

Chain Reference: Premillennialism

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Introduction.

- A. A couple of weeks ago, back when I began to write this sermon, I was casting around for another topic that would be good chain-reference fodder, when it occurred to me that premillennialism would make an excellent subject for study. Premillennialism is an extremely popular doctrine these days. In fact, the majority of Protestant denominations teach some form of it. That means that we need to be able to address it.
- B. In a nutshell, here's what garden-variety premillennialism says. It starts off with the idea that the promises of God are eternal. Therefore, premillennialists say that the promise that God made to Abraham that his children would inherit the land of Canaan is still in effect. When Jesus came to earth, it was really God's plan that Jesus would become an earthly King of the Jews who would fulfill this land promise. As the premillennialists tell the story, God's plan backfired. Instead of taking Jesus for their earthly King, the Jews killed Jesus instead. That forced God to move to Plan B, the church. The church is a stopgap until the time when Christ will return to earth. The second time, the Jews will get it right, accept Jesus as their King, and Jesus will reign as an earthly King in Jerusalem for 1000 years. There's more to premillennialism than that, but those are the basics.
- C. Obviously, this is an extremely complicated doctrine that has wide-ranging implications for our understanding of what it means to be a Christian, but few, if any of us, can point out the problems with premillennialism off the top of our heads. That's why we're going to do another chain reference. Here's the way it's going to work. On that page in the back of your Bibles, write "Premillennialism," and then next to it, write Joshua 21:43-45, because that's going to be the first link in the chain. Then, once we turn to Joshua 21:43-45 and finish reading it, you're going to write the next Scripture in the margin next to it, which is going to be Romans 10:12. Repeat the process through the entire sermon, and you'll have a chain reference for premillennialism.

I. The Jews and God's Plan.

- A. If you'll think back to what I said a couple of minutes ago, it's obvious that premillennialists have a lot to say about a number of Scriptural topics. Sadly, much of what they say is flatly contradicted by the Bible. For instance, they claim that the land promise to Abraham is still in force. By contrast, the Scripture tells us that the land promise was completely fulfilled 3500 years ago. We find this in **Joshua 21:43-45**. Write that Scripture down next to "Premillennialism" on that page in the back of your Bible, then turn there with me. This passage couldn't be much clearer that God did absolutely everything for the Israelites that He said He would.
- B. Because God fulfilled that land promise, it was no longer in force from that point on, any more than a promise that we make is in force once we fulfill it. For instance, let's say that I promise Lauren I'm going to buy her a vacuum cleaner for Valentine's Day. I'm not actually that dumb, but let's say that I were. I make this promise to her, and when V-Day comes around, she gets a vacuum cleaner with a big red bow on it. Now that Lauren has her vacuum cleaner, does she have any reason to expect another one? Of course not; that's not how we interpret promises. In the same way, folks, the Jews have no reason to expect more land from God. That whole premise on which premillennialism is based is actually logically flawed.
- C. Also a part of this idea is the premillennialist teaching that the Jews are somehow still God's special people, even though they have been opposing the will of Christ for 2000 years, that they are still the heirs of this ancient covenant. In reality, though, in the spiritual realms of today, the Jews have no special significance. Among many other places, we find this in **Romans 10:12**. Write that in the margin next to Joshua 21:43-45, then turn there with me. Before Christ came, certainly, the Jews were the one and only chosen people of God. But Jesus changed all that. Jews can become Christians just like Gentiles can, and they can disobey God just like Gentiles can, but their genetic Jewishness has no more meaning than the fact that I have green eyes and brown hair. God no longer makes a racial distinction among the people He accepts or rejects. That means, folks, that anybody who tries to put the Jews up on a pedestal has to ignore the Scripture to do it.
- D. Just as their doctrine leads the premillennialists to emphasize the Jews, so too it also leads them to minimize the importance of the church. They treat the church as the result of a tragic failure of God's plan, a momentary stopgap that God cobbled together because it was the best He could do. In reality, the significance of the church is very different. Look with me at what Paul reveals about the church in **Ephesians 1:3-4**. Just like we always do with these, write Ephesians 1:3-4 in the margin next to Romans 10:12, then turn to that passage with me. As this passage makes clear, God didn't save people through the church because the Jews messed up and He needed to do something to fill the time until the return of Jesus. Instead, since before the foundation of the world, God looked into the future, decided that He wanted to establish the church, and from that point on, guided the course of human history so that in the fullness of time, the church would spring into existence and continue forever. It just doesn't make sense, folks, as we consider the scope of God's eternal purpose, to say that all of those thousands and thousands of tiny details came together so

perfectly, even though they weren't part of something that God had planned at all. In reality, friends, the church is the highest goal that God has for the earth, and the premillennialists are totally wrong.

- E. One of the parts of God's plan that the premillennialists are most wrong about is the significance of the death of Christ. They claim that Christ came to earth not to die, but to reign, and the fact that He did die wasn't part of God's plan at all. Instead, it represents a moment when God's plan was defeated by Satan and his minions.
- F. This theological idea runs exactly counter to one of the main messages of the New Testament. Book after book asserts that Jesus came to earth not to reign, but to die for our sins, and then to be exalted. Along these lines, consider with me **Acts 4:27-28**. Write this Scripture down next to Ephesians 1:3-4, then turn there with me. As the apostles' prayer makes quite clear, those who killed Jesus, even though they meant to defy God, only ended up carrying out His will. The death of Jesus was not the failure of God's plan. Instead, it was the centerpiece of God's plan, the means by which God would destroy the power of the devil. Premillennialists, along with any others who deny this, are literally missing out on the main message of the Bible.

II. Christ.

- A. This idea, that Jesus came to earth to die for our sins, then to be raised and exalted to heaven to intercede for us, is critically important to genuine Christianity. Without it, our entire system of faith collapses and becomes incoherent. That means that any interpretation of Scripture that calls into question the intercessory function of Christ must be wrong. And yet, that's exactly what premillennialism does, when it says that Christ is going to return to earth to reign for a thousand years BEFORE the day of judgment. The passage that highlights the problem with this is **Hebrews 8:4**. As always, write Hebrews 8:4 in the margin next to Acts 4:27-28, then turn to it with me so that we can read it together. As this passage says, Christ can be a priest only as long as He remains in the heavens. If He returns to earth, He cannot be a priest, because He doesn't qualify under the Law of Moses. That means that if the premillennialist expectations were to play out and Christ DID come back to Jerusalem, Satan would lose the battle but win the war, because Christ could no longer intercede for the saints. At the very least, any Christian who sinned even once during this supposed millennial reign would no longer have a way to seek forgiveness of his sins. That can't be. The premillennialists must be wrong.
- B. In fact, folks, not only would Christ reigning on earth pose a serious problem for His true function, it wasn't ever part of the plan at all. Christ was never meant to be an earthly king, and we see this clearly in His words in **John 18:36**. Hopefully, by now you know the drill. Write John 18:36 down next to Hebrews 8:4, then turn to John together with me. Look at the logic that Jesus uses here. He acknowledges to Pilate that He is a king, but modifies that by saying that His kingdom is NOT of this world. Why should Pilate believe Jesus? Because if Jesus DID have a kingdom that was part of this world, surely His earthly servants would be fighting to protect Him. In fact, if you remember some of the gospel accounts, Peter tried to fight for Jesus, and Jesus told him not to! Let's be honest about this, folks. If Jesus did in fact come to earth with the intent of becoming an earthly King, it was the sorriest, most pathetic attempt at kingship that history records. I'm no great war leader, but at least I would have enough sense to let people fight for me who wanted to. This leaves us with two choices: either Jesus meant to become an earthly King and was just totally incompetent about making it happen, or earthly kingship was never part of His goals at all. Brethren, I refuse to believe in an incompetent Savior. Jesus never meant to reign on earth, and the premillennialists are totally wrong.
- C. They're just as wrong when they say that Jesus is not now reigning as King, and will only begin to reign when He returns triumphantly to Jerusalem. Once again, there are many passages in the Bible that say exactly the opposite. Let's look at one of these, **Colossians 1:13**. Be sure to write that one down right next to John 18:36, then turn to it with me to see what it says. Paul, writing in the first century, describes what happens when any Christian is saved. He is taken out of the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the Son of God. The kingdom of Jesus is in existence at this very moment, and every saint is a part of it. Jesus doesn't need to come back to earth to start reigning. He's reigning right now.
- D. Finally, though, we need to spend some time dealing with the premillennialist confusion about when the return of Christ is going to take place. Although it's not strictly part of premillennialist doctrine, most believers in that doctrine are very interested in what they call "the end times," and spend a lot of time piecing together supposed clues from Scripture that point to Jesus returning in the very near future. This is not a new development. Believers have probably been trying to predict the time of the return of Jesus since shortly after He was taken up. I can think of at least one modern denomination that has put a date to that return at least six times. There have been many, many predictions about Christ's triumphant reappearance, but all of those predictions have had one thing in common. They've all been wrong, and they will continue to be wrong.
- E. We see the reason why in **Matthew 24:36**. This is our last Scripture for the evening, so write it in the margin next to Colossians 1:13, then turn to it with me. As the saying goes, if you want to keep something secret, don't tell anybody else. That's exactly what God has done with the date of the end of the world. He hasn't even told Jesus about it. Folks, if Jesus doesn't know, who are we to think that we can spend fifteen minutes studying the book of Revelation and figure it out on our own? Jesus will return only when we least expect it.

Conclusion. What we should do about it is live to be ready for Him whenever He does come back.