

By Andrew D. Robinson

Amillennialism is a laundered system which has bleached out the plain meaning of Scripture; it cannot be deduced from Bible study, but must be taught. It is my belief that anyone reading the Scriptures, without being

tutored could never arrive at an amillennial position. Conversely, I know of people who came to the Bible for the first time and instantly understood God's purposes for Israel.



Amillennialism makes no distinction between Israel and the church, wrongly asserting that there is only one people of God and one overarching covenant, the so-called covenant of grace. Amillennialism further asserts that the millennium is symbolic of the church age, in which Christ is said to be reigning now in the hearts of believers on earth and over the souls of the saints in heaven. The millennium is therefore seen as an indeterminate period of time between Christ's first and second advents, which will be followed by the general resurrection, the last judgment, and the eternal state.

Amillennialism was systematized by Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), one of the church's most influential theologians who is revered by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Augustine drew many of his ideas from Tyconius (died c. A.D. 400), a Donatist theologian whose writings had the profoundest effect on his thinking. He was also strongly influenced by the Greek philosophical doctrines of Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.) and the allegorical methods of Origen of Alexandria (c. A.D. 185-254), which helped shape his theological schema. What is perhaps surprising to learn is that Augustine once walked in the footsteps of the premillennial fathers, as he himself records, "I myself, too, once held this opinion."²

Augustine is the Charles Darwin of the church, the pioneer of a mutant system

of evolutionary theology which has replaced biblical literalism with allegorical interpretation; his system was destined to lay the foundation upon which Western theology would be constructed. Augustine taught that God's purposes for Israel as a territorial nation ended with the cross, and that all unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies were to be reinterpreted spiritually or allegorically in favor of the church. Consequently, references to Israel, Zion, and Jacob, with their attendant promises, no longer applied to the Jewish nation. This is a "doctrine of demons" that has led generations of unsuspecting Christians astray. Spiritual application is important, but not at the cost of the plain, primary meaning of the text. The great nineteenth-century Anglican bishop of Liverpool, J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), protested the allegorizing of the Bible when he declared: "I believe the habit to be unwarranted by anything in Scripture, and to draw after it a long train of evil consequences."³ I made this point to one amillennialist preacher who argued not only that the church inherited Israel's promises, but also that Christ fulfilled every geographical land feature recorded in the Bible. This is allegory at its shoddiest and is nothing short of cowboy exegesis. It is little wonder that God's house lies in such a dilapidated state.

Augustine's amillennialism quickly became the accepted view of the church and was formally adopted at the Coun-

cil of Ephesus in A.D. 431. At that meeting, the bishops condemned premillennialism as superstitious, which ostensibly outlawed it from the church. This was a black day in the history of biblical interpretation, and one that has cast a dark shadow over the church to the present day. So decisive and influential was Augustine's coup on the Scriptures that his doctrines formed the bedrock upon which the Protestant Reformers built their theologies; Lutheranism and Calvinism in particular owe a huge debt to Augustine. In fact, every Reformed creed is expressly amillennial, including the defining Augsburg Confession (1530), considered to be the most significant document of the Protestant Reformation. Drafted by Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560), Martin Luther's successor, Augsburg upheld the church's traditional policy of zero tolerance towards premillennialism. Article 17 condemns those "who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed." It seems that denominational amillennialism has little time for God's prophetic Word.

A Rootless Church

The amillennial church is a rootless church, which cares little for its histori-

¹ This article is based on the first chapter of *Israel Betrayed*, a book published by Ariel Ministries in 2018 and written by two Gentile believers who love the Messiah of Israel. To fit the format of this magazine, the chapter was shortened and slightly edited.

² "Augustine: The City of God," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, Vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), Book XX, Chapter VII, 426.

³ J. C. Ryle, *Prophecy* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1991), 147. This book was previously published in 1867 under the title, *Coming Events and Present Duties*.



cal and spiritual dependence upon the Olive Tree (Rom. 11:17-21). One pastor has likened it to a Christmas tree: beautifully decorated and ablaze with lights, but cut off at the roots and dying. The arrogance which the Apostle Paul so strongly warned against in verse 18 of Romans 11 emerged soon after the apostolic age, and it has held its head high in the church ever since. The further away from its Jewish roots the church moved, the more allegorical it became in its interpretation of Scripture. Replacement theology, or more accurately speaking, “theory,” was adopted as the major framework for interpreting the Old Testament prophetic passages, and it is not surprising, therefore, that amillennialists have little room for literalness when it comes to reading the Prophets. Like their postmillennial counterparts, they adopt a gymnastic approach to biblical interpretation, arguing that prophecies relating to Israel’s restoration that were fulfilled in Bible times are to be taken literally, but insisting that prophecies which were unfulfilled at the close of the apostolic age find their spiritual fulfilment in the church.

One major amillennial objection to premillennialism is the claim that the New Testament has nothing to say about Israel’s restoration. Opponents will even try to convince us that when Paul refers to Israel in his letters, he is speaking of the church, and they will point triumphantly to Galatians 6:16—where the apostle writes of the

Lord’s mercy “upon the Israel of God”—as conclusive evidence. What they overlook, however, is the historical fact that the church was *never* identified as Israel until the middle of the second century, with the emergence of allegorical interpretation. Interestingly, the translators of the 1560 Geneva Bible found it necessary to add an explanatory marginal note to Galatians 6:16, which reads “that is, upon the Jewes” (original spelling).⁴ My 1607 edition continues with the cross reference, “as Rom. 10:19.” Although the Geneva translators were amillennial to a man, they clearly understood that in Galatians 6:16, Paul was referring to the Jewish people and not the church.

Spiritual Alchemy



In his book *The Momentous Event*, twentieth-century amillennialist W. J. Grier scurrilously denounces as “extravagant and absurd,”⁵ belief in a literalist view of Scripture which upholds premillennial truth. He follows the example of his mentor, John Calvin (1509-1564), who, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vilified the premillennialists of his day with equal disdain:

In short, either such persons are utterly ignorant of everything divine or they are trying by a devious malice to bring to nought all the grace of God and power of Christ . . . Even a blind man

can see what stupid nonsense these people talk . . .⁶

I encountered this clichéd attitude in a theology class some years ago, when my lecturer, an eminent Scottish theologian, was charting the church age from the incarnation to the second advent. I noticed that the millennium was missing from his diagram and questioned the omission. With a look of utter astonishment, he turned to me and said, “No one believes in the millennial kingdom today!” My desk mate and I assured him that we did and pointed to the fact that this was the standard position of many of the early church fathers, a point he duly conceded.

In spite of clear biblical and historical evidence to the contrary, amillennialists, like their postmillennial cousins, believe that the church is the new Israel of God. R. C. Sproul, Jr., the son of popular American author and Presbyterian minister R. C. Sproul (1939-2017), championed the amillennial cause with his much-publicized statement: “We believe that the Church is essentially Israel. We believe that the answer to, ‘What about the Jews?’ is ‘Here we are.’”⁷ Jewish Bible



⁴ This footnote does not appear in the 1599 version, which the Pilgrim Fathers took with them to the New World.

⁵ W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event: A Discussion of Scripture Teaching on the Second Advent* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 34.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), Book 3, Chapter 25, Para 5.

⁷ R. C. Sproul Jr., *Tabletalk* magazine (December 1998), 2.



teacher Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum responded to Sproul's outlandish statement with this piercing riposte: "Too bad you were not declaring this on the streets of Berlin around 1941."⁸

Although it is hotly denied by amillennialists, there is no question that amillennialism is rooted in the anti-Semitic soil of Augustinian Roman Catholicism, through the medium of which the Jewish people have been twice robbed—first of their prophetic Scriptures, and then of their land. One of today's most culpable offenders is former premillennialist Reverend Dr. Stephen Sizer, who is regarded by many Christians and Jews as an enemy of Israel because of his virulent anti-Zionist position. Sizer, one of the leading and most strident voices within the pro-Palestinian camp, speaks for amillennial academia by falsely asserting that "it is fundamental that Christians read the Scriptures with Christian eyes."⁹ When we consider that approximately 80 percent of the Bible relates to Israel, of which 26-30 percent is predictive, and that the name "Israel" is used over two thousand times in Scripture,¹⁰ one wonders how Sizer and his fellow amillennialists can possibly believe that

it all refers to the church. Even when "Israel" occurs in the New Testament (over seventy times), it *always* refers to ethnic Israel. Those, like Sizer, who refuse to accept the plain meaning of the biblical text have been described by Roy Huebner as "spiritual alchemists."¹¹ Dispensing, in an allegorized form, Bible prophecies which should be taken literally, they are seriously damaging the spiritual health of the church. Changing the metaphor, in his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul warned the saints not to be carried away "by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Eph. 4:14). Paul uses two interesting Greek words in this passage which perfectly describe the amillennial alchemists: *kubia*, which is translated "cunning" and denotes "dice playing" and can be rendered "sleight of hand"; and *methodia*, which is translated "deceitful wiles," and literally means "the process of systematizing error." There are indeed great dangers in contorting the Word of God, as J. C. Ryle points out: "Never does a man take

up an incorrect principle of interpreting Scriptures without that principle entailing awkward consequences and coloring the tone of his religion."¹² Church history bears witness to the truth of Ryle's statement.

The "Unauthorized" Version

In the wake of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, with the Bible available for the first time in the common language, replacement theology ruled the European pulpits, and it was a brave man who dared to speak against the status quo. This corrupt system of biblical interpretation, which was carried lock, stock, and barrel from Rome into the margins of the popular 1560 Geneva Bible (or "People's Bible" as it has been called), has shaped the thinking of Western Protestantism towards Jewish nationhood for 450 years. One of the most successful pieces of amillennial replacementist propaganda that the Church of England has ever produced appears in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV). First published in 1611, the KJV, rightly termed "the noblest monument of English prose,"¹³ dominated the English-speaking church and mission field for nearly 300 years until the emergence of the Revised Version (1881-85). However, incorporated into the 1611 KJV were numerous *unauthorized* allegorical chapter headings



⁸ Statement confirmed in private correspondence with Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum.

⁹ Stephen Sizer, "An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism," *Churchman*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (1999).

¹⁰ This figure includes references to Jacob, the entire nation, and the northern kingdom.

¹¹ Roy Huebner, *The Truth of the Pre-tribulation Rapture Recovered* (Millington, NJ: Present Truth, 1976), 29.

¹² Ryle, *Prophecy*, 148.

¹³ Quoted in the preface to the Revised Standard Version (RSV).



transferring Israel's blessings to the church. As a result, generations have been seduced into believing the amillennial lie. Some amillennialists regard these insertions with almost canonical reverence and tenaciously defend their inclusion.¹⁴ Although not all modern KJV editions contain these chapter headings, it is essential to note that they formed an integral part of the fabric of the 1611 edition and subsequent editions right through into the twentieth century. The following examples show the extent to which amillennial allegory has permeated the thinking of the English-speaking church, initiating both clergy and laity into the error of replacement theology:

Psalm 83:9 "A prayer against them that oppress the Church."

Psalm 87:1 "The nature and glory of the Church."

Psalm 129:5 "The haters of the Church are cursed."

Isaiah 30 "God's mercies towards his Church."

Isaiah 33 "God's judgments against the enemies of the Church."

Isaiah 43 "The Lord comforteth the Church with His promises."

Isaiah 62:1 "The fervent desire of the Prophet, to confirm the Church in God's promises."

Micah 4 "The glory, peace, kingdom, and victory of the Church."

Zechariah 9:1 "God defendeth his Church."¹⁵

Addressing this problem in 1867, J. C. Ryle wisely urged his readers:

"Cleave to the literal sense of Bible words, and beware of departing from it, except in cases of absolute necessity. Beware of the system of allegorizing and spiritualizing, and accommodating, which the school of Origen first brought in, and which has found such an unfortunate degree of favour in the Church. In reading the authorized version of the English Bible, do not put too much confidence in the "headings" of pages and "tables of contents" at beginnings of chapters, which I take leave to consider a most unhappy accompaniment of that admirable translation. Remember that those headings and tables were drawn up by uninspired hands. In reading the Prophets, they are sometimes not helps but real hindrances, and less likely to assist a reader, than to lead him astray. Settle it in your mind, in reading the Psalms and Prophets that Israel means

Israel, and Zion Zion, and Jerusalem Jerusalem. And, finally, whatever edification you derive from applying to your own soul the words which God addresses to His ancient people, never lose sight of the primary sense of the text."¹⁶

This is extremely good counsel, but it went against the traditional teaching of Ryle's day. The Church of England was steeped in allegorical methods of biblical interpretation, which can be found in the writings of their most learned and influential theologians. Take, for example, the allegorical methods of the august and highly accomplished seventeenth-century historian and theologian Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), whose "witty and popular style won him a wide reputation."¹⁷ Although, like many of his contemporaries, Fuller had a heart for the conversion of the Jews, his allegorical worldview refused to countenance belief in their restoration to the land. In his monumental *Pisgah-sight of Palestine* (1650), he bases his interpretative methods on Jesus' words, "a spirit hath not flesh and bones" (Lk. 24:39), to argue that we must always look beyond the plain, literal sense of the text to the "mystical meaning therein."¹⁸ His fanciful comments on Ezekiel 40-48 expose the nonsense of allegorical interpretation:

"As once our Saviour told *Pilate*, *My kingdom is not of this world*: so the sense of *Ezekiels Land, City, and Temple*, is not carnall, and corporall, but mysticall, and spirituall. Yea, God may seem of set purpose to have troubled, and perplexed the text...with inextricable difficulties, merely to *wean* us from the *milke* of the letter, and make us with more appetite seek for stronger meat therein . . . therefore, it is generally conceived, this vision imports the great

¹⁴Grier writes: "Times without number have we heard pre-millennarians scoff at the chapter-headings of our Authorised Version . . . Such headings are all wrong, say these pre-millennarians; they are a display of appalling ignorance on the part of those who inserted them . . ." (*Momentous Event*, 44-45).

¹⁵This is the wording in my facsimile of the 1611, and in my original copies of 1637, 1641, 1648, 1653, 1758, 1762, and 1764. Later editions vary; some include the headings, others do not. The same headings even appear in my Welsh Bible that dates from the reign of King Charles II. The headings were incorporated as part of the overall printing plan from the outset, and the royal printers were not at liberty to vary the manuscript, which included the headings.

¹⁶Ryle, *Prophecy*, 149.

¹⁷F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 646.

¹⁸Thomas Fuller, *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and the Confines thereof, with the Historie of the Old and New Testament acted thereon* (London, 1650), Book 5, Chapter 2, 190.



inlargement . . . of the Church under the Gospel.”¹⁹

The doctrinal rationale underpinning this theology of replacement was further expounded by Francis Atterbury (1663-1732) in a sermon preached in St. James’ Chapel, London, on Good Friday 1715. Titled “The Horrid Imprecation of the Jews and the Justice and Wisdom of God in fulfilling it upon them,” Atterbury, the most powerful English High Church preacher of his day, explained why the Jews would never experience national restoration:

“All the attempts that have been made towards rebuilding their Holy Place, or even towards recovering their country, out of the Hands of the Infidels, have been defeated, and blasted by God, in so remarkable a manner, as if he were jealous of every Event, which might seem to open a Way home to this wretched People and give them the least Glympse of a Deliverance from their Bondage. And all this while . . . they have continued unmixed, unincorporated with any of the Nations of the Earth, amidst whom they dwelt; their Preservation in which Separate State is more wonderful, than their Total Dispersion; and could not have happened for so long a time, so uniformly, every where, without the Immediate Interposition of God’s Providence, to prevent a Coalition; in order to render them, by that means, Standing and Illustrious Monuments of his Vengeance, to all Nations and Ages.”²⁰

We may smart with indignation at such intemperate, dismissive words, but we must remember that this line of

theological thought dominated the church from the early post-apostolic era, shaped the allegorical contours of Roman Catholic dogma concerning the Jews, and was adopted virtually unchanged by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformed church. Add to this the fact that Palestine, as it was known, was a forlorn, barren, and largely forsaken land to which nobody paid much attention, and we can perhaps understand *to a degree* why the amillennial Reformers scorned belief in Israel’s physical restoration. Today’s amillennial leaders, however, are an entirely different kettle of fish; they are completely without excuse, because they deny a literal interpretation of the Scriptures *in the face of* their clear prophetic fulfilment. I would like to think that men like Fuller and Atterbury, if they could visit the modern State of Israel today and witness firsthand God’s miraculous restoration, would acknowledge without hesitation that prophecy has indeed been fulfilled to the letter!

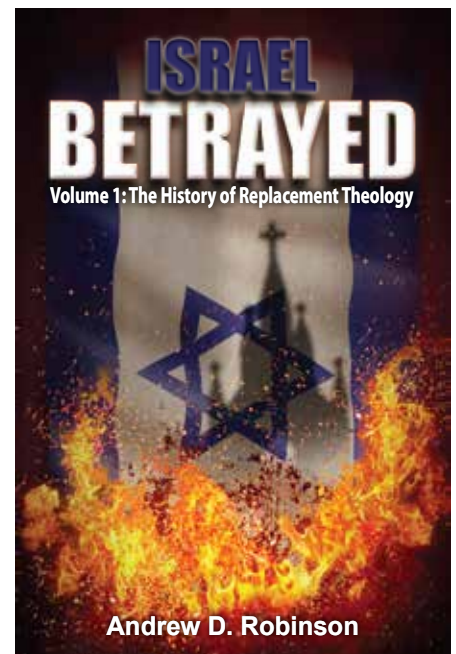
The Prophet Ezekiel foresaw these days of restoration:

And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. And they will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now inhabited and fortified.” (Ezek. 36:34-35)

God has a clear, twofold purpose in restoring Israel’s nationhood, declaring firstly that the Jews “will know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. 36:38), and

secondly that “the nations . . . shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it” (Ezek. 36:36). What further evidence does the amillennial church need to be convinced that Israel exists according to God’s express will and purpose?

This article is an excerpt of *Israel Betrayed*, a book Ariel Ministries recently published in two volumes. The authors are the late Andrew Robinson and Dr. Paul Wilkinson. Andrew Robinson served for nineteen years as the Senior Pastor at Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church in Stockport, England. He was the founder and overseer of Hazel Grove Ministries, which offers pastoral support and teaching to believers around the world. He held a BA in Theology from Manchester. Andrew was a true friend of Israel.



¹⁹Ibid., 191.

²⁰Francis Atterbury, “The Horrid Imprecation of the Jews and the Justice and Wisdom of God in fulfilling it upon them,” a sermon preached at St. James’ Chapel on Good Friday 1715, in *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 1 (London: George James, 1734), 128-29.