgement. The difference is that at the end Jesus will be the judge and they will be on trial (2 Corinthians 5:10). Notice the passage refers to Jesus as coming in the clouds. The figure of God coming on the clouds is often used to represent judgement (Psalm 18:6-10; Isaiah 19:1-4; Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7). Many have supposed from these passages that Jesus is coming in the clouds **to the earth**. Notice, however, 1 Thessalonians 4:17. “*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, **to meet the Lord in the air**: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” The Bible does not show Jesus as coming to the earth, but rather us as leaving the earth to join Him in the air. “*And so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” This is considered by some to be a minor point, but the fact is that according to the Bible record, Jesus will never again set foot on the earth. Will Jesus return to the earth? If we are ready to give the Bible answer, we must answer “No”.

### Will Jesus Establish A Kingdom?

To the surprise of many the Bible answers this question, “No!” If the question were restated, “Did Jesus establish a kingdom?” The answer would be “Yes!” Again, let’s allow the Bible to speak for itself. God promised Jacob that a ruler would come through Judah (Genesis 49:10). God established a kingdom (physical Israel) under the Old Testament law that was typical of a kingdom (the church) that was yet to come (1 Samuel 8:5-7; Galatians 6:15-16). Jehovah specified that a king would come from the line of David and rule from David’s throne (2 Samuel 7:8-16). Luke records for us that Jesus is the King through whom the Father fulfilled this promise (Luke 1:31-32; Acts 2:29-36), and that “*...he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*” (Luke 1:33). This is the same kingdom that is prophesied in Isaiah chapter two, Daniel chapter two, and Joel chapter two, and whose prophecy was fulfilled in Acts chapter two. That it was divinely planned that Jesus should establish and reign over a kingdom is without question.

That His kingdom has already been established and He is now reigning over it is equally certain. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded the promise of Jesus to establish His kingdom during the lives of those who saw Him walk this earth about 2000 years ago (Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). Either Jesus lied, which is impossible (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:17-18), Jesus failed, which is also impossible (Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Mark 10:26-27, 14:36), or Jesus established His kingdom during the lifetime of those to whom He spoke in the first century.

The Bible even tells us exactly when He was established as King over His kingdom. Daniel 7:13-14 reads thus,

*I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man **came with the clouds** of heaven, and **came to the Ancient of days**, and they brought him near before him. **And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom**, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, **and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed** (emp. PDM).*

Please notice the text does not say that He will receive His kingdom when he comes in the clouds to the earth. Rather, He received His kingdom when He went in the clouds **to the Ancient of days**. The record of this event is plainly given in Acts 1:9-11 when Jesus ascended back to the Father in heaven. That is why the apostle Paul could tell the Colossian Christian to give thanks to the Father *“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and **hath translated us into the kingdom** of his dear Son”* (Colossians 1:13, emp. PDM). This would have been an impossible task if the kingdom had not already been established.

Some may ask, “If the kingdom has already been established, where is it?” Again the Bible provides the answer. In Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus promised to build His church and give Peter the keys to the kingdom. Here Jesus answers for us the question. His church is His kingdom. Paul addressed the letter we know as First Thessalonians to *“the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 1:1). Then in chapter two and verse twelve he exhorted them to *“walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”* The kingdom of God is not hard to find. One simply has to look where it is. If we look into the future for something existing in the present, we will miss it. If we look for a king ruling on earth when there is a King ruling from heaven, we will miss Him. So, will Jesus establish a kingdom? If we are ready to give the Bible answer, we must answer “No, He already established it.”

### **Didn't God promise the Land of Canaan to the nation of Israel?**

This question is vital to any discussion of premillennialism not because the Bible makes it important, but because of the great importance premillennialists place on this small piece of land. In his book *The Gathering Storm*, Harold Lindsell claims

... the land of Palestine is designed by God to be the centerpiece of, the events surrounding the end times .... Israel is one of the keys to the end of the age. Whoever loses sight of Israel and its role in the events connected with the consummation of history has an incorrect view of the second advent of Jesus” (Rutherford 26, 37).

This misunderstanding of the land of Palestine and whose it rightfully is, is so strong that it has even exerted political influence on American foreign policy.

Now, let's examine the question. Did God promise the land of Canaan to the nation of Israel? The answer is “Yes.” However, the land of Canaan (currently fought over by Israel, Jordan, Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and others) is not the God-given property of any people today. How can both be true? The answer is found in the Biblical record.

In Genesis chapter 12 Jehovah ordered Abram, later renamed Abraham, out of his homeland

and into another land. Upon arrival Jehovah promises Abram that the land of Canaan would belong to his children (Genesis 12:7). It is upon this promise that the premillennialists build their hopes of a restored physical nation of Israel in the land of Palestine. When the United Nations in 1948 declared Israel to once again be a nation, many were sure the “end time prophesies” were beginning to be fulfilled. However, to conclude such ignores the record of what God did for Israel and with the land of Canaan in the intervening years.

The book of Joshua opens with God’s instruction to “...*arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, **unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel***” (Joshua 1:2, emp. PDM). This occurs just after Moses has died and Joshua is beginning to lead Israel. God was at that moment in the process of giving them the land He had promised to Abraham. That was not an eternally ongoing process. Joshua 21:43-45 tells us,

*And the LORD **gave** unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they **possessed** it, and **dwelt** therein. And the LORD **gave** them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD **delivered** all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass. (Emp. PDM)*

At the end of his life Joshua reminded the people,

*...behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that **not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof*** (Joshua 23:14, emp. PDM).

There are two other things that we should note in Joshua’s farewell address. First, we should note that the claim that God had already delivered to Israel the things promised (Joshua 23:14) follows a reminder that it was Jehovah who had driven their enemies out of the land and had thereby given it to them (Joshua 23:13). Second, we note that the following verse warns them of the conditional nature of their inherited land,

*Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you (Joshua 23:15)*

The inheriting of the promised land was never intended by God to be a blank check for unrighteousness. Rather, the land was one of the blessings a Father provided for His children and, as with all other blessings, it would be withdrawn if they were disobedient.

That Israel was disobedient and forfeited the land God gave them is also a matter of record (2 Kings 17:22-23, 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:16-20). In fact, Nehemiah chapter nine gives a wonderful history of Jehovah’s dealing with his people. Nehemiah begins by acknowledging Jehovah as the

Creator (Nehemiah 9:6). He then shows that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham (Nehemiah 9:7-8, 23-25), that Israel rebelled and was therefore removed from the land (Nehemiah 9:26-35), and that only God's mercy brought Israel out of captivity. He acknowledges that God was right in so dealing with Israel and that they were returned to the land as servants that Jehovah might fulfill His own will and bring from that nation a savior (Isaiah 46:10-13; Nehemiah 9:36-38). So, did God promise the land of Canaan to Israel? If we are ready to give the Bible answer, we must answer "He promised them the land, gave them the land, and they, by their disobedience, forfeited the land."

### What is the Rapture everyone is talking about?

The rapture, as premillennialists allege, will be (1) a sudden return by our Lord, (2) a secret return by our Lord, (3) and the sweeping up into heaven of all the righteous from the earth, both living and dead. They further claim that the rapture will be followed by a seven-year period of persecution known as the tribulation and that the tribulation will end when Jesus comes to earth, accompanied by those who have been raptured and His angels, to fight the battle of Armageddon. Jesus will secure victory and will then establish His kingdom and rule from Jerusalem for 1000 years. The question we should ask is, "What does the Bible say about the rapture?" The answer is, "Nothing!"

The word "rapture" is not even in the Bible. The word is of Latin (*raptō*) not Greek origin and means to sweep or catch away. The word "rapture" in the English language has come to mean, being caught up or swept away with happiness or joy. What is more important than the absence of the word from the Text, is that the premillennial concept of the rapture is not in the Bible. In fact, the Bible record of Jesus' second coming makes the premillennial concept of the rapture impossible.

The Bible does say that Jesus will come suddenly. Matthew 24:36-25:46 is a series of teaching about the second coming of Jesus and the end of time. Matthew 24:42 tells us to, "*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*" Matthew 24:44 warns, "*Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*" The second coming of Jesus will be sudden and unexpected. However, the Bible denies that His coming will be secret. Revelation 1:7 says, "*Behold, he cometh with clouds; **and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen***" (emp. PDM). Paul comforted the Thessalonians by saying "*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven **with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first***" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, emp. PDM). Jesus' coming will be sudden but it will not be a secret.

Further, the Bible tells us that Jesus' coming will mark the end of time and the end of the world. The apostle Peter teaches us that the same God who once destroyed the world with water is currently maintaining the existence of this world and that it is "*reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*" (2 Peter 3:7). Additionally, Peter warns us not to become complacent and disbelieving as years pass because "*the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*" (2 Peter 3:10). Once again we see the sudden, unannounced nature of the Lord's coming, but we also learn that on that day the earth will be completely destroyed. That means there will be no time for the seven years of the tribulation or a 1000-year earthly reign of Christ. All will come to an end on that day.

The Bible also denies the premillennial idea that there will be separate resurrections for the good and the evil. The Bible records that all will be raised, changed, judged, and assigned to their eternal destination when Jesus returns (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 14:11-12; 1 Corinthians 15:23-55; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15). That means the rapture, tribulation, 1000-year reign, and battle of Armageddon the premillennialists tell us about simply will not happen. They can not. There is no time or place for them in the Inspired Account. What is the rapture everyone is talking about? If we are ready to give the Bible answer, we must answer, "It is the invention of man's mind and has no Bible foundation at all."

### Doesn't the Bible say anything about a 1000-year Reign?

The answer is, "Yes." In Revelation 20:4 John wrote,

*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

This is the only passage in the Bible that mentions a millennium. While it is true that one passage is enough to firmly establish a doctrine, the passage in question must actually teach the doctrine in question. In other word, this passage must actually say what the premillennialists claim. It does not! In fact, not only does it not support all the premillennial doctrines, **it does not support any** of them. In examining the twentieth chapter of Revelation, brother Rod Rutherford in his wonderful book, *The Millennial Mania*, observes,

There are several essential items missing for this to refer to a millennial reign of Christians on earth with Jesus Christ:

The second coming of Christ is not mentioned.

The resurrection of the body is not mentioned.

A reign **on earth** is not mentioned.

The literal throne of David is not mentioned.

We Christians today are not mentioned (please note that it is "they" not "we" who reigned).

Christ on the earth is not mentioned"  
(78, emp. RR).

That is core of their doctrine. Everything that premillennialism is built on, everything that its practitioners rely on, this passage fails to provide. Homer Hailey, in his *Commentary on Revelation* concluded, "A theory which rests on a passage of Scripture in which not one of its peculiar tenets of doctrine is found cannot be true" (390). Such is certainly the case with the 1000-year earthly reign of Christ and the twentieth chapter of Revelation.

So, some may ask, what is the 1000-year reign mentioned in Revelation 20:4? It is a symbolic

and figurative way of representing victory for those who serve and follow Christ. Those on the thrones were seen earlier (Revelation 6:9-11) under the altar crying out for judgement against the wicked who had killed them. Moving these martyrs from under the altar (representative of death and sacrifice) and placing them on thrones (representative of victory and rule) was a message of comfort and encouragement to those of John's day who were enduring Roman persecution. Its divine preservation affords all who suffer for the cause of the Lord the strength and courage of assured victory. Does the Bible have anything to say about a 1000-year reign? If we are ready to give the Bible answer, we must answer, "Yes. But probably not what you have heard on television and radio."

Please do not wait for some future kingdom. The kingdom of Christ is available now and by His Gospel you are called to it (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Obey His word and He will save you (Hebrews 5:8-9). Refuse Him and you will surely die (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

### Works Cited

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Rutherford, Rod. *The Millenial Mania (A Study in Premillennialism)*. Duluth, GA: Rutherford Books (1998).