

PREMILLENNIALISM

The Doctrine – The Error – And The Consequences

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INDEX OF CLASSES

LESSON	SUBJECT	DATE
1	Definitions and Introduction (LB)	2-24-02
2	Background and History (DB)	2-27-02
3	What The Bible Says – Isa 2, Dan 2, Joel2 Acts 2 (DD)	3-3-02
4	Promises To Abraham - Fulfilled or Future? (DD)	3-6-02
5	Daniel 2 – The Kingdom of God (LB)	3-10-02
6	Daniel 9 – The 70 Weeks (DD)	3-13-02
7	Matthew 24 – The 2 nd Coming (DB)	3-17-02
8	Matthew 24 - The Last Days (DB)	3-20-02
9	Studies in Revelation - Rapture and Tribulation (LB)	3-24-02
10	Studies in Revelation - Anti-Christ and Armageddon (DB)	3-27-02
11	Studies in Revelation - (LB)	3-31-02
12	1 Corinthians & 1 Thess. 5 (DD)	4-3-02
13	Summation and Review (ALL)	4-7-02

LESSON 1 – DEFINITIONS AND OVERVIEW

Everyone would like to have insight into the future. This explains why in an educated and civilized society so-called fortune tellers and psychics have their followers, and why every large newspaper prints the astrology charts. Why? Because people would like to know the future. But what if a man takes the Bible and claims he has found prophecies which are soon to be fulfilled? He will have an even greater popularity, for many who would doubt astrology charts can be easily persuaded if the claims are supposedly founded upon scripture.

The doctrine of premillennialism has become popularly taught because it claims the Bible has foretold both current world events as well as those soon to occur. People need to be stirred up for the Lord and urged to prepare for His second coming, but to do so by misapplying scripture and making the Bible say something it does not is certainly not the answer.

Let us first begin by defining some terms and phrases that we will use in class;

MILLENNIAL THEORIES

POSTMILLENNIALISM – This theory is not as popular as it was during the Restoration Movement. This theory holds that gradually more and more people will be converted to Christ through gospel teaching, and that eventually all the living Jews will be added to the church. A future, universal, kingdom among men will be achieved and will usher in the second coming of Christ. The second coming, in turn, will be followed by the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment.

AMILLENNIALISM – This is widely held and advocated by most brethren. It is an unfortunate term because it literally means “no millennium”, but most amillennialists believe that the millennium is an equivalent term for the church age (the period that extends from Pentecost to the final consummation). Amillennialists hold that the millennium is spiritual in nature and that the bible does not teach a wholesaler conversion of the Jews in to the church.

HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALSIM – This is an old theory that teaches the church was prophesied in the Old Testament and the “church age” is identified as the heavenly phase of the kingdom-rule that Christ will presently exercise over the Jews and Gentiles. It also teaches that Christ will return to the earth and establish his kingdom for a thousand years and the Old Testament promises concerning the restoration of Israel will be fulfilled at that time.

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALSIM – This is the most popular and wide spread theory of the millennium (notice that I didn’t say the most accurate or most scriptural). This has been promoted for many years by the Scofield and Ryrie bibles, John Walvoord (President of the Dallas Theological Seminary and author of the “Millennial Kingdom”), but has been made popular by Hal Lindsey who has written several books (The Late Great Planet Earth, and There’s A New World Coming) that show the dispensationalist viewpoint.

Dispensationalism differs from historic premillennialism in several ways, two of which are significant. *First*, the dispensationalist holds to a “gap” theory in the interpretation of biblical prophecy. They teach that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the blessings to be bestowed on national Israel would have been fulfilled at the first coming of Christ if the Jews had not rejected Him. But since He was “rejected”, it became necessary to postpone the fulfillment of these prophecies until His second coming. In fact the dispensationalist makes a clear distinction between the “church age” (going on now) and the millennial “kingdom age” (which begins at His second coming), and that none of the ancient prophecies have anything to do with the church. Second, Dispensational Premillennialism places great emphasis on the doctrine of the “rapture”. R.L. Ludwigson (A Survey Of The Bible) writes “Christ will come *for* His saints (the rapture, the parousia, or presence); afterwards, He will come *with* His saints (the revelation, epiphany, or appearing of Christ).” Between these two events, the great tribulation, which will last seven years, will take place. There are other variations of Dispensational Premillennialism (pre-tribulation rapture, post-tribulation rapture, and mid-tribulation rapture), but we will not attempt to explain in detail each of these variations.

DEFINITIONS: I like Foy Wallace’s definition the best; “Pre” meaning “before, “Millennium” meaning “1,000 Years” and “ism” which means “it ain’t so.”

The following excerpts are taken from “The Millennial Kingdom” by John F. Walvoord (president of Dallas Theological Seminary);

- **MILLENNIUM** – Comes from two Latin words “MILLE” meaning “one thousand” and ANNUS which means “years”. The word means a thousand years and never occurs itself in the bible, although the bible does refer to the thousand years six times.
- **PREMILLENNIALISM** - Is the teaching that Christ will reign on earth for one thousand years following His second advent. Premillennialism as a term derives its meaning from the belief that the second coming of Christ will be before this millennium and therefore premillennial.
- **THE PREMILLENNIAL PRESUPPOSITION** - Premillennialism is founded on the interpretation of the Old Testament ... it is conceded by practically all parties that the Old Testament presents the premillennial doctrine if interpreted literally... The Old Testament prophecies, if interpreted literally, would demand a millennial kingdom on earth after the second advent of Christ. *(The question is “Should all Old Testament prophecies be understood literally? We’ll have more to say about this later.)*
- **ESCHATOLOGY** – The doctrine of the last of final things, as death, resurrection, immortality, judgment (Webster).

WHY STUDY PREMILLENNIALISM?

Foy Wallace, in his opening arguments in a debate on Premillennialism on January 2, 1933 in Winchester Kentucky with Charles M. Neal said “We are not here discussing non-essentials. I would not have come from Nashville to Winchester to discuss non-essentials. That would put me in the ridiculous position of traveling across two states to engage in a discussion which is not vital, or that does not involve a single thing essential to salvation. Brother Neal’s position, if taken to its logical conclusion, will nullify the Great Commission as applicable to the Gentiles; and, therefore, destroy to us who are gathered here all hope of sharing in the promises given in that Commission.” That, my friends is **very essential**.

Newsweek magazine (10 Jan. 1977:49) reported a “growing chorus of latter-day prophets. As the year 2,000 approaches they discern in current events Biblical signs foreshadowing the end of the world and Christ’s second coming. Hal Lindsey’s books (as well as a host of others) have been met with great interest around the world. The latest “Left Behind” series has been on top of the New York Times Best Sellers list for weeks. Each book is met with a flood of interest the likes of which only Harry Potter has enjoyed.

Think for a moment that if the dispensationalist is correct, that the church is not the kingdom that God intended, then if the Jews did not reject the Christ, He would have established His kingdom on the earth (remember the kingdom and the church are not the same to the dispensationalist). One may ask “What is the difference?”. The difference is this; one required the Cross (the church), and the other did not (kingdom). Scofield clearly states the conclusion: “The kingdom was promised to the Jews. Gentiles could be blessed only through Christ crucified and risen.” (75-76). Here is the dilemma of the premillennial doctrine: Millenarians teach that the purpose of Christ’s first coming was to establish an earthly kingdom with Israel. But if Christ had established a kingdom with the Jews, such as the premillennialist propose, He would have never been crucified, meaning the Gentiles would have been forever barred from the blessings they could obtain only through the Cross. But that would mean, that if the Jews accepted Christ’s offer of an earthly kingdom, and not put Him to death, they could have been saved apart from the Cross.

Any theory which eliminates the necessity of Christ’s death is an enormous perversion of Scripture! (Heb 10:1-14)

Interestingly enough, Hal Lindsey tells us that the “church” was in the mind of God from eternity but that he never told anyone about it – it was kept secret until New Testament times. They insist that the church was not an “afterthought”, but that the Old Testament said nothing about it (They will use Col 1:26 and Eph 3:1ff to support this claim). But truly this is the only conclusion that one could draw if this false teaching is followed completely. We will spend more time on this in lesson five (5) when we discuss the Kingdom of God, but notice for a moment Romans 1:2 where Paul says the gospel of God has been promised afore by His prophets in the Holy scriptures. And in Acts 26:22

Paul stated before Agrippa that he preached nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come. Now, did Paul preach the church or didn't he? If he preached it (and he did – Eph 5:22-23), does it not follow that the church had to be spoken of in both Moses and the prophets? Paul's own claims contradict the premillennial teaching.

In fact there are several areas that are affected by Dispensational teaching and make it a very important topic to study and understand; (1) How are we to view and understand the death of Christ? (2) How are we to interpret Scripture? (we will cover this in a minute but the Dispensationalist interprets Old Testament prophecy as literal unless “forced to do otherwise.”). Charles Ryrie maintains “*that any other approach to scripture other than the premillennial one is humiliating to the Word and indirectly sustains unbelief.*” John Walvoord wrote “*Premillennialism is a system of interpretation which involves the meaning and significance of the entire Bible, ... It is more than a dispute over Revelation 20... It is not too much to say that millennialism is a determining factor in Biblical interpretation of comparable importance to the doctrines of inspiration, and the deity of Christ.*” (3) Does God keep His promises. (4) What is the purpose of the church? And, (5) It is the latest and most popular theological fad. If one wishes to teach his friends and neighbors about the gospel, he must be prepared to deal with this subject.

You may ask “How do premillennialist read so much into the bible?” There are several reasons, but I'll list four; (1) By piecing together scattered verses in scripture, (2) by hiding behind a “double application” of scripture, (3) By ignoring the general nature of some bible prophecies, and (4) by insisting on a literal interpretation of all prophecy.

Now, concerning the “Literal Interpretation” of scripture it is important to know that the premillennialist feels the amillennialist simply spiritualizes any prophecy when it suits his purpose. Now it's not hard to understand the premillennial push here. If we are discussing baptism and our friend figurizes passages after passage, we'd begin to wonder about his honesty. How do you think the premillennialists feel when amillennialists figurize verse after verse, section after section, and even whole chapters?

In support of their emphasis on literal interpretation they remind us that literally hundreds of scriptures have been literally fulfilled. Christ is literally of the seed of woman, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, born of a virgin, in Bethlehem. He literally worked miracles, was betrayed and sold for 30 pieces of silver, was crucified and people gambled for his clothes. All of these (and more) have been literally fulfilled, but when it comes to His throne, glory, and kingdom, the premillennialist says “the amillennialist has been yelling literal all the time and all of a sudden says figurative.” They cry “Foul”.

Let me show you how all this is applied (from a quote from Jim McGuiggan's book called “The Kingdom Of God and The Planet Earth”). Does Ezekiel speak of a temple the like of which hasn't been literally built? Then you can be sure it is yet to be built! Are there prophets who promise (after the 539 BC return) a restoration of the Jew to Palestine, and under the Messiah? You can be sure it is yet in the future. Does Ezekiel speak of the coming restoration of the Levitical priesthood under the Messiah? If must

be future. And on and on we could go. Walvoord claims that the literal understanding of scripture is the “only one which provides any intelligent explanation.”

All this is fine and good if the premillennialist would be consistent, but they are not. Many take Ezekiel 34:24 and 37:24 and where it talks about David, make him stand for Christ (correct), but Walvoord insists that it must be David himself. They will make Gog and Magog stand for Russia and in other passages they insist that the Roman Empire must come back to world wide power.

But it seems plain (an intelligent by the way) to see from scripture that God does not intend for us to understand all Old Testament passages literally. Hebrews 1:1 says that God spoke to us “in different ways”. Daniel 9:24 speaks of “70 weeks” and yet no one interprets that to mean a literal 70 weeks! In Malachi 4:5 God said “Elijah” when He meant “John”. In Ezekiel He said “David” when He meant “Jesus”. The point is this: God didn’t need to say “David” or “Elijah” but He did it just the same! He could have said “John” and “Jesus” but He didn’t! To me that shows that He didn’t intend all prophetic speech to be taken literally.

Here are some rules you can go by when interpreting scripture; All passages are to taken literally unless such an interpretation (a) Creates a contradiction with another passage, (b) Creates an absurdity, and (c) Another inspired writer gives it a figurative interpretation.

Here are some examples of other passages where the premillennialist can not take them literally; (Please write down why they can not be taken literally)

1. Isaiah 11:6-10 compared to Romans 15:10-12
2. Ezekiel 16:53-55 compared to Jude 7
3. Ezekiel 37:22-25
4. Ezekiel 27:25 compared to 2 Peter 3:10
5. Isaiah 34:5-17
6. Isaiah 40:3-5 and Luke 3:4-6

My good friend, Mark Roberts, wrote the following article in Abundant Life, which is a very good summary of Premillennialism;

Overview of Premillennialism

By Mark Roberts

Through the centuries Revelation has become a haven for false teaching of every kind. Nearly anything imaginable has been derived from this wonderful book, including authority for instruments of music (harps in heaven, 5:8) and the number of the saved (144,000, of course). Yet no system of false doctrine has ever been more deeply indebted to the book of Revelation than premillennialism.

Have you seen those bumper stickers that say "In case of RAPTURE this car will be unmanned?" That is premillennialism. Ever hear talk that the Mid-East will explode in a war called Armageddon? That is premillennialism too. Seen Tim LaHaye's incredibly popular books in the "Left Behind" series? Premillennialism strikes again. What is premillennialism all about? What should you know about it? How can we show it to be false and contradictory to the Bible? Let's get some answers to these important questions.

Premillennialism is a way of interpreting the Bible, especially biblical prophecy, that became popular in the 1830's. Names you might hear or recognize that are associated with premillennialism include Darby, Ryrie, Walvoord and Scofield (of Scofield Reference Bible fame). All of these men believed that Jesus had attempted to establish a literal kingdom reigning here upon this earth, that He was rejected and crucified, and so must return and establish that literal kingdom at some point in the future. The term "premillennialism" roughly means "before the thousand years" because premillennialists believe we are living before the (coming) thousand year reign of Jesus Christ here on earth. Naturally, Revelation, with its dark signs and symbols, became a haven for such speculation. Persecution, false teaching, days of troubles and a thousand year reign are all to be found in this difficult book. Announcing that they had found the key to unlocking biblical prophecy premillennialists peddled their doctrines and ideas everywhere. In the last century interest in premillennialism came and went, but in the early 1970's premillennialism enjoyed quite a revival. Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, made a difficult system of Bible interpretation accessible to the common man and premillennialism took off again.

Let's get a brief summary of pre-millennialism's teachings (notice the chart). Premillennialism teaches that we are now in the church age. The church is nothing more than a stop-gap measure the Lord established when Jesus was crucified, rather than accepted as king. Someday the Lord will return and get it right! The church age will be marked with increasing sin, wickedness and rejection of righteousness. World events, as interpreted through a hodge-podge of Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew 24 and Revelation, will move toward a one-world government and one, charismatic leader who will mesmerize the world. Just as things appear to be getting worse and worse for Christians God will suddenly and mysteriously snatch or rapture all true Christians off the planet. The rapture marks the end of the church age. With all believers gone the world will descend into terrible tribulation and destruction. This period of time, lasting by most counts, seven years will be marked with appalling violence and wickedness. Premillennialists believe the bowl and trumpet judgments

of Revelation describe these times. This time is divided into periods of three and one half years, with some premillennialists even believing that the rapture won't come until the middle of the tribulation. At the end of the seven years the world will be just about ready to tear itself apart in a huge war (Armageddon) that will destroy all mankind in a nuclear conflagration. At the last moment Jesus will return from heaven, stop the war, and establish His literal kingdom, reigning and ruling from Jerusalem for one thousand years. At the end of that time there will be the resurrection of the unsaved, judgment and eternity will begin. Clearly, such a brief synopsis of a huge system of interpretation has to leave out some details but that is the gist of premillennialism. Now, what is wrong with it?

First, premillennialism teaches that the kingdom is yet future, but the Bible plainly states the kingdom is now presently in existence. Paul tells us that Jesus "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). In Mark 9:1 Jesus promises some of the apostles then living that they would see the kingdom of God come with power. In the very first Gospel sermon Peter urges the audience to understand that Jesus is both Lord (King) and Christ (Messiah) (Acts 2:36). The kingdom has been established and Jesus is now ruling over it! Further, the very idea of God failing is simply astounding. If Jesus had wanted to establish an earthly kingdom He would have! God does not fail! Jesus had opportunity to be such a king (see John 6:15) but plainly announced "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Let none misunderstand: the fundamental tenet of premillennialism is that the kingdom is still to come. The Bible affirms that Jesus established His kingdom, and rules it right now.

Secondly, premillennialism teaches that all Christians will be raptured. This necessarily leads then to the idea of two resurrections. There will be a resurrection of dead Christians at the rapture, and then the resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the millennial reign. Again, we find premillennialism contradicting scripture. Jesus says "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29). Jesus knows nothing of two resurrections, separated by over a thousand years of time. The very term "rapture" is nowhere found in scripture. Appealing to Paul's talk of the coming of the Lord in Thessalonians won't help. It is clear in that context that Paul is discussing the end of everything, not some coming before everything gets going! There is no rapture taught in scripture.

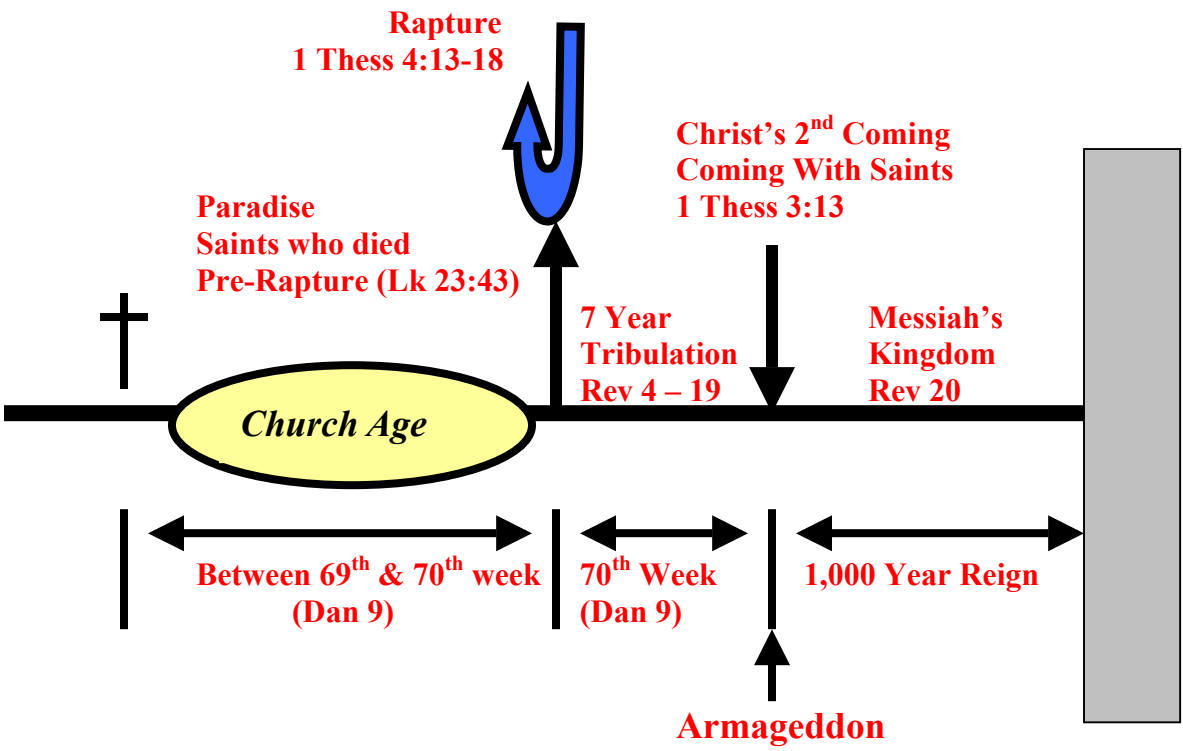
Thirdly, premillennialism teaches that God still owes Israel something. Much is made, for example, of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would inhabit Canaan. Yet the Bible plainly states that the land promises were fulfilled: "So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it . . . Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass" (Joshua 21:43, 45). If it be argued that Israel then lost that land it must be remembered that God's promises to them concerning that land were always conditional (see Deut. 28-32). If Israel was not faithful to Jehovah He was not obligated to preserve them on that land. Further, the entire dispensation of physical Israel and her laws were only to prepare the world for Jesus' coming and His spiritual kingdom (see Gal. 3:24ff). In short, God owes the present day Jew, faithless to Him and rejecting His Son as Messiah, absolutely nothing!

Fourthly, premillennialism brutalizes God's word. Read any premillennial material or examine any of their colorful charts and you will find that passages from all over the Bible are cut and pasted together to weave their false doctrine. Regardless of original context, whether this interpretation would make any sense to the original readers, or what the stated time frames of the verses are the premillennialist meshes them all together to derive his peculiar

doctrine. Travesties with biblical numbers are common, as literal times (such as Israel's wandering in the wilderness in for forty years) are plugged into non-literal figurative passages to obtain dates and times for Christ's return. Revelation's original message of comfort and hope to persecuted first century Christians is obliterated, all so that today's interpretation of scripture can match the headlines on CNN. Rightly did Peter warn us that some would "twist to their own destruction" God's precious word (2 Peter 3:16).

In the early 1990's premillennialists found their doctrine on the front page of every newspaper. Saddam Hussein looked like a promising antichrist and the Gulf War would surely plunge the world into chaos. The Soviet Union would attack from the north, just as Lindsey and Company had been saying for years. It didn't happen. Hussein was reduced to the status of a third-rate tyrant, world war three didn't break out, and the Soviet Union dissolved into a weak and powerless group of unhappy little nations. So premillennialism has fallen onto hard times. They lack tribulation, a terrible world leader to be afraid of, and a superpower nation to play the bad guy in their drama of human devising. Yet all along those who knew the scriptures understood that premillennialism was false and could never be true. If world events spin back around into the premillennialists corner let us be steadfast in teaching the truth: the kingdom is here now and everyone needs to be a part of it." MR

Here is a chart that you might find useful in describing the basic elements of Premillennialism. Please be aware that there are many variations of this doctrine.



QUESTIONS FOR LESSON ONE;

1. Why are you wanting to learn more about Premillennialism?
2. List some basic facts about Premillennialism as you understand it today;
3. What is the “Rapture”
4. How do Dispensational Premillennialist view the church?
5. What is the “kingdom of God” – Is it always the church or is it something else?
6. What are some logical consequences of premillennial teaching?
7. What do you think is the most important reason to study premillennialism?