

MILLENNIAL HOPES IN THE WESLEY FAMILY: SAMUEL WESLEY SR.'S BEQUEST

by

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The topic of the millennium was broadly ignored in doctrinal treatments of eschatology in the modern age until recently, outside of a sub-group of evangelical theologians. Partly due to the flamboyance of this sub-group, most other professional theologians appeared to judge debate over alternative models of the millennium as similar to debate over the date of Christ's second coming—irrelevant to present life, impossible to determine, and presumptuous even to attempt.

This reactionary dismissal has had unfortunate results. Among others, it made it difficult to discern the convictions of earlier theologians about the relationship of God's rule to present socioeconomic realities, because these convictions are typically embedded in explicit or assumed millennial models. As Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart note, it was those earlier writers who were most overtly millenarian (hence most easily dismissed) that served in many respects as "the guardian of the more immanent and this-worldly aspects of the Christian eschatological hope."¹ The loss of their voice helped promote an *other-worldly* Christian hope like that critiqued by Ludwig Feuerbach, who charged famously, "Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul."²

In this light, Jürgen Moltmann's decision to make consideration of millenarianism central to a mainline theological treatment of eschatology in 1995 was largely unprecedented, yet very much in keeping with his

¹Richard Bauckham & Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 137; cf. 132–39.

²Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 287.

³Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996 [German original, 1995]), 131–202; his thesis is on p. 192. Cf. Brandon Lee Morgan, "Eschatology for the Oppressed: Millenarianism and Liberation in the Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 39 (2012): 379–93.

goal of highlighting the socio-political and ecological dimensions of God's work of new creation.³ At the same time, it is not surprising that his exposition reveals lack of clarity about the models prominent among earlier Christian writers.⁴

The example of Moltmann suggests that any adequate consideration of eschatology in the Wesleyan tradition must include attention to alternative and shifting stances within the tradition concerning millenarianism. The purpose of this paper is to explore the stance on this topic (and its implications) that Samuel Wesley Sr. bequeathed to John and Charles Wesley. To put this inheritance in perspective, I will first sketch briefly the origin of Christian millenarianism and the main variants in mid-seventeenth century England.

The notion of the "millennium" emerged in pre-Christian Judaism as a way of handling the alternative hope offered in Isaiah (long life in the present world) and Daniel (eternal life in a reconstituted world). As an option to forcing a choice between these two visions, some suggested that Isaiah was describing a still-future thousand-year golden age in this world, while Daniel was describing the final state after this age. Within Judaism this left three basic options: 1) affirming only Isaiah's vision of shalom in this world, to be enjoyed by those then alive, as the ultimate hope (i.e., denying resurrection and eternal life); 2) affirming instead Daniel's vision of shalom coming for all, but only after resurrection in a new heavens and new earth; or 3) combining these, with the millennium as an intermediate earthly anticipation of the future eternal hope.

In light of Christ's resurrection, the choice for Christians was reduced to whether or not one saw a need for the intermediate period of the millennium, prior to the general resurrection and God's creation of the new heavens and new earth. More accurately, that was the choice conveyed by the *Hebraic* roots of our faith. The *Greco-Roman* culture that profoundly shaped early Christianity introduced other options. In particular, dominant currents in Greek philosophy, particularly the Platonic strand, portrayed our earthly existence as inherently defective, and the ultimate human hope as release at the moment of death *from* this earthly setting into the timeless realm of purely spiritual reality. This sparked a divide in early Christianity between those who affirmed the importance of a millennium (called "chiliasts" reflecting the Latin translation of the

⁴See Richard Bauckham, "Must Christian Eschatology be Millenarian? A Response to Jürgen Moltmann," in K. Brower and M. Elliot (eds), *Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 263–77.

Greek word transliterated “millennium” in English), and those who rejected any need for such an intermediate expression of our hope for eternal spiritual existence (“antichiliasts”).⁵

Irenaeus is representative of early Christian chiliasts, who endorsed the millennium as an intermediate expression of our final hope. In addition to honoring scriptural warrant, Irenaeus's interest in the millennium was the counterpart of his conviction that God's rule was finding little expression in the present socioeconomic situation (with Christianity marginal and persecuted), or in the lives of most Christians. He embraced the millennium as a time for fulfilling the promise of God's triumphant rule in the present creation, and to provide time for the additional spiritual growth that most believers need before they are ready to enter God's glorious presence. Since Irenaeus and the other early chiliasts believed that such an expression of God's rule in the present world would be possible *only* if Christ was present as glorified ruling King, their stance became known eventually as *premillennialism* (since Christ returns *before* the millennium). But unlike many later premillennialists, early chiliasts generally conceived of the millennium as a hope for *all* Christians—assuming that believers who died before Christ's return remain in a state of “sleep” in the grave, awaiting their resurrection at his appearing, to enjoy God's perfect rule in the millennial age and complete their spiritual growth.

Those early Christians drawn to Greco-Roman emphases increasingly questioned the language in Scripture of deceased believers remaining in a state of sleep in the grave. They were drawn instead to passages that suggest believers enter directly into God's heavenly presence (paradise) at death, where they participate consciously in God's *eternal* rule. This being the case, these early Christians saw no need for a future earthly millennial reign of Christ—indeed, many specifically rejected it as a *Jewish* rather than a Christian hope (this antichilist stance is now typically called *amillennialism*). St. Augustine gave this stance its enduring form. Significantly, Augustine framed his eschatology after Christianity's establishment as the religion of the Roman Empire. While he was careful not to equate God's present rule univocally with either the empire or the church, he was bound to connect the new relation of the church to civil

⁵Two helpful surveys of this early split and later historical variations are Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002); and Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

authority with biblical promises about God's rule. In his treatise *The City of God* Augustine encouraged fellow Christians to accept that the present world-order will *always* be a fluctuating mix of God's rule with human brokenness and sin—with the unmitigated expression of God's rule found only in God's eternal heavenly presence. Augustine's stance came to dominate Christian eschatology, particularly in the medieval West. As a result, affirmation of an earthly millennium nearly disappeared from Christian circles by the fifth century of the church age.

Some questions were raised about the broadly standard amillennial model at the outset of the Reformation.⁶ But the Lutheran and Reformed traditions ultimately reaffirmed this stance, at least wherever they achieved status as the established church now giving appropriate expression to the dimensions of God's rule that are available in the present age. Those who suffered at their hands—Anabaptists and others who rejected the notion of established religion—were the key exception. They reclaimed chiliasm, with its longing for a future time when God would dramatically vindicate the righteous and establish an earthly reign of *true* Christianity.

Reflecting the influence of Lutheran and Reformed traditions (through Thomas Cranmer), the newly independent Church of England officially rejected millenarianism at first.⁷ But Britain proved to be fertile ground for the notion of a future earthly era with radically transformed socio-political structures—particularly among anti-episcopacy, anti-monarchy circles. This interest took radical form in the Fifth Monarchy Men, who tried unsuccessfully to initiate the new age in the 1650s by revolt.⁸ Their example understandably cast a pall over millenarianism, leading to a broad scholarly assumption by the mid-twentieth century that affirmation of a literal millennium ceased to be a serious option for

⁶For more details on the following summary, see Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁷See Article 41 of the 42 Articles adopted in 1553: “They that go about to renew the fable of heretics called Millenarii are repugnant to Holy Scripture, and cast themselves headlong into Jewish dotage.” This article was removed from the official standards in 1563.

⁸See Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); and Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Revised edn.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

all but the most fringe Christian groups in England by the late seventeenth century.⁹

My previous adoption of this scholarly assumption is evident in the ease with which I presented John Wesley's comments on eschatology through the middle of his career as echoing a reigning amillennial model.¹⁰ Fortunately I have lived long enough, and my interest in issues of eschatology has continued long enough, that I have the opportunity now to revise—or at least nuance—this depiction of the eschatological hope that John (and Charles) Wesley imbibed with their upbringing.

A major prod toward my revised understanding of the Wesley brothers on this topic has been recent scholarship on millenarianism in seventeenth-century England, particularly Warren Johnston's *Revelation Restored*.¹¹ Johnston demonstrates convincingly that interest in an earthly millennium continued—across the Protestant confessional divisions—in England through the end of the seventeenth century. More importantly, he highlights distinct strands within this general interest. After an introductory chapter, Johnston considers first (in Chap. 2) the “radical” strand, which connected millennial hope to championing militant actions and attitudes against the Restoration state and church (i.e., the reinstated monarchy and episcopacy after the failure of the Commonwealth interlude). While this dissenting form of millenarianism was most common strand in the early 1660s, Johnston traces its constriction through the next few decades. He devotes Chapter 3 to a “moderate nonconformist” strand that increasingly displaced the radical form. While these dissenters from the Church of England found governmental ordinances and oppression unpalatable, they rejected social subversion and violent political response—believing instead that their passive resistance and suffering for the sake of conscience would be honored when God eventually removed the agents of their persecution and brought in a millennium of true Protestant faith and life. Johnston devotes later chapters to millennial

⁹E.g., William Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603–1660* (New York: Macmillan, 1969); and Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁰See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 236; and Maddox, “Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory,” In M. D. Meeks (ed.), *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2004), 38.

¹¹Warren Johnston, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011).

themes in the supposed plot by Roman Catholics to assassinate Charles II in the early 1680s (Chap. 5), and in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89 that brought William and Mary to the throne (Chap. 6).

But for our purposes, Johnston's fourth chapter is most instructive. Here he probes post-Restoration proponents of an earthly millennium who aligned with the Church of England. While there were fewer such Anglican advocates of the millennium than among the dissenters, Johnston highlights how they went beyond encouraging *passive resistance* (like the moderate dissenters) to endorsing conformity, or at least *passive obedience* to the current (imperfect) king and church. For this Anglican strand, such conformity would be honored by God when Christ—the *true king*—returns to institute the millennial age of earthly peace and tranquility through the *true church*. The millennial age would then be followed by eternity in God's heavenly realm. As this suggests, this Anglican strand of millenarians were solidly premillennial, and chose that stance in part because of their emphasis on conformity to the earliest church. But Johnston stresses their affinity as well for Joseph Mede's specific defense of a premillennial reading of Revelation; which was republished in 1664 with a preface by John Worthington seeking to rehabilitate it from the taint of radicalism.¹²

Shortly after reading Johnston's treatise, I had occasion to look over Luke Tyerman's biography of Samuel Wesley Sr., where I noticed his comment: "It is a remarkable fact, not generally known, that Samuel Wesley was a millenarian."¹³ Tyerman's cited evidence for this comment is an article published October 17, 1691 in the *Athenian Mercury*.¹⁴ As Tyerman notes, this periodical was an early publishing venture of Samuel Wesley Sr., in conjunction with his brother-in-law John Dutton and Richard Sault. It provided answers to questions submitted by readers on a range of topics. The answers are unsigned, but Tyerman suggests that Wesley, the only clergyman of the three main contributors, provided most of the answers to theological inquiries.¹⁵ This suggestion is confirmed by Charles Gildon, in his *History of the Athenian Society*, published the same

¹²See Johnston, *Revelation*, 133.

¹³Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. Samuel Wesley* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1866), 146.

¹⁴Tyerman refers to the journal in question as the *Athenian Gazette*; this was the title of the very first issue, but when the publishers of the *London Gazette* raised concern John Dutton changed the title to *Athenian Mercury* from the second issue on.

¹⁵Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 140–41.

year as the essay on the millennium to which Tyerman refers.¹⁶ More importantly, Gildon specifically identifies Samuel Wesley as the author of this essay!¹⁷

Over 150 years after Tyerman's comment, scholarly recognition of Samuel Wesley Sr.'s advocacy for an earthly millennium remains quite limited. I have located to-date only three subsequent discussions, all drawing on Tyerman.¹⁸ This helps explain why Johnston makes no mention of Samuel Wesley in his chapter on late seventeenth-century Anglican millenarians, even though the essay in the *Athenian Mercury* epitomizes Johnston's themes in the chapter. In order to demonstrate this resonance, I append below an annotated transcription of the extended essay on the millennium published in the *Athenian Mercury* in Oct. 1691, and a much shorter piece that alludes to the millennium published in 1693. Let me highlight some of the points to notice in the initial essay.

First, it is well-known from Samuel Wesley Sr.'s *Advice to a Young Clergyman* and elsewhere that he placed great authority in the teaching of the early Church fathers, particularly the first three centuries.¹⁹ Thus he began the 1691 essay: "We believe, as all the Christians of the purest ages did, that the saints shall reign with Christ on earth a thousand years" (§1, emphasis added). In his subsequent discussion he chides the antichiliasts (i.e., the amillennial stance more common among Anglicans) for dismissing the teaching of the earliest fathers, most of whom affirmed a millennium. This suggests that the best place to look for the "Anglican strand" of millenarians at this time might be among those who most prized the earliest church.

¹⁶See Charles Gildon, *History of the Athenian Society* (London: James Dowlley, 1691), 13.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸Tyerman's comment caught the eye of his contemporary William Maude (d. 1883), a prominent advocate of premillennialism, who published an essay in a recently founded periodical devoted to such advocacy, "Samuel Wesley on the Millennium," *The Rainbow* 5 (1868) 22–30; Maude leans on Tyerman in assigning the 1691 essay to Wesley, then reproduces it at length. More recently, Gilbert D. McEwan makes the same connections in *The Oracle of the Coffee House: John Dunton's "Athenian Mercury"* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1972), 165–67. And Tyerman's account is echoed briefly in Bruce Marino, "Through a Glass Darkly: The Eschatological Vision of John Wesley" (Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1994), 104–5.

¹⁹See Samuel Wesley, *Advice to a Young Clergyman* (London: Charles Rivington, 1735), 40–41.

Second, Wesley is equally critical of the antichiliasts for setting aside the emphases on God's rule in this world in the Hebrew Scriptures, insisting that any "Jewish errors . . . of carnal delights" that may have been annexed to hope for the millennium by "heretics or weak men" may be rejected "and yet the foundation still be firm" (§2). To set aside this foundation, he suggests, is ultimately to "deny *all the scriptures*" (§3).

Third, it is noteworthy that, beyond his appeals to Scripture and the early fathers, the only relatively contemporary scholar that Wesley cites is Joseph Mede (§2, §7).

Fourth, it is evident from the opening paragraph on that Wesley views the millennium as inaugurated by the return of Christ and the "first resurrection" (which is not *general*, but only of the "martyrs and holy men"). He specifically rejects the suggestion that biblical language about the millennium refers to "the state of Christ's kingdom as it is now under the gospel" (§4). So he is technically affirming *premillennialism*.

Fifth, Wesley is explicit that the millennial age remains a *terrestrial* existence, although under the changed conditions of the "new heavens and a new earth" or the "New Jerusalem" (see particularly §1 and §7).

Sixth, while Wesley allows that many promises about a time of God's rule in this age found in the Old Testament focus on the Jews, as distinguished from the Gentiles, he insists that they also (along with New Testament texts) refer to a future time of "peace, tranquility, and glory of the church" (§4). Wesley does not connect enjoyment of that future blessed time with proper obedience to king and church in this essay, but his loyalist stance is clear elsewhere.

And finally, note that Wesley *restricts* the biblical promise of "new heavens and a new earth" to the millennial age, assuming it is followed by a general conflagration and the transition of the millennial saints (and all the remainder of the saved raised at the general resurrection) to an eternal heavenly existence (see §11, quoting Tertullian; and the 1693 short essay).

While there is not time or room to explore Samuel Wesley's numerous manuscript sermons seeking further corroborating evidence, I believe that Gildon's testimony (cited above) and the general fit of the preceding themes with what is known of Samuel Wesley's convictions are sufficient to confirm his place within the "Anglican strand" of millenarianism described by Johnston. There is also every reason to assume that Samuel instilled these emphases in his sons.

Recognizing this inheritance from his father can help explain, for example, why the premillennial themes evident in Charles Wesley's writ-

ing are not “ironic.”²⁰ Rather, they suggest that Charles inherited from his father both the expectation of an earthly millennium and the central rationale of its purpose, as reflected by a stanza in a 1747 hymn:

According to his word,
His oath to sinners given,
We look to see restor'd
The ruin'd earth and heaven,
In a new world his truth to prove,
A world of righteousness and love.²¹

This inheritance also casts light on a characteristic of Charles's depictions of the millennium. They focus more on the restored piety and love that (he believed) characterized the early post-Pentecost church, than on renewed *shalom* among all creatures and in human social structures (as in Isaiah). The following stanzas are representative:

But may we not expect to see
The genuine pristine piety
On this our earth restor'd;
The heavenly life again made known,
The Christians all in Spirit one,
One Spirit with their Lord?

Surely Thou wilt from heaven descend,
The dark apostacy to end,
And re-collect thine own:
These eyes our beauteous King shall view,
Jesus creating all things new
On his millennial throne!

Then shall thy church in Thee abide,
Renew'd, and wholly sanctified,
And pure as those above;
No power shall then impair our peace,
Or break the bond of perfectness,
The unity of love.²²

²⁰See this characterization in Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism*, 67. It reflects Gribben's reliance on the portrayal of CW by Kenneth Newport.

²¹CW, Hymn 48, st.7, *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 61. All of Charles Wesley's verse, published and manuscript, are available on the website for the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke University.

²²CW, Hymn on Acts 6:1, st. 4–6, MS Acts (1764), 98–99.

To be sure, Charles Wesley believed that Christ's millennial reign would put an end to "infernal war," establishing peace beyond the confines of the church. But he gave no countenance to suggestions that Christ's cause might be advanced by forceful overthrow of perceived unjust social structures. He dismissed the rebellious colonists in North America as the equivalent of the discredited "Fifth Monarchy" movement.²³ And he pilloried the popular uprising in the early 1780s in Britain, led by Lord George Gordon, against the Catholic relief act.²⁴ Posing no threat to the monarchy or the established Church of England, Charles (like his father) located hope for peace and reconciliation, even with the rebel Americans, in the Spirit's work of renewing hearts.

Prince of Peace, and Israel's King,
With thyself the blessing bring:
Peace divine thy Spirit imparts;
Plant thy kingdom in our hearts. . . .

Sprinkling us with thy own blood,
Reconcile us first to God,
Then let all the British race
Kindly, cordially embrace.²⁵

Finally, like his father, Charles Wesley apparently equated the biblical promise of "new heavens and a new earth" with the millennial age,²⁶ assuming that this would then perish in the final conflagration.²⁷ Thus he can speak of Christ returning to a renewed earth "to reign before thy saints alone, and *then* through all eternity."²⁸

And what about John Wesley? While I previously highlighted the resonance of emphases on eschatology in his writings (through the 1760s) with those of the amillennial model most broadly endorsed in the Church of England in the eighteenth century, I now recognize that these

²³See CW, Hymn 17, esp. st. 3, *Hymns for the Nation* (1781), 23–24.

²⁴See CW, *The Protestant Association* (London: Paramore, 1781).

²⁵CW, "For Peace," sts. 4 & 6, *Hymns for the National Fast* (1782), 23.

²⁶See, for example, Hymn 48, "At the Parting of Friends," sts. 5–8, *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 60–61; Hymn 15, *Hymns for the Year 1756*, 21–22; and Hymn on Malachi 4:6, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:123.

²⁷See particularly Hymn 174, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) 2:237–38; Hymn 40, "Thy Kingdom Come," *Hymns of Intercession for all Mankind* (1758), 33–34; and Hymn 16, *Hymns for the Nation* (1781), 22–23.

²⁸CW, Hymn 9, st. 4, *Hymns for the Nation* (1781), 14 (emphasis added).

emphases could fit equally within his father's Anglican version of millennialism. Like his father, John held that "the time will come when Christianity will prevail over all and cover the *earth*," and insisted that this time was not yet present.²⁹ And prior to 1770 John expected, like his father, that the promises in the Hebrew prophets about God's rule "will be fulfilled during the thousand years wherein Christ shall reign upon earth."³⁰ But by the last decade of his life John Wesley had become convinced instead that these things would be brought to pass by the Holy Spirit, working *through* the church, ushering in a time of "latter-day glory" *before* the second coming of Christ.³¹ It was this "postmillennial" hope that took root in early American Methodism and dominated through at least the first half of the nineteenth century (longer in the northern church).

²⁹See JW, Sermon 4, *Scriptural Christianity* (1744), III.1 & IV.1, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984ff), 1:169, 172–73.

³⁰An addition by JW to his sources in the comment on Isaiah 60:18, in JW, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (Bristol: Pine, 1765).

³¹For more details on this see *Responsible Grace* or "Nurturing the New Creation," as cited above.

Appendix: Samuel Wesley Texts¹

Athenian Mercury (October 17, 1691)²

Question: What think you of the millennium? And whether do you believe it is yet to come, or already past?

Answer: [1.] We believe, as all the Christians of the purest ages did, that the saints shall reign with Christ on earth a thousand years. That this reign shall be immediately before the general resurrection, and after the calling of the Jews, the fulness of the Gentiles, and the destruction of Antichrist, whom our Saviour shall destroy by the “brightness of his coming” and “appearance” in heaven.³ That at the beginning of this thousand years shall be the first resurrection, wherein martyrs and holy men shall rise and reign here in spiritual delights in the New Jerusalem—nay, in a new heaven and new earth, foretold by all the holy prophets. For which opinion of ours we hope to show no inconsiderable arguments—which, if they can be answered, we will willingly forsake it. And we think we have no less for it than the universal tradition of the Jews, the ancient church of God, the unanswerable authority of almost all the books in the Holy Bible, and the constant faith and doctrine of the first and purest ages of Christianity.

[2.] For the Jews, the antichiliasts are so far from denying them us on this point that one of their great arguments against the opinion, and indeed the only one that makes any sound, is that it is *Judaism*. But because the Jews held it, must it therefore be necessarily false? They also held the creation of the world and the resurrection from the dead. However that part of it, and those Jewish errors annexed to it by heretics or weak men, of carnal delights, etc., may be rejected and yet the foundation still be firm. For that the first Christians held it in a more sober sense we shall anon prove. But we have the authority of such Jews for this truth as were before our Saviour’s time and that nation’s refusing the Christian religion; nay, that which makes against them, for it affirms their *law should cease*. To instance in the famous tradition which they term *Domus Eliae*, which Elias lived under the second temple, before our Saviour’s

¹These texts have been edited to conform to modern (British) spelling and punctuation.

²*Athenian Mercury* 4.6 (Oct. 17, 1691), entire issue devoted to single question. Reissued in collected form as *Athenian Oracle* (1703), 1:282–88.

³Cf. 2 Thess. 2:8.

birth: “*Duo millia inane, Duo millia lex, Duo millia dies Messiae.*”⁴ Again, “*Justi quos resuscitabit Deus. . .*”⁵ [Translation:] “The righteous whom God shall raise to life again” (that is, at the first resurrection) “shall not any more be turned to dust.” He goes on discoursing the manner of their escape in the thousand years when God shall renew the world. But should this authority be questioned, we are yet more certain this was the opinion of the ancient Jews by several passages in the Apocrypha, particularly that in the 3rd [chapter] of Wisdom [of Solomon], from the 1st to the 8th [verses], “The souls of the righteous which are departed, shall shine in the time of their visitation. . . . They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people.” So 2 Maccabees 7:14,⁶ one of the seven brethren, “when he was ready to die, said,” (to Antiochus) “‘It is good being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by him’” (viz., in the first resurrection); “‘but as for thee, thou shalt have no *resurrection to life.*’” Accordingly Rabbi Solomon interprets Isa. 26:19, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise,” of martyrs (Isaiah was one of that number), and takes it as an antithesis of what went before [in] v. 14., “They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise (*rephaim non resurgent*)”—which *rephaim*⁷ he understands to be the *wicked*. For the wicked, he says, shall not arise in *saeculo futuro*;⁸ that is, shall not live again till the thousand years are over, as the very scriptures express it. And the 21st [chapter] of Proverbs, verse 16 seems plainly to intimate as much, “The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead.”

[3.] This for the opinion of the ancient Jews—which, that it was none of their *vain traditions*, but exactly agreeing with God’s word, seems so plain to us that we believe it is impossible for the antichiliasts to over-

⁴A Talmudic tradition, ascribed to a certain Elias, affirming that the world would exist for six thousand years: two thousand years without the law, two thousand years in the law, and two thousand years with the Messiah. Wesley’s source for this and the quote that follows was Joseph Mede, *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D.* (London: Richard Royston, 1672), 776.

⁵The third word is misspelled as *recussitabit*; corrected in 1728 edn. The Latin and the following English translation again come from Mede, *Works*, 776.

⁶Orig., “7:15.”; a misprint.

⁷A transliteration of the Hebrew word for “shades.”

⁸“Future age.” Wesley’s source for the quote of Rabbi Solomon is Mede, *Works*, 578.

throw our opinion unless they will deny *all the scriptures*, as they already have a good part of them because so directly against them (of which more anon). And here we might begin with the promises to Abraham and the patriarchs. But because we shall meet with them again, urged by a better hand, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we will till then dismiss them. Though we can bring other proofs almost as high, namely from the book of Job, chap. 19, vv. 25–26: “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. . . . In my flesh shall I see God.” That this “latter day” or “last day” (ἔσχατη ἡμέρα) is used in the Holy Scriptures for the time of the resurrection, everyone knows. At which time Job says he shall see his redeemer *upon earth*, and *in his flesh* or body, *renewed* again after the worms had destroyed it. But if this be not granted to reach any further than the general resurrection, let us go on to the Psalms, where we shall find much clearer authorities. Not then to insist on that in the 90th Psalm, “Thou turnest man to destruction. Again thou sayest, return ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday.”⁹ Not to insist on this, though from this place Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, nay perhaps the apostle himself in 2 Peter, infer the millennium. There is a text in the 104th Psalm which appears very fair for this *renovation*, the 29th verse and onward. He has been speaking before of man and the rest of God’s creation. He goes on: “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled. Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust.” Yet after this see the next verse: “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are *created*, and thou *renewest* the face of the *earth*.” And v. 32, “He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth. He toucheth the hills, and they smoke.” And v. 35, “Let the sinners” (or, they shall) “be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more!” What can be a plainer description of the ἀποκατάστασις, the renovation and restitution of the creature, of the new heaven and new earth, the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men? And in this very sense we find it interpreted by Methodius, Bishop of Tyre, in a fragment of his preserved by Epiphanius,

Et vero conturbatam iri creaturam. . . . But we are to expect that the creature shall be troubled, and that it shall die in the great conflagration, that it may be restored again, but not that it shall be totally extinct, that we ourselves also being renewed, may dwell in this new world free from grief or sorrow, according to

⁹Ps. 90:3.

that text, “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, thou renewest the face of the earth.”¹⁰

[4.] The book of Isaiah, besides what has already been urged, is full of plain prophecies to this purpose. Nor can we ever make the Jews, or hardly ourselves, believe that all those august promises of this peace, tranquility, and glory of the church—nay, in many places of the Jews distinguished from the Gentiles—are already fulfilled. If any affirm the contrary, we desire no more to convince them but Isa. 65:17 and 66:22, “Behold I create new heavens and a new earth. I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. . . . The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her.”¹¹ “For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind. . . . The new heavens and the new earth which I will make. . . .”¹² It hence appears that new heavens, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem shall be created. It appears that is not yet past, because that not yet accomplished: “the voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her.” Besides, the glorious appearance of the Lord in flaming fire to judge the world and render vengeance on his enemies is here described. But it is yet plainer that all this is to be taken, not of the state of Christ’s kingdom as it is now under the gospel, but as it will be at the restoration of all things. For thus St. Peter himself interprets it, 2 Pet. 3:13, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for *new heavens* and a *new earth*.” And where was this promise but in the very words before quoted? When was it to be made good? After “the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, the elements” (the στοιχεῖα, or heavenly bodies) “shall melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.”¹³ This for Isaiah. But we have the infallible authority of the same St. Peter that this restitution of all things was prophesied not only by him, but by all the “holy prophets since the world began,” in his sermon to the Jews in Acts 3.¹⁴

[5.] To omit therefore other testimonies in the Old Testament, some of which in Daniel are in as express terms as possible, let us now proceed to the New, where we shall find it much clearer. And where we have our Saviour’s own words for it, nay directions to all his servants to *pray* for it as constantly as for their *daily bread*, in that petition of the Lord’s Prayer:

¹⁰Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 64.40.5.

¹¹Isa. 65:17–19.

¹²Isa. 66:15–22.

¹³2 Pet. 3:12.

¹⁴Cf. Acts 3:21.

“Thy kingdom come.”¹⁵ That this is God’s kingdom upon *earth* may perhaps be not obscurely intimated, even in the prayer itself; it being not improbable that those words “in earth as it is in heaven” may refer to all the three foregoing petitions, as well as the last only—that God’s name may be sanctified, and that his kingdom may come, and he reign on earth as now in heaven, as well as that his will may be done in the same manner. But we further prove that it was taken in this sense by our Saviour’s disciples, for a temporal kingdom. “Lord,” say they in one place, “wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?”¹⁶ Not doubting but he would do it one time or other, though not certain whether at *that* very time. Nor does he reprehend them for it as a *gross conceit*, but only as an unseasonable curiosity. Nay, his answer unto them not only grants but confirms their supposition: “It is not for you to know the times, whether *this time* or *another*,” which he adds, “the father hath put in his own power.”¹⁷ Agreeable to that in another place, of the day of judgment, when the Jews shall be restored: “no man knoweth it, but the father only.”¹⁸ And much the same answer our Saviour gives the mother of Zebedee’s children, when she petitioned that one of her sons might sit on his right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom (which none denies they meant of an earthly kingdom). To which he first replies, “Can you drink of the cup that I drink of?”¹⁹ Can you suffer martyrdom for my sake, since for such, in an especial manner, this kingdom was provided? They answered they could. Our Saviour rejoined they should, but yet to sit at his right and left hand was not his to give, but was theirs for whom it was “prepared by the Father”—wherein he owns such a kingdom, and such rewards as they desired were really *prepared* by the providence of God. Further, this kingdom neither was the Christian religion, nor destruction of Jerusalem, because it was not to come “till the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.”²⁰ And because we still pray for it. Nor is it his eternal kingdom in heaven, because that generation was not to pass away till “all those things were fulfilled”²¹—that is, that nation of the Jews who are

¹⁵Matt. 6:10.

¹⁶Acts 1:6.

¹⁷Acts 1:7.

¹⁸Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36.

¹⁹Mark 10:28; Matt. 20:22.

²⁰Luke 21:24.

²¹Matt. 24:34.

called “an evil and adulterous generation.”²² They were not to perish before the kingdom shall come which is there prophesied of. They were to continue a nation to the end of the world, therefore it must be an earthly kingdom.

[6.] It would be too long for this paper to take notice of many other texts in the evangelists, or to add any more to what has been said on that in the 3rd [chapter] of the Acts concerning the “times of refreshing” and “restitution of all things.”²³ Let us therefore go on to the 8th [chapter] of Romans from verse 17 to 22, where are mentioned: our being “glorified with Christ,” and that for “suffering with him”; of that “glory to be revealed”; of the “creatures earnest expectation and hope”; of the “whole creation’s groaning and travailing,” and its being at length “delivered from the bondage of corruption.” Of all which, if any man can make sense if they take another way, we are extremely mistaken. And to what but this millennium and *great day*, according to our hypothesis, can those passages Rom. 11:13–15,²⁴ refer to? “If the diminishing them” (the Jews) “be the riches of the world, how much more their fulness? . . . If the casting away of them, be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving” (the πρόσληψις) “of them be, but life from the dead?” What can be plainer for the reign of Christ, after his coming to judgment, before the end of the world, than that [of] 1 Cor. 15:22–23: “They that are Christ’s” (shall rise) “at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father. . . . For he must reign” (still *after* the beginning of the resurrection, which is to last this thousand years) “till he hath put all his enemies under his feet, and the last enemy is death.”²⁵ And this too after the resurrection; for then, as we read in the Revelation, death and hell are to be cast into the lake.²⁶

[7.] The next we will produce shall be from the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. 1: “Again when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, ‘Let all the angels of God worship him.’”²⁷ And here the learned Mr. Joseph Mede seems to have just cause to find fault with our translators (for they were not infallible) for rendering it “Again when he

²²Matt. 12:29; 16:4.

²³Cf. Acts 3:20–21.

²⁴His quote actually begins with v. 12.

²⁵1 Cor. 15:22–26.

²⁶Cf. Rev. 20:14.

²⁷Heb. 1:6.

bringeth in”—instead of “When he bringeth in again his first-begotten into the world” or “When he shall bring in again”; the original being “ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην.”²⁸ The word οἰκουμένην signifying, as all know, the terrestrial habitable world. And that it is of our Saviour’s future reign and coming into the world appears from chap. 2, v. 5, where the apostle calls it “(οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν) the world to come, whereof we speak,” or concerning which he had been discoursing in the former chapter. Which world to come is not yet put under our Saviour, v. 8, for “now we see not yet *all* things put under him.” Though we see him so high advanced as, for the suffering of death, to be crowned with glory and honour. Besides, as the apostle argues, “now” (that is, at his incarnation, or his coming into the world) we see Jesus made a “little lower than the angels.”²⁹ But when God bringeth him *again* into the world, this “world to come,” which he has not put in subjection to the angels, he then saith, “Let all the angels of God worship him.”³⁰ That is, “worship him all ye gods,” as we translate it (ye *elohim*), which includes angels, the place being taken out of the 97th Psalm,³¹ which contains a glorious description of the coming of Christ to reign here and judge the world. Let us go on to the 11th [chapter] of the Hebrews, v. 8. Abraham was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance; namely, the land of Canaan. This he did not receive while he lived, see Acts 5:7, “He gave him no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on.” This was intended to him in person. God promised that he would give it to *him* for a possession, and that as distinct from his *seed*, for so they are named. He, and Isaac, and Jacob died in “faith,” as it is added, “not having received the promises” (what promise but that of Canaan before mentioned?) “but having seen them afar off”;³² namely, at the end of the world. They, as well as Abraham, looking for “a city with foundations whose builder God is”³³—viz., the New Jerusalem—to descend out of heaven. Which therefore cannot be heaven itself. Besides, it is such a city as they “now desire” (v. 16), and as God has now “prepared” (*ibid.*) and “provided” (v. 40) both for *them* and

²⁸See Mede, *Works*, 577.

²⁹Heb. 2:9.

³⁰Heb. 1:6.

³¹Cf. Ps. 97:7.

³²Heb. 11:13.

³³Cf. Heb. 11:10.

us together, therefore not *actually given* it [to] them. And what that “better thing” is (better than Canaan then was) which God has “provided,”³⁴ see chap. 12: “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, [. . .] the general assembly of the first-born” (which plainly intimates the resurrection) “. . . and to that kingdom which cannot be moved.”³⁵ Thus says Irenaeus, when describing the reign of Christ, and Christ himself restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance.

[8.] St. Peter we have already discoursed of. St. Jude is almost a transcript of him. But the 20th chapter of the Revelations is so express and plain that we think it can never be avoided. Wherein it is evident that after the fall of Babylon, the appearance of our Saviour in the clouds, the destruction of antichrist in the foregoing chapter—after all these, Satan is bound (v. 2) for a thousand years (Is he so now? Or has he been ever since Constantine?). After this, “the souls of them that were beheaded, or murdered, for the witness of Jesus . . . lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not” *again* “till they were finished.”³⁶ The dead must be taken *literally* of *one* as well as the *other*. It is added, “This is the first resurrection.” And the second is described in the 10th verse: “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, . . . the sea gave up its dead.”³⁷ If we make the first allegorical, how shall we secure the second?

[9.] Thus for Scripture. To come to [the church] fathers, our enemies as good as give us all the *first*, and most of the *second* century. Or if they will not, we can prove them ours: Papias, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Clement [of Rome]; and afterwards Irenaeus, Lactantius, Tertullian, Methodius (already quoted); and still lower, St. Cyprian, Nepos, Apollinarius, and many others too long to name.

[10.] Nor need we wonder that poor Papias is represented as the founder of this opinion, and a weak man, by Eusebius (though he owns him a *diligent* and *expert* [student] in the Holy Scriptures). Since he [Eusebius] and his friends Dionysius, Gaius, and other antichiliasts have dared—some of them *positively*, others by *consequence*—to strike out almost an eighth part of the New Testament (no less than four entire books) from the canon of the Holy Scripture, because they saw it impossible to overthrow

³⁴See Heb. 11:40.

³⁵Heb. 12:22–28.

³⁶Rev. 20:4–5.

³⁷Actually, Rev. 20:12–13.

the testimonies therein for this great truth. Namely, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the 2nd [Epistle] of St. Peter, the Epistle of St. Jude, and the Revelation. Against the last of which they bore the greatest spite, as being the clearest against them. Some attributing it to the heretic Cerinthus, but all denying it to be St. John's. Particularly Eusebius, though herein he notoriously contradicts himself, and though there are such severe sanctions at the end thereof against whoever shall take away anything from it (the Holy Spirit that indited it, no doubt, foreseeing what would happen). How much more against those who took it away altogether?

[11.] It is too long to insert the words of all the fathers confirming this doctrine, which indeed would require a volume. Take but two: Justin Martyr, who in his dialogue with Trypho tells us "that he himself, and all other orthodox Christians, believed it; and those who did not, ought not to be esteemed Christians"—but adds expressly that there should then be no Jewish observances and bloody sacrifices, but true and spiritual praises and thanksgivings offered to God;³⁸ and Methodius, before mentioned, of those who shall rise, "They shall neither *die* nor *marry*, but live the *life of angels*, being employed in *good works*."³⁹ Accordingly Lactantius, "They shall live a heavenly and angelical life."⁴⁰ We will conclude this noble question with a passage of Tertullian, which fully includes all the doctrine of the millennium and first resurrection; it is Book 3, *Contra Marcion*, chap. 24:

For we acknowledge (says he) a kingdom promised us upon earth, but before heaven and in another state, to wit, after the resurrection (the first), in the 1000 years, in the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, which the apostle calls Jerusalem which is above, and the mother of us all. This Ezekiel knew, this St. John foresaw. There, we say, the saints shall be received at the resurrection and refreshed with all *spiritual* good things, in compensation of whatever they have either despised or lost in this world. . . . For it is both just and worthy of God that his servants should triumph there, where they have formerly suffered for his name's sake. . . . And this is the manner of the heavenly kingdom. . . . After which 1000 years, wherein will be finished the resurrection of the saints, to be raised sooner or later, according to their deserts, then the destruction of the world, and last conflagration being accomplished, being changed in a moment into

³⁸See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chaps. 80–81.

³⁹Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 64.40.5.

⁴⁰Lactantius, *Divine Institutions*, Chap. 72.

an angelical substance, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, we shall be translated into the kingdom of heaven.

Athenian Mercury (March 14, 1693)⁴¹

Question: Whether it be likely the world should end by a general conflagration, and when?

Answer: It is not only *likely* but *certain*, for eternal Truth has said it: “That the earth” (at least) “and all that is in it shall be burnt up.”⁴² The Stoics themselves were of the same opinion. And the great probability thereof has been demonstrated from *natural causes*, and is clear to those who understand the frame of the earth and of those prodigious *mines* of sulphur and materials of fire—nay, many of the actually ignited—reserved within its bowels. For the time, there have been so many lame *guesses* at it already that we shall not pretend to make any new; only give you the *oldest* we know, perhaps the most *probable*, however such a one as *time* has not yet confuted, and that is that of the rabbis, that the world shall last as it is now for 6000 years, the 7th [thousand] to be the Sabbath, and then the *conflagration*.

⁴¹*Athenian Mercury* 9.27 (March 14, 1693), q. 14. Reissued in collected form as *Athenian Oracle* (1703), 1:503.

⁴²Thess. 1:8.