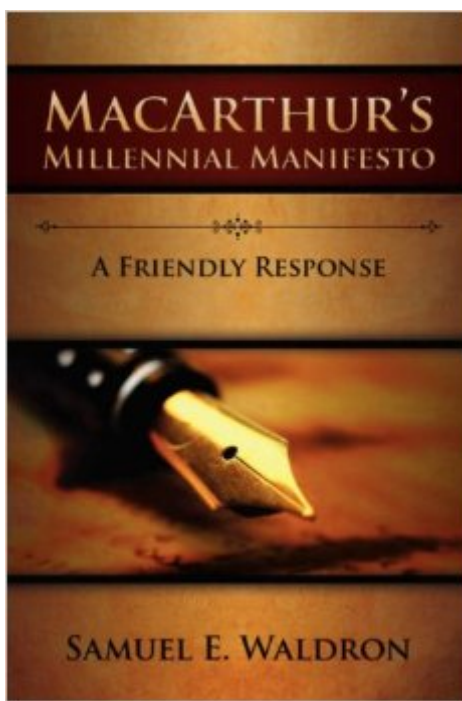


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MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto



Synopsis

At the 2007 Shepherds' Conference, Pastor John MacArthur delivered a controversial message entitled, "Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist". In this book, Dr. Sam Waldron addresses the assertions of MacArthur historically, exegetically and theologically. Although his arguments are rigorous, the entire tenor of the book is level-headed and irenic. This "friendly response" grants modern day Amillennialists the opportunity to thoughtfully engage their Dispensational brethren.

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Customer Reviews

On March 7, 2007, John MacArthur opened his Shepherd's Conference with the topic "Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist." He called all Calvinists to become premillennial and leave amillennialism for the Arminians. He argued-Since amillennialism holds to a replacement theology that Israel forfeited God's promises because of their disobedience and was superceded by the Church-And since this interpretation of Scripture is based on the understanding that the fulfillment of God's promises are conditional-This amounts to the Arminian doctrine of conditional election This amounts to guilt by association and, as usual, Arminianism is the scapegoat. If MacArthur's analysis is correct, then let me be the first to welcome all Arminians to leave premillennialism. Before we proceed, however, we need to define some terms. A biblical study of covenants indicates that they are conditional in nature. Richard Watson defined the essence of a covenant as mutual stipulations between two parties. "It could not be a covenant unless there were

terms, something required, as well as something promised or given, duties to be performed, as well as blessings to be received." In my article "An Arminian Covenant Theology" [Fall 2000], I cited a Calvinistic scholar who declared that according to Leviticus 18:24-30, remaining in the land was conditional. If Israel did not obey, God said he would spew them out (v 28). But did not God promise to give the land to Abraham and his descendants "forever" (Gen 13:15)? Of course he did. But there remains a conditional side to the promises. Jesus states, without reservation or equivocation, that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matt 21:45). Anyone who claims to interpret the Bible literally cannot easily dismiss these passages. If the promises to Israel are unconditional, then no matter what Israel does, she still inherits all the promises. There can be no "spewing out," no kingdom "taken away," and no coming to "remove your lampstand." Thus, Arminianism and Calvinism understand the conditional nature of covenants. It is dispensationalism which teaches that covenants are unconditional. According to Arminian theology, whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Thus, we cannot be accused of teaching salvation by works because the condition is faith in the work of Christ alone. But the faith which saves is a present tense faith and we must persevere in faith or else we are liable to apostasy. Calvinism teaches that only the elect can be saved. Those who ultimately do not maintain the condition of the covenant were never elect. While Louis Berkhof held that the covenant is eternal and unbreakable, as a consistent Calvinist he held that it is particular and realized only in the elect. Yet he also concluded that if there were no condition, God only would be bound by the covenant and the covenant would lose its character as a covenant, "for there are two parts in all covenants." Yet God himself fulfills the condition in the elect. Therefore, it appears that the only real condition, in the Calvinistic covenant of grace, is that we must be selected for salvation. But those who are the elect are predestined to persevere in faith. Dispensationalism teaches that a believer could be a new creation and yet remain a carnal Christian without any change in character or exhibiting any spiritual fruit. Thus, a Christian could deliberately choose to disobey his Lord and remain in that state of carnality, addicted to sin. The promptings of the Spirit may be ignored and the wickedness intensified until the "believer" is sucked into a kind of black hole, winding up in misery and filth. They could even die in such a condition, but they are assured of heaven because the covenant of salvation is unconditional. No one has taken on this antinomian theology of dispensationalism any more boldly than John MacArthur in *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988). And yet poor John cannot decide whether he wants to be a dispensationalist or a Calvinist. While he professes to be a Calvinist, he holds to a dispensational view of covenants. Amillennialism and postmillennialism both interpret the millennium as the realized spiritual kingdom and not in terms of

a political Jewish kingdom. All postmillennialists are amillennial in the sense that they deny chiliasm or the literal earthly reign of Christ. And all amillennialists are postmillennial regarding the timing of Christ's return. Premillennialists, however, believe that Christ must return to earth to establish his millennial reign. However, the real issue in evaluating MacArthur's call to premillennialism is that all three positions historically have held to what MacArthur labels as replacement theology, meaning that the Church is now the Israel of God. Thus, MacArthur is actually contending for a particular type of premillennialism, known as dispensationalism, which makes a distinction between Israel and the Church. Daniel Fuller explained it was necessary for dispensationalism to insist the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional and the blessings physical so that Israel and the Church could be kept distinct. All who do not accept MacArthur's dispensationalism are labeled by him as "supercessionists," meaning that the Church has superceded Israel, or as holding to "replacement theology." This term is so offensive to Jack Van Impe that he declares it to be heresy. But Jack has such a consistent track record of failed predictions that I doubt whether anyone except Rexella still takes him seriously. Is God through with old Israel? No, because "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom 11:26). But all who are saved are added to the Church. Thus, God does not have two brides. The Church is God's covenant people, the continuation and expansion of old Israel. Perhaps the Bible could shed some light on the commentators. In Romans 4:12 and 16 the "seed of Abraham" includes all who believe. In fact, Paul redefines the Jew as one who has undergone circumcision of the heart by the Spirit of God (Rom 2:28-29). Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:29). The Church is described as the children of God, heirs according to the promise, and sharing in the inheritance promised to Abraham (Rom 4:13). Both Jew and Gentile are to be incorporated into "one new man" (Eph 2:15). Christ reformed the old Church (Heb 9:10) and the new Church was built upon the foundation of the old (Eph 2:20). Thus, the Church is the new Israel of God (Gal 6:16; Eph 2:12; 19). According to Ray Dunning, "The most pervasive metaphor used in the New Testament for the Church is 'the new Israel.'" There are eighteen descriptions of Israel given in the Old Testament which, in the New Testament, are used in reference to the Christian Church. In addition there are sixteen passages in the Old Testament referring to Israel which are quoted in the New Testament as referring to Christians. And there are seven ethical commands to Israel in the Old Testament which are quoted in the New Testament as applying to the Church. Therefore, the conditional privilege of old Israel has been transferred to the Church. N. T. Wright said that the promises to Israel have been "redefined." In his Notes on Romans 8:33 Wesley explained that the Jews who would not receive the Lord Jesus Christ were termed "reprobate." They no longer continued to be the people of God, but were cut off from the chosen

people of God because of their apostasy. Their titles and privileges were transferred to both Jews and Gentiles who embraced Christianity. Methodist writers have remained consistent in their interpretation that the Church is the new Israel. In fact, Israel and the Church had never been segregated until the theology of John Darby (1800-1882). Darby concluded, "Israel is always the people of God and cannot cease to be the people of God" because God never casts off. "He does not repent of His counsels, nor of the call which gives them effect." Therefore, Darby concluded that the Church was an interruption of God's plan with Israel. Daniel Steele had the opportunity of hearing John Darby and reported that he could hardly keep from laughing in his face. "The wriggling and floundering of this great evangelist was something wonderful to behold. May I never see another man, manifestly of so great genius and learning, compelled to crawl through orifices so small. There is something very depressing to a generous mind to witness such an intellectual humiliation in the attempt to save a baseless dogma from a manifest overthrow." Darby carried this dogma of Israel and the Church to its logical conclusion. If God has two peoples, then Christ must return separately for each of them. Thus, Darby also introduced the teaching of a secret, pretribulation rapture of the Church prior to Christ's return to establish his Jewish kingdom. A proponent of this teaching, John Walvoord, admitted, "It is therefore not too much to say that the rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology." In other words, this separate coming of Christ is a logical necessity of a system that has distinguished between the Church and Israel. Tim LaHaye also contended, "Separating Israel and the church is one of the major keys to rightly understanding Bible prophecy." John Hagee believes every Jewish person who lives according to the Law has a relationship with God and will come to redemption. He contends that Jewish people do not need to be saved since they are under a different covenant. He told the Houston Chronicle that "trying to convert Jews is a waste of time. Jews already have a covenant with God that has never been replaced by Christianity" (30 April 1988). More recently in his book, *In Defense of Israel* (2007), Hagee claims that Jesus never came to be Messiah to the Jewish people. MacArthur told his conference, "If you get Israel right you will get eschatology right. If you don't get Israel right, you will never get eschatology right." Yet those who adopt a dispensational theology tend to get a lot of things wrong. MacArthur also taught that the covenants of Scripture were irrevocable promises based on God's sovereign, unilateral, unconditional election. MacArthur concluded that if you get election right -- divine, sovereign, gracious, unconditional, unilateral, irrevocable election -- you get God right, you get Israel right, and you get eschatology right. While MacArthur calls all Calvinists to embrace the dogma of Darby, unfortunately many who claim to be Arminian have also embraced it. They have never processed the implications of the theology they

picked up from televangelists. Dispensationalism, with its secret rapture of the Church, is based on the premise that God's promises are unconditional. Thus, no consistent Arminian can embrace MacArthur's call to dispensational premillennialism. Ironically, no consistent Calvinist can either!

If you are looking for a good a-millennial response to a pre-millennialist's understanding of a-millennialism, this book is for you. Samuel Waldron's "MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto" is an excellent work that contributes to our understanding of the biblical issues concerning the millennium, the relationship of Israel and the Church, the identity of the Jew, the relationship of the OT and the NT, the promise of the gospel, and the principles of sound Bible interpretation. In 2007, Dr. John MacArthur stirred the waters of controversy at his own Shepherd's Conference by declaring that all self-respecting Calvinists should be pre-millennialists. He argued in his keynote address why he believed that Calvinism comported better with pre-millennialism than a-millennialism. Dr. MacArthur suggested that a-millennialism tends toward Arminianism, doesn't adhere to a literal hermeneutic, and accused a-millennialist of teaching "Replacement Theology"; that is that the Church replaces Israel. Dr. Sam Waldron, a proponent of a-millennialism, has taken up the task of providing a cogent rebuttal to Dr. MacArthur's arguments with great respect and Christian grace. He systematically interacts with MacArthur's arguments from his message and some of the writings of his faculty of Master's Seminary. Waldron's book even supplies the complete text of MacArthur's message so the reader is able to read his entire original statement in context. This is a great benefit for all readers regardless of their agreement with MacArthur or Waldron. It enables the reader to interact with both men's positions for the mastering of the issues. Dr. Waldron, with deftness and precision, displays the issues that are at stake in this debate, corrects some common misunderstandings of a-millennialism and offers some very cogent exegetical challenges to dispensational pre-millennialism. Dr. Waldron cogently puts forward the a-millennialism's position on hermeneutics, Israel, Gentiles, millennium, the gospel, and the church and offers a sound a-millennial response. This book is of a great benefit to all readers, pre-millennial, a-millennial, and post-millennial alike because you get to interact with two good minds over biblical texts and issues on which faithful Christians disagree. Agree or disagree with the Dr. Waldron's conclusions, the reader is given a tremendous amount of biblical data to work through in a manner that promotes respect for all individuals and positions involved. This book is highly recommended for anyone who new to the millennial debate who wants to know what issues are at stake from both a pre-millennial and a-millennial perspective. The book is beneficial because both MacArthur's and Waldron's commitment to serious theology permits both the pre-mill and the a-mill positions are well

represented. Its benefit to the reader is augmented by Waldron's not seeking to destroy a "straw man" nor does he attach MacArthur's character but sticks to the issues. Waldron seeks to give honest answers to the honest issues MacArthur has raised. Agree with MacArthur or Waldron, but the student who carefully and thoughtfully reads this text will have a good grasp of the biblical issues that divide pre-mill and a-mill. They will also gain insight in how to wrestle with difficult texts and theological issues. They will also be better equipped to give an answer to the position that they perceive to be correct. How good is that! Agree with MacArthur or Waldron, the modern church could use more books like this in our ongoing pursuit of rightly dividing the Word of God. Regardless of your position, this book is an excellent example of how Christians can disagree with one another graciously and at the same time advance one another's understanding of the Bible. This book will make a great gift for your pastor, seminarian, or Bible college student. "Take up and read!"

This is a cogent rebuttal to John MacArthur's comments at the 2007 Shepherd's Conference. John MacArthur deserves a lot of respect, but he was simply wrong when he said that every self-respecting Calvinist should be a premillennialist. The book does a fine job of showing why MacArthur's statement is wrong and provides a solid case for the amillennial position on Israel and the Church. Waldron deals with MacArthur in a very respectful and honorable way. He writes in an engaging and compelling fashion. If you have any experience reading about theology, I think you will find this a quick read. I could spend a lot of time getting into the specifics, but I think it's best to just get the book and read it yourself. I think if you are open to hearing something new and are interested in eschatology and Israel/The Church, you will not be disappointed regardless of what perspective you come from.

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