

# Premillennialism – A System of Fatal Error

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## Introduction

Premillennialism pervades the vast majority of Protestant churches, including the old “mainline” denominations, independent groups, the various Pentecostal sects, and the newer “community” churches. This phenomenon is more than “a doctrine.” It is a **system of theology** which the adherents impose like a template over the Bible and through which they view every passage. Several variants of this theological system are extant, but the one constant is belief in a material, earthly, political kingdom of Christ that will last for one thousand years (the “millennial” part of *premillennialism*, the “pre” part referring to their contention that Christ will come again immediately **before** He establishes His millennial reign).

“Historical” premillennialism is the “standard” version. The “deluxe” version is “dispensational” premillennialism, which includes the above, but also includes such doctrines as the “rapture” and the “great tribulation.” It is called “dispensational” because it divides all of time into seven mythical “dispensations.” By their calculations, we are in dispensation six (“the church age”), awaiting number seven (“the millennial kingdom age”). Protestants in the USA are almost universally dispensational premillennialists. We do not question their sincerity, but sincerity of believe does not convert religious error into doctrinal truth.

Some may be thinking that members of the Lord’s church are not in danger of succumbing to this system of error, so we need not study it. They could not be more wrong for several reasons:

1. The level of Biblical illiteracy among the saints is appalling. This fact means that many have no Biblical “information bank” with which to evaluate doctrines and philosophies. Those who know little of the Truth are hardly in a viable position even to recognize – much less, reject and refute – error.
2. The less one knows of and relies upon God’s Word for his religious knowledge and convictions, the more susceptible he is to the errors to which he is exposed, including premillennial errors. It is not uncommon to hear members of the church using such terms as *signs of the times* and *the battle of Armageddon* as defined by Billy Graham, the PTL Club, and other popular denominational televangelists.
3. The dominant doctrinal crisis among brethren between the two world wars last century was premillennialism, led principally by R.H. Boll. It attracted many and would have captivated more had it not been for such stalwart defenders of Truth as Foy E. Wallace, Jr., E.R. Harper,

R.L. Whiteside, and G.C. Brewer, whose articles, debates, and books exposed the system's errors. Without vigilance it can rise again.

4. Some today, who still claim affinity with the Lord's church, view premillennialism as benign. Carroll D. Osburn, ACU Professor of New Testament, wrote: "There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who...differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism..." (*The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1993, pp. 90-91). (We should not be surprised, since in the same paragraph he argues that using instrumental music in worship and advocating that baptism is **because** of remission of sins are likewise acceptable optional positions.)

Premillennialism is based upon several misapprehensions about the kingdom of Christ, to a few of which I now invite the reader's attention.

### Church-Kingdom Dichotomy

A major fallacy of premillennial theology is its dichotomy between the Lord's church and the earthly state of His kingdom, although the New Testament repeatedly identifies them as one and the same. Jesus said:

And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mat. 16:18-19).

Jesus promised to build His church and, in the same breath, promised to give Peter the "keys of the kingdom." We can hardly imagine the Lord's promising to build one thing, only to give Peter the keys to something entirely different. (These keys would have been utterly useless in Peter's hands if they were for a kingdom that still has not come, per premillennial doctrine.) The fulfillment of this promise is generally (and I believe correctly) understood to have been fulfilled when Peter led in announcing the terms of salvation on Pentecost, which resulted in the Lord's adding of obedient believers to the church (Acts 2:36-41, 47). After thus using the "keys" to admit the Jews, he then used them to open the kingdom's doors to the Gentiles (Acts 10:47-48; 11:11-18).

The church at Colossae is described as the kingdom of Christ into which its members **had been** "translated" (Col. 1:13). The Hebrews author described the church as "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12:23, 28). John wrote to the "seven churches that are in Asia" that the Lord has "made us to be a kingdom" (Rev. 1:4, 6). In the same context he said that he was **at that time** (i.e., in the first century A.D.) a partaker with them "in the kingdom" (v. 9). These are only a few of the many statements that identify the church of Christ as His kingdom.

The premillennial denial of the church/kingdom identity implies that the blood-purchased church of the Lord was/is little more than an afterthought in the mind of God, arranged spontaneously to substitute for the alleged failed establishment of their expected earthly kingdom. The “God” of premillennialism is thus seen to be so impotent that He is unable to anticipate the rejection of His Son and His earthly kingdom ambitions. Of course, the God of Truth knew what they would do to His Son (read Isa. 53), and, as seen below, He had no earthly kingdom plans. The church was no sudden substitute for some greater royal institution—it **was** the plan and the kingdom. Jesus built it despite His cruel rejection and murder by the Jews (Mat. 16:18).

### **Earthly Kingdom Ambitions**

A bedrock doctrine of premillennialism is that Jesus came to establish an earthly, political kingdom. There can be little doubt that the Jews generally interpreted the kingdom prophecies in this way. They had chafed as a subject people for centuries, and they longed for the restoration of a glorious and powerful kingdom in the likeness of David’s or Solomon’s. They expected the prophesied Messiah to be the king over such a realm.

However, their interpretation of the prophets was mere wishful thinking and represented **eisegesis** (the interpretation of a text [as of the Bible] by reading into it one’s own ideas) rather than **exegesis** (critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of Scripture). Jesus never had any such kingdom plans or ambitions, which fact the Lord demonstrated by both His teachings and His refusal to participate in any such matters. The Lord attracted crowds of thousands and could likely have led a political revolt of considerable consequence, even without miraculous help. With the miraculous aid at his disposal, He could have utterly and immediately crushed Rome and every lesser power. The materialistic Jews once sought to force a crown upon Him, but he refused it and fled rather than accept such (John 6:15). Instead of seeking to overthrow Rome (as the Jews falsely accused [Luke 23:2]), He told the people to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17).

When the officers and soldiers came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane, Peter sought to defend Him with a sword, but Jesus forbade it (Mat. 26:49–52). Has it never occurred to the premillennialists that, if the Lord had intended to establish a political kingdom, all of the demons of Hell could not have prevented His doing so, just as His death could not prevent the

establishment of His church (Mat. 16:18) and His enemies could not have taken His life had He not determined to “lay it down” Himself (John 10:18)?

He could have called more legions of angels than Rome had soldiers, had he sought an earthly domain (Mat. 26:53). Do these folk never ponder the fact that the murderous Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, not because He **wanted** to be their earthly king, but because He **refused** to have anything to do with the kind of kingdom the premillennialists still envision? What part of Jesus’ statement to Pilate do they not understand?

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 my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

I have often wondered if advocates of this theology are even aware that this statement is in the New Testament.

### **Jesus Failed in His Kingdom Plans**

The premillennial averment that Jesus failed to establish a physical earthly kingdom at His First Coming implies that its establishment will be sometime in the future (at His Second Coming, they allege). First, surely they do not understand the gravity of this accusation — that the Son of God **failed** to do what God sent Him to do and what He Himself came to do. Furthermore, it is only fair to ask them how they can have any confidence that the Lord will be able to do the second time that which He was not able (they assert) to do the first time?

They must ignore numerous statements from the Lord and other inspired men to believe that He failed. All the passages already cited, indicating that people were in the kingdom in the first century, necessitate the conclusion that He established His kingdom at His first appearance. Moreover, before His self-sacrifice on Calvary He told the apostles that some of them would be alive to see His kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1).

Clearly and specifically, Jesus tied the time of the beginning of His kingdom to the lifetime of His contemporaries. If it did not begin while the apostles (excepting Judas Iscariot) lived, then Jesus either knowingly lied or was grossly misinformed, either of which disqualify Him as the sinless Savior of mankind. However, if He told the Truth, then **the kingdom was established in the first century** — just as Jesus said it would be (and as various passages demonstrate that it was). All must choose one of the following mutually exclusive propositions:

1. Jesus lied when He said His kingdom would come with power while some of the multitude and disciples lived.

2. Premillennialists lie when they say Jesus failed to establish His kingdom, which is His church.

Numerous times Jesus stated that His aim in coming the first time was to do His Father's will and to teach His Father's doctrine (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28; 14:10; cf. Mat. 26:39). If He failed in this aim, He again lied to His Father as He prayed; "I glorified thee on the earth, **having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do**" (John 17:4, emph. DM). He either did or did not succeed in what His Father sent Him to do. The premillennialist argues that He failed, which makes our Savior both a failure and a liar (twice over). No, He did not fail, He did not lie, and He was not mistaken.

### Conclusion

The theological system of Premillennialism is a prime illustration of the uninspired (but true) proverb: "People are willing to believe almost anything in religion as long as it is not in the Bible." The collection of doctrines that comprises it is most definitely not in the Bible. The three doctrines of the theological system discussed above are fundamental to the entire system. The remainder of this multifaceted, almost science-fictional system collapses with their removal.

If there were no other reason to reject premillennialism, one should do so just because it is false. However, it is not "merely" false, but **fatally** false on the grounds that it:

1. Denies that the church and the kingdom are one
2. Implies that the church is a Divine afterthought
3. Rejects the spiritual nature of the kingdom
4. Makes of the Son of God a failure and a liar
5. Ignores the Bible's clear teaching that the kingdom was established in the first century and that the only "future kingdom" will be the eternal Heavenly state of the church/kingdom

Let no one pronounce premillennialism a mere innocent and inconsequential "doctrine."

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared in the January 2003 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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