

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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AMILLENNIALISM – A CRITIQUE

Some Christians feel very unhappy with the premillennial view of the future. They do not believe that the Church (all true believers) will be raptured away from Earth suddenly, returning later with Jesus for His one thousand year (millennium) reign on Earth as King of Israel. Instead they understand that time, and God's dealings with this world in history, will be completed once and for all with the second coming of Jesus. Amillennialists believe that there is no future reign of Jesus on earth after that, but that only the eternal states of Heaven and Hell continue at that point. In order to accommodate this view (and there are variations) Amillennialists hold to several general positions:

- a) The Church is now to be seen as the new Israel, and all biblical prophecies about the future of Israel are fulfilled in the present gospel age by and through the Church. This is generally known by the term "Replacement Theology".
- b) Much of Old Testament prophecy about the future is to be understood allegorically and not literally, as is the description of Christ's thousand year kingdom reign on earth described in Revelation 20.
- c) Therefore the idea of Christ's kingdom on earth is to be understood as being fulfilled here and now through the Church.
- d) The present State of Israel is an accident of history and is of little biblical significance.
- e) There is only one Second Coming of Jesus and this single event will include the raising of both dead and living Christians and non-believers, followed by God's full and final judgement and the introduction of the eternal realm.

I have always had difficulty with this viewpoint, I guess mainly due to having a high view of the literal accuracy and integrity of scripture. These are my main objections:

1. The nature of God's promises to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, described many times in the Bible, are always declared to be permanent (e.g. Jeremiah 33 v 23 – 26). They were given unconditionally. These promises include both the continued existence of the Jewish people as a chosen race throughout time and their ultimate destiny in the land promised to Abraham.
2. Amillennialism contravenes the theological nature of God's unconditional promises. In order to accommodate an amillennial view there has to be abandonment of Israel by God as a chosen nation, with the promises now being given instead to another body of people, the Church. This completely contradicts the nature of God - His promises, His grace and His unchanging faithfulness, as understood theologically from scripture. How can an all-righteous God not keep His promises? If He can abandon His promises to Israel then what assurance of the promised eternal life can I have in respect of my own salvation? The amillennial view that Israel forfeited its place in God's promises by rejecting Jesus cannot be true theologically as God's gracious promises are based solely on His righteousness and sovereign choice; not on man's uncertain response. This applies both in respect of Israel and of the Christian. Because of this God can be faithful and His promises unconditional.
3. Throughout scripture God makes no attempt to foretell or explain any change of heart regarding these promises to Israel, or to correct the clear impression that they are to be understood literally. The many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah eventually sitting on the throne of David (e.g. Isaiah 9 v 7), taken up for example by both Mary and Zechariah in their songs recorded in Luke chapter 1, are never corrected if, indeed, they are wrong. The whole argument throughout the gospels, and in the teaching of the apostles, is centred on the Lord being the Christ exactly as foretold by the prophets. When the disciples asked about the restoration of the earthly

Kingdom in Acts 1 v 6 Jesus simply replied that they were not to know the timing, not that their understanding was in error. In other words, if God's purposes are not to do exactly what He allowed untold generations of His people to live and die believing He would do, then an enormous divine apology would be necessary – an unthinkable position. But that is logically what amillennialism requires.

4. If much of the Old Testament is required to be taken allegorically in order to fit in with the amillennial view then we have great difficulty in deciding which passages of scripture are literal and which are allegorical. There are well-established rules of biblical interpretation to help us understand the limited allegorical references and other figures of speech, and by those rules much of the Bible is either past history or accurate prophecy of future history. If we start changing those rules to fit in with our preconceptions then what strength of argument do we have left for issues such as a six-day creation, original sin, human nature and responsibility, the nature of God, standards of morality, the Flood, etc? Each of these essential truths becomes dangerously compromised.
5. An important basis to the amillennial position is Romans chapter 4 where Paul argues that Abraham's faith, credited to him as righteousness, means all who have true faith are children of Abraham. But Amillennialists go on to argue that therefore all Christians are the true inheritors of God's promise to him, rather than the nation of Israel. It is absolutely true that Abraham's faith is the essential template of our faith and that faith is the ground of all credited righteousness. But this declaration of the nature of true faith in no way nullifies God's specific promise to Abraham and his physical descendants, which was the ground of his faith. Indeed, in verse 16 they are clearly included in this great treatise on faith. Nowhere does Paul argue that we share that promise made to Abraham. *Faith that God will keep His promises* is the common factor in Paul's argument, making all true believers children of Abraham, not the actual nature of the various promises given either to Abraham or the Church.
6. The amazing restoration of Israel as a nation with a clear Jewish identity within the past 100 years on part of the territory promised to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob is nothing short of miraculous, and is in clear fulfilment of scripture after scripture. Most if not all of these prophecies could not possibly apply to the worldwide Church or to Israel in Old Testament times. Sadly, Amillennialists who deny the validity of God's sovereign hand in these events since 1917 (the Balfour Declaration) often appear to end up making more common cause with an Islamic view than with a literal understanding of a biblical perspective. I believe the lack of a true biblical theology of the total purposes of God for Israel - past, present and future - is at the heart of the error of amillennialism.
7. I cannot find any designation of the Church as Israel in the New Testament. Seventy-five of the seventy-seven references to Israel and Israelites in the New Testament are either direct quotations from the Old Testament, or used in an Old Testament sense. The only two exceptions are in Romans 9 v 6, clearly referring to Jews, and Galatians 6 v 16 where the word "even" (NIV) is a mistranslation and should read "and" (AV), thus including historic Israel in the benediction. On the contrary, the whole passage of Romans chapters 9 to 11 is the most emphatic teaching possible that although the nation of Israel has been set aside for the benefit of the Church, Gentiles in particular, God will once again bring Israel into the outworking of His purposes in fulfilment of His promises.
8. The origin of amillennialism would urge the strongest degree of caution. Up to the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire in 313 AD the vast majority of the early church fathers were all premillennialists, believing as did the apostles that Christ would return to establish His kingdom on earth on David's throne. The one important exception in those early centuries was Origen (185 – 254 AD) who was the first leader to allegorise large parts of scripture in order to fit in with his ideas. Once the Empire embraced Christianity and the Church of Rome became influential it was expedient to keep quiet about a better future kingdom and accept the reality of the present kingdom of the Roman emperors! From this the Roman Church, and especially Augustine, carried on developing the idea of a "new Israel". Thus the Church replicated Jewish features – a select priesthood, vestments, an altar, the continuing sacrifice (ultimately transubstantiation), infant baptism (in lieu of circumcision), canonical law, national and international identity (Christendom), etc., etc. Of course, none of this is in the New Testament. Sadly, all this replacement theology led to persecution of the Jews by the Church, and anti-Semitism in the name of Christianity has continued on and off over the centuries. However, these ideas brought in by the Roman Church have been progressively abandoned since the Reformation by a great many evangelical Christians, and we can rejoice in the rediscovery of the literal and premillennial truth of scripture, especially in the last 200 years.