

EARLY HISTORY OF MILLENNIUM TEACHING

The Millennium doctrine started in an ungodly heretic by the name of **Cerinthus**, who lived in the first century. It is true that the Jews generally believed that the Messiah would establish a literal or earthly kingdom. And even some of them believed that Messiah's reign would last a thousand years. We here give an extract from Neander's History of Christian Dogmas, Vol. 1, Page 248.

"The idea of a Millennial reign proceeded from Judaism; for among the Jews the representation was current that the Messiah would reign a thousand years upon earth. . . . Such products of Jewish imagination passed over into Christianity."

As before stated, Cerinthus was the first to attempt to introduce this doctrine under Christianity. Let history speak. In Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter 28, is preserved a fragment from the writings of Caius, who lived about the close of the second century, which gives us the following account of Cerinthus's heresy:

"But Cerinthus, too, through revelations written, as he would have us believe, by a great apostle, brings before us marvelous things, which he pretends were shown him by angels; alleging that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ is to be on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem is again to be subject to desires and pleasures. And being an enemy to the scriptures of God, wishing to deceive men, he says that there is to be space of a thousand years for marriage festivities." "One of the doctrines he taught was, that Christ would have an earthly kingdom."

This is the true origin of the Millennium theory. The reader will observe how lightly our author speaks of Cerinthus's idea of the kingdom of Christ being set up on earth after the resurrection. He says this doctrine was

"something which he [Cerinthus] pretends was shown to him by angels."

Caius must therefore have believed the orthodox teachings of the scriptures, that Christ's kingdom was set up at his first coming. Observe also that Caius calls Cerinthus "*an enemy to the scriptures of God,*" and one who was "*wishing to deceive men.*" This language he uses with special reference to the one thousand years Cerinthus claimed would be spent in sensuality. Notice also that Cerinthus believed in an earthly kingdom.

Cerinthus lived in the days of the apostle John. We will now call your attention to the attitude of the beloved apostle toward this Millennial teacher.

Irenaeus, who was born about 120 A. D. and was acquainted with Polycarp, the disciple of John,

[Eusebius's Eccl. Hist., V. 24], states that while John was at Ephesus, he entered a bath to wash and found that Cerinthus was within, and refused to bathe in the same bath house, but left the

building, and exhorted those with him to do the same, saying, "Let us flee, lest the bath fall in, as long as Cerinthus, that enemy of the truth, is within."—Eusebius's Eccl. Hist., III. 28.

Let this be a rebuke to modern Millennial advocates. They claim their doctrine is well founded in the Apocalypse of John. But John called the founder of their theory "*that enemy of the truth.*"

"Cerinthus required his followers to worship the supreme God.... He promised them a resurrection of their bodies, which would be succeeded by exquisite delights in the Millenary reign of Christ.... For Cerinthus supposed that Christ would hereafter return . . . and would reign with his followers a thousand years in Palestine."—"—Mosheim's Eccl. Hist., Page 50.

"Cerinthus required his followers to retain part of the Mosaical law, but to regulate their lives by the example of Christ: and taught that after the resurrection Christ would reign upon earth, with his faithful disciples, a thousand years, which would be spent in the highest sensual indulgences.

*This mixture of Judaism and Oriental philosophy was calculated to make many converts, and this sect soon became very numerous. They admitted a part of St. Matthew's Gospel but rejected the rest, and held the epistles of St. Paul in great abhorrence."—*Gregory and Ruter's Church History., Page 30.

"Even though the floods of the nations and the vain superstitions of heretics should revolt against their true faith, they are overcome, and shall be dissolved as the foam, because Christ is the rock by which, and on which, the church is founded. And thus it is overcome by no [16] traces of maddened men. Therefore they are not to be heard who assure themselves that there is to be an earthly reign of a thousand years; who think, that is to say, with the heretic Cerinthus. For the kingdom of Christ is now eternal in his saints."

—From a commentary on the Apocalypse, by Victorinus, Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Thank God for the united testimony of history. Observe, dear reader, how closely the modern Millennium teachers cling to the doctrines of their founder. Cerinthus taught that "*Christ will have an earthly kingdom.*" "*After the resurrection the kingdom of Christ is to be on earth.*"

"The resurrection would be followed by exquisite delights in the Millenary reign of Christ."

"That Christ would hereafter return, and would reign with his followers a thousand years in Palestine."

The only difference is that his modern followers have dropped the idea of sensuality. But how did the early church regard the doctrine of Cerinthus? The apostle John called Cerinthus "*that enemy of the truth.*" They taught that

"they are not to be heard who assure themselves that there is to be an earthly reign of a thousand years."

What was the doctrine of the early church according to history?

"Christ is the rock on which, and by which the church is founded."

"The kingdom of Christ is now eternal in his saints."

"It was the universal feeling among primitive Christians that they were living in the last period of the world's history."—Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. VIII.. Page 534.

The reason they believed this was because the New Testament was their faith, and this is the doctrine of the New Testament throughout. No wonder Cerinthus and his followers

"rejected part of St. Matthew's Gospel, and held the epistles of Paul in great abhorrence."

Just so do modern Millennium teachers dwell very little in the plain Gospels and Epistles to prove their doctrines, but speculate in prophecy and revelation.

Having seen that Cerinthus and his false doctrine were rejected by God's church we will now come to its next chief advocate, **Papias**, who lived in the first half of the second century.

Eusebius, under the heading "*The Writings of Papias*," says of him:

"The same historian also gives other accounts, which he says he adds as received by him from unwritten tradition, likewise some strange parables of our Lord, and of his doctrine, and some other matters rather too fabulous. In these he says there would be a certain Millennium after the resurrection, and that there would be a corporeal reign of Christ on this very earth; which things he appears to have imagined, as if they were authorized by the apostolic narrations, not understanding correctly those matters which they propounded mystically in their representations. For he was very limited in his comprehension, as is evident from his discourses."—Eusebius's Eccl. Hist., Book m, Chap. 39, Page 115.

Historians generally tell us that Papias was a very zealous advocate of this imaginary reign of Christ on earth.

"The first distinguished opponent of this doctrine was Origen, who attacked it with great earnestness and ingenuity, and seems, in spite of some opposition to have thrown it into general discredit."—Wadlington's History, Page 56.

"This obscure doctrine was probably known to but very few except the Fathers of the church, and is very sparingly mentioned by them during the first two centuries; and there is reason to believe that it scarcely attained much notoriety even among the learned Christians, until it was made a matter of controversy by Origen, and then rejected by the great majority. In fact we find Origen himself asserting that it was confined to those of the simpler sort."—Wadlington's History, Page 56.

Next among the advocates of this doctrine was **Nepos**, a bishop in Egypt. He advocated the doctrine about A. D. 255. We here insert the following from Eusebius's History, Book VII, Chapter 23, under the heading "Nepos, and His Schism."

"He taught that the promises given to holy men in the scriptures should be understood more as the Jews understood them, and supposed that there would be a certain Millennium of sensual luxury on this earth: thinking, therefore, that he could establish his own opinion by the Revelation of John . . . He (Nepos) asserts that there will be an earthly reign of Christ."

"Though Millennialism had [18] been suppressed by the early church, it was nevertheless from time to time revived by heretical sects."—Dr. Schaff's History, Page 299.

"Nowhere in the discourses of Jesus is there a hint of a limited duration of the Messianic kingdom. The apostolic epistles are equally free from any trace of Chiliasm."—Encyclopedia Britannica—Articles on Millennium.

To sum up the uniform voice of history, the theory of a literal kingdom and reign on the earth was gathered from Jewish fabulous "apocalypse," "unwritten tradition," "carnal misapprehensions," "pretended visions," "suppositions," and "superstitious imaginations."

The vain worldly expectation that the Messiah would establish a literal kingdom caused the Jews to reject him, and his spiritual kingdom. They only wanted an earthly kingdom; hence rejected and crucified the Son of God. As soon as the church began to apostatize, and lost the glory of his spiritual kingdom, vain ambitions awakened the old Jewish desire for a literal kingdom.

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