

From the Watchman

The Pre-Millennial Kingdom.

BY PROF. H. LINCOLN, D.D.

In accordance with your request, I send an article on the Pre-Millennial Reign, embodying the thoughts recently presented at the Ministerial Conference. I have aimed to discuss this important question in a courteous and Christian spirit, but with the freedom claimed by Baptists in their search for truth. Such freedom is not always conceded by those bearing the Baptist name. A recent article of mine on this subject, in the Examiner and Chronicle, has been assailed in such a spirit by the Baptist Weekly that self-respect forbids all thought of reply. The attack has been followed up in a second number of the paper, by Dr. Hiscox, over his own signature, arraigning me for unfairness in the statement that Pre-Millennialism "paralyzes Christian effort, and induces indifference to the conversion of the world." After reading this interpretation of my article, I could not wonder at any theory Dr. Hiscox might find in the Bible. I said nothing of the kind, I intimated nothing. Such a thought was not in my mind. There is not a word from which this meaning can be wrung out by the thumb-screw of the Inquisition. Both thought and words are put into my article, and then I am accused of a want of fairness. I am grateful that Pre-Millennial brethren in Massachusetts have a different spirit, and welcome discussion. In reading my article again I find nothing to change in letter or spirit. I discussed a grave question in the light of history and of doctrines inexpressibly dear to Christian hearts. I discussed principles, without a remote allusion to living man or organized party. If the spirit was discourteous, I am ignorant of the nature and scope of courtesy. It is a compensation of Providence that I have received many letters with thanks for this same article, from Christian men and women whose good opinion is dear to me.

I hold, with Pre-Millennialists, to the personal advent and reign of our Lord. They maintain that His kingdom will be set up on earth at His second advent. As I read the New Testament His kingdom is already set up, and His second advent will close its earthly stage, and introduce its heavenly and eternal state. The Pre-Millennial theory rests on what is called the literal interpretation of prophecy. It claims that the line of prophecy in regard to the birth, life and death of the Messiah, had a literal fulfillment; and the line of prophecy relating to His kingly reign must have a fulfillment equally literal. The prediction that the Messiah will reign in Jerusalem, and on the throne of David, has not been realized. It awaits His second advent.

The claim is a plausible one; clear and satisfactory reasons alone can warrant its rejection. I find such cogent reasons to control my own views.

1. A literal theory is often objectionable. Pre-Millennialists admit that prophetic language is symbolic, and that figures abound in the New Testament. If "this is my body" be literal, Christianity teaches the doctrine of transubstantiation. If the "six days" of Genesis are literal, the Bible is in open conflict with geology. If "Elias must first come" be literal, John the Baptist was not the predicted forerunner of Jesus. If Rev. v. 13 be literal, it cannot refer, as Pre-Millennialists interpret it, to the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire under Constantine. "Every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb forever." Such universal worship is peculiar to the Millennial reign.

2. The literal theory cannot be true. (a) It subverts Christianity and reinstates Judaism.

Pre-Millennialists hold that Ezekiel teaches the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, under the Messianic reign. No other interpretation is possible, they say. But Ezekiel teaches with greater clearness and fulness the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the sacrifices during this reign. Twelve chapters are devoted to the temple, with its burnt-offerings and thank-offerings.

Jeremiah, also (xxxiii. 17, 18), makes the kingly and priestly offices co-extensive under the reign of the Messiah. "For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel. Neither shall the priests, the Levites, want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to do sacrifice continually." In the visions of John at Patmos, the redeemed appear as priests, no less than as kings, Rev. i. 2, 5, 10.

Here, then, is the dilemma. If the literal theory be true, and Jesus is to reign in Jerusalem over the nation gathered from exile, then the temple will be rebuilt, the Levites will resume their priestly office, and daily sacrifices will be repeated. But John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem. The epistle to the Hebrews teaches that sacrifices are forever abolished, and who ever falls back to them forfeits salvation. If the book of Hebrews is inspired, the temple can never be rebuilt. If the temple is not to be rebuilt, the literal theory cannot be true, and the throne in Jerusalem is not a visible throne. If the priesthood is spiritual, so is the kingdom, for the same interpretation is demanded for both.

(b) The apostles interpret these prophecies spiritually, not literally. Peter, at the Pentecost, quotes four prophecies of the Messianic reign: one from

Joel, announcing extraordinary signs in the heavens and the earth; another from 2 Samuel vii. 7, 12, 13, declaring the permanence of His reign in David's line; another from Psalm xvi, foretelling His resurrection; and a fourth, from Psalm cx, asserting His final triumph over all enemies. Peter interprets these predictions. His aim is to win the Jews to faith in the Messiah. Why does he not say, "These prophecies, as you know, foretell Messiah's reign. He is to set up His throne in Jerusalem, and to have dominion over the whole earth. Your views are correct, only you have anticipated the time. He has gone on high for a little while, but will soon return, perhaps in our life-time, and His kingdom will be more glorious than the golden age of David and Solomon?" Such teaching might have saved the Jews from apostasy. Such teaching was demanded on the pre-millennial theory. But Peter says, these grand prophecies of Messiah's reign are not future, they are now fulfilled. Jesus has gone to His throne, He is now sitting on it, and scatters these royal gifts, whose power you witness. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," i. e., both King and Saviour. I understand Peter to say, "You have misinterpreted prophecy. Jesus is not to be a visible King. His throne is in heaven, but His kingdom shall embrace the whole earth. The prophecies are fulfilled in our time, even that of Joel, with its signs in the heavens above and in the earth beneath."

In the prayer of the apostles, Acts iv. following the healing of the lame man and the threats of the Sanhedrim, Jesus is recognized on the throne. They quote from the second Psalm, where the Messiah is exalted to reign, and pray that its promise of overthrow to His enemies may be fulfilled.

In Acts v. 31, they declare that Jesus, by His ascension, has been lifted to the throne of David, to rule over Israel: "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel." In Acts xiii. 31, 33, Paul says, "The promise made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again." The promise refers to the second Psalm, foretelling His royal reign. James, in the conference at Jerusalem, says that the restoration of Israel and the ingathering of Jew and Gentile belong to his own age: "After this I will return, and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up," Acts xv. 16. Paul, in Phil. ii. 8-10, declares that Jesus now reigns, as a reward for His humiliation: "Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth."

These numerous passages compel me to believe that Jesus is now upon David's throne, that His reign has begun. His ascension lifted Him to the kingship foretold. His reign will continue, till all enemies are subdued, when, the Mediatorial work ended, He will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. 1 Cor. xv. 24. I find this view confirmed by the preaching of the apostles. They seem to use as synonyms the terms "preaching Christ," and "preaching the kingdom." "The Samaritans believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of the Lord Jesus." Paul expounded to the Jews, "preaching the kingdom of God, and the name of the Lord Jesus." "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ."

If this be the apostolic teaching, that Jesus, at His ascension, took the Messianic kingdom, and fulfilled the prophecies of heirship to David's throne, the literal theory cannot be true. His kingdom will cover the earth, but its seat will not be a visible throne in Jerusalem, but an invisible throne in the heavens.

3. The literal theory seems an impossible one, from the consequences involved. These consequences are incongruous with its own idea of a holy kingdom, and with cardinal doctrines of the New Testament.

(a) It seems to take the glory from the cross. The central doctrine of the New Testament for me is, reconciliation by the cross. A suffering Christ excites the wonder of angels, the adoring love of saints, and melts to love the hearts of sinners. Jesus, lifted to the cross, draws all men to Him. The cross is the ultimate revelation of divine love, the mightiest moral force in the divine government.

I understand the Pre-Millennial theory to teach that this marvellous force fails, and fails by divine appointment. A crucified Saviour and a renewing spirit are not intended to win back a lost race. Bethlehem and Calvary are powerless against the forces of evil, and the world grows worse and worse till the second Advent. I might bow in silence before this mystery, and see in it only the malignant power of sin baffling divine grace.

But the Pre-Millennial theory makes it a

* I do not mean that Pre-Millennialism detracts from the worth of the cross, as a vicarious sacrifice for the guilty, or as the only ground of salvation for the lost. I mean, only, that it disparages the cross as a moral force to move men. In this age, it makes the object of the cross gained when the elect are separated from the mass of men, and led to a new life. In the next age (the Millennium), the cross becomes subordinate to the throne. It may still operate as a moral force, but no longer retains its place as "the power of God unto salvation." Kingly power, not suffering love, constrains to repentance.

part of the divine plan that judgment succeed where grace failed; that sight be mightier than faith. A world that could not be won by a crucified Saviour is won by a reigning King. Hearts that love could not subdue yield to appalling judgments. The visible reign of the Messiah makes the world holy, which His incarnation and death were impotent to change. The glory goes out of my faith when visible forces supplant the invisible; when the terrors of a Judge constrain rather than the love of a Redeemer. My highest aspiration for heaven is to bow in adoration before the Lamb that was slain.

(b) The earthly kingdom is made up of incongruous elements.

Its inhabitants are composed of saints with glorified bodies; Jews, with mortal bodies, but renewed hearts; and Gentiles, undergoing severe judgments, from whom are to come, at the end, the countless hosts of Gog and Magog.

Such a mixture of subjects seem fatal to the idea of a perfect kingdom. How can the dying and the undying, blend in unity, the spiritual and the sensuous, the perfect and the imperfect? How can death and bereavement occur daily, without giving rise to sorrow?

The inequalities of the kingdom can hardly fail to disturb its peace. The preference of the Jew will excite jealousy in the Gentile. A home in Jerusalem will have untold advantages over a home in America or Australia.

Is a visible kingdom, with a throne in Jerusalem, accessible to the few, a real improvement on an invisible kingdom, with its throne in heaven, equally accessible to all?

(c) The kingdom fails of its ideal. It is not a kingdom of perfect happiness, for disease, and death and sorrow reign, and happiness is impossible, till death, the last enemy, is destroyed.

It is not a kingdom of peace, for judgments are in progress on refractory Jews and Gentile nations. So Pre-Millennialists generally teach. Mede makes the judgment co-terminous with the Millennium. Seiss agrees with him; and, if I understand him, Dr. Cooper, in the late Conference, holds to a similar view.

It is not a kingdom of rest. The environment must be suited to the inhabitants. If they are born to die, the earth must be tilled for food, and homes must be built for shelter, and meats and milk will spoil, and clothing and furniture wear out, and houses decay and need repairs. The curse is not removed; the groaning and travail continue.

It is not a kingdom, if I understand it, for multiplying Christians. The elect have all been gathered. The cross has won all it was designed to win. The number of the redeemed is complete, and the door is shut. How any can be added, without a change in the divine plan, or on other terms than in the present age, is not clear.

If the work of salvation go forward, as I believe most Pre-Millennialists hold, its methods are obscure. The present age, with its means of grace, the cross and the Spirit, has ended. The throne and visible judgments supplant the method of salvation by faith. Can those saved by the discipline of judgments join in the Song to the Lamb that was slain?

Indeed, no way seems open for such to enter the eternal kingdom. They die, and are laid in the grave. How can they rise again? The first resurrection, for saints, is over. The second resurrection is only for the wicked dead. No provision is announced for the future life of the saints of the Millennium.

(d) The theory leaves no room for a heavenly kingdom.

It requires a personal reign on earth to fulfil the prophecy that the Messiah shall sit on David's throne. That throne, it says, was erected in Jerusalem; and, therefore, Jesus must reign in the holy city. But the theory requires, also, the continuation of the throne in Jerusalem. The prophecy is explicit, "There shall not fail a man to sit on the throne of David; the kingdom shall be an everlasting one."

If, as the majority of the Pre-Millennialists hold, the throne, after the final judgment, be transferred from earth to heaven, then, the promise fails. David's throne ceases, the kingdom is no longer everlasting, nor one that cannot be moved, and the literal interpretation, on which the theory rests, gives way. There seems no room in the theory for a home of the redeemed in any other world than this.

I cannot believe that such a kingdom fills out the grand conception of the Bible, evoking the wonder of angels, inspiring the visions of prophets, and kindling the aspirations of saints. I find in the New Testament another line of teaching, in open antagonism with this whole theory.

Judaism is ended, and will know no resurrection. The Jew and Gentile are one in Christ, and barriers of race will never be set up again. The probation of the Jews, as a nation, has closed. The object of their call and isolation, to preserve the truth and prepare for the Messiah, has been accomplished, and their national life will have no renewal. The temple has perished, never to be rebuilt; sacrifices ended forever with the victim of Calvary.

No new Kingdom of Christ will ever be set up. At His ascension, He took His seat on the throne, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. That kingdom comes not with observation; it is set up within men. It is introduced, with no outward pomp, but works inwardly, invisible, like the leaven. It is not revealed suddenly, but grows by slow accretions from the germ, like the mustard-tree. It is not complete at its origin, but unfolds in successive stages,

first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

This kingdom has no local capital, like Jerusalem, to which subjects from distant provinces must make wearisome journeys, to look on their King, and then go in sadness from His presence. In the New Jerusalem, the blessed, on high, every one alike can look on the King in His glory, and go no more out forever.

The Advent for which I long is not one which prolongs the incongruities of earth, the contact of the spiritual and material, the mortal and the immortal, the saint and the sinner. The grand Advent to which the New Testament looks forward, for which the whole creation waits, is the coming of the Redeemer, as Judge, to close the present age of disorder, and introduce an eternal harmony; to put an end to sin, destroy death, the great enemy of man, and restrain forever the power of the devil to harm. It is an Advent which separates the redeemed from all things that offend, confines them in eternal holiness, and gathers them evermore in the presence of the Lamb.

For such an Advent I pray, with an unutterable longing, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Saved by Grace.

Tried and tempted ones, beloved of the Father, souls for whom the Saviour died and for whose justification He rose again, remember amid your trials, the promise coming like a mighty undertone from the throne of God, "My grace is sufficient for you." For "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." And "The gift of God is eternal life!" Wonderful grace! every thing for nothing—heaven with all its glory and joys, the Father's only-begotten and well-beloved Son, His life of suffering and ignominious death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, His ascension on high and intercession for us at the Father's right hand. For the unspeakable gift of His love, let us thank God and take courage. Oh may we seek, day by day, to magnify His grace in our walk and conversation.

Remember, too, that from all our temptations God will make a way of escape, and has promised that we shall not be tempted above that we are able to bear. Then say, in the language of Paul, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." Knowing that the grace of God is sufficient for us in the midst of life and prosperity,—sufficient for us in death, and to satisfy the soul through eternity.

O, then, take fresh courage, and by grace surmount every difficulty, for the promise is, the mountain shall become a plain, the rough way smooth, the crooked path straight; this will I do, saith God, and not forsake you.

Grace, 'tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear,
Heaven with the echo shall resound
And all the earth shall hear.

Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days,
It lays in heaven the topmost stone
And well deserves the praise.

O God! hasten the hour when this grace shall be sounded from shore to shore, till all nations shall sing Thy power to save. Then shall that promise be fulfilled, that the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; when men will learn to submit to the ways of God, and be guided by grace divine.

In conclusion, let us remember that he whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, even as the father the son in whom he delighteth. G. R. W.

St. Martins, N. B., Nov. 18, 1878.

He Went Out, and It Was Night.
BY REV. J. HUNT COOKE.

It is an awful and impressive fact, that of all human beings, the one of whose eternal death we have the clearest evidence, was the one who made the highest Christian profession. Never was there a higher fellowship than the "company of the glorious Apostles." Amongst them Judas appeared to have been the most trusted, yet he was called "the son of perdition," and of him it is written "he is gone to his own place."

All events have a seen and an unseen side. During the institution of the Lord's Supper Judas received an offence; that was seen. Satan, who was seeking to sift the disciples, took possession of Judas; that was the unseen. Judas went out and it was night. Night in the region of the seen; he went out into the darkness. Night in the region of the unseen; he went out from Jesus Christ, the sun of souls; the day-spring of the spiritual, invisible, and eternal world.

He went out from the fellowship of believers; he left the church. And so did one whom we knew and loved in these modern times. We all deeply regretted that the offence had arisen; it was but a little matter after all that made him leave us; that is to say, on the side that

was seen. There must have been an unseen side with which, perchance, Satan had to do. Why our Bishop, Jesus Christ, who rules over both the seen and the unseen, permitted it, we cannot tell, but he went out from us. We dare not say he went out from Christ. God forbid that we should judge any in this; but he went out from our fellowship, out into the night.

In after life he frequently expressed his regret; he was soon entangled by the fashionable religious ideas of the age, often he sighed for the simple faith of by-gone days; he found his moorings at last in a gloomy, arctic indifference; he attended public worship, gave to charities; kept up a form of family and even private worship, but the enjoyment of religion was gone. "He went out and it was night."

He was relieved from any share in the burden of supporting the means of grace at the little chapel. His friends congratulated him on getting clear from the narrowness of Dissent. He often told humorous stories of the blunders of deacons, and crudities of church meetings. He boasted of having become a man of liberal opinions and one who sympathized with broad thought. But he was conscious of a want, something that should give brightness to all. "He had gone out and it was night."

He rejoiced in having overcome the prejudice against the stage, and could go to the theatre without compunction. His children soon changed the pleasures of Sunday School work for the gaieties of this world. The early promise of those young people has not been fulfilled; more than one having broken down the fence of early days, went far astray and darkened the father's heart. To him progress in respectability had been regress in spirituality. "He went out and it was night."

Let church members ponder well the words of Paul annexed to his precept for observing the Lord's Supper. "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged, but when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned." Offences must come; whenever they come there are unseen powers at work. It is on such occasions souls are tested. Rare opportunities are then afforded for revealing the graces of the Christian character. How much better at such times to exercise a gentle, holy spirit, and so dwell in the light of Christ's favor, than to show a proud, defiant, worldly spirit and go out into the night!

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