

AMILLENNIALISM EXAMINED

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

(Rev 20:6)

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The word “millennium” means “a thousand years.” This special millennial period is taught in Rev 20:1-7 where the phrase, “a (the) thousand years,” is used six times. Rev 20:6 tells us that during this period of time, the saints “shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” However, there are two ways of looking at the millennium: (1) the *figurative view of amillennialism* (i.e. there is “no millennium,” or the millennium is a spiritual one—a “realised millennium”), and (2) the *literal view of premillennialism* (i.e. Christ will return to reign for a literal millennium on this physical earth). The former interprets the millennium to be the *present church age* when Christ reigns in His Church until His return, while the latter interprets the millennium to be a *future kingdom age* when Christ reigns over the whole world literally for a thousand years.

Israel and the Church

It is important first to discuss how amillennialists view the nation of Israel before we consider their principles of interpretation and concept of Christ’s millennial rule. This is important because how amillennialists understand Israel’s place in God’s salvation plan affects how they would interpret the prophetic passages of Scripture, and how they would understand the nature of the millennium.

Amillennialism takes the view that God has forsaken Israel for crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ. For rejecting her Messiah, Israel forfeited her claim to the promises of God. The OT promises to the Nation have now been transferred to the Church. The Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen. God is no longer interested in Israel; His concern is only for the Church. According to amillennialists, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 is proof that God has cast Israel away.

God Has Not Forsaken Israel

The God of the Bible is a covenant keeping God. His covenantal promises to Abraham and to David cannot be broken (Jer 33:19-26). Despite Israel's disobedience, God remains faithful. He will keep His Word (Deut 7:9). Time and time again in the Old Testament, Israel sinned against God by worshipping idols. God punished Israel but never forsook her. Although He consigned the Jews to captivity in Babylon in 586 BC (2 Kgs 25, 2 Chr 36:17-20), consider how He preserved them through Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah during this time. True to His promise, the Lord released Israel from captivity 70 years later under Cyrus—the Persian king (2 Chr 36:21-23, Isa 44:28, 45:1, Jer 29:10).

The failure of Israel is seen also in her rejection of Jesus Christ—the promised Messiah (Gen 3:15, Deut 18:15, Isa 7:14, 9:6, Jer 23:5, Zech 3:8, 6:12).

The Jews in crucifying their Messiah said, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:25). God finally punished the nation when the Roman army led by Titus destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. The Jews were driven out of their land, and dispersed to all parts of the world. Since that time, they have suffered much persecution especially in the holocaust of World War II. God no doubt punished Israel, but did God forsake her? No, He did not. God had promised in Isaiah 11:11-12 that He will gather them back into their land the second time from every part of the world. This promise was fulfilled on May 14, 1948 when Israel returned to Palestine, and became a full-fledged nation again. Israel will no longer be displaced from the land God had given to her (Isa 11:13).

Although Israel today is still unconverted, she will finally repent when Jesus returns. Israel will finally acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. To amillennialists who dismissed Israel from God’s plan of salvation, the Apostle Paul has these words, “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of Gentiles be come in. And so *all Israel shall be saved*: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For *this is my covenant unto them*, when I shall take away their sins” (Rom 11:25-

27). “Hath God cast away his people? God forbid” (Rom 11:1).

Amillennialists say that “Israel” refers to spiritual Israel, i.e. the Church. A careful study of Romans 11 will show that there is a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. Paul was writing to the Church in Rome which is predominantly Gentile. Now that the Church is blessed by God with salvation, Paul warns the believers not to misunderstand that God has replaced Israel with the Church—“God hath not cast away his people (i.e. Israel) which he foreknew” (Rom 11:2). Paul goes on to explain that the Church is not meant to replace Israel but to provoke her to jealousy (Rom 11:11). This blindness of Israel will finally be lifted when the last elected Gentile is saved (Rom 11:25). So non-Jewish Christians ought not to despise unbelieving Israel. Israel is of the natural olive tree, while we Gentiles are wild olive branches grafted into the natural olive tree (Rom 11:17). Although God has broken them off, He is able in good time to graft them in again (Rom 11:23-24). Paul evidently makes a distinction between Israel and the Church in his analogy of the olive trees.

Principles of Bible Interpretation

God had made many promises to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Many prophecies in the Old Testament speak of God’s total restoration of

Israel in a time of unprecedented peace on earth. These prophecies or promises of God to Israel involve the restoration of (1) the Jewish people (Gen 12:1-3, 13:16, 15:5, 17:7, 22:17-18; Isa 42:1:6; Jer 31:31-34), (2) the promised land (Gen 12:7, 13:14,15,17, 15:7,18-21, 17:18; Jer 33:38-40), (3) the Davidic throne (2 Sam 7:12,13,16; 2 Chr 13:5); and the building of (4) a new temple (Ezek 40-48). These prophetic texts of promise to national Israel in the Old Testament pose a serious problem to the amillennial understanding of Israel and her future. In order to explain away those passages of promise that relate to Israel, amillennialists employ the allegorical method of interpretation. They spiritualise the physical and national promises of Israel to make them applicable only to the Church.

The Millennium is Literal not Figurative

David Cooper's golden rule of interpretation applies: "*When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense;* therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise." Although amillennialists generally agree to this literal rule of interpretation, they are inconsistent in their application of it. The literal method is applied to most parts of Scripture, but when amillennialists come to the prophetic texts, especially those that

relate to Israel or to the millennium, they switch to the allegorical method. This dualistic way of interpreting the Scriptures is due to their presuppositional bias against the nation of Israel. They refuse to see that God still has a future for Israel in keeping to His covenant promises. The spiritualising method of biblical interpretation is fallacious. It fails to allow the text to say what it actually means (i.e. exegesis), but imposes upon the text what the interpreter wants it to mean (i.e. eisegesis).

In keeping to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:12-23), Christ the Son of David will rule over all the earth in a future millennium (Zech 14:9, Rev 5:10, 20:6). The Davidic covenant of a worldwide government of God was surely not fulfilled by Solomon. The other kings of Israel have failed miserably in governing the nation. Only Christ can literally fulfill the Davidic covenant (Luke 1:31-33, Acts 1:6). Christ will sit upon the throne of David and rule over the whole world from Jerusalem a thousand years (Isa 24:23 cf 2:1-5, Jer 3:17, Mic 4:2).

Premillennialism and Covenant Theology

A correction of two common misconceptions are in order:

(1) Premillennialism is not dispensationalism.
Dispensationalism is a system of theology of which

premillennialism is only a part (see my tract on “Dispensationalism Examined”). All dispensationalists are premillennial, but being premillennial does not make one dispensational.

(2) **Premillennialism is not incompatible with covenant theology.** As a matter of fact, a consistent covenantalist must reject amillennialism for premillennialism. One of the major emphases of covenant theology is the *faithfulness of God in keeping His covenants*. God does not change, and His covenant promises do not change either (Heb 13:8, Ps 102:26-28, Jer 33: 35-37; see also *The Westminster Confession Faith* VII:4-6, VIII:6-8, XXV:1-3). The Lord has said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, . . . My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me” (Ps 89:3,34-36). As much as God will fulfill all His spiritual promises to the Church, He will also fulfill all His physical promises to Israel when Christ returns to reign over the whole world for a thousand glorious years. Amen.

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