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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Biblical Analysis of Amillennialism”

TRANSCRIPT

We are studying eschatology and for the last two of our sessions we have been looking particularly at the amillennial system. We have been saying in the course of our introduction and in the course of some of the preceding lessons that there are three important eschatological systems: the post-millennial system, the amillennial system, and the premillennial system. All of these systems are named by virtue of the relationship between the millennium and the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and so post-millennialism is the doctrine that the Lord Jesus shall return to the earth after the millennium.

According to the post-millennial system from the cross to the time of the Second Advent is the period of the church, and during this period of time Satan is bound, bound as a result of the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. The church period shall progress with things getting better and better spiritually, more and more people becoming Christians, until ultimately we shall have a kind of golden age upon the earth. That golden age upon the earth will not mean that every single person will become a Christian, but rather that a great number of the earth shall become Christians so much so that we shall have a golden age of sorts, at least.

Following that there will be a period of Great Tribulation for a little season and then Jesus Christ will come to the earth to introduce his eternal kingdom of the new heavens and the new earth. At this period of time the Second Advent will take place, all of those eschatological events which are described in the Bible under the terms of Armageddon, Gog and Magog, the battle of Armageddon will occur here, the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of all the separation of saved from the lost at the Great White Throne Judgment, and following that there will be a new heavens and a new earth.

Essentially post millennialism is a very optimistic system and if you like optimism well then post millennialism is the kind of doctrine that you might be interested in. As far as I’m concerned I’m more interested in truth, and I do not see any evidence of the claims of the post-millennialists, not only from Scripture but also from experience.

Amillennialism is a term derived from the Greek letter *alpha* which in Greek is a negating word, like our un- before unknown, *mille* a thousand years, and *annus*, a year so amillennialism teaches that there is no thousand year reign of our Lord upon the earth. According to amillennialism, the time between the cross of Jesus Christ and the Second Advent is the church period. During that time Satan is bound.

Now we have been studying and you may remember that we have pointed out that there are different interpretations of the amillennial system, some of them claiming that the thousand year period of time is a specific period of time. Augustine, for example, thought that that thousand year period of time that millennium would end at 650 A.D. then later on, when Jesus Christ did not return then, that figure was increased to 1000 A.D., and then ultimately to about 1044 A.D., and then those that sought to do that gave up and thought of the thousand year period of time as a general term, thousand years being a kind of round number for the period of time between the cross and the Second Advent.

Now according to some amillennialists, there was to be a millennium on the earth. But most amillennialists today think of the millennium as Jesus Christ reigning in heaven during this age from the time of the cross to the Second Advent with his saints in heaven. Following the church period in which evil and good will grow together throughout the age, there will come at the end of the age the Great Tribulation to be followed by the battle of Armageddon, the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the lost and the saved, the Great White Throne Judgment and the new heavens and the new earth. According to this system there will be no reign of Jesus Christ for a thousand years upon the earth following his return to the earth.

Amillennialism then teaches that there is no millennium in which saints reign with Jesus Christ upon the earth. It does not really teach that there is no millennium, for they do have to account for the fact that John, in the book of Revelation does speak of a thousand year reign. That millennium is a heavenly reign, according to most amillennialists.

And then we also have referred to premillennialism, the doctrine into which we shall go in more detail. According to premillennialism, the Lord Jesus will come in his Second Advent prior to the millennium and there will be a reigning up on the earth of the saints with our Lord. According to the premillennial system, from the time of the cross to the time of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus is, generally speaking, the church period –we will define this more exactly later on when we talk about the church period specifically and the rapture of the church; we are just talking about premillennialism as a whole at the present – the church period will be followed by a time of Great Tribulation upon the earth, at the conclusion of which, the Lord Jesus shall come to the earth. The first resurrection the resurrection of the believers shall take place after the battle of Armageddon, and the Lord Jesus with his saints shall rule and reign through a thousand year period upon the earth.

It is during that period of time according to premillennialists that Satan is bound. Post-millennialists and amillennialists believe that he is bound in the present age. But as we have been saying, he has a very long chain. He is only bound with respect to the deception of the nations. They were forced to that interpretation by the circumstances of the experience of Christian lives and others. At the conclusion of the millennium there will follow the release of Satan for a little season, a final conflict and then the Great White Throne Judgment and the new heavens and the new earth. This is the system of premillennialism.

The amillennial system – we want to spend our time on the amillennial system for our last session upon it – the amillennialism system rests firmly upon the hermeneutical method of spiritualization. Two things must be distinguished when we talk about method of interpretation in prophetic study and first is figurative language. What is figurative language? In this type of speech one type of concept is represented in terms of an other that may be thought of as analogous with it. We may have figurative acts in the Bible. We may have figurative words in the Bible.

For example in Revelation chapter 22 and verse 15 – you needn’t turn there because I’ll just read it quickly and we’ll pass on but in Revelation chapter 22 and verse 15 we read, “After he has said, blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city for outside are dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” The reference here to dogs is not a reference to specific dogs, dogs that we know, animal dogs, but reference to certain kinds of people who are described by this figurative term as dogs.

Now this may not be a happy kind of figure of speech for a veterinarian, but nevertheless that is what the Bible does say that there are some people who are like dogs, and we know it because that’s what we use about to describe some certain kinds of

people. We even describe certain types of people as cats too. We are using a figure of speech.

The Bible is full of figures of speech, and we need to distinguish between figures of speech and spiritualization. Spiritualization is something different. By this method concepts are given new meanings, new identities. For example, we read last time in connection with Revelation chapter 20 verse 5 the statement, “But the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” We pointed out that the term resurrection in the New Testament almost always refers to a bodily resurrection, and yet it is the claim of the amillennialists that the resurrection is a reference to the new birth. That is giving to the term resurrection a new meaning. That is spiritualization.

Now the most flagrant kind of spiritualization and the most common by our good amillennial friends is the kind by which the terms Israel and David and tabernacle of David and expressions like that are referred to the Christian church. For example, in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 16 we read this word, this text, “And as many as walk according to this rule peace be on them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.”

Now if we were to take this term Israel and make it mean the church then of course we are giving that particular concept a new meaning. We are not using a figure of speech, but we are giving it a new meaning. So when we read the Old Testament, and we see references to Zion, references to Jerusalem, references to David, references to Israel, and we take these terms and give them new meanings by which the identifications are made with the church of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, we are spiritualizing the Old Testament prophecy.

Now this has been one of the flagrant misuses of Scripture down through the centuries. We really could spend several hours discussing the rise and development proliferation and use of spiritualizing and allegorizing methods of interpretation in the

history of the Christian church. Let me cite you a few illustrations of this kind of interpretation which have plagued the Christian church down through the years.

For example, the journey of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldes to Haran is interpreted as the imaginary trip of a stoic philosopher who leaves sensual understanding and arrives at the senses. This is actually an interpretation that has been given of this particular historical event in past time. The two pence given by the Samaritan to the inn keeper has the hidden meaning of baptism and the Lord’s supper. The river Euphrates means, the outflow of manners and is not an actual live literal river in Mesopotamia.

Pope Gregory the Great interpreted the book of Job in an equally strange manner. He said the patriarch’s three friends denote the heretics. His seven sons are the twelve apostles. How seven sons could be the twelve apostles, I don’t know, [laughter] but nevertheless that was his interpretation. His seven thousand sheep are God’s faithful people, and his three thousand hump back camels are the depraved Gentiles.

Now this is spiritualizing of the prophecies of the word of God and it is this kind of thing that some of our amillennial and post millennial friends do, when they take the term Israel or the term Zion or the term Jerusalem and refer these terms to the Christian church in the present day.

I thought that perhaps one of the simplest ways for me to get over to you the force of some of the amillennial interpretation is to take one of the outstanding passages of the New Testament which both amillennialists and premillennialists regard as a very important passage, and we shall look at this passage and seek to discover what it really means, both what the amillennialists say that it means, and what the premillennialists say that it means, and of course, I’m going to try to persuade you that the premillennialists are correct, but you may of course—I hope you will think originally enough to make up your own mind from the study of the passage.

Will you turn with me to Acts chapter 15, and I want to read the first 21 verses of Acts chapter 15 for our Scripture reading. Acts chapter 15 and verse 1 through verse 21.

You can see at the bottom of the page if you have a Scofield Edition of the King James Version that this passage is regarded as extremely important. He says, This important passage shows God’s program for this age. If you have one of the older editions of the Scofield Version you will find that it is stated that it is the most important dispensational passage. The new editors have toned down their language a little bit in the new edition.

Amillennialists frequently pick up this remark from Mr. Scofield and the editors and say well, let’s, since this is so important from the standpoint of the premillennialists, let’s see what it says, and I think you will see that it is extremely important for the amillennialists. So both of them appeal to this passage as teaching what they think the Bible says about prophecy. So we want to look at it with that in view.

Now if you’ve found it, I’m going to read beginning at verse 1. I want you to pay careful attention to the progress of thought as we read of the so-called Council at Jerusalem. It really was just simply a conference of the church at Antioch with the church at Jerusalem. Delegates were not sent from different churches as we might think of a conference or a convention in the 20th Century. It was a meeting and they met over the question of the significance of circumcision with reference to salvation. We, of course, can throughout this substitute the term baptism in order to bring it up to date, and then they discuss at the end of that particular part of their discussion the question of the relationship of the Jewish promises to the present age. But listen now as I read,

“And certain men who came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they

passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church, and by the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, (You’ll notice the early church did not hesitate at all to have some good knock down, drag out fights. If doctrine was at issue, because doctrine is extremely important, so when there had been much disputing they didn’t get up and say now brethren we mustn’t have any cross words because after all, we’re supposed to love one another. They realized that true love must be a love within the limits of the teaching of the word of God that if it’s not it’s not true love. So after this disputing) Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, who knoweth the hearts, bore them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why put God to the test, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (And here we have the apostles’ creed.) But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept

silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon (that’s Simon Peter) Simeon hath declared how God first did visit the nations the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. (Now he refers of course to what happened in Cornelius’ house and he says it is there that Simon told us how God for the first time visited the Gentiles and saved them.) And to this agree the word of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again its ruins, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the nations (or Gentiles), upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the age. (This is no surprise; this is all in accordance with the purpose of the ages. Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them, who from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.”

We’ll stop at that point.

Paul in his and his company after their first ambassadorial journey returned to Antioch which was the mother of Gentile Christianity, and there they discovered to this

dismay that in Antioch, the mother of Gentile Christianity, a snake had crawled into Eden. The way of salvation for Gentiles had become an issue.

Now we might have thought that the incident in Cornelius’s house, when Peter had preached to Cornelius and other Gentiles, we might have thought that the question of the salvation of the Gentiles had been settled by what happened there. But as you reflect upon Acts chapter 10. it becomes evident that the thing that was settled in Cornelius’s house was the fact of Gentile salvation. That is. that Gentiles could be saved. Because you see that was a question that the Jews would have had.

Now the question that arises is not the question of the fact of Gentile salvation. The question that arises now is the method of Gentile salvation. Are they going to be saved as Gentiles, or are they going to be forced to become Jews in order to be saved? That is, are they going to be forced to undergo the right of circumcision in order to be saved? And there was a hot dispute over this particular question.

This question is a very relevant one at all times, and as I suggested in our Bible reading, if we were to substitute the term baptism instead of circumcision, then we would be right up-to-date because in the Christian church today we still struggle over the relationship of water baptism to Christian salvation. There are great numbers of professing Christians who believe that it is not only necessary to believe on our Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved, but also to be baptized in water. So the question of whether a spiritual right such as circumcision in the Old Testament or baptism in the New Testament is necessary for salvation, is a relevant question. The position of the great mass of the Protestant Church has been that we are saved through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the term by which we enter into the experience of salvation is faith.

Now there are some parts of the Christian groups who affirm that that faith is the work of man. There are others who affirm that it is the work of God. But nevertheless the great mass of the Protestants have claimed that salvation is through faith, resting upon

the finished work that the Lord Jesus accomplished when he shed his blood upon Calvary’s cross.

We have seen as we study not only the New Testament, but the history of the Christian church that the cross preached as the only means of salvation is an offense to the natural man. It’s an offense to morality, because it says that human good works cannot justify. It is an offense to philosophy, because it suggests that the proper approach to God is the approach of faith and not of human reason. It is an offense to culture, because it claims that the truths of the word of God are revealed to babes and not to the wise and noble and educated among us, necessarily. It is an offense to the sense of caste which seems to be a part of human thought, for God chooses the poor and the humble. It is an offense to our will because it calls for unconditional surrender.

It says that we’re not born again through our own human will, but we are born again because God has willed our salvation through the word of God. It is an offense to human pride because through the preaching of the gospel there is revealed the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart. And it is an offense to the man himself in all of his being, because it says to him ye must be born again. So the preaching of the gospel is an offense to man.

Now, Paul and the apostles didn’t hesitate to preach that kind of gospel, and they got the kind of response that you might expect. And that kind of response was a rejection it was often anger and persecution and sometimes it was death. Well Paul and Barnabas when they came to Antioch and discovered the situation there, that the snake of human works had crawled back into the Eden of this home church of Gentile Christianity, they did not jump to conclusions and condemn Jerusalem altogether.

They said the thing that we must do is to go up to Jerusalem and have a talk over the matter and so they and their company went up to Jerusalem and the talk that they had there became what someone has called one of the ten decisive battles of Christianity, because if this question had not been settled as it was settled, it is very doubtful humanly

speaking—I stress that, humanly speaking—that we would be preaching the grace of God as we preach the grace of God today.

But fortunately by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Peter and James as well as Paul and Barnabas took their stand in the headquarters of the Christian church for a salvation through grace and affirmed that, we the apostles believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they. So after much disputing, Peter spoke and settled the issue humanly speaking. The method of salvation is by grace through faith and the council at Jerusalem had to reach a decision. They had to choose in effect.

Well when Peter had made his statement, it apparently was such a shocking kind of conclusion, it must have also been greatly condemning, because we read in the 12th verse, then all the multitude became silent. That’s the way the Greek text puts it. The multitude fell silent, we might translate it. It was just as if they had heard some striking pointed message in which it was very evident that God the Holy Spirit was speaking, and when Peter finished and sat down there was a silence that fell over the whole of the auditorium.

Now after they had held their peace, James stood up. This is not the Apostle James. This is the James who is the brother of our Lord and the brother of Jude who wrote the book of Jude. He was a recognized leader in the church in Jerusalem, and it is James who speaks.

Now the question that James speaks to is a natural question that would arise when these two groups come together and debate the relationship of the Gentiles and the Jews to salvation. They have settled the question of Gentile salvation. The Gentiles may be saved through faith. They also may be saved as Gentiles. But did not the whole of the Old Testament teach that it was by means of the promises made to the Jewish nation that there should be worldwide blessing among the Gentiles? So the question immediately arose, can this Gentile movement be harmonized with the teaching of Scripture?

What we’re seeing is a vast movement among the Gentiles, but can we harmonize it with all these Old Testament passages that teach that God has given Messianic promises to the seed of Abraham and to the seed of David. How do these things fit together? And so this is when James the Just arises. What would this Jew of Jews, the brother of Jesus, say to such a question? Would he side with the Pharisees who believed? No. As a matter of fact, in his reply, he even cites the Greek translation of the Old Testament, indicating that he is not going to side with them in their narrow kind of view, but he is going to look at the Scriptures as a whole but he does it gently. The Pharisaic element has been silenced. They need a little soothing now, and so he turns to the Scriptures in order to answer the questions that they had had in their minds, and he points out that Jewish supremacy is relevant but it is future.

Now I think this is the important thing to remember. He is saying that Jewish supremacy is a biblical teaching, but it is future. What he is going to show us is that the program of God is that during the present age there is a wide movement of God among the Gentiles. At the conclusion of this age, Israel shall be restored. The Messianic promises shall be fulfilled to her, and then as a result of the fulfillment of the Messianic promises to Israel there will be a worldwide salvation far wider than anything that we see in the present day. So the order is Gentile salvation now. In part Jewish national conversion, ultimate worldwide Gentile salvation. That is the order. This by the way is the same order that the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans chapter 11. These apostles were in harmony in their teaching.

But now let’s look at what he says specifically. James answered saying in the 13th verse “Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon.” Now he does not say as we might expect, your holiness has declared how God first did visit the nations. He does not say Father Peter has now expressed his mind on this question. He has not said the bishop of Rome has spoken. He doesn’t even use the term, Peter. He uses the most intimate of

names: Simeon, his Aramaic name. Simeon the personal name. It’s evident that the idea that Peter was a kind of bishop of Rome was not at all in the mind of James.

During the 300s and 400s, after the time of our Lord, the Roman primacy increased in power despite definite recognition of spiritual supremacy was shown when Leo the Great from 440 A.D. to 461 tried to improve the degenerate Greek branch of the Christian church. In 451 A.D. there was a meeting of six hundred and thirty bishops and four papal legates, and they assembled to hear the decree of Leo, and they are reported to have exclaimed unanimously, “What Leo believes we all believe.” Anthema to him who believes anything else Peter has spoken by the mouth of Leo. That kind of spirit is not found here in the council at Jerusalem.

This is very informal in James’s reference to Simeon. Simeon has declared how God first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. Notice the purpose that James says is expressed in what God has done for the Gentiles. The purpose of God is to save and to save a particular people. His purpose is not to civilize. His purpose is not social welfare. His purpose is the salvation of a certain group of people from the Gentiles. God did visit the Gentiles in Cornelius’s house to take out of them a people for his name.

That is of course what God is doing in the present age. He is visiting the nations to take out of them a people for his name. It’s evident from this that the spiritual welfare of individuals is the primary goal of God, and further it is also evident from this that it is not God’s intention to save all men. Simeon has declared how God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. In other words, in the expression of this, there is an expression of the selecting work of God the Father. He is taking out of the nations a people for his name.

Now if it had been his intention to save all men, he would have saved all men. To think that men may reject, rebel, frustrate the divine intention is unthinkable. We do

not have an omnipotent God if such were possible. He has visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name and that is precisely what he is doing.

I think also in connection with this, it would be perhaps worthwhile for us to just comment upon how different this is also from the common doctrine that is plaguing the Christian church today, and that is the doctrine of Universalism. Universalism has come to pervade most of our professing Christian denominations today. The great heresy that is running rampant through Presbyterianism, through the Baptists, through the Methodists, through the Episcopalians, through most of our well-known denominational groups, the great heresy that is running rampant through them is the heresy of Universalism, that it is God’s intention to save everyone. That everybody has been elected, and that the task of the evangelist is not to preach the gospel so that men may be saved, but rather to let men know that they all have been elected so that the work of the evangelist is the work of the communication of their election rather than the preaching of the gospel.

This of course is a terrible thing, because at stake are the lives the spirits the souls of countless thousands of men. It’s a very pleasant kind of doctrine. It would be nice, men might think, if we could stand behind the pulpit and say, Now I say to you on the authority of the word of God that everybody has been elected and that it is my task simply to preach to you the fact that you have been elected and that as you respond to the message, you enter into your inheritance which God has reserved for you. That would be very nice. Would you think it very nice if you were riding on a train or in some conveyance – let’s just say a train – would you think it very nice if those who knew the condition of the road and knew that the bridge was out were to give you beautiful reports of how everything was lovely down the line? No, you wouldn’t think that at all.

Well now, the question of course is truth, and when men say to other men on the authority, so-called, authority of the Christian Bible the word of God that all have been elected, it is far worse than telling the passengers on a train of which track the bridge is out down the way – it’s far worse to say everything’s lovely down the line, far worse to

say that about spiritual things than to say that about the natural things. So notice that the purpose is to take out of them a people for his name.

Now then at this point James wishing to show that this is in harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures says in the 15th verse, “And to this agree the words of the prophets as it is written.” Now in other words the Gentiles are saved as Gentiles now, and the Old Testament spoke of a time of Gentile mercy before the restoration of Israel to God’s favor. You’ll notice, James does not say and the words of Scripture are fulfilled, but the words of Scripture agree with what has happened.

So James, answers the same question that Paul dealt with in Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11. How is Gentile salvation and equality in salvation at that to be reconciled with God’s promises to Israel? As we look out about us today in the Christian church, and we see thousands of Gentiles coming into the Christian church, what about those promises that the Old Testament contains that were directed to the Nation Israel? Have they been canceled? Are they no longer valid? Should we no longer expect God to really bring Israel into his favor again and confer upon Israel the Messianic promises that the Old Testament sets forth in so many passages?

Now you can see there are two ways that we may look at this. We may say, no God is a faithful God he keeps his word. “Let God be true and every man a liar,” as Paul says in Romans chapter 3 verse 2 to this very question. Does man’s unfaithfulness void the faithfulness of God? God forbid. God is faithful to his word. He will fulfill those promises. That’s one way. That’s the biblical way in my opinion.

But we could say Israel was unbelieving. Israel rebelled. Israel rejected the promises. They are therefore canceled, and they are fulfilled in the Christian church for the church has been responsive, and thus they inherit the promises of the Old Testament that were given to Israel.

Now this, these are the two view points of the amillennialists and the premillennialists. The premillennialists contend that those promises that God gave to

Israel will be fulfilled. The amillennialists say, no, they will not be fulfilled to literal Israel. They are fulfilled in the blessing that has come to the Christian church, today.

Now we want to see what the text says further. Verse 16, “After this to this agree the words of the prophets as it is written, after this.” Now what does the this refer to? After this. Well it may refer to verse 14. After this that is after the taking out of a people for his name from the Gentiles. After what is happening today, I will return, and we’ll build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. After the Gentile calling, I will deal with Israel.

Now I don’t take it to mean that. That is a possible meaning. The reason I don’t is rather technical. I think I’ll express it to you and then if you don’t quite understand it it’s because I haven’t explained it as clearly as I should have, no doubt, and also because it does involve an understanding of the Greek translation of the Old Testament in the Hebrew text of the Book of Amos chapter 9. This is a citation as you can see from Amos chapter 9.

Now in Amos chapter 9 in the text with corresponds to verse 16 it reads, “In that day, I will return and build again the tabernacle of David.” In the Greek translation of the Old Testament it reads the same way, “In that day I will return and build again the tabernacle of David. It seems then that James himself is responsible for this, after this. Well what is he referring to if he’s not referring to the outcalling of the Gentiles specifically? I take this, after this, to be a reference to the Jewish disavowal of God at the present time, to Jewish unbelief, which is implicit in this paragraph all the way through. So it seems to me that what he is saying is after the time of Jewish disobedience – that’s the negative side of Gentile outcalling – these two things are related together. After this Jewish unbelief, I will return and I will build again the tabernacle of David.

So what he is saying is simply this. After this time in which Israel has turned away from the promises of God, and God is now saving Gentiles, after this program is over I will return again and rebuild or build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen

down. The net result of this is very much the same. The point is simply this Gentile blessing is taking place at the present time which is the result of Jewish unbelief, but that is to be followed by Israel’s blessing at the Second Advent, so that the order is the selection from among the Gentiles now, then Gentile, then Jewish blessing and then world blessing as we have been talking about previously.

Now this I think is what seems to be the plain teaching of this passage. I want now to interrupt for a few moments and give you the amillennial interpretation of this passage, because I think it will show us the distinction between these two approaches to the understanding to the word of God about as clearly as it is possible for me to make it.

An outstanding amillennialist was a man by the name of Oswald T. Allis. Some years ago I preached at the anniversary of Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse’s ministry at the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and Doctor Allis was on the program with me and I spoke first, and then he spoke afterwards. He was a much older man than I so I know you know that he must have been a very, very old man. [laughter] He did not die until just a little while ago at the age of about ninety-one, I think. In his book *Prophecy in the Church* he has a lengthy discussion of this, because he thinks that this is one of the means by which amillennialism can be shown to be the correct interpretation of the New Testament.

He claims that amillennialism is correct and his claims are built upon these facts from this passage. First of all, he says, “Now the true point at issue is the status of Gentiles in the church and their obligation to observe the Mosaic law,” I’m reading from him, “the nature of the Christian church and the relation of the Gentile to Jew in it.” He has said in effect, then, that the context here has to do with the nature of the Christian church and the relation of Gentile to Jew in it.

I want to point out this. This passage says nothing about the church per se. It speaks about the relationship of Jew and Gentile during the present age; that part in that

respect, Dr. Allis is true to the point here. But the question of the relationship between the Jew and the Gentile was settled in verses 1 through 11. That’s when Peter stood up and said, we believe that the Gentiles are saved the same way the Jews are saved, by faith. That settled the question. The Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles. But that raised the second question, the next question being, then, if the Gentiles are saved just as the Jews, then Jewish supremacy and Jewish advantage is all gone. That’s the question that James answers by citing Amos chapter 9.

Now you can see, if you approach this question, as if the question at issue is the nature of the Christian church and the relation of the Gentile to the Jew in it, you almost have immediately settled the kind of interpretation you don’t arrive at. It reminds me of a statement made in the *London Economist* some years ago about a person whose argument was not very convincing. The economist said that he proceeded from an unwarranted assumption to a foregone conclusion.

And this is the kind of thing it seems to me that Dr. Allis has done here. He has told us that this has to do with the nature of the Christian church and since it has to do with the nature of the Christian church then of course we are to expect to find the church in verse 16 when he talks about the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. So he has given us here an unwarranted assumption, and he proceeds to a foregone conclusion.

The second thing that Allis claims is that the premillennialists say that the prophecy skips over the church age, but on the basis of this passage that’s ruled out. Now if this were true Allis would be correct. This passage does not skip over the church age. It simply says that the church age is characterized by the Gentile salvation, and of course if that’s what he is trying to say that’s correct.

The third and more important thing that he says is that the tabernacle of David – that expression the tabernacle of David – does not refer to Israel, but it refers to the church and its build up by the salvation of Gentiles. Now this is the point at issue. When we read here, after this I will return and build again the tabernacle of David, does the

tabernacle of David refer to the Christian church or does it refer to the Jewish nation?

That’s the issue.

Dr. Allis says that the tabernacle of David is a reference to the church and its buildup by the salvation of the Gentiles, and if that’s so then all of this is happening now ,and James is citing this passage, not to say how God will be faithful to his promises to the Jew in the future, but to show how in the present time in the Gentile salvation, we are seeing the building up of the tabernacle of David.

Let me point out these things. The term David is used about sixty times in the New Testament. It never means anything but the historical person, David. I defy you to go through the New Testament with a concordance and look at the term David and find it meaning anywhere anything other than David. That’s all it means. The New Testament states the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled literally in Luke chapter 1. Further, the building up of the tabernacle of David is said to be after this, according to our text here after this, I will I will return and build again the tabernacle of David. It must be after something, and even in the context of Amos chapter 9 he has been talking about Jewish disobedience. Then he says, after this, I will return and build again the tabernacle of David. In both cases there is a period of Jewish disobedience and after this God will return and build them up again.

And finally the passage refers to a rebuilding of ruins, and this is hardly applicable to the New Testament church. We do not think of the New Testament church as a rebuilding of ruins. The Lord Jesus said, I will build my church. He did not say I will rebuild my church. I will build my church.

Now this is one of the results of the method of spiritualizing in the desire to avoid the fulfillment of the promises that God made to Israel in the Old Testament. We must in the desire to avoid the fulfillment of the Davidic promises affirm that the tabernacle of David is a reference to the Christian church and how it is being built up at the present time by the addition of Gentile salvation.

Well, I hasten through the rest of this. After this, I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David. This may be a reference to the Second Advent; it may not. The event itself is the Second Advent, but this could be translated, I will again build up the tabernacle of David. The tabernacle of David is the restoration of the dynasty of David. And then in the 17th verse he says that the residue of men might seek after the Lord—that probably is a reference to Jews, but it may be to Gentiles, because it may be equal to what follows—that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called saith the Lord who doeth all these things.

In other words what he is saying is we are seeing now a period of Jewish unbelief and a people taken out of the Gentiles for the sake of God’s name. After this God will return and build again the tabernacle of David. That is, the promises to the Israelites will be fulfilled in order that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called—worldwide salvation.

So what we have then is something like this. We have out-gathering at the present time, Gentiles taken out of the nations or a people taken out of the nations, I should say, for his name. Out-gathering. Then we shall have regathering of Israel. They shall be installed in their land again and following that, an ingathering from the Gentiles over the whole of this earth, a great salvation spoken of in the Epistle to the Romans and the book of Revelation.

That’s why we pray, Thy kingdom come, in the Lord’s prayer, so-called.

I want to say just a word or two in closing about the fundamental principle of interpreting prophecy. Next time we’ll start investigation of premillennialism, but there is something at issue here that is of the greatest importance it seems to me for the study of the Scriptures. A fundamental principle for the interpretation of Scripture is to interpret the Scripture literally, or normally.

Now when I say normally, I mean simply that in the New Testament or Old Testament, we may have figurative language. We may have symbolic language—we

surely do in the book of Revelation. But even behind the symbols and the figures there are facts or literal truths; otherwise we could not possibly communicate.

Many years ago I used to hear a man preach quite frequently. His name was David L. Cooper. He used to have a rule of interpretation which I have thought down through the years is imminently sensible. I’m not sure I can repeat it. I looked through my notes to try to find a copy of it, so I’m just going to do it from memory. I wrote down from memory what his rule was. It was if the plain sense of a passage makes sense seek no other sense. Another variant form of that is, don’t seek nonsense. But seek no other sense.

But take every word at its primary ordinary usual literal sense unless the facts of the context studied in the light of other passages and related in axiomatic truths, indicate clearly otherwise. I think that’s very close to the rule that he used. I think it’s a very sound rule of interpretation. We’re not saying, when we say interpret the Bible literally, that the Bible does not contain figures of speech. Of course it does. We’re not saying that it does not contain any symbols. Of course it does. But we are saying that we should not spiritualize the Bible. We should not take one word and make it mean something else, give it a new identity. What really is needed is a kind of recognition of both of these things, but the recognition also of the rule.

Now it is true that Dr. Allis, for example, and myself if we both were standing here, he would say, yes I believe that there is such a thing as figure of speech and symbol, and I believe there are passages that should be taken literally. And I have just said the same thing. The question is not whether both agree there are figures and symbols, but the question the real question is what is to be the rule and what is to be the exception. I affirm that the rule is, the standard approach is, that we interpret literally unless there are indications that that is not the approach that we should take rather than, let’s spiritualize unless we must take the text literally.

Well next time we shall begin a discussion of premillennialism. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for Thy word and for Thy truth. We pray that Thou wilt help us to understand the Scriptures. for we know that in understanding the Scriptures being taught of the Holy Spirit there is joy and peace and instruction, illumination and life.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.