

What is Premillennialism?

Barbados ZOOM Study (12.6.2020)

Joshua Welch

Introduction: The term “eschatology” refers to “a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eschatology>). When any national or worldwide event occurs—such as a national disaster, war, pandemic, etc—many doomsdayers begin to talk of coming “signs” and try to connect them to Biblical terms such as “tribulation” or “Battle of Armageddon” or the coming “millennium.” These are all eschatological concepts. Yet, any time a lesson discusses the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment or the reality of heaven or hell it is a study of eschatology. Tonight’s study, on the topic of premillennialism, is a study of one particular and popular view of eschatology. Each view of end times has its own intricacies and differences. Each school of thought has its own divergent views. Premillennialism is no different. Thus, this will be a broad and general overview of the basic tenets held by premillennialists and we will conclude by contrasting the Scriptural teaching on the subject.

I. Definition of Premillennialism

- A. “Premillennialism” is defined as...
 - 1. “The doctrine or belief that the Second Coming of Christ will precede the Millennium” (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*).
 - 2. “This interpretation teaches that the age will end in judgment at the second coming of Christ, who will restore the kingdom to Israel and reign for at least 1,000 years” (*New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*).
- B. Breaking the word down may help us understand its meaning...
 - 1. “Pre”=before
 - 2. “millennial”=1,000 year reign
 - 3. “ism”=a doctrine, system or theory
- C. Thus, this basic eschatological view teaches we are living prior to the 1,000 year reign of Christ and the events preceding His return.

II. Prevalence of Premillennialism

- A. This particular eschatological view is held by several influential denominational groups.
 - 1. The Assemblies of God: “13. WE BELIEVE...in The Blessed Hope—When Jesus Raptures His Church Prior to His Return to Earth (the second coming). At this future moment in time all believers who have died will rise from their graves and will meet the Lord in the air, and Christians who are alive will be caught up with them, to be with the Lord forever. [1 of 4 cardinal doctrines of the AG] 14. WE BELIEVE...in The Millennial Reign of Christ when Jesus returns with His saints at His second coming and begins His benevolent rule over earth for 1,000 years. This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel and the establishment of universal peace” (http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_short.cfm).
 - 2. Church of God: “Premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the dead saints and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years. Zechariah 14:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Jude 14, 15;

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Revelation 5:10; 19:11-21; 20:4-6”
(<http://www.churchofgod.org/index.php/pages/doctrinal-commitments>).

3. Church of Latter-Day Saints: “He will usher in the Millennium. The Millennium is the thousand-year period when Jesus will reign on the earth. The righteous will be caught up to meet Jesus at His coming (see D&C 88:96). His coming will begin the millennial reign” (From *lds.org*, Gospel Principles, Chapter 44).

4. Baptist Church: “There will be a literal Second Coming of Jesus Christ on earth. Most Southern Baptists believe a 1,000-year reign of peace will follow the return of Christ and that believers will be taken up before the end-time troubles begin. Many also believe the rapture will come after the Tribulation” (Source: Dr. Richard Land, President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention).

B. These premillennial views have been popularized by various books and preachers.

1. Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) and *There’s A New World Coming* (1974) as well as host of “The Hal Lindsey Report.”

2. Tim Lahaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, co-authors of the *Left Behind* series.

3. Popular religious leaders: James Dobson, Pat Robertson, John Hagee...

C. There are some who may not be familiar with terms like “premillennialism” but they are familiar and in agreement with the above authors, preachers and leaders!

III. Basic Claims and Tenets of Premillennialism

A. The “land promise” to Israel is still in effect today and all Christians should support Israel in their quest for the “promised land” and anticipate the restoration of this promise.

1. ““Since the Abrahamic covenant deals with Israel’s title deed to the land of Palestine, her continuation as a nation to possess that land, and her redemption so that she may enjoy the blessings in the land under her King, it is of utmost importance to determine the method of the fulfillment of this covenant. If it is a literal covenant to be fulfilled literally, then Israel must be preserved, converted and restored” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 71, 73).

2. “As I approach my 94th birthday, I realize this election may be my last,” Graham says in the ad. “I believe it is vitally important that we cast our ballots for candidates who base their decisions on biblical principles and support the nation of Israel” (<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/10/billy-grahams-website-removes-mormonism-from-cult-list/>).

B. Christ originally came to establish an earthly kingdom, but failed.

1. “Some contend that neither the Lord nor John ever offered Israel an earthly kingdom, but only a spiritual kingdom. Such a view entirely fails to comprehend the nature of ‘the kingdom’ preached by John, the Lord, and His disciples. The fact has been shown that they preached the same kingdom the Old Testament promised and Israel expected without change of concept whatsoever” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*. Pp. 463-464).

2. Since Jesus did not set up an earthly kingdom, premillennialists argue the church was merely “Plan B” and the establishment of the kingdom of Jesus is still future.

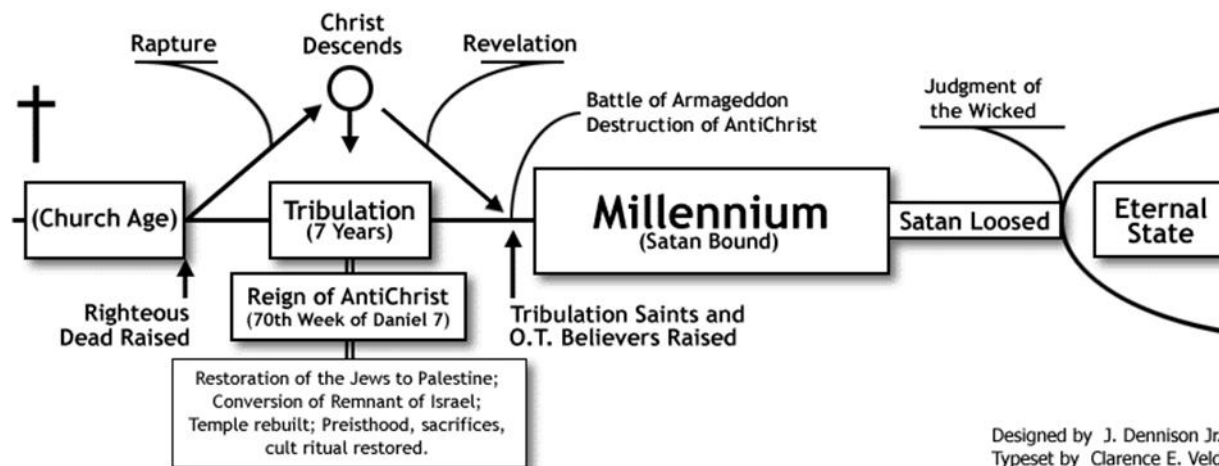
C. A rapture of the saints only will occur at Christ’s coming.

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1. "Rapture: this refers to the time, prior to the start of the 7 year Tribulation Period, when believing Christians (both dead and alive) will "in the twinkling of an eye" rise up to meet Christ in the air...Sometime in the near future...several MILLION people will suddenly disappear from this earth... 'in the twinkling of an eye' (1 Corinthians 15:22)" (Kirban, Salem. *A Guide to Survival*).
2. "Part of the confusion on this issue rises from a failure to distinguish two stages in Jesus' second coming. One passage of Scripture speaks of Christ's coming in the air and in secret, like a thief coming in the night. Another part of the Scriptures describes Christ's coming in power and majesty to the earth, with every eye seeing Him. Both of these can be true only if there are two separate appearances of Christ in the future" (Lindsey, Hal. *There's A New World Coming*, p. 61).
3. Bumper sticker premillennial theology: "WARNING! When the rapture comes, the car in front of you will be empty!"
4. Bumper sticker response: "Come the Rapture—Can I Have Your Car?"



D. Seven years of tribulation will immediately follow the rapture. At this time, premillennialists believe...

1. 144,000 of those "left behind" will convert to Christ and strive to convert the world.
2. The Jews will be restored to Israel.
3. The temple will be restored and Old Testament worship rituals will be restored.
4. The Antichrist will be revealed.

E. The Great Tribulation will have its dramatic end with the Battle of Armageddon.

1. "At this point the greatest war of all history, involving hundreds of millions of men, will be set in motion,..." (Walvoord, John. *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, p. 63).
2. "...the passage indicates that 'leaders of the whole world' will send armies to the Middle East to fight under the Antichrist's command against 'the kings of the east.' Such countries as Western Europe, the United States, Canada, South America, and Australia undoubtedly will be represented....these armies will be assembled and deployed for battle in the place called 'Armageddon' or 'Harmageddon.'...but the king of the north shall rush upon him (the Israeli leader) like a whirlwind, with chariots (mechanized army)

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and horsemen (cavalry), and with many ships' (Daniel 11:40b)" (Lindsey, Hal. *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 142, 152).

- F. After this battle, Jesus Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years.
 - 1. Notice: Jesus has already returned once to "rapture" the saints. In this theory, He returns again to reign in His millennial kingdom.
 - 2. The key passage used to try and prove a literal, earthly millennial reign is from Revelation 20.
- G. Only after this millennial reign, will the wicked be judged and our eternities decided.

IV. A Brief Response to Premillennial Theory

- A. God has kept His "land promise" to Israel and, because of their sins, their land has been revoked.
 - 1. God did make such a promise (Genesis 12:7; 15:18).
 - 2. God fulfilled His promise (Joshua 23:14-16; 1 Kings 4:21, 24; Nehemiah 9:7-8).
 - 3. Yet, it was a conditional promise (Deuteronomy 28:58-63).
 - 4. God has the right to bless and give and He has the right to punish and take away!
- B. The nature of Christ's kingdom was never intended to be physical, but spiritual and He did not fail in this endeavor but succeeded!
 - 1. Daniel prophesies of "a kingdom which will never be destroyed" that "will itself endure forever" (Daniel 2:44-45).
 - 2. John and Jesus preached the "kingdom was at hand" (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17).
 - 3. Jesus declared the terms of entrance into the kingdom (John 3:3,5).
 - 4. Jesus told Pilate His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36).
 - 5. This kingdom is spoken of as being in existence in the first century (Colossians 1:13).
- C. The "rapture" defies Biblical teaching.
 - 1. The term "rapture" is not found in the Scriptures.
 - 2. The concept of the "rapture" creates a contradiction in Bible teaching.
 - i. For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 does not indicate Christ will come "secretly" but "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God..." (see also Acts 1:9-11).
 - ii. Further, the idea that saints would be taken to heaven, then return to earth is not what 1 Thessalonians 4:17 indicates—"thus we shall always be with the Lord."
 - iii. Yet, to assume the "righteous dead" will be raised at one time and, then, years later, the wicked dead will be raised teaches two resurrections (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).
- D. The "great tribulation" proof texts are often highly speculative and misused.
 - 1. For example, the "144,000" are supposed to be the future evangelists of the world during this great tribulation period.
 - i. Yet, the book of Revelation itself says they are "redeemed from the earth" not "on the earth" (Revelation 14:3).
 - ii. Further, they are "before the throne of God"—which, in Revelation, always refers to heaven (Revelation 14:5).

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2. Texts from both Matthew 24 and Revelation are supposedly referring to the great tribulation over 2,000 years away and counting.
 - i. Yet, the context of Matthew 24 indicates the passage is dealing with the events within the lifetime of those Jesus taught (Matthew 24:1-3, 34).
 - ii. Every time statement in the book of Revelation indicates events only a short time away (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20).
3. The speculation about the “Antichrist” is a fruitless endeavor.
 - i. According to John, “many antichrists” had already “come” in his day (1 John 2:18).
 - ii. Their character is described (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7).
 - iii. These “antichrists” were “already in the world” at this time (1 John 4:3).
- E. The Battle of Armageddon is only mentioned one time in the Scriptures—in a book full of apocalyptic language.
 1. A study of Megiddo or “Harmageddon” can help us understand the spiritual idea represented by this figure (Judges 5:19; 7:1; 2 Kings 9:27; 23:29-30).
 2. Different places in Scripture can be used symbolically.
 - i. Valley of Hinnom is used as a symbol of eternal punishment (Mark 9:43-48).
 - ii. Jerusalem is a symbol of the church (Hebrews 12:22-23).
 - iii. Babylon is a symbol of seduction (Revelation 17:5).
 - iv. Sodom is a symbol of corruption (Isaiah 1:10).
 - v. Armageddon is a symbol of conflict (Revelation 16:16).
 3. Other New Testament passages use physical weapons to illustrate our spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:11-17; 1 Timothy 1:18-19).
- F. The “millennium” does not necessarily need to refer to a literal 1,000 years.
 1. First, we need not forget the Scriptures proclaim Christ is already reigning as king (Psalm 2:1-6; Acts 2:33-36; Revelation 1:5).
 2. Second, the term “1,000” is used symbolically in other places in Scripture (Psalm 50:10; Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Chronicles 16:15).
 3. Third, if other things in Revelation 20 are clearly not to be taken literally, then why must we take the 1,000 years literally?
 - i. Key (20:1)?
 - ii. Bottomless pit (20:1)?
 - iii. Great chain (20:1)?
 - iv. Dragon (20:2)?
 - v. Serpent (20:2)?
 - vi. Seal (20:3)?
 4. Finally, if Christ has all authority, power and glory what else does He need to come back to accomplish?

Conclusion: Perhaps the greatest danger of these speculative teachings is that so much time is spent focusing on what may happen, that we forget to prepare for what we know will happen! It has been said the message of the Bible can be summarized in these three sentences. 1) Christ is coming. 2) Christ is here. 3) Christ is coming again. Indeed, this is the truth of Scripture and we need to repent before we are called to stand before Him in judgment (Acts 17:30-32; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Are you ready?

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Discussion Questions Sunday, December 23, 2012

1. What do premillennialists tend to believe about the nature of the Lord's kingdom? What do the following passages indicate about the nature of the Lord's kingdom?

- John 3:1-5
- John 18:36-37
- Luke 17:20-25

2. Premillennialists believe Jesus came to establish His kingdom, but was unexpectedly rejected and set up the church as an "interim measure." Do the following passages affirm or deny this idea?

- Psalm 2 (cp. Acts 4:24-25)
- Psalm 22 (cp. Matthew 27)
- Isaiah 53 (cp. Acts 8:29-35)
- Psalm 118:22 (cp. Acts 4:11)
- Matthew 21:33-46

3. The teaching of the rapture demands two separate resurrections—a resurrection of the righteous at the rapture and a resurrection of the wicked after the millennium. How do the following Scriptures refute this idea?

- John 5:28-29
- Acts 24:15
- 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

4. During the 1,000 year reign, premillennialists believe the temple will be rebuilt, animal sacrifices will be restored and temple worship reinstated. What does this imply about the blood of Jesus? What do the Scriptures teach about going back to Old Testament worship rituals?

- Hebrews 9:11-28
- Colossians 2:8-17
- Galatians 5:1-4

5. Part of the divergent views about end times revolve around differences concerning how we should interpret the Scriptures. Must we interpret the Bible literally? In the book of Revelation, for example, what guidelines help us as we make interpretive decisions?

- Revelation 1:1,3
- Revelation 22:6,7,10,12,20

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