

Sunday, November 13, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 45 Millenarianism: Forging a Narrative for Truth's Resurgence, Part 2

Introduction

- Last week we began discussing the Millenarian movement as a larger narrative around which we can organize our discussion of the resurgence of Pauline truth. I stated the following, “The Millenarian Movement of the 19th century provides the perfect storyline to chronicle the development of systematized dispensationalism. In fact, British Millenarianism of the early 1800s proved to be the seed bed for the resurgence of Pauline Truth. Consequently, we will use the history of the Millenarianism movement as a means of tracing major developments in dispensational theology.”
- Due to the overambitious nature of last week's notes, we will begin our discussion this week with a review of the major positions that have been held throughout church history concerning the Millennium. Secondly, we will fill in this outline by providing more details regarding the postmillennial viewpoint. Lastly, we will retrace our steps concerning the Revival of British Millenarianism between 1800 and 1830.

Review

- Historic Premillennialism (*Chiliasm meaning 1,000 in Latin*)—was the historic view of the church during the post Apostolic era until the time of Augustine. According to this view, Christ will return to earth before the millennium to personally establish his kingdom. This view is also characterized by the following:
 - *Historicist* rather than *Futurist* view of Revelation, i.e., Revelation is a prophetic overview of the entire church age.
 - Employs the day/age theory or year-for-a-day principle when studying Biblical prophecy.
 - Rapture occurs toward the end of the Tribulation. *Historic Premillennialism* could also be called *Posttribulational Premillennialism*. (Blomberg and Chung, 86-87)
 - George Ladd chief proponent in the modern era.
- Amillennialism—several factors converged to undermine *Chiliasm* within the early church. Once *Chiliasm* was supplanted by *Amillennialism*, the latter became the dominant view of the Church from the time of Augustine till after the Reformation. The following factors caused *Chiliasm* to fall out of favor:
 - Origen's allegorical interpretation
 - Conversion of Constantine and the adoption of Christianity as the favored Imperial religion.
 - Influence of Augustine who taught that the millennium was a spiritual kingdom characterized by Christ's reign—which began with His resurrection and will continue to expand in both the church and in heaven until Christ's return. Because they do not expect a literal millennium on the earth, they are called *Amillennialists* (literally, non-millennialists). (Blomberg and Chung, 3)
- Postmillennialism—argues that the second coming will follow the world's conversion to Christ and the rise of a Christian golden age. Because they place Christ's return after the millennium,

they are called *Postmillennialists*. See the next point for more details regarding the historical development of this view.

Overview of Postmillennialism

- “Postmillennialism takes this thousand-year period, or millennium, as the final period of time during this present era, in which believers, yielded to the power of the Holy Spirit, facilitate a Christianizing of the earth to an unprecedented extent, thereby creating the idyllic earthly condition described in Revelation 20 and in numerous Old Testament passages (particularly in the closing chapters of a number of the Prophets). In this scheme, Christ then comes back after the millennium.” (Blomberg and Chung, xii-xiii)
- “. . . postmillennialists emphasize the present aspect of God’s kingdom, which will reach fruition in the future. They believe that the millennium will come through Christians preaching and teaching. Such activity will result in a more godly, peaceful, and prosperous world. The new age will not be essentially different from the present, and it will come about as more people are converted to Christ. Evil will not be totally eliminated during the millennium, but it will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is increased. During the new age the church will assume greater importance, and many economic, social, and educational problems will be solved. This period is not necessarily limited to a thousand years because the number can be used symbolically. The millennium closes with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment.” (R.G. Clouse, entry in Elwell, 771)
- Contemporary reconstructionist postmillennialist Kenneth L. Gentry gives the following seven characteristics of evangelical postmillennialism:
 - “understands the messianic kingdom to have been founded upon the earth during the earthly ministry and through the redemptive labors of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . the church becomes the transformed Israel.”
 - “The fundamental nature of the kingdom is essentially redemptive and spiritual. . . Christ rules His kingdom spiritually in and through His people in the world, as well as by His universal providence.”
 - “Christ’s kingdom will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history. This will occur as more and more people are converted to Christ.”
 - “Postmillennialism, thus, expects the gradual, developmental expansion of the kingdom of Christ in time and on earth. . . Christ’s personal presence on earth is not needed for the expansion of His kingdom.”
 - “Postmillennialism confidently anticipates a time in earth history (continuous with the present) in which the very gospel already operative in the world will have won the victory throughout the earth in fulfillment of the Great Commission. . . During that time the overwhelming majority of men and nations will be Christianized, righteousness will abound, wars will cease, and prosperity and safety will flourish.”
 - “There are two types of postmillennialism today: pietistic and theonomic postmillennialism. . . Pietistic postmillennialism. . . denies that the postmillennial advance of the kingdom involves the total transformation of culture through the application of biblical law. Theonomic postmillennialism affirms this.”

- “Possibly we can look forward to a great golden age of spiritual prosperity continuing for centuries, or even for millenniums . . . After this. . . earth history will be drawn to a close by the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ (accompanied by a literal resurrection and a general judgment) to introduce His. . . consummative and eternal form of the kingdom.” (Thomas D. Ice entry in Couch, 307)
- “The historical rise and development of postmillennialism has been the object of some dispute, partly because of some similarities between it and amillennialism. Amillennialism and postmillennialism, for example, would have Gentry’s points 1, 2, and 4 in common. Thus, because of points of similarity, some have confused amillennialism and postmillennialism. Because of these similarities, it may be difficult at times to clearly distinguish postmillennialism and amillennialism in history. It is the differences that are significant, in spite of similarities. Both are clearly anti-premillennial.” (Thomas D. Ice entry in Couch, 307-308)
- “It is generally thought that Daniel Whitby (1638-1725) developed systematic postmillennialism as a clearly distinct form of millenarianism. This does not mean that elements of systematic postmillennialism did not exist prior to Whitby, for they clearly did. However, it seems best to understand the maturity of postmillennialism into a distinct system of post-Reformationalism and in a sense an optimistic form of amillennialism. Thus, postmillennialism’s development is dependent upon amillennialism.” (Thomas D. Ice entry in Couch, 308)
- “It would be left to the post-Reformation era for developments to spring forth into what can rightly be called postmillennialism. . . Postmillennialism came into flower in the 1600s as the idea of novelty rather than return is seen in the excited references to all the new manifestations of the age—the new lands, the new learning, the new books, the new missionaries. This was aided by the gains of Protestantism over Catholicism in Europe as the new continued to gain over the old. The postmillennialism of the seventeenth century consisted mainly of those who believed in the success of the preaching of the Gospel and correspondingly the conversion of the Jews.” (Thomas D. Ice entry in Couch, 309)
- “First expressed in the works of certain Puritan scholars, it received its most influential formulation in the writings of the Anglican commentator Daniel Whitby. It seemed to him that the kingdom of God was coming ever closer and that it would arrive through the same kind of effort that had always triumphed in the past. Among the many theologians and preachers who were convinced by the arguments of Whitby was Jonathan Edwards. Edwardsean postmillennialism also emphasized the place of America in the establishment of millennial conditions upon the earth.” (R.G. Clouse, entry in Elwell, 772)
- “After gaining dominance in Europe and America among both conservatives and liberals, postmillennialism began a decline into near extinction. Fallout from the French Revolution in Europe dealt a severe blow to postmillennial optimism. Later, in the States, postmillennial decline awaited the turn of the century and was dealt a near-fatal blow by WWI and WWII and identification with the social gospel and liberalism. Only since the 1970s has postmillennialism begun to reassert itself, primarily through the reconstructionist movement. While postmillennialism has made some gains in recent years, it is still a minor position in the overall field of eschatology.” (Thomas D. Ice entry in Couch, 309)

Revival of British Millenarianism 1800-1830

- “The French Revolution was directly responsible for the revival of prophetic concern. To live through the decade of the 1790s in itself constituted an experience in apocalypticism for many of the British. The violent uprooting of European political and social institutions forced many to the conclusion that the end of the world was near. And just at the time that an apocalyptic cosmology seemed the most realistic outlook, one of the biblical prophecies appeared to have been exactly fulfilled.” (Sandeen, 6)
- “As the unbelievable events of the 1790s unfolded, students of this apocalyptic literature became convinced (in a rare display of unanimity) that they were witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13. The Revolution brought the cheering sight of the destruction of papal power in France, the confiscation of church property, and eventually the establishment of a religion of reason; the final act occurred in 1798 when French troops under Berthier marched on Rome, established a republic, and sent the pope into banishment.” (Sandeen, 6)
- “Commentators were quick to point out that this ‘deadly wound’ received by the papacy had been explicitly described and dated in Revelation 13. Although prophetic scholars had previously been unable to agree on what dates to assign to the rise and fall of papal power, it now became clear, after the fact, that the papacy had come to power in 535 AD.” (Sandeen, 7)
 - Is not Papal power, at Rome, which was once so terrible, and so domineering, at an end? But let us pause a little, was not this end, in the other part of the Holy Prophecies, foretold to be, at the end of 1260 years?—and was not it foretold by Daniel, to be at the end of a time, times, and half a time? And now let us see;—hear—and understand, THIS IS THE YEAR 1798. And just 1260 years ago, in the very beginning of the year 538, Belisarius put an end to the Empire, and Dominion of the Goths, at Rome. (Edward King quoted in Sandeen, 8)
- “Thus we sense the special significance of the French Revolution to the student of prophecy. That cataclysm undermined the progressive and rationalist cosmology of the eighteenth century, but its most important contribution to the millenarian revival was the spur it provided to further prophetic study. The identification of the events of the 1790s with those prophesied in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 provided biblical commentators with a prophetic Rosetta stone. At last a key had been found with which to crack the code.” (Sandeen, 7)
- “The origin of the second aspect of the nineteenth-century millenarian revival, renewal of interest in the state of the Jews, can be traced most directly to the intriguing eccentricities of Lewis Way. . . His interest in the condition of the Jews of Europe was aroused when, in about 1811 while visiting Devonshire, he was told about a grove of trees which were not to be cut down until the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. The owner of the wood had left a will which contained the clause, “These oaks shall remain standing, and the hand of man shall not be raised against them till Israel returns and is restored to the Land of Promise.” (Sandeen, 9-10)
- Through the process of time the subject of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine—the return of the chosen people to the promised land—became a firmly established plank in the millenarian creed. The subject was discussed in detail in monthly periodicals such as *Jewish Expositor* and dozens of books. Millenarian interest in the subject stemmed explicitly from the interpretation of prophecy. “The prophetic text which described the cataclysmic events apparently fulfilled in the

French Revolution also predicted the second advent of Christ and the restoration of the Jews. The prophetic timetable had joined these expectations inextricably. The millenarian accepted both events as the will of God, prayed for the coming of both, and, if he could not work for the accomplishment of the Second Advent, did what he could to aid the cause of the Palestinian resettlement.” (Sandeen, 11)

- “The doctrine of the premillennial advent, the third aspect of the millenarian revival, seemed novel, probably mistaken, possibly heretical to most Anglicans of the day. In keeping with the standard . . . eschatology, Christians had not been taught to expect the second coming of Christ during their own lives. The second advent, they felt, would occur only after the millennium and, therefore, must be more than one thousand years away.” (Sandeen, 12)
- “Renewed interest in the second coming of Christ was, of course, tied closely to prophetic study and concern with the condition of the Jews. The apparently complete and precise fulfillment of biblical prophecies during the French Revolution had a direct impact upon the biblical interpretation generally. It became a hallmark of the millenarian party that literal rather than figurative or spiritualized fulfillments should be sought for every biblical prophecy. . . Millenarians became convinced that allegorical and spiritualized interpretations of prophecy were a manifestation of unbelief and a denigration of the authority of Scripture. . . Wellington’s triumph over Napoleon did not, at least for the millenarians, vindicate faith in the ultimate success of virtue and reason. The nineteenth-century converts to millenarianism looked upon the French Revolution as the frustration of hope built on faith in man’s abilities but the fulfillment of hopes built on God’s promises.” (Sandeen, 13)
- “Thus belief in the pre- rather than the postmillennial return of Christ involved much more than a question of the timing of the Second Advent. Converts to premillennialism abandoned confidence in man’s ability to bring about significant and lasting social progress and in the church’s ability to stem the tide of evil, convert mankind to Christianity, or even prevent its own corruption.” (Sandeen, 13)

The Albury Conferences

- Edward Irving was a significant leader in the early British Millenarian movement. Irving’s melodramatic sermons gained notoriety as crowds packed into Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden, London in 1822. Irving spent the summer of 1826 on leave of his parish duties to translate a millenarian treatise by a Chilean Jesuit Manuel Lacunza titled, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* into English. In January of 1827, just before the manuscript went to the printer, Irving added a short postscript to his very long introduction describing the first Albury prophetic conference. About twenty interested laymen and clergy were invited by the Honorable Henry Drummond to spend the first week of Advent, 1826, at his Albury Park estate in an extended discussion of prophetic truth. The same kind of meetings were repeated in 1827 and 1828. (Sandeen, 14-18)
- “Following the French revolution, numbers of books on prophecy were written. But it was not until 1826 that a conference on prophecy, called the first Albury Conference, was convened—at the residence of Henry Drummond. It lasted one week and ‘twenty men of every rank, and church, and orthodox communion in those realms’ attended.” (Huebner, 143)
- Irving wrote the following concerning this first meeting:

- “. . . all being agreed that the 1290 days of Daniel were accomplished, and the remaining 45 begun, at the conclusion of which the blessedness will be fully arrived.” (quoted in Huebner, 143)
- “As historicists, they believed that the 1290 days meant 1290 years. Dan. 12 speaks of 1290 days and 1335 days. The remark about the 45 days (equals 45 years) refers to the difference between 1290 and 1335. So what is said here means that the millennium would begin in 45 years from then.” (Huebner, 143)
- “It is important to see that Irving and his followers believed that they were living in the epoch of the fulfillment of various apocalyptic prophecies. It is also important to note that date-setting for the Lord’s return is part of historicism; i.e., historicism leads to date-setting.” (Huebner, 143)
- Concerning the results of the Second Albury Conference, Irving said:
 - “We have had another Albury Meeting and are more convinced than ever of the judgments which are to be brought upon Christendom. . . I trust the Lord will give you time and leisure to consider the great hope of the Church first given to Abraham: ‘That she shall be heir of the world.’” (quoted in Huebner, 143)
- “The Albury conferences, more than any other event, gave structure to the British millenarian revival, consolidating both the theology and the group of men who were to defend it. . . The conference was dominated by Anglican clergymen, with scarcely three or four participants not affiliated with either the English or Scottish national churches. . . The old dissenting groups and the Methodists provided very few converts to this cause, and participants in the movement—Irving for example—often expressed antagonism to dissenting principles. This is ironic considering that so many millenarians, including Irving, left the established churches to form sects, which proved more hospitable to their millenarian doctrines.” (Sandeen, 19-20)
- “In the conference sessions themselves, the program was about equally divided between the three chief concerns of the day—prophetic chronology, the second advent, and the restoration of the Jews. No appeal to authority or argument was allowed in these sessions except the authority of direct biblical quotation or an argument designed to reconcile scriptural references.” (Sandeen, 20-21)
- “In 1829 Drummond summarized the conclusion reached at the conferences into a table of six points on which all of the participants had been in substantial agreement.
 - This “dispensation” or age will not end insensibly but cataclysmically in judgment and destruction of the church in the same manner in which the Jewish dispensation ended.
 - The Jews will be restored to Palestine during the time of judgment.
 - The judgment to come will fall principally upon Christendom.
 - When the judgment is past, the millennium will begin.
 - The second advent of Christ will occur before the millennium.

- The 1260 years of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 ought to be measured from the reign of Justinian to the French Revolution. The vials of wrath (Revelation 16) are now being poured out and the Second Advent is imminent.” (Sandeen, 21-22)
- “These six points clearly and concisely convey the platform of the millenarian revival. Basic to the whole statement was the assumption that an irreversible deterioration in religion and culture had now reached crisis proportions and that the final act of this era of the world had already begun. Some of the members of the Albury conference spoke confidently about the Second Advent happening in 1843 or 1847, but, whether they set dates or not, all the participants expected Christ’s return within a few years.” (Sandeen, 22)
- “Millenarianism had come of age in 1828. . . The next phase of the movement was marked by publicity and proselyting. The *Christian Observer*’s reaction to the millenarian revival illustrates this maturation process. This voice of the evangelical party in the Church of England first noticed the millenarian revival in July 1825; the journal reviewed ten books on millenarian issues, including works by Lewis Way, John Bayford, and James Haldane Stewart. . . The *Observer*’s editors, unmoved by the best arguments of the millenarians, turned their attention to problems then besetting the Bible Society and the crisis over disestablishment. Having failed to capture this citadel of evangelicalism, the millenarians made their voices heard, nevertheless, in their own periodicals and in special prophetic societies.” (Sandeen, 22-23)
- The following is a sampling of early millenarian periodicals and prophetic societies.
 - *Morning Watch* (London, 1829-33)—contained much from the pen of Edward Irving
 - *Christian Herald* (Dublin, 1830-1835)
 - *Investigator* (London, 1831-1836)
 - The Society for the Investigation of Prophecy (London, 1826)—founded before the first of the Albury conferences.
 - Prophecy Investigation Society (1842)
 - Edinburgh Association for Promoting the Study and Illustration of Prophetic Scripture (1841)—Edward Irving was the first millenarian voice in Scotland. He preached on the second coming of Christ to a crowded congregation in Saint Cuthbert’s Church in 1828. (Sandeen, 23-26)

Early British Futurists

- The *Futurist* view maintains that Revelation’s prophecies are scheduled to occur in the future, just before Christ’s return. (Blomberg and Chung, 4) As we have already seen, *historic premillennialism* holds that we are currently living within the book of Revelation and that the prophecies contained within the book are currently being fulfilled. In contrast, *futurists* believe that Revelation 4-22 await a future fulfillment.
- “William Witherby published a book in 1818 and another in 1821. In the 1821 book (*Hints Humbly Submitted to Commentators* 54 pages), he referred to historicism as a “delusion” and

condemned calculations. He understood Rev. 4-19 to refer to future events previous to the second coming . . .” (Huebner, 125)

- Before Manuel Lacunza’s book was published in English (in 1827), in 1826 S.R. Maitland published his *An Enquiry into the Ground on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John has been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years*. He set forth elements of futurism in this book. In 1829 Maitland published a second edition of his book which stated the following in the preface:
 - “I was not aware that the literal interpretation of the 1260 days had been maintained in a work recently published. (b) I mention this, not only that I may offer my thanks to the author, for that and for other works on the subject, for which I am indebted to his kindness; but because, in some parts, the line of argument is so similar to that which I have myself followed, that the readers of that work might reasonably think me guilty of having barrowed from it without acknowledgement.
 - (b) “Hints Humbly Submitted to Commentators; and more especially to those who have written elaborate Dissertations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation of St. John: by William Witherby,” London, 1821. The same view had been previously maintained in “A Review of Scripture, in the testimony of the truth of the Second Advent, the first Resurrection, and the Millennium, & c by a Layman”—London, 1818—a work containing suggestions which I believe to be original, and which certainly well deserve the consideration of the writers on prophecy.” (Huebner, 126)
- “S.R. Maitland’s 1826 book and the 1818 and 1821 books by William Witherby were available in English before Lacunza’s book. However, these writers were not Jesuits.” (Huebner, 126)

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