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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

Systems of Eschatology: the Amillennial System – II

TRANSCRIPT

For our Scripture reading I'm going to turn again and read Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through 6 because we will be referring to it in just a moment. Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through verse 6.

You'll remember in chapter 19, we have had the account of the second coming the battle of Armageddon the doom of the beast and false prophet and of the kings and armies opposed to our Lord. And then we read of the binding of Satan and also of the first and second resurrection:

“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, (that “they” probably refers to the individuals referred to

in chapter 19 verses 11 through 16, for it is the nearest possible antecedent) 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. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. 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 we have been saying that there are three important systems of eschatology defined according to the relation of the Second Advent to the kingdom of God. We have spoken first about post-millennialism. That is a term which we have said is derived from three Latin words: *post* which means after; *mille* which means a thousand I should say; and *annus* which means a year. So post-millennialism has to do with something after the thousand years. The Greek form is *chilias* from which we get the English transliteration chiliasm. That is the same as millennialism.

Now we have tried to point out that these terms, such as post-millennialism, have reference to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. In other words, these terms, post-millennialism, amillennialism and premillennialism, are terms that are derived from the relationship between the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus to the kingdom. So, post-millennialism which means after the thousand year doctrine, means that the Lord Jesus will return after the thousand year reign.

Now we have talked about this post millennialism pointing out that of course this is a reference to the cross this is a reference to the second coming and the events that are gathered around the second coming. Throughout the period between the cross and the Second Advent according to the post-millennialists, this is the church period, the church period will be characterized by ultimate victory for the saints of God who shall through their relationship to the Lord Jesus rule and reign with him. We shall have ushered in a long period – usually, post-millennialists do not necessarily think that this is a literal thousand year period of time – but a period of righteousness and peace.

And then at the conclusion of that period of righteousness and peace most, of the post-millennialists believe there shall be Great Tribulation for a little season. The second coming of the Lord Jesus shall take place. The Great White Throne judgment, Armageddon, Gog and Magog, all of those great climactic events associated with Second Advent, and then we shall have a new heavens and a new earth so that the Lord Jesus comes after the millennium.

Characteristic of this period is a sense of optimism that we are, throughout this period of time – and we are living in this period of time, the church period – we should expect to see things get a little better all along, until finally the Lord until finally we have this period of righteousness and peace upon the earth following which the Lord Jesus shall come again. Some post-millennialists claim that this was the view of the early church and some of them, startlingly, claim that it was the view of all the historical creeds.

Then we also talked about amillennialism. We pointed out that the term amillennialism derived from *mille* and the Greek word-letter *alpha*, which is the way the Greeks have of negating a word, so amillennialism means there shall be no millennium. That *a-* functioning just as *un-* does in English with words like unknown, so that amillennialism is the doctrine that there is not going to be a thousand year period of time at all upon the, in which the saints reign with our Lord upon the earth.

In amillennialism, we have the church period. Satan is bound throughout the church period. As I said, this may be something you didn't know but nevertheless this is their doctrine. We are now living in the millennium. Some amillennialists believe that the period of the millennium, the thousand years, is an earthly period. It is of course to be thought of as, again, figurative for just a general period of time. Although Augustine, the first amillennialists, did believe that the thousand years was a definite number. So that the millennium is the reign that we enjoy with Jesus Christ because we have been born again.

Having been born again and having been given new life, we because we have been born again we rule and reign with the Lord Jesus, and we are all in the millennium at the present time. There are some amillennialists who believe that the millennium is a heavenly term and refers to Christ reigning in heaven during this age with his saints. So we rule down here on the earth with him, having been born again, and when we go to heaven before the second coming of the Lord Jesus, we continue to rule with him in heaven.

This was the view of such men as Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield. He held that the millennium was a heavenly rule. He however in some ways was better classified as a post-millennialist. Then of course according to amillennial doctrine, the second coming, the resurrection, the Great White Throne judgment, Armageddon, Gog and Magog, shall follow the Great Tribulation of a little season and that, too, shall be followed by a new heaven and a new earth.

Amillennialism is rather strange because it is one of those doctrines that is contrary to its name. They speak an awful lot about the millennium but yet their doctrine is no millennium. And I want to say something about that a little later. Professor Berkoff, another good Calvinistic theologian, is an amillennialist, and he claims that this view is as old as Christianity, and it is the only view either expressed or implied in the great historical confessions of the church.

Now here we are noticing something about students of the prophetic word. They all claim that the early church taught their doctrine. And when we get to premillennialism and deal with it a little more in detail, we will discover that it is the premillennialists who also make the claim that the early church was premillennial. So we have had the post a post-millennialist claiming that the early church was post-millennial, and amillennialist claiming that the early church was amillennial, and then we'll have the premillennialists and they too will claim the same thing. Claims of course do not make it true.

Now premillennialism. Premillennialism is derived from the same words, but this time the Latin prefix *pre* is before millennialism, and so that means that the second coming of the Lord Jesus precedes the millennial reign. So we have the cross, and the church period, a time of great tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the first resurrection, Armageddon, then we are brought into the millennium. Satan is bound during the millennium. There will be a little season at the conclusion and Satan is released according to Revelation chapter 20 verses 7 through 10. That will be followed by the defeat of those armies of the last rebellion, the Great White Throne judgment – Gog and Magog are referred to there – and then we have the new heavens and the new earth.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about premillennialism is that it is the most fervently attacked view of all of these views. Very few people go out of their way to attack post-millennialism. Very few people go out of their way to attack amillennialism. But quite a few people go out of their way to attack premillennialism. And I must say it suffers from a great deal of wicked misrepresentation. But at any rate we want to come back to our subject here and uh deal with the question of amillennialism.

These are the three great systems of prophetic interpretation: post-millennialism amillennialism and premillennialism. And last time, you may remember, we first reviewed the history of amillennialism from the apostles to Augustine. We discussed Augustine who is really the father of amillennialism, and then from Augustine to modern times. Then we looked briefly at a description of modern amillennialism with the leading

viewpoints: the broad view, the narrow view and some of the leading advocates. And I think we also just mentioned briefly the amillennial program.

And we were looking last time at the biblical analysis of amillennialism and specifically its foundations, and if my memory serves me correctly—I did not make a note in my notes—we discussed thousand years in Revelation chapter 20 verses 1 through 6, and we discussed I believe the binding of Satan—is that true?—but we did not discuss the first resurrection in Revelation 20 and verse 5.

So what I would like for you to do now if you will is to turn with me to Revelation chapter 20 and verse 5, and let’s note what the amillennialists are saying about Revelation chapter 20 verse 5, and then I want to make an answer to their claims. In verse 4, remember, he has said, “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. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. 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.”

Amillennialists, in discussing the first resurrection – usually this is almost universal among them – usually refer the first resurrection to the new birth of the believer when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we read here the latter part of verse 4, and they lived and they reigned with Christ a thousand years, that “lived” means they came to personal faith in Jesus Christ and were given a new nature. They were born again. They were regenerated, and they reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Now the thousand years is understood symbolically as representative of a large number, generally representing completeness, so the thought is that when a person believes in the Lord Jesus and is born again, at that point, having been born again he

enters into his millennial reigning with the Lord Jesus. He rules and reigns upon the earth as long as he is alive upon the earth with the Lord Jesus Christ who is ruling in heaven, and when he dies he passes into the presence of the Lord, and he continues his rule there. Well then what to the amillennialists do—that is the first resurrection. The first resurrection is our new birth.

Well what is the second resurrection? The second resurrection is the resurrection that takes place just before the end of the world, to use Rushduni’s expression, and the entrance into the eternal state, and at the second resurrection all of the dead are brought up and are judged. There is a great general judgment of both the living and the dead, and those that do not pass muster the judgment pass into the lake of fire, and those who have been born again they enter into the new heavens and the new earth.

But now let’s see what the text says about this first resurrection. And I want to notice two or three points about it first of all. In the first place, this expression “and they lived” is an expression in the book of Revelation which refers as a general rule to the bodily resurrection – not to the spiritual resurrection when we are born again – but to the bodily resurrection. Let’s turn back for example to chapter 2 and verse 8 of the Book of Revelation. In chapter 2 verse 8 in the message that the Lord Jesus sent to the church at Smyrna we read these words, “And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived.”

Now this is the same expression, the same verb, that is found in Revelation chapter 20 and verse 4. So the reference to our Lord’s living cannot be to any kind of new birth that he went through, for he did not undergo any kind of new birth. This is a reference to the fact that the Lord Jesus died at the cross at Calvary and then was resurrected. So the word refers to a physical resurrection.

The same thing is true then of Revelation chapter 20 and verse 4. “They lived and they reigned with Christ a thousand years” is a reference to the fact that at the conclusion of this present age there shall come to be a resurrection and the believers shall participate

in the resurrection. The Lord Jesus shall come in the air. We shall be caught up to meet him. We shall be given a new body. We shall participate in the resurrection. The dead in Christ shall rise first. They also shall begin to live at that time. At the conclusion of the tribulation period, then, Israel itself shall enter into her resurrection, and so as a result of the resurrection of believers in the present age and the resurrection of Israel at the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, the first resurrection shall be complete.

Well then, what about the statement “the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years were finished”? Who are the rest of the dead? Why the rest of the dead are those who do not participate in the resurrection of the body like our Lord Jesus Christ’s glorious body, but who at the time of the Great White Throne judgment are resurrected and given a body in which they suffer the pangs of eternal hell fire. So the first resurrection has to do with bodily resurrection. It’s the bodily resurrection of the redeemed. The second resurrection has to do with bodily resurrection; it is the bodily resurrection of those who are lost.

Now there is another confirmation of this interpretation. This statement in verse 5, this is the first resurrection, is a statement in which the Greek *anastasis* is used. This is the first *anastasis*.

Now if you’ll take your concordance – and every Christian ought to have a concordance, and he ought to use the concordance – that is the best way to study the Bible. Get a concordance and as you are reading when you come to important words, look up the usage of the words, look up those passages in the Bible and put it all together to see what the Scriptures have to say on a particular subject.

Now if you will look at the term resurrection – this term found here in the term this is the first resurrection – you’ll discover it occurs about forty-two times in the New Testament. *Anastasis*, that Greek word. In forty-one out of the forty-two times it has reference to a physical resurrection. It is not a spiritual resurrection, not the resurrection by in which we are born again. It never so far as I know refers to the new birth,

specifically. So the interpretation, this is the first resurrection, that this is a reference to our new birth and that we enter into the millennium then, and we now are living in the millennium and shall live in the millennium when we die with the Lord Jesus, that is a figment of the imagination of those who have not bothered to look up the usage of this term *anastasis*. It refers to a physical resurrection.

Well do the rest of the dead have a spiritual resurrection at the end of the reign? If the first resurrection is spiritual would not the rest of the dead have a spiritual resurrection? Not even the amillennialist believes that. He likes to think that the first resurrection is spiritual the second resurrection is physical. Dean Alford, the famous Anglican interpreter who has written a commentary which has been in use for over a hundred years on the New Testament, on the Greek text of the New Testament, has commented in this way, and I think this sums up the sense of this passage about as well as it could be summed up.

He says, "If in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain souls lived at the first, and the rest of the dead lived only at the end of a specified period after that first, if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ while the second means literal rising from the dead, then there is an end of all significance in language and Scripture is wiped out." He wrote this over a hundred years ago and he's right up to date. Wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.

Notice what he's saying. If we can say using the terms, resurrection, first resurrection, and then refer to a second resurrection, if we can say that the first resurrection is spiritual and the second physical, then there is an end of all significance in language and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.

Revelation chapter 20 and verse 5 does not have to do with a spiritual resurrection and with that particular fact, the whole Augustinian theory of our entrance into the

millennium when we are born again, collapses and the whole position would have to be rethought.

Now let's come to a fourth thing which I want to spend the rest of our time on: the spiritualization of the kingdom promises of the Old Testament. We are talking about the foundations of amillennialism, and we have just knocked out one of the pillars of their foundation. We want to talk about another one. They lay a great deal of stress upon the fact that the promises of the Old Testament which say that Israel is to have a kingdom in the future. Those promises are to be spiritualized. Those promises regarding Israel's kingdom are to be referred to the present reign of the church of Jesus Christ with the Lord Jesus.

So when we read in the Old Testament in all of those beautiful passages of the coming kingdom of the Messiah and of Israel reigning and ruling with him and of the kingdom of God stretching over all the earth, we are not to think that our Lord is to rule and reign with the Nation Israel. We are to understand by the term Israel and by the term Zion and by the term Jerusalem and by the term Jacob – all of those nationalistic terms – we are to understand terms that ultimately refer to the church of Jesus Christ in the present age.

Now if you have an old edition of the King James Version, which had chapter headings and also page headings, you will notice that many of those chapter headings and page headings were of that character. Passages that had to do with the blessing of Israel in the future were referred to, the blessing of Zion the church, or something of that order, for that was very common.

Now let's analyze this for a little while. In order to support this peculiar doctrine that terms such as Israel and Jerusalem do not refer to Israel and Jerusalem, but rather refer to the church, amillennialists state that the kingdom of the Old Testament is a spiritual and a heavenly kingdom, not a political and an earthly kingdom.

For example, let’s read one of the passage passages. Let’s turn over to Amos chapter 9. Now I know that it’s illegal to turn to one of the Minor Prophets, but nevertheless we are going to do it. Amos. Hosea, Joel, Amos. Remember? Amos, Obadiah. So if you can find Obadiah [laughter], well then you have practically found the Prophet Amos. Amos chapter 9 verses 11 and 12. Now I saw someone look at his wife then very pleased because he happened to accidentally open up his Bible and it fell open on Amos [more laughter]. Amos chapter 9 verses 11 and 12. Do you have it? Amos 9 11 and 12. Some of you are looking at me as if you’ve found it but you haven’t bothered to look it up because you know you couldn’t find it by the time that I’m getting around to read it. Use your index if you cannot find it. That pertains to deacons and elders also. [Laughter] Amos chapter 9 verses 11 and 12,

“ In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches of it; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they might possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the nations, which are called by my name, saith the Lord who doeth this.”

Now this statement, in that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, that passage is cited in the New Testament in Acts chapter 15, and there amillennialists and many post-millennialists, too, for they are at one in this, they refer this to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Specifically, one post millennialist, and he speaks for them as well as the amillennialists has said that this refers to the rise and expansion of the New Testament church into all the nations. That’s what we are to understand by, in that day when I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches of it – a text that seems to refer to the restoration to the Davidic family of monarchy in the kingdom, which

seems to suggest that the kingdom of the Old Testament is going to be restored in its glorious form in the future, far exceeding anything of the past, of course, but is to be connected in a vital way with the David and Israel of the Old Testament. This is to be referred to the rise and expansion of the New Testament church into all the nations.

Now how would you support something like that? Well you would support it by saying things like this. Entrance into the kingdom is by the new birth. Do we not read in the New Testament, repent for the kingdom of heavens is at hand? Does that not suggest that in order to enter into the kingdom we must repent? And specifically and more to the point, does not the Lord Jesus say to Nicodemus, except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God? Does not that tell us that entrance into the kingdom is by the new birth, thus the kingdom is a spiritual kingdom and not a political and an earthly kingdom?

Well how would you answer that? What would you say to someone who said that? Well this is what you should say. You should say the fact that a kingdom is political and earthly does not mean that it is not spiritual. To oppose political and earthly to spiritual is to deny that there could possibly be any kind of spiritual kingdom upon the earth. Spirituality has to do with the disposition of the kingdom, the nature of the kingdom. Political and earthly may also be additional qualities, but to be political and earthly does not ipso facto or of itself mean that it cannot be spiritual.

Well they say the characteristics of this kingdom are also spiritual. For example Paul says in Romans chapter 14 and verse 17. I’ll read these verses, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And we saw that Augustine laid a great deal of stress upon this, because he felt that many of the premillennialists laid too much stress upon the fact that the kingdom was a kind of carnal banqueting, and he said that the kingdom of God, was not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. But we pointed out, remembering our big fat preacher who liked fried chicken, that it is possible for a person to eat and drink

and be spiritual at the same time [laughter]. Now it may not always be something that we can pull off, but nevertheless it is a definite possibility. These are the characteristics of the kingdom, but the fact that the kingdom is righteousness joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, does not mean there cannot be an earthly and political kingdom over which our Lord Jesus Christ shall rule.

Well my friends, also point out that the Lord Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world. Will you turn over to John chapter 18 and verse 36? John chapter 18 and verse 36. Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now in my kingdom not from here." My kingdom is not of this world. Does not that tell us then that we cannot have a kingdom upon the earth? To have such a kingdom would be no kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many years ago I had a conversation with a very fine young man. At the time as I remember, he was in a Christian college, and he was being taught by an amillennial professor. He is now a theological professor in one of our fine seminaries in the United States. It was in Jackson, Mississippi, and we had a conversation. He was sitting in the back of the car and I was sitting in the front of the car and we were parked in front of the house of the director of The Youth for Christ, and we were having a discussion over the question of the millennium.

We were talking about the kingdom upon the earth, and he raised the objection based upon this particular text, he could not accept a kingdom of God upon the earth because the Lord Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world.

Now what would you say to that? Well of course the first thing you would notice I'm sure is that the Lord Jesus did not say my kingdom is not in this world, or will not be in this world. He said, it is not of this world.

Now if you'll turn back to chapter 17 and verse 11 and following, he makes some interesting statements here. He says, "And now I am no more in the world, but these are

in the world.” Now notice he says that his disciples are in the world, his apostles and, “I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: in those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world.”

Now notice he has said concerning the apostles, they are not of the world, but he has also said that they are in the world. In verse 11 he has said that they are in the world. These are in the world, but in verse 14, he has said they are not of the world. Now in chapter 18 verse 36 he says, my kingdom is not of this world. What did he mean in both of these places?

Why he meant simply – I know you understand this; this is talking to you as if you were children – you already understand this. When he said you are in the world, he meant of course they were physically present in the world, but when he said they were not of the world, he meant that they had been given a new nature and their disposition the source of their life was heavenly. They had been born from above. And so the character of those individuals has now become spiritual. They are spiritual in individuals their disposition is different now. They are not of the world.

As you know in the Gospel of John, he speaks about the world, and he says that you are not of the world. You’re different; you have been born again, but he does not deny that they are in the world. So the kingdom of our Lord, when he says my kingdom is not of this world, he means simply that his kingdom is not dominated by human carnal principles. It is not a kingdom operated along those lines. It is a kingdom that is spiritual in its power in its motivation and in its activities. So to say my kingdom is not of this world describes the kingdom but says nothing whatsoever about its locale.

Now it is also said, I think that I’m sure you understand, then, that that kind of an objection to an earthly kingdom does not hold. It is also said by amillennialists that a literal interpretation of the promises of the Old Testament lands one in absurdities. For example, Professor Berkoff says, “Why if you interpret the prophecies of the Old Testament in a literal fashion, then that would involve the future restoration of the former conditions of Israel’s life.” In other words, we should expect in the future conditions that resembled Israel’s life in the Old Testament period of time. If you say that those prophecies are going to be fulfilled, literally, why what does that mean but that the great world powers of the Old Testament must be restored to power.

Now Professor Berkoff made this statement fifty-five, about fifty years ago. Now little did he realize that fifty years later we would be living in a situation in which those very powers with which Israel had to deal in ancient times are the powers of the world today. If you don’t believe they are the powers of the world today, turn on your little radio to channel four or channel eight or channel five at five thirty and listen to all of the difficulties that those little powers have caused for this great big old country in which we live.

As a matter of fact everything that we do now is touched by the fact that those powers have become great again. And there is Iran. Persia is back in power again. And Iraq and Kuwait and all the rest of them. The areas in which Babylonia and Assyria and Persia and Egypt – all of those areas now are the important nations in the world, and we are fast becoming a nation totally dependent upon them, doing everything that we can to escape from becoming simply vassals of the Arabs. They are buying up our land, they are buying up our banks, they are buying up our companies. I imagine there are some people in this room that are in bad enough financial condition, interested in pieces of property that you’d be happy for the Arabs to buy you out, too. So the very thing that Professor Berkoff said is an absurdity is something that is with us today. He even

mentions the Egyptians – to think the Egyptians would have to be restored to power – the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

Furthermore, he says this would involve the rebuilding of the temple. You would have to have the temple rebuilt in Israel. Now mind you he wrote this fifty years ago when the farthest thing from the mind of the average Christian was the possibility of the rebuilding of the temple in the next fifty years. But now Jerusalem is largely in the hand of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple is of course a possibility.

A further objection to the literal kingdom and a further support for a spiritualizing of those Old Testament promises is found in passages of the New Testament which seem to suggest to amillennialists that in the New Testament, Israel has become equal to the church. So let's look at a few of them. In a few moments we'll look at a two or three of them. They give you the kinds of things that amillennialists like to say about premillennial interpretation. Romans chapter 9 verses 6 through 8, first.

Now we are supposed to find in this passage according to amillennialists the teaching that Israel is now equal to the church. Listen to what we read. Paul now is going to give us a little history about Israel. He's going to point out that if they had read their own history they would understand why they were rejected. They would have come to understand that the Old Testament did not teach that every Israelite would be converted, that in the Old Testament there was a program of election being carried out by God:

"Not as though," verse 6, "Not as though the word of God had taken no effect. For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."

Now the amillennialists like to read this as meaning, verse 6, For they are not all Israel who are of Israel but Gentiles also may be Israelites. In other words, they are not all Israel who are Israel because there are also Gentiles. Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children but there are also Gentiles who may be seed of Abraham. Now of course, that we shall see in a moment is true in the faith sense. That is, they who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, Israel, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed in which we are to read, Gentiles.

Now this statement in verse 6 “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” means simply this: not all Israelites are true Israelites. The apostle is not distinguishing the men of faith whether they be Gentiles or Jews from men who are not of faith whether they be Gentiles or Jews. The apostle is distinguishing men of faith in Israel from men of unbelief in Israel. He is saying, simply, they are not all Israelites, true Israelites who are Israelites, that God’s promise never comprehended the Israelite who would not believe. God’s promises pertain to the Israelite who believes. They are not all Israel who are of Israel. You could be an Israelite and be lost in other words. That’s what he is saying.

And of course the illustrations show this as he proceeds on through the passage. He states the same thing back in chapter 4 and verse 11 where he says, “And he received the sign of circumcision, Abraham a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.” He says there are Israelites who walk in the steps of the faith of father Abraham, and they are the true Israelites. So that text does not say what it is claimed that it says.

Now let’s turn finally to Galatians chapter 6 verse 16. This text is supposed to be the one text that tells us that Israel is used in the New Testament for the church.

Premillennialists have made the claim that the term Israel is never in the New Testament referred to the church. Amillennialists quickly refer to Galatians 6:16, and say, ah but there is a text that says that Israel is a term for the church. Listen. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”

I was in Charleston, South Carolina holding meetings in the First Presbyterian Church about twenty years ago, teaching Galatians. When I came to this passage, a lady came up to me after the morning class and asked me a question about it. I sought to explain it to her, but the pastor was an amillennialist – a friend of mine, a very fine man still living, still a friend of mine, but an amillennialists – and he could not allow me to explain that to a member of his congregation. He immediately – he was standing right by me – he immediately said, “Oh that’s very simple. In that case, Israel, the Israel of God, is a reference to the church.” And we had a nice little discussion there about this text.

Now remember Paul is writing to Galatians who had been troubled by Judaizing teachers, and they had been told you must be circumcised in order to be saved. Now concluding his epistle, he says, “And as many as walk according to this rule, (what rule? Why the rule of the new creation that he has just mentioned) in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation.” When we believe in him we have been born again we are not under the statutes of the law of Moses. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy,” and then he adds, “And upon the Israel of God.”

Now the amillennialists like to translate that, *even* the Israel of God, as if the Israel of God is the same as them, but they forget that the little word *kai* translated and is hardly ever in the New Testament used in the oppositional sense, but aside from that, Paul’s point is simply this. For you Gentile Christians in the Galatians church, if you walk according to this rule peace be upon you and mercy, and if there are Jewish Christians in this congregation who have not been entangled in legalism, true Israel of God, not like those Judaizing Israelites that have come up from Jerusalem and infiltrated the church,

peace be upon them also, the Israel of God – those Jewish Christians who have not been involved in Judaism. That’s one way to understand it.

Since our time is about up I’m going to save another way to explain it next time, but at any rate, the one thing it doesn’t mean is that Israel is a church. I’ve found in the study of most of these interpretations, as you probably can see, that those who hold that Israel equals the church proceed from an unwarranted assumption to a foregone conclusion. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of studying the Scriptures. We pray that Thou wilt guide and direct us in a way that will bring honor to Thy name.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.