

# HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION OF MILLENNIAL VIEWS REGARDING ISRAEL

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## Introduction

This paper aims to survey the history of interpretation of the various views of the Millennium with special attention to how each one deals with national Israel and perhaps why it deals with Israel in that way. After this introductory material on the major views, the track will be laid to look at views as they occurred in church history. First early premillennialism of the first two centuries of the church, then amillennialism of the bulk of church history. Next the postmillennialism of Reformation England hence, fourth premillennialism's re-emergence in the Puritan revivals of Britain and Netherlands. Then the extreme millenarianism of the Puritan political ascendancy. Sixth, dispensationalism with all its sensationalism, and seventh, historic premillennialism, followed by a concluding note.

Russ Bush says eschatology has some of the more interesting doctrines of the Christian faith. The Second Coming of Christ is both a hope for believers and a warning to nonbelievers. He adds, "the truth is that the pattern of interpretation growing out of our understanding of Revelation 20 actually extends throughout the Bible" affecting our reading of the parables, the prophets, the Law and our method of interpretation of many other parts of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Christian attitudes toward the millennium fall into three general categories: amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism. Amillennialists do not believe in a literal millennial kingdom on earth and generally interpret the prophecies symbolically. It has been the prevailing view in most of the Church since the fifth century. Postmillennialism is the belief that the millennium will be established with the global spread of the Gospel and rise in Christian holiness in the earth. Once that perfection is in place, Jesus will return.

Premillennialists believe Jesus will return to establish his kingdom himself and will inaugurate a literal millennium. Since about 1875, most American premillennialists have been dispensationalists as well. Bush says, "The earliest Church Fathers seem to have been mostly post-tribulational premillennialists (often labeled "historic premillennialism"), but later theologians defended other alternatives. Some think Augustine's writings gave rise to Amillennialism, and some find Calvin to be the source of postmillennialism. Nevertheless, only in the last hundred and fifty years or so have these systems of interpretation been clearly and fully defined and defended as such."<sup>2</sup>

Charles R. Erdman, the twentieth century Princetonian, saw the Millennium as an "unfortunate" teaching, obscure, highly figurative, and full of mystery. "These symbols cannot be interpreted with certainty or with confidence." The prediction is found nowhere else in the Bible, Erdman says. While he believes that the Bible affirms the kingdom of God to be universal on the earth ultimately, he asserts that outside Revelation 20 there is not even a hint of such a time.<sup>3</sup> Erdman hopes that someone will one day come up with a better interpretation than the three major positions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Russ Bush, *Major Christian Theories about the End Times* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bush, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Erdman, *The Return of Christ* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1922), 63-64.

<sup>4</sup> Erdman, 67.

### Early Premillennialism

Hellenistic Judaism held that the world would last for seven millennia based on the seven creation days of Genesis and the Babylonian and Hellenistic notions of seven cosmic periods.<sup>5</sup> Since a day in the sight of the Lord was as a thousand years (Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8), early Christians easily assimilated this idea with Revelation 20. The Epistle of Barnabas (c. 135 AD) applied it to millennial doctrine: “In six days, that is in six thousand years, everything shall come to an end. ‘And, He rested on the seventh day,’ means this; when His Son shall come, and shall abolish the time of the Lawless One, and shall judge the ungodly, and shall change the sun and moon and stars, then shall He rest gloriously on the seventh day,”<sup>6</sup> the seventh millennium, a Sabbath, when Christ will renew the world and the righteous. Afterward, the eighth day would be the beginning of a new world, the eternal state.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, says Yaakov Ariel, Christians have been dividing human history into ages or dispensations. Dispensational historians often link themselves with these ancient millenarians, but dispensationalism is distinct from those early church convictions.<sup>8</sup>

Such futuristic millenarianism was not alone. Papias records a tradition that “there will be a certain period of a thousand years after the resurrection from the dead, when the kingdom of Christ must be set up in a material order on this earth’ when ‘all the animals, feeding only on the produce of the earth, shall live in peaceful harmony together, and in perfect subjection to man,”<sup>9</sup> a direct reference to Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25. Anti-millenarian William Shedd notes that this literal millennial view appears not only in the Jewish-Gnostic Cerinthus, the contemporary and opponent of the Apostle John, but also in Ignatius of Lyons, the disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of John, so this proves only that the idea was present even among opposing sides in the first century church.<sup>10</sup>

Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century held belief in a future millennium as essential to orthodoxy. “I and others who are right-minded Christians at all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.”<sup>11</sup> By the last half of the second century, Justin Martyr said that premillennialism was the belief of all but the Gnostics,<sup>12</sup> but Irenaeus writes about opposition to pre-millennialism from within the church. Since these anti-millennialists agreed with the Gnostics, Irenaeus concluded that anti-

<sup>5</sup> Peter Toon, ed., *Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel, 1600-1660*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1970), 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> *Epistle of Barnabas*, 15:3-8.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945*, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 39:11-12. Eusebius also described the materialistic chiliasm of the Gnostic Cerinthus, the Apostle John’s opponent. Therefore millenarian critics in the seventeenth century identified millenarianism with Cerinthus. Toon, 10.

<sup>10</sup> William G.T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 2:390. Shedd adds that *Barnabas*, *Hermas*, and *Papias* also have chiliastic teaching, “the latter in its grossest form.”

<sup>11</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80.

<sup>12</sup> Justin Martyr, *DT*, 80-81.

millennialism must be heresy.<sup>13</sup> One of those millenarian opponents was the Roman presbyter Gaius (c. 200) who attacked the millennial views of the Montanist Proclus and went so far as to say that premillennialism was the invention of Cerinthus who himself wrote the Apocalypse!<sup>14</sup>

Shedd attributes the rise of millenarianism from 150 to 250 B.C., found in Irenaeus and Tertullian, to government persecution. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 175-200 AD), Shedd says, synthesized the ideas of seven millennia and the millennium of paradise in Jerusalem in the context of his literally understood Biblical theology. Irenaeus firmly held that the Scriptures were the final deposit of the apostle's teaching and that it alone was sufficient for salvation. He placed the Second Coming after the Antichrist's appearance and before the millennium. At the resurrection of the righteous, the resurrected would receive bodies of flesh and govern the restored Creation. Jerusalem would be the global capital of the earth which would be replaced by the new, heavenly Jerusalem at the close of the thousand years (Revelation 21:2). The Great White Throne judgment would then occur in which the unbelieving dead, who had been awaiting the Day of the Lord in a place without light or blessing, would be raised and condemned. Then the sheep and goats would be divided forever (Matt. 25). Irenaeus was firmly against a figurative view of the eschatological prophecies, such as Isaiah 65:20-25.<sup>15</sup>

“When this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, that hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which the Lord declared that ‘many coming from the east and west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’<sup>16</sup>

Cyprian held to premillennialism with moderation,<sup>17</sup> perhaps a sign of the lower level of urgency accorded the doctrine compared to the raging Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the day, so much that millennialism was never mentioned in the early creeds. Even Irenaeus and Tertullian mention no more about eschatology in general than is said in the Apostles' Creed.<sup>18</sup>

### **Amillennialism**

With Constantine, Christianity was no longer persecuted, but was set in a preferred position. The pressure of persecution alleviated, the personal memory of the original Jewish-majority church gone, and the rise of a Latin Gentile church brought new ideas. Constantine, in writing to the assembled Council at Nicaea (325 A.D.) asked the bishops to distance the Church from the “polluted wretches” guilty of “a nefarious crime” by changing Easter's date to something other

<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:31:1.

<sup>14</sup> Shedd, 2:394.

<sup>15</sup> Toon, 11-13.

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *AH*, V, 30:4.

<sup>17</sup> Seeberg, 197. “Great delight was found in drawing portraitures of the last times and the conflicts under the reign of the Antichrist (Nero), with the consolation of the millennial kingdom (see esp. Comm. Carm. Ap. 791ff.; instr. li. 2-4; 39; i. 27, 28, 41, etc. Lactant. Ep. 66, 67). The gulf between the church, as it was then conceived, and the kingdom of God lying wholly in the future, became but the wider.” Seeberg, 197.

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *AH*, 1:10:3;4; Tertullian, *De virg. vel.* 1; *Adv. Prax.* 2; *De praescr. haer.* 13; Shedd, 394.

than the Jewish Passover. It was unworthy that the most holy feast should be connected with the practices of Jews, Constantine wrote the assembled bishops.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the church moved away from premillennial views to a more spiritualized interpretation of Revelation 20 in harmony with Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2. The personal coming of Christ would not happen until Doomsday, when the gospel would be preached to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8), the fullness of the Gentiles would be brought in, the Jews converted to Christianity (Rom. 11), and the Apostasy had occurred (2 Thess. 2:3).<sup>20</sup>

This new amillennial theory taught that both Jews and Gentile believers spiritually receive the Old Testament promises to Israel now through the Church. Noted amillennialist Dr. Oswald T. Allis explains, “For the gospel age in which we are living is that day foretold by the prophets when the law of God shall be written in the hearts of men (Jeremiah 31:33) and when the Spirit of God abiding in their hearts will enable them to keep it (Ezekial 11:19; 36:26f).”<sup>21</sup>

In the third century, strong opposition to premillennialism developed from within the Alexandrian School led by Clement and Origen, and later from Alexandrian bishop Dionysius who was responding to its spread in his diocese from the teaching of Nepos and Coracion.<sup>22</sup> Millenarianism therefore was not part of the Alexandrian spiritualized hermeneutic, which emphasized analogical over literal interpretation.

By the time of Origen mid-third century, it was commonly held that Jerusalem’s destruction and Jewish dispersion demonstrated that God was finished with Israel. They “will never be restored to their former condition,” Origen wrote, “For they have committed a crime of the most unhallowed kind, in conspiring against the Savior of the human race.”<sup>23</sup> Origen especially denied a future millennium; he tended to allegorize the same passages which Irenaeus interpreted literally. In post-Constantinian Rome, millenarianism was rare as well. Between these two large churches, a spiritualized interpretation of Revelation 20 became widespread. Afterward, only Lactantius (d. 330) notably defends premillennialism.

Eusebius’ tone toward chiliasm demonstrates that the doctrine had fallen on hard times by the fourth century when he says that Papias’ writings contain “matters too fabulous” that “there would be a certain millennium after the resurrection, and that there would be a corporeal reign of Christ on this very earth; which things he appears to have imagined, as if they were authorized by the apostolic narrations, not understanding correctly those matters which they propounded mystically, in their representations. For he was very limited in his comprehension, as is evident from his discourses,” adding that he caused others like Irenaeus to be mistaken on that doctrine.<sup>24</sup>

After 400 A.D., premillennialism disappeared from official church doctrine, though its popular appeal seems to have been viable in the expectation of doomsday in A.D. 1000 and 1500 and the Anabaptist aberrations of the Reformation period. The Augsburg Confession condemned Anabaptist premillennialism and a limited future punishment as does the English Confession of Edward VI.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Dan Gruber, *The Church and the Jews* (Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 1997), 35.

<sup>20</sup> Shedd, 2:398-99.

<sup>21</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1945), 42.

<sup>22</sup> Henry C. Sheldon, *The History of Christian Doctrine*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1886), 391-392.

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4:22, in Don Finto, *Your People Shall be My People* (Ventura: Regal, 2001), 88.

<sup>24</sup> Eusebius, *EH*, 3:39.

<sup>25</sup> Shedd, 2:395-6.

Messianic Jewish leader Daniel Juster writes that in the first century Jewish believers, especially the ethnically Jewish Apostles, were respected as the elders of the Church. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish revolts at Rome, accompanied by the long-standing Roman disdain for Jews, the Church began to see Israel as cursed by God for their rejection of Christ. The Church became the new Israel, fully replacing the old Israel. Two groups of Jewish Christians emerged, the heretical Ebionites who denied Jesus' divinity and received neither Paul's letters nor parts of the Gospels, and the Nazarenes who accepted Jesus' deity and the whole New Testament. The Church rejected both groups.

John Chrysostom (late third, early fourth century) called Jews devils, murderous, greedy, immoral, vicious criminals in his eight *Homilies Against the Jews*. "As for me I hate the synagogue... I hate the Jews."<sup>26</sup> Justin Martyr said that one could not be both a Jew and a Christian, and this idea became Church law at Nicaea II (787 A.D.) and reaffirmed until the middle of the nineteenth century. The Lateran Councils of 1179 and 1215 ordered Jews to live in separate quarters and wear distinctive dress in a precursor to the twentieth century Holocaust.<sup>27</sup>

Even Augustine had initially adopted premillennialism in his early days but later rejected it.<sup>28</sup> In the fifth century, Augustine and the Donatist Tyconius completed the replacement of a literal interpretation with the allegorical, and under their influence, the Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned as a superstition the literal, future millennium. Thus, amillennialism became the orthodox teaching of the Western Church.<sup>29</sup> Augustine believed that the Jews were once God's chosen people, but their spiritual blindness in killing Christ put them forever beyond the pale of God's grace.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine thought it was possible to take the millennium literally, but he preferred to take it as representing the period of the Church in the world until the Last Judgment, the victorious Christian life on earth. The casting of the devil into the Abyss meant that during the Gospel age, God would not allow Satan to seduce or know the elect. Augustine understood Colossians 3:1-2 to be connected to Revelation 20:4 in regard to the sitting of the Church's bishops on earth and the martyrs in heaven as the resurrected of Revelation 20:1-6. At the end of the spiritual millennium, Satan will stir up Gog and Magog (i.e., the unbelieving nations) to make war on the people of God, but the Church will overcome. Then the second resurrection of all who have ever lived will occur and they will appear before the Great White Throne for a judgment of works. Afterward, the wicked will go into eternal torment and misery, the righteous into the fullness of glorified life everlasting, and the New Jerusalem will come down from heaven.<sup>31</sup>

This amillennial shift was so thorough that the Church expunged Irenaeus' chapters on premillennialism from his *Against Heresies*, and did such a good job that not until 1575 was a manuscript found with Irenaeus' authentic teaching on the subject. Also, Jerome replaced Victorinus' (d. 304) Apocalypse commentary with passages from Tyconius' fourth century

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<sup>26</sup> Finto, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Finto, 90.

<sup>28</sup> Sheldon, 391-392.

<sup>29</sup> Toon, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew P. Scheil, "Anti-Judaism in Aelfric's *Lives of the Saints*" in *Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, Malcolm R. Godden, and Simon Keynes (Cambridge, UK: CUP, 2000), 68.

<sup>31</sup> Toon, 15-16.

commentary from an amillennial perspective. Victorinus' commentary on Revelation had explained Revelation 20 as a future reign of Christ with his saints.<sup>32</sup>

The effort against Jewishness continued through church history. The Christian Spanish rulers Ferdinand and Isabella exiled, tortured, and killed thousands of Jews in the fifteenth century Inquisition. Crusaders killed Jews by the thousands. In one instance, as the great synagogue in Jerusalem burned while filled with Jews, the Crusaders marched around it singing, "Christ, we adore Thee."<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther grew to hate the Jews by the end of his life.

"Their synagogues should be set on fire.... Their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed.... They should be deprived of their prayer-books and Talmuds.... Their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach anymore.... Passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden.... Let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses."

Luther commented on Romans 11:28-29, "The word *enemies* must here be taken in a passive sense, that is, they [the Jews] deserve to be hated. God hates them, and so they are hated by the Apostles and all who are of God." Luther's attitude was quoted in Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.<sup>34</sup>

John Calvin called Jews "profane dogs,"<sup>35</sup> the worst of people: ignorant, greedy, impious, ungrateful, rebellious, criminal. He said that "the Jews stupidly devour all the riches of the earth with their unrestrained cupidity."<sup>36</sup> In regard to their disobedience, Calvin wrote, "The degenerate and unlimited stubbornness [of the Jews] has served to justify their unending accumulation of misery without limit and without measure. Everyone seems cheered by their punishment; no one feels sorry for them."<sup>37</sup> Gerhard Kittel, the German New Testament scholar, in his *Jewish Question* in 1933 recommended that the Jews should accept discrimination and defamation as their due as second-class citizens whose lot is to wander "restless and homeless on the face of the earth."<sup>38</sup>

Even today the idea that Israel is completely displaced by the Church is plentiful. *Harper's Dictionary of the Bible*, commenting on the Jewishness of Paul in the entry on Israel, reads, "Paul argued that the Jews had forfeited these promises, which had come to Abraham through faith, not the law (Romans 4:13). Because 'it is men of faith who are the [true] sons of Abraham' (Galatians 3:7), Christians, not Jews, could now claim to be descended from the Israelite

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<sup>32</sup> Toon, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Michael, *A Concise History of American Anti-Semitism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 162.

<sup>35</sup> Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992), 49.

<sup>36</sup> Salo Baron, "John Calvin and the Jews," quoted in Jeremy Cohen, *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict* (New York: NYU Press, 1991), 381.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Courvoisier, "Calvin et les Juifs," *Judaica* (Zurich: n.p., 1946), 206.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel C. Juster, *The Irrevocable Calling* (Gaithersburg, MD: Tikkun Ministries, 1996), 52-53. Finto, 72. Michael Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1992), 11; Frank Ephraim Talmadge, ed., *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York: Ktav/Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rit, 1975), 15, 34-36; and Malcolm Hay, *The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism* (New York: Liberty Press, 1981), 27.

patriarchs. The Church was, in fact ‘the twelve tribes in the Dispersion’ (James 1:1).”<sup>39</sup> In an otherwise excellent dictionary Paul’s own words are turned to say what he clearly denied – that the Gentiles have replaced Israel. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible does similarly in outlining Isaiah 41-65 thus: “41: God speaks of his merciful providence in regard to his church; 43: The Lord comforts the church with his promises; 52: The church roused with God’s promise of free redemption; 60: Glory of the church in the abundant access of the Gentiles; 65: The Gentiles called. The Jews rejected. A remnant saved. Blessed state of the new Jerusalem.”<sup>40</sup>

Chiliasm, or premillennialism went underground and became the stuff of popular religion, one later example being the kookiness of Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists of Münster. Because of that Anabaptist extremism, the Reformers dismissed a premillennial view out of hand. Luther and Calvin fell back on Augustine’s interpretation and denied a future millennium. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) condemned “Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth.” Instead, it saw the future as a time of trial and tribulation for the saints, referencing Matthew 24-25, 2 Thessalonians 2, and 2 Timothy 3-4.<sup>41</sup>

Not all the Anabaptists were so extreme, though. Ronnie Lawson says “there exists within sixteenth century chiliasm no coherent, unified theology concerning the role of the church and Israel,” although there are points of continuity. One place of continuity is between the nation of Israel and the new kingdom of the elect, taking Old Testament passages of Israel as prescriptive for the kingdom of God. Those Anabaptists representing quiet eschatology in the sixteenth century saw the church and Israel in spiritual relationship in which the new covenant was the spiritual fulfillment of the old physical covenant with Israel. There was only a spiritual continuity between Israel and the church, not a physical one. The Hutterite Anabaptists believed their communities were the reborn people of God, the true Israelites. They recognized Israel as the first people to enter into covenant with God through Abraham, but the new covenant of grace with Christ was better, making them the new people of God and rejecting the Jews and replacing their kingdom with Christ’s.<sup>42</sup>

The Amillennialists, Erdman says, are hard pressed to say there is no such thing as a Millennium at all since Revelation 20 mentions it six times, but they believe the passage points to heaven’s blessedness. The problem with the millennium being in heaven, though, is that John says it is on the earth. Erdman adds that Amillennialists attach too little weight to the great prophecies of the Old Testament when war shall be done, the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth, and one Lord shall govern a perfect worldwide kingdom. What about the liberation of all things from its present corruption? Erdman does have praise for Amillennialists: They rightly remind postmillennialists that the millennium cannot be before the Lord’s return and restrain from the premillennialists features that belong to the eternal state.<sup>43</sup>

But there is more here than that. Amillennialism was born out of anti-Semitism. It may be a perfectly fine eschatological doctrine, but its origin is sinful. Dan Juster believes that Israel will

<sup>39</sup> *Harpers Bible Dictionary*, 1985, s.v. “Israel.”

<sup>40</sup> *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, 4<sup>th</sup> improved ed. (Indianapolis: B.B. Kirkbride, 1964).

<sup>41</sup> Toon, 18-19.

<sup>42</sup> Ronnie Lee Lawson, “The Role of the Church and Israel: A Critical Appraisal of Eschatology in Sixteenth Century Anabaptism” (Ph.D. Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 72-75, 112-119, 176-177.

<sup>43</sup> Erdman, 67, 77-78.

come to faith in Christ in the last days (Zechariah 12:10), but just as in Jesus' trial and crucifixion in which Israel's leadership rejected him, so in the last days, Juster asserts, there will be a recognized leadership among the Jewish people who will make a confession before Christ returns (Acts 3:19-21).<sup>44</sup> We Gentiles who believe indeed have come into the promises of Israel, but that is because the character of a holy God guarantees those promises and blessings to Israel. We have been grafted in. The Messianic Jewish movement today teaches the "One New Man" doctrine, that the Church and Israel have a common end together as Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:11-22. By replacing Israel, we are trying to replace the tree. In doing so, we foolishly are uprooting our tap root, the promises based in the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants.

### Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists like Charles Hodge who take a literal interpretation believe that Israel will come into its full Old Testament promises in the church through believing in Christ. Thus, postmillennialism believes the promises will be fulfilled to Jews in this present age to those who receive Jesus as Messiah.<sup>45</sup> Postmillennialism or Latter-day Glory eschatology developed in the seventeenth century under Thomas Brightman, William Gouge, John Cotton, and John Owen. Providing the foundation for that postmillennialism was the development of interest in Hebrew study. Cambridge University made its first appointment to a Hebrew chair in 1549, a German scholar named Paul Fagius. His successor was a converted Jew named John Immanuel Tremellius. They not only read the Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic, but they also read the Rabbis, many of whom predicted a glorious future on the earth for Israel. By 1611 an able body of English Hebraists worked on King James' new Authorized Version. Between 1648 and 1653 nine different Hebrew grammars were printed. The interest in the Old Testament was motivated by a desire to understand the background of the New Testament. It was the Bible Jesus and the early church used. The Old Testament held types and shadows of the Messiah as prophet, priest, and king. Further, the Old Testament provided a model for a God-ordained theocracy in a period of Puritan political ascendancy.

Yaakov Ariel says that Reformation in England and the emphasis on the Bible led to new studies in eschatology, "At this time the return of the Jews to Palestine and their conversion to Christianity was to play a dominant role in prophetic interpretations and predictions."<sup>46</sup> Ariel says the first to advocate a Jewish restoration to the Land was Francis Kett in 1585. His book was declared heretical by the Anglican Church, and Kett burned at the stake in 1589.

Thomas Brightman followed with books wisely published posthumously, predicting the defeat of the Turks, i.e., the Muslim world (Gog and Magog), the conversion of the Jews, and their restoration to Palestine. Jerusalem would be the center of the universe and the church there would be the center of Christianity. Attorney Henry Finch published *The Calling of the Jews* in 1621, promoting the view that the Jews would convert to Christ and be restored to Palestine. Finch insisted on a literal reading of the Old Testament prophecies referring to Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, and Zion.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Juster and Intrater, *Israel, the Church, and the Last Days* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1990), 48-50.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1909), 589.

<sup>46</sup> Ariel, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ariel, 1-2.



Thomas Brightman wrote that the battle with Gog and Magog (the Turks and allies) will take place (Rev. 20:8) and the Jewish nation, now converted to Christ, will be surrounded by the Turks in the Holy Land (Rev. 20:9). Then the Lord will miraculously intervene on behalf of his chosen people and the Church, destroying their enemies (Rev. 20:10) and bringing about the full conversion and restoration of the Jews as a great spiritualized resurrection (Rev. 20:11-12; Rom. 11:15; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37; Dan. 12:2-3). Brightman's eschatology is a form of postmillennialism.<sup>48</sup>

There were three effects for eschatology from the growing importance of the Hebrew Bible and rabbinical literature. First, there was the possibility of following Jewish exegesis and hermeneutics of Old Testament prophecies like Ezekiel 37 as a future literal restoration of the Jews to Canaan. Second, the word *Israel* in Romans 11:25ff, which Calvin and Luther had understood as referring to the Church of Jews and Gentiles could be taken as plainly *Jews*, i.e., non-Christian Jews. Beza favored this interpretation followed by the editors of the Geneva Bible who were English and Scot exiles in Geneva fleeing the persecutions of Queen Mary I. Through the Geneva Bible and Puritan writings, this view of the conversion of the Jews was disseminated throughout England, Scotland, and New England.<sup>49</sup>

Third, the widespread feeling that the world's end was near at hand and a rabbinic theory of a day representing a year made it possible to mathematically decipher the date for the end of the world. The rabbis' theory emerged from Ezekiel 4:6 where God tells Ezekiel to lie on his side forty days to represent Judah's forty years in exile. While the rabbis used the theory to interpret Daniel, Puritans saw a way to make sense of numbers in The Revelation. Buttressing this interest in Jewish studies was a growing conviction among Reformed believers that the Bible was the Word of God, that each book was of equal value because each was divinely inspired, and therefore was a literal interpretive grid. The net effect for Old Testament interpreters was that many prophetic passages now spoke of a literal restoration of the Jews and not a spiritual or symbolic new Israel, the Church. The millennium, of Revelation 20, therefore, became a literal one thousand years of Church history preceded by Revelation 13-19 which taught the total destruction of Christ's enemies (the Turks, the Papacy, and their supporters) before the final judgment. Seen in light of the Reformation, it appeared to the new post-millennialists that God was bringing all things to a triumphant end.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1730s, Jonathan Edwards taught that the millennium would be ushered in on the shoulders of human perfection with the arrival of Jesus Christ on earth when that was fulfilled. The Jews would convert before the Lord's return. Edwards' millennial view of preparing for the King's arrival was the common position of many evangelicals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Jewish nation had no real role in that vision.<sup>51</sup>

Georgia Presbyterian clergyman James Stacy, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, believed the millennium to be a literal thousand years of rest and peace. He followed the ancient rabbinical and early church ideas of the seven epochs, the last being the Sabbath Millennium. He

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<sup>48</sup> Toon, 29-31.

<sup>49</sup> The note in the Geneva Bible for Romans 11: 15, 25 reads, "He sheweth that the time shall come that the whole nation of the Jews, though not ever one particularly, shall be joined to the church of Christ." Ian Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988), 72, in Finto, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Toon, 23-25.

<sup>51</sup> Ariel, 5-6.

describes the Millennium as a time without war, but not everyone will be converted, citing Daniel 12:10, “Many shall be purified, but the wicked will do wickedly.” A postmillennialist, Stacy cannot see a literal first resurrection, but a figurative return of the martyr spirit to be honored. Sometime after the Millennium, no one including Stacy knows how long, there will be a war against the saints in which Christ will destroy the devil, Gog, and Magog. After this, no one knows when, the Resurrection and the Judgment will take place. Before the Millennium to come, Stacy held that three things must take place: The preaching of the gospel to every creature, the completed accumulation of prayer, and the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Once this trifacta converges, “nations will easily be converted in a day.” Since his calculations demonstrated the end of the prophetic period as 1866, and a further Daniel calculation adding up to 1941, Stacy would have swooned to know that another Antichrist, Adolf Hitler, would be prosecuting a war against the Jews in Europe while America would be drawn into the Second World War by one of the kings of the East. Stacy expected just the opposite: “By that time we confidently expect a wonderful change and development in the progress of events, if not another complete upheaval.”<sup>52</sup> Nowhere in Stacy’s eschatology is a hint of a future for Israel except once in his fifty-page diatribe against premillennialism.

Erdman says the postmillennialists are in an embarrassing place because they wish to reverse the order of events surrounding Revelation 20, to make Revelation 19 the first coming, which is difficult to maintain in his opinion because of the Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Their weakness, he asserts, is imaginary optimism which neglects the Scriptures’ teaching of the evil of this age, seeing the wheat and forgetting the tares. There is no Man of Sin, no Apostasy, no difficult last days. It is a false hope, Erdman says, to think that a golden age will somehow evolve from our present conditions, attained by human ingenuity, a social reconstruction and international compact. Erdman credits this view to unpreparedness at time of war, radical socialism, and the focus on saving society instead of souls. A postmillennialist, Erdman says, would have a hard time preaching a sermon on Christ’s words, “When the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?”<sup>53</sup>

### **Premillennialism**

Premillennialism, “Millenarianism, or chiliasm,” says William G.T. Shedd, “is the doctrine of two resurrections (Rev. 20), -- the first, that of the righteous dead at the time of the second advent of Christ, and the second that of the righteous and wicked at the end of the world, -- and a personal corporeal reign of Christ between them, for a thousand years, upon a renovated earth,” essentially the same as the “Later-Jewish doctrine of a Messianic kingdom upon earth.”<sup>54</sup> This kinship of belief, according to Shedd, made millenarianism “a peculiarity of the Jewish-Christian, as distinguished from the Gentile-Christian branch of the church at the close of the first century.”<sup>55</sup>

Congregationalist Increase Mather in *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation* (1669) wrote that the conversion of the Jews and their restoration to the Land would happen before the millennial age.

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<sup>52</sup> James Stacy, *Handbook of Prophecy* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1906), 67-102.

<sup>53</sup> Erdman, 65-67, 76-77.

<sup>54</sup> Shedd, 2:389.

<sup>55</sup> Shedd, 2:390.

His son Cotton Mather, shared his father's premillennial views.<sup>56</sup> "There is a destiny for Israel and the Church," Messianic Jewish believer Dan Juster adds, "for they are bound to fulfill this destiny. For the Church, it is to rule as the Bride Queen by His side in the Age to Come. For Israel, it is to be the capital of the nations, the place of the visible appearing of the Messiah on his throne.... During the Millennial Age, Israel will inherit the land according to the full descriptions of its borders. However, the meek will inherit the earth and the whole earth will become a land of promise."<sup>57</sup>

Messianic Jew Keith Intrater writes that "the same covenant of God with Abraham which promised a savior to the world through his seed also promised the territory of Israel in the Middle East to Abraham's physical descendants. The attack against Israel's right to that property is ultimately an attack on the validity of the same covenant that brought us Yeshua as Messiah. The spirits of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are closely akin therefore to the spirits of anti-Christ."<sup>58</sup> Don Finto says that Jesus told the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem that he would return only when they would receive him (Matt. 23:38-39). He interprets these verses as meaning that a significant number of Jewish people will be back in the Land and will have received him before he returns.<sup>59</sup>

Henry C. Sheldon writing in 1886 says that "the millenarian theory, or, to speak more exactly, the theory of the pre-millennial advent, has claimed the assent of more writers of learning and repute in the present age than in any preceding period since the ante-Nicene age.... Still, the weight of theological opinion is against it."<sup>60</sup> He quotes Joseph A. Seiss' list of pre-millennial beliefs. Regarding Israel, Seiss' pre-millennial position is "that during these great and destructive commotions the Jewish race shall be marvelously restored to the land of their fathers, brought to embrace Jesus as their Messiah and King, delivered from their enemies, placed at the head of the nations, and made the agents of unspeakable blessing to the world. Christ will then re-establish the throne of His father David, exalt it in heavenly glory, make Mount Zion the seat of His divine empire, and, with the glorified saints associated with Him in His dominion, reign over the house of Jacob and over the world in a visible, sublime, and heavenly Christocracy for the period of 'the thousand years.'"<sup>61</sup>

In the 1620's a growing number of English Puritans, by virtue of their own Biblical exegesis and the contemporary signs of the times were moving quietly toward the ancient doctrine of a future millennium. They were yet hesitant to go public with their views as they had been branded heretical by the Reformers. That is until German Calvinist Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638) announced his support of the doctrine. Alsted's hermeneutic of The Revelation involved separating the clear statements from the difficult and figuring out the difficult statements by comparing them with Scripture, history, and experience. While his view of the millennium was originally Augustinian, by 1622 in his *Theologia Prophetica*, he placed the millennium in the future, a remarkable new development not seen since Irenaeus (c. 202). Then in 1627, Alsted

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<sup>56</sup> Ariel, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Juster, *Irrevocable Calling*, 58.

<sup>58</sup> Juster and Intrater, 128.

<sup>59</sup> Finto, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Sheldon, 389. Sheldon notes pre-millenarians as Bengel, Hofmann, Karsten, Delitzsch, Auberlen, Rothe, and Van Oosterzee, In the UK: John Gill, Bickersteth, Bonar, Frere, E.B. Elliott, Cumming. In the US: Seiss, Duffield, and D.T. Taylor.

<sup>61</sup> Sheldon, 390.

published his radical millennial views in *Diatribes de mille annis Apocalypticis*, a study of Revelation 20, later translated into several languages including English in 1643 by William Burton and entitled *The Beloved City*. In the foreword to that book, Alsted gave his three rules of Bible study: the Holy Spirit's aid, comparison of Scripture with Scripture, and the experience of fulfilled Bible prophecy. He quoted Irenaeus' statement that prophecy prior to fulfillment is a riddle but after fulfillment is easily understood. The horrors of the Thirty Years War helped shift Alsted from his Augustinian eschatology to a strong premillennial position. Alsted's summary of Revelation 20 is that after God puts the dragon, Satan, into the abyss for a thousand years, he cannot stir up rebellion and thus peace prevails. The martyrs are raised from the dead, and the nations and the Jews are converted to Christ. This peace would end with the war with Gog and Magog when the Church would again be persecuted followed by the Last Judgment of Satan and his helpers and the saints' reign forever with Christ. Alsted offered Psalm 110:5-6 and Isaiah 2:1-4 as examples of prophecies which had not yet been fulfilled. In Alsted's millennium, Israel would have an honored place as a nation converted to Christ. The *Beloved City* frequently mentions that theme of a Jewish conversion as a prelude to the coming kingdom. Alsted offered as proof Genesis 49:10; Deuteronomy 32:1-44; Isaiah 27:13; Jeremiah 16:14-15; 31:1, 3; 32:37-39; Amos 9:14-15; and Micah 5:7. To strengthen his view, Alsted offers sixty-five arguments from Scripture, one of the more interesting involving Daniel 12:11-12. Here he dates "from that time" as Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in 69 A.D., and since a day in prophecy should be understood as a year, one could add 1290 years to make 1359 A.D. where the Epoch of 1335 days or years begins to arrive at 2694 A.D. when the millennium will end and the beginning of the war with Gog and Magog, but the exact time or hour is not known because no one knows how long the war with Gog and Magog would last. Thus the millennium would be 1694-2694 A.D. Regrettably, later in *Thesaurus Chronologiae* of 1628, Alsted included astrological signs to bolster his claim involving the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter portended the emergence of a new Government or Empire.<sup>62</sup>

Alsted also appealed to men throughout church history who believed in a future happy state of the Church on earth when evil would be restrained and ended by answering thirty-six objections to his view. One of those objections accused the millenarians of being Judaizers, but Alsted answers indignantly, "Therefore also the Scripture doth Judaize... we generally entertain too mean a conceit of the conversion of the Jews, because being over-much addicted, and carried away with Scholasticall trifles, we weigh not at all the Mysteries, which are propounded in the Scriptures."<sup>63</sup>

Included in this new millenarian interest among Puritans was an interest in the conversion of Israel to Christ. Among the Dutch Reformed churches of Holland there was great interest in the Portuguese-born Sephardic Jews. The synod of South-Holland in 1676 considered a proposal of how to work toward the conversion of these Dutch Jews. The next year the synod recommended that congregations pray for the conversion of the Jews. Every obstacle to their coming to Christ should be taken away including divisions and abuses within the Church and the 'general aversion to the Jews and a contempt which appeared in evil names.' Ministers should maintain their Hebrew skills and invite rabbis to friendly conversations so that they could show 'God's

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<sup>62</sup> Toon, 42-65.

<sup>63</sup> *The Beloved City*, 68. Quoted in Toon, 55.

wondrous ways with regard to Jews and Gentiles,' all with an expectation based in Romans 11:25-26 of their future conversion since it was 'timely in these latter days.'

But what of theological underpinnings for conversion of the Jew? What would the Reformed forebears say? Calvin saw the 'whole of Israel' as the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles together. While his exegesis of Romans 11:25 attributed some priority to the Jews,<sup>64</sup> he probably did not find any special significance in a massive Jewish conversion. Calvin's eschatology had no place for millenarian ideas. Neither did Beza, but he interpreted 'the whole of Israel' more literally as the *Jewish people generally* which would be gathered into the church in its fullness. The 1637 Dutch Reformed version of the Bible followed Beza rather than Calvin.<sup>65</sup>

In England, millenarianism brought political relief to Jews. The Puritan ascendancy led to calls to repeal the Expulsion Act of 1290, to readmit the Jews to England for their evangelization, perhaps even help ship Jews back to their homeland. A year after Oliver Cromwell asked the Whitehall Conference to discuss the issue, Marranos Jews living in London as merely Spanish or Portuguese were allowed to express their Jewishness openly and build a synagogue.<sup>66</sup> In 1808 the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews was established and grew to nearly 200 missionaries at 50 stations in several nations.<sup>67</sup>

### Extreme Millenarianism

There were extremist expressions of premillennialism in seventeenth century England. The extreme millenarians were related to the Fifth Monarchy Men after the execution of Charles I in 1649. They merged their views of the millennium with political and social reform, and they were determined to establish the millennium by violent force. John Archer was a pre-millenarian whom the Fifth Monarch Men respected. His book, *The Personall Reigne of Christ upon Earth* (1641) stressed a literal interpretation of Daniel's vision, a conversion of the Jews shortly, and a literal, global, thousand-year, future millennium. Archer had great respect for the Jewish people and expected their coming glory. He believed that Israel's national conversion would be a preview of the millennium and that after their conversion the Jews would have the greatest glory in it. He saw in the millennium the establishment of God's kingdom with kings falling before the Lord when Christ overthrows their thrones and establishes his own on the earth. The saved would be freemen while the reprobate would be their slaves for a thousand years until they rebel at the end. The elect would have every temporal blessing including one hundred years of life, every child would be elect, and infant mortality would be unknown along with the communion service since it was "to show forth his death until he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26).<sup>68</sup>

The Fifth Monarchy Men were more radical. They believed that the saints must clear the way for the millennium themselves, that many of the prophetic symbols such as the little horn, referred to contemporary English political figures. They described the millennium in far greater political, social, and economic detail. They saw in Psalm 149:6-9 the admonition to bind their kings with

<sup>64</sup> *Commentarius in Ep. Pauli ad Rom.*, C.R. LXXVII (O.C. XLIX.), p. 226, found in Toon, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Toon, 137-140.

<sup>66</sup> Ariel, 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Ariel, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Toon, 66-68.

chains and their nobles with fetters of iron with the high praises of God in their mouth and a two-edged sword in their hand to execute vengeance on the heathen. John Tillinghast, one of the Fifth Monarchist spokesmen, believed the conversion of the Jews and fall of Roman Papacy would occur in 1656 (based on the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11), and the Return of Christ in 1701, (based on the 1,335 days of Daniel 12:12). Charles I was the little horn who usurped the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, but later he was the king of the north (Daniel 11:15-19) and Oliver Cromwell was the little horn, but Cromwell later became the Beast of Revelation since “Rex Oliver Lord Protector” in Roman numerals added up to 666, and the list goes on.

The Fifth Monarchists saw themselves as God’s chosen people, and since the New Jerusalem would center around them, they took an interest in the Jews whose conversion and return to Israel they desired. Alas, it was no use to send missionaries to the Jews until that vile Whore, Rome was destroyed. Fifth Monarchist William Aspenwall thought the Jews would have the greatest role in setting up the millennium. While there was disagreement as to whether the saints in heaven could do without Christ for 1,000 years for him to reign on earth, it was agreed that the government should have the Old Testament law of Israel in the millennium which they were setting up in the Protectorate. There should be a redistribution of private property among the saints, and a sweeping away of a national church in favor of a church of voluntary groups of the elect.<sup>69</sup>

### Dispensational Premillennialism

Dispensationalism originated in Britain in the 1820s-1830s with John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>70</sup> Darby’s eschatological ideas which became dispensationalism were not all original, but the codification of many ideas swirling in nineteenth century Britain about the Second Coming. Prior to Darby, the prevailing premillennial view was historical. Historicists claimed the end of days had already begun and spent their time trying to figure the exact time of Jesus’ return. Darby’s premillennialism was futurist, i.e., eschatological events have not yet begun. Futurists see signs that the present age is ending and the eschaton will begin soon. The Jesuit Francisco Ribera was the first proponent of futurism. Attempting to defend the Pope from Reformation accusations, Ribera said in 1590 that the Antichrist will appear only after this age has ended.<sup>71</sup>

Darby’s premillennial innovation was the secret, momentary rapture.<sup>72</sup> He taught that Jesus would return in two phases. In the first, Christ would meet the believers in the air and secretly

<sup>69</sup> Toon, 68-76.

<sup>70</sup> Ariel, 12-14. Saved early in his law career in 1825, Darby became a curate in the Church of Ireland and ministered with great energy to the small, rural Wicklow parish, but resigned in 1827 in disappointment at the *corpus permixtum* of the established church. While he recuperated from falling off a horse, Darby closely read Acts which helped him develop ideas of regenerate church membership. He began to meet for prayer and Bible study with a group in Dublin. Similar groups emerged in other cities. In 1831, the group in Plymouth invited Darby to join them, and Darby named them the Plymouth Brethren, not a regular, established church but merely a spiritual fellowship of believers in Christ. Darby, though, had a hard time with criticism, and was harsh with opponents, leading to endless internal factions and quarrels among the Plymouth Brethren.

<sup>71</sup> Ariel, 12-14.

<sup>72</sup> The idea of a rapture was not exactly new with Darby. Both Cotton and Increase Mather as well as Philip Doddridge (1738) and John Gill (1748) described a post-tribulational rapture. Richard G. Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again: A History of the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 78-79; Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 75. Early

whisk them away to heaven. In his second descent, Christ would return with his saints, defeat Antichrist, and reign for a thousand years. In contrast to the historicists, dispensationalists did not predict a time for the second coming. For Darby and most American premillennialists since the late nineteenth century, the rapture would occur before the Great Tribulation and inaugurate the great end time program. That idea is not new either, though it may have been to Darby. Jewish messianic literature of the second temple period expressed the expectation of true believers being saved out of the Great Tribulation.<sup>73</sup>

Though Dave McPherson in 1975 famously accused Darby of stealing the secret rapture idea from the entranced utterances of the young Scottish woman Margaret MacDonald in 1830,<sup>74</sup> Darby had previously written his rapture doctrine in 1827, and he considered MacDonald's charismatic revelations, which were postmillennial in the first place, to be of demonic origin.<sup>75</sup>

The other major attribute of dispensationalism is the role it sets for the Jewish people, sharply delineating between Israel and the church. In dispensationalism, the Jews are the objects of the eschatological promises in the Old Testament. The Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3), the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19-20), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:4-17) are still in full force. The prophets saw fulfillment of all these covenants through the Messiah as King over a restored, glorified Israel resident on its God-given land (Jeremiah 31:21-34; 33:15-16). The church came into existence because the Jews rejected their Messiah and the kingdom was delayed. Now the church operates in the time of the Gentiles while the Jews are scattered, harassed, humiliated, yet not forgotten.

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church post-tribulational rapture advocates include Tertullian (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 41; *Against Marcion* 3.25, 5.15, 20), Hippolytus (*Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus - On the End of the World*, 37), Origen (*Against Celsus* 5.17), and Methodius (*Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 6.4). T.E. and J. Clontz, "The Comprehensive New Testament" (n.p.: Cornerstone Publications, 2008), 671. Baptist leader Morgan Edwards conceptualized a pre-tribulational rapture in an essay in Philadelphia in 1788, almost forty years before Darby came to the idea while recovering from an October 1827 horse riding injury. Frank Marotta, *Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist* (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1995). Some pretribulationists even go back as far as Ephraem of Nisibis (306-373): "For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins." Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 210n.

<sup>73</sup> David Flusser, "The Reflection of Jewish Messianic Beliefs in Early Christianity," *Messianism and Eschatology*, ed. Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1983), 132-133, found in Ariel, 15, n.16.

<sup>74</sup> Ariel, 14-15. On Margaret MacDonald's vision of rapture, see Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover Up: The True Story on the Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Plainfield, NJ: Omega Publications, 1975; Dave MacPherson, *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983), found in Ariel, 15, n.17. A portion of Margaret MacDonald's revelation as quoted by Dave MacPherson in *Incredible Cover Up*, 151-154: "I saw the people of God in an awfully dangerous situation, surrounded by nets and entanglements, about to be tried, and many about to be deceived and fall. Now will THE WICKED be revealed, with all power and signs and lying wonders, so that if it were possible the very elect will be deceived - This is the fiery trial which is to try us. - It will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus; but Oh it will be a fiery trial. Every soul will be shaken to the very centre. The enemy will try to shake in every thing we have believed - but the trial of real faith will be found to honour and praise and glory. Nothing but what is of God will stand. The stony-ground hearers will be made manifest - the love of many will wax cold." For a refutation of Dave MacPherson's charge: Thomas D. Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulational Rapture did not begin with Margaret McDonald", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (April-June 1990), 155-68.

<sup>75</sup> See Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 192-196; and John L. Bray, *The Origin of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Teaching* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, Inc., 1992), 24-25, 28.

Matured dispensational doctrine taught that the Jews would one day return to their land and establish a state and rebuild a temple before the rapture of the church. After the rapture, the Antichrist, a Jew, would become ruler of the Jewish state as a false Messiah prosecuting a reign of terror which would kill two-thirds of the Jewish people. A series of wars from four empires would invade Israel culminating at the Battle of Armageddon in northern Israel when Christ would return with his church to destroy the Antichrist and his evil forces. Then Christ would judge the nations, one of the criteria being the treatment of God's chosen people by those nations. Afterward, the millennium would begin with Christ himself as ruler of a global Pax Christa in Eretz Yisrael. Israel would return to the head of nations with Jerusalem as the global capital and the restored Israel administering the new government.

Israel is essential to much of dispensational eschatology. Therefore, dispensational premillennialists have taken a close interest in the developments surrounding national Israel and connected them with their end-time convictions. When dispensationalists saw the fulfillment of their schema of the partial return of the Jews in unbelief to their homeland in the twentieth century, they saw an exciting fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Some have worked to promote Jewish resettlement in the Land as well as spread the knowledge of Christ among the Jews so that the 144,000 Jewish evangelists of The Revelation could be ready when the rapture occurs.<sup>76</sup>

But not everyone sees dispensationalists and Jews so chummy. According to Yaakov Ariel, there is no basis for a millennium with a distinctly Jewish character. From Ariel's Jewish perspective, the dispensational millennium will dispense with postbiblical rabbinical Judaism and the cultural heritage of the oral Jewish law. Instead the Jews would become honorable citizens in the new Christian commonwealth. In this way dispensationalists recognize the Hebrews as God's chosen people, Israel's great future, and exhibit their thankfulness for being grafted into the olive tree. But there is retained, Ariel insists, reticent bitterness for their original refusal to accept Jesus.<sup>77</sup> And for those whose dispensationalism is progressive, there is trouble: John MacArthur's crowd doesn't appreciate your hermeneutic. Robert L. Thomas of Master's Seminary believes that the progressive dispensationalists are deserting grammatical-historical hermeneutics for a new, less accurate hermeneutic that panders to the literary theologians.<sup>78</sup>

Straight-laced dispensationalism's hermeneutic, according to Ariel, has shaped the importance it has assigned to the Jewish people and their return to their land. For them the Bible is divine and inerrant. In the Bible, God reveals his plans for the past and the future, and the promises are claimed literally, especially in regard to Israel and Jerusalem. Fundamentalist Oliver B. Greene assesses the literal interpretation of prophecy. "Every prophecy and promise of the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was literally fulfilled to the letter. The prophecies which speak of his first and second comings are often found in the same verse – even the same sentence. How can we accept as literal the prophecies of his first coming and then spiritualize the prophecies concerning his second coming? (Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9; 11:2, 13; 12:10; 13:7 Psalm 16:10; 22:16, 18; 34:20; 35:11; 41:9; 69:21; Isaiah 50:6; 53:8-9, 12; Hosea 6:2; Matthew 26:31, 60, 67; 27:7-10, 34-35; Luke 1:30-35; John 13:18; 19:31-36).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ariel, 22.

<sup>77</sup> Ariel, 15-17, 21-22.

<sup>78</sup> See Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New versus the Old*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2002), 351-372.

<sup>79</sup> Oliver B. Greene, *The Second Coming of Jesus* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1971), 313-316.



The word dispensationalism, Ariel says, stands for a deterministic philosophy of history of different economies for humanity in each of seven ages.<sup>80</sup> Messianic Jew Keith Intrater verifies the rabbinical seven-age theory. “The one day, one-thousand-year formula does not apply everywhere, but it does pertain to the coming of the end-time events,” Intrater writes. He agrees with the parallel of six days of creation and six thousand years of human history with the Sabbath being the Millennium. “We are not nearing the close of six thousand years since the time of Adam. If the model holds true, we are also nearing the start of the millennial Sabbath.” After a downward transition from Eden to Noah, Intrater says that the Millennium will be an upward transition to the New Heavens and the New Earth, the parallel to Eden.<sup>81</sup>

Ariel concludes that “Modern dispensationalism is thus unique among Protestant premillennialists in its relation to the Jews. Dispensationalists have consistently and explicitly assigned the utmost importance to the Jewish people in their understanding of the course of human history and in their eschatological hopes.”<sup>82</sup> Christian Zionist John Hagee explains why the Jews are the center of his eschatology. He notes that “the Jewish people gave to us the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prophets, Elijah, Daniel, Zechariah, etc. – not a Baptist in the bunch. Every word in your Bible was written by Jewish hands. The first family of Christianity, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, were Jewish. Jesus Christ, a Jewish rabbi from Nazareth, made this statement: “Salvation is of the Jews.” The point is this: If you take away the Jewish contribution to Christianity, there would be no Christianity.”<sup>83</sup>

Oliver B. Greene deals with the objection that if Israel had received Jesus as Messiah, then “how would the atonement have been made through the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God?” His first response seems underhanded and *ad hominem*: “Those who live by faith and walk by faith do not ask such questions because the secret things belong unto God (Deuteronomy 29:29), but instead gives Old Testament proofs that if Israel had repented and believed the Kingdom would have been established (Deuteronomy 32; 2 Chronicles 7:12-22; Isaiah 48:18; Psalm 81:8-16). Despite Israel’s disobedience, Greene says, God used it for good (Romans 11). Greene goes on to say that the Messiah’s offer of the Kingdom was withdrawn, postponed, and that ultimately Israel will accept it (Romans 11:25-27).<sup>84</sup>

Erdman admits that premillennialists have a great advantage in Revelation 20, for on a plain reading of the text, “unhampered by any theory,” Revelation 19 speaks of the Return of Christ, Revelation 20 the Millennium, and Revelation 21 the New Heaven and New Earth. But Erdman is happy to note that there is no secret rapture mentioned anywhere in the chapter. Further, Erdman says, while they correctly restore to the Jewish nation many of the blessings “which too commonly have been appropriated by the Christian church,... they go too far and surrender to them many glorious prophecies which properly apply to this present Gospel age.” Erdman adds that they try to crowd too much of the Old Testament into the Millennium, “when many of these predictions probably refer to a larger and more glorious era which lies beyond the millennial

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<sup>80</sup> Ariel, 18-20.

<sup>81</sup> Juster and Intrater, 192.

<sup>82</sup> Ariel, 17.

<sup>83</sup> Christians United for Israel: Available from:

[http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=learn\\_christian\\_zionism#zionist\\_forerunners](http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=learn_christian_zionism#zionist_forerunners); Internet; accessed May 15, 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Greene, 292-306.

age.” And in the New Testament, Erdman charges, the premillennialists reverse course, applying all the blessings to the church and the prophecies of woe [i.e, the Great Tribulation] upon Israel.” The premillennialist, Erdman concludes, thus has a dim view of the world as it worsens, taking away the motivation to missions and social ministry. The premillennialist forgets the wheat and focuses on the tares.<sup>85</sup>

### Historic Premillennialism

Historic pre-millennialism was held by Irenaeus and others in the second century as noted above as well as the seventeenth century Lutheran J.O. Bangel, J. Barton Payne at Wheaton College, and George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Seminary. For them the Kingdom is already here, but not yet fully manifested as it will be in the end.<sup>86</sup> Though some historic premillennialists of seventeenth and nineteenth century Britain also saw a central role for the Jews and their conversion, they have differed on details such as the restoration to the Land. William Miller, the nineteenth century’s most noted historicist, had no place for Israel in his eschaton. He had an Augustinian amillennial outlook.

While historical premillennialism was a position of individuals, it gained ground in the early nineteenth century but then imploded under its own weight. Historicist premillennialism suffered a severe blow in America in 1843 and again in 1844 when Baptist preacher William Miller’s prediction that Christ would return that year failed to happen. Thus, a vacuum for dispensational eschatology was open on American soil.<sup>87</sup>

George Eldon Ladd brought historic premillennialism back into prominence in the 1960s. Ladd writes, “Many evangelicals feel that the inspiration of the whole Bible leads to the conclusion that the whole Bible is of equal theological value. . . A bit of reflection shows, however, that this procedure is impossible. The two Testaments have very different themes.”<sup>88</sup> Here is a problem this writer has with Ladd’s eschatology. Though one may have a preference for the New Testament and progressive revelation, the doctrine of inerrancy and verbal, plenary inspiration means that there are no parts of the Bible which are more inspired or less inspired than others.

The Old Testament is primarily concerned with the people of Israel, writes Ladd, with “no clear prophecies of the Christian church,” though Gentiles are found in the Old Testament (to serve Israel: Amos 9:12; Micah 5:9-13; 7:16-17; Isaiah 45:14-16; 49:23; 60:12-14; and to be converted to Israel’s God: Zephaniah 3:9, 20; Isaiah 2:2-4; 42:6-7; 60:1-14; Zechariah 8:20-23; 14:16-19).<sup>89</sup> The New Testament gives a different picture according to Ladd. Jesus is largely rejected by Israel when he offers Himself as their Messiah, and the kingdom is transferred to others (Matthew 21:43). Now the church is an open fellowship of those believing Jesus is the Messiah. “Eschatology in the New Testament deals largely with the destiny of the church,” says Ladd. “Here we have two different stories: the story of the nation Israel and the story of the church. What are we to make of this apparent dilemma?”<sup>90</sup> Ladd then gives two radically different proposals. First, that God has two different programs, a theocratic and earthly one for Israel and

<sup>85</sup> Erdman, 64-65, 70-74.

<sup>86</sup> Juster and Intrater, 60.

<sup>87</sup> Ariel, 8, 14-15.

<sup>88</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 7.

<sup>89</sup> Ladd, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ladd, 8-9.

a spiritual and heavenly one for the church, i.e., dispensationalism. The second proposal, Ladd says, is to recognize progressive revelation and interpret the Old Testament by the New, sometimes called covenantal theology. From his own study of the Bible, Ladd came to the conviction that the Old Testament must be interpreted or reinterpreted by the person of Jesus Christ through the Old Testament's images of Royal Messiah (Isaiah 11), supernatural Son of Man (Daniel 7) and the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). Ladd's hermeneutic is that Jesus and his apostles "reinterpreted the Old Testament prophecies in light of Jesus' person and mission."<sup>91</sup> At Pentecost, Peter reinterpreted Psalm 16:8-11; 110:1-2; 132:11. Thus, according to Peter, Jesus was both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Then what does an historic premillennialist do with Israel? "Is the church the new and true Israel? Or does God still have a future for his people Israel?"<sup>92</sup> Ladd turns to Romans 9-11 and says Paul's first point is that the true spiritual Israel is not the same as Abraham's descendants (Romans 9:6-8), i.e., the true Israel are the elect (Romans 2:28-29 referring to Jeremiah 4:4; cf. Revelation 2:9; 3:9) regarding whom God has a sovereign right to do as He pleases (Romans 9:20-21). God has been very patient with the rebellion of the literal Israel (Romans 9:23) in order to show mercy to the true Israel (Romans 9:24; 11:11). Amazingly to Ladd, Paul then quotes Hosea in regard to literal Israel and applies the passage to the Church (Romans 9:25; Hosea 1:6). This rejection of Israel, Ladd points out, is not final. Instead, Hosea affirms the eschatological salvation of literal Israel (Romans 9:26; Hosea 2:19, 23). Here the New Testament reinterprets the Old Testament's literal Israel as the Gentile Church. "It follows inescapably," Ladd says, "that the salvation of the Gentile church is the fulfillment of prophecies made to Israel. Such facts as this are what compel some Bible students, including the present writer, to speak of the church as the New Israel, the true Israel, the spiritual Israel."<sup>93</sup> Though Ladd acknowledges that dispensationalists call a spiritualizing hermeneutic dangerous, he says, "The present writer feels that he must adopt a spiritualizing hermeneutic because he finds the New Testament applying to the spiritual church promises which in the Old Testament refer to literal Israel. He does not do this because of any preconceived covenant theology but because he is bound by the Word of God."<sup>94</sup> This writer wonders if Ladd's last line is a defense or a confession.

Ladd then addresses the question of literal Israel. Has God finally rejected his people (Romans 11:1)? He says Paul hints at their future salvation in Romans 11:15 and then caps it with what Ladd calls a magnificent statement in Romans 11:25-27 that a hardening has come upon part of Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and so Israel will be saved. Ladd takes this statement as redemptive history: natural branches on the olive tree; natural branches broken off in unbelief; wild branches grafted in; natural branches yet to be regrafted. Ladd then concludes that "the day will come when 'all Israel,' the vast majority of living Jews, will be saved" through faith in the Deliverer from Zion, Jesus Christ, not some dispensational Mosaic covenant in the millennial kingdom.<sup>95</sup>

On the question of a literal end-time temple, Ladd thinks it "inconceivable that God's redemptive plan will revert to the age of shadows (Heb 8:6-7; 10:1, 11-18; Jeremiah 31:31-34). And what of the state of Israel? Ladd says first that God has preserved his people, and they remain set apart

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<sup>91</sup> Ladd, 9-17.

<sup>92</sup> Ladd, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Ladd, 19-23.

<sup>94</sup> Ladd, 23-24.

<sup>95</sup> Ladd, 24-25.

for divine purpose (Romans 11:16). Second, they will yet be saved. Third, Israel will be saved through the new covenant in Christ. While Ladd affirms that God's preservation of Israel is a sign that he has not cast them away forever, he calls misguided the dispensational position that Israel is the "clock of prophecy."<sup>96</sup>

Messianic Jew Dan Juster is a post-tribulationist, or historic premillennialist, and he believes there are markers which must be achieved before Christ will return: "Before Yeshua returns there must be an adequate remnant from every nation for 'the Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in all nations as a witness, then the end will come,' (Matthew 24:14). This is the end of this age and the inauguration of the Age to Come."<sup>97</sup> Messianic Jew Keith Intrater says two things must happen: the Great Commission must be completed among the nations (Matthew 24:14) and a Messianic revival (Matthew 23:37-39) is the final prerequisite for the second coming.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed the history of interpretation of the Millennium with regard to Israel. When this research began, the goal was to establish a personal position on eschatology, but then the pivotal nature of Israel emerged in determining one's millennial view. Then the pivotal nature of one's hermeneutical perspective emerged in determining one's view on Israel, and the historical narrative became like holding three freshly caught fish at once – unwieldy. While each one of these millennial views has truths, each one as well has problems. One of those problems is that no system yet really treats Israel with the respect and love that nation deserves for no other reason than that Christ loves them. While it is clear from this research that historically the Amillennialists did not care for Israel, the postmillennialists ignored them, and for all the adulation the premillennialists accord Israel, it seems from a Jewish perspective that they feel used rather than really honored. Perhaps, as Charles Erdman said, someone in the future can come up with a better system than any of these, perhaps a system that truly honors Jews who believe in Jesus as their Messiah.

Perhaps we are operating from a position of arrogance as Gentiles. Dan Juster says that it is not the Jews who should be in question as to whether they may participate in the New Covenants. It is the Gentiles. The early church was all Jewish, and the question that needed adjudication was whether a Gentile could part of the new Israel (Acts 15). The inclusion of the Gentiles, Juster says, actually "extends priesthood and the meaning of the people of God to those called from the nations [who are] grafted into a Jewish Olive Tree (Romans 11:24). The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, then, comes from the Jewish people through a Jewish Messiah to Gentile believers. "The concept of priesthood is the foundational concept for understanding the call of Israel (Exodus 19:6)."<sup>99</sup>

Kenneth L. Barker says it is not wise to think that the end of the thing is in the Church. The Church vs. Israel is a false dichotomy, he says. "As I perceive the grand sweep of what God is doing, the old sharp distinction between Israel and the church begins to become somewhat

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<sup>96</sup> Ladd, 25-28.

<sup>97</sup> Juster, *Irrevocable Calling*, 44-45. On his historic premillennialism, see also Juster and Intrater, Introduction.

<sup>98</sup> Juster and Intrater, 122-123.

<sup>99</sup> Juster, *Irrevocable Calling*, 9, 17, 19.

blurred. In my understanding of Romans 11 and other passages, both entities are involved in the present and future forms of God's kingdom as well as in the eternal state."<sup>100</sup>

This paper has strengthened this writer's perspective that any viable eschatological system must take into account a literal reading of the Old Testament that gives that text the same respect we accord the New and gives a real respect to Israel, not to supplant, ignore, or use them for our own glory. "Paul argues for a future for ethnic Israel in Romans 11," J. Lanier Burns says, "under his stated theme in verse 2a: 'God has not cast off his people whom he foreknew.'" Burns says that theme is developed in three ways. First, Israel has always had an elect remnant as Paul shows in looking back at the Old Testament (Romans 11:1-10). Second, the explanation of the present phase of God's plan demonstrating that the unbelief of the majority of Israelites will not last forever (Romans 11:11-24), and third, the mystery and mercy of the divine plan will result in a future fullness of salvation for Gentiles and Jews (Romans 11:25-32). A closing doxology for Romans 9-11 praises God for his mysterious ways (Romans 11:33-36).<sup>101</sup>

Dan Juster writes, "The Jewish disciple of Yeshua is proof that the gift and call of God to the nation of Israel as a whole still continues. Apostle Paul points to the fact of his own faith as proof that the nation has not been rejected. Furthermore, that there is a remnant saved by grace (Romans 11:5) is proof that God has not rejected the nation as a whole."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Kenneth L. Barker, "The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 303-304.

<sup>101</sup> J. Lanier Burns, "The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 190

<sup>102</sup> Juster, *Irrevocable Calling*, 47.

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