

The Coming Millennial Kingdom—Part 1

INTRODUCTION

This is part one of a two-part series on *The Coming Millennial Kingdom*. In this paper, we will consider:

1. The Battle for the Theocratic Kingdom.
2. Some Views of the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Some Consequences of Erroneous Views.

In part two, we will examine some disputed passages of Scripture relating to *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* which does not exist at this present time but will be established in the future.

Throughout history, mankind has struggled with three major questions:

1. Where have we come from? In other words, what was the origin of mankind?
2. Why are we here? Is there any real purpose for our lives here on Earth?
3. Where are we going? What's going to happen in the future?

There have been many different attempts to give explainable answers to those three questions. Those attempts could be called a worldview or a philosophy of history from creation to the end of the millennium. God's Word addresses all three of those questions. Therefore, the Bible presents a philosophy of history from God's perspective. As such, we will consider a biblical philosophy of history and demonstrate how God's ultimate purpose for history demands that there will be a future literal millennial kingdom established on earth.

THE BATTLE FOR THE THEOCRATIC KINGDOM

The Establishment of the Kingdom

In eternity past, God decided to establish a kingdom in which He would rule as sovereign King (1 Tim. 1:17). Besides having a king to rule, a kingdom requires two other things. First there must be a realm, or a kingdom over which to rule. Moses described the created universe like this: "In six days God created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them (Ex. 20:11)." Secondly, a kingdom requires subjects over which to rule. So, God created the beings He would govern. God created two categories of beings—angels and humans.

God created angelic beings who were more powerful than any other created thing (2 Pet. 2:11). Some angels were given greater power, and authority than others (Dan. 10:13, Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16). The Bible doesn't specify the exact number of angels created by God, but it does mention a vast number (Dan. 7:10, Heb. 12:22; Rev. 5:11).

God also created human beings for His kingdom. Since Earth was part of God's domain, He created a being in His own likeness who would administer His rule over everything else on the planet. God created man and gave him dominion over the entire earthly province of His universal kingdom (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:6-8). Placing them as overseers of the Earth, He held them responsible for managing the planet on His behalf. In simple terms, God's plan was for the Earth to be governed as a theocracy. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, a theocracy is:

A form of government in which God (or a deity) is recognized as the king or immediate ruler, and his laws are taken as the statute book of the kingdom, these laws usually being administered by ... a representative or representatives as his ministers and agents.¹

The word theocracy literally means God-rule, and so God was establishing a theocratic kingdom rule here over this earthly province of His universal kingdom.

Dr. Andy Woods explains:

The biblical story of the kingdom begins as early as the Garden of Eden. Here, God placed Adam and Eve in a position of authority over God's creation. ... It should be noted that Adam and Eve were given authority over the physical realm (fish, birds, living things that move on the earth). Here, God arranged for humanity's first couple to govern God's creation on God's behalf. ... The technical term for this hierarchy, where God rules over a man who in turn governs creation on God's behalf, is the office of Theocratic Administrator. This term simply refers to someone who governs for God. In other words, God ruled the world indirectly through the first Adam.²

With the creation of humans, God finished the task of establishing His kingdom and pronounced all "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The Rebellion of Satan

One of the chief angels of God became extremely arrogant. He deluded himself into believing that he could challenge God's supreme authority (Is. 14:12-14; Ezk. 28:11-17; 1 Tim. 3:6). He wanted to become the ruler of the entire universe by establishing his own kingdom. His goal was to wage war against God and ultimately overthrow His kingdom. Because of this angel's rebellion against God, his name was changed to "Satan," which means "adversary." He became a rebel, the enemy of God and adversary of every member of God's kingdom (Mt. 13:25, 28, 39; Lk. 10:18-19).

The Rebellion of Other Angels

To establish his own kingdom, Satan needed to have subjects to rule over. As a created being, he did not have the ability to create other beings. His only option was to convince God's other creatures to join him in his rebellion. For his kingdom to include both heavenly and earthly dominions, he had to persuade other angels and humans to join him in his rebellion.

A substantial number of angels chose to join Satan's rebellion and placed themselves under his authority. Satan became the leader of these fallen angels. Scripture refers to Satan "and his angels" (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7) and calls him "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

Although many angels switched their loyalty from God's kingdom to Satan's, a vast host of angels remained faithful to God. These are referred to as the "holy" and "elect" angels (Mk. 8:38; 1 Tim. 5:21). Therefore, God's kingdom retained a multitude of angelic subjects who remained loyal to Him.

¹ "Theocracy," The Oxford English Dictionary, 1961, Vol. XI.

² Woods, Andrew, *The Coming Kingdom: What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church?* (Ch. 2) Grace Gospel Press. Kindle Edition.

The Rebellion of Mankind

Satan infiltrated the perfect environment on earth where humans lived. He enticed them to violate a specific command given to them by God. Satan lied to them, saying that if they disobeyed God's command, then they would become like God (Gen. 3:15). In other words, he insinuated that humans could be in charge of their own lives and be their own rulers if they rebelled against God. Ignoring God's warning, our first parents chose to disobey the command of their Creator. As a result, the ones who were responsible for overseeing the earthly part of God's kingdom joined the rebellion against God.

The Consequences of Rebellion

Man's rebellion had catastrophic consequences.

When our first parents violated God's command, they experienced a spiritual death at that moment of disobedience (Gen. 2:16-17). They acquired a sin nature resulting in hostility toward God (Rom. 8:7). Their relationship with God, who is the source of life, was severed.

Besides experiencing a spiritual death, physical death eventually became a reality for humans. Their rebellion began a process of physical decay in their bodies.

As caretakers of God's earthly dominion, man's rebellion brought disaster to their domain. The earth's fertility was greatly reduced (Gen. 3:17), and thorns and thistles emerged for the first time (Gen. 3:18). God's earthly creation suffered from vanity and corruption due to human rebellion, leading to ongoing suffering and distress (Rom. 8:19-22). Through their sin, humans forfeited their once perfect environment.

Mankind was transferred from members of God's kingdom to members of Satan's dominion. This had ramifications for the entire human race as Adam's sin nature was passed down to succeeding generations.

Originally Adam was the theocratic administrator of God's earthly territory. However, when he rebelled against God, the theocracy ceased. Satan took control of the world system. The Earth's governance shifted from a theocracy (rule by God) to a "satanocracy" (rule by Satan). For this reason, Christ referred to Satan as "the prince of this world" (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), as Satan had the authority to offer all the kingdoms of the world to Christ (Lk. 4:5-6).

Our first parents were deceived by Satan into believing a lie (Jn. 8:44). Instead of becoming sovereign over their own lives, humans found themselves under the dominion of a new ruler. Their original King offered them life, peace, happiness, and fulfillment in exchange for willing obedience. Their new king became a harsh, self-serving taskmaster who inflicted upon them death, illness, conflict, sorrow, and frustration while demanding their service.

With the fall of humanity, Satan succeeded in usurping God's theocratic kingdom. He had succeeded in persuading numerous angels to join his realm and by deceit brought all of humanity into it also. He assumed control over the world system. In this challenge to God's sovereignty, Satan appeared to be victorious over God.

The Promise of a Redeemer

Almost immediately after Satan took control of the world system for his kingdom, God delivered a prophecy about Satan's ultimate defeat (Gen. 3:14-15). In this prophecy, God addressed Satan in the deceptive form he had assumed to tempt humanity. God warned Satan that, in the future, a man born of a woman would deliver a powerful blow to him. Later scriptures revealed that this prophecy marked God's initial promise that a Redeemer would be born into the world. This Redeemer would undertake the necessary work to defeat Satan's kingdom and plans. In other words, the Redeemer would be God's Counterrevolutionary, enabling the overthrow of the great revolutionary, Satan. Therefore, the Redeemer was to play a pivotal role in fulfilling God's purpose for history.

To reverse the consequences of human sin, it was crucial to address the root cause, which was human sin itself. This meant dealing with human sinfulness. Later scriptures clarified that only the payment of an appropriate penalty to satisfy divine justice could eradicate human sin. It also revealed that death was the sole adequate penalty (Rom. 5:12; 6:23). In the Genesis 3:15 prophecy, God predicted that the Redeemer would ultimately defeat Satan, even though Satan would inflict harm upon Him. This was God's way of conveying that, as a result of Satan's actions, the promised Redeemer would experience death as a means to conquer Satan. Later scriptures further revealed that through His sacrificial death, the Redeemer would atone for humanity's sin, leading to the removal of sin (Is. 53:4-6, 10-12; Jn. 1:29; 1 Pet. 2:24). This, in turn, made it possible for God to reverse the consequences of human rebellion.

The Purpose of History

This brings us back to the biblical philosophy of history. It sets the stage for an extraordinary conflict—a battle that would span the ages. This conflict would unfold both in the heavenly realm and on Earth (Rev. 12:7, 13, 17; Eph. 6:10-12).

Satan had launched an assault against God's kingdom, aiming to usurp it. For God to retain His supreme authority, He needed to defeat Satan and his kingdom. Not only that, to demonstrate His supreme authority God needed to defeat Satan in the very arena in which the enemy seemingly won his greatest battle against the Sovereign Creator of the universe.

Dr. Renald Showers explains:

This conflict of the ages provides the key for unlocking the mystery of the ultimate purpose of history. God's purpose for history is to glorify Himself by demonstrating the fact that He alone is the sovereign God of the universe. Inasmuch as God's purpose for history is the ultimate one, it is correct to conclude that the ultimate purpose for history is for God to glorify Himself by demonstrating His sovereignty. In order to demonstrate His sovereignty during history, God must restore the present earth to the basic original condition it enjoyed before man's rebellion. Old Testament prophets received revelation to the effect that He would do just that (Acts 3:21). It is important to note that the restoration must take place on this present earth, not the new earth to be created by God for eternity future (Rev. 21:1). Should God permit the present earth to pass away at the end of history without restoring it to its original conditions, it would appear that He was incapable of overcoming the devastating work of Satan and his kingdom. Thus, there would be no demonstration of divine sovereignty during history.

The universal kingdom is eternal, comprehensive, under God's direct rule, and always in existence. By contrast, the theocratic kingdom is futuristic, earthly, under God's indirect rule, and conditional.

What is the storyline of the Bible? It is how the office of theocratic administrator is restored through the messianic Kingdom. God originally intended to indirectly govern through (sic) the physical world through the first Adam; He will, one day, govern the world through the Last Adam, or God the Son.³

Dr. Charles Ryrie concurs:

In premillennial eschatology much is made of what the Millennium will mean to the world, to Jerusalem, to Palestine, to Israel, to the nations, etc., and rightly so, for it will affect many changes for good in the entire earth. But there is another perspective perhaps more important to consider: What will the Millennial Age mean to our Lord?

In Psalm 2:7–8 King Jesus was promised authority to rule the earth in righteousness. Certainly, He did not see that promise fulfilled during His first advent, though He paid the price of His own life for it. In Revelation 5 He is proclaimed worthy to take the sealed book, open it, and receive the inheritance that is rightfully His. This will be fulfilled when He comes again (11:15).

Why is an earthly kingdom necessary? Did He not receive His inheritance when He was raised and exalted in heaven? Is not His present rule His inheritance? Why does there need to be an earthly kingdom? Because He must be triumphant *in the same arena* where He was seemingly defeated. His rejection by the rulers of this world was on this earth (1 Cor. 2:8). His exaltation must also be on this earth. And so, it shall be when He comes again to rule this world in righteousness. He has waited long for His inheritance; soon He shall receive it.⁴

When we think of the millennial kingdom, our minds often jump to the book of Revelation. And yet the battle of the ages began at the dawn of creation. This conflict demands a literal fulfillment of the promises of God's millennial kingdom on this earth.

Dr. Harold Hoehner drove this point home to his students:

The late Dr. Harold Hoehner of Dallas Theological Seminary used to terrify doctoral students during oral exams by asking them how they would defend the notion of a future earthly kingdom from the Scriptures. Nervous students would usually start with Revelation 20:1–10, which speaks of the future one-thousand-year reign of Christ. Hoehner would then ask the student to find an earlier biblical reference to the coming kingdom. Students then typically went first to Paul, then Christ, then the prophets, and finally the covenants ... to find scriptural support for the coming kingdom. When Hoehner again asked for something earlier in Scripture, the student was forced to go back to Genesis 1. The learned professor was simply seeking to get his students to understand that the theme of a future, earthly kingdom begins on the Bible's very first page. One day God the Father will restore what was lost in Eden. He will again rule the world indirectly through a human intermediary. This human

³ Dr. Renald Showers, *What On Earth Is God Doing*.

⁴ Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. Print.

intermediary will not be the original Adam but rather the Last Adam or the unique God-man Jesus Christ who is the second member of the Trinity.⁵

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost also explained the need for a literal millennial kingdom on earth:

Apart from the reign of Christ...here on earth...And apart from this rule, God's purpose for man would never be brought to conclusion. God's purpose for the earth would be unrealized and the problem generated by Satan's rebellion would never be resolved. Thus, the physical, literal reign of Christ on the earth is a theological and biblical necessity—unless Satan is victorious over God.⁶

In music, the term *resolve* refers to the final resolution of a musical phrase, or composition. A song needs to end with a chord that brings resolution to the musical composition.

Johann Sebastian Bach sometimes slept more than he should have. His children had a unique way of waking him up. They would go to the piano and begin to play a composition. When they would get to the last note, they would stop. They wouldn't play the last note. It worked like a charm, and it would always wake him up. He would get up from his sleep, go to the piano, and play the final chord. He couldn't stand to leave it hanging there incomplete—unfinished. In the same way today, we are all waiting for the last note on the final page of God's song of victory. God will not leave His grand composition without striking the final note. That final note is the messianic kingdom of Jesus Christ.⁷

So too, this conflict of the ages needs to end with God demonstrating that He alone is the victor over Satan.

Summary

God's purpose in history is to glorify Himself by demonstrating that He alone is the sovereign God of the universe. God can only fulfill His purpose for history through His literal millennial kingdom with Christ reigning on earth.

SOME VIEWS OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

The Literal Interpretation

Why should students of God's Word expect to see a literal millennial kingdom with Christ reigning on planet earth? Certainly, God's purpose in history is a powerful argument in favor of a literal future kingdom on earth. But that is not the only argument for such a kingdom.

The Principles of Bible Interpretation. To understand God's Word, we must apply sound principles of Bible interpretation. We must use the tool of consistent, literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics to arrive at a solid understanding of the text of Scripture. David L. Cooper explained the meaning of literal interpretation this way:

⁵ Woods, Andrew, *The Coming Kingdom: What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church?* (Ch. 2) Grace Gospel Press. Kindle Edition.

⁶ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God's Kingdom and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 316.

⁷ Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 421-22.

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.”⁸

The Old Testament prophets wrote extensively about the future kingdom. Those promises of a future kingdom when understood using the plain sense of Scripture demand a literal fulfillment.

The Consistency of Bible Prophecy. It has been estimated that 25% to 30% of Scripture was prophetic at the time it was written. Of those prophetic passages in God’s Word, approximately 80% were literally fulfilled at Christ’s first coming.

Some Bible teachers would have us believe that the remaining 20% are being fulfilled spiritually or allegorically today. But that is problematic for several reasons.

- In the Old Testament false prophets were exposed by the outcome of their prophecies. If their predictions were not literally fulfilled, they were to be stoned to death (Deut. 18:20-22). Allowing for the allegorical method of interpretation would violate the Old Testament test of a false prophet. How could a false prophet be identified if allegorical interpretation were allowed? In the Old Testament, God staked His reputation on the literal fulfillment of His Word (Is. 42:8-9; Ezk. 37:6, 13-14; Joel 2:27). Allegorical interpretation would undermine God’s reputation.
- Since 80% of prophetic passages were fulfilled literally at Christ’s first coming, then why not expect the remaining 20% to also be fulfilled literally? Why would God change the way He would have us understand His Word?

The Understanding of Jesus’ Disciples. In Acts 1:3 we are told that Jesus was seen by the apostles for forty days between His resurrection and ascension. During that time, Jesus was speaking to them about “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” In verse 6 the disciples asked, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Certainly, they were expecting a literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom. Jesus was the master teacher. If He had been teaching His disciples about an allegorical kingdom during those forty days, one must wonder how the disciples could have been so confused. And if they were totally confused, such an error does not speak well of Jesus’ teaching ability. Assuming that the disciples had totally misunderstood Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom, this would have been a perfect time for the Lord to rebuke their misunderstanding. But how did Jesus respond to their question? In verse 7 we read, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” Jesus did not rebuke them for thinking that there would be a literal kingdom for Israel. Then we read, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven (vv. 9-11).’” How did Jesus ascend into heaven? He ascended visibly. And how will He return? He will return “in like manner.” Certainly, this argues for Christ’s visible return to

⁸ David L. Cooper, *The World’s Greatest Library: Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970), p. 11.

earth to establish His literal millennial kingdom.

The Understanding of the Early Church Fathers. A number of the Early Church Fathers were taught by the apostles of Jesus. They held to a literal interpretation of prophecy and understood the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom to be fulfilled literally on earth. For example:

- Justin Martyr (100 A.D. – 165 A.D.) wrote, “But I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem as was announced by the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others.”⁹
- Irenaeus (120 A.D. – 202 A.D.), advocated for a literal understanding of God’s Word. Irenaeus was a disciple of Papias (60 A.D. – 130 A.D.) and Papias was discipled by the apostle John. Irenaeus was a stern defender of the literal interpretation of Scripture. As such, the Early Church Fathers also believed in a literal millennial kingdom on earth.

Having considered some solid arguments for a literal understanding of the millennial kingdom, we will briefly consider some views of the promised kingdom.

The Premillennial View

According to the premillennial view, Christ will return to earth at His second coming to establish a kingdom of peace and righteousness which lasts for 1000 years. Following Christ’s thousand-year reign on earth, eternity begins. This was the view of the Early Church Fathers for the first 3 centuries of church history. Premillennialism went into a decline after the 4th century and was revived again in the 1800’s with the beginning of Bible and prophecy conferences.

Premillennialism is the only view that holds to the consistent literal, historical-grammatical, interpretation of Scripture. The promises made to Abraham and David were unconditional and will have a literal fulfillment. These promises have not been transferred to the church.

The Amillennial View

Amillennialism teaches that there is no literal millennium on earth. When Christ returns, then eternity begins. Many amillennialists believe that we are living in the millennium now here on earth. Others say that the millennium is being fulfilled now in heaven.

Amillennialism began in the 4th century with Augustine and his followers. In his early Christian life, Augustine followed the Premillennial view of the Early Church Fathers. Later he changed his view and developed Amillennialism.

Interestingly, when the blessed hope of Christ’s return was lost, the church was plunged into the dark ages. The Roman Catholic church continued to teach Amillennialism. This was the predominate view until sometime after the reformation.

Amillennialism is based on a non-literal or allegorical interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures regarding the kingdom.

Floyd Hamilton (amillennialist) conceded, “Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic Kingdom that the

⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 80.

Jews of the time of Christ were looking for, on the basis of a literal kingdom interpretation of the Old Testament promises.” Another amillennialist, Oswald Allis, admits that “the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age.”¹⁰

The Postmillennial View

Postmillennialism began in the 1600’s as a reaction against humanism and liberal theology.

According to Postmillennialism, Christ’s kingdom is now being expanded through the preaching of the gospel. The church triumphant will eventually Christianize the whole world after which Christ returns at the end of the millennium. This view teaches that the present age is the millennium. After Christ returns at the end of the millennium eternity begins.

Postmillennialism has been called an optimistic version of Amillennialism. It differs from Amillennialism in that they believe in triumph of the gospel message resulting in the whole world turning to Christ.

Postmillennialism is also based on a non-literal or allegorical interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures regarding the kingdom.

The Kingdom Now View

Kingdom Now Theology is also known as dominion theology, theonomy, or Christian reconstructionism. Typically, it finds its roots in Postmillennialism or Amillennialism. Gary Gilley described it when he wrote: “There is a movement about that is casting a long shadow for its size. It is known by different handles such as reconstructionism, kingdom theology, theonomy, and dominion theology, and it is a curious blend of Reformed/Calvinist theology and Charismatic influence. While there are relatively few who would call themselves reconstructionists, a number of the movement’s ideas have infiltrated the thinking and actions of many believers, often without them knowing it.”¹¹

It certainly has cast a long shadow and has influenced the thinking of many evangelicals.

Bruce A. Baker noted the various forms that Kingdom Now Theology can take:

If one were to poll U.S. Christian evangelicals concerning how they view the “kingdom,” the overwhelming majority would proclaim that the invisible Body of Christ (the church) in the here and now is, in one way or another, the Kingdom. Of those holding to a “kingdom now” theology, there would be various opinions concerning what happens in the future; but all would make similar statements concerning what is going on in the present.

Some would state the church is the only form of the Kingdom that will ever be. When Jesus Christ returns, they say, He will destroy the heavens and the earth by fire (2 Pet. 3:10); then the eternal state will begin. The current (and only) kingdom, as seen in the church, is a spiritual kingdom, not a physical kingdom. This viewpoint is known as

¹⁰ Cited in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 83, 86.

¹¹ Gary Gilley, *Dominion Theology*, Think On These Things Ministries, Last accessed 9/15/2023, <https://tottministries.org/dominion-theology/>

Amillennialism. People arrive at this conclusion by reading the New Testament and concluding that the church has somehow replaced Israel. In other words, when the Old Testament speaks of a future for Israel, it is really referring to the church.

Others contend the Kingdom is already here, but in an incomplete form. Of these, a minority would insist that as the church spreads the gospel, more and more people will come to Christ and the world will be made a better and better place until, with the ultimate victory of the gospel, a golden age appears. (Yes, people really do believe this!) They believe that at the end of that golden age, Christ will return and judge the living and the dead, followed by the eternal state.

This was the predominant view in the 19th century. If you read closely, you will see this view alluded to in “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord”) and in many of our old Christmas carols, such as “Joy to the World.” This idea fell out of favor after the terrible devastation of World War I. People looked around and saw that the world was not becoming a better place. They saw that it was actually getting worse and worse.

Amazingly, this idea (known as Postmillennialism) is making something of a comeback. The main idea behind this view is that the kingdom of God is not a literal, physical kingdom in the future but, rather, the rule of God in the hearts of believers. People who believe this view refer to Luke 17:20–21 and Romans 14:17. They reject as childish the idea of a future, literal Kingdom mentioned in Revelation 20. They insist Revelation 20:1–6 refers to the martyrs in heaven who died during the Roman persecution. Put another way, they reject the plain reading of the text for a reading steeped in allegory.¹²

Kingdom Now Theology is based upon the allegorical method of interpretation found in Postmillennialism or Amillennialism. As such, it rejects the consistent, literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation regarding prophetic passages dealing with the kingdom.

The Already / Not Yet View

In recent years, a new form of Kingdom Now Theology has gained popularity among those who advocate the Premillennial view of the kingdom.

Bruce Baker explains:

The rest who argue for a kingdom in the here and now maintain that Christ is ruling the world through the church, albeit in an incomplete fashion. When Christ returns, He will set up a worldwide Kingdom where He rules the nations with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9), which will be the kingdom in its complete form. Still, even though the kingdom is not complete, it is, in one sense, already here.

Some argue that Christ’s reign through His church is an invisible, spiritual reign. Others disagree. As Darrell Bock put it, we are getting a sneak peek of the coming kingdom. This sneak peek means that Christ is ruling in the here and now—physically, not just spiritually—through His church, albeit incompletely. When He comes, His physical reign will be worldwide and complete.

¹² Bruce Baker, *Kingdom Now*, Israel My Glory, Last accessed: 9/15/2023, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/kingdom-now/>

This idea is usually expressed as follows: the Kingdom is already here—but not yet here. This used to be known as Covenant Premillennialism, but now a slightly different version has appeared, known as Progressive Dispensationalism. Regardless of what label is applied, however, this idea of a Kingdom that is already here but not yet here is becoming so prominent that Russell Moore, former president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, has labeled it the “emerging evangelical consensus.”¹³

As Gary Gilley noted, the ideas of Kingdom Now Theology “have infiltrated the thinking and actions of many believers”¹⁴ including those who hold to Premillennialism.

A major problem of Progressive Dispensationalism’s Already / Not Yet View is that it uses something called “complementary hermeneutics” to arrive at its interpretation of Scripture. This is known as “Realized Eschatology” which is a clear departure from consistent, literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics. In contrast, “complementary hermeneutics” imposes upon the Old Testament text a theological bias by redefining the understanding of the text through the lens of the New Testament Scriptures.

When reading God’s Word through the lens of consistent, literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics, we see the Church Age as having a distinct purpose and administration from the future Millennial Kingdom. We see a distinction between Christ’s current reign at the right hand of the Father in the Church Age in which we live, and His future earthly reign on David’s Throne in Jerusalem during the Millennium when the blessings of the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled.

In contrast, those embracing “complementary hermeneutics” claim that the present Church Age is a “realized” form of the Kingdom. They make no distinction between Christ’s current reign at the right hand of the Father and His future rule on David’s throne during the Millennium.

The Already / Not Yet View undermines the sound principles of Bible interpretation by using “complementary hermeneutics.”

Summary

The central issue between these views is whether or not we are to take God’s Word literally with regard to prophecy. Only Premillennialism allows God to fulfill His purpose for history by establishing a literal millennial kingdom on earth.

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF ERRONEOUS VIEWS

Changing the Character and Focus of the Church

What difference does it make whether we are living in the Kingdom today or not? Isn’t this simply a matter of splitting theological hairs regarding views about the end times? The fact is that a person’s view of eschatology (the doctrine of end times) will affect their view of ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church).

Alva McClain warned:

Theological confusion, especially in matters which have to do with the church, will

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Gary Gilley, *Dominion Theology*.

inevitably produce consequences which are of grave practical concern. The identification of the Kingdom with the church has led historically to ecclesiastical policies and programs which, even when not positively evil, have been far removed from the original simplicity of the New Testament *ekklēsia* [church]. It is easy to claim that in the “present kingdom of grace” that the rule of the saints is wholly “spiritual,” exerted only through moral principles and influence. But practically, once the church becomes the Kingdom in any realistic theological sense, it is impossible to draw any clear line between principles and their implementation through political and social devices.

... the basic assumption is always the same: The church in some sense is the kingdom, and therefore has a divine right to rule; or it is the business of the church to “establish” fully the Kingdom of God among men. Thus the church loses its pilgrim character and the sharp edge of its divinely commissioned “witness” is blunted. It becomes an *ekklēsia* which is not only in the world, but also of the world.¹⁵ Dr. Andy Woods notes three problems that can occur when the church begins to see itself as the kingdom.

First, the church ceases to see itself as a pilgrim in the world but rather sees herself at home in the world. A pilgrim is one who is simply passing through a temporary realm toward a final destination. In the same way, this world is not the church’s home but rather is a temporary sphere that the church is passing through on her way to eternal glory.

Second, if the church pursues worldly power, she becomes distracted from her divine mission to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). God only promises to bless and empower the church when she remains within His intended design. Once the church becomes something that God never called her to be, she is emptied of this divine power. If Satan can convince the church to become involved in projects that she was never given the power to fulfill, he will have effectively neutralized the church.

Third, seeing the church as the kingdom causes the church to substitute social causes in lieu of preaching the true gospel. The Great Commission is subtly transformed from evangelism and discipleship to altering societal structures. In other words, rather than fulfilling the Great Commission, the church perceives its central purpose as fixing societal ills such as curing cancer, ending world poverty and hunger, and establishing social justice. The collective salvation of nations or communities replaces the individual salvation of souls. This philosophy and misguided emphasis is known as the “Social Gospel.”¹⁶

We can see this trend occurring today. Progressive Dispensationalism teaches the already / not yet view of the kingdom. When you examine the writings of Progressive Dispensationalists, you often see them advocating for social justice causes. Craig Blaising is one of the leading voices of Progressive Dispensationalism. He complained, “Unfortunately, present-day dispensationalists have written very little in proposing a theology of social ministry.”¹⁷ Continuing, he wrote, “if we as a community of Christ worked on creating our community as a model of social justice and

¹⁵ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 438–39.

¹⁶ Woods. *The Coming Kingdom*.

¹⁷ Craig Blaising, “*Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition*,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 14, n. 3.

peace, then we really would have some suggestions to make for social reform in our cities and nations.”¹⁸

It’s been said that the good is the enemy of the best. Feeding the poor and defending the defenseless are good things. However, those good things were not what the church was commissioned to do. Some have aptly said, “God sent us to be fishers of men, not to clean up the fishbowl.”

Dr. Woods correctly advises:

Kingdom building, societal transformation, and the Social Gospel have largely replaced the church’s central calling to evangelize and disciple. Thus, kingdom now theology should be avoided not only because it is not scripturally supported, but also because it alters the divine purpose for the church, thereby robbing her of divine power and blessing.¹⁹

Summary

Premillennialism reinforces the pilgrim character of the church and focuses its purpose on the Great Commission.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we examined some views of the millennial Kingdom. One view that we did not touch on is the “Pan-millennial View.” Rather than dealing with the complex problems of eschatology, some Christians are satisfied with sitting on the fence to see whatever “pans out” regarding the millennial kingdom. Little do they realize that their fence sitting may impact their focus regarding ministry.

Theologians tend to examine doctrines in the Bible as if they were dissecting a frog in a laboratory. They study doctrines in isolation from one another. But the fact is a person’s view of the millennial kingdom can affect their view of the church and the mission that Jesus assigned His bride to do.

When Jesus was 12 years old, His mother asked Him why He went missing for a period of time. He replied, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business (Lk. 2:49)?” When Jesus returns for His bride, will the church be found laboring on behalf of the Father’s business? Will the church be dedicated to the task of fishing for men? Or will the church be busy trying to clean up the fishbowl? Our view of the kingdom will make a significant impact on where we focus our efforts on behalf of the Father.

¹⁸ Craig Blaising, “Theological and Ministerial Issues in Progressive Dispensationalism,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, ed. Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), 288–89.

¹⁹ Woods. *The Coming Kingdom*.

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²⁰ How Augustine’s switch from Premillennial to Amillennial affected his own views (Part 1) and Calvin’s view (Part 2) on salvation.