



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Premillennial System,” 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

TRANSCRIPT

We are continuing our series of studies in systems of eschatology, and I want to turn to consideration of the premillennial system, our first of a series of studies dealing with this system. I would like for you to turn with me to 1st Corinthians chapter 15, and I want to begin the class by reading one of the great sections on the premillennial kingdom in 1st Corinthians 15. Verses 20 through 28 of 1st Corinthians 15. This is Paul's chapter on the resurrection, and he is now giving us some details concerning the order of the resurrections. And he writes

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, (and he evidently has in mind another order of resurrection) when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and all power. For he must reign, till he hath put all

enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”

Now we have been saying that there are three important eschatological systems, and these terms, post-millennialism, amillennialism and premillennialism are terms which refer to these systems, but are terms derived from the relation of the Advent of Jesus Christ to the millennial kingdom. In other words, as we’ve been saying over and over again, post-millennialism affirms that Jesus Christ will come in his Second Advent after the millennial age, after the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amillennialism affirms that there will be no thousand year reign of our Lord Jesus Christ with his saints upon the earth. And finally, premillennialism, affirms that the Lord Jesus will return before the thousand year reign of the saints with him upon the earth. So these terms are related to the relation between the Second Advent of Jesus Christ and the millennial kingdom.

Now we have been noting these things particularly, if I may sum them up in just a few sentences. We have tried to point out that the post-millennial system is characterized by unscriptural confidence in man. According to this system, we are to expect, apart from divine intervention as in the case of the premillennial system, a golden age in the future. This, I have tried to suggest, reflects an unscriptural confidence in man. It also is characterized by an inability to handle effectively the passages that portray a growing apostasy in the last times. It cannot, so far as I can see, handle effectively such passages as 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 1 and following, where the Apostle Paul in his words to Timothy says, “This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come.”

Now of course a post-millennial man may affirm well that is after the kingdom of our Lord upon the earth. But there is no reasonable explanation of how we can expect through the continuation of events in the present time to ultimately reach a golden age, and why then having reached the golden age we should fall back into the status reflected by 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 1.

As a matter of fact, in 2 Timothy chapter 3 in verse 13 we go on to read, “But evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse deceiving and being deceived.” So the general progress of the age according to the revelation here in 2 Timothy chapter 3 is from bad to worse. Post-millennialism cannot handle that type of passage. That is not of course the only one. You will recognize others yourselves.

Then finally it cannot handle the passages of the word of God that seem plainly to refer to a kingdom following our Lord’s advent, and in order to attain its interpretations, it is necessary for post-millennialism to engage in a spiritualizing of prophetic passages.

The amillennialism system is also characterized by difficulty. It is characterized by an inability to handle effectively the kingdom passages, such as Revelation chapter 20 verses 4 through 6. No real convincing amillennial interpretation of Revelation chapter 20 verses 4 through 6 has up to the present time been presented. I have just read three articles by an amillennialist writing in a leading reformed journal which is amillennial in character, in which he is seeking to expound the prophetic Scriptures according to the amillennial system, and the whole thesis of these three articles is, up to the present time we have not been able to effectively present a system of eschatology. Our own system is unconvincing to us and we need something different. So they are unable to handle effectively the kingdom passages.

This of course I hope will come out more clearly as we deal more specifically with the texts of individual passages. It, too, must lean upon a spiritualizing principle in prophecy. It cannot explain itself without reverting to the spiritualizing of the Scriptures by which certain terms are made to mean things that they ordinarily do not mean. The

most flagrant illustration of this is probably known to you ,and that is the taking of the term Israel and applying it to the church of Jesus Christ.

Now I don’t think that I had time to speak at the end of the class about one of the cases in the New Testament, one of the passages in which this principle is applied, and I’m going to ask you for just a few moments to turn with me to Galatians chapter 6 and verse 16, and I want to deal with this in a little more detail.

Now my memory may be playing me tricks, but I think that I had to put stop the class before we got to consider this particular passage. But this illustrates this principle of spiritualizing the word of God by which certain terms which have throughout passages in the word of God in the Old Testament have come to refer to certain things, are now, by the system of amillennialism, made to refer to something different, and in this case we have the term Israel applied to the church. The text reads, “And as many as walk according to this rule peace be on them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.”

It is very evident to almost all amillennial interpreters that the term, Israel, ordinarily means Israel. That is, members of the Israelitish nation. But in order to take the promises of the Old Testament which are given to Israel and are given by the prophets with reference to Israel and apply them to the church, it is necessary for them to find some justification for taking the term Israel as a reference to the church of Jesus Christ. This is one of the texts that is thought most plainly to support the amillennial position, for does not this text say, our amillennial friends and brethren say, that the church of Jesus Christ is the Israel of God? And if the church is the Israel of God, then why cannot we apply passages of the Old Testament which have to do with Israel to the church of the Lord Jesus?

Now premillennialists of course scream in irritation, that is robbing Israel of their promises! The amillennialists retort, if we are correct then, you are guilty of robbing the church of its promises. So that kind of argument does not win any points in this particular debate. We must look at the text itself and see what it says in the light of the

New Testament usage. I believe the other night I pointed out that aside from this passage and perhaps one other in Romans 9 which we will look at later, but it is not nearly so clear as this one, in every place but these there is no question but that the term Israel in the New Testament means Israel as we would ordinarily expect it to mean: Israel, the Israelite nation, certain descendants of Abraham in a physical sense.

Now that of course is a point for the premillennialists, because this surely is very very unusual usage if it should be here proved that the Israel of God is a reference to the church. Now of course one could say, yes the church is the Israel of God only in this sense, that Israel is an illustration of the church, a type of a church in the sense that Israel was God’s Old Testament election and also his future election, this election. And his work with Israel illustrates his work with the church and in that sense we could say that that the church is the Israel of God, that is it is like Israel it is an election of God.

I don’t think however that even that is what Paul is talking about. Just think for a moment. What is Paul saying in the Epistle to the Galatians? Well, he is arguing that certain Judaistic teachings are false. He is saying in effect that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is that we are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus. Now there are those who have come in the midst of these Gentile churches in Galatia, and they have been telling the Christians there that it is necessary for them to be circumcised in order to be saved, and so the epistle is written as a polemic against the teaching that one must believe in the Lord Jesus and also be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul says that that is a work—circumcision—and that if we are circumcised in order to be saved, then we have abandoned the grace principle of salvation. We have to use his term, fallen from grace. We have not fallen from salvation if we are saved, but we have fallen from grace, the grace method of salvation.

Now having reached the conclusion of his letter, having reached the point where he is about to tell them goodbye, it’s only natural that he should say something about those Jewish Christians in the churches of Galatia who are true Christians, but who have

not fallen prey to the Judaistic teachers. So he adds at the conclusion of his letter, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation.” In other words, we have been brought out of the sphere of the Old Testament and its cultus with its law of Moses and its practice of circumcision, and we now as a body of Christians are a new creation. We have new resurrection life, and we are united to our Lord Jesus.

And he adds in the 16th verse, “As many as walk according to this rule.” Now what does he mean? According to the rule of the new creation. As many as recognize that they have been baptized into our Lord’s death burial and resurrection and have now come out in newness of life in a new sphere entirely from the Mosaic Law and it’s prescriptions, “as many as walk according to this rule peace be on them and mercy and Paul says and upon the Israel of God.” Well who are the Israel of God? Why they are the true Israelites but who have by faith become a member of the church of Jesus Christ. They are the Israel of God and these Judaizing teachers are the Israel of Satan. So the Israel of God is not a reference to Gentiles, but it’s a reference to Jewish Christians who have not fallen prey to the legalism suggested by the Judaizing teachers.

Now that is one interpretation of this passage and as far as I know it is just as good as any. However, there is another explanation that we may make--Oh I should of course confirm the fact, I hope you recognized it, that this interpretation effectively, so far as I know, effectively refutes the amillennial contention that the Israel of God are Gentiles. There is no support for that at all. These are Jewish Christians, who from a remnant in the church of Jesus Christ as Paul speaks in Romans chapter 11, “Even so at the present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace”—he’s talking about men like, say, Dr. Finberg or other Jewish Christians. There are some probably in in the congregation of this assembly here and you would know them. They are Jews, but they have been converted to Jesus Christ—the whole Jews for Jesus movement would be the

Israel of God in that sense—they are Israelites, but they are in the church of the Lord Jesus.

Some years ago I was preaching the word in the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston, South Carolina, which is my family’s home church, and I was holding a series of meetings during the week on various aspects of New Testament teaching, but teaching Galatians in the morning. And the pastor of the church, a very godly man who is still living retired in Charleston and who likes me enough every now and then to give me one of his old, old books that uh he studied when he was in theological seminary, but who is an amillennialists, was not too happy about my coming to the church, but since a number on the board of elders were old golfing friends of mine at the Charleston Country Club, they were the ones who had heard that I had been converted, and I think they just wanted to get a good look at what had happened, so I came for the series of meetings and uh had a very good time during the week, and in the morning as I taught Galatians.

Well the last morning on Friday morning we came to this passage in chapter 6, and since I had to cover about two chapters as I remember – I did it rather cursorily and did not deal in detail with this particular text. So I was standing up front in front of the pews, in the front of the auditorium, and a lady who was a well known Bible teacher in the city and a member of that church came up to me—she was a premillennialist—and she said, “Well what is your explanation of chapter 6 verse 16?” And the pastor was standing about six feet away and I think he saw immediately that here were two premillennialists that were going to have a little fellowship in the church and maybe that was not so good.

So he moved over quickly and before I could even open my mouth to reply to her he uttered the words, “Oh well the Israel of God there is a reference to the church of Jesus Christ.” And so we had a nice little discussion about the interpretation of this passage, and I objected to his interpretation nicely, and he very nicely affirmed that I was wrong, too [laughter] But we are we are still friends, but the usage of the New Testament

and also the context of the Epistle to the Galatians has convinced me through the years that the interpretation I suggested to you is correct, that this would be the only case in the New Testament in which the term Israel did not refer to Israel.

Now it is possible for us to take this in another way. The last clause, peace be upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God, this last clause may be translated, “and mercy also upon the Israel of God.” In other words, we would render it, peace be upon them and *mercy also* upon the Israel of God.

Now since in the New Testament teaching of Paul, it is affirmed in Romans chapter 11 the great pass—we will study Romans 11 in a more detail later on—but in this great passage in Romans 11 as many of you know, it is said in that particular passage that Israel is to be saved and that salvation of Israel is called, the mercy of God. That very term is used for Israel’s conversion in the future. It is the expression of the mercy of God by which they are saved.

Now we can render this, then, as many as walk according to this rule: peace be upon them. All the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians who walk according to this rule, peace be upon them, and anticipating the future conversion of the Nation Israel Paul writes under this interpretation, “and mercy also upon the Israel of God.” And of course that would then be a reference to that generation of Israel in the future which shall as a nation come to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Under both of these explanations, the term Israel, means “Israelites who are saved.” It does not refer to Gentiles who are part of the church of Jesus Christ. So, the amillennialists must resort to spiritualizing interpretation of Scripture, and this is about the only leg to that they have to stand upon, and we have just destroyed that at least in my mind.

Now the remainder of our studies are going to concentrate upon the premillennial system which we shall seek to justify from Scripture. And in this opening study I want to survey the support for the system.

Now last time, I must apologize, last time I was speaking about the biblical analysis of amillennialism, and I spoke about its foundations, the thousand years in Revelation 20, we discussed that. The binding of Satan, we discussed that. The first resurrection in Revelation chapter 20 verse 5, we discussed that. I tried to show that that did not have to do with the new birth but rather with uh the resurrection of the body. Then we were discussing the spiritualization of the kingdom promises of the Old Testament. I am not going to consider the rest of this because, these points, the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the parable of the wheat and tares, the synchronization of events, the weaknesses of which we have been speaking about some of them now, are going to be considered as we deal with the premillennial system, and there is no need for me to repeat what I’m going to say, so we are going to launch into the positive of the premillennial system and discuss the support for the system from the standpoint of the Old and New Testaments and early church. So first of all, the testimony of the Old Testament plainly interpreted to premillennialism.

Now I’m going to use a term, plain interpretation, instead of literal interpretation as much as I can. The reason that I’m going to do this is because the premillennial system rests upon the plain common sense meaning of terms.

Now if I were to use the term, literal interpretation, you would immediately, if you yourself did not think of this—I think most of you would—if you didn’t think of it. If you had an amillennial friend, he would remind you of it that the Bible contains figures of speech, and of course, since they are critical of our position, and we are critical of their position we are always anxious to make a few points if we can and also embarrass our opponents in the interpretation of Scripture.

The term literal is like waving red flag before an amillennialists, because he knows it’s the bedrock of our system, and it’s the strongest aspect of our system, and he knows that there are figures of speech in the Bible, and it is his way of setting us off on a wild goose chase. So I’m going to use the term, “plain”—common sense interpretation of

Scripture—just plain interpretation I think everybody will understand that, and we won’t get hung up over the question of whether they are figures of speech in the Bible.

Of course there are figures of speech in the Bible. There are also symbols in the Bible. There is also apocalyptic in the Bible. There are passages of the Bible that are narrative portions. There are passages of the Bible that are poetic. The great prophetic sections of the Old Testament; great sections of them are poetic in force. There are many figures of speech, of course. And then there are these special sections that are apocalyptic—a special kind of literature.

So we are not suggesting that we are to look at every word in the Bible and take it literally. We are saying that we should follow a plain method of interpretation, looking for the plain sense of Scripture. And by the plain sense of Scripture when we reach a figure we will interpret it as a figure of speech. When we reach something or study something that is apocalyptic, like the Book of Revelation, we will interpret it according to what we know of apocalyptic methodology. And when we deal with the poetic sections of the Old Testament, we will look for many figures of speech. We just want to affirm that the plain interpretation of Scripture does support the premillennial system. Our hermeneutic principle, then, for interpreting prophecy is, interpret texts normally, giving them their plain sense and avoiding spiritualizing and allegorizing.

Now this we affirm is not taught in Scripture. There are figures of speech, and there are apocalyptic sections, but there is not so far as I know spiritualizing in the Bible. So we interpret texts normally, giving them their plain sense, avoiding spiritualizing and allegorizing. Even behind the figures of speech and the symbols which are found in the Bible, there must be facts or plain truths—otherwise communication is impossible. If words do not mean anything at all how, can we possibly make ourselves known?

Now we suggested to you, I think last time, a rule. It’s an old rule which I read and which I have not by the way scientifically ascertained in every phrase. I did it from memory, but I know that I’m very close to it. If the plain sense of a passage makes sense,

seek no other sense, but take each word, every word at it’s 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.

Now that is a good rule of hermeneutics. I’ll say it again. If the plain sense of a Scripture makes sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at it’s primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning or sense, unless the facts of the context, studied in the light of other passages, related passages and axiomatic truths indicate clearly otherwise.

I also suggested last time that the real debate over this method of interpretation is not a debate over whether there are figures of speech or not, or whether there are passages of Scripture that are to be taken literally or not. Our amillennial friends who are our most vigorous opponents, they affirm that the great majority of the passages of the Bible are to be taken literally, *except* when we are dealing with prophecy. They take the passages of the New Testament that deal with soteriological truths very literally. And of course, the premillennial friends affirm that all of the Bible, generally speaking, is to be taken in its plain sense. So both affirm that there are figures of speech and symbols, both affirm that there are passages that are to be taken literally or plainly, but the real issue is which or what is to be the rule for interpretation? Shall we look for that which is literal and plain, that sense first, and then shall we look for the other, or shall we reverse the procedure? That’s really the difficulty. And so we want to affirm that.

Now then, having affirmed the hermeneutical principle, let’s just take a look at some Old Testament passages, and we are going to cite only a few representative passages that predict a kingdom on the earth following the Advent of Jesus Christ. And I want you simply to see that the testimony of the Old Testament plainly interpreted is [Johnson’s voice cracks]—now I did not realize that I was so young. [Laughter] My voice is changing, evidently. The testimony of the Old Testament plainly interpreted is to premillennialism.

Now it’s obvious that I’m not being realistic, because of course, that also is a characteristic of old men. And that’s the first time that’s ever happened to me. [More laughter]

Now Isaiah chapter 11 is our first passage. Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 through 16. What we want to see is if we just read these passages giving them the normal sense that comes to us, they affirm a kingdom upon the earth in the future, following the coming of the Messiah to the earth.

Now the latter part of Isaiah chapter 10 describes under figurative language the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, but in chapter 11 Isaiah has given us one of the great passages on the millennium. To emphasize the lowly condition of Israel, Isaiah looks to its lowly origin not even referring to it as the house of David, but merely as the root stock of David. Jesse had lived in Bethlehem and Bethlehem was least among the thousands of Judah so we read,

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears”

Now you of course recognize this great Messianic passage has to do with our Lord Jesus who is the rod out of the stem of Jesse and the branch out of his roots. But then we read in verse 4,

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity

for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked one.”

Now this is clearly a reference to the Second Advent. Paul describes the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus in 2 Thessalonians 2 using this very passage as his as his text.

“And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his waist. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and flatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”

It is evident that here, under these words which he has just written, we are to understand the kingdom of our Lord Jesus. We have never seen any such occasion as this, as a time when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, except in such cases as when the leopard and kid lie down and the kid is inside the leopard.

“And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand for an ensign of the people; to him shall the nations seek: and his rest shall be glorious.”

Now here the question is answered, how shall it be possible for him to reign in the midst of a scattered nation? And so we read of the return of the Nation Israel.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand, again the second time, to recover the remnant of his people, who shall be left, from Assyria, and Egypt, and Pathros, and Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

Now its evident from this passage here that we have a picture then of the first coming of the Lord Jesus, then we are carried on to the time of the second coming of the Lord Jesus, when he destroys the antichrist and the one who motivates him, Satan, at his Second Advent, and introduces us to an age of righteousness and peace. And further that this shall cover the whole of the earth. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Now I affirm from this, that a simple plain reading of this passage of Scripture affirms the premillennial interpretation of the word of God. Calvin and Luther, however, regarded this scene, symbolically. Modern interpreters see it as literal—that is, those who are unbelieving modern interpreters—see it as literal. They saw the prophet as seeing this literally, but they consider it only a beautiful dream—a kind of wish fulfillment—whereas really it is the greatest fulfillment and the divine answer to the prayer that the church has so often prayed, Thy kingdom come. This is the divine answer to it.

Let’s turn over to the book of Micah. Micah. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. Micah chapter 5. And again notice the progression from the first coming of the Lord Jesus to the second coming and the idea of the rule of God upon the earth. Verse 2

of Micah chapter 5. This is verse 1 in the Hebrew text. The chapter really probably should begin here, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” There is no question but that this is a reference to the Messiah.

So again, the same kind of pattern as is found in Isaiah. At the time of Zion’s deepest degradation, the ruler in Israel will arise out of Bethlehem, who will not only secure for his people deliverance from their foes, but raise them into a beneficent and dreaded power over all the nations, and thus found a kingdom of peace, Israel, glorified into a holy nation. Listen, “Therefore will he give them up,”—now this is the interval between the first and the Second Advent; remember last week we talked about how at his Second Advent he shall come and restore the tabernacle of David which is fallen down. This is the reference here to the same thing—“Therefore will he give them up, Israel until the time that she who hath travaileth had brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.” And so on. So again we have this pattern of the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, an interval of a period of time in which Israel is in degradation, then a period of time in which the Lord Jesus shall in his majesty appear on the earth and there shall be a kingdom or a rule of the Messiah to the ends of the earth.

Turn over to the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9 and 10 another well known passage. Oh, I should have mentioned this. In connection with that Micah passage, chapter 5 verse 2, you will remember that twice in the New Testament, the question is asked, where is the Messiah to be born? And in two instances, in Matthew

chapter 1 chapter 2 and also in John chapter 7, the Jewish people reply, because they were students of the Scripture and they read the Scripture in its plain sense, they replied when they were asked where is he that is King of the Jews to be born, they said, he will be born in Bethlehem, and they cited Micah chapter 5 verse 2.

Now let me ask you a question. Was that passage fulfilled literally? Was he born in Bethlehem? Well of course he was born in Bethlehem. Don’t sit there and just look at me when I ask you a question like that. Reply. [Laughter] He was born in Bethlehem.

Now then let me ask you a question related to it. If the prophecy of his first coming is fulfilled according to the plain sense of the Old Testament will we not therefore expect are we ignorant to expect that the other passages of the Old Testament, will not also be fulfilled in their plain sense when they tell us that there is to be a universal kingdom over the whole of the earth with the Lord Jesus ruling and reigning as the Messiah? Does not the fulfillment of the prophecies of the first coming in the plain sense of the Old Testament suggest that the prophecies that have to do with the Second Advent shall also be fulfilled in their plain sense? Well, you don’t have to answer that. I know that you agree with me.

Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9 and 10 we read, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.” Now we are told in the New Testament in passages such as Matthew chapter 21 that this passage was fulfilled in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This very text is cited in those passages, “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” Now suppose I were to say to you but I don’t interpret the Old Testament prophecies, because they are poetic giving them the plain sense, I spiritualize those things and all this means is that the Lord Jesus shall come in lowly fashion. Well did our Lord Jesus come riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass? Did he? [Audience replies affirmatively] Good you’re learning. [Laughter] He did.

Now then that text of Scripture was fulfilled in its plain sense and in detail. Now we read in verse 10, “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the nations: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.” Now if we have then here a reference to a kingdom of our Lord upon the earth, and if the first part of the passage which has to do with his first coming is fulfilled in its plain sense, are we so carnal, are we so unspiritual as to suppose that the second prophecy shall also be fulfilled in its plain sense? I don’t think so.

Now some of our amillennial friends have recognized this. For example, Mr. Allis, who has written probably the most important book on as an attack against the dispensational interpretation, which of course is a form of premillennial interpretation. He has said this, “The Old Testament prophecies, if literally interpreted, cannot be regarded as having been fulfilled or being capable of fulfillment in this present age.” So he acknowledges that the Old Testament prophecies, if literally interpreted, have not been fulfilled at the present time nor, he goes on to say, can they be fulfilled in this present age. So he sees that it is essential for his system that he not have a literal system of interpretation.

Floyd Hamilton, who has written also an attack against premillennialism is even more frank. He says, “Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic kingdom that the Jews of the time of Christ were looking for on the basis of a literal interpretation of the Old Testament.” So Mr. Hamilton says that if we follow this method of interpretation and read the Old Testament then we get the very picture that the premillennialist gets from his reading of the Old Testament and that also is the way that the Jews read the Old Testament, he said. Of course that’s bad, because the Jews are said by him to have read it falsely.

The Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament was not false in that they read those passages giving them their plain sense. The falsity was that they laid stress upon the prophecies of glory and neglected the prophecies of suffering, which of course was which of course row rose out of the fact that they did not recognize their own sin, and that is the basis of the error of the Jews rather than their method of interpretation.

Now let’s come over to the New Testament, the testimony of the New Testament, plainly interpreted to premillennialism, and again I cite only a few representative passages. In fact, for the sake of time, I’m going to select one or two from the several I have there and when you get home tonight and if you cannot sleep, I advise you to take your Bible and look at a few of these. We will look first at Matthew chapter 24 verse 29 through 31 and 25:31 through 34. These go together. Matthew 24. This is a passage as you know which is part of the Olivet Discourse of our Lord. Matthew chapter 24 verse 29 through 31.

Now here we are reading of our Lord’s answer to the question, Where is the promise of your coming? Verse 29 through 31.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Now this text simply says that our Lord Jesus is going to return to the earth.

Now an amillennialist of course may affirm all that we have seen here in these verses. Let’s turn over to chapter 25 verses 31 through 34. Here we will notice that he talks about the throne or his kingdom that follows that Second Advent.

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from the another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

These two passages then put together say that the Lord Jesus shall come in his Second Advent. He shall sit upon the throne of his glory. He shall judge the nations and those that measure up to the judgment shall enter into his kingdom.

Now you see the order of his coming and his kingdom. That is premillennial order. He shall come before his kingdom. Luke chapter 22 verse 29 and 30. I omit those well known passages which I think you are probably familiar with. But you look them up: Luke chapter 1 verse 30 through 33 and 46 through 55. We’ll just read Luke 22:29 and 30. Luke 22:29 and 30, “Ye are they who have continued with me in my trials. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Now it is evident that that kingdom here is a future thing, and the Lord Jesus promises it to them and they will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Surely this is a picture of an earthly Messianic kingdom.

Robert Louis Stevenson is not known as a great student of the word of God, but you probably know that he was a Scot and all Scots are theologians, even if they are not

good Christians, in the old days, because theology was something that the Scots discussed at their tables and everybody knew something about theology, I say, whether he was spiritual or not. Now today we have an entirely different situation. We have a lot of people who are spiritual but they know nothing about theology. In those days when a person was converted, he knew a little something about God, because he knew something about theology. Today, because we know nothing about theology, we have a lot of Christians who are going around converted, but their Christianity is just skin deep, just barely enough to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ. We have so little understanding of theology in the church of Jesus Christ today.

Well Robert Louis Stevenson, I started to say, once wrote – now mind you, he’s not a theologian – he wrote, “I cannot understand how you theologians and preachers can apply to the church or multiplicity of churches Scripture promises which in their plain meaning apply to God’s chosen people, Israel and to Palestine, and which consequently must be still future. The prophetic books are full of teachings, which if they are interpreted literally, would be inspiring and a magnificent assurance of a great and glorious future, but which as they are spiritualized, become farcical, and as applied to the church, they are a comedy.” Now this is a word of advice from Robert Louis Stevenson to the theologians and preachers of his day. A very striking testimony.

In Acts chapter 1 verses 6 and 7 we have a passage which as to do with the question of the kingdom of Israel. Our Lord affirms that it is future here. He also affirms that it is right to expect a kingdom for Israel. Having taught for forty days, the apostles concerning the kingdom of God, according to verse 3 – how would you understand kingdom of God? Why you would understand it as it is taught in the Scriptures. Now in the Old Testament, kingdom of God meant the Messianic kingdom upon the earth.

Having taught them for 40 days about that, it’s no wonder that the apostles say to the Lord Jesus before he ascended, “Lord (verse 6) wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Now notice he does not say, no I’m not going to restore the kingdom

to Israel that it must all be spiritualized. That has to do with the great blessings of the Christian church. No he says it’s not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his power. In other words, the kingdom is to be expected, but the time of it’s coming, well that’s something that belongs to the Father, and therefore we shall live in the light of the promise, but we shall not expect its immediate coming, necessarily.

Acts chapter 15 we looked at last time so we’ll pass that one by.

Turn over the Romans chapter 11 verse 1. Romans chapter 11 verse 1. Paul answers the question that an amillennialist has raised directly. God has cast away Israel, the amillennialist says. He has cast away national Israel. Paul says, “I say then, (Romans 11:1) Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”

Now lest you should say well Paul just talks about himself being saved in a remnant and so on. Well then we read in verse 26, and so all Israel shall be saved and a passage from the Old Testament is cited in order to prove it. And then in order to show that those Old Testament promises are promises that God has committed himself to and committed his character to, he says in verse 29, “For the gifts and calling of God are not to be regretted.” He is faithful to his promises and having made promise that he would save Israel he will save them.

The apocalypse in chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation—I just remind you of this; no need to look there—remember, the order of events is chapter 19 verse 11. We have the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus in chapter 20 after the doom of the Beast and False Prophet, and the binding of Satan, we have the kingdom. So we have Second Advent and then kingdom. That is the premillennial picture of a premillennial coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now finally, so what we have seen is that the Old Testament plainly interpreted suggests premillennialism. The New Testament plainly interpreted suggests premillennialism.

Third, the testimony of the early church to premillennialism. We won’t have time to deal with all of the things that could be said about this, but it is generally admitted that the Jews of apostolic times were premillennial. That is, that they expected the advent and then the kingdom of the Messiah. It is also admitted by most of the amillennial friends that the early church was largely premillennial, some debate this, but it is agreed also by premillennialists that from Augustine’s time through the Reformation the premillennial view was in decline. In the 1st Century, Clement of Rome, who lived from 40 to 100 A.D. speaks of “preaching the coming of Christ.” He rebukes scoffers of the alleged delay of that coming, and he expresses the hope “that he shall come quickly and not tarry” and he occupies the Chiliastic position, of every hour expecting the kingdom of God. Clement is probably the earliest testimony to the premillennial coming of the Lord Jesus. In the 2nd Century, Papius, Justin Martyr and Areneaus—Areneaus, by the way, is the first great systemic theologian, and he, these men, important early church men, affirm the premillennial coming of the Lord Jesus.

Now we have just a minute or two, and I have already read you the quotation from our from Justin Martyr in which he talks about the kingdom plainly and says that right minded Christians believe as he does about it. He acknowledges that there were some that did not like his doctrine of the premillennial kingdom, but nevertheless, he affirms that that was the orthodox doctrine so far as he was concerned.

Areneaus, who is I say, the first systematic theologian of the Christian church, also has some things to say about the promises of God to Israel, and I think I have about a minute so I’m going to just read a few of them. Speaking about the Abrahamic promises, Areneaus, in his book against the heresies says, “So then, God’s promise which he promised to Abraham remains firm.” In other words, it’s to be literally fulfilled. He also

warns people against spiritualizing the prophecies. “I’m not unaware,” he says, “that some try to refer these prophecies to fierce men of divers nations and of different kinds of behavior who have believed and when they have believed have come to agree with the righteous,” and he speaks out against the spiritualizing of the prophecies. He writes, “John therefore (speaking of the first of the book of Revelation chapter 20 John therefore) predicted precisely the first resurrection of the just and their inheritance of the earth in the kingdom, and the prophets prophesied about this in agreement with each other.”

Next time perhaps at the introduction, I would like to read a couple of these statements. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the clarity of the word of God. Enable us Lord to understand the things that we read. They are exciting prophecies and promises. We know that Thou art faithful to the Scriptures, because Thou art faithful to us as well. Go with us as we part.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.