

Premillennialism: Its Rise and Fall in Satan's War against God

Goals:

1. To understand what Premillennialism is and how it is important now and in the future.
2. To contrast Premillennialism with Amillennialism, and to understand how the differences are important to you.
3. To recognize Satan's War against God throughout Church History and how an attack on Premillennialism was front and center.

I. What is Premillennialism?

A. Definitions:

1. Millennium

- a. Means 1000 years
- b. Derived from 2 Latin words: mille = a thousand - annus = year.
- c. The millennial kingdom in the Scriptures is the phase of the kingdom of God where Jesus Christ reigns.
- d. The length of this 1000 year kingdom is specifically given in Revelation 20:1-6

2. Premillennialism

- a. Teaches that the second coming of Christ to earth takes place before (pre) the millennial reign.
- b. Thus, the Millennium begins after the return of Christ to this present earth

B. The Concept of the Kingdom

1. Old Testament:

- a. The main theme throughout the Old Testament was that a kingdom was coming where Israel would be restored to the head of the nations (Daniel 2:31-44; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14)
- b. The Messiah would bring in this kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14; Isaiah 9:6-7)
- c. All the historic and prophetic writings of the OT point to this Messianic Kingdom as the consummation of human history.

2. New Testament:

- a. The main theme of the New Testament is to preach to the nations their need for Christ because there is a coming kingdom and judgment.

- b. The New Testament writers often point to a time of resurrection and glorification where we will reign with Christ in our sinless glorified bodies.
- c. The consummation of the New Testament is also the coming Messianic Kingdom.

C. Other types of Millennialism:

1. Postmillennialism:

- a. Teaches the world will get better and get “Christainized” over time, a golden age of peace will come (the millennium) – then Christ will return.
- b. Christ will return after (post) the millennium
- c. This position is all but dead

2. Amillennialism:

- a. Teaches that the millennial kingdom began at the first coming of Christ.
- b. Christ is today reigning in the church in the hearts of believers.
- c. The millennium will end at the 2nd coming of Christ.
- d. The binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3, took place at Christ’s first coming and continues until the 2nd coming.
- e. Do not believe in a physical, literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. The 1000 years is not to be taken literally.

II. Premillennialism As Related to Hermeneutics

A. Quotes:

1. “There is great misunderstanding regarding the nature of Premillennialism. It is far more than merely a problem in eschatology. It is an entire system of Biblical interpretation” (Ernest Pickering, “The Importance of Premillennialism,” Central Bible Quarterly 02:4, 1959).
2. “Modern Premillennialism...is a complete theological system. It is not one doctrine, but a whole outline of theology” (Harrison F. Rail, “Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope,” p. 109).
3. “Premillennialism is rather a system of theology based on many Scriptures and with a distinctive theological context” (John F. Walvoord, “The Millennial Kingdom ,” p. 127).

B. Two “Camps” of Theology today (how you see and read the Bible)

1. Premillennialism, Dispensationalism, Literalists (Premil)

“Dispensationalism” is simply a term that defines the Premillennial system of Theology (how we see, read, and interpret scripture)

2. Amillennialism, Covenant Theologians, Allegorical (Amil)

“Covenant Theology” is simply a term that defines the Amillennial system of Theology (how they see, read, and interpret scripture)

C. Three Essential Beliefs/Contrasts of the Two “Camps”:

1. Interpretation of Scripture:

a. Premil: literal, grammatical-historical method

- 1) Normal, plain, literal
- 2) It means what it says

b. Amil: allegorical

- 1) spiritualizing
- 2) figurative or symbolic

2. Israel and the Church

a. Premil: Distinction between Israel and the Church

1) The uniqueness of the Church

- We are not the continuation of Israel or the “New Israel”
- At the rejection of Christ, God put his program on hold for Israel and began to work through the church
- The church was a NEW thing that began in Acts 2
- The mystery (Eph 2-3), the “Church Age”

2) Israel is distinct from the Church

- A national future for Israel
- Once the church is raptured, God will turn again to Israel during a 7 year tribulation:
 1. to judge the world
 2. to purge out unbelief from Israel (the 70th week of Daniel or the time of Jacob’s trouble)

- God will keep his promises to Israel
 1. Abrahamic: Gen 12:1-3
 2. Palestinian (Land): Duet 29-30
 3. Davidic: 2 Sam 7:8-16
 4. New: Jeremiah 31:31-34

b. Amil: Replacement Theology

- 1) The church is the new Israel
- 2) Israel has been done away with for their disobedience
 - No future for Israel
 - All promises made to Israel now apply to the Church
 - No rapture
 - No kingdom and millennium

3. The Underlying Purpose of God in the World

a. Premil: Doxological: God's Glory

- 1) Salvation, while important, is just one of the means in which God is bringing glory to Himself.
- 2) Scripture is not man-centered (salvation of mankind), but God-centered (His glory is at the center).

b. Amil: Soteriological: Salvation

- 1) Spiritual redemption is God's purpose in everything
- 2) The Covenant of Grace through the church and the gospel is all that matters

III. Premillennialism as related to Church History

A. ERA 1: Apostolic Christianity (Apostles - 300)

Leroy Edwin Froom: *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, I, 207: "The early church was distinctly premillennial in her cherished expectations of Christ's second advent. His coming and Kingdom were her constant hope. The Apostolic Fathers anticipated a future Kingdom in connection with the Redeemer's Advent."

1. Papias (d. 155)

According to Eusebius, *Church History*, "Fragments of Papias," in *ANF*, I, 154: "Amongst these he [Papias] says that there will be a millennium after the

resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth.”

2. Justin Martyr (100-165)

“Dialogue with Trypho,” in *ANF*, I, 239:

“But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.”

3. Tertullian (160-c. 230)

“Against Marcion,” in *ANG*, 3, 343:

“But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us on earth. . . . inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem ‘let down from heaven. . . .’”

4. Hippolytus (d. 236)

- a. Concentrated on the Book of Daniel.
- b. Premillennial interpretation of the image, and the animal passage.
- c. Excellent interpretation of the days, seeing them as days, not years.
- d. Even a good start on the interpretation of the 70 weeks.
- e. Separated the 70th week from the 69th.
- f. Froom, 278: “Hippolytus is believed to be the first to have projected such a theory, making the sixty-nine weeks reach from the first year of Darius the Mede to Christ’s first coming, and the seventieth to begin separately after a gap, just before Christ’s second coming.”

5. Historical Developments / Satan’s War Against God:

- a. Phase 1 of Satan’s War against God: Era of PERSECUTION
 - 1) Christianity outlawed by Rome
 - 2) Satan tried to stomp out the early church with persecution, but it grew despite his efforts.
 - 3) widespread commitment to believe & obey the Scriptures (OT and NT)
- b. Virtually universal CHILIASM in every corner of nascent Christianity

The Point: For about the first 200 years of church history, as far as we know, everyone was premillennial.

B. ERA 2: Constantinian Christianity (300 – 500)

1. Allegory:

- a. Origen (185-254)
- b. The Father of the Allegorical Method of Interpretation.
 - 1) Antiochene (literal)
 - 2) Alexandrian (allegorical) – became more prominent
- c. Brought Greek philosophy into the church (the idea that matter was evil), thus....
 - 1) Could not believe that there would be a resurrection of the material body.
 - 2) Couldn't believe that a material, physical kingdom could also be a spiritual kingdom.
 - 3) So, he rejected the idea of a real kingdom of Christ here on earth.

2. Acceptance and Assimilation:

- a. Constantine (288-337)
- b. Under Constantine: Christianity was accepted as legitimate and persecution stopped.
- c. It soon became the religion of the Roman Empire.
- d. This brought in massive pagan “conversions” which led to heresy, allegory, and anti-Semitism.
- e. Magnificent church buildings began to be built throughout the empire, fulfilling Isaiah 35.
- f. Premillennialism abandoned (along with Israel's great future)
 - 1) Literal interpretation was lost: transformed the thousand years into the indefinite period of Christian history
 - 2) Transformed the future reign of Christ in Jerusalem into the current reign of the Roman church.
- g. Constantine rebuilt Jerusalem and called it the New Jerusalem
- h. Feast for Bishops, foreshadowed the kingdom, specifically the marriage supper of the lamb

3. Amillennialism

- a. Augustine (354-430)
- b. Rome = the Christian Jerusalem
- c. The stone of Daniel which rolls down the hill has already become a mountain and is presently filling the earth.
- d. Augustine rejects chiliasm and embraces allegory.
- e. He embraces Amillennialism, which becomes official Roman Catholic doctrine.

- f. Thus Augustine “focused the church’s gaze on the kingdom as a then-present reality on earth. This resulted in a tragic near-sightedness which blurred her vision of the future kingdom of Christ to be inaugurated at the second coming” (Froom, 491).
 - g. Basic to RC doctrine is notion that the Kingdom = the [Roman Catholic] Church
 - h. Augustine begins his *The City of God* as follows:
 “The glorious city of God is my theme, . . . a city surpassingly glorious, whether we view it as it still lives by faith in this fleeting course of time, and sojourns as a stranger in the midst of the ungodly, or as it shall dwell in the fixed stability of its eternal seat, which it now with patience waits for, expecting until ‘righteousness shall return unto judgment,’ and it obtain, by virtue of its excellence, final victory and perfect peace” (Book 1, preface)
4. Historical Developments / Satan’s War Against God:
- a. Phase 2 of Satan’s war against God:
 - 1) “If you can’t beat them, join them!”
 - 2) The early church had grown despite hard persecution
 - 3) Satan changed tactics: Corruption from the inside
 - b. By the 4th century AD Christianity had become the accepted and official religion of the Roman Empire
 - 1) Mass “conversions” as it became expected to be “Christian”
 - 2) Mass paganism in the church
 - 3) This opened the door to allegorical interpretation, which became the dominate form and brought corruption and ambiguity to the texts of scripture
 - 4) Allegory, Anti-Jewishness on the rise

The Point:

- “Augustinian amillennialism was the dominant eschatology for centuries. Premillennialism, with few exceptions, soon became the view only of outcasts and heretics.
- A future kingdom for Israel seemed silly and unspiritual

C. ERA 3: Middle Ages (500-1500)

1. Roman Church becomes ever more AUTHORITATIVE;
 - a. Bible in Latin, only for the educated clergy
 - b. Elevates tradition as authority equal to or superior to Scriptures
2. Amillennialism central to RCC's claim to be the repository of grace & salvation;
 - a. The claim – RCC has inherited (through Peter) the keys of the Kingdom.
 - b. The marginalization of the Premillennialism was so successful that even later (16th century), during the Reformation; the reformers dismissed it as a fable of Jewish origin.
3. Historical Developments / Satan's War Against God:
 - a. Phase 3 of Satan's War against God:
 - 1) Bible taken out of the hands of the regular people
 - 2) It meant whatever the Catholic Church said it meant because the regular folks could not read it.
 - 3) Penance, indulgences, sacraments, and tradition elevated to equal authority, or superior to, Scriptures
 - 4) Much PERSECUTION of dissenters, especially the "stubborn Christ-killing" Jews.
 - b. Allegory and anti-Jewishness lead to heresy and widespread Anti-Semitism.
 - 1) In some places Jews were drug out into the town squares on Easter Sunday and beaten publically.
 - 2) This brutal persecution of Jews and anti-Semitism throughout church history by the church is why it is so hard to share the gospel with Jewish people today. They still see "Christianity" and Christ as the enemy. They have not forgotten.

The Point:

- o These were the "Dark Ages" of Christianity
- o Satan brought in corrupt leadership that sought political power and monetary gain, until the church was turned into a "monstrous political machine that gradually usurped power over the state.... Thus, the organized church of the Middle Ages became characterized by a corrupt hierarchy that controlled the nations of Europe."
- o Regular people enslaved and fearful of disagreeing with the Catholic Church.
- o Premillennialism was all but lost!

D. ERA 4: Renaissance & Reformation (1300-1700)

1. European REFORMERS (Luther, Huss, Knox, Calvin, Zwingli, et al.) recover doctrine of salvation in Christ alone on the basis of grace alone by faith alone as revealed in the Scriptures alone.
2. Reformers rejected that “RC = the Kingdom” concept in favor of “universal church = kingdom”
3. However, Reformers clung to Amillennialist doctrine because it had been the dominate mindset for over 1100 years, up to that point. Satan had brainwashed well, and they knew no better.
4. COVENANT THEOLOGY develops as a system (many: in response to unworkable emphasis on God’s “sovereignty”)
5. Historical Developments / Satan’s War Against God:
 - a. Phase 1 of God’s counter-attack:
 - 1) The Reformation and a return to the scriptures
 - 2) Reformers put the Bible back in language and hands of the people.
 - b. The tradition, penance, sacraments, and power of the RCC begin to diminish.

E. ERA 5: Post-Reformation Premillennialism (1700-Today)

John Walvoord, *Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, 13: “In the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, with the proliferation of individual churches and denominations, it was only natural that all areas of systematic theology should again be reexamined, including eschatology. Premillennialism, which had formerly included in its ranks some who held extreme views, began to solidify and organize its interpretation of Scripture.”

The Return of Premillennialism began in Europe in the 18th century and in American the return began in the 19th century

1. Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
 - a. Father of English Hymnology
 - b. Wrote hymns on his Premillennial beliefs including “Joy to the World”
2. Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

He taught in England that Christ would reign on earth with his saints for 1000 years.

3. John Gill (1697-1771)
 - a. Multi-volume commentary set, Systematic theology, etc.
 - b. Book VII, chapter 8: "Of the Millennium, or personal reign of Christ with the saints on the new earth a thousand years."
 - c. "That Christ will have a special, peculiar, glorious, and visible kingdom, in which he will reign personally on earth."
4. Many others: Charles Spurgeon. Dennis Swanson--ETS
5. James Hall Brookes (1830-1897)
 - a. Father of American Dispensationalism.
 - b. Teacher of C. I. Scofield
 - c. A postmillennialist in early life, then later became a premillennialist

6. The Niagara Bible Conference

The 1878 Niagara Creed:

"We believe that the world will not be converted during the present dispensation, but is fast ripening for judgment, while there will be a fearful apostasy in the professing Christian body; and hence that the Lord Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel shall be restored to their own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; and that this personal and premillennial advent is the blessed hope set before us in the Gospel for which we should be constantly looking. . . ."

7. Historical Developments / Satan's War Against God:

- a. Phase 2 of God's counter-attack:
 - 1) The return of Premillennialism (the "**2nd Reformation**")
 - 2) Once the Bible got back into the hands of the people and the Roman Catholic Church lost its power, people were free once again to read and debate scripture. Doctrines lost to the Dark/Middle Ages were reexamined.
 - 3) DISPENSATIONALISM as a system develops in response to attacks upon doctrine of 2nd coming
 - 4) A return to literal interpretation and a future for Israel
- b. The Fundamentalist Movement of the late 19th Century into the mid-20th Century
 - 1) Careful, scholarly defense of biblical doctrine, including Christ's 2nd Coming

- 2) Scofield, Dallas Theological Seminary, Chafer, the Golden Age of Premillennial Dispensationalism
 - 3) Pentecost, Ryrie, Walvoord, etc
 - 4) Philadelphia College of Bible: Clarence Mason, John McGahey, Dr Cawood, Paul Karleen, Gordon Ceperly, Renald Showers, etc.
- c. A return to Jewish Missions:
- 1) Hananeel House (1911)
 - 2) Jewish Awareness Ministries began (1946)
 - 3) Friends of Israel (1938)

The Point:

- Years after the Reformation, God began to prompt men to a return to the Premillennialism of the early church fathers.
- This brought back a literal hermeneutic, a hunger and understanding of prophecy, and a belief in a future for the nation of Israel.
- This was a return to what the church believed in the 1st two centuries
- Much regret for the way Jews had been persecuted throughout church history, thus the rise of Jewish missions and Zionism.

IV. Conclusions

- A.** In the earliest days of Christianity (i.e., the centuries immediately after the apostles), *chiliasm* (i.e., the persuasion that history would culminate with a 1000-yr literal reign of Jesus on the earth) *was virtually universal*.
- B.** The denial of chiliasm and the simultaneous rise of amillennialism were part of Satan's war against God which prompted the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire as a result of the conversion of Constantine, and the subsequent rise of an official, authoritative, centralized church which had a vested interest in the notion of a present, spiritual kingdom.
- C.** Throughout the eras of church history, there have been various groups of *dissenting believers* who affirmed and cherished the hope of Christ's earthly, literal, end-time kingdom and a future for Israel. They were always persecuted and quickly hushed (often imprisoned or killed).
- D.** God countered with the Reformers who confronted and corrected the *soteriological* (salvation) heresies of the Roman Catholic Church, they rejected the dependence upon *tradition* so important to the RCC, but they did not ultimately challenge or abandon the *essential established hermeneutic of Replacement Theology*, or the *flawed eschatology* of the RC Church.

- E. God countered a second time with the return of Premillennialism in Europe in the 18th century and the Fundamentalist Movement brought the return of Premillennialism to America in the 19th and 20th centuries. This brought back literal interpretation of scripture, a return to prophecy and a future for Israel, and a proper love for the Jewish people (Jewish missions).
- F. Two distinct “camps” of theological thought within the broad Christian community should be recognized:
1. Amil:
 - a. A spiritualizing hermeneutic (1st – 3rd cent) = the epistemological foundation
 - b. Replacement Theology (4th – 5th cent) = the defining construct
 - c. Amillennialism (4th – 5th cent) = the eschatological implication
 - d. Covenant Theology (16th – 17th cent) = the synthesized framework
 2. Premil:
 - a. A consistently literal hermeneutic (from the beginning) = the epistemological foundation
 - b. Distinguish Israel & the “Church” (from the beginning) = the defining construct
 - c. Premillennialism/Chiliasm (from the beginning) = the eschatological necessity
 - d. Dispensationalism (17th – 18th cent) = the synthesized framework
- G. Ask yourself if an understanding of Satan’s war against God and church history help you see which camp is more faithful to a literal reading of Scripture, and which camp brings the most glory to God?
- H. Whichever camp you’re in effects all of scripture – how you see it and how you read it.
If you miss Israel, as Satan wanted the church to do, then you miss A LOT!!!