

PREMILLENNIALISM (3)

What Is the Nature of the Kingdom of Heaven?

In our study of premillennialism, last week we discussed how the kingdom and church are the same thing. We showed how many dispensationalists believe the church was either an afterthought, or something set up until the kingdom comes. BUT the Bible shows BOTH were established on Pentecost, contain the same individuals and are identical in many elements. This defeats a future material kingdom which is the premise of this doctrine. With that in mind, today I would like to address the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God in greater detail.

I. The Problem stated

- a. We have already noted that one of the main tenets of premillennialism is a physical kingdom.
- b. One of the premises that this is based upon is to declare that OT kingdom prophecies are to be taken literally – applied to a literal kingdom.
 - i. According to Jeff Archer,¹ Tim LaHaye (author of the “Left Behind” series) said in the book, *Charting the End Times*, “*And because hundreds of specific prophecies have already been literally fulfilled – most of them in relation to the first coming of Christ – we know that all the prophecies about the future will be fulfilled literally in the end times, and Christ’s return will be fulfilled literally as well.*” (pg. 11)
 - ii. John Walvoord, in article 11 of a series about premillennialism, entitled “The Theological Context of Premillennialism” said, *Premillennarians, on the other hand, insist that one general rule of interpretation should be applied to all areas of theology and that prophecy does not require spiritualization any more than other aspects of truth. They hold that this rule is the literal, grammatical-historical method. By this it is meant that a passage should be taken in its literal sense, in keeping with the grammatical meaning of the words and forms. History is history, not allegory. Facts are facts. Prophesied future events are just what they are prophesied. Israel means Israel, earth means earth, heaven means heaven.*
 - iii. When premillennialists note prophecies of the everlasting kingdom of Israel in the OT (including the promise to Abraham of a great nation and given a lang – Genesis 12:1-3, and the throne promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, etc.) they believe it was to be forever (or at least as long as the world exists). This belief was a catalyst in developing the theory of premillennialism.
- c. It is worthy to note that Israel of Jesus’ day was expecting the same thing.
 - i. They wanted an earthly king and to crush Rome. One of the sects of 1st century Jews were the zealots (Simon the apostle is included – Luke 6:15) who advocated the overthrow of Rome. Luke 17:20-21 illustrates this.
 - ii. This is why His message was rejected by so many. The sermon on the mount was a message about the spiritual nature of His kingdom – Matthew 5:17-20 – the theme of this message.
 - iii. Even the disciples of Jesus were anticipating a material kingdom – Acts 1:6-7, Mark 10:35-37 where James and John asked to sit on His right and left hand, etc.

II. The kingdom of God/heaven was NEVER intended to be physical

- a. We have noted the plain declarations – John 18:36, Luke 17:20-21, Romans 14:17, etc. Also passages like Mark 9:1 which declared the beginning of the kingdom was imminent.
- b. Prophecies bear this out – Isaiah 65:25 speaks of the lion and lamb laying down together, Isaiah 11:6-9ff which clearly speaks of Jesus (the stem of Jesse) and also notes the wolf and lamb will lie together,

¹ Archer, Jeff. Premillennialism: Examined and Refuted. One Stone Press, Bowling Green, KY (2014), Pg. 9.

and a child will put his hand in the viper's den and not be hurt. Clearly this was spiritual. And many others could be added to these.

- c. Jesus implied this with many of His teachings
 - i. John 3:3-7 – a declaration that you must be born again.
 - ii. John 4:21-23 - where He began with physical worship in Jerusalem and mountains, and concluded with worship “in spirit and in truth”.
 - iii. His use of parables illustrated the spiritual nature of the kingdom. Consider Matthew 13:10-11 as Jesus explained WHY He spoke in parables - because it had been given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven... Note also vs. 16-17 where Jesus noted how blessed they were to see the fulfillment of God's purpose. Remember the definition of a parable, “An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”
 - iv. Type-Anti-type in scripture –
 - 1. There are many things in the Old Testament, concerning Israel, that God had something greater in mind – a spiritual application. We sometimes refer to these as type/anti-type descriptions. The idea of a “type” is that of a blueprint or shadow of something that is real. The shadow or blueprint is not the real thing, but it projects the real thing.
 - 2. Priesthood - Hebrews 8:4-6 in reference to the priesthood of Jesus, notes that the Aaronic priesthood was a “copy and shadow” of heavenly things.
 - 3. Adam - Romans 5:14 speaks of Adam as “a type of Him who was to come” – a reference to Christ. NOTE: The word “pattern” found in Hebrews 8:5 is the same word as type in this text.
 - 4. The tabernacle – Hebrews 9:1-11 – a clear passage that describes both the physical tabernacle under Moses and how Jesus fulfilled it. This example CLEARLY demonstrates spiritual application intended with God's very specific instructions for the physical.
 - 5. Circumcision – Genesis 17:9-13 – a covenant between Abraham and his descendants. NT – spiritual circumcision – Colossians 2:11, Romans 2:28-29
 - 6. A study of type-anti-type examples is fascinating and powerful. You find people, events and things that in hindsight, their mention shows God's forethought, wisdom and ultimate plan from the very beginning.
 - 7. The point – God gave physical instructions, but His ultimate goal was a spiritual fulfillment.
- d. Contrasting the Old and New Covenants
 - i. In teaching a physical kingdom, premillennialism fails to recognize the distinction in nature of the old and new covenants.
 - ii. In addition to many of the above examples of types – the tabernacle, circumcision, the priesthood, the new birth, true worship, etc. – consider the following contrasts:
 - 1. Sacrifices – Under the Old Law (and before) animal sacrifices were legislated (see Leviticus 1-7, etc.). But note Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-13 finds its fulfillment in Christ. A physical sacrifice that fulfilled a spiritual need. Hebrews 9:28 notes that He was offered once to bear the sins of many.
 - 2. Israel – Under the Old Law Israel was clearly a physical nation. But consider Romans 2:28-29 – the Jew NOW is one inwardly – spiritual. Paul will develop this in much greater detail in that letter as he explains physical Israel's rejection and what they need to do to return to Him. Philippians 3:3 – we are the circumcision (God's nation) who worship in Spirit.
 - 3. Priesthood – In contrast to the Aaronic priesthood, we are now ALL priests – see 1 Peter 2:5, 9, Hebrews 13:15, Romans 12:1

4. Nation – we are now a spiritual nation – 1 Peter 2:9-10
5. Our treasures – Matthew 6:19-21 – Israel was promised many material blessings (which were conditional). But note what Jesus says here and in other places. Our kingdom is NOT about material prosperity. Cf. Matthew 19:20-21 as Jesus gave instructions to the rich young ruler.
6. Our food – Israel was promised material abundance (again it was conditional - Deuteronomy 11:8-9) when they inherited their physical promised land. It was described as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). Our food is spiritual – consider the living water of John 4:14 and Jesus being “the bread of life” in John 6:27. Cf. Romans 14:17 – the kingdom of heaven is NOT eating and drinking...
7. Our minds – Romans 8:4-9 – we are called upon to be spiritually minded and not carnally minded. This is in stark contrast with premillennialism which is material minded – anticipating a material kingdom, prosperity, rule, etc.

These are just a few of the many passages that emphasize the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. To fail to recognize this distorts the very purpose for which Jesus came – to save us and establish a kingdom of the saved. Desiring a physical kingdom shows a materialistic mindset that is the very antithesis of what He did.

We do NOT need Jesus to come back and reign in the sin-cursed world. We need Him to redeem us FROM it! And He has done all that He needed to do. He said so Himself (John 17:4 – He finished His work). The only question that remains is – will you accept Him at His word.