

Lesson 2: Literal or Physical Interpretation

Introduction: Premillennialism is the view that Christ's second coming will occur prior to His millennial kingdom, and that the millennial kingdom is a literal 1,000-year reign. In order to understand and interpret the passages in Scripture that deal with end times events, there are two things that must be clearly understood: a proper method of interpreting Scripture, and the distinction between Israel (the Jews) and the Church (the body of all believers in Jesus Christ).

First, a proper method of interpreting Scripture requires that Scripture be interpreted in a way that is consistent with its context. This means that a passage must be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the audience to which it is written, those it is written about, who it is written by, and so on. It is critical to know the author, intended audience, and historical background of each passage one interprets. The historical and cultural setting will often reveal the correct meaning of a passage. It is also important to remember that Scripture interprets Scripture. That is, often a passage will cover a topic or subject that is also addressed elsewhere in the Bible. It is important to interpret all of these passages consistent with one another.

Finally, and most importantly, passages must always be taken in their normal, regular, plain, literal meaning unless the context of the passage indicates that it is figurative in nature. A literal interpretation does not eliminate the possibility of figures of speech being used. Rather, it encourages the interpreter to not read figurative language into the meaning of a passage unless it is appropriate for that context. It is crucial to never seek a "deeper, more spiritual" meaning than is presented. This is dangerous because when it takes place, the basis for accurate interpretation is placed in the mind of the reader, rather than coming from the Scriptures. In this case there can be no objective standard of interpretation, but instead, Scripture becomes subject to each person's own impression of what it means. Second Peter 1:20-21 reminds us "...no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Applying these principles of biblical interpretation, it must be seen that Israel (Abraham's physical descendants) and the Church (all the believers) are two distinct groups. It is crucial to recognize and understand that Israel and the Church are distinct because if this is misunderstood, Scripture will be misinterpreted. Specifically, passages that deal with promises made to Israel are prone to be misunderstood and misinterpreted if one tries to make them apply to the Church, and vice versa. Remember, the context of the passage will determine to whom it is addressed, and will point to the most correct interpretation!

With those concepts in mind, we can look at various passages of Scripture that produce the premillennial view. Let's explore some examples.

1. What did God promise to David (2 Sm. 7:12-13)?
 - a. Did Jesus see His kingdom as literal or physical (Jh. 18:36)?
 - b. How did Peter see, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment (Ac. 2:30-36)?
2. How did Jesus fulfill the prophecy of Is. 61:1-2 (Lk.4:17-21)?

Premillennial Position:

- This theory says that Christ came to set up a literal earthly kingdom but He was rejected by the Jews and put it off. *"The purpose of the writing of the Gospel of Matthew was to record the presentation of Jesus Christ as Messiah (1:1-11:1), to trace the opposition to Him and his offered kingdom by the nation (11:2-16:2), and to record the official and final rejection of that King and kingdom by Israel (16:13-28:20)."*

- “Because of an anticipated future literal fulfilment, certain facts present themselves concerning Israel’s future. 1. First of all, Israel must be preserved as a nation. 2. Israel must have a national existence and be brought back into the land of her inheritance. Since David’s kingdom had definite geological boundaries, and those boundaries were made a feature of the promise to David concerning his son’s reign, the land must be given to this nation as the site of their national homeland. 3. David’s son, the Lord Jesus Christ, must return to the earth, bodily and literally, in order to reign over David’s covenanted kingdom. The allegation that Christ is seated on the Father’s throne reigning over a spiritual kingdom, the church, simply does not fulfil the promises of the covenant. 4. A literal earthly kingdom must be constituted over which the returned Messiah reigns. 5. This kingdom must become an eternal kingdom. Since the “throne”, “house”, and “kingdom” were all promised to David in perpetuity, there must be no end to the Messiah’s reign over David’s kingdom from David’s throne.”*

Questions for Discussion (Biblical Position):

- What are the types (literal) and antitypes (spiritual) in the Bible?

<i>Example</i>	<i>Old Testament Type Was Literal</i>	<i>New Testament Antitype Is Spiritual</i>
Covenant	Ex. 34:1	Hb. 8:8-12
Place of Worship	Jh. 4:21	Jh. 4:23-24
Tabernacle	Hb. 9:1-10	Hb. 9:11
Priesthood	Ex. 29:44	1 Pt. 2:9
Circumcision	Ge. 17:9-13	Co. 2:11

- What are found in Christ right now (Ep. 1:3)?
- How much of the plan of God was gathered together in Christ (Ep. 1:9-10)?
- Is it possible for literal/physical blessings of a millennial kingdom to be greater than the spiritual blessings we have in Christ right now? Explain your answer.

Conclusions:

- The church stands today as a memorial to God’s power, wisdom, love and concern for dying sinful man (Ep. 3:10-11).
- The kingdom was established as promised (Co. 1:13; Hb. 12:28).
- Every person should resolve to enter the kingdom and live faithfully in it.