

# Premillennialism Defined

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The common belief today, which is the belief of postmillennialists, is that the Gospel is to be preached to all nations, until the whole world shall be converted to Christ, and then shall follow a universal reign of righteousness and peace, called the Millennium, followed by a short season of awful wickedness and apostasy, to close which Christ shall come, and there shall be a simultaneous resurrection of the righteous and the wicked to be instantly followed by a general judgment; that the world is then to be destroyed by fire, that Christ shall then surrender up all to God, and that God shall then be all in all.

Premillennialists, on the other hand, believe that the world, instead of growing better, will grow worse and worse, until Christ shall come and raise the righteous dead and translate the living saints, and having gathered them before his judgment seat in the air, reward them according to their works. The Jews are then to be gathered back to their land, along with the lost ten tribes, all in an uncovered state. Antichrist then sets up his kingdom, enters into a league with restored Israel, and when he gets them in his power, acts the traitor and subjects them to such an awful persecution that it is called in Matthew's gospel and the Apocalypse, "The Great Tribulation." After a short period this persecution is ended by the revelation of Jesus Christ with His Saints, and the "Man of Sin" is destroyed by the brightness of His coming. The beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire, and Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit. The living nations on earth are then summoned to judgment. the "Goat" nations are destroyed, and the "Sheep" nations, along with Christ's brethren, the Jews, become the nations over which Christ establishes His earthly dominion. The government is a "Theocracy," with Christ as King and His saints as coadjutors. Then follows a thousand years of Millennial glory, after which, Satan is loosed from the pit, deceives the outlying nations, Gog and Magog, gathers them to battle, and they are destroyed by fire from Heaven. Satan is then cast into the lake of fire, the earth is renovated by fire, God's people being preserved in some way during the operation, and then caused to inhabit the new earth. Then the wicked dead are raised, the fallen angels are summoned from Tartarus, the books are opened and the Judgment of "the Great White Throne" is set; ending with all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life being cast into the lake of fire. Then follow the eternal ages. From the foregoing it will be seen that premillennialists do not consider the resurrection and judgment days as days of twenty-four hours, but as periods, extending over at least a thousand years. They recognize at least two resurrections, those of the righteous and the wicked, a thousand years apart; and they expect four judgments: first, of the righteous in Christ, for their sins; second, of the righteous for their works when Christ comes and removes His Church; third, a judgment of nations; and fourth, the judgment of the wicked dead, known as the "final judgment."

The premillennial view of the second advent is no new doctrine. It dates back to the days of the prophets, and is largely the subject of their prophecies. Particularly is this so of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel Daniel, Zechariah and Malachi, who prophesied during the period from 700 to 400 B.C. It was clearly taught by Christ, and firmly held by the Apostles and the early Church. It is a common, yet wholly erroneous impression, that the premillennial faith is based mainly, if not solely, on a disputed passage of the Apocalypse (Rev. 20:4-6). The fact is that the main question at issue (whether Christ's return will precede or follow the Millennium) antedates the Apocalypse, and would have been a question of no less interest and importance through this dispensation if the Apocalypse had never been written. The Old Testament prophets, in plain language, and in glowing terms, foretold an era or age of universal righteousness and peace on this earth, under the reign of Messiah the Prince. (See Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; Micah 4:3,4; Jer. 31:34; Hab. 2:14; Daniel 7:13-27.)

That the disciples were not mistaken in their idea of such an earthly kingdom, ruled over by the promised Messiah, is evident from the fact that Jesus never reproved them for holding such a view. And after His resurrection, and previous to His ascension when they asked Him if He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), He did not say, "You are mistaken in your idea of a temporal kingdom; the kingdom I came to set up as predicted by the prophets is a spiritual kingdom." But He said, "**It is not for you to know the times and seasons.**" After Christ's ascension the disciples fully apprehended the matter of "**the kingdom,**"

their sermons and epistles were full of exhortations to wait for His return. They lived and acted in the firm conviction that He might return at any time, and establish His kingdom and until that kingdom was set up on the earth, they did not look for a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, that promised a reign of earthly righteousness and peace. The Apostolic Church was premillennial in its teaching and belief.

### **The Origin Of Postmillennialism**

For over two hundred years no other idea than that of the premillennial return of Christ was entertained by the primitive Church. The writings of the Church Fathers abound in evidence of the fact. But about 250 A.D., Origen, one of the fathers, conceived the idea that the words of Scripture were but the husk in which were hid the kernel of Scripture truth. At once he began to allegorize and spiritualize Scripture, and thus founded that school of interpreters from which the Church and the Bible have suffered so much. As time went on, the prophetic portions of the Word of God became a sealed book, and ignorance, like the gloom of night, settled down upon all Christendom, and innumerable errors prowled through the midnight blackness, threatening the utter extinction of the Gospel. But amid the gloom God was not without witnesses to the truth. The Waldenses, Paulicians and other sects, believed in the premillennial return of the Lord.

But that doctrine was not the only one that was eclipsed during the "dark ages;" the doctrine of justification by faith disappeared in the thick darkness, and star after star went out. But the gloom was not eternal. When the fullness of time was come, that "Morning Star of the Reformation," John Wycliffe arose and was followed by Luther, and Calvin and Knox and with the resurrection of the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrine of the premillennial return of the Lord was

revived. When the persecution aroused by the Reformation ceased, the time of peace and prosperity became as it always has been in the history of the Church, a time of peril. Rationalism refused to believe that the world was ripening for judgment and a new way of interpreting the prophecies appeared. Daniel Whitby, in the early part of the eighteenth century propounded the theory which is generally held at the present time by those who are not expecting the Lord's return till after the Millennium. He taught that the Millennium was not a reign of persons raised from the dead, but of the Church flourishing gloriously for a thousand years after the conversion and restoration of the Jews to their own land; and then Christ would come the second time.

Thus, postmillennialism, as advocated in our day is not yet two hundred years old, while premillennialism dates back to the days of Isaiah and Daniel. (*The Christian Herald and Signs of Our Times*, Dec. 3, 1890, pp. 774-775).

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