

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 12

ANALYZING PREMILLENNIALISM AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Premillennial theology is not separated from the fact of a literal Millennial Kingdom on earth; therefore, premillennial theology and the Kingdom of God will be discussed together. We cannot understand one without understanding the other. They are so interrelated and intertwined one with the other that they must be discussed together.

Premillennialism is the doctrine that Christ will return to earth at His Second Coming and at that time inaugurate the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom over which He will rule from the Davidic throne that will be located in Jerusalem. This Kingdom will last for 1,000 years after which eternity will begin. The word "premillennial" is derived from the fact that Christ's return is prior to or before the beginning of the Millennium, hence, premillennial. We will see that there are various strands of premillennial thought, but dispensational premillennialism is the position we will take to be the only valid biblical view of premillennialism because it is the only doctrine that is entirely based on literal hermeneutics. Dispensational premillennial theology necessarily includes the doctrines that there will be two resurrections, one for the saved, to be accomplished in stages, and one for the unsaved which will occur all at one time. There will be two judgments, one for believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ and one for unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment. The pretribulation Rapture of the church is a doctrine held almost exclusively by dispensational premillennialists; we will examine it in detail later. Premillennialists make a distinction between Israel and the church, they are not Replacement theologians, and they recognize the unconditional, everlasting nature of the biblical covenants God made between Himself and Israel. These covenants will be completely fulfilled with Israel during the Millennial Kingdom. We will also examine these covenants in depth at a later time.

We have to understand the concept of this Messianic, Millennial Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, if we are to have any correct understanding of the Bible and God's plan for history. It is not, as most, if not all, of the theological systems other than premillennial dispensationalism teach, appropriate to reinterpret the Old Testament with the New Testament. Rather, it is exactly the opposite. The New Testament and God's program for history cannot be properly understood apart from understanding the Kingdom program God covenanted with Israel as it is presented in the Old Testament and clearly identified in the New Testament. Remember, many theologians who deny a literal Messianic, Millennial Kingdom admit that using literal hermeneutics leads to exactly these conclusions.

"The concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible" ... "Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as the two acts of a single drama. Act I [the Old Testament] points to its conclusion in Act II [the New Testament], and without it the play is an incomplete unsatisfying thing. But Act II must be read in the light of Act I, else its meaning will be missed. For the play is organically

one. The Bible is *one book*. Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it 'The book of the Coming Kingdom of God.' That is, indeed, its central theme everywhere." [John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, pp. 7, 197]. This is exactly correct! The New Testament cannot be correctly understood without understanding the Old Testament revelation concerning the Kingdom of God which is the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom and that Kingdom is a literal Kingdom that will exist for 1,000 literal years.

"In affirming this affirmation we are not forgetting the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. For *He* is the King eternal, and there could be no final Kingdom apart from Him and His work as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Surely the primary object of our faith must always be the One who is both Lord and Saviour; but as we contemplate Him and His manifold glories as revealed in the Word of God, we shall inescapably come sooner or later to the Kingdom of which He is the divine center. For it is in this Kingdom that the Father's eternal purpose in the incarnate Son shall be certainly and completely fulfilled. This reign of God arises out of His own sovereign nature, was reflected in the 'dominion' bestowed by God upon the first Adam, was forfeited quickly by reason of the sin of man, has been restored judicially in the Last Adam, will be realized on earth in the final age of human history, and reaches out endlessly beyond history where we behold a throne which, as John explains, is 'the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Rev. 22:3)." [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God*, p. 5].

Eschatology and the Kingdom of God, properly understood, are the basis for the formation of a Christian philosophy of history that is consistent with biblical revelation. If this is not understood, then many other facets of biblical truth are also obscured. That's why so many theologians have their theological system take precedence over revelation. They don't have a proper understanding of God's Kingdom program for history, so they make up a theology that they think reconciles their inadequate understanding of the Bible and its history with what they think it should have been and said.

Here is an example of how this has worked out in real life and the resulting consequences of this situation have had seriously destructive consequences for properly understanding biblical revelation concerning the Kingdom. We have studied amillennialism and we know they deny a literal, earthly Kingdom with the King sitting on a literal Davidic throne in a literal city of Jerusalem. We know this started with Augustine and we know that his theology was heavily influenced by pagan Greek philosophy, the pagan Manichean cult, and Gnosticism which grew out of the philosophy of dualism in which it is thought the spiritual is good and the material creation is evil. Luther unquestioningly adopted Augustine's Eschatology. Accordingly, Luther did not understand God's Kingdom program. As a result, Luther did not think that the book of Revelation was coherent and understandable and he did not think it belonged in the canon of Scripture. Luther could not comprehend Revelation because he did not comprehend the Kingdom of God program for history. Because Luther got this doctrine wrong, how many people have blindly followed him in denying God's historical program for mankind? The number is probably millions and millions of people since Luther lived and ministered in the sixteenth century. Many of these people may well be born again and eternally secure, but how effective can a believer be if they deny a

major proposition of biblical revelation? It seems evident that by denying biblical truth in the area of Eschatology and the Kingdom program denying biblical truth in other areas inevitably follows because a high view of revelation becomes lost and man centered theology replaces it. The result is the Scriptures must be reinterpreted to support the new theology. This wasn't just Luther's problem; Calvin embraced amillennial Eschatology as well and postmillennial Eschatology cannot escape this problem either. They all change the Bible and deny its clearly presented historical program.

"Here again, it should be observed, if men would understand clearly the future consummation of the Kingdom, they must first understand the Kingdom in history; if they expect to understand the Kingdom of which our Lord spoke, they must first consider what the Old Testament prophets have said about it; if they desire to expound the Book of Revelation, they must begin with the Book of Daniel." [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 6]. Moody Bible Institute combines Daniel and Revelation in the same class with Daniel studied first.

"The Scriptures cannot be rightly comprehended without a due knowledge of this kingdom. It is a fact, attested by a multitude of works, and constantly presented in all phases of Biblical literature, that the doctrine respecting the kingdom has materially affected the judgments of men concerning the canonical authority, the credibility, inspiration, and the meaning of the writings contained in the Bible. If in error here, it will inevitably manifest itself, e.g., in exegesis and criticism." [George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, p. 1:29, proposition 1].

Because many theological systems consider the redemption of man to be the primary purpose of God in history, they misunderstand God's Kingdom program and reinterpret the Bible accordingly. The Bible becomes man-centered and theology is used to interpret it. Hodge wrote [see Peters, pp. 43-44, proposition 3, observation 6] that God was determined to deliver man from his unsaved state so He inaugurated a kingdom that was the opposite of the world's darkness. In his mind, the church then is God's Kingdom. Hodge said, on the one hand, that the descendants of the patriarchs were the visible manifestation of the kingdom but then he says when Christ came He established a new kingdom. He also had a spiritual kingdom which had two parts. The first part consisted only of the regenerate in an invisible kingdom and the second part was a visible kingdom present in organized, external society of believers. This is very confusing because those sound like the same thing. The point is, that's what happens when you make theology the starting point for exegesis; no one can keep their facts straight and unconfused when they are just making it up. When the definition of the Kingdom changes, then one's interpretation of the Bible has to change with it. For Hodge, the Kingdom was never promised to Israel as a nation because Israel was always the church. Now Israel as a nation is finished and the church has inherited that nation's Kingdom promises.

Peters made some very wise observations concerning this state of affairs [Peters, pp. 1:45-46, proposition 3, observations 11-14]. God knew that man, burdened with the intellectual weaknesses that attend to his fallen state, would need guidance into the truth. One of the ways He has assured us that even in our weaknesses, we can discover

the truth is because He had it written in a plain, grammatical sense that clearly expresses His thoughts. Many men cannot accept this and therefore impose their own thoughts and their theology onto God's Word. The only way to avoid this is by the use of literal hermeneutics. Peters makes the point that most theologians are unwilling to change their mind even when confronted with the literal truth of the holy Scriptures. "The only way to rid ourselves of these ill-defined and antagonistic explanations, is to adopt *legitimate principles of interpretation*, and then carefully, in detail, examine the original covenants and promises upon which the kingdom is based; and if we have obtained a definition *strictly in accordance* with these, *never to depart from the same*, without the most express—not inferential—proof in hand that a change is denoted." He goes on to say that it is a very noble deed to change one's mind based on the truth of the Scriptures. It goes without saying that it is a very noble thing to steadfastly stand on the truth of the Scriptures as written. Remember, the God of the Word was the force behind the Word of God and He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

There can be no kingdom of any sort without a king or ruler who has the power and authority to reign over that kingdom, there must be a realm that consists of subjects to be ruled, and there must be an actual exercise of rulership in that kingdom over those subjects. This definition defeats the concept of a spiritual kingdom. The Bible never speaks of any sort of spiritual kingdom. Whenever it speaks of a kingdom, it speaks of a literal ruler with the authority to rule over a specific geographical territory containing a people group or groups who are the subjects of that ruler. Perhaps the closest the Bible comes to anything resembling a spiritual kingdom is in relation to Satan's authority in the world today. However, Satan is a real ruler, with real authority, to whatever extent God allows, over a specific geographic area, the world, and his subjects are the unsaved people of the world. Satan's rule is not spiritual but real.

The doctrine of premillennial Eschatology precludes any notion that the Millennial Kingdom is present in any way in this dispensation. The doctrine that Christ brought the Kingdom into existence at His First Advent is the result of numerous exegetical errors. The major error is to assume that the Kingdom offer to Israel was not just an offer but the inauguration of the Kingdom. This misunderstanding leads to Replacement Theology. Everyone recognizes that the Jews as a national entity rejected the King and His offer of the Kingdom at His First Advent. The error is assuming that the Jewish rejection of the Kingdom means the church has taken over the Kingdom and Israel, except as individual Jews believe in Christ Jesus, is out of the plan of God as a result. Replacement Theology alone accounts for numerous faulty exegetical conclusions concerning the Scriptures and God's Kingdom program. Over the last three months we've examined many of them but there are many more.

The Bible clearly records the truth that Israel will be restored and will realize all the Kingdom promises God made to them. This whole Kingdom program is not really about Israel; it is about God being faithful to accomplish His plan and to fulfill His promises. If God won't fulfill His promises to Israel, but what right do Replacement theologians assume He will be faithful to fulfill the promises He made to those who are in the church in this age?

Jeremiah recorded one of the most amazing promises in Scripture concerning the existence of Israel. This Scripture, in its own right, should totally destroy any talk of national Israel being dumped on the ash heap of history.

Jeremiah 31:35–37 ³⁵Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ³⁶“If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” ³⁷Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

The Replacement Theology argument is that Israel is the church because Paul said so in Romans and in Galatians but that argument is not exegetically supportable when the Scriptures are interpreted according to literal hermeneutics. In this Scripture, the nation of Israel is the subject and the realization of the New Covenant promises depend only on God and not on Israel's faithfulness or lack thereof. “Ordinances here are the natural laws that govern creation. The foundation of the New Covenant is as sure as the God who maintains creation. measured ... searched out: At the peak of Judah's apostasy, shortly before the destruction of the nation by Babylon in divine judgment, the Lord emphatically reaffirmed His covenant relationship with the Jewish people in such strong terms that the promise was unbreakable, even by Him. When we see a rainbow in the sky, we should recall God's promise to Noah, even as God does (Gen. 9:16). When we observe the sun, moon, or stars in the sky, we should remember God's promise to the Jewish people, even as God does.” [Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, p. 924].

We do recognize that God has a Universal Kingdom of which the Millennial Kingdom is only one part. The problem is the Millennial Kingdom is the primary subject of the Kingdom program as it is presented in the Bible. But God does have a Universal or Eternal Kingdom that is from eternity past to eternity future. This Universal Kingdom is God's sovereign, providential rule encompassing everything including, but not limited to, history.

1 Chronicles 29:11 ¹¹“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.

Psalms 103:19 ¹⁹The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

One of the hallmarks of God's Universal Kingdom is its eternal nature. God's rule over this Kingdom is without beginning and without end.

Psalms 145:13 ¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

God's Universal Kingdom includes His rule over the world of the unsaved dead as well as the saved. God can and will overrule any pact made with death and hell.

Isaiah 28:15, 18 ¹⁵Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception." ... ¹⁸"Your covenant with death will be canceled, And your pact with Sheol will not stand; When the overwhelming scourge passes through, Then you become its trampling place.

The Messianic or Millennial Kingdom is a literal, on earth Kingdom during which the Messiah, the seed of David, will rule over Israel and the Gentile nations, indeed, the whole earth, from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. The Messianic title refers to the King who is the prophesied Jewish Messiah who is the Savior of the world. The Millennial title refers to the duration of this earthly aspect of God's program for history and it will last for 1,000 years.

Fruchtenbaum writes this about the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom. "In the New Testament, it is this Kingdom that was proclaimed to be *at hand* by John the Baptist, and this Kingdom was offered to Israel by Jesus, only to be rejected in Matthew 12. As a result of the rejection by Israel, the offer of the Kingdom was rescinded and revoked from that generation. From a human perspective, then, it could be said that the Messianic Kingdom was postponed; from a divine perspective, it was part of God's divine plan, and there was no postponement whatsoever. It was the means by which the Messiah would die and provide atonement, already prophesied in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. It was also the means by which the gospel would extend to the Gentiles (Is. 49:1-13). This Kingdom is destined to be re-offered to the Jewish generation of the Tribulation, and that generation will accept it. The Messianic Kingdom will then be established." [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, pp. 664-665].

I would add that it wasn't only the Kingdom that was rejected by the Jewish people; it was the King Himself who was personally rejected. They knew who He was and they didn't want Him. They knew He was their Messiah and they followed their leadership in saying "No" to His offer to be their King over their promised, covenanted Kingdom. The rejection does not mean the Kingdom offer has been permanently revoked; it has been postponed.

God's program for history has always been mediatorial in nature. That is, He leads through His representatives. "The Mediatorial Kingdom may be defined tentatively as: (a) the rule of God through a divinely chosen representative who not only speaks and acts for God but also represents the people before God; (b) a rule which has especial reference to the earth; and (c) having as its mediatorial ruler one who is always a

member of the human race.” [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 41]. These mediators fall into the categories of prophet, priest, and king (or ruler), but the complete manifestation of mediatorial leadership will be found in Christ Jesus when He is ruling during the Millennial Kingdom.