

A Re-evaluation of Anglo-Irish Premillennialism 1789-1914: Part 1

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KEY WORDS

Historic Premillennialism	Dispensationalism		
Nineteenth Century	Charles Spurgeon	Jewish Restoration	J. C. Ryle
Eschatology	Futurism	Historicism	

ABSTRACT

Contemporary premillennial interpretations of the last days and the kingdom of God have been largely dominated by two primary interpretations, often described by the nomenclature of “dispensational premillennialism” and “historic premillennialism.” The conclusion is that dispensationalism, though popular in the 19th and 20th centuries, has been replaced by historic premillennialism which is more akin to non-dispensational views of the 19th century and earlier (perhaps summarizing the views of the patristics as well), hence the formation of the term, “historic premillennialism.”

This article posits the case that this conclusion is reductionist. And, to simplify the premillennial viewpoints down to these two competing interpretations misses the overlapping theological concerns as well as the cultural and contextual milieus that contribute to developing theology. In order to demonstrate, this article will focus on what is commonly called the “long 19th century.” Specifically, this article will begin by comparing contemporary theological thought with writers of the previous century and will then proceed to assess key Anglo-premillennialists from the 19th century.

INTRODUCTION

The emphasis in current premillennial literature is focused on two forms. The first, which is often considered the most prevalent, is twentieth century dispensationalism.¹ The second is the subsequent resurgence of “historic premillennialism” originating in

the mid twentieth century.² The assumption is often made by evangelicals that these two paradigms are indicative of history and that premillennialists broadly align with one of “two important variants to this position.”³ One of the most recent attempts at addressing non-dispensational premillennialism (as one of two major variants) from an academic perspective may be found in the collections of essays edited by Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung.⁴

1 A strict definition of dispensationalism may be elusive, partially because the teaching of ‘dispensations’ is not bound to dispensationalism. Nonetheless, it is generally understood to be a system of hermeneutics that is thought to have originated in the 19th century among the Plymouth Brethren sect. The system tends to divide Biblical history into several epochs, culminating in the Millennial Kingdom. The division of Church and Israel is important to the thinking. For a helpful explanation, see, Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500-2000* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 13. For a definition from a self avowed dispensationalist, see, Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1966).

2 Though it originated in the 1950s, it has developed in later writings.

3 Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism*, p. 12

4 “Craig L. Blomberg, Sung Wook Chung, eds. *A Case for historic premillennialism: An Alternative to ‘Left Behind Eschatology’* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 12

Likewise, an example tying the development of early Brethren thought with modern notions of Zionism and dispensationalism may be found in Paul Wilkinson's work on John Nelson Darby⁵

Yet, I would contend that theological premillennialism is more broad and multifaceted than just two perspectives, and thus best understood in light of its immediate historical context. Thus, to impose current thoughts (two forms of premillennialism) upon the 19th century misses the overlap and contextual concerns of each generation of thinkers. Further, understanding the complexity of these perspectives reveals that to relegate the premillennial movements both in the 19th and 20th centuries to the two binary categories to the point of identifying each with the timing of the rapture as "dispensationalism versus historic premillennialism (or perhaps better put, pre-versus post-tribulationism)" is reductionist.⁶ For example, the differences between the various schools of premillennial thought of this time period must take into account other doctrinal issues such as ecclesiology, as well the concepts that united the premillennialism of this time period in ways that lead us to see earlier premillennialism (and perhaps current premillennialism) as one broad theological category with multiple subsets which I will elaborate further.

On some level, the standard conclusions may be due to a desire for theological taxonomy. Shantz keenly acknowledges the tendency scholars (especially evangelicals) have in succumbing to simplistic categorization as he states "we should address the fact that many evangelicals, in seeking to establish their distinct

5 Paul Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Studies in Evangelical History and Thought) (Bletchley: Paternoster Publishing, 2007), 22. Here is an example where the Brethren are studied intrinsically with twentieth century dispensationalism.

6 Chung and Blomberg, p. 10.

identity, have been wary of acknowledging the possibility of connections with heterodox or marginalized groups."⁷ Thus, the goal of this article will be to explore 19th century Anglo-Irish premillennialism as a movement independent of later theological developments.⁸ I will begin by briefly examining the current theological literature and context of "historic premillennialism" and dispensationalism in this article, followed by an examination of the greater exegetical considerations during the 19th century, such as "futurism" (the interpretation that the book of Revelation and much of end time prophecy deal with the future events surrounding Christ's return) and "historicism," (the interpretation that the book of Revelation largely spans Church history) which largely differentiate Anglo and Irish premillennialism.⁹ I will follow this introductory material with an analysis of 19th century British premillennialism.

I am preferring to use what is commonly called the "Long 19th Century" as the focal time period. This allows for a brief exploration of the impacts shortly after the death of Particular Baptist John Gill (1697-1771) through influential writers such as David Baron (1855-1926). This review is essential because the time period is long enough to trace how various key authors influenced later writers and teachers. While a thorough examination of Gill's views is not warranted here, some comments will be

7 Douglas H Shantz, "Millennialism and Apocalypticism in Recent Historical Scholarship," in *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* eds. Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004), 41. This approach has often been employed in evaluating Edward Irving.

8 This article serves as part one of a two part series on the broader subject.

9 It should be noted that I comment on the broader theological constructs of the growing Plymouth Brethren movement within the already established covenantalism as well.

made through comparisons with the covenantal premillennialists.

MODERN “HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM,” DISPENSATIONALISM AND HISTORY

Before I proceed to 19th century premillennialism, it may be helpful first to discuss modern “historic premillennialism” and dispensationalism. Further, the premise should be questioned whether historic premillennialism and dispensationalism are “historic” or whether they are actually new developing theological perspectives. Modern historic premillennialism, or as Blomberg and Chung describe as “classic premillennialism,” is rightly understood to be based on the work of George Eldon Ladd (1911 – 1982).¹⁰ Yet, rather being assessed as the formulator of a new development within premillennialism, he has been credited with a revival of “historic premillennialism.”¹¹ It is then presumed that his “historic” variation of premillennialism is none other than the premillennial view of “history.”¹² One example of connecting Ladd to those who went before him is found in an article connecting Spurgeon with “historic premillennialism.”¹³ Here, in trying to assess Spurgeon in relationship to various premillennial views, Swanson makes the assumption that men like “Spurgeon and his contemporaries were familiar with the four current millennial

10 Blomberg and Chung, 16.

11 Timothy P. Weber, “Dispensational and Historic Premillennialism as Popular Millennialist Movements,” in Craig L. Blomberg, Sung Wook Chung, eds. *A Case for historic premillennialism: An Alternative to 'Left Behind Eschatology'* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 19.

12 Weber, 14.

13 Dennis M. Swanson, “The Millennial Position of Spurgeon,” *Masters Seminary Journal*. Vol. TMSJ 07:2 Fall 1996.. Accessed online October 14th 2022 via Galaxie Journals.

views—amillennialism, postmillennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism—though the earlier nomenclature may have differed.”¹⁴ He then proceeds to define the term “historic premillennialism” as “twofold: (1) the kingdom will be the culmination of the Church age and (2) the ‘rapture’ will follow the tribulation, with the Church going through the tribulation under the protection of God.”¹⁵

Yet, scholars tend to overlook the theological locus that drives contemporary “historic premillennialism” as opposed to the premillennial views of earlier times. One example of a concept that was foreign to earlier writers is that of inaugurated eschatology. For, “within this field of study, much of the research has relied on a particular stream of thought, specifically relying on the already/not yet paradigm first developed in seed form in the writings of C.H. Dodd and further developed by George Eldon Ladd.”¹⁶ Chung and Blomberg and Moore broadly acknowledge Ladd’s eschatology and influence on contemporary thought.¹⁷¹⁸ Yet, it is unclear if they understand Ladd’s realized eschatology is actually the heart of the system of contemporary “historic premillennialism.”¹⁹ Ladd was developing a view that was novel in itself for “it is in Ladd’s overlap of the future eschaton of glory with Christ’s first coming that gives this ‘inaugurated eschatological’

14 Swanson, 183.

15 Swanson, 183.

16 For further evaluation, see my article “Zach Doppelt, ‘Kingdom of Grace, Kingdom of Glory: A Reassessment of the Historic Views of Christ’s Kingdom.’ *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics*. Volume 6, 2018. p. A59” where I approach the subject outside of strict millennialism.

17 Chung and Blomberg, 59.

18 Russell Moore, “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment.” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*: Volume:SBJT 12:1 Spring 2008, 68.

19 Doppelt, 59.

view its substance as well as its newness in kingdom interpretation.²⁰ Scholars have not emphasized that this specific locus of thought on inaugurated eschatology was not limited to premillennialism, as it was a hybrid position not necessarily inherent to one particular millennial view,²¹ as “Ladd was influenced by Dodd, a functional postmillennialist.”²² I believe this particular impact from Ladd on eschatology places contemporary non-dispensational premillennialism as a distinct product of the current theological milieu, rather than the supposed identity as the historic view of the Church.²³ Thus, we will see little evidence of Ladd’s system prior to his writing.

For example, John Gill (1697-1771) was the pastor of the Horsleydown Baptist Church until his death in 1771.²⁴ It was this same congregation Charles Spurgeon was called to pastor in 1854.²⁵ Gill laid out a rather clear description of his premillennialism in his doctrinal divinity, demonstrating that “Gill had moved, against the trend of the age, to reclaim the premillennial hope.”^{26,27} Gill tended to see a the current phase of Christ’s kingdom as spiritual (and growing more so) with a clear distinction between the spiritual “gospel” kingdom and the future kingdom in somewhat

stark contrast.²⁸ He writes “but this is different than that... it will be very glorious and visible.”²⁹ The key to understanding Gill and others after him, especially in the Reformed tradition, is the principle of Christ as “Mediator” through the Gospel. In this sense, the premillennialists (even the Plymouth Brethren) had a strong Christological/Gospel focus in the divisions of the phases of the kingdom.

Unlike the contrast found in earlier writers, modern historic premillennialists (since Ladd) see the progress of the kingdom as more of a physical and spiritual “tension” between this age and the age to come.³⁰ It was already noted that Ladd’s inaugurated eschatology was not limited to premillennialism. It must also be observed that Ladd held a unique preterist-futurist view of the book of Revelation.³¹ This view likely represents Ladd blending his former dispensationalism with the current academic influence of Dodd.³² This hybrid eschatological position further undergirds the conclusion he was not firmly representative of the premillennialist views that preceded him.

Chung maintains “as is well known among theological scholars, the Reformed tradition has been almost unanimous in advocating amillennialism in interpreting the account of the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20:1-6.”³³ Yet,

20 Doppelt, 60.

21 FF. Bruce and J.J. Scott, Jr., “Eschatology.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 389.

22 Doppelt, 61.

23 This is not a novel conclusion, for scholarship often develops new concepts and ideas that share similarities yet are still distinct from previous ways of expression.

24 Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771-1892* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 3.

25 Oliver, 337.

26 John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, 1767-1770* (Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2007 Reprint), 643-667.

27 Gribben, 64.

28 Gill, 643.

29 Gill, 643..

30 Moore, 76.

31 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 14.

32 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, eds. *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 49.

33 Sung Wook Chung, “Toward the Reformed and Covenantal Theology of Premillennialism.” *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to ‘Left Behind Eschatology.’* Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 133. Chung correctly identifies Calvin, but Warfield likely held a sort of hybrid view between amillennialism and postmillennialism, if not a complete postmillennialism.

his conclusion seems to miss the longstanding heritage of covenantal premillennialism found in men such as Gill, Spurgeon and Ryle, all of which would have been broadly “Reformed” in the general understanding of the term.³⁴

Consequently, though Weber gives some comment to a few non-Brethren premillennialists of the 19th century such as Maitland and De Burgh, he also passes by the others.³⁵ Perhaps these exclusions contribute to the overemphasis on George Eldon Ladd.³⁶ And, these exclusions may explain the growing role the rapture has in such divisions of premillennialists.³⁷ In this context, the 19th century Plymouth Brethren writers have been examined with a renewed interest by scholars such as Crawford Gribben of Trinity College, Dublin and Timothy C.F. Stunt.³⁸ Yet, their writings are often relegated to the discussion of current dispensationalism and Zionism.³⁹

The roots of dispensationalism are thus ascribed to the 19th century Anglo/Irish Bible teacher John Nelson Darby and his “elaborate dispensational system” that “divided history into distinct eras or dispensations in order to keep track of God’s redemptive plan.”⁴⁰ And, “[e]ven more fundamental to his interpretation of the Bible was the conviction that God has two completely separate plans and peoples in the divine plan of redemption, one ‘earthly’ (Israel)

and one ‘heavenly’ (the Church).”⁴¹

But, contemporary dispensationalism draws more heavily on the work of C.I. Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible than it does the Plymouth Brethren and Darby.⁴² And, Mangum and Sweetnam identify there were multiple influences on Scofield beyond the Plymouth Brethren as well, where “Scofield seems to manifest his being part of what would continue to grow into a nation-wide movement: eventually identified as American evangelicalism.”⁴³ In this regard Scofield was as much a product of the “conservatism that characterized the aristocratic culture he was a part of” as he was of the theology that predated him.⁴⁴

Further, though twentieth century dispensationalism derives much of its influence from the Scofield Bible, the term was yet to be utilized as a descriptor of a theological system, demonstrating that even later fundamentalism may be seen as a unique movement in itself.⁴⁵ The growing evangelical movement maintained a broad conservative theology, yet it was also seeking to interact more thoroughly with culture.⁴⁶ Thus, twentieth century dispensationalism was just as concerned as the Plymouth Brethren with Israel, the historicity of the Bible and other doctrines, but their focus was different.⁴⁷ They were seeking to expand and work together with a broad group of Christians against the emerging rationalism of the day, whereas men like Darby were more concerned

34 See, Chung, 133-146, where Covenantal premillennialism seems absent in the discussion.

35 Weber, 1-22. It is possible that current debate over the millennial positions of men like Spurgeon may contribute to his hesitancy.

36 Weber, 19-20.

37 Chung and Blomberg, 10.

38 Timothy C.F. Stunt, “Influences in the Early Development of John Nelson Darby” *Prisoner’s of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt, eds. (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004), 44-68.

39 For an example, see Wilkinson.

40 Weber, 10, 15.

41 Weber, 10.

42 See R. Todd Mangum and Mark S. Sweetnam, eds. *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church*. (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009).”

43 Mangum and Sweetnam, 53-92.

44 Mangum and Sweetnam, 132.

45 Mangum and Sweetnam, 188

46 Mangum and Sweetnam, 84.

47 Mangum and Sweetnam, 84.

with separating from the state church “that obscured the Church’s heavenly calling and nature.”⁴⁸

A more complex example where modern historic premillennialism and dispensationalism seem to diverge from their supposed predecessors may be found in Hal Lindsey. Gribben places Lindsey, a late twentieth century representation of dispensationalism, as a combination of both *futurism* and *historicism*. He proceeds to state “it is important for readers to distinguish ‘historicist’ premillennialism, one date-suggesting variant of which is represented in the bestselling writings of Hal Lindsey, from ‘historic’ (i.e. non-dispensational) premillennialism, which may or may not be historicist, and which Lindsey would certainly oppose.”⁴⁹ In this case, one could argue that modern day date setting dispensationalists have more in common with earlier historicists such as Edward Irving rather than the Plymouth Brethren in which they are purported to be heirs. Likewise, we shall see men like Benjamin Newton, often considered an “historic premillennialist” hold an elaborate dispensational system much like modern dispensationalists today.⁵⁰ Ultimately, the modern futurism held by many “historic premillennialists” has more in common with the Plymouth Brethren and early so-called dispensationalists than some whose theology they claim to inherit.

I would argue an assessment of the schemes of historicism and futurism may be evaluated in ways that are more compelling than the

contemporary (and assumed) historic vs. dispensational premillennial categorization. If so, this demonstrates the observation that premillennialists over the course of the long 19th century were simply building off the ideas before and around them, evolving premillennialism as they continued to teach. Interestingly, Weber admits the discussion concerning contemporary premillennialism as a whole is predominantly focused on futurism.⁵¹ And, he admits that futurism is a relatively newer perspective where both “[d]ispensationalism and historic (not historicist) premillennialism were relative latecomers to a religious culture already replete with millennialist successes and failures.”⁵² Though Weber still oversimplifies premillennialism, he does recognize “permutations” and elaborates on the important distinctions of futurism and historicism that are helpful in understanding the “messy” nature of historical categorizations.⁵³ This demonstrates that research still must advance in finding “balance” in the study of millenarian ideas.⁵⁴ I believe this is essential to dismantle assumptions and further analyze the greater nuance and interconnectedness in previous premillennial ideology, especially in terms of their milieu and how they may form one greater school of interpretation. Before one can understand the current setting of prophetic discourse, it is helpful to revisit previous centuries, especially that of the “expansion of evangelical millennialism.”⁵⁵

In other words, in examining 19th century premillennialism, we will ultimately examine a number of critical questions. Is “historic

48 Mangum and Sweetnam, 70.

49 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 15.

50 Of course, Darby also held an elaborate dispensational scheme. What I am arguing in this paper is not that Darby and modern day dispensationalists fail to hold similarities, but rather, certain similarities existed amongst all nineteenth century premillennialists and twentieth century premillennialists alike.

51 Weber, 21.

52 Weber, 4,14.

53 Weber, 4, 18, 16, 8-11.

54 Shantz, 43.

55 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 71-91.

premillennialism” really “historic” or is it new? Have we been too quick to impose current thoughts on older movements, or are we too quick to label anything non-dispensational as the historic premillennial position of the Church? Is it really given that the two streams of premillennialism are really dispensationalism, which found its roots in the 19th century Plymouth Brethren movement, and historic premillennialism, the view of the patristics, post-reformational premillennialists and modern non-dispensational premillennialists?⁵⁶ I will begin with 19th century British Premillennialism.

ANALYSIS OF KEY BRITISH PREMILLENNIAL AUTHORS

British premillennialists may be understood best in light of the broad “Reformation” theological context that they inherited.⁵⁷ Though Calvinistic tendencies were increasing on a broad scale, it is also true that Romanticism was influential, which could account for some varied and more extreme interpretations.⁵⁸ Yet, the Calvinistic and covenantal theology that undergirded a “literal hermeneutic” should not be underestimated as British evangelicals were reformulating their millennial views from a broad historicist postmillennialism to premillennialism.⁵⁹ It is not to say that premillennialist convictions were new. Rather, this century saw an increase in these convictions. One example is that of Horatius and Andrew Bonar who were 19th century

ministers part of “a famous trio of clergymen brothers who exercised profound influence upon the piety and hymnody of evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic.”⁶⁰ A major element of this influence was their “commitment to the premillennial faith”⁶¹ in contrast to the broader postmillennialism of their day.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) wrote *Prophetical Landmarks: Containing Data for Helping to Determine the Question of Christ's Pre-Millennial Advent*. His stated purpose in his preface was to demonstrate that the premillennial advent was not carnal, yet a “sober, scriptural, reality.”⁶² He believed that the early Church was “ever waiting and looking for” His appearing,⁶³ and broadly maintained the prevalent historicism of previous millenarians,⁶⁴ especially given that he would have inherited historicism as the view of the Reformers before him.⁶⁵ Yet, his trend was in modifying these standard eschatological interpretations.

For example, Horatius Bonar interprets the trumpets in the book of Revelation taking place in a period “not nearly so long as that of the former vision to which I have been referring,” possibly allowing for a specific end time tribulation.⁶⁶ In this regard he moderately divides ages dispensationally, though he was unwilling to give firm conclusions on timelines of end time events.⁶⁷ He does allow for the interpretation of an individual end time Antichrist, though, like his brother Andrew,

56 For a partial explanation, see Doppelt,, A41-A42.

57 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 85

58 Bebbington, 80-85.

59 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 72.

60 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 85.

61 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 85..

62 Horatius Bonar, *Prophetical Landmarks: Containing Data for Helping to Determine the Question of Christ's Pre-Millennial Advent* (London: FB&C, 2018 reprint), 24.

63 H. Bonar., 68.

64 H. Bonar, 152.

65 Bebbington, 85.

66 H. Bonar, 139.

67 H. Bonar, 51, 139.

he continued the Reformation era papal interpretation of the Antichrist.⁶⁸

Ultimately, he holds a myopic view of certain portions of the book of Revelation which seem to suggest an evolution of historicist exegesis. This is not to say that he held the strict futurist views of the Irish Brethren that we shall examine in a later article, but rather, his exegesis gives us clues to the evolution of prophetic inquiry into the interpretation of prophecy as it relates to Church history as well as the age immediately preceding Christ's coming. This is especially unique to the historicist theory that dominated much of 19th century prophetic speculation.

Within this myopic view of Revelation, Horatius Bonar sees an "end time" place for Israel with national distinction based on a literal interpretation of prophecy.⁶⁹ His view of Israel in the current age is distinct enough to apply a three-fold division between the Church, Israel and the earth.⁷⁰ Neither the idea of the general calling of the Jews, nor the idea of prophetic fulfillment involving the Jews was novel in itself.⁷¹ However; his firm stance and view that "the importance of the subject calls for" writing on Israel shows the growing premillennial consensus and development of the concept that did not strictly equivocate the Church and Israel as in older commentators.⁷²

Like his older brother, Andrew Bonar

(1810-1892) wrote extensively on "millennial themes."⁷³ He was a thoroughgoing supporter of the broader Reformed confessions, though this did not detract him from ascribing to premillennial convictions.⁷⁴ It is also interesting to note that much of Bonar's prophetic interest came from the influence of Edward Irving and his views of the coming of Christ,⁷⁵ and his works will reveal some central themes that were of importance to his thinking.

In his commentary on Leviticus originally published in 1846, Andrew Bonar devotes an entire chapter on "the Sabbatic Year, and the Year of Jubilee - Millennial Times."⁷⁶ There, he sees the millennial age as the final age after 6000 years of Church history.⁷⁷ Broadly, this is the same scheme that Augustine held, though Augustine interpreted this seventh sabbath to relate to the age of the Church forming an early amillennialist reaction to patristic chiliasm.⁷⁸ Perhaps Andrew Bonar's views stand most closely with the premillennialism of John Bunyan (1628-1688),⁷⁹ as both similarly connect the millennial age to the "New Jerusalem."⁸⁰ For Andrew Bonar, this age of "glory" is typified when the temple was "finished in the seventh month."⁸¹ Ultimately,

68 H. Bonar, 159, 286. For a discussion of Andrew Bonar, see "Crawford Gribben, 'Andrew Bonar and the Scottish Presbyterian Millennium.' *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* Crawford Gribben and Timothy, C.F. Stunt, eds. (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004), 187."

69 H. Bonar, 233-234.

70 H. Bonar, 55-63.

71 Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550-1682 (Revised Edition)* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 154; Wilkinson, 159. This may be understood as part of a growing interpretive process which stemmed from the century before.

72 H. Bonar, 228.

73 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 85.

74 This is an important point if one wishes to have a better understanding of the eschatology of the 19th century. One's eschatology was not as intrinsic to one's theological system as it is today.

75 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 86.

76 Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1846. 2018 reprint), 443.

77 A. Bonar, 441.

78 Donald Fairbairn, "Contemporary Millennial/Tribulational Debates: Whose Side was the Early Church On?" *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to 'Left Behind Eschatology.'* Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 116-117.

79 Gribben, *Puritan Millennium*, 211

80 A. Bonar, *Leviticus*, 468.

81 A. Bonar, *Leviticus*, 468.

he saw the first coming of Christ as “the earnest of those blessings which His Second Coming shall give in full.”⁸²

Andrew Bonar also gives a place for ethnic Israel’s “final restoration.”⁸³ Given the context of his exposition of the Levitical laws, and his back-and-forth application between ethnic Israel and the believer in general, it appears that Bonar sees a place for a redeemed Israel within the larger context of the Church, rather than as a distinct entity. This concept of the Jewish restoration was evidently stirred early when Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M’Cheyne met for study of “unfulfilled prophecy” as part of a broader theological “society” in their early years of ministerial preparation.⁸⁴

Perhaps one of the most striking of Bonar’s interpretations is the allowance of a rebuilt Ezekiel’s temple, where the world may learn of Christ during the millennial age.⁸⁵ This “dispensationalist” interpretation may be surprising at first, but these themes were becoming more prominent in the context of the renewed interest in mission work to the Jews and the growing focus on the specifics of prophecy. Thus, the strong Jewish coloring of Andrew Bonar’s millennialism is likely connected to his “mission to Palestine and the Jews” with Robert Murray M’Cheyne.⁸⁶ He recounts the discussions they had on the practical elements of the premillennial faith, and in his account of M’Cheyne detailing this endeavour, Bonar states, “his views of the views of the importance of the Jews in the eye of God, and therefore, of their importance as a sphere

of missionary activity labour, were very clear and decided.”⁸⁷ Andrew Bonar also tells of a sermon M’Cheyne gave on Rom. 1:16-17, that led many to say “how was it we never thought of the duty of remembering Israel before.”⁸⁸

Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1813-1843), like Andrew Bonar, had an evident fondness for Edward Irving. This was likely due to his prophetic speculations. M’Cheyne wrote in his memoirs that he “heard of Edward Irving’s death. I look back upon him with awe, as on the saints and martyrs of old. A holy man in spite of all his delusions and errors.”⁸⁹ This statement reveals how strongly the culmination of prophetic study and missionary zeal connected these men to others whom they differed in other areas both in England and Ireland. Thus, and without clarification, Horatius Bonar spoke broadly and favourably of the multitude of prophetic literature that was being written at the time.⁹⁰ But, to understand the prevalent thinking of 19th century premillennialism, one must consider the impact that directly came from Edward Irving.

Edward Irving (1792-1834) was a Church of Scotland minister⁹¹ who was removed from his local presbytery due to certain Christological errors.⁹² This did not inhibit, however, the impact of his prophetic discourse on others at the time as “his belief in the imminent return of Christ and the promised restoration of Israel gained prominence following the publication of

82 A. Bonar, *Leviticus*, 450.

83 A. Bonar, *Leviticus*, 450.

84 A. Bonar, *Leviticus*, 44

85 A. Bonar, *Leviticus*, 6-7.

86 Andrew Bonar, *Robert Murray M’Cheyne*. (Edinburgh:Banner of Truth Trust, 1844, 2019 reprint), 129.

87 A Bonar, *M’Cheyne*, 130, 135.

88 A Bonar, *M’Cheyne*, 205.

89 Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M’Cheyne, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne: Minister of St. Peter’s Church, Dundee* (Hamilton, Adams & Co. J. Nisbet & Co. And J. Johnstone & Co., 1846), 25.

90 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 89.

91 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 77.

92 Wilkinson, 184. These are the same errors in which M’Cheyne lamented Irving held.

his book, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed*.⁹³

It has been alleged that he influenced the interpretation of the rapture held by John Nelson Darby thus making him the direct progenitor of later futurists. Yet, Irving's connection to the Albury Park Conferences in which prophetic discourse was largely of the historicist school of thought makes the impact on Darby's unique views unlikely.⁹⁴ Therefore, Irving is best understood to be part of the broader transition in premillennial interpretation at large.⁹⁵ For example, it appears that Irving held, like the historicists before, that the Danielic covenant "made with many for one week" was made by the Messiah, not Antichrist as Darby would have taught.⁹⁶

The question of how a man who had been accused of holding to a heretical Christology could still obtain a certain amount of reverence from men like M'Cheyne (and who could be responsible for spurring on a prophetic revival) is not an easy one to answer. But, this paradox may be best understood in the times in which he lived. It was clear that many saw the failures of certain organizational churches in their handling of holiness and mission. For example, "Irving created a great stir" when he denounced the way the London Missionary Society handled its affairs of support.⁹⁷ The idea of relying on the Lord rather than institutions found support in other contemporaries such as George Müller.⁹⁸ Thus, it should be observed that Irving was answering questions that other Bible students were also asking.

93 Wilkinson, 185.

94 Wilkinson, 124.

95 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 128-129.

96 Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving. Vol 2* (London: Alexander Strahan and Co., 1864), 115.

97 Bebbington, 76.

98 Bebbington, 152.

The growth of prophetic inquiry and missionary zeal, coupled with a growing distrust of the established Church and the organizations in which she supported, surely provided a consensus for needed change.⁹⁹ In his lectures on John the Baptist, Irving demands the need for change for "good in this lame age of the Church," thus alluding to Irving taking on his own role as a modern day embodiment of the prophets of old.¹⁰⁰ His call to action seemed to appeal to M'Cheyne, who despite Irving's flaws, saw him as one of many in a long line of mighty men of God.¹⁰¹ It is this felt need for action that the analysis of the remaining authors needs to be understood. 19th century premillennial apocalyptic teaching was fomented from the writers that went before them coupled with a reaction to the Church of their day. In other words, there was a tremendous "outlook of pessimism," that was a key component in the gradual transition from historicism to futurism.¹⁰²

Pessimism was a critical theme in the revived interest in prophecy.¹⁰³ Likewise, a pessimistic outlook in history pointing to the end times, along with a revived interest in prophecy as it related to the Jews, Gentiles and the book of Revelation bridged the gap between organizations such as the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews and the Albury prophetic conferences (in which Irving was a participant) via men such as Henry

99 Bebbington, 103.

100 Irving, 23.

101 Bonar and M'Cheyne, 25.

102 Bebbington, 102

103 Tim Grass, "Edward Irving: Eschatology, Ecclesiology and Spiritual Gifts," *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* eds. Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004), 100.

Drummond and the Rev. Lewis Way.¹⁰⁴ “The participants reasoned that if the Second Coming is associated with the restoration of the Jews to their land, then the Millennium must follow rather than precede it.”¹⁰⁵ This interconnected relationship between mission work to the Jews connected a theology that was associated with ecclesiology and eschatology as well.¹⁰⁶

Numerous “controversies” centre around Irving,¹⁰⁷ not just because of his Christology, but also due to his view of the spiritual gifts¹⁰⁸ and his overall zeal for ecclesiastical holiness. Though Irving’s role in the transition of premillennialism should not be overlooked, there was a cult-like element in the Irivinites and the Catholic Apostolic Church that led men like John Charles. Ryle to lament the potential discrediting of the doctrine of the Second Coming¹⁰⁹ as “too many have written and talked as if they had a *special revelation* from Heaven.”¹¹⁰

In this way, John Charles (J.C.) Ryle (1816-1900) provides an interesting contrast to reactionaries such as Edward Irving. Ryle was an Anglican Clergyman, later Bishop, and remained within the established Church as opposed to other men such as Irving and John Nelson Darby. While it is uncertain whether Ryle attended any of the more potent prophetic conferences, such as those at Albury or the Powerscourt Estate, he did speak at the

Bloomsbury conference on prophetic themes.”¹¹¹

Ryle’s commitment to historic evangelical doctrine allowed him to stand firm in the doctrines of the Reformation and call others to a sort of “low Church Anglicanism.”¹¹² While many of his books deal with these fundamental evangelical doctrines in which he was most concerned, he did make his views of prophecy and the kingdom clear in his book based on a series of lectures, *Coming Events and Present Duties*.

Ryle states in his preface that he will “abstain from giving an opinion” on certain fine prophetic details of which he says are conjecture.”¹¹³ This serves as a consistent response to what he perceived to be overzealous “prophets,” yet this does not dissuade him from giving certain conclusions, nonetheless. In his lecture on Romans 13:12, he gives his understanding of the condition of the world, as night, during the days surrounding Christ’s coming.¹¹⁴ Though Ryle is moderate, his writing is still imbued with the premillennial pessimism like others during the century as discussed earlier. This is not surprising in that he wrote against the High Church Anglican failures that he saw, which gives a marked emphasis on a proper ecclesiology united with premillennial concerns. His premillennialism was also in contrast to the growing postmillennialism that so often characterized the Reformed Church, as he states “the world will not be converted when Christ returns: it will be in the same condition that it was in the day of the flood.”¹¹⁵

104 Grass, 99.

105 Grass, 100.

106 Grass, 100.

107 Wilkinson, 185.

108 Grass, 107-108.

109 Alan Munden, “The ‘prophetic opinions’ of J. C. Ryle,” *Churchman* 125.3 (Autumn 2011), 259.

110 J.C. Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties* (Londing: William Hunt and Company, 1867, 2021 reprint without page numbers).

111 Munden, 259.

112 Eric Russell, *J.C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2008), 121, 125, 134.

113 Ryle, *Coming Events*, preface.

114 Ryle, *Coming Events*

115 J.C. Ryle, “Matthew” *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 261.

Ryle broadly interpreted the book of Revelation through the lens of the historicism that had been the norm, yet, like the Bonars, he was willing to modify his conclusions when he believed it necessary. For example, Ryle gives place to the possibility of an end time tribulation (or second tribulation) period not dissimilar to, though not as narrow as the futurist school.¹¹⁶ Ryle acknowledges his conclusions may be unexpected as it was not the customary view of the historicist school of interpretation.¹¹⁷ This leads Ryle to cite evidence among the church fathers and the early Reformers to bolster his point of a future tribulation and end time Antichrist figure.¹¹⁸

Despite these convictions, Ryle maintained his historicism as these interpretations of prophetic passages were literal “prophecies from the time of John to the very end of the world... spreading over the whole ‘times of the Gentiles’ and covering the mighty interval between the destruction of the first Jerusalem, and the descent of the new Jerusalem.”¹¹⁹ Yet, Ryle’s view of the times of the Gentiles is connected to a literal view of Israel and the nations.¹²⁰ This stemmed from a belief that it is imperative to understand prophecy in such a way as not to

allegorize the findings, and to “clearly see the place that Israel occupies in Scripture, a view consistent with the growing appreciation for a consistent “literalistic” hermeneutic of the times.”¹²¹

An example of this perspective may be seen where Ryle takes the word Israel in Jer 31:10 to be defined as the whole Jewish nation, recognizing the prevailing opinion “in the Churches of Christ a strange, and to my mind, an unwarrantable mode of dealing with this word ‘Israel.’”¹²² Further, Ryle sees the continued presence of literal Israel as a “living book of evidence that the Bible is true.”¹²³ While not holding a radical Church/Israel distinction, Ryle does believe that “until Christ returns to this earth, the Jews will always remain a separate people.”¹²⁴ Consequently, Ryle sees the times of the Gentiles as “a fixed period” where the Gentiles have a place of prominence until their time is fulfilled and “Jerusalem is to be once more restored to its ancient inhabitants.”¹²⁵

Finally, rather than seeing Ezekiel’s temple prophecy (chapter 40) as a mere type of the Church, it is evident that Ryle connects this to the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21. based on an attempt to search out the literal sense of the text first.¹²⁶ Therefore:

Given Ryle’s Reformed theological convictions it would have been expected that he would have been a convinced a-millennialist like Francis Close and Bishop Samuel Waldegrave (whom Ryle greatly admired), or a post-millennialist like Charles Simeon and the majority of

116 See Ryle, *Matthew*, 255 where concerning Matthew 24:15-28 he states, “But we must not suppose this part of our Lord’s prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord’s words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a *second siege of Jerusalem*, which is yet to take place, when Israel has returned to their own land; and to a *second tribulation* on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

117 Ryle, *Matthew*, 255.

118 Ryle, *Matthew*, 257. Though interpretations of a literal antichrist were not novel in themselves for Reformed Christians, the usual emphasis was that of the culmination of the papal system rather than the foci being placed on the individuality of the abhorrent figure. For more information, see “Gribben, *Puritan Millennium*, 258.”

119 Ryle, *Coming Events*.

120 Ryle, *Coming Events*.

121 Ryle, *Coming Events*.

122 Ryle, *Coming Events*.

123 J.C. Ryle, *Matthew*, 259-260.

124 Ryle, *Matthew*, 259.

125 J.C. Ryle, “Luke” *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 276.

126 Ryle, *Coming Events*.

Ryle's beloved Puritans. However, Ryle adopted premillennialism because of his commitment to the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.¹²⁷

Overall, Ryle's views on evangelical doctrine fit well within the Anglican and broader Reformational circles in which Ryle taught and was trained. Yet, a survey of the specific views on prophecy he, and others like Charles Spurgeon, held do demonstrate a gradual shift in conviction on prophetic interpretation.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a well-known Baptist pastor in the late 1800s. It is likely due to his "notoriety" that many attempt to align his millennial views with their own.¹²⁸ While it is possible the debate over his position could be interpreted in such a way that his views evolved over the course of his life, what is most important for the sake of this research is not what view he held at any given time, but what view seems most prevalent in his writings.¹²⁹ Thus, we do well to examine how he was influenced and how he influenced others. In this light, Gribben is likely correct that he shared the historicist premillennialism of E. B. Elliott encapsulated in the work on the book of Revelation *Horae Apocalypticae* in what Spurgeon called "standard."¹³⁰ Like Ryle, this can be interpreted as a view contiguous with his theological context, as the Reformers and Puritans before Spurgeon interpreted the book

127 Munden, Ryle, 260.

128 Swanson, 183.

129 This point cannot be overstated. Perhaps the greatest evidence that has been given for this is a vague quote by Spurgeon that he utilized AA. Hodge's theology outlines in the college, giving hearty agreement to the work except for baptism. Given Hodge was a postmillennialist, it is possible, though unprovable, that Spurgeon did eventually agree with this position. Yet, one point of examining one's writings is that of influence, and a majority of Spurgeon's writings convey a staunch premillennial position that has influenced succeeding generations.

130 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 80-81.

of Revelation with the same perspective, save their exposition of Rev. 20.

Yet, also like Ryle, Spurgeon was willing to modulate his interpretations in ways that were not constrained by the historicists whom he read. This is especially noted concerning the propensity to engage in date setting by some historicists when Spurgeon states, "I am not now going into millennial theories, or into any speculation as to dates. I do not know anything at all about such things, and I am not sure that I am called to spend my time in such researches. I am rather called to minister the gospel than to open prophecy."¹³¹

Though he was unwilling to engage in such speculation, Spurgeon does see in Scripture (as those mentioned earlier), a literal sense of prophecy when he states, "The meaning of our text, as opened up by the context, is most evidently, if words mean anything,"¹³² where he then proceeds to expound on a distinct place for the national Israel. He continues his sermon "first, that there shall be a political restoration of the Jews to their own land and to their own nationality; and then, secondly, there is in the text, and in the context, a most plain declaration, that there shall be a spiritual restoration, a conversion in fact, of the tribes of Israel."¹³³

Like Ryle, this is not an overly rigid distinction, yet a distinction of the Church and Israel exists at least in some sense. Spurgeon reveals his interpretation of the Jews and Jerusalem in a sermon on Revelation 21:23 in which he speaks of the "millennial state" in

131 Charles Spurgeon, *The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews*, accessed online via <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-restoration-and-concession-of-the-jews/#flipbook/>, February 9, 2023.

132 Spurgeon, *Conversion of the Jews*.

133 Spurgeon, *Conversion of the Jews*.

considerable detail with a literal hermeneutic.¹³⁴

What is more intriguing is that Spurgeon seems to allow for certain Jewish observances as “there may be even in that period certain solemn assemblies and Sabbath-days,”¹³⁵ yet he does qualify “but they will not be of the same kind as we have now; for the whole world will be a temple: every day will be a Sabbath; the avocations of men will all be priestly.”¹³⁶

It is important to recognize that though Spurgeon’s Jew and Gentile distinction appears subtle (compared to Irish premillennialism), there is more of this type of language in his sermons than Gill who preached before him. On Revelation 21:24 Gill writes:

...nor the Gentiles only, which shall come into the Church state of the Jews when called, for that state is not here designed; and besides, all Israel shall be saved then; nor the living saints at Christ’s coming, who shall have escaped, and are saved from the general conflagration; for these, with the raised ones, will be caught up together to Christ, and descend and dwell together on earth, and make one Church state; but all the elect of God, both Jews and Gentiles, whom God has chosen.¹³⁷

It is not that Spurgeon interpreted the text radically different than Gill, but rather, it is the emphasis on the *language* and *literalness* of the text that is of note here. For Gill, while there is a latter day “conversion of the Jews,” there seems

little margin for any end time Jewish rites as they “shall join themselves to the Church and partake of the Gospel ordinances with them.”¹³⁸ Thus, the allowance for some “Jewish” worship was a novel evolution within the premillennialism of Spurgeon’s time in contrast to those who taught before him, conveying a growing literalness in key details.

The detailed discussions on matters such as the Jews may also be seen in the debates that existed within Particular Baptist thinking of which Spurgeon would have been involved to some extent. One of Spurgeon’s students who trained at his college, William Jeyes Styles, took up the mantle of the Jews insisting that “a sharp distinction needed to be drawn between the message preached to the Jews on the one hand, and to the Gentiles on the other.”¹³⁹ Oliver likens his position to the growing dispensational thought of the time, yet acknowledges Styles wrote against the contrasting premillennial positions held by dispensationalists and the covenantal premillennialists alike.¹⁴⁰

While this observation may not suggest much toward Spurgeon’s thinking of the subjects at hand, it does reveal what was on the minds of many Gospel ministers in 19th century England, namely on the coming kingdom and its relationship to the Jews. To some extent, the certain convictions concerning the conversion of the Jews and their place in the kingdom may have been largely assumed in Spurgeon’s day. This is especially true within the missionary mindset not only to the Jews, but to the entire world that was dominating what some call historic Calvinism.¹⁴¹ If this assessment is correct, the examples we have

134 Charles Spurgeon, “The Lamb, The Light.” *Spurgeon’s Sermons* Vol. 8. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 279. On page 281 we read the following quote, “We believe that the Jews will be converted, and that they will be restored to their own land. We believe that Jerusalem will be the central metropolis of Christ’s kingdom; we also believe that all the nations shall walk in the light of the glorious city which shall be built at Jerusalem.”

135 Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons*, 281.

136 Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons*, 281-282.

137 John Gill *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments, Vol. 9: Galatians through Revelation*, (Paris Ark: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2016 Reprint), 863.

138 Gill, *Exposition*, 711.

139 Oliver, *Baptists*, 351.

140 Oliver, 351.

141 Oliver, 345.

seen in the preceding quotes by Spurgeon would be understood as representative of the current scholarship in which he was acquainted with, along with a missionary movement that was indicative of evangelical Calvinism. This missionary zeal is embodied in a converted Jew, David Baron, who was a later contemporary of Spurgeon.

David Baron (1855-1926) was born in Russia and a Jewish convert to Christianity. He co-founded The Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel of London, England along with C.A. Schonberger.¹⁴² There, they “engaged for many years in the work of preaching the Gospel, in different parts of the world, to the people still ‘beloved’ for the fathers’ sake.”¹⁴³ It is his ministry in London which is why I assess his work in the greater context of and in connection to English premillennial thought.

Baron was also a writer whose books and articles give some insights into his views on the millennial kingdom. As a convert to Christianity, Baron maintained the importance of “Israel’s present state among the nations, and looks on prophetically to God’s dealings with them in the future,”¹⁴⁴ as he believed that “the most eloquent monument to the faithfulness of God and to the everlasting truth of His holy Word is the JEW.”¹⁴⁵

For, in Baron’s mind, Scripture speaks of “the blessing of the nations bound up with the salvation of Israel”¹⁴⁶ Therefore, Israel holds a

prominent place in God’s dealings with men as “they are the only people, which, *as a nation*, God has chosen as His own peculiar possession out of all the nations of the earth.”¹⁴⁷

Baron sees their fall as the open door for salvation to the Gentile world.¹⁴⁸ Yet, he does not see this fall as final - rather, he believes the glorious future for Israel involves “restored and converted Israel as a nation to bring *the nations* to a knowledge of their glorious Messiah and King.”¹⁴⁹ This will take place at the time that God’s rule is established.¹⁵⁰ For, His kingdom shall “become manifestly and universally true by and by, after Israel as a nation shall, in and through Christ, enter experimentally into the relationship.”¹⁵¹

Thus, two connected conclusions can be derived from Baron’s premillennial theology. 1. Baron held a premillennial view much like the others we have examined - a rule that is connected to the restoration of Israel, a people with whom God has an “everlasting covenant.”¹⁵² And 2. Baron connects the “eschaton” with Jewish mission work. It is the Abrahamic covenant that Baron believes has application spiritually as the covenant of grace for all, demonstrating a close connection to earlier evangelical and Reformed thought. This keeps him well within the covenantal premillennialism that still largely dominated evangelical thinking.

In this context his approach to the Church and doctrine was much like the Bonar brothers. And yet, his view that the Abrahamic covenant had very specific and certain promises (including land) to Israel demonstrates a growing Judeo-

142 David Baron, *Israel in the Plan of God*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1983), see back cover.

143 David Baron, *The Shepherd of Israel and His Scattered Flock: A Solution of the Enigma of Jewish History*, (Eugen, Or: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004 reprint), 139.

144 Baron, *Shepherd of Israel*, v.

145 Baron, *Shepherd of Israel*, v. Notice how this conclusion is remarkably similar to Ryle’s “living book of evidence” statement quoted earlier, whereas Baron noticeably capitalizes the word “Jew” for emphasis.

146 Baron, *Israel*, 281.

147 Baron, *Israel*, 282.

148 Baron, *Israel*, 282.

149 Baron, *Israel*, 283.

150 Baron, *Israel*, 286.

151 Baron, *Israel*, 143.

152 Baron, *Israel*, 146.

centric shift in the Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, a shift in interpretation that would find its climax in the writings of the Plymouth Brethren premillennialists and later dispensationalists.¹⁵³

His views of the millennium must be understood in context; however, of the current phase of God's kingdom which is largely individual and oriented toward the Gospel of grace, revealing the need for decided missionary activity. Baron writes that the "mission of the Church is to evangelise the world with a view to the gathering in of *individuals* out of all nations into its fold."¹⁵⁴ This statement is largely similar to Ryle who writes "I believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people - and not to convert all mankind,"¹⁵⁵ revealing the common bifurcation of the Church's current role in contrast to the events surrounding the messianic rule of Christ.

Baron compares the state of unbelief that the nation of Israel will experience in their land immediately preceding the second coming of the Lord with their state at the time of Jesus' incarnation and first coming.¹⁵⁶ Baron also believes in a literal, personal end time Antichrist as he states "if we interpret Scripture rightly, they shall have entered into covenant and sworn allegiance to a false Messiah."¹⁵⁷ Further, Baron seems to hold that the "day of Jacob's trouble" is yet future as well as Ezekiel's prophecies looking forward to the day of Jesus' glorious kingdom.¹⁵⁸

Unlike some of his British counterparts,

Baron seems to interpret many passages in the book of Revelation in a futurist sense, thus his strong conviction of an Antichrist and future trial for Israel.¹⁵⁹ Much of this thought is likely due to his highly Judeo-centric and literal view of the Old Testament prophets. We have already seen the evolution from older men such as Gill to more contemporary writers such as Spurgeon. But, most of those still held at least a hybrid if not full historicist view of prophecy in general.

Therefore, it is important to remember that "as prophetic interpretation settled into established grooves during the 1830s and 1840s, two schools of thought emerged."¹⁶⁰ And, the "dominant school was that normally called 'historicist.'"¹⁶¹

The second school of thought by contrast, fostered withdrawal from public concerns into an esoteric world of speculation about supernatural events still to come. This, the futurist school held that the book of Revelation depicts not the course of history but the great happenings of the future.¹⁶²

Modern futurism seems to have gained a foothold via works such as that of Samuel Roffey Maitland (1792–1866), some of which seemed polemical answering the previous historicist interpretations of both Daniel and Revelation.¹⁶³

While Maitland showed interest in the 1260 days of Daniel as early as 1826, he elaborated on this subject further in 1834.¹⁶⁴ On the opening page there is a quote by one called "Bishop

153 Baron, *Israel*, 149.

154 Baron, *Israel*, 283.

155 Ryle, *Coming Events*, preface.

156 David Baron, *Zechariah: A Commentary on His Visions and Prophecies*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, Undated reprint), 492.

157 Baron, *Zechariah*, 494.

158 Baron, *Zechariah*, 494, 496.

159 Baron, *Zechariah*, 27-28, 464.

160 Bebbington, 85.

161 Bebbington, 85.

162 Bebbington, 85.

163 Bebbington, 86.

164 Bebbington, 86-87. See, "S.R.Maitland, *The Twelve Hundred and Sixty Days in Reply to the Strictures of William Cuninghame, Esq. of Lainshaw, in the County of Ayr*. (J.G.&F. Rivington, 1834)"

Horsley” denouncing the view of Mede that the 1260 days in prophecy are to be understood as literal days. Maitland then proceeds to explain his reasoning of answering, what was once a cordial exchange of views, a debate that seemed to turn to name calling. Maitland suggests that he had, by inference, been called “stupid and dishonest”¹⁶⁵ in order to bolster Mr. Cuninghame’s interpretation. The pamphlet seems to give a thorough analysis of the debate, and there are not a few details that we can learn from Maitland’s views.

Perhaps the most poignant detail we see is the conviction of Maitland that he was on the side of history when he suggests “did not all those whose opinions we know for more than a thousand years after the Apostles, believe that the 1260 days would be natural days, and that the Antichrist would be an individual persecutor of the Church of a character altogether different from that of the Pope.”¹⁶⁶ From there, he writes “I am told that I rest my chief argument on the primitive Church, and the Fathers.”¹⁶⁷ Maitland acknowledges Cuninghame “may know more about the discrepancies among interpreters” concerning the 1260 days, etc.¹⁶⁸ Yet, it cannot be missed that he rested much of his interpretation on the Patristics, a view not held by Darby, which we shall see later.

In a sense, then, we don’t see a direct chain of interpretive succession in the evolving views of futurism, but rather, it was a broader shift taking root. These thoughts were part and parcel of the interpretive milieu and the growing futurism that was intertwined with a growing polemicism against speculative year-day prophets such as William Miller, a Baptist

preacher who became part of what is known as the “Great Disappointment,” another name for a failed prediction of when Christ would return.¹⁶⁹

This momentous change may be a more pronounced point of contrast than the supposed bifurcation of dispensational and non-dispensational theology. And, it is this growing futurism that dominates much of the thinking of the premillennialists especially in Ireland at the time as we shall see in the next article.

However, for a majority of the writers in England, historicist interpretations still remained commonplace.¹⁷⁰ This should not be a surprise due to the Puritan influence upon evangelicalism as a whole.¹⁷¹ Nor should it be a surprise due to the historicist interpretation that dominated the Puritans’ view of the prophecies of the millennium as “applied variously to universal history,” regardless of whether the individual Puritans held to a premillennial stance or not.¹⁷² What we have seen; however, is that many of the premillennialists were willing to augment some of their stances while maintaining many of the themes such as the conversion of the Jews found even in the Reformed confessions.¹⁷³ In this sense, premillennialism of men such as the Bonar brothers, M’Cheyne, Spurgeon and Ryle may be understood as a continuation of the theology they inherited, possibly as a result of the revived premillennial and “Zionist” convictions of the 16th and 17th centuries.¹⁷⁴ This renewed interest in Zionism is only amplified by the renewed

165 Maitland, iv.

166 Maitland, 4.

167 Maitland, 4.

168 Maitland, 7.

169 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 75-76.

170 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 80-81.

171 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 4.

172 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 18.

173 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 258.

174 Wilkinson, 135-136.

interest in Hebraism.¹⁷⁵

E.B. Elliott, the historicist premillennialist commentator which Spurgeon recommended heavily, gave “a scholarly defence of the historicist premillennial reading of Revelation.”¹⁷⁶ Yet, he simultaneously affirmed the patristic literalistic readings of “the 1260 ‘days’ of Daniel’s prophecy.”¹⁷⁷ While this may not warrant a consensus on certain details within prophetic interpretation, it does serve as another example that literalism was another key tenant at least for discussion within premillennialist thinking. Two premillennialists that we have examined, David Baron and S.R. Maitland, represent a transition in England to a form of futurism, which may have been a part of a growing shift within English premillennialism as “other English Calvinistic Baptists meanwhile refuted the ‘year-day’ theory and the historicist approach adopted by Elliott, Cumming and a large part of the Nonconformists.”¹⁷⁸ This set the stage for a more thorough break from the date setting tendencies of historicism, especially those of the more extreme variety such as the Irvingites and Millerites.¹⁷⁹

In this article I introduced a thesis that the categorization of premillennialism in Christian eschatology is simplistic. I then evaluated the current literature, briefly contrasting modern “historic premillennialism” and dispensationalism with some key thinkers from the prior century. I then continued this thesis by assessing 19th century British premillennialism as a major case study in comparison (and contrast) with the present, noting the evolution of premillennialism with a growing shift from

historicism to futurism. In the next article, I will examine prominent Irish premillennial thinkers and further elaborate on this growing futurism. From there I will analyze further conclusions comparing both Irish and Anglo premillennialism from the “long 19th century” noting key theological trends within their premillennial convictions with a proposed way forward in the discussion.

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175 Wilkinson, 150.

176 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 80-81.

177 Wilkinson, 115.

178 Gribben, *Trans-Atlantic*, 81.

179 Wilkinson, 246.

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