

## “Is A Millennial Kingdom Coming?”

We continue our series on “the kingdom of Christ” today with a look at one of the most popular doctrines of our day concerning the reign of Christ. I can hardly think of a famous televangelist today who does not teach that there is a coming rapture of the church, a period of tribulation upon the earth, a great battle involving Christ, and a literal period of one thousand years during which Christ will bodily live on the earth and reign over all of the nations until the end of time. You may have read books that picture what it will supposedly be like when the church is taken out of the world and the unsaved are “left behind,” or you have heard the well-known preachers on television and radio warn that the political events of our day in the Middle East are part of a countdown to the ultimate appearing of Jesus and the commencement of His kingdom reign on the earth.

There are many views of eschatology today. But what I have just described is, by far, the most widely accepted and popular theory, but it hasn’t always been so. John Nelson Darby, from England, was one of the early proponents of this end-time theory and it was popularized in America by C.I. Scofield, who published his famous and widely used “*Scofield Reference Bible*” back in 1909. It was largely due to him and his new study notes that the doctrine of *dispensational premillennialism* began to cross denominational lines, becoming the dominant theory among the evangelical community concerning the end of time. Dwight L. Moody was an incredibly influential preacher and was one of the early ones to embrace and preach dispensationalism across America and around the world. Today, it’s hard to think of a well-known preacher who doesn’t preach some form of premillennialism.

The theory hinges upon a literalistic interpretation of prophecy, in the Old Testament and in the New Testament book of **Revelation**, where the major proof text is found.

**Revelation 20:1-10 “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”**

What a passage! But is it teaching that a millennial kingdom of Christ is yet to come? Let's take a look at the scriptures for our answer.

*Dispensational Premillennialism* is based upon the idea that all of earth's history can be broken down into seven periods of time: the age of innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law and so forth. When we come to the New Testament, we supposedly have the dispensation of grace, otherwise known as the church age. Then we're waiting on the final era of time to commence and that is what they call the kingdom age or dispensation.

In other words, Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago preaching the kingdom, but the Jews rejected Him. Since they rejected He and His kingdom, He delayed the kingdom until a yet future time. That's what the proponents of premillennialism say. They say that instead, Jesus established the church, and we're living in that era where we as Gentiles can enjoy the blessings of God, but that God still has a plan in place to set up the Jewish kingdom and reign over it and over the world.

The theory says that when the redemption of the Gentiles is complete, the Lord is going to secretly rapture the church out of the world, marking the beginning of a seven-year period of tribulation on the earth. The anti-Christ will arise, darkness will reign over the earth, and it will be a terrible time. But at the end of that seven years, Jesus will return with His saints and a great battle will take place in the Valley of Megiddo in the Middle East, or Armageddon. Jesus will win the battle, bind the devil, and He will reign from Jerusalem on David's throne, over the whole earth for a literal one thousand years.

At the end of that one thousand years, Satan will be loosed and unleash his fury, trying one last time to get the upper hand. But the last judgment of God will come. Satan and his forces will finally be cast into hell forever and eternity will begin.

That sounds like a very convincing theory, doesn't it? So says the premillennialist. You've likely heard some version of that scenario many, many times. But is it what the Bible teaches? Does that match what Jesus and His apostles said about the kingdom? If time permitted, we could go through the above theory point by point, word by word and verse by verse of our text and learn a great deal. But the whole argument really comes down to these three major points of contention:

1. How does one interpret Bible prophecy? That is what we have in our text from **Revelation**. How is it intended to be interpreted? Literally or figuratively?
2. Are the Jews still God's chosen people? That is a crucial question.
3. What do plainer, non-figurative passages in the Bible say about the kingdom?

How we answer these questions will tell us whether or not there is any truth to premillennialism.

Let's look at the first point: how are we to interpret prophecy? Specifically, the book of **Revelation**. Many people, including preachers, have a field day with the revelation given to John when he was on Patmos. If you don't consider the timeframe, style and purpose of the book, your imagination can easily run wild. It is a book worded in the type of language that lends itself to that if we don't properly approach the book with an understanding of the style and purpose behind it.

In the very first verse of the book, it is called "*the revelation*," which comes from the word *apocolypsis*, meaning *an unveiling*. It is an apocalypse. That's what revelation is. It belongs to a specific kind of literature that was popular leading up to the first century, during the intertestamental period and even

back in the writings of the Old Testament. There were many of these types of writings: some inspired and included in the Old Testament, such as **Daniel**; and other uninspired apocalyptic-type writings. They were all visions, steeped in signs and symbols intended to convey a greater or moral message.

In the case of **Revelation**, it was written in code, so to speak, in order to smuggle a message of hope to the rest of the church. Smuggle? That's right. God wanted to give a message of victory to the oppressed and persecuted church that was under the Roman government at that time. A message that its Roman persecutors would not be able to understand. You see, **Revelation** signaled their victory over the crushing forces of earth. Had that message fallen into the hands of the emperor or the Roman authorities, they would have decimated the church for saying what the book of **Revelation** suggested.

So, **Revelation** was revealed by the Holy Spirit in the symbolic language of an apocalypse that Jews and the early church would readily understand, and therefore, draw comfort from its message, but pagans would not understand it. What that means is this: the specific prophecies **Revelation** are not to be taken as literal events literally spelled out as we read them. Rather, they are symbols used to paint a picture for us.

How can a person read the book of **Revelation** and not immediately recognize that the things spoken are not literally what they're pictured as, but they represent something? It doesn't mean they're not true; it means that the things that are specifically mentioned are representative of something else. In **Revelation 20** alone, where the proof for a millennial kingdom is supposedly found, we see several figures or symbols that virtually no one takes literally. For example:

**Revelation 20:2 "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil..."**

Well, is the devil literally a dragon? Or is that a figure that Jesus used to represent the devil? Here's another example:

**Revelation 20:4 "...and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."**

Does that mean that if a person was not martyred—specifically by beheading—then he cannot be part of Christ's reign, whatever it is to which John refers? Of course not! One doesn't have to be martyred to reign with Jesus Christ, regardless of what that reign entails. We all understand that. It's another symbol. The dragon, the serpent, the chain, the key, the bottomless pit, the many numbers that are employed throughout the book of **Revelation**...ALL of those are symbols that are used to draw a larger picture for the persecuted church of the first century. "*One thousand*," as it is used here and in other places in the book, is not to be taken as a literal quantity any more than "*one hundred forty-four thousand*" (from **chapters 7 and 14**) is to be taken as a literal numeric value. The Jehovah's Witnesses, of course, try to make 144,000 a literal number. Ironically, some who will argue with them over that will then try to turn around and make **Revelation 20** mean a literal 1,000-year reign on the earth.

The number *one thousand* is likely a symbol of *completeness*. This reign of Christ is not talking about a literal earthly government. How do we know that? because Jesus said this:

**John 18:36 "...My kingdom is not of this world..."**

**Revelation 20** is simply speaking of the unfettered spread of the gospel; that is, as long as the gospel exists in the world, Satan has no power over your heart or mine that we don't give him. There's no

excuse for being deceived as long as we have access to the word of God. There may come a time—and it seems this may be what John is referring to in this vision—when faith will virtually vanish from the earth. But this is all symbolically referring to Christ’s mastery over sin and evil through the reality and availability of redemption to the whole world who would turn to Jesus and be saved and reconciled unto God. Jesus has won the victory! He has gained the triumph! He died on the cross and He not only wiped away our debt of sin, but He also broke the fetters of death and came forth from the grave on the first day of the week after He was crucified, then He ascended back to heaven as a conquering king!

So, we live in the time of this great reign that the Bible speaks of NOW. The premillennial theory about the kingdom requires a literal reading and interpretation of **Revelation**, you see. And prophecies like **Revelation** are written in symbolic, not literal, language.

On to the second point: are the Jews still God’s chosen people? This is really the crux of the matter. Dispensational premillennialism suggests that God has two different plans for two different groups of people. According to the theory, you have the promises made to Abraham in **Genesis**, later expanded to David in **II Samuel**, and those are physical promises for the racial Jews of the Jewish nation. Then, says the premillennialist, you have the church, in this age which has received other promises from God that are spiritual promises. God is, supposedly, working two plans: one for the church, and one for the Jews.

This church age that we are supposedly in is sort of like parentheses in God’s plan, a stop-gap measure until Jesus comes and fulfills the plan pertaining to the Jews. Premillennialism says that God will deal with the Jews, finally fulfilling all of the promises which are supposedly unfulfilled in the millennium. That when Jesus comes and sets up His kingdom the Jews will finally have all of the promises of Abraham fulfilled; the Old Testament system of worship will be resumed, the temple re-established, even animal sacrifices will be resurrected in Jerusalem during this purported era to come.

A few things about that theory: first of all, according to the Old Testament, ALL of God’s promises to Israel WERE fulfilled. The nation promise was fulfilled: God made them a nation. The land promise was fulfilled: God brought them into the land that was promised. We later read where Solomon reigned over all of the promised land (**I Kings 4:21**). The seed promise given to Abraham was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus through their own lineage. So, none of God’s promises were left unfulfilled.

We should also remember that their enjoyment of God’s promises to Abraham was conditional. Their retaining of the benefits of those promises was conditional. Premillennialism says that the promises were unconditional; that despite the Jews’ rejection of God, He will still fulfill all of the promises made thousands of years ago. But, friend, God placed conditions on His people enjoying those promises throughout their history. Such as, the promise to give them a land. Conditions that ancient Israel, by the way, didn’t keep. Remember when Moses exhorted the people to remain faithful and warned them of what would happen if they disobeyed?

**Deuteronomy 28:63** “And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.”

We know that they DID disobey. In fact, they lost the land because they didn’t obey the Lord (**II Chronicles 36:14-17**). They had a kingdom and they lost it. This is significant: not only is there no prophecy of a Jewish kingdom to be found in the New Testament, but the Bible teaches that upon God

casting racial Israel off as His people, the promises were then given to the NEW Israel instead. Thus, we read passages like this:

**Galatians 3:26-29** “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Obviously, the writer is talking about spiritual relationships here when he says *Jew nor Greek...bond nor free...male nor female*. We are all one in Christ. Who receives the ultimate fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham? Those who are in Christ. Who are those in Christ? Either Jew or Gentile—it doesn't matter. There is no Jew or Gentile in the eyes of God. Those who come to Jesus Christ in obedient faith are those who receive the benefits and blessings and enjoys these promises. *We are all one in Christ Jesus*, Paul says. That is, those who are IN Christ Jesus are one by being baptized into Christ Jesus.

Thirdly, the whole debate boils down to what we studied our last two times together: when did the kingdom come? What is the kingdom? We can interpret **Revelation 20** literally or we can interpret it figuratively, but those questions will help us decide which way we should interpret it. Is the kingdom yet to come or are we in the church age and still waiting on the kingdom, as the premillennialist alleges? Is the kingdom a literal earthly kingdom or is Christ reigning in the hearts of His subjects from the right hand of God today?

Let's quickly notice these comparisons concerning the church and the kingdom:

1. Christ is the head of the church...

**Ephesians 1:22** “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,”

...and Christ is king over the kingdom.

**Colossians 1:13** “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:”

2. One is baptized into the church...

**I Corinthians 12:13** “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

...and one enters the kingdom through water.

**John 3:5** “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

3. The church is an everlasting institution...

**Ephesians 3:21 “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”**

...and the kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

**Daniel 2:44 “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”**

4. The church is identified as having received the “*washing of regeneration...*”\*

**Titus 3:5 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”**

...and the kingdom is identified as existing during the “*times of regeneration.*”\*

**Matthew 19:28 “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”**

(\*speaking of man being regenerated by the gospel)

5. Communion is observed in the church until Christ comes...

**I Corinthians 11:26 “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”**

...and communion would be observed in the kingdom.

**Luke 22:29-30 “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; 30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”**

You can't have the communion in the church and then stop after the church age if we are to observe the communion in the kingdom is to come after the church age. You see, it's one in the same thing.

6. The parables of **Matthew 13** have long been understood to refer to the church...but all seven of those parables are said to pertain to the “*kingdom of heaven.*”
7. The church was established during the lifetime of the apostles when they received power...

**Acts 2:1-4 “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it**

**filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."**

...and Jesus said the kingdom of God would come within the apostles' lifetimes with power.

**Mark 9:1 "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."**

8. The church of Christ is called the "*Israel of God...*"\*

**Galatians 6:16 "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."**

...and the kingdom is referred to as that same "*Israel.*"\*

**Matthew 19:28 "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."**

(\*referring to spiritual Israel)

All of that tells us that the kingdom of God has come. It is a spiritual reign NOW, as long as the gospel is preached and obeyed in this world. Premillennialism says that Jesus will take up His reign when He comes back to earth, but Paul said that when He returns and the resurrection takes place, He will lay down His rule and deliver up the kingdom to God the Father.

**I Corinthians 15:22-24 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."**

Well, He is given all authority and power right now, according to **Matthew 28:18**. One day, He is going to deliver the kingdom back up to God.

You can reign with Christ today. You can be born of water and the spirit and enter the kingdom of the Lord today. You can serve King Jesus as His subject here below and be robed and ready when He returns to take you and all of His kingdom back to heaven to praise and serve God for all eternity. I hope you'll obey the gospel and you'll enter that glorious, indestructible and everlasting kingdom today.