GENESIS TO THE EXODUS

A COMMENTARY AND SURVEY SERIES

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST
&
THE GLORY THAT SHOULD FOLLOW

Premillennial

Dispensational

King James Version

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SAMPLE PAGES

By

Dr. J. A. Moorman

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THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST AND THE GLORY THAT SHOULD FOLLOW

A proper survey and commentary of the Holy Scriptures must begin by identifying the constant theme of the Scriptures in their entirety. Of that theme there can be no doubt; it is twofold and is stated in 1 Peter 1:11.

> *Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand* ***the sufferings of Christ,*** *and* ***the glory that should follow****.*

The Old Testament prophets foresaw the First and the Second Comings of Christ, and the many events surrounding these Two Comings. These Two Comings are the great theme of the Bible: the **Suffering** Saviour and the **Glory** attending the Returning Saviour. The fact that the prophecies of His First Coming and all of the attendant events were fulfilled literally demonstrates conclusively that the same will be true of Christ's Second Coming and with its surrounding events. A great denial, however, has been built up across the centuries against the literality of **the glory that should follow**. As this affects the way the entire Bible is interpreted, it is an issue which must be addressed at the beginning of our survey.

The *sufferings* of Christ and the *glory* that should follow are the two pillars upon which a correct understanding of the Bible rests. If one pillar is interpreted literally (the *sufferings*) and the other symbolically (the *glory*) the greatest confusion, and in fact outright denial of Biblical truth will be the result. Note several erroneous conclusions held today:

- Christ *will not* literally and visibly reign upon the earth He created and for which He died.
- The clearly stated Biblical covenants with Abraham and David *will not* be fulfilled literally, and will instead be replaced by extra-biblical philosophic covenants superimposed upon the Bible (*covenant theology*).
- Israel, despite all the Scriptures to the contrary *will have no claim* to her ancient land (Gen. 17:8); it belongs to the Palestinians.
- God is finished with Israel *nationally* (again, with the Bible overwhelmingly stating otherwise) and the Church has replaced and become the "new Israel" (*replacement theology*).

A survey of the Bible must stress at the outset that ***the glory that should follow*** (the goal of all Biblical revelation) is to be interpreted exactly as ***the sufferings*** – literally!

Writers in the early centuries of the church show that the literal interpretation of Bible prophecy with its resultant premillennialism was the dominant view. Dr. Thomas Ice demonstrates this crucial fact of early church history.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EARLY PREMILLENNIALISM

"Premillennialism is so clearly taught in Revelation 19 and 20 that it is hard to understand how anyone can think otherwise without realizing honestly that they are going against the Biblical text. A kingdom reign of the Messiah was just as clearly taught in the Old Testament. Jesus and His Scripture-writing disciples also support the belief of an earthly kingdom headed by the Messiah. Such clearness in the Bible provides the likely reason why the early church fathers who spoke on this matter were all premillennialists.

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The first premillennialists were those who received God's revelation and wrote it down in the Bible. Eusebius tells us that one of the earliest church fathers that had heard the Apostle John and others who had known the Lord and His Apostles was **Papias** (AD 60-130), the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, Asia Minor. Papias taught "that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth." **Irenaeus** (AD 130-202) tells us that Papias "related that they had heard from him [the Apostle John] how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times" (the Millennium) in *Book Four* of Papias' writings, which are no longer extant, except a few fragments. Papias is recorded as saying: "there will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth."

Polycarp (A.D. 70-155), bishop of Smyrna, is also said to have been a premillennialist. ***The Epistle of Barnabas*** (written between AD 120-150) presents the common belief that "in six thousand years, all things will be finished ....then shall He truly rest on the seventh day." The writer speaks of the Second Coming of Christ with the clear implication that He will set up the thousand year kingdom on earth, followed by the eighth day or the eternal state.

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165) in his *Dialogue With Trypho* c. AD 140, a Jewish man, made the following premillennial statement: "But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on 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." Justin considered premillennialism an aspect of orthodoxy in his day, "And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place."

Two of the greatest ante-Nicene fathers were Irenaeus and Tertullian (AD 160-230). **Irenaeus** grew up in Asia Minor and was discipled by Polycarp, who knew the Apostle John. Irenaeus had a very extensive view of Bible prophecy in his last five chapters of *Against Heresies*, which were suppressed throughout the Middle Ages by anti-premillennialists and rediscovered in 1571. The restoration of a more literal interpretation and reading of the early church fathers by many post-Reformationists led to a revival of premillennialism in the early 1600s. Irenaeus' writings played a key role because of their clear premillennial statements. "John, therefore, did distinctly foresee the first 'resurrection of the just,' and the inheritance in the kingdom of the earth," he says, "and what the prophets have prophesied concerning it harmonize [with his vision]." Again, Irenaeus declares, "But 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."

Tertullian, who gave us the Latin word "Trinity" was also a strong premillennialist. He makes his premillennialism clear when he says the following: "But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth…it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem…This both Ezekiel had knowledge of and the Apostle John beheld."

Another outstanding premillennialist of the early church was **Lactantius** (AD 250-330) of North Africa. He wrote an important defense of Christianity that was the first systematic expression of Christianity called *The Divine Institutes*, which included a section on prophecy. Lactantius said: "But when the thousand years shall be completed, the world shall be renewed by God, and the heavens shall be folded together, and the earth shall be changed…"

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Virtually everyone who wrote on this topic for the first two to three hundred years of the church's history was a Millennialist. The list would include individuals like: **Clement of Rome**, who wrote a letter to an early church around AD 95; **Ignatius of Antioch**, who is said to have been a disciple of the Apostles John and Peter. Early church tradition tells us that he was thrown to lions in AD 107; **Theophilus of Antioch** (115-181), who wrote one of the first accounts of primitive church history; **Tatian of Assyria** (d. 167); **Melito**, Bishop of Sardis, (d.170); **Clemens Alexandrinus**, a contemporary of Justin Martyr; **Hippolytus**, a disciple of Irenaeus, martyred in 230 for his faith. **Victorinus**, Bishop of Pettau (d. 303); **Methodius**, Bishop of Tyre (d. 311); an Egyptian bishop, **Nepos** of the third century; **Cyprian**, Bishop of Carthage, martyred in 258; **Commodians**, a Christian historian, who wrote about 250. Others could be added to the list.

It is generally recognized within the scholarly world of early church historians that premillennialism was the most widely held view of the earliest church tradition. One of the leading experts on the doctrine of the early church, J.N.D. Kelly, wrote, "millenarianism, or the theory that the returned Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years came to find increasing support among Christian teachers...This millenarian, or 'chiliastic' doctrine was widely popular at this time." "The great theologians who followed the Apologists Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus, were primarily concerned to defend the traditional eschatological scheme against Gnosticism," explains Kelly. "They are all exponents of millenarianism."

Philip Schaff, the dean of American church historians and himself a postmillennialist, provided the following summary of the early church's view of the millennium: "The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius."

European scholar and church historian, Adolph Harnack echoes Schaff and tells us, "First in point of time came the faith in the nearness of Christ's second advent and the establishing of His reign of glory on the earth. Indeed it appears so early that it might be questioned whether it ought not to be regarded as an essential part of the Christian religion."

The Bible is the sole basis from which a believer in Christ should learn what is true. What others have believed down through church history is really not the issue. However, when we believe the Bible teaches a particular doctrine, it is not surprising that others who have read the Bible see the same thing. This is exactly what we find in the early church in regards to premillennialism before allegorical interpretation began to dominate. Maranatha." http://www.ldolphin.org/premillhist.html

THE DEMISE OF LITERAL PREMILLENNIALISM

The first known opponent of premillennialism was **Marcion** (died c. 160). Harvard scholar H. Brown notes: "The first great heretic broke drastically with the faith of the early church in abandoning the doctrine of the imminent, personal return of Christ...Marcion did not believe in a real incarnation, and consequently there was no logical place in his system for a real Second Coming."

In the 3rd century, the influential scholar of Alexandria, **Origen** (d. 254), became the first to openly challenge the doctrine. By devising an elaborate allegorical interpretation of Scripture, he became a proponent of amillennialism (i.e. no millennium). He completely spiritualized Christ's Second Coming saying in his *Commentary on Matthew* that "Christ's

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return signifies His disclosure of Himself and His deity to all humanity." Origen's teaching that there was no literal 1000 year reign of Christ upon earth was so extreme that few then actually followed it. But his influence was to gain wide acceptance especially in the period following Constantine.

Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 265) stood against premillennialism when the work, *The Refutation of the Allegorizers* written by Nepos, a bishop in Egypt became popular in Alexandria. Dionysius argued against Nepos's influence and convinced the churches of the region of amillennialism. The church historian, **Eusebius** (d. 339), reported this in his *Ecclesiastical History.* Eusebius himself had low regard for the millennialist, Papias, and said that Papias was "a man of small mental capacity" because he had taken the Apocalypse literally.

The most influential name, however, is that of **Augustine** (354-430) bishop of Hippo in north Africa. Oxford theologian Alister McGrath has noted that "all medieval theology is 'Augustinian' to a greater or lesser extent. Augustine's influence shaped not only the Middle Ages (i.e. Catholic theology from the 5th to 15th centuries), but also influenced the Protestant reformers, who constantly referred to his teaching in their own debates." As described in his famous work *The City of God*, Augustine converted from premillennialism to amillennialism and took with him much of the Roman World and rapidly developing Roman Catholic Church.

While there may be a *pick and choose* aspect, it is the strangest anomaly that both Roman Catholic and Protestant reformers look to him for so much of their teaching and particularly his teaching on the Second Coming.

> In the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion he is a saint, a pre-eminent Doctor of the Church, and the patron of the Augustinians… Many Protestants, especially Calvinists, consider him to be one of the theological fathers of the Protestant Reformation due to his teachings on salvation and divine grace. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine of Hippo)

> Augustine's later amillennial view laid the eschatological foundation for the Middle Ages, which practically abandoned premillennialism… The Lutherans formally rejected millennialism in **The Augsburg Confession**. Art. XVII. condemns the Anabaptists and others "who now scatter Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed." Likewise, the Swiss Reformer **Heinrich Bullinger** wrote up the **Second Helvetic Confession**, which reads "We also reject the Jewish dream of a millennium, or golden age on earth, before the last judgment." **John Calvin** wrote in his *Institutes* that millennialism is a "fiction" that is "too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation." **The Anglican Church** originally formalized a statement against millenarianism in the Anglican Articles. This is observed in the 41st of the **Anglican Articles**, drawn up by **Thomas Cranmer** (1553), describing the millennium as a "fable of Jewish dotage," but it was omitted at a later time in the revision under Elizabeth (1563).

> Contrarily, certain **Anabaptists**, **Huguenots**, and **Bohemian Brethren** were premillennial. **Michael Servetus** taught a millennial view, though he was denounced by the Reformers as a heretic and executed in Geneva under Calvin's authority. A few in the mainstream accepted it, such as **Joseph Mede** (1586–1638) and possibly **Hugh Latimer** (d. 1555), but it was never a conventional belief throughout the period. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premillennialism)

Through the *singular* influence of Augustine and following Origen, both Catholic and Protestant have largely rejected the literal premillennial view of Bible prophecy in favour of allegorical amillennialism.

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