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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“Systems of Eschatology: the Amillennial System – I”

TRANSCRIPT

We are studying the theology of the future events, or eschatology, seeking to restore sanity to prophecy. Now we have been saying, essentially, that we want to avoid two kinds of error. We want to avoid, on the one hand, evangelical fanaticism – the kind of fanaticism manifested when one of our leading Bible teachers announced that according to the study of the Scriptures, it had become evident to him that Mussolini was the Antichrist. And also one of our most respected faculty members at the Seminary, about seven or eight years ago after Jerusalem was taken by Israel, announced that we would probably not meet the theological seminary classes any more after that particular session. He has only demonstrated to us at the Seminary that he is not a prophet. He is still a very, respected teacher and we love him, but we now know that he is not a prophet.

One of the outstanding premillennial teachers of the 17th Century and 18th Century was a man by the name of Albrecht Bengel. He was a good German Lutheran. He was premillennial. Unfortunately, however, he set the date of the Lord’s coming at 1846, and most people are convinced that that did not happen at that time.

Now we have on the one hand, evangelical fanaticism, but we also have on the other hand, liberal cynicism, and we want to avoid that. Elmer Hamrehausen, a professor

at Princeton Theological Seminary, said a few years ago that “The idea of a millennium on earth is a lot of sentimental heavenism, whatever heavenism means, [laughter]. I think I understand what he means by that. And Professor Reinhold Neibuhr, perhaps the most famous American theologian of the 20th Century, said some years ago, “It is unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell”—well, I think we would probably agree with him there—“or to be too certain about any details of the kingdom of God in which history is consummated.”

Now the latter I think I would disagree, because the Bible has a great deal to say about the details of the kingdom of God in which history is consummated. Our Lord did not discourage the study of the prophetic word. When the apostles asked him, “Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” he did not say to them that you should not study the Scriptures that have to do with the Antichrist or with the second coming or with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He simply said, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons. That is, the time was the thing that belonged to the Father in heaven. So we are not to be deterred by extremists of either ilk. We want to study the Scriptures, and we want to listen to what they have to say concerning the future.

There are three important systems of eschatology and they are defined according to the relation of the Second Advent to the kingdom of God. We walked last time about the first of the systems post-millennialism. We want to begin our study tonight of a more important system, the system of amillennialism, and then we hope ultimately to discuss the system of premillennialism, too.

Now we say that these terms are terms that are used in relationship to the relation of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus to the kingdom of God. Post-millennialists are called post-millennialists because they believe that the Lord Jesus will return after post, after the kingdom of our Lord upon the earth.

Amillennialists are called amillennialists, which means no millennium, really are called amillennialists because they do not believe in a millennium in the customary sense

of the term, millennium. We’ll discuss the details later on. We pointed out that amillennialism has become popular, because post-millennialists, many of them, were disillusioned by the events of the 20th Century, and in fact amillennialism has been called disillusioned post-millennialism.

And finally premillennialism is called premillennialism because it is the doctrine that the Lord Jesus will return pre, before the millennium.

Now we talked first about post-millennialism and remember that millennium itself is a term that is derived from the Latin, millennium is a term that is derived itself from the Latin words, *mille* which means, a thousand, and *annus* which means, a year, so that millennium means “a thousand year period of time,” and post-millennialism is a view that our Lord will return after the millennium.

Now we looked at this particular diagram in which we tried to point out that post-millennialism believes the church period is the period of time between our Lord’s cross and the coming again, and during that period of time, according to post-millennialists, Satan is bound. He has been bound because the Lord Jesus died upon the cross at Calvary, and shed his blood for the sins of men, and thus has bound Satan through the atoning work. Throughout this period Satan is bound.

The church period will be characterized by increasing righteousness which will ultimately lead into a kingdom of, or a time of righteousness and peace upon the earth, millennium. So we will have a millennium. Following that, there will be for a brief time, a little season, the Great Tribulation which will be followed by the second coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth, the resurrection of those who have died, the Great White Throne judgment, the separation of the saved from the lost following the battle of Armageddon, and then there will be a new heaven and new earth so that our Lord comes after the millennium, post-millennialism.

Now of course you can see from this that post-millennialism is characterized by extreme optimism concerning the course of human history, that the church period will

eventuate in or culminate in a righteous reign of our Lord upon the earth, but not literally in a period of righteousness and peace, is an expression of extreme optimism.

Now it may be seem it may seem surprising to you – it certainly is surprising to me – that men can actually believe that this world in which we are living is getting better and better. But there are people who do believe that. Now I can see how someone might believe that from the standpoint of scientific advancement. I do think we are getting better and better in scientific advancement, but so far as the morals of the world are concerned, so far as the spiritual nature of man is concerned, it seems to me that all the evidence is on the other side.

And as I was speaking with my wife coming over here just expressing my amazement that people really could think the world is getting better and better, she called my attention to something, as she often does, she called my attention to the fact that the environmentalists probably would not agree with a statement that the world was getting better and better, either, since we are about to pollute ourselves out of existence.

But nevertheless, Loraine Boettner, a fine Christian man, a very, very fine Christian man, and tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon lest the uncircumcised Philistines of the Arminians hear, but a good Calvinist, Loraine Boettner, seventeen years ago said, and has written this in a book, “Historical perspective and simple observation of world conditions should make it clear to everyone that the world is getting better.”

Now this coming from an outstanding Calvinist theologian is an amazing statement. But then Mr. Boettner is a post-millennialist. He further qualifies this a page later by saying, “While we hold that the world is becoming better, that does not mean that there is steady progress.” And finally he makes this amazing statement, “The world over the world over the pagan religions quite clearly have had their day and are disintegrating.”

Now I have a friend who is a missionary in Tunisia among the Mohammedans, and this is a statement I want to be sure to write to him in my next letter so he will get a great deal of encouragement [laughter] and let him know that the pagan religions are

disintegrating, because he’s been now ministering there for some time and he has not yet discovered this. In fact, he has discovered just the opposite. He has discovered that the Christianity that exists in Tunisia which was just a group of maybe twenty or twenty-five people plus a few – this is going out on tape but nevertheless I’m going to say it – a few knuckleheads from the National Council of Churches that are also down there, that is the total [laughter] that is the total expression of Christianity there, and instead of Christianity overcoming, Christianity has been defeated by the Mohammedans in Tunisia and there are others also who are having the same experience. And simple statistics ought to tell us that that is not true because we have more non-Christians now in the world than we have ever had before. These statements are just not true. Now that is Professor Boettner, and he is an he is a fine Christian man.

Now a liberal post-millennialist looks at things a little differently. He does not look for the millennium to come by the progressive preaching of the gospel, as Mr. Boettner does. A liberal theologian wants to take the whole question of bringing the millennium in into his own hands, and so Shirley Jackson Case said, “Shall we still look for God to introduce a new order by catastrophic means, or (and this is the better program) shall we assume the responsibility of bringing about our own millennium, believing that God is working in us and in our world to will and to work for his good pleasure?” So Professor Case is going to bring in the millennium himself by his own activities, but he has not yet succeeded either. That’s post-millennialism and post-millennialism does not offer us a great deal of hope. Fortunately there are not many post-millennialists around any more.

We want to study the system of amillennialism. Now remember amillennialism is the doctrine that there is no millennium in the customary sense. So let’s look for a few moments at the history of amillennialism.

Amillennialists have very little to point to in the early Christian centuries. The early Christian centuries in the evidence that they do give us of beliefs concerning the

millennium give support for a premillennial interpretation of history, but give us no specific support for amillennial interpretation. Amillennialists, therefore, in defending their system, usually content themselves with denying the claims of premillennialists that the early church was premillennial. One of the amillennialists simply stated very baldly in his book on amillennialism, Jesus and the apostles were amillennial in their eschatology.

Of course that is as a logician would say, a *petitio principii*, an assumption of the thing that he is trying to prove, and we have to of course discount that kind of statement. I could tell you that the Bible supports premillennialism, but that wouldn’t prove anything. We should go to the Scriptures and indicate it from the Scriptures themselves. And to say that Jesus and the apostles were amillennialists is to say what we are trying to discover from the study of the Scriptures.

Let’s look now historically at the question of amillennialism from the apostles to Augustine. I believe it is of the greatest importance in studying any subject to begin with the history of that subject. So we want to begin with the history of that subject. The thing that you learn immediately about these three centuries, because you remember the date of Augustine, his birth was 354 A.D., and he died in 430 A.D. The thing that you learn about the three centuries from the apostles to Augustine is that they are almost devoid of any testimony whatsoever to amillennialism. If history teaches us anything at all, by means of any kind of consensus, it teaches us that the great majority of the early church fathers were premillennial in their doctrine.

Now let’s just take two or three illustrations. In the case of Barnabas, Barnabas wrote an epistle, by some scholars dated in the latter part of the 1st Century, by others in the early part of the 2nd Century, and in this testimony, his epistle, called the Epistle of Barnabas, he makes reference to the question of a kingdom upon the earth. His testimony is disputed. His testimony is not very clear. His testimony is disputed. Traditionally, however students of the Epistle of Barnabas have usually regarded him as being premillennial. The 15th chapter of his epistle I think confirms that. But if there is

any support for amillennialism at all in the first two centuries, this is the only support and it is disputed, and the great majority of the students of the Epistle of Barnabas have affirmed that he was premillennial.

Justin Martyr was probably the first of the Christian apologists. Justin Martyr lived from 100 A.D. to 165, so you can see he was born just about the time that John the apostle died, therefore he has very close connections with the apostolic church. Justin Martyr had very definite premillennial views.

Now of course this does not mean that premillennialism is necessarily true. Justin Martyr had other views which were not scriptural. He believed in baptismal regeneration. He spoke about saving people through baptism, as Augustine did, too, and as other heretics have done who did not have the knowledge of truth that Justin Martyr or Augustine had. So when we quote Justin Martyr, we are quoting him not to affirm that everything he said was good, but his views were definitely premillennial.

Now listen to what he says. He writes a dialogue with Trypho, a Jew, in which he seeks to defend Christianity before Trypho. And in his dialogue with Trypho he asks, “Do you really admit that this place Jerusalem shall be rebuilt and do you expect your people to be gathered together and made joyful with Christ, and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came?”

Justin answered him, “I and others are of this opinion.” Now notice he says that Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, his people shall be gathered together, made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs and the prophets, men of our nation and other proselytes joined, who have joined them before your Christ came. He says, “I and others are of this opinion, and believe that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware. But on the other hand, I signify to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians and think otherwise. But he concluded, I and others who are right minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in

Jerusalem which will then be rebuilt, adorned, enlarged as the Prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others have declared.

Now you can see a couple of things from this. In the first place Justin Martyr was a premillennialist. That’s what he says. He admits that there are others who do not accept premillennialism. He does not say that they are amillennialists; he simply says they do not accept these views. But he affirms that those who are right-minded Christians on all points do accept what he has just set forth in his dialogue with Trypho.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen are two other very important early men. Clement lived in 155 A.D. to 220 A.D. and Origen lived from one 185 to 254 A.D. Both of these men lived in Egypt. They were of Egyptian persuasion and possessed Egyptian theology. Tendencies of the spiritualization of the prophecies arose in both of these men, arose in Clement and were developed in Origen, and led to an opposition to the doctrine of premillennialism. Clement of Alexandria and Origen are the first real evidences of the existence of organized opposition to the premillennial doctrine which had been the doctrine of the early church until this time.

Now when you have said this, when you have referred to these men of whom Barnabas’ testimony is questionable, Justin Martyr admits that there were some people around who didn’t accept premillennialism, and then when you come a couple of hundred years later or a hundred and fifty years later to the time of Clement and Origen, you have men who deny the millennial teaching that is the total of the support for amillennialism in that whole period.

Now when we come to talk about premillennialism, we will talk about the testimony of a number of men who specifically affirm that they were premillennial. So I think that we can sum up the period of time from the apostles to Augustine by saying that for the three centuries we find almost no testimony to the doctrine of amillennialism. It is definitely a doctrine that did not so far as history tells us originate with our Lord or the apostles, as Mr. Landis has so boldly declared.

Let’s come to Augustine now. Augustine was probably the greatest of the early church fathers from the standpoint of a theological mind. He was born in the fourth century lived on until the fifth century, and it is Augustine that we are indebted for a great deal of the teaching on grace that Luther and Calvin popularized in the time of the Protestant Reformation. Augustine says that he was first a premillennialist, as we read last week. He said he was a premillennialist, but he said that he had abandoned premillennialism because of the beliefs of some of the premillennialists who over-stressed the idea of the carnal banquetings. In other words, he confesses that he does not abandon the doctrine because of the scriptural teaching, but rather because of the excesses of those who believed in the premillennial doctrine.

Now all of us know of course that this kind of principle pertains in our own Christian testimony. There are not a few people who have been stumbled by the odd ideas that evangelicals come up with and strange reasons that they give for this Christian faith, so it’s evident that some of Augustine’s friends or acquaintances or people whose existence he knew had expressed ideas concerning the premillennial doctrine that were so wild and fanatical and strange and suggested a kind of Mohammedan paradise that he was deterred from his continuation in the belief of the millennium.

What then did he come to teach? Well Augustine came to teach that the binding of Satan referred to in Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through 3 took place in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. Now I’m going to ask you at this point if you will to turn with me to Revelation chapter 20, and I want to read verses 1 through 6 which will be our Scripture reading, and to which we shall refer a number of times later on. Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through 6. This passage is famous in prophetic discussions because of the mention of the term, one thousand years. The term one thousand years occurs about five or six times in these verses and does not occur specifically anywhere else.

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, (by the way the

19th chapter has just concluded with the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus to the earth and the battle of Armageddon, the doom of the beast and the false prophet, and of the armies of the beast and the false prophet, then we read) And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, who is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Now there is the text for a millennium.) But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection (that is, when he says that they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years, he explains that by saying this is the first resurrection). Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

Now Augustine taught, as a result of the change of mind, he taught that the binding of Satan referred to here took place in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. He

does not assume, since that that this chapter follows chapter 19 in which the Second Advent is referred to, but Augustine like many interpreters since have seen the book of Revelation as a series of recapitulations of biblical teaching. So that in chapter 20 we go all the way back again to the time of the early ministry of the Lord Jesus and when we read “He laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, who is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him in the bottomless pit,” we are to understand this as referring to the effects of our Lord Jesus Christ’s death on the cross. Since on the cross he overcame Satan by dying for sin which was Satan’s hold over men, it was then that he bound the strong man, as the Lord Jesus suggested, and Satan has been bound since that time in Augustine’s teaching.

Augustine also had definite views concerning the millennium. He taught that the millennium which follows the binding of Satan, for we read about it just afterwards is the present age in which we live. Now let’s put ourselves in the day of Augustine. He lived around the year 400 A.D. and if he were teaching us he would say the binding of Satan that is referred to here occurred three hundred and fifty years ago when the Lord Jesus died on the cross and died for sin, and thus Satan was bound. We are now, therefore living in the millennial age. It is a literal period of time for Augustine. He took the thousand years to be literally, contrary to many present day amillennialists, but he took the thousand years to be a literal period of time.

Now he also had the idea that human history is largely covered by a series of thousand year periods of time. He thought that there was going to be another thousand year period of time after the millennium, but nevertheless he thought of the millennium and evidently in his teaching – there is a little question about this but most are agreed – evidently he thought that the sixth millennium in which our Lord accomplished this really began at about 350 B.C., so that when our Lord died there remained only six hundred and fifty years of the one thousand year period of time the millennium. So he expected since

we lived we live in the millennium, he expected the Lord Jesus to come around the year 650 A.D.

Now he doesn’t say that specifically. He is not a date setter. But everything that he says about the thousand year period leads most to believe that that is what he was trying to say though he doesn’t put it down in so many words. So he viewed Revelation 20 then as a recapitulation of the preceding chapters, the binding of Satan as occurring at the time of our Lord, that we are now living in the millennium, it will be over in around the year 650 A.D. and at that time the consummation shall take place.

The first resurrection for Augustine which he refers to here in verse 5, this is the first resurrection, Augustine took to be the new birth of the believer. So when he says they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years, he refers to the new birth of individuals who have believed in Christ. By being born again they experience the first resurrection and they live and reign with the Lord Jesus spiritually. So the first resurrection is the new birth. First resurrection is the new birth, Satan was bound, the Lord, the millennium will be over around 650 A.D. Now that was Augustine’s teaching. Now he was a great man but unfortunately for him he lived in an age in which he didn’t have the benefit of all of us great prophetic students of the 20th Century.

History, of course overthrew the theory of Augustine. When 650 came, those who believed with Augustine discovered that his theory was wrong. Attention was soon fastened thereafter on the year 1000 A.D. as one might immediately think, because if Satan was bound when the Lord Jesus died, then why not begin the millennial period then? For some reason Augustine had not, but it was for someone else to make that particular distinction, and you can imagine someone in 650 A.D. waiting for the Lord Jesus to come, and when he didn’t come looking over the situation again and coming up with a new theory and announcing a new series of prophetic lectures in which he would tell his congregation when the millennium actually began, and when then the Lord Jesus would

be coming. So 1000 A.D. was set upon, and the belief was widespread that the Second Advent would occur at the year 1000 A.D.

But at the year 1000 A.D. the Lord Jesus Christ did not come, and so then some thought of the year 1044, and again he did not come, and finally again in the year 1065 there was hope that the Second Advent would occur on Good Friday, when Good Friday happened to coincide with the day of annunciation which the church had decided was March the 25th, when Gabriel had made the annunciation to Mary the mother of our Lord. But again in the year 1065 on March the 25th, the Lord Jesus did not come. And so Augustinian eschatology was shown to be wrong.

We move now from Augustine to modern times. The Reformers were great admirers of Augustine. The Reformers accepted the eschatology of Augustine. That is, they did not believe in a literal millennial kingdom upon the earth. Calvin accepted Augustinian eschatology. Luther accepted Augustinian eschatology. Melancthon accepted Augustinian methodology, and the Roman Catholic Church, of course, accepted Augustinian eschatology, because they had held that all down those centuries. In other words, in eschatology, the Reformers did not move away from the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching, but remained within the teaching of the Roman Church in eschatology.

Now variations of course have taken place, but generally speaking, in saying that they stood with the Augustinian eschatology, we are saying that they did not accept premillennialism, that they did accept a form of spiritualized millennium. Calvin has some rather interesting words to say about millennialism. Calvin was a great man and as you know, I love John Calvin. When I get to heaven, I’m going to ask him how he could make such an error as this, but nevertheless this is what he says in his *Institutes*. He says, “Not long after arose the millenarians who limited the reign of Christ to a thousand years. Their fiction is too puerile to require or deserve refutation.” So he thought it was so stupid to believe in a reign of Christ of a thousand years on the earth that it wasn’t even required that he refute it. He says, “Nor does the revelation which they quote in favor of

their error afford them any support, for the term of a thousand years there mentioned refers not to the eternal blessedness of the church, but to the various agitations which awaited the church in its militant state upon the earth. Those who assign the children of God a thousand years to enjoy the inheritance of future life little think what dishonor they cast on Christ and his kingdom.”

Now you can see from that last statement that Calvin did not understand what the millennium was all about, for he thought that the premillennialists believed that the millennium was the time of eternal life. In other words, what he seems to say here is that the premillennialists believed that eternal life would last for a thousand years on the earth. It’s evident he had never really studied the question, and that’s explainable by the fact that he and the rest of the Reformers were not interested in prophecy. They were contending with the Roman Catholic Church over the means by which a man is declared righteous before God. And just like Charles Hodge, as I mentioned last time, begins his session his section on eschatology by saying, I don’t really know anything about it and then spends his eighty pages proving it, so the Reformers did not study eschatology except its broad forms, and therefore they did not know anything about it, and they prove it by the things that they have written concerning the premillennialists, at least in my opinion.

Now I want to move to the description of modern amillennialism, or Roman two in our outline. Berkoff, perhaps the simplest and clearest of the amillennial theologians of the 20th Century, admits that the amillennial system is purely negative. By the very term, “no millennium,” the amillennialist is saying simply we don’t agree with the premillennialists or the post millennialists. We do not believe in a millennium.

The leading viewpoints may be divided into two classes. There is a broad view of amillennialism and a narrow view, and let me try to state these. There are two senses then in which they use millennium. In the broad view, the adherents to amillennialism deny that there will be a period of righteousness and peace on the earth before Christ

comes. Now that of course is what the post-millennialists have suggested. The amillennialists deny that there is a period of time call a millennium in which there will be a period of righteousness and peace on earth before Christ comes, and they also deny, of course, a period of time following his second coming in which the Lord Jesus shall reign on the earth with his saints. So the amillennialists deny a millennium before the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus as the post-millennialists teach, and they deny a millennium afterwards in the sense in which the premillennialists teach that. That’s the broad sense of amillennialism.

The narrow sense of amillennialism is that the amillennialists teach that the thousand years refers to the reign of the saints in the intermediate state. That is, in their teaching on the millennium, when they read Revelation chapter 20, they take the thousand years here to refer to the reign of the saints who have been born again and who have died and who have gone to be with the Lord – the reign of the saints in the intermediate state. They are with the Lord; that is, in their intermediate state when they are spirits with the Lord but without a resurrection body. They teach that the thousand years refers to the reign of the saints in the intermediate state. In other words, the millennium is a heavenly kingdom in which Christians who have died and have gone to be with the Lord rule and reign with him. That’s the narrow sense in which amillennialists believe prophetic teaching concerning the millennium. Under either circumstance they deny that there is a kingdom on the earth in which the Lord Jesus rules and reigns with his saints.

Now let me for a few moments talk about the various exponents of this view. Now I don’t want to make fun of the amillennialists. I want to try to be as sane as I possibly can in this. The leading advocates of amillennialism are not in agreement with one another, and we should not be too happy over that and think that that’s a point in our favor if we are premillennialists, because the premillennialists are not always in agreement with each other either as you well know.

If you listen to three people teach the prophetic Scriptures it’s not long before you sense that they don’t agree on every point, and you usually are forced to go to the Scriptures yourself if you’re interested in finding out what seems to be the truth and deciding between these variant interpretations that have been offered. As you well know for example, within the premillennial camp, there are those who believe that the Lord Jesus shall come for the saints before the tribulation period. Then there are good Christian people who believe that the Lord Jesus will come in the midst of the tribulation period. And then there are good Christian men who believe that the Lord Jesus shall come at the end of the tribulation period, but before the millennium, and these three forms of belief concerning the rapture of the church are all differences within premillennialism. They all are premillennialists, but they differ over the time of the rapture of the church.

And then to complicate it a little more there are some who believe that when the Lord Jesus comes, he comes during the period of the Great Tribulation but only a certain part of the church are raptured – those who are the faithful ones. The unfaithful ones – may be the majority of you; I don’t know – will be left to go through the tribulation. That has been called the partial rapture view. So you see, there are four different views within the camp of premillennialism. So when I point out that the amillennialists cannot agree, don’t think that that’s necessarily a point for you’re side, because they will very quickly point out to you that we do not agree among ourselves either.

Now if I could just get everybody to agree with me, we could solve this problem, but unfortunately we cannot do that. First of all Professor Berkoff. What does he believe about the millennium? Well he believes and he is an amillennialist of course; all of these men are amillennialists. All of them are 20th Century theologians with the exception of Cleveot who was a European and lived in the 19th Century, but whose theory is the theory of Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield.

Professor Berkoff believes that the present age is the age of the kingdom of God and will be followed immediately by the eternal kingdom. So we are living in the kingdom of God at the present time. The period of time between the advents of the Lord Jesus is the millennium, and we are living in the millennium. Now you may not have realized that, but that is what you are living in. You thought because you lived in Texas that it was good, you just didn’t know how good it really is. You are living in the millennium.

Floyd Hamilton, another well-known Reformed theologian who is an amillennialist, believes that the a thousand years is a symbolic number. It refers to a complete period. They do not that the—he does not take the thousand years as a literal thousand years. It just is a round number that means a complete period of time the period of time between the two comings of the Lord Jesus, and the reigning is the spiritual reign of the disembodied spirits in heaven with Jesus Christ. So again, the millennium itself is the period of time between the two comings. The reign itself, the kingdom, is the kingdom of the spiritual reign of the disembodied spirits in heaven with the Lord Jesus. When you die, you enter the millennium and begin to rule and reign with the Lord Jesus.

George Murray is another amillennialist. He believes that the binding of Satan was accomplished by the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, but Mr. Murray was associated with a lot of premillennialists. I happen to have to have had a very good friend who was a good friend of Mr. Murray’s. Now any time that someone says that during the present age Satan is bound, you can be sure that a Bible student is going to have questions in his mind. Because when he reads the Bible, as I mentioned last time, he notices the Bible says Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And so you come to the conclusion as I suggested last time that if Satan is bound, he is bound by a very long chain—one that stretches all over this world in which we live. Further, you remember all of those other texts that speak of the various ways in which Satan was

active in the life and ministry of the apostles hindering the Apostle Paul from doing this and so on.

Now Mister Murray knew all of that, and he undoubtedly had people who said when he said Satan was bound, “How can you believe that when the Bible says Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour?” So as he looked at Revelation chapter 20 verse 3 he came to the conclusion that since this says that he was cast into the bottomless pit and shut up that he might not deceive the nations any longer, he then hit upon the explanation that Satan was bound only in this respect, that he no longer deceives the nations. He cannot prevent the gospel from going to them, so that he is not bound in other ways, but he is bound in this way and this way alone.

Previously he points out only the Jews knew the way of salvation and other nations were in darkness. But at the time of our Lord’s death, Satan was bound so that the gospel now goes out to all, so he is bound only in the sense that he no longer is able to deceive the nations. So in Professor Murray’s opinion, the thousand years is a definite period of time extending from the first to the second coming when the departed saints reign with Christ in heaven and Satan is prevented from deceiving the nations, and this reigning in heaven is the culmination of the new birth, and the first resurrection is there reigning with the Lord in heaven.

Now of course Mr. Murray cannot explain those texts which say that everybody is blinded by Satan. He cannot explain those texts such as 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 3 and 4 where the Apostle Paul speaks about the gospel being hidden. He says, “But if our gospel be hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine until then.” That text says that Satan has blinded the minds of all those that believe not. So Mr. Murray’s theory is not Scriptural, but nevertheless that’s what he holds.

Albertus Peters is another believer in amillennialism. He, too, takes the thousand years as a symbolic period. It began when paganism ceased to be a menace to the church. So in his theory it began the millennium began at the accession of Constantine to the throne of the Roman Empire, or if you include the northern nations, he said it began at the time of Charlemagne and has continued since that time.

Cleveot and Warfield had different views, a slightly different view. The millennium does not relate to the earth at all, according to Warfield’s view, but the reign of the blessed dead with Christ in the intermediate state in heaven. Amillennialism in the strictest sense. The millennium is entirely apart from the world, has no connection with the world whatsoever, doesn’t have any connection with Satan’s deceiving the nations. Well, you can see why Loraine Beottner, when he finishes his discussion of amillennialism says, “An exact definition of amillennialism is rather difficult to formulate.”

So in essence to sum it up these are the essential features of amillennialism. We have the time of the cross, this is the time when Satan is bound. Satan is bound throughout this period of time, the church period. The millennium is Jesus Christ reigning heaven during this age with his believing saints in the intermediate state. They are disembodied, for the resurrection has not taken place yet, but they are enjoying a millennium in heaven. There will be a Great Tribulation a brief period of time before our Lord’s Second Advent. Then the second coming of the Lord Jesus shall occur. The resurrection of the saints, they will be given their bodies; the Great White Throne judgment just following the final battle of Armageddon; and the rebellion of Gog and Magog, after which we shall enter into the new heavens and new earth without any period of a millennial reign of our Lord with believers on the earth. That is the amillennial teaching.

The amillennial program as you can see is a program that is very similar in some ways to the premillennial program. Excluding the fact that the millennium is a period of time during the present when our Lord reigns in heaven with his saints, putting the

millennium over here on the earth, then premillennialism and amillennialism are quite similar. There is a church period, there is a time of Great Tribulation. At the conclusion of the Great Tribulation, the Lord Jesus comes to the earth, and in the premillennial system, the kingdom takes place, and then the Great White Throne judgment at the end and a new heavens and a new earth. But amillennialism then has a program of a church age, a tribulation period, a Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, and entrance in to the new heaven and the new earth.

Now I want to for just a few moments, we have about five or six or seven minutes, I want to criticize a few things in the amillennial scheme from the standpoint of Revelation chapter 20. So I want you to turn over to Revelation chapter 20, and I want to talk for just a moment about, first of all, the one thousand years in Revelation 20 verses 1 through 6.

Now remember, amillennialists take the one thousand years in the Book of Revelation to be a symbolical period of time, not a real period of time at all. I want you to notice now one or two things in connection with this. We read in verse 4: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

Now John as you can see from the first three words, and I saw, is giving us a vision of things that he saw and he is reporting to us the things that he saw. Then he adds in the 5th verse, “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” Now having said that, he then gives us in the 6th verse an interpretation of the vision. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” The point I want you to

be careful to notice is this: verses 4 and 5 refer to a vision; verse 6 contains the interpretation of the vision.

Now if we are to understand the vision as a symbolical vision and there is good reason for taking the visions in the Book of Revelation in symbolical form, for John tells us in the opening verse of the book that he does give us much of his material in the Book of Revelation in symbolical form. If there is good reason for thinking that the first two verses have to do with a vision, verse 6 has to do with interpretation.

Now the striking thing is that a one thousand year period of time, taken symbolically by amillennial interpreters, is found not only in the vision, but it is also found in the interpretation. Now if this were a symbolical number, then it is highly unlikely that the same number would be found in the interpretation. We should find an explanation of the thousand year period of time. But the thousand year period of time is found both in the vision and in the interpretation, suggesting that we are to take the one thousand years as a literal period of time explained in the interpretation.

Second, in order to support that, I want you to notice the change in tenses in the description of the vision and the interpretation to show that verse 6 is an interpretation of verses 4 and 5. Now at the end of verse 4 we read, they lived and they reigned with Christ a thousand years, in English the past tense. John describes the vision. He speaks of the living and reigning, and the living and reigning are in the past tense. Now when he comes to the explanation of what this is, he repeats the thousand years, but at the conclusion of verse 6 we read and shall reign with him a thousand years. In other words, the past tense has now become a future tense, suggesting that in the interpretation, we are not to look to something in the past but we are to look to something in the future. So we have, then, in the interpretation the retaining of the thousand years, which suggests that it is to be understood literally. We have the past tense change to the future in order that we may locate the time of the reigning in the future.

Now one other thing before we close. In the 19th chapter we have had the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. Chapter 19 verse 11 says, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” And you have the beautiful description of our Lord’s coming as the word of God, and how he comes and he smites the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

Now that begins in verse 11 with the little word, and. And I saw heaven opened. We have progression in these visions. Verse 17, *And* I saw an angel standing in the sun. And we have a description of events that have to do with the battle of Armageddon which follows the coming to the earth. Then we read in verse 1 of chapter 20, *And* I saw an angel come down from heaven. These ands connect one right after the other. We call them in Greek continuative ands, indicating there is chronological progression. *And* I saw the angel come, and the binding of Satan takes place.

Then in verse 4 we read, *And* I saw thrones and they sat upon them and the description of the millennial kingdom. In other words, we have the second coming of our Lord, we have the battle of Armageddon, we have the binding of Satan, and we have the kingdom of God upon the earth, and they are connected with, and, right along chronologically. What does that not suggest but that the kingdom of our Lord Jesus is a kingdom that is to follow this Second Advent, contrary to amillennial teaching, and not a millennium that has preceded his coming. Further we read in the 7th verse, *And* when the thousand years are ended, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison.

Now how an amillennialist who believes that the Lord Jesus by his death on the cross bound Satan so that the nations should be deceived no longer, could then, how you could understand this then that Satan is going to be loosed after the millennium and shall go out to deceive the nations I do not understand. It seems to say that the work of the Lord Jesus was not really finished after all. But notice the and again. And when the thousand years are ended. These are chronologically progressive visions. And so it is

evident then that the amillennial interpretation of the thousand years will not stand the investigation of the exegesis of the text. Our time is up. We will deal with further weaknesses of the system in our next study. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the study of the Scriptures. We realize Lord that great men of God have differed over the interpretation of the millennium, and we realize that our Christianity does not depend upon our understanding of the millennium, but upon our relationship to Jesus Christ.

But as we study the Scriptures we see that a great portion of Thy word is devoted to the description and explanation of these great events, and thus it is evident that Thou art interested in our reading and studying of the prophetic portions of the word. Deliver us from scorn of the prophetic Scriptures. Help us to be subject to the spirit and to learn, for we know that the knowledge of the word is sanctifying.

Go with us as we part. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.