

Problems with Premillennialism

M.W. Bassford
1-7-07

Introduction.

- A. In Revelation 20:4-6, we see the core of a doctrine known as premillennialism—the idea that before the Last Judgment, Christ will reign for a thousand years on earth. Although it begins with this questionable interpretation of a figurative passage, premillennialism doesn't end there. Indeed, most premillennialists subscribe to a reinterpretation of the entire Bible. Here's the way they tell the story:
- B. Thousands of years ago, God made a promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. This promise was never actually fulfilled because the Jews lost control of the Promised Land, and it was still in need of fulfillment when Christ came to earth. Indeed, they continue, Christ came to fulfill that promise, to be an earthly king of a reunited nation of Israel. Sadly, however, this plan went badly wrong when the Jews killed Jesus instead of crowning Him. Christ did NOT establish this kingdom as He had planned. The church is not the kingdom of Christ; it is merely a stopgap until Christ's second coming. When Christ does come again, the Jews will be converted to Christianity, the righteous dead will be raised, and they will live with Christ in a new nation of Israel whose capital is Jerusalem, which will fulfill the promise to Abraham.
- C. Now, this sort of teaching might sound outlandish to the serious Bible student, but it's not immediately apparent what the practical problem with it is. After all, why should we care what someone believes about a future event that won't affect our lives or theirs? Sadly, things aren't that simple. We can't just accept the teachings of premillennialism and stop there. There is always a ripple effect associated with false doctrine, and in this case, the ripple effect of premillennialism causes some of the core teachings of the Bible to come under attack. Let's examine some of these teachings to learn about some of the problems with premillennialism.

I. Problems with the Plan of Salvation

- A. The doctrinal consequences of premillennialism are too complex to address completely in one sermon, so we're only going to look at a couple of broad categories of problems. The first of these categories is the problems premillennialism causes for our understanding of the plan of salvation. In order for premillennialism to be logically consistent, it must teach the following four things:
 1. **God's ultimate purpose was to set up an earthly kingdom.** In other words, all the way along, God was not planning to set up a church or a spiritual kingdom. Instead, He wanted to permanently restore the physical nation of Israel to Palestine and have that be His kingdom.
 2. **Jesus came to rule, not to save.** When Jesus first came to this earth, He did not come to die for the sins of mankind. Instead, He came as the descendant of David to reign from David's earthly throne.
 3. **Jesus' death disrupted God's plan.** Premillennialists teach that when Jesus died on the cross, it was not the fulfillment of 4000 years of prophecy, but a ghastly mistake. Jesus was supposed to reign, not die.
 4. **Christ's first coming failed.** This sounds strange, but it must be true. Christ, according to the premillennialists, came to permanently establish Israel. He did not do that, so He must have failed.
- B. Remember, friends, these are all doctrines that are based on one interpretation of Revelation 20. Certainly, Revelation 20 is a difficult passage, and certainly, that's one way to read it. However, friends, we should not read the Bible by interpreting an obscure passage and then rearranging everything else to fit. Instead, we should find plain passages and use those to help us understand the hard parts. It's like doing a puzzle. You don't start with the hard pieces in the middle. Instead, you start with the easy pieces on the border. Let's look at some of the "easy pieces" of God's plan of salvation, and see what they tell us about premillennialism and these four claims. If any of these four points is untrue, then premillennialism is also untrue.
- C. First of all, the Bible teaches plainly that God's ultimate plan was to establish the church, not to re-establish the earthly kingdom of Israel. Look at the language of Ephesians 1:3-4. This passage tells us plainly that God chose us before the foundation of the world, not to be citizens of Israel, but to be holy and without blame before Him in love. All the way along, God was looking not for a physical nation, but for a way to spiritually purify His people. God's purpose cannot be described in terms of the first point. We must reject it.
- D. Second, the Bible also teaches that Jesus did not come with the intent of becoming an earthly king with an earthly throne. Ironically enough, this premillennialist teaching follows along with the MISconceptions that the Jews had about their Messiah. The Jews WERE expecting what this doctrine says Jesus was. They were expecting an earthly king to come along and kick out the Romans. If Jesus had been that, the Jews would have accepted Him. They ended up rejecting Him because He was something different. We see Jesus' true purpose described in Luke 19:9-10. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. The second point is also untrue.
- E. Third, the Bible teaches that Jesus' death was the fulfillment of God's plan, not a disruption of it. Now, the premillennialist teaching here is questionable just on logical grounds. Let's say that God really had been planning since before the foundation of the world to set up a permanent Israelite kingdom. This is God we're

talking about here—omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Whatever God says, goes. Premillennialists expect us to believe that a bunch of Jewish high priests and Roman officials were able to take this eternal purpose of an omnipotent God and completely ruin it without even working very hard. Does that make sense to you? The fact is, those priests and officials didn't thwart God's purpose. Instead, even though they acted from evil motives, they did exactly what God wanted them to do. Look at Acts 4:27-28. This passage could not be any clearer. When the Jews and Gentiles assembled against Jesus, when they condemned Him, when they murdered Him, they carried out the purpose of God. The third point is also untrue.

- F. Fourth, Scripture reveals to us that Christ did not fail, but rather succeeded during His first coming. Consider the opening of what is commonly called the High Priestly Prayer in John 17:1,4. Here we see Jesus praying on the night before His crucifixion. Does He sound like a man admitting failure? Quite the opposite! Jesus here isn't telling God that He's failed in the work God gave Him. Jesus isn't confessing that the earthly kingdom God wanted isn't going to be established. Instead, Jesus tells God that the work that God gave Him is FINISHED, and all that now remains is for God to glorify Jesus in a spiritual way, as had been the plan all along.
- G. The point of this is plain. Premillennialist teaching does terrible violence to the Biblical conception of God's plan of salvation. Instead of these four teachings being true, all of them are clearly false.

II. Problems with the Kingdom.

- A. The second area of premillennialist teachings that we're going to examine concern the kingdom of God. Once again, these teachings are drastically different from what plain passages of Scripture teach. Here are four of the most central premillennialist doctrines on the subject:
 - 1. **Christ's kingdom did not come in the first century.** Premillennialists, because they believe that Christ came to set up an earthly kingdom, believe that He did not succeed in that in the first century.
 - 2. **It is still a future kingdom.** Because that earthly kingdom is obviously not among us at this time, premillennialists look to the future, to a time when Christ will return to set it up.
 - 3. **It will be a physical kingdom.** This is essentially the core idea of premillennialism. They don't think of Christ as the spiritual King of a spiritual kingdom. They see Him as the earthly King of an earthly kingdom.
 - 4. **Christ is not yet reigning as King.** To the typical believer's ear, this sounds blasphemous. To the premillennialist, it is the truth. If Christ does not yet have a kingdom, He cannot yet be the King.
- B. Once again, folks, premillennialism stands or falls with each one of these four points. If any of these four contentions is untrue, premillennialism is also untrue. As it happens, however, all of them are false.
- C. To begin with, it is Scripturally indisputable that Christ's kingdom did come in the first century. Consider the teaching of Jesus recorded in Mark 9:1. Here, He promises His disciples that some of them will not die until they see the kingdom of God come with power. That kingdom, according to premillennialists, has not yet come. Just a few weeks ago, I read a news item about the oldest woman in the world dying. She was 116. The thought crosses my mind that the Guinness Book of World Records would be thrilled to meet these disciples of Jesus who are still waiting for the kingdom to come, who still have not tasted death since their Lord made that promise 2000 years ago. What's more reasonable to believe, friends? That there are some Christians still wandering around out there who make Methuselah look like he died young, or that in fact the kingdom came on the day of Pentecost, mere days after the ascension of Christ to heaven? The facts are plain. The kingdom came in the first century with the establishment of the church, and the first point is false.
- D. Second, because the kingdom came in the first century, it was a kingdom present then, and it is still a present kingdom now. Look at Paul's words in Colossians 1:13-14. Here, Paul describes two things: what God did for him, and the way that God did it. Paul says that he was conveyed from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Conveyed, as in past tense. The kingdom of Christ must already have existed because at the time of Paul's writing, he was already in it. Secondly, this passage tells us that this transfer was accomplished by redemption and forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. Now, friends, what do we call that body of people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ? That's right—we call it the church. Once again, we see the link between the church and the kingdom, and that the second point is false.
- E. Third, the kingdom of Christ was, is, and always will be a spiritual kingdom, not a physical kingdom. Jesus Himself says as much in John 18:35-36. It doesn't get much plainer than "My kingdom is not of this world," but there's still a point worth looking at here. As Jesus says, if His kingdom were earthly, His servants would fight for it. As we know, Jesus PREVENTED His servants from fighting, rather than encouraging them. I read a lot of history, and I have to say that if Jesus' object had been seeking an earthly kingdom, I have never heard of a more incompetent grab for power than His. That wasn't it at all. The third point is false.
- F. Finally, the Bible plainly teaches that Jesus is not just a future King. He is a present King. Look at the way Paul describes Him in 1 Timothy 6:13-15. Note Paul's use of the present tense. One day Jesus is going to appear, but even now He is the only Potentate, which just a fancy word that means "ruler." He is the King of kings. He is the Lord of lords. It is not possible for Jesus to assume a future kingship because He is already all the King He can possibly be. The fourth and final point is untrue, and so is premillennialism.

Conclusion. If you would like to submit your life to the King of heaven and earth, come to Him now.