

A CASE FOR PREMILLENNIALISM

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The Kingdom:

The theological concept *kingdom* is both easy and difficult. It is easy because it simply refers to God's rule and reign over the universe. It is complicated because that rule and reign is expressed in different ways at different times. At one time or another the Bible refers to God's kingdom as universal, national, or spiritual. Sometimes it is eternal; at other times, clearly temporal. Sometimes it is present; at other time it is clearly future.

All Christians believe that God will establish a some kind of kingdom after the cross and before the eternal state ruled over by Jesus Christ. There are, however, three major views of when that kingdom starts and what it looks like.

1) Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism takes a very positive view of future history. It says that as we approach the coming of Christ, Christianity will spread more and more, until it becomes the dominant influence in the world. Laws will reflect God's righteous standards, a large percentage of people will be Christians, and the rest will be Christianised. This general victory of Christianity in government, culture, and morals will continue for at least a thousand years, perhaps longer. At the end of that time of extended peace, blessing, and righteousness, Christ will return, not so much to establish His kingdom, but to step into a kingdom already established for Him. In this view, Jesus' coming is postmillennial, *after* the kingdom has already been established.

2) Amillennialism

Amillennialists believe that the OT promises of a kingdom centred on Jerusalem ruled by the Messiah are, because of Israel's disobedience, transferred categorically to the church. All those kingdom promises are currently being fulfilled spiritually and figuratively in the church. The millennium, then, is not a thousand years in length. That number is merely figurative. Instead, the millennium covers the whole church age, however long it extends. When Christ returns, the eternal state will start immediately, without any earthly kingdom since Christ's current rule and reign in the church satisfies all the OT and NT prophecies regarding the kingdom. This view is called *amillennialism* (*a* equals *no* in Greek) because it holds that there is no distinctly visible, thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth.

3) Premillennialism

Premillennialists believe that Christ will return *before* the millennium. At the end of the age, Christ will return, destroy the wicked, and establish a literal thousand-year kingdom ruled over from Jerusalem, fulfilling all God's OT promises to Israel. When that thousand years is complete, Satan will lead a final rebellion. Once it is crushed, the eternal state will begin.

Note: premillennialism is divided into two subcategories.

Dispensational premils believe that this thousand-year reign of Christ will fulfil God's OT promises to Israel and will have a strong Jewish flavour.

Historic premils believe in a literal thousand-year kingdom, but see no special place in it for the nation of Israel.

Methods for studying the kingdom: Two approaches

1. Choose one of these three views and selectively choose key verses from the Scripture to prove your predetermined view.
2. Follow the progress of God's revelation regarding the kingdom from the OT into the NT and see how those promises unfold step by step.

These notes will take the second approach. The *progress of revelation* is a key hermeneutical principle that is often violated in millennial debates. For example, Jesus and the Gospel authors never defined the word *kingdom*; they just used it (Matt 3:2; 4:17). Clearly they expected that their readers' view of the kingdom would be dominated by the OT teaching on the subject. We will follow their methodology.

A Survey of the Old Testament Data on the Kingdom

God is King

- God is the eternal ruler of a universal kingdom (Ps 145:13; 103:19; 47:2, 8)
- God is the divine King of Israel specifically (1 Sam 8:7, 12:12)
- The human kings of Israel were God's vice-regents or sub-kings (1 Sam 12:13, see the next main point)

God rules through human subordinates

Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:10-11; 49:10 (king will be from the tribe of Judah)

2 Samuel 7 The Davidic covenant: a king from David's house.

the Prophets It gradually became clear in the prophets that the covenant with David would not be fulfilled by a perpetual line of rulers, but by *one ruler* who reigns perpetually.

Is 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; Micah 5:2; Ezk 22:24

Daniel 7:13-14. The king of God's kingdom is crowned by God the Father. This is nothing less than a picture of God the Father crowning God the Son, Jesus Christ. They are King and divine-human Vice Regent.

Old Testament details about the Messiah's kingdom.

1) Changes to nature

weather	Is 4:5-6; (see also Ezk 34:26).
animals	Is 11:1, 6-9a (see also Ezk 34:25, 28)
crops	Ezk 34:29 (context 34:23 messianic); Ezk 36:28-30; Amos 9:13
fertility	Ezk 36:37

2) Changes to geography

Jerusalem's water supply	Zech 14:8
Jerusalem's physical exaltation	Zech 14:10

3) Rebuilt temple Ezk 40ff. The level of detail given in these chapters defies spiritualisation, and there is no hint in the context that Ezekiel intended them to be spiritualised. For now, we must take these chapters at face value, as Ezekiel's readers would have: they refers to a rebuilt Temple in the Messiah's kingdom (see also Zech 6:12; Hag 2:6-9).

4) Political changes

Is 2:4	Israel exalted politically
Jer 23:5-6	permanent peace (see also, 2 Sam 7:10; Micah 4:4; Zech 14:11; Zeph 3:13)
Zech 14:14	the world's wealth will pour into Israel (Zeph 3:20; Hag 2:7)

5) Location: Jer 33:14-17, 20-21; Is 9:7

Amos 9:14-15; Jer 32:25-26; Ezk 36:24, 28

The land promises are just as much part of the New Covenant as are the promises of forgiveness and spiritual restoration. From the prophets' perspective *both* promises had to be fulfilled for the New Covenant to be fulfilled. (see Ezk 36:33; 37:24-27 for the juxtaposition of spiritual/physical blessings)

Comment: Reading them at face value, the prophets expected the Messiah to rule over Israel from David's throne. That meant the city of Jerusalem.

Amillennial view: Those references to Jerusalem and Israel are spiritual references to the church.

Response:

Spiritualising these passages is not done on the basis of what these passages actually say. There is no hint that they meant anything else other than that the Messiah would reign over national Israel from David's throne in the physical city of Jerusalem. Should these references be spiritualised? On the basis of their *OT context* the answer is no. We will need to decide at a later point if there are NT passages that force us to reinterpret these OT texts. But until then, we will let the prophets say what they say.

Amillennial interpreters tend to focus on the spiritual aspects of these prophecies, but they typically ignore the rest of the details of the prophecy, as if they were mere window dressing. The physical blessings spoken of by the prophets were not merely window dressing. They were integral to the prophecies, set side-by-side with the spiritual blessings (Ezk 36:33; 37:24-27).

6) The place of Gentiles

Is 2:2; Is 42:6; Is 49:6; Is 56:6-8; Jer 3:17; Gen 12:3;

The OT assumed that Gentiles would be part of the Messiah's kingdom without in any way *replacing* the nation of Israel in that kingdom.

The OT prophets did not see Gentile inclusion in the New Covenant as requiring God's promises to Israel be transferred from national Israel to the church.

7) Timing Zech 14:1-6, 9

God's promised kingdom is established after a time of terrible persecution. God comes in the person of the Messiah and rescues Jerusalem and the Jewish nation from ultimate destruction by Daniel's little horn, the Anti-Christ (cp. Dan 2:44-45; Dan 7:18, 22, 26-27).

According to Daniel 12:2, this event will also coincide with a resurrection from the dead.

Question: Doesn't Zech 14:9 refer to the eternal state? No. In Zech 14:16-19, sin is still possible even though Christ has returned and is ruling over the earth.

Further evidence: Isaiah 2:1-4. Jerusalem will be the centre of world government under the Messiah's rule, but people will still need instruction to walk in God's paths (2:3), and judgement will be required to keep peace (2:4)

8) Spiritual aspects of the Messiah's kingdom.

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| 1. Forgiveness | Ezk 36:33 (note: spiritual and physical blessing are mentioned side by side; the physical blessings are <i>not</i> spiritualised); Ezk 36:25-26; Zeph 3:8-9, 11-13 (Gentile inclusion); Is 49:5-6 |
| 2. New heart/Spirit | Ezk 36:26-27 |
| 3. Obedience | Ezk 37:24-25; 36:27 |
| 4. God's presence | Ezk 37:26-28; Is 4:5 |
| 5. Teaching | Is 2:1-3 Jerusalem is the centre of spiritual education at a time when there are no wars. |

Comment: The NT authors apply these *spiritual* blessings to the church (forgiveness, for example). However, they do not apply the equally important *physical* blessings. In other words, these *spiritual* blessings being applied to the church do not remove Israel's hope. Paul is clear that national Israel still possess (present tense) the promises (Rom 9:3-4).

Key point: election and unilateral promises

God's revelation on the subject of the kingdom does progress from the OT to the NT; however, because of His faithfulness, God cannot *cancel* promises made unconditionally to national Israel in the OT.

Jeremiah 32:40-42; 31:28.

Amillennialism sees God's promises as fulfilled to a different people (the church, not national Israel). God specifically says that He will not do that.

The unconditional nature of these promises to Israel:

Jer 33:14-16, 19-26

Key point: Israel's disobedience is assumed. God's New Covenant promises to national Israel assume Israel's *disobedience*, not her obedience. This removes the whole basis for amillennialism (i.e., the notion that the church replaces Israel because of Israel's disobedience).

Jer 31:20, 35-37

Summary:

The OT prophets do not present a confused or shadowy picture. At this point in God's revelation there is no reason not to take their prophecies concerning the kingdom at face value.

Three key points:

- Zechariah 14:16-19 refers to an extended time period after the return of Christ during which Christ reigns, but sin and disobedience are still possible. This cannot be the eternal state? The OT, taken at face value, is clearly *premillennial*.
- Jer 32:40-42. God specifically said He will not give national Israel the pain of His promises and not the full pleasure of His promises. Amillennialism says the opposite.
- Jer 31:20, 35-37. God's new covenant promises to national Israel *assume* Israel's disobedience, not their obedience, removing the basis for amillennialism.

The way ahead:

Does the NT *change* the picture of the Messiah's kingdom that is so clear in the OT or does it merely *add to* the picture without denying God's promise of a physical kingdom to Israel?

New Testament

Two key misperceptions (one amil, one premil)

Misperception 1: For it to be valid, God must repeat an OT promise in the NT.

The crucial point is how we know whether something in the OT (especially prophecy about Israel's future) is still binding in the NT.... If the NT explicitly rejects an OT institution, etc., it is canceled. But if God makes a point once (the OT), why must he repeat it in the NT for it still to be true and operative? To argue that it is canceled because it is not repeated is a classic case of arguing from silence. On the other hand,

it is not arguing from silence to claim it is still in force despite the NT's silence, because God has already in the OT broken the silence and given us his thinking. (John Feinberg, in Continuity/Discontinuity, 76.)

Point: God doesn't have to repeat an unconditional OT promise to Israel in the NT for that promise still to be valid.

Misperception 2: In order to protect the idea of an earthly reign of Christ, some early dispensational premillennialists argued that *no* aspect of the kingdom is present in the church age. This is neither necessary nor biblical.

One need not deny the kingdom's presence in some sense in this age to safeguard a special expression of it later for national Israel. (John Feinberg, Continuity/Discontinuity, 68)

The spiritual aspects of God's OT promises can be applied to the church under the New Covenant without confounding God's promises to Israel regarding a physical, earthly kingdom. God can do more than His promises obviously included; He cannot do less. He cannot take away promises from national Israel and give them to a totally different group of people in a totally different form.

The Millennium: The Gospels and Acts

Starting point: the teaching of the OT is assumed:

From first to last [Jesus] refers to 'the kingdom of God' as a fixed conception with which he takes for granted, his hearers are familiar. (Geerhardus Vos, The Kingdom and the Church, 14).

For all his repeated mention of the Kingdom of God, Jesus never once paused to define it. Nor did any hearer ever interrupt him to ask "Master, what do these words, 'Kingdom of God,' which you use so often mean?" On the contrary Jesus used the term as if assured it would be understood, and indeed it was. The Kingdom of God lay within the vocabulary of every Jew. It was something they understood and longed for desperately. (John Bright, quoted by Kaiser in Continuity and Discontinuity, 289-90)

If Jesus' doctrine was an amillennial view of the kingdom (Israel superseded and replaced by the church), then He would have had to do some intensive re-instructing to correct the wrong notions of both the disciples and the Jews generally about the earthly, national, Messiah-ruled kingdom the OT promised Israel.

The Historical Setting of the Gospels and Acts

By the time Christ's earthly ministry started, the Jews had been under Roman rule for about 90 years. They hated every second of it.

Expectations regarding the kingdom were extraordinarily high. Josephus, a Jewish historian of the NT era, records numerous attempts by false messiahs to lead revolts against the Romans. The Gospels also reveal these heightened expectations of the kingdom:

Luke 2:38	Anna: "waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem."
Luke 23:51	Joseph of Arimathea: "waiting for the kingdom of God."
Matt 20	James and John asked for first and second seats in the kingdom
Luke 19:11	Many "supposed the kingdom was going to appear immediately."
Acts 1:6	"Is it at this time that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The Gospels:

The Nature of the Kingdom in the opening chapters of Luke

The Gospels' view of the kingdom was basically the same as the OT's view of the kingdom: the kingdom has national, political, and spiritual aspects.

Mary:	Luke 1:30-33 The continuity between the OT view of the kingdom and the Gospels' view is virtually word for word in this text.
Zacharias:	Luke 1:69-74 The salvation to be provided by the Messiah included both salvation from sins (v. 77) and the national/political/social promises of the OT (v. 70-71, 74).
Simeon:	Luke 2:28-32 Gentiles are included in the Messiah's saving work without any suggestion of a replacement of national Israel.

The closing chapters of Luke

Jesus: Luke 21:20, 24. The kingdom includes an exaltation of the city of Jerusalem.

Luke 21:25-31. The kingdom will come after observable external signs.

Luke 17:20-21. The kingdom has a present, spiritual component seen in the repentance and restoration of individual sinners. Translation note: *within you* or in *your midst*. The translation, *within you* should be preferred (Matt 23:26). Note: This emphasis on the internal, spiritual aspect of the Messiah's kingdom work doesn't wipe out the external, national-political aspects which are emphasised in Luke 1-2 and by Jesus in Luke 21.

Luke 22:15-16 The future kingdom will include both NT worship (communion, v. 18) and at least one OT, Jewish worship event: a literal celebration of the Feast of Passover. This strikes a blow against historical premillennialism, which says the thousand year reign of Christ will have no special Jewish flavour.

Summary: The Gospels carry on the theme of the kingdom with no alteration of the OT promises. In the Gospels, the kingdom is ...

national from David's throne in physical Jerusalem (Luke 1, 21)

universal	includes Gentiles, not just Jews (Luke 2)
political	safety from human enemies (Luke 1)
spiritual	forgiveness and internal transformation (Matt 12, 23; Luke 17)

The King of the Kingdom: Jesus

This is no different than the OT, because Jesus is God, the Father's vice regent.

Timing of the kingdom

Near Matt 3:1-2; Mark 1:14-15 (see also Matt 10:5-7; Lk 10:9-11)

Does that mean that the kingdom promised in the OT had to (in its fullness) begin immediately? OT data: Four different prophets in four different centuries said that the day of the Lord or the final day of God's judgement was "near" without there being any immediate initiation of the day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14 (800s); Is 13:6 (700s); Zeph 1:7 (600s), 14; Ezk 30:13 (500s)). Clearly the nearness of the day of the Lord and of the kingdom is a matter of expectation, not necessarily time.

Future	Matt 6:10 Matt 13:36-43, Matt 25:31, 34 Luke 19:11-12 Luke 21:25-27, 31	in the Lord's prayer end of the age end of the age Jesus said He would go away, return, and rule later.
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Present	Matt 12:28 Matt 23:13	The king is the kingdom. Note present tense verbs. When someone gets saved, it is a representation of Christ's kingdom work.
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Conclusion: The Gospels use the word *kingdom* in a variety of ways:

- universal reign
- Messiah's earthly kingdom
- the eternal state
- a summary of Jesus' teaching
- a synonym for salvation

To be biblical, one needs to embrace a view of the kingdom that wraps its arms around all those aspects of God's kingdom.

The Citizens or Residents of the Kingdom

OT: Both Jews and Gentiles (Isaiah 2, Zech 14). While God's unconditional promises to the *nation* were unbreakable, Jesus taught that *individual* Jews will be excluded from the kingdom because of unbelief.

Matt 8:10-13	The issue is individual belief (the centurion in v. 13) as
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opposed to individual unbelief. This is not a statement of national rejection.

Matt 21:33-45 Jesus applied this parable to the Pharisees' rejection of Himself.

Question: Is the rejection of v. 43 a *national* rejection? No. Five Reasons:

1. Jeremiah 31:35-37 assures the nation of Israel that they will not be cast off because of their disobedience. Matthew 21:43 cannot overturn that previous, unilateral promise of God.
2. *You* in v. 43 refers only to the unbelieving Pharisees standing there talking with Jesus.
3. Verse 44 clearly refers only to individual unbelief.
4. *Them* in v. 45 clearly refers only to the unbelieving Pharisees standing there, not to the nation. The text does not read, "They understood that He was speaking about *Israel*," and should not be interpreted that way.
5. As late as forty days after Jesus' resurrection the apostles didn't interpret Jesus' teaching to mean that there was no earthly kingdom for national Israel (Acts 1:6-8).

Individual Jews could forfeit their place in the kingdom because of their personal unbelief. The nation, however, could not ultimately forfeit the kingdom because it was based on divine election and unconditional promises (thus the startling accusation that amillennialism is an *Arminian* view, in which a divinely elected entity (Israel) falls from her place of election through disobedience). Note: Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12-13 foretold of the Jews' rejection of the Messiah, but the prophets still taught that there would be a kingdom for national Israel.

Who is the nation or people "producing the fruit of it" (v. 43)? Believers, and ultimately the believing nation of Israel, when God draws the nation to repentance *en mass* just before Christ's return (Zech 12:10; Rom 11:12, 15, 25-26). Principle: the salvation of Gentiles doesn't repudiate the promises to national Israel. Gentile participation was foreseen in the OT and never impinged upon the election of Israel.

The Book of Acts

Acts 1:1-7

Context: 40 days of teaching about the kingdom of God (v. 3)

Question: *Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?* (v. 6)

Did Jesus take this final opportunity to set straight his deceived and confused disciples? Did He explain that the OT had to be completely reinterpreted, and that the church replaced Israel in regard to the kingdom blessings? This is His last earthly chance to set their theology straight.

Answer: 1:7. Jesus rebukes only their desire to know the timing of that event, not their spiritual *and* national/physical understanding of the kingdom.

*When Christ is asked (Acts 1:8) whether the kingdom would be restored to Israel, he does not say Israel forfeited the kingdom. He replies that the disciples could not know the timing of these events and that in the meantime they were to do another job. Christ's response hardly sounds as though Israel lost the kingdom forever. (John Feinberg, in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 83)*

Conclusion: At this point the apostles—and apparently Jesus too—were *premillennial* in their understanding of the kingdom.

The rest of Acts

Question: If not in Acts 1, when did the apostles become amillennial? When did they come to understand that not only would Gentiles share in the benefits of the kingdom, but that the church would *replace* Israel, receiving her physical blessings in spiritual form?

When did they change their view?

If all of the expectations that the Jews had built up over the centuries (Luke 1-2; Acts 1) were wrong, *extensive* teaching on the subject would be required to help very mad and very disappointed Jews that the Messiah's kingdom had been taken away from their nation. It would have taken extensive instruction to convince Jews that they had to reinterpret all the kingdom promises of the OT as not for Israel.

There were other passionate Jewish issues on which just such *extensive* re-instruction was necessary and supplied. For example, clean and unclean food, and clean and unclean people. Two chapters in Acts (chaps. 10-11) were dedicated to addressing this issue. Equally significant was the question whether circumcision required for salvation. Acts 15 and many of Paul's epistles addressed this.

Point: Since the apostles were still premillennial in Acts 1, where does the book of Acts record the atomic explosion that occurred when they changed their view and told their fellow Jewish Christians that they had completely misinterpreted the OT and that the kingdom was not for Israel?

Acts: Three Passages used to support the Amillennial view

What we're looking for:

- a direct statement that the church *replaced* Israel
- a direct statement that the national and physical promises of the OT prophets are to be applied to the church
- a direct statement that Christ is currently ruling over a spiritual kingdom that replaces the earthly kingdom expected in the OT, Gospels, and Acts 1.

Passage 1: Acts 2:14-17

Reasons Acts 2:14-17 does not teach the amillennial view:

1. The Spirit was promised to *all flesh* (v. 17), which included Gentiles, not just Jews. Therefore, applying the spiritual blessings of Joel 2 to the church does not mean that those promises have been taken away from Israel. Since Joel 2 expected spiritual blessing to be applied to Gentiles, Peter was in no way radically reinterpreting the OT promises.
2. When Peter said, "This is that," did he mean that the events of Pentecost fulfilled *all* that is prophesied in Joel 2? No. The astronomical signs mentioned in v. 19-20 were not fulfilled in Acts 2. There must be a further fulfilment which, naturally, will include the fulfilling of God's promises to Israel as a nation.

Conclusion: Replacement of Israel by the church is neither mentioned or required in Acts 2:14-17. Peter had not changed from premillennialism to amillennialism between Acts 1 and Acts 2.

Passage 2: Acts 2:32-36

1. The point of this text is to prove that Jesus is the Messiah based on His resurrection and ascension. It is not a text addressing a change in the nature of the kingdom.
2. Replacement of a spiritual/physical kingdom by a *merely* spiritual kingdom is not mentioned in these verses.
3. Psalm 110:2 speaks of Christ reigning. Interestingly, Peter doesn't quote that part of Psalm 110, the part that would have conclusively proven that Christ is reigning now. He simply pictures Christ in the place of approval and esteem, at the right hand of the Father, but he avoids saying Christ is reigning now. In fact, Psalm 110 is quoted 19x in the NT. Not includes the second verse of the Psalm which speaks of the Christ's on-going reigning. This is odd if the apostles were trying to promote and amillennial view of the kingdom.

Conclusion: While the amillennial view can be *assumed* into Acts 2, it is not *taught* by Peter in Acts 2. Good theology is built on what the text actually says, not on what the text might allow if you bring a prepared theological view to it.

Passage 3: Acts 15:14-19

Question: Is James saying that Gentile salvation in the church is the *complete* fulfilment of God's promise to raise up the fallen tent of David?

1. The supposed replacement of Israel by the church is not under discussion in Acts 15. In fact, James quoted from Amos 9 to prove that Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews, not to prove that the church replaces Israel.
2. James is teaching nothing new in this text. The OT consistently taught that the Messiah's work would include bringing Gentiles to salvation. Why would the fulfilment of that OT expectation now mean that Israel had forfeited God's kingdom promises?
3. Does James mean that *all* the OT promises about the Messiah's work are obliterated and replaced by the promise to save Gentiles? Does he mean that all the promises to Israel were really hidden promises to save Gentiles? James' focus on one aspect of God's New Covenant promises doesn't mean the other aspects of God's promises are not still in force.
4. James does not mention the national/political promises to Israel in this text: there was no reason that he should. They did not apply to the issue under debate at the Jerusalem counsel, which was whether Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews. The nature of the kingdom wasn't under discussion in Acts 15, and it is theologically invalid to argue that James had to *repeat* OT promises to Israel for them to still be in force.

Conclusion regarding Acts:

1. Other than Acts 1:6-7, the book of Acts contains no teaching directly addressing the issue of the kingdom.
2. The book of Acts contains no statement that Christ is currently reigning over a spiritual kingdom, although Psalm 110:2 could easily have been brought into play if the apostles wanted to teach that view.
3. The book of Acts contains no statement that Israel has been replaced by the church; it merely says that Gentiles, as expected, are saved as part of the Messiah's work.
4. The book of Acts contains no record of the apostles changing their view on the kingdom and has no record of the furore that would have erupted or of the extensive teaching that would have been necessary if they had changed their view on such a passionate Jewish issue.

The NT Epistles

Do the NT epistles teach that the church replaces national Israel in the Messiah's program? Do they teach that the physical and national blessings promised to the nation of Israel in the OT have either been cancelled or are fulfilled spiritually in the church?

For the amillennial view to be correct, the NT must clearly teach these points. An affirmation of the spiritual aspects of the Messiah's kingdom is not enough to prove the amillennial view. There must be an active denial or redirecting of the national and political promises to Israel.

What the amillennial view requires to be true is the following:

1. A text that calls believing Gentiles *Jews*.
2. A text that calls believing Jews and Gentiles *Israel*.

These references must be clear enough that the Jewish believers in the early church would have been convinced that national Israel had been replaced by the church.

The NT Epistles: Key Texts

Romans 2:28-29

This text was not given to address the subject of the kingdom. Furthermore, Jews, not Gentiles are being addressed by Paul in Romans 2:28-29 (see 2:17, 25; 3:1, 9). Paul does not teach here that believing Gentiles are true Jews. He only says that *believing Jews* are true Jews.

Romans 9:6

Who is being addressed, Jews or Gentiles? Jews only (Rom 9:1-4, 8). Romans 9:6 proves that physical descent from Abraham does not guarantee ultimate spiritual favour for *individual* Jews. It does not teach that believing Gentiles are Jews. In fact, what Romans 9 does teach is that national Israel, in spite of her historical and current unbelief, far from being replaced by the church, still possess (present tense) God's OT promises (9:3-4).

Romans 11:25-26

1. The nine previous uses of *Israel* in Romans all clearly refer to ethnic Israel. To suggest a new meaning here without explanation by Paul is special pleading, and is unacceptable hermeneutical procedure.

John Murray: *It should be apparent ... that it is exegetically impossible to give to "Israel" in this verse any other denotation than that which belongs to the term throughout this chapter. (Romans, 2:96).*

2. Paul already said in Romans 11 that God has a future *fulfilment, acceptance, and re-grafting* for Israel (v. 12, 15, 23-24). Arguing for the replacement of Israel by the church in this passage is contradictory to the whole point of the passage, indeed, the whole point of Romans 9-11 (cf. 9:3-4).
3. The explanatory *so all Israel will be saved* in 11:26 does not refer to what comes before it, i.e., the fullness of the Gentiles coming in (v. 25). It refers to the words that follow in v. 26-27. The covenant-keeping faithfulness of God as promised in the OT is the means by which national Israel will be saved.

4. In 11:29, Paul confirms that God's election of Israel as a nation cannot be overturned: His gifts and calling are irrevocable.

John Feinberg: *Paul seems to settle the issue in Rom 11:25-29. Not only does he predict the future salvation of Israel as a nation, but concludes his whole discussion on Israel's position by saying that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." What can this mean other than what God has promised Israel, he will deliver? (Continuity/Discontinuity, 83)*

Hebrews 12:23

You have come to the general assembly and to the church... The word *church* here does not refer to OT Israelites as some suggest (i.e., equating the church and Israel). The word *you* refers to the believing recipients of this letter: NT believers not OT believers.

Acts 7:38

Acts 7:38 is clearly a non-technical use of *ekklesia*, meaning assembly. It is not true that every use of the word *ekklesia* in the NT refers to the church (see Acts 19:32, 39, 41).

Galatians 6:16

Three reasons Galatians 6:16 does not call the church *Israel*.

- Translation: *and* or *even*? An amillennial interpretation of this verse requires that the word *kai* be translated *even*, equating the words *them* and *Israel*. However, only 5 of the 72 uses of *kai* in Galatians are translated *even*. There is no reason to take the unusual usage in this verse because the normal usage (*and*) provides clear meaning. Paul was clearly setting up two categories to be blessed: all who obey, and especially believing Jews whom he calls the "Israel of God." As in Romans 2, believing Jews are the true Israel, not believing Gentiles.
- The point of Galatians. One of the main points of Galatians is that Gentiles don't have to become Jews (i.e., receive circumcision) in order to be saved. In that context, would Paul then muddle things by calling saved Gentiles "the Israel of God," as if they did have to be circumcised and become Jews? This is very unlikely.
- If the translation *even* is correct, the view that the church is the new Israel would have to be based on one passing, unexplained comment in the closing remarks of an epistle not written to address that issue. That would never have been enough to convince Jewish believers that there was no future national-political kingdom for Israel.

1 Peter 2:9

Does the text actually speak of replacement? No. Peter applied to the church some of the language used for Israel as God's people. This is appropriate according to Zechariah 2:10-12.

Zechariah 2:10-12: The OT predicted that God would save Gentiles under the title *people of God*, but that didn't turn Gentiles into *Israel*. Therefore, when Peter calls the church *the people of God*, that in no way excludes Israel from still holding a unique national position as God's elect nation.

Conclusion: Peter did not say that the church and Israel are the same or that one has replaced the other. That can be assumed into the passage but it is not taught by this passage.

The NT Epistles: Summary

- There is no passage in the NT epistles written for the express purpose of teaching Jewish believers that they needed to revoke their OT-based belief in a future kingdom for national Israel. In other words, the premillennial view of the kingdom expressed by the apostles in Acts 1:6 was never rejected or modified by the apostles.
- On the other hand, Paul wrote Romans 9-11 for the express purpose of teaching that God's OT promises to national Israel are still valid and are irrevocable.

Revelation 20:1-10

What the OT promised and what the apostles clearly expected in Acts 1 is described in Revelation 20. When you get to the end of God's revelation, you find that God keeps His promise of a national kingdom ruled over by the Messiah from the beloved city (Jerusalem). There is no reason to deny the obvious tie-ins between the OT's promises, the apostles' expectations, and Revelation 20's teaching.

If God wanted to teach that there is no national, earthly reign of the Messiah at the end of the age, Revelation 20 is a *really bad* way to do that. In the absence of clear and extensive apostolic instruction to the contrary, what believing Jew would interpret Revelation 20 as anything but the fulfilment of God's OT promises to national Israel?

Five reasons Revelation 20 must be interpreted premillennially

1) The chronological flow of Revelation 19-20

Revelation 19 gives extensive, chronologically sequential details about the return of Christ. Revelation 20 begins only with the word *kai* (*and* or *then*), just as do thirteen verses in chapter 19. Those uses of the word *kai* clearly mark sequence—the next event in the story. There is no reason not to interpret the *and* or *then* that opens v.

20 as sequential as well—the next event in the story (remember that the chapter breaks are artificially imposed).

In other words, Revelation 20 does not record a new vision; something that happened *before* Christ's return. It is unquestionably a chronological continuation of the vision of chapter 19. John introduces new visions with "after these things" (see 19:1). Therefore, it is exegetically invalid to try to make this refer to a spiritual reign of Christ over the church that takes place *before* His return. The syntax of chapters 19 and 20 prove that this kingdom must take place *after* His return. Whatever you believe about the rest of Revelation, Revelation 19-20 are clearly chronological or sequential.

2) Satan's binding: Rev 20:1-3

If this thousand-year reign refers to the church age, then according to v. 1-3, Satan must be bound and completely shut away from the earth right now. The purpose of this binding is to put a complete halt to Satan's deceiving effort among the nations.

The imagery of binding and being sealed into the abyss cannot refer to a mere *curtailing* of Satan's activity. If the imagery means anything, it must mean a complete *cessation* of Satan's earthly activities.

Is it accurate to say that Satan is completely shut away from this earth during this age and that his deceiving work among the nations is completely inoperative? Note the following verses:

2 Cor 4:4

2 Cor 11:13-15

Eph 2:2

1 Peter 5:8-9

Acts 5:4

Acts 26:18

1 Cor 5:5

1 Tim 5:15

Do these verses sound like Satan is incarcerated and sealed into the abyss completely away from the earth and is not actively deceiving unbelievers today?

Conclusion:

The standard amillennial interpretation of this passage does no justice to the fullness of its imagery of Satan's binding and plainly denies what the rest of the NT teaches about Satan's current nature and realm of operation.

3) Nothing in the context suggests that Revelation 20 should be taken figuratively

There are no indicators in Revelation 20 that suggest this description of Christ's kingdom is supposed to be taken figuratively—any more than His return and destruction of the armies of the earth in chapter 19 should be taken figuratively.

While figurative language is used (the binding Satan with a chain), it is another matter altogether to assert that the whole passage is figurative.

4) Two resurrections

Revelation 20:4-6 says that the reign of Christ takes place between two resurrections. Whether you interpret the number 1,000 literally or figuratively (there is no reason in the passage to take it as anything but literal), Christ's reign as described here must take place bookended by two resurrections.

By necessity, amillennial interpreters believe that the first resurrection refers to spiritual resurrection, God making believers alive from spiritual deadness at salvation. Is this what this text teaches?

Two reasons the amillennial view of the two resurrections in Revelation 20 is impossible.

1. The word "come to life" in v. 4 and in v. 5 is exactly the same word in both verses. In its NT uses, it never refers to being made alive spiritually. Its overwhelmingly established NT meaning is physical resurrection. To sustain their view, Amillennial interpreters must give it a unique meaning in this passage.
2. Verse 4 says that those who came to life had been "beheaded" for the cause of Christ. This reference to beheading clearly requires that the "coming to life" at the end of v. 4 be physical resurrection. Beheading and being made alive spiritually have no relationship.

Conclusion:

It is exegetically impossible to say that the first resurrection in Revelation 20 is a spiritual resurrection from sin, thus, referring to salvation in the church age.

Revelation 20 teaches a reign of Christ bookended by two physical resurrections. This is exactly what the premillennial view expects—a resurrection of the righteous at Christ's return and a resurrection of the unrighteous at the end of the thousand years, just prior to final judgement. The amillennial view is not merely unlikely in this passage; it is impossible.

5) Fulfilment of Zechariah 14

Revelation 20 fulfils Zechariah 14's prediction of an extended time after Christ's return during which He rules over the earth, but during which sin is still possible. What the OT promised, the NT confirms.

Conclusion for the series

Following the progress of God's revelation, we found that the OT is clearly premillennial. Furthermore, the premillennial view is clearly taught in Luke 1 and 21, Acts 1, Romans 9-11, and Revelation 20. The amillennial view can be assumed and read into a few NT texts, but it

is never taught by any text. The key components of the amillennial view—the *replacement* of Israel by the church in God's kingdom plan and the active denial of the national-physical promises of the OT and Luke 1—are not taught in the NT.

In fact, no NT epistle or portion of an epistle was written to explain to irate and disappointed Jewish believers that the kingdom promises of the OT had to be dramatically reinterpreted and reapplied. It is inconceivable that the early Jewish Christians changed their monolithic OT view on the kingdom without a single NT passage being written to address the matter.

On the other hand, the premillennial view can point to Acts 1 where the apostles and Jesus were clearly premillennial in their view of the kingdom. Furthermore, premillennialists can point to a major section of Scripture (Romans 9-11) which was written specifically to confirm that God's OT promises to national Israel are irrevocable.

Summary: Six passages that make me a premillennialist

1. Zechariah 14:16-19. Zechariah refers to an extended time period after the return of Christ during which Christ reigns, but sin and disobedience are still possible. This cannot be the eternal state.
2. Jeremiah 32:40-42. God specifically promised national Israel that they would not receive the penalty of His election and promises (punishment for their disobedience), but not receive the full blessings. God said that those who received the penalty must also receive the blessings. Amillennialism works on exactly the opposite premise.
3. Jeremiah 31:35-37. God's new covenant promises to national Israel assume Israel's disobedience, not their obedience. This removes the basis for amillennialism, i.e., the idea that the church replaces Israel because of Israel's disobedience.
4. Acts 1:6-8. Forty days after Jesus' resurrection the apostles expected a kingdom for national Israel, and Jesus tacitly approved their view of the kingdom when He rebuked their desire to know the timing of that kingdom, but did not rebuke their belief in such a kingdom. Simply stated, neither the apostles nor Jesus were amillennial in Acts 1.
5. Revelation 20. The amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 is exegetically impossible, and should be abandoned. Besides being irresponsible exegesis, it is simply *unnecessary*. When you read to the end of the book, you find that God delivers exactly what He promised—an earthly kingdom ruled over by the Messiah fulfilling both the physical and spiritual kingdom promises of the OT as given.
6. Romans 9:4 and 11:29. Paul confirms that national Israel still possesses (present tense) God's OT promises and asserts that these promises are irrevocable.