

Samuel E. Waldron, *MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto: A Friendly Response*. Reformed Baptist Academic Press. 2008. 188pp. (paper). Reviewed by Jesse Johnson, M.Div.

At the 2007 Shepherd's Conference at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, John MacArthur preached a message titled "Why Every Self-respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist." While the title may have been tongue-in-cheek, the sermon itself was not. It was a serious call for pastors to look at how the doctrine of election should contribute to our understanding of God's plan for Israel. This sermon was a bit of a shot heard around the blogisphere, and Samuel Waldron, a noted amillennialist, wrote a response: *MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto*.

This book may be a lot of things, but one thing it is not: it is in no way a real rebuttal to MacArthur's message. John's message had four points to it:

1. The OT, and specifically Gen 12, 15, and Ezk 16, 36, and Jer 31, all demand a future for ethnic Israel and a premillennial interpretation.
2. The Jews in Jesus' day saw a Messiah coming and ushering in a restoration of ethnic Israel.
3. Jesus' last earthly words in Acts 1 were a reference to a future kingdom for ethnic Israel, one that only fits with a premillennial understanding.
4. The Apostles, as seen in Acts 3 and 15, Heb 6, and Romans 3, all saw a future restoration of ethnic Israel that can only make sense from a premillennial perspective.

For Waldron's book to be considered a serious response to MacArthur's message, he would have had to interact with those four points. Instead he responds to exactly zero

of them. Rather, he develops arguments in favor of amillennialism from Gal 6, Rom 9, 1 Cor 10 and 12, and Eph 2. This is more or less tantamount to the kind of response that says, “You have your verses, and I won’t respond to those, but I have these verses over here...” In a book explaining amillennialism, that would be one thing. But for a book alleging to be a response to a particular message, it is disappointing that it does not interact with the substance of the actual message.

This error is seen most glaringly by his repeated quotation of Michael Vlach, a theology professor at The Master’s Seminary. To set up dispensationalist points that Waldron disagrees with, he quotes Vlach. In fact, Vlach is quoted more than any other source or author in the entire book. This is surprising for this reason: MacArthur has written a commentary on every New Testament book (except Luke and Mark), has written a study Bible which explains his take on practically every verse in the Bible, and has written two full-length books on eschatology. It is not as if his views on theology are hidden. Yet these sources are never quoted. Rather, a professor who was hired at TMS less than a year before the sermon is used in what is allegedly a “response” to MacArthur’s views.

The substance of Waldron’s book is this: MacArthur is wrong to say that amillennialists believe in replacement theology because they don’t believe the church *replaces* Israel, they believe that Israel *becomes* the church. This is an expansion, not a replacement. In the same way a tree does not replace a seed, or a caterpillar does not replace a butterfly (Waldron’s actual examples), the church does not replace Israel. Ever since Abraham God has a remnant of his elect people inside of Israel, and now that

remnant is the church. In that sense the remnant can be called Israel, because in the past it existed inside Israel.

While I understand the butterfly analogy, it must be said that it misses MacArthur's point entirely. The land promises, the kingdom promises, the promises of a return, these were all given to ethnic, disbelieving Israel. To say that they will not be fulfilled by ethnic Israel because Israel disobeyed, and that instead they are fulfilled by the church is exactly what MacArthur calls replacement theology. To point out that inside of ethnic Israel was a remnant, and inside of the world today there is still a remnant, and that today's remnant is now the church, but that it can trace its spiritual lineage back to Abraham, our father in the faith, is more-or-less common ground with premillennialism. That is not the point. The point is that the land and kingdom promises were given to disobedient ethnic Israel—not the remnant—and God will bring those promises to pass.

It is fair to say that about one-third of Waldron's book is an effort to explain and elaborate the butterfly analogy. Another third of the book was spent on material that MacArthur would probably agree with—why eschatology matters, why it does not matter in the same way the Trinity matters, why full-preterism is heresy, and an explanation of how today's amillennialism is substantially different than the amillennialism of fifty years ago. The middle third of the book is essentially an argument for amillennialism that has very little to do with MacArthur's message.

Waldron does make some admissions that should be noted. For example, in arguing that in Gal 6:16 the phrase "Israel of God" should be understood as the church, Waldron says that this makes sense when you "read backward through the letter" or when you adopt a "strategy of reading the epistle backward" (41, 42). This is exactly the kind

of hermeneutic that makes a premillennialist squirm. Elsewhere, Waldron writes that there are kingdom promises in the Bible that can only be fulfilled in a future age. In fact, he writes that “a glorious kingdom awaits [believing] Jews in the age to come.” This is precisely what premillennialists believe. He admits that the previous generation of amillennialists (he calls them “your father’s Amillennialists”) may have said that the church replaces Israel, and that all of the kingdom promises are fulfilled in the church age, but this generation of Amillennialists is different, and they see an already/not yet tension in these promises. In chiding MacArthur for quoting amillennialists who wrote 100 years ago, he points out that amillennialism has changed substantially over the last generation. This is a welcome admission, and one that not many other amillennialists are willing to make.

The tone of *MacArthur’s Millennial Manifesto* is summed up by the subtitle—“A Friendly Response.” Waldron is generally gracious, and to his credit he goes out of his way to be civil. But the weakness of the book still stands: it does not respond to the main points of MacArthur’s message, nor does it interact with the verses that he used. It is simply, but graciously, an argument for amillennialism, and an explanation of why amillennialists do not like the term “replacement theology.” Unfortunately, he does not explain how promises given to ethnic Israel can be fulfilled by a group other than ethnic Israel, and not be deserving of the label, butterflies not withstanding.