

An Overview of the Biblical Teaching on the Kingdom of God: A Rationale for Premillennialism and Why Premillennialism Must Be True

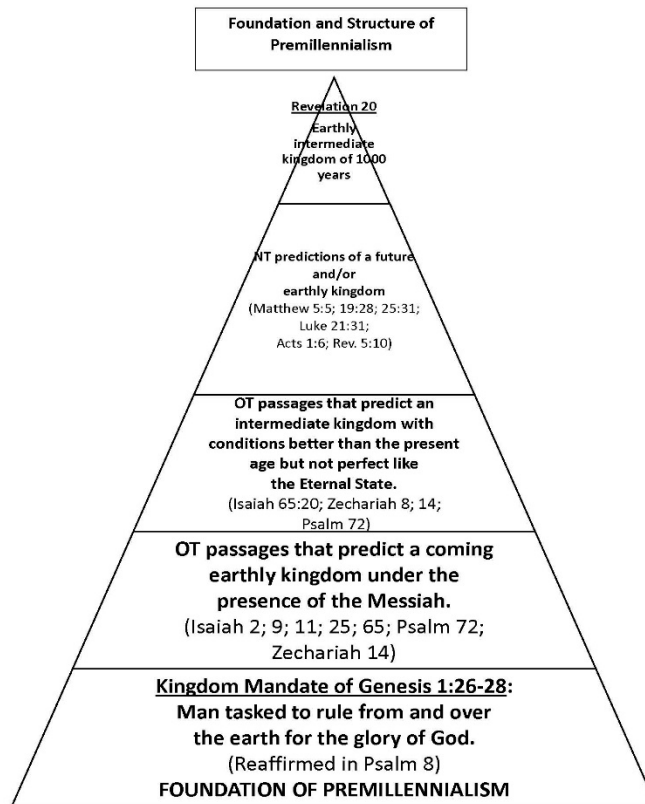
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Many are aware of the debates concerning which view of the millennium is taught in the Bible. Both amillennialism and postmillennialism assert that the millennial kingdom of Jesus the Messiah is occurring spiritually in this present age before the return of Jesus. Premillennialism, on the other hand, argues that Jesus' millennial kingdom is a future earthly kingdom from our current standpoint in history. The goal of this paper is to offer a rationale for premillennialism and explain not just that premillennialism is true, but that premillennialism must be true. Thus, this paper goes beyond explaining the "what" of premillennialism to offering an explanation concerning "why" premillennialism is the biblical position. It does so mainly by looking at biblical evidence beyond Revelation 20, where most discussions of premillennialism are usually focused.

Contrary to what some critics have claimed, premillennialism is not a one-text doctrine. The case for premillennialism is not solely reliant on Revelation 20. Premillennialism has deep roots in the Old Testament and New Testament texts outside of Revelation 20. Overall, the case for premillennialism involves:

1. The kingdom mandate of Gen 1:26–28.
2. Old Testament passages that predict a coming earthly kingdom under the presence of the Messiah.
3. Old Testament passages that predict an intermediate kingdom with conditions better than the present age but not perfect like the Eternal State.
4. New Testament predictions of a future earthly kingdom.
5. An earthly, intermediate kingdom of a thousand years found in Rev 20:1–6.

The following chart shows these connections:



Kingdom Mandate of Genesis 1:26–28

The roots of an earthly kingdom begin in Genesis 1. This passage reveals the importance of man’s mediatorial rule over the earth. God created a beautiful and wonderful world in six days. With Gen 1:26–28, God made man in His image and gave him an earthly kingdom task:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:26–28; emphases added).

This reveals a strong connection between man and earth. God made man in His image and instructed him to rule over the earth and its creatures. This connection is further explained in the detailed account of man’s creation in Genesis 2 where God formed man from the dust of the ground (see Gen 2:7). The Hebrew word for “man” is *adam* and the term for “ground” is *adamah*. The close connection between *adam* and *adamah* emphasizes the relationship between man and the ground he is to rule over.

God told man to “rule” over the creation. The Hebrew term for “rule,” which is used twice in Gen 1:26–28, is *rādāb* and means “have dominion,” “rule,” or “dominate.”¹ The term is used later of the Messiah’s future reign in Ps 110:2: “The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule [*rādāb*] in the midst of Your enemies.”

The word for “subdue” is the Hebrew term *kābaš*, which means “dominate” or “bring into bondage.”² The term “especially speaks of the work of a king (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:11).”³ Both verbs “rule” and “subdue” are linked to dominion and show, as Merrill observes, that “man is created to reign in a manner that demonstrates his lordship, his domination (by force if necessary) over all creation.”⁴ This is evident with man’s naming of the animals, which was a demonstration of dominion (see Gen 2:19–20). Thus, there is a royal and kingly aspect to the language of Gen 1:26–28.

The *realm* of this kingdom rule for man is the earth, not heaven. As Ps 115:16 declares, “The heavens are the LORD’s, but the earth He has given to the human race.” So the kingdom is an earthly kingdom, with Adam established as its king. God did not create Adam and mankind to rule heaven or to rule earth from heaven. Man is to rule *from* and *over* the earth with “an earthly vocation.”⁵ In addition to his relationship with God, Adam possessed physical and social/political authority. This was to manifest itself in every area—agriculture, architecture, domestication of animals, harnessing of energy and natural resources, and other areas.⁶ As Middleton notes, “the human creature is made to worship God in a distinctive way: by interacting with the earth, using our God-given power to transform our earthly environment into a complex world (a sociocultural world) that glorifies our creator.”⁷

Psalm 8, which functions like a restatement or commentary on Gen 1:26–28, also reveals man’s relationship to the creation:

What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas (Ps 8:4–8).

¹ See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 921.

² The term is used for subduing the land of Canaan so it could provide for the people of Israel. See Num 32:22, 29 and Josh 18:1.

³ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 196.

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, “A Theology of the Pentateuch,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 15.

⁵ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 39.

⁶ See Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 325. Grudem says, “God expected Adam and Eve and their descendants to explore and develop the earth’s resources in such a way that they would bring benefit to themselves and other human beings.”

⁷ Middleton, 41.

The connection with Gen 1:26–28 in Ps 8:4–8 is clear.⁸ In Genesis 1 Adam was created in God’s image so that he could serve God by ruling and subduing the creation on God’s behalf for God’s glory. Psalm 8 shows that man still possesses the right to rule the creation. David writes thousands of years later in a fallen world still under the devastating effects of the curse. Yet a marred world has not removed man’s right to rule. It is not the case that with the Fall God changes his plans and makes man’s ultimate destiny heaven as opposed to earth.

The truths of Ps 8:6 concerning all things being placed under man’s feet will be picked up by Paul in 1 Cor 15:25–28 and Eph 1:22 and with the writer of Hebrews in Heb 2:5–8. With Eph 1:22 Jesus’ resurrection and ascension are the reasons for God’s putting “all things in subjection under His feet.” So the authority to rule the earth is granted to Jesus by the Father and will be exercised by Jesus when He comes again (see Ps 110:1–2).⁹

With 1 Cor 15:25–27 Paul quotes Ps 8:6 regarding Jesus’ coming earthly reign. The writer of Hebrews also quotes Ps 8:6 to reaffirm that man still has the right to rule the earth although all things are not subjected to man in this age (Heb 2:5–8). These passages indicate that the fulfillment of Psalm 8, which is drawing upon Gen 1:26–28, will occur in a world to come in connection with the ultimate Man, Jesus, the Last Adam (see 1 Cor 15:24–28; 45).

So how do these passages relate to Genesis 1? Genesis 1 teaches that man was created to rule from and over the earth on God’s behalf. Although he is fallen and unable to accomplish this task on his own, ruling the earth is still man’s destiny, as Psalm 8 and Heb 2:5–8 reveal. So man’s kingly right is earthly since he is a creature placed on earth to rule from and over the earth. The millennial kingdom will highlight the successful reign of the Last Adam (1 Cor 15:45) in the realm where the first Adam failed. When Jesus comes again He will share this reign with those who identify with Him (see Rev 2:26–27; 3:21; 20:4). While Jesus is the ultimate King (Rev 11:15), His followers are also a “kingdom” and “they will reign upon the earth” (Rev 5:10).

In this way, the mediatorial reign of man on earth is fulfilled. Adam failed but success will occur with the ultimate Man, Jesus, who will not only successfully reign, He will share His reign with His people. This is corporate representation at its best. As Jesus succeeds, His people will succeed. This kingdom reign then transitions into the Eternal State. There, both the Father and Jesus are on the throne in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:3), and the saints reign forever over the New Earth (Rev 22:5). A successful mediatorial reign leads to an eternal reign in the eternal kingdom. As shown below:

Mediatorial Kingdom Connections

Gen 1:26–28 (unfallen creation)

Man tasked to rule
from and over the earth



Psalm 8 (fallen world) (explains Gen 1:26–28)

Even in a fallen world, man still
possesses right to rule over the earth



⁸ Psalm 8 could be viewed as a commentary on Gen 1:26–28. “. . . vv. 5–8 parallel the Gen. 1 story of God’s making men and women godlike and giving them power over the rest of the animate world.” John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1: Psalms 1–41*, in Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 159.

⁹ This could be similar to the parable of the nobleman in Luke 19:11–27 where Jesus likened Himself to a nobleman who needed to travel to a distant country to receive the rights to a kingdom and then return. Once the rights are given he then returns to rule, rewarding his servants and destroying his enemies.

Heb 2:5–8 (fallen world)
(quotes Psalm 8:6)

Man still possesses the right
to rule the earth but this is not
occurring in this age



Eph 1:22 (Heaven)
(quotes Psalm 8:6)

With ascension Jesus possesses
right to rule the earth



1 Cor 15:26 (Millennial Kingdom)
(quotes Psalm 8:6)

Jesus as ultimate Man (“Last Adam”) will fulfill
man’s mandate to rule the earth after His return



Rev 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10 (Millennial Kingdom)

Jesus will share His rule over the
earth with those who identify with Him
in the millennial kingdom



Rev 22:3, 5 (Eternal State)

God and Jesus are on the throne and
the saints reign forever in the Eternal State

Predictions of a Future Earthly Kingdom in the Old Testament Prophets

The demise of Israel’s kingdom in history did not mean an end to God’s plans to establish an earthly kingdom. While the monarchy deteriorated and then ended in Israel, the prophets arose with a message of a coming, glorious earthly kingdom under the Messiah. With Isa 2:2–4 the prophet Isaiah predicted a coming kingdom with Jerusalem as the capital city and nations streaming to this city to know the ways of God. The Lord will judge between the nations and make righteous decisions on behalf of them. This is a time of international harmony as weapons for warfare are no longer needed. Such conditions of an earthly kingdom with international harmony have never occurred in history yet, but they await the coming kingdom of Jesus the Messiah. Isaiah 9:6–7 revealed that a “child” and “son” (Jesus) will be born and “the government shall be upon his shoulder” and of His kingdom “there will be no end.”

Isaiah 11 foretold of a time when a righteous descendant of Jesse (i.e. Jesus) (Isa 11:1) will “decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth” (11:4). Isaiah 65:17–25 predicts a future time when houses will be built and agriculture will blossom, and those who labor well will reap the benefits of their hard work. The animal kingdom will exist in harmony. With Psalm 2, David told of a coming day when God will establish His King upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where He will rule the nations in the realm where they once rebelled against God. Psalm 72 predicts a time when a righteous Davidic King will “rule from sea to sea . . . from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8). “All nations will serve him” (72:11). This King will “deliver the needy” and the “afflicted” (72:12). He will also “have compassion on the poor and the needy” (72:13). During this time there will be “abundance of grain

in the earth on top of the mountains” (72:16). These depictions cannot be spiritualized or allegorized to purely spiritual blessings, nor can these be fulfilled with the church. These anticipate conditions in a coming earthly kingdom. Psalm 110 is an explicitly messianic text which describes the coming earthly reign of David’s Lord, the Messiah, from Jerusalem after a session at the Father’s right hand in heaven.

Daniel 2 declares that a divine “stone” from heaven will dramatically shatter the Gentile kingdoms of the world and grow to fill the whole earth, which means an earthly kingdom (Dan 2:31–45). Zechariah 14 also tells of a time when the Lord will return to the Mount of Olives and be King over all the earth, including its nations.

These passages reveal a coming earthly kingdom of God under the Messiah. No indication exists that these promises of an earthly kingdom won’t be literally fulfilled, or that these promises will eventually give way to spiritual realities. Nor is there any indication that these passages should be spiritualized to this present age with the church.

Intermediate Kingdom Conditions Predicted in the Old Testament

Revelation 19:11–21:8 tells of an intermediate era between the present age and the Eternal State. But in addition to Revelation 20, *several Old Testament passages predict an era on this earth that is far better than the current age we live in but not yet as perfect as the coming Eternal State.* Thus, there is a necessity of an intermediate kingdom after the second coming of Jesus but before the Eternal State. As Wayne Grudem puts it:

Several Old Testament passages seem to fit neither in the present age nor in the Eternal State. These passages indicate some future stage in the history of redemption which is far greater than the present church age but which still does not see the removal of all sin and rebellion and death from the earth.¹⁰

Isaiah 65:20

One passage that points to an intermediate period is Isa 65:20. In discussing new earth conditions (65:17) this verse states:

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

When this prophecy is fulfilled people will live so long that if they die at age 100 something must be wrong since people will live much longer than that. In fact, it will be assumed that a person dying at age 100 must be “accursed.” So notice two important things here with Isa 65:20—an increased longevity of life and the presence of sin which brings curses and death.

Now we must ask the question, “When in history have these conditions described in Isa 65:20 occurred? Can it be during our present age?” The answer is clearly, no. We live in a day where people live between 70–80 years on average (see Ps 90:10). If a person dies today at age 100 we say he or she lived an exceptionally long life, not a short one. So, will Isa 65:20 be fulfilled in the coming Eternal State? The answer again must be, no. In the Eternal State there is no longer any sin, death, or curse

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1127.

(Rev 21:4; 22:3), so no one will die. Therefore, Isa 65:20 must be fulfilled in an era that is different from our current period yet distinct from the Eternal State. This means there must be an intermediate kingdom, or what we call a millennium. Compare the three eras:

Present Age: Life spans of 70–80 years

Millennial Kingdom: Life spans well beyond 70–80 years but death still occurs.

Eternal State: People live forever with no presence of sin, death, or curse.

This idea that Isaiah 65 is a reference to a future millennium is not recent. Christians of the second century viewed this passage as support for premillennialism. Martin Erdmann points out that Isa 65:20–25 formed “the scriptural basis, besides Revelation 20:1–10, on which Asiatic millennialism built its chiliastic doctrine.”¹¹ This was also true for Justin Martyr. In reference to Isaiah 65 Justin said, “For Isaiah spoke thus concerning this period of a thousand years.”¹² Erdmann points out that Justin’s reference to Old Testament prophets “indicates his reliance on the Old Testament as the primary source of his chiliasm. He did not shy away from utilizing different passages from the Hebrew Bible to strengthen his argument in favor of a literal millennium.”¹³ Likewise, the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas* was a premillennialist, and according to Erdmann, “his chiliastic views are partially based on verses from the Old Testament.”¹⁴

Zechariah 8

Zechariah 8 offers some descriptions of God’s coming kingdom when Jesus returns. The chapter begins with God restoring Jerusalem. With “great wrath” and “jealousy” (8:2) the Lord returns to Zion and dwells in Jerusalem (8:3). The great city will have another name—“City of Truth” (8:3). This capital city of God’s kingdom will be characterized by sweet peace and fellowship, as the Lord himself says:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zech 8:4–5).

When the Lord comes and reigns from Jerusalem, the elderly and young people will be talking and playing in the streets. It appears that age and age discrepancies still exist when the Lord’s kingdom is established. Old men and women at this time will need the aid of a staff “because of age.” They possess some weakness because of advanced years. This suggests the concept of an intermediate kingdom (or millennium), an era that is different from the present evil age but different also from the Eternal State in which all negative aspects of aging and death are removed. From Zechariah’s time until now there has never been a time where the conditions of Zechariah 8 have happened. On the other hand, there will be no elderly who are weak in the final Eternal State, for all remnants of the curse have been removed (see Revelation 21 and 22). What Zechariah describes must take place in an initial phase of God’s kingdom before the Eternal State begins. Such an intermediate state between

¹¹ Martin Erdmann, *The Millennial Controversy in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 118.

¹² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 80, 1:239.

¹³ Erdmann, 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

the present age and the Eternal State is described in Revelation 20 where a thousand-year reign of Christ is emphasized.

Zechariah 14

Zechariah 14 also supports premillennialism. It describes kingdom conditions after the return of Jesus to earth. After a siege of Jerusalem verse 9 states that the “LORD will be King over all the earth” after His feet stand on the Mount of Olives (v. 4), but there will still be occasional disobedience and rebellion on the part of some nations. It is predicted that Egypt and other nations will be punished with drought when they do not obey the Lord as they should:

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Zech 14:16–19).

Grudem states the issue well when he points out that the sin and punishment of the nations after Jesus returns does not fit the present age or the Eternal State:

Here again the description does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the Eternal State either, because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present.¹⁵

Thus, the events of Zechariah 14 best fit with a premillennial understanding of the kingdom. While people from all nations are being saved in the present age, the nations themselves do not obey our Lord (see Psalm 2). In fact, they persecute those who belong to God. In the millennial kingdom Jesus will rule the nations while He is physically present on earth. The nations will obey and submit to His rule, but as Zechariah 14 points out, whenever a nation does not act as they should there is punishment. On the other hand, in the Eternal State there will be absolutely no disobedience from the nations. The picture of the nations in the Eternal State is only positive. The kings of the nations bring their contributions to the New Jerusalem (see Rev 21:24) and the leaves of the tree of life are said to be for the healing of the nations (see Rev 22:2). To compare:

Present Age: Jesus is in heaven and the nations do not yet submit to Jesus as King.

Millennial Kingdom: Jesus rules the nations on earth and punishes those nations that do not act as they should.

Eternal State: The nations act exactly as they should with no need of punishment.

¹⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1129.

The idea of an earthly kingdom that comes after Jesus' return but before the Eternal State is consistent with several Old Testament passages. In the course of progressive revelation, Revelation 20 will reveal how long this intermediate kingdom will be ("a thousand years"), but it is not the first and only reference to such an era. When someone says, "You have only one passage, Revelation 20, which allegedly teaches a millennium," the answer is, "That's not true. Revelation 20 tells us how long Christ's intermediate earthly kingdom will be—one thousand years—but other passages teach the idea of an intermediate kingdom." Premillennialism, therefore, is a doctrine found in both testaments.

New Testament Predictions of a Coming Earthly Kingdom

A key component of premillennialism is that Jesus' millennial kingdom is both future and earthly. Several passages in the New Testament affirm this understanding. This contrasts with other millennial views which see the millennial kingdom as present and spiritual in nature.

Revelation 5:10 and the Coming Reign

About sixty years into the church age (ca. A.D. 90), the apostle John received visions concerning events to come. According to Revelation 5, he was allowed to see a scene in heaven where twenty-four elders sang a new song:

"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev 5:10).

The ones Jesus purchased with His blood (5:9) are "a kingdom." They are positionally related to the kingdom because they know King Jesus. Yet this positional status will lead to an actual kingdom reign—"and they will reign upon the earth." Being positionally related to the kingdom results eventually in a coming kingdom reign.

Three points are significant for understanding Messiah's kingdom from Rev 5:10. First, the saints of God are destined to reign with Christ. There is a close connection between the reign of the Messiah and the reign of the saints. When Jesus reigns, the saints will also reign. Other passages present the reign of the saints as future. In 1 Cor 4:8 Paul made a brief statement to the Corinthians who were acting as if they were already reigning. He said, "You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you." The Corinthians were acting like they had arrived, that they were reigning in God's kingdom already. But Paul sarcastically mocks their attitude. He plays along and says that they have become "filled" and "rich." "You have become kings without us," he declared. Paul then switches back to reality by telling them, "I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you." Contrary to the way the Corinthians were acting, Paul says that they were not reigning. It would be nice if they were reigning because Paul would like to be reigning too. But that was not reality yet.

Second, Rev 5:10 indicates that this reign is future—"they *will* reign." The present age is an era of persecution and trial from Satan and his servants. That is why Jesus offers future rewards to the seven churches of Asia Minor (see Revelation 2–3). But a day is coming when the tables will be turned and those who are persecuted by the world will reign.

Third, this coming reign of the saints is "upon the earth." This shows that the kingdom of Christ is an earthly reign. This is not a reign that only exists in heaven or in the church or in the hearts of men. It is an earthly kingdom. The promise that the saints will reign upon the earth finds its

culmination with Rev 20:4 when the saints will sit on thrones and judgment is given to them. A close connection exists between Rev 5:10 and Rev 20:4. The former is the promise of a coming reign, the latter describes the inauguration of that reign.

The Future Rule of Messiah and the Saints

Several other passages place the reign of Jesus and the saints in the future. Notice the future tense in the following:

- 1 Cor 6:2: Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?
- 1 Cor 6:3: Do you not know that we will judge angels?
- 2 Tim 2:12a: If we endure, we will also reign with Him.
- Rev 2:26–27: He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;
- Rev 12:5: And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.
- Rev 19:15: From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

First Corinthians 6:2–3 states the Christians “will” judge the world and angels. This truth should influence their judgment in the present. Second Timothy 2:12 indicates that enduring for Jesus now will lead to a “reign” with Jesus. Reigning is not occurring now but will be the case later. The three passages in Revelation refer back to Psalm 2, where it is revealed that God’s King and Son will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Revelation 12:5 and 19:15 reiterate this truth that Jesus the Messiah will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Revelation 2:26–27 says Jesus will share His rule with those who know Him and overcome the world in this age.

What is significant about these references is they place Jesus’ rule and the reign of the saints over the nations in the future. With Rev 2:26–27 the promise of ruling the nations is offered as a future reward to overcomers in the church. Ruling the nations is not their current experience. Also, Jesus tells the church of Thyatira, “hold fast until I come” (2:25). If they “hold fast” until the coming of Jesus, they will be rewarded with ruling functions in the kingdom of Christ. In sum, ruling the nations is a reward that Jesus brings to His own when He comes.

The Rev 19:15 passage is also important because the statement that Jesus will “strike down the nations” and “rule them with a rod of iron” comes within the context of Jesus’ second coming, which is the subject of Rev 19:11–21. It is Jesus’ second coming that leads to the ruling of the nations with a rod of iron. Revelation 1:5 tells us that Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Yet it is with His second coming that He actually rules the nations.

The Coming Reign of Messiah from David's Throne at the Second Coming

Another evidence for premillennialism is found with Matt 19:28 and 25:31, where Jesus says He will assume His glorious Davidic throne at the time of His second coming. This is very significant. Jesus explicitly ties His Davidic throne reign with His second coming to earth and not before. This shows that Jesus' kingdom is future from our standpoint. *The kingdom comes when Jesus comes again.* This truth makes amillennialism and postmillennialism impossible since these positions assert that Jesus is now reigning from the Davidic throne in His millennial kingdom in this age.

The throne of David, which finds its roots in the Davidic Covenant promises of 2 Samuel 7, is linked with Jesus who is the ultimate Son of David. When the angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary, he stated the following concerning her coming Son:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

Gabriel made clear that Jesus was coming so He could be given the throne of David and reign over Israel. With Matt 25:31 Jesus addresses when He will assume that throne:

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.”

The word for “then” (*tote*) is an adverb of time and means “at that time.” The term for “will sit” is *kathisei* and is in the future tense. The Davidic throne, therefore, is linked with two things: (1) the Son of Man coming in glory and (2) all the angels coming with Him. When those two events occur the Son of Man will then “sit upon His glorious throne.” *Therefore, sitting upon the glorious Davidic throne by Jesus occurs at the time of His coming in glory with His angels.*

This is the strongest possible evidence concerning the timing of Jesus' kingdom. Jesus explicitly states, in a prophetic context, when He will assume the Davidic throne. It is when He comes in glory with the angels. This event is future from our standpoint. Since Jesus has not returned in glory yet with all of His angels, we can know that He has not yet assumed the Davidic throne. A similar statement by Jesus is found in Matt 19:28 which also links Jesus' throne with other future events:

And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Again we see Jesus referring to sitting upon “His glorious throne” in a future context. Here, Jesus is talking about future rewards for His disciples. Importantly, He ties it with an event called “the regeneration.” Most scholars believe Jesus is speaking of the renewal of the cosmos, the glorification for creation (see Rom 8:19–23). The word “regeneration” is the Greek term *palingenesia* which means “regeneration,” “renewal,” or “genesis again.” J. I. Packer says, “it denotes the eschatological ‘restoration of all things’ (Acts 3:21) under the Messiah for which Israel was waiting.”¹⁶ This renewal must be future since we have not seen a glorification of the creation yet.

¹⁶ J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 925.

When this cosmic renewal occurs, two other things come with it: (1) the Son of Man sitting on His glorious throne; and (2) the apostles judging/ruling the twelve tribes of Israel. Both refer to kingdom and ruling functions. Jesus' sitting on the glorious throne of David has not occurred yet, but it will occur in the future at the time of the renewal of the world and the apostles ruling over a restored national Israel. So with Matt 19:28 Jesus tells us His Davidic kingdom throne reign will occur with other glorious future events. He does not say that His second coming brings an end or culmination of His kingdom reign. This strongly supports premillennialism while making amillennialism and postmillennialism impossible. If Jesus' Davidic and mediatorial reign begins with the second coming this means Jesus' kingdom must be future and is not in operation in this age. As 1 Cor 15:24–28 reveals, Jesus must reign over His enemies successfully before He hands the kingdom over to the Father. According to Jesus in Matt 19:28 and 25:31, this Davidic reign begins at His second coming.

WHY PREMILLENNIALISM MUST BE TRUE

As the previous sections showed, the main reason to affirm premillennialism is because the Bible explicitly teaches it. In one sense that's the main issue. But are there reasons for such a kingdom? Is there a rationale for premillennialism? Can we understand why a premillennial kingdom is necessary and so important to God's purposes? I think we can. Premillennialism fits well with the overall storyline of the Bible and explains what the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21) means and looks like. There are at least four reasons *why* there must be a premillennial kingdom of Jesus upon the earth:

1. There must be a successful reign of man and the Last Adam (Jesus) from and over the realm—earth—where God tasked the first Adam to rule.

Eschatology (i.e. last things) fits perfectly with protology (i.e. first things). Premillennialism best coincides with what God first tasked man to do—successfully rule the earth. In Gen 1:26–28 God told man to “rule” and “subdue” the “very good” (v. 31) creation that God entrusted to him. Adam, who was made in God's image, was called to exercise authority over the earth and function as God's mediatorial and representative king over it. But Adam failed this task when he disobeyed God. When this happened mankind as a whole failed since Adam acted as our representative (see Rom 5:12d). But Paul speaks of Jesus as another representative of mankind, a “Last Adam” (see 1 Cor 15:45) who succeeds where the first Adam failed (see Rom 5:17).

Important patterns exist between Jesus and Adam. Jesus, at times, repeats the pattern of Adam, succeeding where Adam failed. For example, Adam and Eve failed the temptation from Satan in Genesis 3, but Christ withstood and triumphed over the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4). With Romans 5, Adam's act of disobedience brought condemnation to all men (5:12) while Jesus' “one act of righteousness” (the cross) brought righteousness. As two federal heads of humanity, Adam brought death but Jesus brought life.

There is another important parallel between Adam and Jesus. Just as Adam was appointed as king to rule successfully from and over the earth, so too Jesus will successfully reign from and over the earth as King. In Matt 19:28, Jesus said that in the “regeneration” or “renewal” of the planet, He “will sit on His glorious throne” and the twelve apostles will be there with Him “judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” This is kingdom-over-the-earth language (see also Rev 5:10).

The main point here is that Jesus as the Last Adam is destined to rule from and over the realm where the first Adam failed. With His first coming, Jesus exhibited His kingdom authority in the earthly realm many times with His nature miracles. When He walked on water, multiplied bread, healed diseases, and raised the dead, He showed His power in the realm of nature. These were tastes and glimpses of the kingdom conditions to come, a restored Eden and earth. But Rom 8:19–23 reveals that the full restoration of nature awaits the return of Jesus and the glorification of the saints. Today we still see decay, illness, death, natural disasters, famines, earthquakes, and many other calamities that let us know that nature is not yet subject to man (Heb 2:5–8), that the consequences of Adam’s failure are still with us. But Jesus is coming again with His kingdom to fulfill the Adamic mandate over the earth. The earth will be restored (see Isaiah 11). Sung Wook Chung accurately connects the kingdom role of Jesus as the Last Adam with a rule over the earth:

Therefore by establishing the millennial kingdom, Jesus Christ, as the last Adam, will restore and fulfill not only the spiritual/priestly dimension but also the physical/institutional dimension of the first Adam’s kingdom.¹⁷

A great strength of premillennialism is that it is the only millennial view that places Jesus’ messianic and millennial reign *from and over the earth*, and in doing so sees Jesus completing what was expected of Adam. Other millennial perspectives place the center of Jesus’ reign from heaven, but heaven is not where God placed Adam to rule. Psalm 115:16 declares, “The heavens are the LORD’s, but the earth He has given to the human race” (HCSB).

Also, the reign of the Last Adam is not just a spiritual rule. Amillennialism makes Jesus’ messianic and millennial reign a spiritual kingdom now, either with the church or with deceased saints in heaven. But God did not create man to rule from heaven over a spiritual kingdom. He put him on earth to reign from earth. If premillennialism is not true, then there is no successful mediatorial reign of man and the Last Adam (Jesus) in the realm where the first Adam failed. The kingdom of the Last Adam is in a different sphere (heaven) over a different realm (spiritual). But this does not do justice to what the Bible says about the destiny of the Last Adam.

So then, premillennialism is the only millennial view that has Jesus succeeding in the realm where the first Adam failed. Chung puts it well:

The first Adam’s priest-kingly activity, which was thwarted by the fall, will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom. Therefore the millennial kingdom will be a restoration and fulfillment of the Edenic kingdom on the earth.¹⁸

Adam → tasked to rule from and over the earth → FAILURE
Jesus (Last Adam) → tasked to rule from and over the earth → SUCCESS

¹⁷ Sung Wook Chung, “Toward the Reformed and Covenantal Theology of Premillennialism,” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to ‘Left Behind’ Eschatology*, eds. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 142.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

2. Jesus must have a sustained and visible reign in the realm where He was rejected.

Since the fall of man in Genesis 3, God has enacted a plan to bring this rebel planet back into conformity with His will (see Gen 3:15). Central to this plan is God's Son, Jesus the Messiah, whom the Father wants to establish as King over the nations (see Psalm 2; 110). Through the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments the Bible presents Jesus as the One who will bring salvation to God's people and the One who will reign as King over this world.

Yet while millions in history have bowed the knee to Jesus as Lord, Savior, and King, the vast majority of the world has not. Survey a world map and ask which countries are bowing the knee to Jesus the Messiah. There are none. The nations with their leaders are still in active rebellion against God's "Anointed One" (see Ps 2:2). We see this in the myriads of false religions and philosophies along with overt acts of rebellion that characterize what Paul called "this present evil age" (Gal 1:4).

While the church has accomplished much during its two-thousand year history, its existence has not led to global recognition of Jesus. Even geographical areas once permeated with gospel awareness, such as Europe during the Reformation, and the American Northeast with the Great Awakening, are far removed from worship of the true God. Northern Africa, once a center for Christianity, is now essentially barren of Christian witness. Some of the most anti-Christian areas today are those that once had much exposure to the gospel.¹⁹

Contrary to the claims of postmillennialists, there is no evidence from Scripture or experience that the appropriate honor due Jesus will occur before His second coming to earth. All Christians agree that such honor will be given with Jesus' return to earth. When Jesus returns to earth in glory, every eye will see Him. He will slay His enemies and there will be no doubt as to His power. On the other hand, it is also true, as 1 Cor 15:24–28 indicates, that when the "end" occurs, Jesus "hands over the kingdom to the God and Father" (v. 24). Verse 28 states, "When all things are subjected to Him [Jesus], then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all." So a time is coming when Jesus will hand His kingdom over to the Father. This does not mean Jesus ceases to reign, but His messianic kingdom will transition to the universal kingdom of the Father.

This leads to an issue that must be addressed. It is the Father's will that His Son rule the nations and that all be subjected to Him. But in this "present evil age" not all things are subject to Jesus. Also, the Bible tells us that Jesus will one day hand His kingdom over to God the Father. This appears to be the time period of the Eternal State. So the question is this—*When does Jesus the Messiah rule in His kingdom and receive the glory and honor in this world that He richly deserves and the Scripture promises?* Is it simply at His second coming to earth? Saucy asks this relevant question:

To be sure, the world will recognize Christ when he returns in glory. But does a short period of destruction and judgment before he turns the kingdom over to the Father for the Eternal State provide an adequate explanation of the centrality of Christ and a sufficient manifestation of his glory *within history*?²⁰

The correct answer to this question is, no. Jesus' second coming with its destruction and judgments is not all there is to His manifestation. The day of His coming is a magnificent display of glory, but more is to come. As Saucy notes, "So far in history, the experience of Christ and his people

¹⁹ This point alone should be a concern for those considering the validity of postmillennialism, which affirms societal renewal by the gospel before the return of Jesus.

²⁰ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 289–90.

has been one of oppression and nonrecognition (cf. 1 Jn 3:1). If history comes to its end with the coming of Christ, there will be no significant time within history when his centrality is manifest.”²¹ So where does the needed recognition come from?

An intermediate or millennial kingdom before the Eternal State “provides just such a time when Christ’s glory will pervade human history and His significance will be rightly recognized.”²² *Thus, a millennial reign of Jesus after His second coming but before the “end” when Jesus hands His kingdom over to the Father is the ideal time for the Son to be manifested in His glory to the world.* Therefore, the millennial kingdom of Jesus after His return will be the time period when the Son reigns over this world, rewarding His servants and punishing His enemies. When He has completed this reign from His glorious throne He will then hand His kingdom over to God the Father and the Eternal State will commence.

Perhaps one objection to this claim is that Jesus’ current session in heaven, fulfills the idea of a sustained reign that the Bible predicted. This position, though, is not satisfactory and does not give justice to Jesus’ kingdom reign for several reasons. First, although Jesus’ exaltation to the right hand of the Father is a powerful display of glory to the courts of heaven and evil spiritual forces (see Eph 1:21–23), heaven is not the realm where God tasked Adam and mankind to rule from. God placed Adam on earth and it is from earth that the Last Adam needs to reign.

Also, the world continues to escalate its rebellion and non-recognition of Jesus as Lord and Messiah. To be blunt, we cannot conceive of this present age as the full manifestation of Christ’s kingdom. We cannot hold to a messianic reign of Christ where the vast majority of the world is not aware of it and is openly defiant to God. Yet this must be the case if the millennium is currently present. On the other hand, when Christ’s kingdom is established at His coming it will be recognized by all. As Zech 14:9 indicates: “And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.” When Jesus the Messiah rules on the earth, there will be no other religions or false worship systems, unlike today. To put it in simpler terms, when Jesus is ruling, all will know it. Everyone will recognize it. His rule with a rod of iron will be respected (Ps 2:9; Rev 19:15).

Second, Heb 10:12–13 states that Jesus is at the right hand of God “waiting” for His enemies to be subjected to Him:

but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET (emphasis mine).

The wording here relies on Psalm 110 in which David’s Lord, the Messiah, is said to have a session at the right hand of God “until” His enemies are defeated and the rule from Zion (Jerusalem) occurs (Ps 110:2). Thus, a session at the right hand of the Father by the Messiah precedes a kingdom reign upon the earth.

Next, the reign of the Messiah includes more than personal salvation, as important as that is. It also involves societal/political transformation for the nations of the earth (see Isa 2:2–4). International harmony under the ruling Messiah will occur as the government rests on His shoulders (Isa 9:6). While messianic salvation has been inaugurated in this present church age, the promised transformation of societies in all their dimensions has not happened yet. Passages like Isa 19:24–25 and Zech 14 predict that nations as national entities will worship God. But such societal and international harmony has not happened yet. How can there be a messianic or millennial reign in which the nations continue in open

²¹ Ibid., 290.

²² Ibid.

rebellion against God and His Messiah? The best answer is that this societal transformation will occur with the second coming of Jesus. As Saucy points out:

The prophets pictured the saving work of the Messiah as both personal and societal renewal. The kingdom work of Christ has entered this age to bring personal salvation, but the transformation of society in terms of peace among peoples and the expression of God's righteousness in the structures of human society are never promised for this age. They await the return of the messianic King, who will destroy the evil structures of this age and institute a righteous rule over the earth for the first time in human history.²³

To summarize, Jesus must be honored with a kingdom reign that is visible to all. God's intent is for His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to rule the nations, including His enemies, from Jerusalem and a restored Israel (see Ps 110:2). Before the perfect Eternal State comes, Jesus must rule over this planet that has rejected God since the Fall and over the world that rejected Him at His first coming. He will rule with righteousness but also with a rod of iron over His enemies (see Pss 2; 110; Rev 2:26–27). While Jesus is currently at the right hand of God in heaven possessing all authority, the nations are still currently in rebellion against God. There is no national entity today that acknowledges and worships God as they should. But that will change when Jesus comes again. At His second coming Jesus will then sit on His glorious throne (see Matt 19:28 and 25:31), and He will rule over this world to the glory of God. This He does in the millennial kingdom after He returns to earth. When this phase of the kingdom program is over, the Son will hand the kingdom over to God the Father and the millennial kingdom will merge into the universal kingdom (see 1 Cor 15:24–28; Rev 22:1).

Look at this issue from another direction. If the premillennial view is *not* correct and the millennium is spiritual and now as amillennialism claims, what would this mean? It would mean that there will be no significant period in human history where Jesus is recognized as King by this world before the Eternal State. The present age is characterized by wickedness and persecution of God's people by the world and Satan. Also, Jesus' messianic reign would be characterized by non-recognition and continual widespread rebellion by the nations. In addition, while a present millennium would include personal salvation of some, it would not involve societal transformation and international harmony that the Bible predicted (see Isa 2:2–4). If the premillennial view is not correct there is no significant period in history where Jesus is given the honor and glory that He deserves. Premillennialism is Christ-honoring in that it sees, as necessary, a sustained and recognized reign of Jesus in His glory in the realm where He was rejected.

Jesus' first coming → Rejection of Jesus on earth

Jesus' second coming → Vindication and reign of Jesus on earth

²³ Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 290.

3. There must be a vindication and reign of the saints in the realm where they were persecuted

The Bible reveals that the period before the Messiah's kingdom is one of persecution and opposition for the saints from both the world and Satan. The blood of the martyrs throughout history and the abuse of God's people in many lands confirms this fact.

The millennial kingdom of the Messiah, though, is presented as a reversal of these difficult conditions on earth. So in addition to looking at how the millennium relates to Jesus, it is also important to examine what the millennium means for Jesus' servants. The millennium is a time of vindication and reigning for God's saints in the realm where they were persecuted. With the millennium there will be an ironic reversal of roles. God turns the tables on His enemies who persecute His people and flips the experience of believers. God's people who now are persecuted by Satan and the nations, will be rewarded, vindicated, and given authority over the nations on earth. They go from persecution to reigning. *Thus, a future millennial kingdom is necessary for the reward and vindication of God's people in the realm where there were persecuted.*

Daniel 7

Such a reversal of circumstances for the saints is found in Daniel 7. This chapter tells of the messianic figure called "the Son of Man" (Jesus) who is presented before the "Ancient of Days" (the Father) and granted "dominion, glory, and a kingdom" (Dan 7:13–14). We are then told of the evil ministry of a "horn" who is a world leader rising from the midst of ten other leaders ("horns") (Dan 7:8, 20). This "horn" offers great boasts and persecutes the saints of God. But this persecution is only for a time until God intervenes:

I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom (Dan 7:21–22).

This enemy of God's people prevails for a while. He was "overpowering them," but God intervenes on the saints' behalf. When God does this "judgment was passed in favor of the saints," and they "took possession of the kingdom." This is a dramatic reversal of circumstances. Persecution leads to vindication. To use a boxing analogy, just when the people of God seemed on the ropes and then out for the count, a knockout of the enemy occurs and God's people are the victors with hands raised in victory.

Notice that the saints were not reigning when the "horn" was waging war against them on earth. But when God intervenes with judgment and His kingdom comes, the roles are reversed and the enemy is defeated, and God's people are the ones in charge. This is an ironic reversal of power. This scenario is further amplified in Dan 7:25–27:

He [the horn] will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.

When the Son of Man (Jesus) begins His kingdom given to Him by the Ancient of Days (see Dan 7:13–14), the saints of God will have an active role in this kingdom. God and Jesus are the Kings, but they share their kingdom with those who serve them. *The major point is that God's people are persecuted for a time, but when Messiah's kingdom comes, reward and vindication come with it and the enemy is destroyed.* This is not occurring now in this age but it will in the coming kingdom. Also, there is no indication that this reign of the saints is in heaven. The saints were persecuted on earth and their reign will be upon the earth as well (Rev 5:10).

Revelation 2–3

The pattern of tribulation followed by vindication and reward is affirmed in Revelation 2–3. As Jesus addressed His churches, each is evaluated for its performance. Then they are left with promises of future blessings for persevering during present trials. Faithfulness now leads to future blessings:

- Ephesus: right to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God (2:7)
- Smyrna: will not be hurt by the second death (2:11)
- Pergamum: given hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name written on the stone (2:17)
- Thyatira: granted authority and rule over the nations (2:26–27)
- Sardis: clothed in white garments, name in book of life, and name confessed before the Father and the angels (3:5–6)
- Philadelphia: given pillar in the temple of God; the name of God and the New Jerusalem (3:12)
- Laodicea: sit with Jesus on His throne (3:21)

There is a noticeable pattern here. Jesus' churches are facing difficult times. These are not days of reigning but of holding fast during Satanic persecution. Some churches are doing better than others, but all of them need encouragement. So Jesus offers rewards as motivation for faithful service. These rewards are not the current experience of these churches. But they will be received with Jesus' return to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. Jesus does not tell the churches that His kingdom is currently in operation or that the kingdom is their present experience. Instead, His message is about remaining faithful so that they can reap the blessings of the coming kingdom reign. Jesus' message to Thyatira highlights this point:

He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father (Rev 2:26–27).

Jesus uses Psalm 2, which describes the announcement that God's King, who is also His Son, will rule over the rebellious nations. The message of Psalm 2 is that the nations who scorn God now will one day have to submit to Him through His Messiah. With Rev 2:26–27 Jesus states that when His kingdom reign begins He will share and delegate His authority with those who are part of His church. In an ironic reversal of circumstances, the persecuted ones will one day become those who rule. So when the Messiah rules, those who belong to Him also participate in this rule. The kingdom is future and the saints' participation in this kingdom reign is also future. Jesus also promises a future kingdom rule as a reward in Rev 3:21:

He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

The overcomer is one who “will” (future tense) sit down with Jesus on His throne. Again, present faithfulness leads to future kingdom reward. So then, Rev 2:26–27 and 3:21 point the churches to a future time when they will reign with Jesus for faithful service now.

Another significant matter is how intense and pervasive Satan’s opposition is to the churches of Revelation 2–3. Satan is mentioned five times (2:9, 13 [twice], 24; 3:9). The church at Smyrna was not only facing “tribulation” and “poverty,” they had to deal with a “synagogue of Satan” (2:9). The church at Pergamum was holding firm in the area where “Satan’s throne is” (2:13).²⁴ The church at Thyatira had withstood “the deep things of Satan” (2:24). The church at Philadelphia also had to face a “synagogue of Satan” (3:9).

The churches of Revelation are characterized by persecution and opposition from Satan. The churches are not reigning or experiencing the kingdom of Christ yet. Positionally they are the nucleus for that coming kingdom (see Rev 1:6), but the promises of reward and vindication are future. Also, Satan is not bound since he is very active in opposing the people of God. This point alone casts doubt on the positions of amillennialism and postmillennialism that assert that Satan is bound in this age. This is not the case according to Revelation 2–3.

Revelation 11:15 announces the coming of the seventh trumpet judgment. It is at this time that loud voices in heaven declare, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15b). Verses 17–18 indicate how this kingdom reign relates to judgment and the rewarding of God’s people. The twenty-four elders declare:

“We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Again, as with Rev 2:26–27 and 3:21, this passage points to the rewarding of God’s people. This “was the time to reward your bondservants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name.” The coming of the kingdom brings reward.

Revelation 20:4

With Rev 20:1–6 the promised resurrection, reward, and vindication of the saints occurs. Satan is imprisoned and swept away from the world to the abyss (Rev 20:1–3). And then in verse 4 we are told:

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

²⁴ The reference to “Satan’s throne” seems problematic for the amillennial and postmillennial views that claim a current binding of Satan in this age. How can Satan have a throne and be bound at the same time? Did Satan take his throne to the abyss?

The words “I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them,” appear to have a connection with Dan 7:22 and its statement that “judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.” It also connects with Dan 7:27: “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One.” The promised vindication of the saints with the kingdom of the Son of Man discussed in Daniel 7 is fulfilled with the reign of the saints in the millennial kingdom of Rev 20:1–6.

Revelation 20:4 is a beautiful depiction of the coming reversal of circumstances for the saints of God. They are resurrected and on thrones with the authority to rule in the kingdom. Such circumstances have not occurred yet but they will when Jesus comes again to earth.

To summarize, a millennial kingdom after the return of Jesus is necessary for there to be a true reward and vindication of the saints of God. Such reward and vindication awaits a future fulfillment. As Dave Mathewson states:

The period of the church age is one in which the kingdom of God and the saints is contested by Satan and his kingdom . . . The authority of the beast is acknowledged worldwide (13:3–4) and God’s people appear defeated (chaps. 11, 13). Moreover, the beast has apparently survived a fatal blow (13:3–4). *However, the millennium reverses this situation by providing a counterpart to the beast’s earthly sovereignty and ostensible invincibility.* The dragon, Satan, is bound and the dragon and beast are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:1–3, 7–11). Now the saints triumph and they reign and rule, and for a comparably much longer period of time, one thousand years.²⁵

The thousand-year kingdom, therefore, “portrays the complete victory and vindication of the saints at the Parousia of Christ.”²⁶

Consider this point from the opposite direction. If premillennialism is not true and the millennium is today, then the reward and vindication of the saints is taking place in this present evil age, which is difficult to believe and goes against our experiences. For example, Paul chided the Corinthians for thinking they were reigning already (see 1 Cor 4:8) and instead described his situation: “To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless. . . . we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now” (1 Cor 4:11, 13).

Also, note that the souls of the martyrs who appear in heaven in Rev 6:9–11 are not vindicated or reigning yet in the world but are told to “rest for a little while longer” until God’s vengeance takes care of their enemies. The vindication of these martyrs occurs in the millennium of Rev 20:4, where we are told “they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” The martyred saints persecuted on earth later become the resurrected and rewarded saints reigning on earth. The reward and vindication of the saints fits better with the second coming of Jesus and the kingdom He brings.

Present age: Saints are persecuted on earth as they serve Jesus.

Millennial kingdom: Saints are rewarded on earth for faithful service.

²⁵ Dave Mathewson, “A Re-examination of the Millennium in Rev 20:1–6: Consummation and Recapitulation” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 248. Emphases mine.

²⁶ Ibid.

4. There needs to be a time in history where all aspects of the covenants and promises are fulfilled

The Christian church has affirmed two comings of Jesus. The first occurred in the first century A.D., and the second will occur on a future day. There are certain things we should expect in regard to the fact that there are two comings of Jesus. One is that certain prophecies and promises were fulfilled with Jesus' first coming, while others await fulfillment at His second coming. If Jesus' coming has two parts to it, then it makes sense that the fulfillment of matters related to Him would come in stages as well.

The first coming of Jesus brought the ultimate Son of David (Jesus) and His sacrificial death. The first coming also brought messianic salvation to believing Jews and Gentiles and the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit. Yet the Bible also indicates that there are major aspects of prophecy that still need to be fulfilled. For example, in Acts 1:6, the apostles asked Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" The apostles did not view Israel's promised restoration as occurring yet. That's why they asked the Lord when it would occur (see also Deut 30:1–6; Ezekiel 36; Rom 11:26–27). In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul explains why the Day of the Lord had not started yet. The dimensions of Israel's land boundaries described in Gen 15:18–21 still need to be fulfilled. The restoration of the city of Jerusalem has not happened yet (see Jer 31:38–40; Luke 21:24). Harmony among nations needs to occur (see Isa 2:2–4). Restoration of the animal kingdom in Messiah's kingdom needs to be realized (see Isaiah 11). In sum, many of the national and physical promises of the Bible are unfulfilled currently.

So then, unfulfilled prophecy is a major reason why there must be a millennium. The millennium is the ideal time period when unfulfilled prophecies and promises will be fulfilled. If God is true and cannot lie, we know that all aspects of His promises will come to fruition with the coming kingdom.

A couple of objections could be offered against this point. One may be that Jesus has already fulfilled all the prophecies, covenants, and promises of the Old Testament. After all, doesn't Paul say that all the promises are "Yes" in Jesus (see 2 Cor 1:20). Doesn't Jesus say that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets? (see Matt 5:17).

The correct answer is that Jesus does fulfill all that was promised. But the real issue is "how" and "when" He fulfills these matters. Does He fulfill them by having them spiritually absorbed into Himself or by fulfilling physical promises in a spiritual way? Or does He fulfill them by being the One through whom the literal fulfillment of God's promises come true? The latter is the better option. Jesus is the center of God's kingdom plans. Jesus is at the center of God's promise plan (see Gen 3:15). Without Him God's kingdom and salvation plan would never happen. But these fulfillments take place as a result of two comings of Jesus. To date we have never experienced harmony among nations, the restoration of the animal kingdom, the restoration of Israel to her land, etc. Can we simply spiritualize these and say they are already fulfilled in Jesus?

Second, the New Testament reaffirms many Old Testament prophecies that still need to occur, such as the Day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:10) and the appearance of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:3–4). If Jesus fulfilled everything with His first coming, why do the New Testament writers view so many prophecies as still needing to be fulfilled?

Third, Jesus himself referred to many prophecies that still needed to be fulfilled, even after His first earthly ministry was near completion. In His Olivet Discourse (cf. Matthew 24–25; Luke 21), Jesus predicted many things that still needed to happen, such as the abomination of desolation, cosmic signs, the gathering of His people, and the judgment of the nations. Nowhere does He say that the details of these prophecies do not matter because they are absorbed into Him.

Another objection could be that unfulfilled prophecies and promises could be fulfilled in the Eternal State and not the millennium. However, there is a major problem with this objection. If the

Eternal State is the fulfillment of yet unfulfilled promises, this means that these matters would come to fruition outside the mediatorial kingdom of Jesus the Messiah. Yet the Bible links fulfillment of many of these matters with Messiah's kingdom. For example, the restoration of the animal kingdom described in Isa 11:6–9 is linked with the coming Davidic ruler in 11:1 (“stem of Jesse”).

If premillennialism is not true, then the unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible do not find fulfillment just as God promised. What the Old Testament writers intended and what their hearers understood were wrong. The prophecies have to be spiritualized, or absorbed into Jesus, or fulfilled in the Eternal State outside the realm of Messiah's kingdom. Whichever option is chosen, the fulfillment would not be like the literal fulfillments of the prophecies that occurred at Jesus' first coming. There would be an inconsistency in how God fulfills His promises. The better position is that God fulfills all of His promises just as He said and that unfulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled with Jesus' return and the millennial kingdom that the Messiah brings.

Jesus' first coming → many prophecies were literally fulfilled.

Jesus' second coming → prophecies not fulfilled at the first coming will be literally fulfilled.

Conclusion

Those who hold to premillennialism should understand that this view is explicitly taught in Scripture and there is a strong rationale for this view. This position is not only taught in Revelation 20, it is supported by many other passages and reasons. Thus, we can both know *that* premillennialism is true and know *why* it is true.