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The Rise and Fall of A-Millennialism by James Payne

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Gibbon, the Roman historian tells us that for the first three centuries of the Christian era, the assurance of the Millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ was the general belief of orthodox Christians. Justyn Martyr, early in the 2nd century says, "I and as many as are orthodox Christians in all respects do acknowledge that there shall be a resurrection of the body and 1000 years reign in Jerusalem".

For the first two and a half centuries Pre-Millennialism was the universal doctrine of the Church as it had been of the Apostles. No other doctrine was so much as known, far less received. A-Millennialism was not heard of in the Church during this period.

In the third century, however, Origen promulgated his false teaching. He contended that practically all Scripture; historic as well as prophetic, was allegorical and should be understood in a figurative sense with an underlying esoteric meaning, seen only by the initiated. He not only regarded the Revelation as mythical but also the records of Creation in the first two chapters of Genesis. He taught that the fires of hell were purgatorial and that the whole human race would eventually be saved and brought to glory.

His teachings were then regarded by the Church as heretical and he was accordingly excommunicated and died a heretic. His doctrine had, however, laid the foundation for much of the Papal teaching which was subsequently to arise.

When the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, accepted Christianity in the year 307, the door was opened for a multitude of worldly men to enter the Church for the purpose of self-aggrandisement. The doctrine of Origen suited them well and all the glorious promises of Scripture both in the Old Testament and the New, relative to the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, were applied to the Church at that time. This developed the Laodicean spirit, when the Church, no longer humble as her Lord, said "I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing".

Then followed the dark ages in which all Truth was obscured and the Papacy with all its persecution, became predominant. When, after centuries of darkness, the Reformation began to dawn, the Millennial teaching of the early Church was almost forgotten. This is the reason why it does not figure either in the doctrine of the Church of England or in the Westminster Confession. The fictitious glory of the Church in this age was never abandoned and the general teaching was that the promulgation of the Gospel would bring in the glory of Christ's kingdom.

The true teaching of the Millennium had, however, been preserved in some communities (principally Baptist) throughout the dark ages and the Baptist Confession of Faith presented in 1660 to Charles II stated it clearly. This, however, resulted in further persecution



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of the Baptists. Benjamin Keach was put in the pillory for preaching the doctrine of Christ's Millennial reign with His saints on the earth.

In the early 19th century, however, the Lord raised up a number of outstanding expositors who abandoned entirely the mystical teaching of Origen and saw that in prophecy as well as history the Word of God means exactly what it says, so that Israel means Israel and not the Church; that Babylon means Babylon and not Rome; that 1000 years means 1000 years and the "house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" means just that. Thus the early teaching of Christ's Millennial kingdom was again brought to light just as the doctrine of justification by faith was brought to light by Luther in the dark days of the Papacy.

Men such as Dr. S.P. Tregelles, Dr. Horatius Bonar, Dr. W. de Burgh, Dr. Adolph Saphir, Cecil Yates Biss, Benjamin Wills Newton, Robert Browne, George Muller and others were enabled to give back to the Church the long lost Apostolic doctrine of the Millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. While there are a number of Sovereign Grace teachers who repudiate this doctrine and still cling to some of the heresies of Origen, the teaching of the Millennium has now become more widespread among Godly expositors than at any other time since the 3rd century.

De Burgh says in his *Messianic Prophecies of Isaiah*, "A change has of late taken place. A more sound and consistent, because more literal system of Biblical exposition is gradually superseding that which was purely arbitrary and figurative: one consequence of which is that the attention of many of the Lord's servants throughout the world has been directed to the future destiny of Israel, and its bearing on the predicted kingdom of the Messiah."

With the establishment of the Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony in 1919 and the writings of such men as E.J. Poole Conner, Thomas Houghton, Bishop D.A. Thompson and George H. Fromow, this teaching has been received by the people of God in many parts of the world. With the increasing apostasy of the World Council of Churches, the complete Gospel of the Kingdom is being preached as a witness in many lands against the false notion of Post-Millennialism which contradicts so much of the Word of God. May the Lord keep alive in the hearts of His people "that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity".