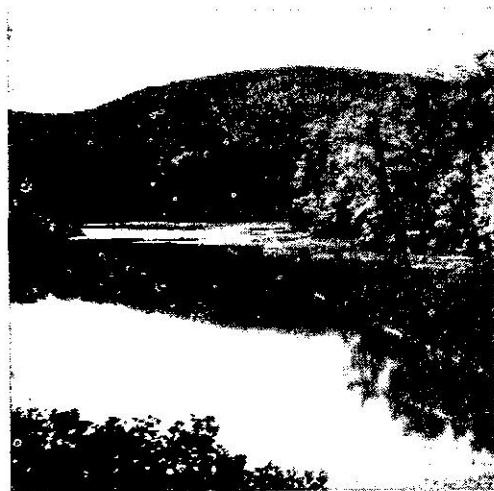


Premillennialism

A SPECULATIVE THEORY



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PREMILLENNIALISM

Premillennial teaching is more common than is the word which describes the doctrine. When it is said that someone or some church teaches the premillennial theory, many eyebrows are raised, questioning the significance of the term. The word is of Latin origin and is applied to the doctrine that Jesus Christ will come to earth again before he begins a reign of one thousand years' duration. There is also the doctrine called postmillennialism, that Jesus Christ will not come again until after the thousand year period. A third doctrine is referred to as amillennialism, that there is no such thing as a thousand year reign of Christ. A man can believe the Bible and hold none of the three doctrines. There is a thousand year reign (Rev. 20:4); but this is a reign of martyred souls with Christ and the passage says nothing of the beginning or end of the reign of Christ. This is the only place in the Scriptures where a thousand year reign is mentioned, hence it has served as a basic text

for both premillennialists and post-millennialists; but it does not contain the essential ingredients of either of the doctrines. It says nothing of the second coming of Christ, and nothing of the duration of the reign of Christ.

Why study the question? Why explain its nature? Why warn people against it? People in nearly every denomination teach and hold the theory of premillennialism. They do not agree at all in many of the features involved, but they do hold the basic theory. Several denominations have the theory as a basic tenet of their denominations. Take the premillennial theory out of the Jehovah's Witness movement and little or nothing will be left. Several churches of Christ have separated themselves into a distinct group in their adherence to the theory. The center for their efforts has been Louisville, Kentucky, with R. H. Boll, now deceased, the school in which he taught, and WORD AND WORK, the paper and publishing house for his and other writings on the theme. They have churches, schools, papers and mission programs scattered over the

nation and throughout the world adhering to and propagating the premillennial doctrine. This movement within churches of Christ will be dealt with here. They do not agree in every item with others who hold the theory, but it is basically the same; hence what is said here will be helpful to all who hold or are confronted with the theory.

BASIC FEATURES OF THEIR ARGUMENT

The basic line of reasoning of premillennialists runs according to the following outline. (1) A glorious millennium is affirmed in the book of Revelation. (2) Jesus Christ has promised that he will come again, therefore they reason that this glorious millennium will come following his second coming. (3) They reason that this is not the final and eternal condition, so they place the millennium before the final judgment. (4) Since they know that this final condition is wholly spiritual in nature they conclude that this millennium must be on the

earth. (5) From this they argue that this millennium necessitates the reign of Christ Jesus upon the earth. (6) Their view of such a glorious millennium demands that all the righteous, both dead and alive, be included, and that no wicked can be in it; hence they argue that the righteous dead will be raised before the millennium and the wicked will not be raised until the end of the millennium. (7) In order to find some argument that will satisfy their own minds for this type of millennium they turn to the Old Testament promises and prophecies. (8) In doing so they deny that the church is the kingdom prophesied of in the Old Testament, either not at all or in its full sense. (9) In this confusion they make of the millennium a Judaistic regime with Jewish worship, Palestinian location, and the Jews as God's favorite people. (10) In their attempt to harmonize their theory with the plain statements of the New Testament about Jesus establishing his kingdom, they argue that Jesus came the first time to establish the mil-

lennial kingdom but because of his rejection by the Jews he set up the church instead, and will not establish his millennial kingdom until he comes the second time. The entire scheme of the theory is based solely on imagination and speculation, using a profusion of scripture citations to give it respectability.

FAVORITE TEXTS

They have a number of favorite texts, none of which teach that which they affirm. Revelation 20:1-6 mentions a thousand year reign. But it specifies neither the beginning nor end of Christ's reign. It is a reign of martyred souls and mentions nothing of those who are alive and in the flesh. It nowhere intimates that the reign is upon the earth. It specifically does not give a place of prominence to the Jews as a nation or race. It has nothing to say or even intimate about the second coming of Christ. Only their imagination connects this passage with their premillennial theory.

They like to use the Abrahamic

land promises and those promises to the Jews of their inhabiting and re-entering that land. People who are relatively unfamiliar with the Old Testament may be deceived by their glib reference to these promises and prophecies as applying to some yet future time. Not one of those promises, however, was left unfulfilled beyond the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. by the Roman armies. Their fulfillment is completely and accurately described in the Scriptures.

FAVORITE EXPRESSIONS

There are a number of favorite expressions by which they may be identified. They speak of themselves as "free churches" and as teaching "the whole counsel." By these terms they signify that they believe that no restriction should be made upon them as they teach their speculative theories of premillennialism. They constantly claim to believe strongly in "literal interpretation" of prophetic language. Yet if watched carefully it will be noticed that there

is hardly a passage, even their favorites, which is literally interpreted by them. They love to speak of the kingdom "deferred" or "postponed," suggesting that Christ did not do what God planned for him and what he intended to do when he came to earth the first time.

They frequently speak of the "rapture" though seldom elaborating on their theory about it. Their theory is that when the Lord comes again he will raise the righteous dead, and then the righteous living with them will be with the Lord in the air for a period called the "rapture," then the Lord with them will set foot on the earth and begin the millennial reign.

They constantly refer to the "Imminence" of the Lord's coming. Their teaching is that he is ready to come and that we are to expect it immediately. But when pressed for such scriptural immediacy they say that the word imminence means that we do not know when he will come. Thus they have created their own definition of the word.

They speak of the "church phase"

of the kingdom. In this they recognize that they cannot deny the existence of the kingdom from the days of the apostles, as Jehovah's Witnesses do, and to justify the existence of the church they call it a phase of the kingdom.

"The blessed hope" is another favorite expression. In this one they are not referring to the eternal state of the righteous, nor to the resurrection of the righteous particularly, but to the sharing in this earthly reign which they suppose will come when the Lord comes again.

NECESSARY LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

There are some necessary logical conclusions to the doctrine which should cause every premillennialist to re-examine his doctrine and discard it:

1. The doctrine makes God a respecter of persons, a flat contradiction of the word of God. The doctrine proposes that the Jews are God's favored race of people and

that eventually he will give them a favored place in his millennial kingdom. Peter learned that this was not so early in the history of the church. He was specifically referring to the distinction between Jew and Gentile when he said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34, 35). The teaching of the apostle Peter and the doctrine of premillennialism about the Jews cannot be believed at the same time.

2. The doctrine rejects the mediatorial priesthood of Christ. It denies that he is now king, and affirms that he will only be king in fact and act upon the earth when he comes again. Thus it flatly denies the word of God. Of Jesus the Branch of David was this promise: "Even he shall build the temple of Jehovah: and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall bear priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." (Zech.

6:13). Notice that the counsel of peace is to be between the rulership and the priesthood, and that this will be when he sits upon the throne, and builds the temple of Jehovah. The New Testament says, "We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man." (Heb. 8:1, 2). Though this passage does not mention his rulership, it does specify the other two items of the prophecy and says that he has now sat upon the throne, has now built, and is now our priest. To deny that he now reigns in the heavens in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah is to deny that he is now our priest. Furthermore, to say that his reign must be on the earth will necessitate his priesthood on the earth, according to the terms of the prophecy. But of such a priesthood the Scriptures declare, "Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all." (Heb. 8:4). Thus the doctrine that he must be a king

on the earth and that this fulfills the Old Testament prophecies rejects the priesthood of Christ. The kingship and the priesthood must go together; it cannot be upon the earth; it is declared to be taking place now, in the heavens. This is flatly contradicted by the premillennial theory.

3. The doctrine questions the power of God, the infallibility and immutability of his word, and the integrity of Christ. The theory supposes its millennial reign is a fulfillment of that which Christ came the first time to establish but that conditions changed his plans. Thus they reason that Jesus while upon earth began an attempt to establish the kingdom which God promised and prophetically described in the Old Testament. But they reason that this required the full acceptance of the Jews; and that since they rejected his plan he postponed its inauguration until after his second coming, setting up the church until that time. Thus the theory teaches that God promised and prophetically described some-

thing which the Jews could and did prevent. If they could thwart God's promises and prophecies we can have no assurance that other promises and prophecies will come to pass. The theory thus denies the infallibility and immutability of God's word. Again, if Christ Jesus could not accomplish that which God purposed and sent him to do he is thence rendered impotent at the hands of the Jews, and we can have no trust in his power to accomplish any of God's purposes. The theory, therefore, challenges the deity of Jesus Christ.

→ 4. The premillennial theory renders the church of relatively little importance in God's scheme of redemption. It claims that the church was only conceived in Divine mind after the kingdom plans failed. This contradicts the announcement of holy writ: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Eph. 3:10,11). It claims that when Jesus comes again he will have a more glorious kingdom than anything the earth has known. This is in open contradiction of the declaration of the Scriptures concerning the position which Christ now has over the church: "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:20-23).

5. The doctrine if followed to its logical conclusion excludes us, the Gentiles, from God's grace. The Old Testament passages which promise that blessings are to come upon the Gentiles as well as the Jews involve the establishment and existence of the kingdom; but all of

these are presumed by the theory to apply to a later era and dispensation after the second coming of Christ. Therefore, according to the theory, the Gentile now has no part in the fulfillment of God's former promises and prophecies; and whatever commission is now addressed to the Gentiles can be but an afterthought because of the failure of God's first plans. Furthermore, the theory supposes that the Jews have a special place in God's scheme for that millennium, hence the Gentile is relegated to an insignificant position in that theoretical dispensation. The fact is that the gospel preached to and accepted by the Gentiles is contingent upon the existence of the rebuilt tabernacle of David, and is declared to have occurred. (Acts 15:14-18.) The theory assumes, however, that this Davidic tabernacle will not be rebuilt until the second coming of Christ. In the passage cited, James says it has occurred, that the prophecy has been fulfilled, and offers the Gentiles' conversion as proof. Once more the theory flatly

contradicts the Scriptures.

6. The theory of premillennialism vitiates the gospel of Christ. The preceding five evidences are sufficient to demonstrate the fact that the theory cuts the very heart out of the gospel, rendering it inefficient and powerless. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, according to that which was written (Rom. 1:16-17.) But if we cannot believe that the Gentiles have an equal place in God's blessings as he has promised, if we are not to believe that the church is the eternal purpose of God, if we are not to believe that Christ rules over it with greater glory and power than in any age to come, if we are not to believe that God and Christ could and did fulfill the purposes, promises and prophecies concerning the kingdom, if we are not to believe that Jesus now sits at God's right hand, reigning and exercising his priesthood, as prophesied and declared to be fulfilled, and if we are to believe that God is a respecter of persons, the

Jews, contrary to the teaching of the gospel; then there is little or nothing left for us of God's power to the believer, and the premillennial theory would destroy faith in what the gospel says. Therefore, the theory vitiates the gospel of Christ.

KINGDOM PROPHECIES FUL- FILLED IN THE CHURCH

The prophecies of a future kingdom which were made in the Old Testament are fulfilled in detail in the church. When premillennialists try to apply them to something else in some yet future time they contradict the Bible in its statement of these prophecies. Space will permit the use of only a few in demonstration of this fact that they are fulfilled in the church.

ISAIAH

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall

be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, 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 the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isa. 2:2-4.)

Notice specific items said to be fulfilled in the gospel dispensation when the church is established; and not yet to be fulfilled when the Lord comes again.

1. On the first Pentecost after the resurrection Peter pointedly identified the period, though quoting from another prophet. He said, "But this is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God," etc. (Acts 2:16, 17). Peter

identifies the events of that day with that which was given by Isaiah, the last days.

2. Isaiah says that the Lord's house was to be established then. The church is the Lord's house, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God." (I Tim. 3:15.)

3. All nations should flow unto it, according to Isaiah. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations," Christ commanded (Matt. 28:19.) And on this occasion when the Lord's house, the church, was established, Peter said, "For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him." (Acts 2:39.)

4. At that time, according to Isaiah, the word of the Lord would go from Jerusalem. Jesus told his apostles, "All things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets. and the psalms concern-

ing me... Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:44-47.) They were at Jerusalem when this first gospel sermon was preached (see Acts 1:12; 2:5.)

5. The Lord would judge among nations and there would be peace in their midst. Jesus Christ commanded his apostles to teach all nations, baptizing them (Matt. 28:19); therefore the peace is to be among individuals of the nations and not the governments. The Gentiles and the Israelites find peace in the church, the body of Christ; "But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition...and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (Eph. 2:13-16.)

DANIEL

"And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Dan. 2:44.)

Daniel had just described four great world powers, beginning with the Babylonian and Nebuchadnezzar as its king. They were to come in succession. The fourth of these was the Roman empire. It was at the height of this world power that Jesus Christ was born and the church established (Luke 2:1; Acts 25:10,11.) Most premillennialists will agree that the Roman empire is the fourth power mentioned by Daniel, but because that kingdom has died, they try to get it back on earth for the Lord's second coming. They refuse to accept the evident fact that the prophecy has been fulfilled in the first coming and the establishment of the church.

That the church is the Lord's

kingdom cannot be denied. Both terms are used to describe his people. "And upon this rock I will build my church...I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 16:18,19.) In this same conversation of the Lord with his apostles as recorded by Matthew and Mark he has this to say about the time of the coming of the kingdom, "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." (Mark 9:1; compare with Matt. 16:28.)

Later, when Paul wrote the Colossian letter he spoke of the kingdom as already being in existence and at the same time referred to it as the church. "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love... And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." (Col. 1:13-18.) For premillennialists to deny that the

church is the kingdom as God promised, prophesied and fulfilled is to deny specific statements of the Old and New Testaments.

When Jesus began his personal ministry following his baptism in the Jordan he preached; "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:15.) In these words Jesus directly connects the kingdom of God with the Old Testament prophecies and declares that the time is fulfilled. To suppose, as do premillennialists, that the kingdom has not yet been established is to deny Jesus' emphatic declaration.

JESUS NOW ON DAVID'S THRONE

Premillennialists argue that Jesus was promised the throne of David and that he does not now occupy that throne, but will do so when he comes again and literally rules in Jerusalem. Upon careful examination, however, it will be found that Jesus Christ is now sitting upon that throne and ruling

in heaven.

God made the promise to David and repeated it through Isaiah (Isa. 9:6,7). This was then repeated by the angel as he told Mary who her son would be: "And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. 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." (Luke 1:31-33.)

It has already been shown that his kingdom was established at Pentecost, and is not a thing to be done when the Lord comes again. The question now is, Is that kingdom a literal earthly kingdom with a literal material throne in Jerusalem? Jesus emphatically declares that this is not the type of kingdom he will have. He says, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews:

but now is it not from hence." (John 18:36.) Knowing that his kingdom is not of this world, we just as well forget the premillennial idea that it will be of this world with the throne of Jerusalem.

Peter referred to the promise of God unto David in his sermon on Pentecost and declared that Jesus fulfilled that promise as he then sat at God's right hand (see Acts 2:30-36.) David knew God's promise to set his descendent upon his throne. Knowing this he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. Peter said that God raised Jesus the Christ. Then he said that Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God exalted. But David also knew that this rule on his throne would be in heaven, not on earth, for it was he who said that God would say, "Sit thou on my right hand." Then Peter emphatically declares that Jesus now has that rule as he uses the word LORD: "God hath made him both Lord and Christ."

Following that resurrection and now at God's right hand Jesus now has a place that is above all rule,

both now and in the world to come (Eph. 1:20-23.) There is no future time, as the premillennialists teach, when he can have more power or a more glorious name than now. But this power is over the church: "and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

The premillennial contention requires that the literal Jew or Israelite have a special place in this supposed future kingdom. They say that when the promise was made that Jesus would sit on David's throne he would also rule over the house of Jacob forever. They make that the literal Jewish race. Israel is another name for Jacob. Paul declares that new creatures are now the Israel of God (Gal. 6:15, 16.) Those who are baptized into Christ are new creatures (2 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 3:27.) And all who are in Christ are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise, whether of the Jewish race or Gentile (Gal. 3:28, 29.)

Jesus Christ is to sit on this throne of David exalted at the right

hand of God till all his enemies are subjected to him; "But he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet? "Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet." (I Cor. 15: 24, 25.) When his enemies are conquered the end comes and he delivers the kingdom back to God. But he reigns till then, and he stays at God's right hand till then. In contradiction to this, the premillennial doctrine says that he will reign on David's throne on the earth for a thousand years before delivering the kingdom to God.

Furthermore, the last enemy to be destroyed is death (I Cor. 15:26.) Jesus is to reign till that occurs. And he is to be in heaven at God's right hand till that occurs. Premillennialists flatly contradict these statements of Scripture by saying

that only the righteous dead are raised at his coming and then after the thousand years reign on the earth the wicked will be raised. They get the reign of Christ at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Premillennialists have the theory that when Jesus Christ comes again he will first raise the righteous dead and those righteous who are alive will be caught up with them for a period which they call the rapture. Then all the righteous are supposed to descend with Christ upon the earth and the reign of one thousand years will begin. This feature of the theory which they speak of as the rapture is not emphasized to any great degree, so the mention of it is all that will be done here. There is no passage which teaches that after the saints, those alive and those who slept, are caught up to be with the Lord there will be a return to the earth. It is pure figment of imagination.

Jesus promises that he will come

again, and that when he does the righteous will be with him in the place which he has now gone to prepare. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-4.) Instead of this, the premillennialist is looking for the Lord to come live with him here at his second coming.

When the Lord left the earth he was taken up and a cloud received him out of the sight of the disciples (Acts 1:9.) An angel told them, "This Jesus who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." (Acts 1:11.) Adding to that promise of his second coming, John says: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him." (Rev. 1:7.) God's word says that when he comes every eye, even those who pierced him, will see him. This

will necessitate the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked at his coming. But in contradiction to this emphatic declaration from God, the premillennialist says that only the righteous dead will be raised at his coming and that the wicked dead will not then see him but that they will be raised after the glorious reign of a thousand years.

This second coming is referred to as the day of the Lord. Of it the Scriptures say: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief." (2 Pet. 3:10.) In contradiction to this the premillennialist talks about the imminence of his coming, which he explains to mean that from signs given us in the Bible it is to happen immediately. Many of them have done so and continue to set dates for his coming. Such date setting is in vain, he comes as a thief. We cannot tell when.

When he comes both the righteous and the wicked will be raised and judged. "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." (John 5:28,29.) This is flatly contradicted by the premillennial theory of two times for the resurrection, one for the righteous and another for the wicked.

When he comes again it is not to set up a thousand years reign upon the earth but to eternally penalize the wicked and to give eternal rest unto the righteous. "And to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed." (2 Thess. 1:7-9.)