

The History & Significance of Premillennialism

Lesson #1 - What is Premillennialism? ⁰⁶³⁸

I. Introduction

Premillennialism is a comprehensive theology of future things based on a literal, grammatical, historic hermeneutic of Scripture. The scope of premillennialist beliefs and teachings are broad and comprehensive about how God interacts with humanity and how He progressively reveals Himself to man. This lesson will lay out some details of this interpretive view of what Scripture speaks to.

Premillennialism must be understood in the context of other views that are different. (Reformed which includes Covenant theology and Roman Catholic Eschatology)

Each of these theologies are substantially distinctive in their eschatological viewpoints and understanding of Biblically prophesied future events

II. Importance of Prophecy:

“Many Christians view Bible prophecy with confusion or cynicism. Some of them are convinced that prophecy is so complicated that only those with special gifts of insight or intellect can make sense of intricate details, such as ten-horned beasts and locusts that resemble horses but have the faces of men. Others have been exposed to enough bizarre interpretations and failed predictions that they have retreated into ‘eschatological agnosticism,’ pleading ignorance on prophetic matters.”

Paul N. Benware; *Understanding End Times Prophecy*; p. 17

Knowledge of Prophecy is critical to our:

- Sanctification 1 Jn 2:28-29
- Withstanding trials & persecution Rom 8:18-25
- Grounding the hope in Christ 2 Pet 3:10-13
- Living in hope Titus 2:11-14

III. Definitions:

A. Church Ecclesiology is the study of the Church, namely what it is, when did it start, who belongs to the church, what is required and expected of the church, what does the church deliver to God in service, and what does the church deliver to its members?

Note: Wayne Grudem’s definition for the church is: “the community of all true believers for all time.” Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*; p. 1238

I disagree with this definition.

In Dr. Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, footnote on p. 853 he says:

“¹See section 5 below [p. 859] for a discussion of the dispensational view that the church and Israel must be thought of as distinct groups. In this book, I have taken a non-dispensational position on that question, though it should be pointed out that many evangelicals who agree with much of the rest of this book will differ with me on this particular question.”

“The **Church Age** is the period of time from Pentecost (Acts 2) to the rapture (foretold in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). It is called the **Church Age** because it covers the period in which the **Church** is on earth.” from www.gotquestions.org/church-age.html

B. Covenant “An unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the condition of their relationship.” Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*; p. 1239

There are two types of covenants between God and man. They are:

- 1st Unconditional Covenants (unilateral) “a sovereign disposition of God, whereby He establishes an unconditional or declarative compact with man, obligating Himself, in grace, by the untrammelled formula, ‘I Will,’ to bring to pass of Himself definite blessings for the covenanted ones,

2nd Conditional Covenants (bilateral) “a proposal by God, wherein He promises, in a conditional or mutual compact with man, by the contingent formula “If Ye Will,” to grant special blessings to man provided he fulfills perfectly certain conditions, and to execute definite punishment in case of his failure.”

Both quotes (1 & 2) above are from Dwight Pentecost’s book *Things to Come*; p. 67-68

C. Covenantalism A theological system that bases God’s dealing with man as being under two or three different covenants. These are:

1st The Covenant of Redemption – Made in eternity past between the Father and the Son. - - -

The great purpose of God is now the salvation of the elect. **Louis Berkhof**; *Systematic Theology*; pp. 565-571; From UET*;

2nd The Covenant of Works – Brought with it the promise of eternal life for obedience and death for disobedience. Adam was temporarily put on probation to see what he would do. he failed, and, because he was the head of the human race, he brought spiritual death to himself and to all his descendants. Covenant theologians have differing opinions as to whether or not this covenant has been set aside. **Louis Berkhof**, *Systematic Theology*; pp. 211-218. From UET*

3rd The Covenant of Grace – defined as that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience. **Louis Berkhof**; *Systematic Theology*; p. 277; from UET*

COVENANT OF REDEMPTION	COVENANT OF WORKS	COVENANT OF GRACE		SECOND COMING
Eternity Past	Pre-Fall	Old Dispensation	New Dispensation	
		Israel ≡ Church		

* **Paul Benware**; *Understanding End Times Prophecy*; UET; pp. 78-79

D. Dispensationalism A theological understanding of the organization of Biblical history into a series of God’s administration of people, covenants, events, promises, and prophetic intentions. Some important differences in Dispensational theology compared to Covenant theology are:

- 1st A more literal interpretation of Scripture, avoiding excessive “allegorical” interpretation.
- 2nd A clear distinction between Israel and the Church, claiming that the Church began at Pentecost.
- 3rd A future pretribulational rapture of the church being caught up to meet Christ in the air.*
- 4th A future literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel.*
- 5th A dividing of Biblical history into 7 distinct dispensations (administrations) of God’s relating to his people through a progressive revelation of Himself to mankind.

* Associated strongly with “Premillennialism”.

Salvation by Grace Through Faith Alone						
(1) Pre-Fall “Innocence”	(2) Conscience “Post Fall”	(3) Government “Noah”	(4) Patriarchal “Abraham”	(5) Mosaic “Moses- Law”	(6) Church Age	(7) Millennial Kingdom
			Israel	≠	Church	
Progressive Revelation →						

Eph 1:3-12 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in*

Him ¹⁰with a view to an **administration** ³⁶²² suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹²to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

Eph 3:1-12 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — ²if indeed you have heard of the **stewardship** ³⁶²² of God's grace which was given to me for you; ³that by revelation there was made known to me **the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ⁷of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. ⁸To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light what is the administration ²⁸⁴² of **the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God** who created all things; ¹⁰so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

The King James Bible used the English word “dispensation” in verses:

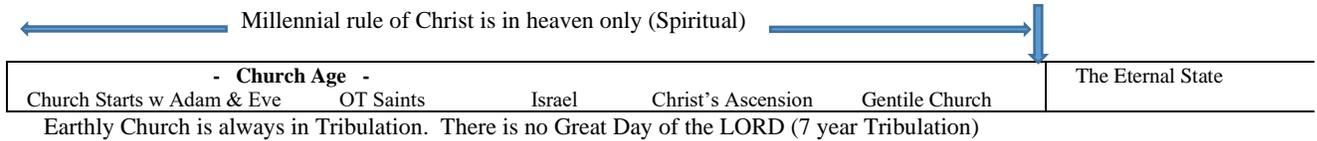
1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10; Eph 3:2; & Col 1:25.

This Greek word οἰκονομος oikonomos (Str. 3622 & 3623) 10x is variously translated as dispensation, management, stewardship, administration, or economy.

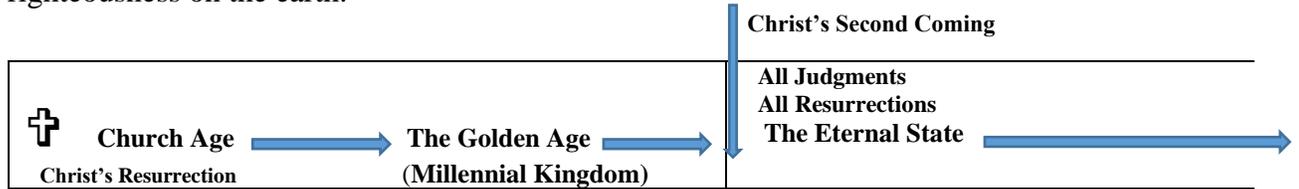
See also 1 Tim 1:3-7

- E. Eschatology** The study of last things, particularly as related to the sequence of events leading up to the eternal states of believers and unbelievers. This includes the sequence and timing of such events as the coming of Christ, the **Millennial Kingdom**, the rapture of the church, and the **Tribulation Period**.
- F. Hermeneutics** The study of the rules and principles by which Christians should interpret Scripture. There is a great divide as to the use allegory in interpreting Scripture. One of our upcoming lessons in this series will go into this historical divide and the difference in interpretation between various theological views of the church and eschatology.
- G. Imminency** A theological view that nothing within Scripture specifies required events that must occur before Jesus' **Rapture of His Church**. His return, as far as we can know, is imminent. (not to be confused with God's immanency)
- H. Last Days** The days that we live in now awaiting the coming of Christ. This is “The Church Age” as discussed above under section “III. Definitions section A. Church”.
- I. Millennial Kingdom** The prophesied 1000-year absolute rule of Christ on the earth. The question is:
1. When does this Kingdom come about? and
 2. What does it look like? We will be answering these questions later in this course.
- J. Millennialism** A set of eschatological views regarding when the Millennial Kingdom appears with respect to the 2nd advent (2nd coming) of Christ. Premillennialism differs from Amillennialism and Postmillennialism. These 3 views are named (by prefix) for their belief about when the Millennial Kingdom occurs with respect to primarily the second advent (coming) of Christ:

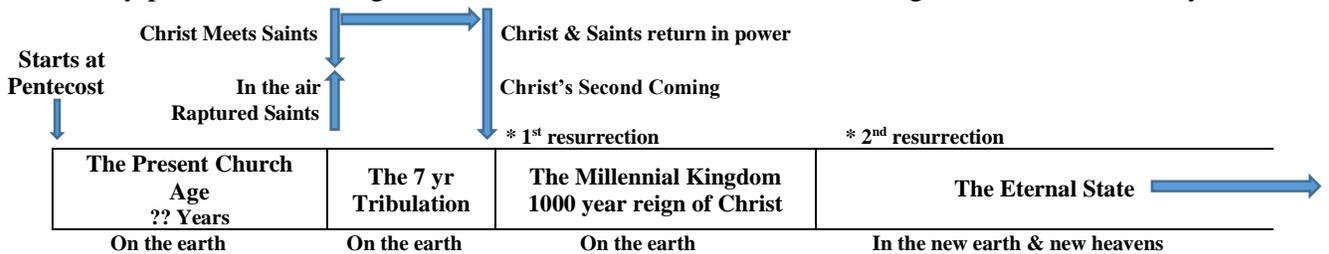
1. **Amillennialists** believe that this Church age is the Millennial Kingdom and that Christ rules from heaven spiritually rather than there being a specific thousand year period with Christ ruling on the earth from David's throne.



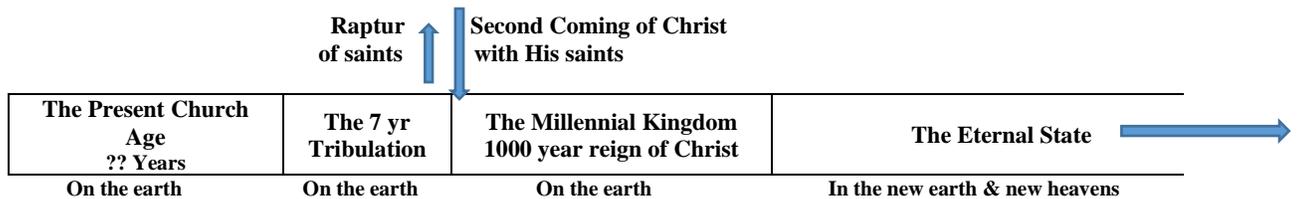
2. **Postmillennialists** believe that Christ will return to earth after (Post) the church purifies the earth through the spread of the gospel and brings about a millennial kingdom of peace and righteousness on the earth.



3. **Premillennialists** believe that Christ comes before (Pre) the Millennial Kingdom and rules upon the earth from David's throne in perfect righteousness for a thousand years where all earthly promises to the righteous elect of Israel and of the Church age are fulfilled literally.



4. **Historic Premillennialists** believe



K. Perspicuity That attribute of Scripture, that doctrine of Scripture, meaning that Scripture is clear and is meant to be understandable with reasonable effort by any saint of God, and that such understanding is objective and not susceptible to personal flights of fancy. Consider the implications of:

2 Pet 1:19-21 *So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (Consider also Rev 22:18-19)*

L. Rapture of the Church A theological view within Dispensational Premillennialism that believes in the "rapture" of the church just prior to the 7-year Tribulation period. This rapture refers to a sudden, imminent, "catching up" of the whole church (alive and dead saints) to meet with Christ in the air (not on earth yet and not immediately in heaven). All such church age saints will be transformed immediately into a physical glorified state.

1 Thess 4:13-18 *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and*

rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up⁷²⁶ together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words. Verse 18 is in the form of a command to the Church! (all passages are from the NASU unless otherwise indicated)

1 Cor 15:50-58 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. ⁵⁵"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

The word "rapture" does not occur in the Bible. Per Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*; p. 1253 "The 'taking up' or snatching up (from the Latin *rapio*, 'seize, snatch, carry away') of believers to be with Christ when he returns to the earth. (55A.3.b; also 55E)"

In 1 Thess 4:17 the Greek reads: *shall be caught away* 'αρπαγνσομεθα *harpagnsometha* (**Str. 726**) 14x verb meaning to snatch, to catch away. The nature of this is a sudden and forceful taking away. Consider 2 Cor 12:2 where this word is used of Paul being caught up. (a type of the rapture??)

Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* discusses the rapture in Chapter 55 in Section E on pp. 1131-1135.

IV. Short/Easy Assignment: Next week we will ask and answer an important question by which we are often challenged as believers in an earthly 1000 year reign of Christ when the Church has not believed this doctrine for most of 1800 years. **Study** Ezekiel 36:22-38: Be prepared to discuss these questions:

1. Does God promise real land to Israel, or heavenly land? **Consider:** (vv. 28-30)
2. What is God's purpose in this promise? **Consider:** (vv. 22-23; 32; 36-38)
3. What has God promised Israel regarding their own salvation? **Consider:** (vv. 25-27)

An Important Quotation

Does this doctrinal area of Bible prophecy make a difference? Yes, emphatically yes! God wants us to know many truths about what is going to take place in the future, and He wants those truths to change us right now in the present. He desires that prophetic truth change the way we think, the way we behave, the way we view Him. And though we will not come to complete understanding of each aspect of this doctrine, we have been given enough information and help in the person of the Holy Spirit who illuminates His truth to accomplish these changes.

Paul N. Benware; *Understanding End Times Prophecy*; p. 14