

Why Every Calvinist Should Be a Premillennialist, Part 2

Tonight we want to go back to our study of sovereign election Israel and eschatology. That's a rather technical title but that really is what I'm trying to convey to you. A bit of a theological lecture more than anything else. So take you to school a little bit, not in the normal preaching style but maybe a little bit more like the classroom.

Certainly the nation Israel is at the center stage of history in the world. It has been for a long, long time, particularly since it was reestablished as a nation last century. But even before that, Israel was always a preoccupation for the world. That little country tucked there in the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea on the western border of the Middle East has been a focal point for world history in many, many ways since it was chosen by God to be the land of promise for His people and since it is the very place where He sent His Son to do His mighty work of redemption and salvation. Israel is still center stage in the world. They are in the newspaper every day, on the news every night. Their...their particular place in history is by all human reckoning a very tenuous one, a very fragile one. They look like at any moment they could be completely engulfed and swept into oblivion by the surrounding enemies, the massive Islamic world. But that will not happen..that will not happen. They are not now under the protection of God because they're apostate and they've rejected their Messiah, but they will be preserved as an ethnic people because God does have a future plan to save a generation of them to give them the promises that He made in the Old Testament. So the history of Israel will continue to be at the center of world history, going forward, and it will even become a bigger point at the very end when the Lord returns to the earth and places His feet in Israel, in Jerusalem on the Mount and sets up His Millennial Kingdom. And from that place, rules the entire world.

So when you think about Israel, you have to understand that currently they are under divine chastening for rejection of the true and living God and the Lord Jesus Christ but they will be preserved to the fulfillment of God's promises to them. This, as I told you last time, is one of the great defenses of the truth of the Scripture, that Israel exists, that Jews exist, that that ethnic people who came out of the loins of Abraham is still here in the world. This has been, I suppose you could say, a racial anomaly throughout all of human history and even in the Middle Ages people were wondering why while no other ancient people could be found, you could always find the Jews. It is evidence visible, tangible that God wrote the Bible and that He is protecting His people for His future purposes.

Now talking about eschatology is an important thing because the end of the story matters. Every story is written really because of an ending. Every story is written for an ending. And God's redemptive history is written so that it might be brought to pass and so that we might understand how it's going to end. We have the beginning in the book of Genesis. We have the early years of God's redemptive history in the pages of the Old Testament, the subsequent years in the pages of the New Testament and God continues to write His history since the close of the New Testament up until now and we await the final chapters in the end. And much of that has been written down in Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that we can know exactly what the future holds insofar as God has revealed it.

This also assumes that God is in control of everything. God could not write the end of human history unless He was in absolute control of it. He could not pre-write it. He could not prophesy it, He could not predict it down to minute details unless He was in control of everything. And He is, in fact, control of everything. History is controlled by God as to culminate in the accomplishment of His purpose for His own glory. It will end with the same perfect precision and power with which it began and by which it is being continually sustained.

There are some people who think, however, that the end of the story is very vague, that the end of the story is somewhat obscure and oblique, and almost any view will do, almost any idea will do because it's so unclear. That is not the case. The end of the story is not vague. It is not unclear, nor is it unimportant. I was talking to another pastor recently and I asked him about his view regarding the coming of Christ's earthly Kingdom and the future fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews, to which he said, "I really don't care about any of that." That was a rather surprising answer to me, you really don't care about that but that is something God cares greatly about and that is something God has written very clearly about. And we are accountable to give the whole counsel of God, and that's part of it. Or to put it another way, God doesn't waste words, God doesn't say what doesn't matter. If He said it, it's very important. And the end of the story, in one sense, is more important than any other part of the story. In any book, in any story, the end is the purpose, the reason, the motive for the story in the first place, therefore it's the most crucial, compelling and important element. And so it is with the Bible. Everything has been predicted and planned and is being executed by a sovereign all-powerful, all-knowing God to bring it to a glorious end which He planned before anything ever began. And He wants us to enjoy the anticipation of this along with Him. He wants us to be able to enjoy now something of the foretaste of the glories that are to come. He tells us about heaven. Why? So that we can enjoy the anticipation of it now. He tells us about the future glorious return of Christ. Why? So we can live in the anticipation of that glorious hope now. And we saw last week how many benefits come from that. We are blessed and we are purified and we are comforted and we are encouraged in knowing what is to come.

Now when you think about eschatology, there's a little sequence of events that are relatively simple for you to think about, and this is the way the Bible lays it out. If we wanted to use technical theological terms we'd call it the *ordo(?) eschaton*, that is the order of last things, the *ordo eschaton*. And it kind of goes like this. In the end, everything is begun by the Rapture of the church, the collection of the church, the gathering of the church into the presence of the Lord. That is followed by a period called the Tribulation.

So Rapture, Tribulation. Tribulation is a period in which God brings horrific judgment on the world, the details of which are described in Revelation, starting in chapter 6 and running through chapter 19. Rapture, followed by Tribulation...Tribulation ends with the Second Coming of Christ, when He comes to earth bringing His church, those of us who have already been with Him, having been raptured before the Tribulation, we come back with Him to earth, He returns, He destroys the ungodly and sets up His Kingdom...Rapture-Tribulation-Second Coming-Kingdom.

At the end of the Kingdom you have the Great White Throne Judgment which is the final judgment of all the ungodly who are raised from the dead and brought before the Great White Throne, the tribunal of

God, where the final sentence is rendered and they are sent forever into the Lake of Fire. Rapture-Tribulation-Second Coming-Kingdom-Final Judgment...after the final Judgment the universe as we know it is uncreated and God creates a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal state in which we live forever.

That's it. Rapture-Tribulation-Second Coming-Kingdom-Final Judgment-New Heaven and New Earth...that's the chronology, that's the *ordo eschaton*. And if you follow the book of Revelation, that's exactly the way it's laid out. It is precisely how it flows. You see the church on earth in chapters 2 and 3, which describes the present church age, immediately you come to chapter 4 and you see the church in heaven which is indicative of the fact they were on earth, they're now in heaven though it doesn't describe the Rapture, it's described in other places, it's clear that that is what happened. And after looking at the church worshipping in heaven in chapters 4 and 5, in chapter 6 the judgments on the earth begin as the Tribulation takes place. At the end of that, the Lord Jesus comes in chapter 19, sets up His Kingdom after His return in chapter 20, then calls all sinners to the final Great White Throne Judgment. Then in chapter 21, sets up the New Heaven and the New Earth. It really isn't that difficult, just take it at face value.

All history then is headed toward this final sequence of events. And the first of these events, the Rapture, is what we call imminent...imminent meaning it is next. And its exact timing is unknown to us. It could happen at any time. People say to me, "Well, what needs to happen prophetically before the Rapture of the church?" Answer: absolutely nothing. All the prophetic elements of eschatology really are triggered by the Rapture of the church. It can happen at any time. Even the Apostle Paul lived in the light of the reality that the Rapture could have happened in his lifetime. It can happen at any time.

So all history is headed toward the eternal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords in His earthly Kingdom, first of all, for a thousand years, then in His eternal Kingdom forever and forever. It is not that complex. That is the point of the book of Revelation. And as you read it, you'll see that sequence unfolding.

Now the major...the major focus for us in this initial study as we look at those events of the end time, is to look at the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. This Millennial Kingdom described in Revelation 20 which lasts for a thousand years. Six times in the opening verses of Revelation 20 it says it will last for a thousand years. It's not a mistake. It's not a symbolic number. It means a thousand years. So we read there about the Kingdom that will exist in the earth over which Christ Himself will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords for a thousand years, followed then by His eternal reign, so that really His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom.

Associated with that Kingdom will be the Rapture of the church, the Tribulation, the Second Coming, the Final Judgment. And then after that, the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. And the Old Testament says a lot about the things that are going to take place in the Kingdom. It talks about the salvation of Israel. It talks about salvation of Gentiles prior to the Kingdom during the Tribulation as well as in the Kingdom. It talks about the renewal of the earth, the restoration of the earth, paradise regained. It talks about the removal of the curse that has been upon the earth. It talks about the bodily

resurrection of the saints who are going to rise from the dead and come to dwell on the earth with the saints that are still alive on the earth, both together in the time of the Kingdom. It describes the Kingdom as a time of righteousness, peace and joy.

The New Testament also describes these events very clearly, as I pointed out. Not just in the book of Revelation but in the book of Revelation you have the sequence and the chronology, but the New Testament talks about the Rapture, about the fact the Lord's going to come and take us. There's going to be a trumpet, the voice of the archangel, we're going to be taken up into heaven...that's the Rapture. The New Testament also talks about the Tribulation time. Jesus talked about it in the sermon called the Olivet Discourse which in Matthew 24...or...yes, in that part of Matthew is basically 24 and 25, His own sermon on His own Second Coming, and He talks about certain events that are going to take place in the Tribulation, including the abomination of desolation when the sacred place, the holy place in the rebuilt temple is desecrated, for example, and persecution breaks out against the Jews during that Tribulation. So the New Testament adds to our understanding. The New Testament talks about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus talked about it, how He comes in the clouds with great glory, accompanied by angels who gather His elect from the four corners of the earth. And He comes to establish the glory of His rule. The New Testament talks about the fact that the twelve tribes of Israel will be identified. Over each of the tribes will rule in the behalf of Christ, one of the twelve Apostles and we as believers having been glorified coming back to earth will even under the leadership of Jesus Christ rule over the earth and over the living people of Israel as well.

The book of Revelation says Satan will be bound for that thousand years, released at the end because during the Tribulation...I should say, during the Millennial Kingdom Satan is bound during that thousand-year Millennium, at the end he's released because people will be born during that time and they will not all believe. And so there will be a rebellion at the end of the thousand years, Satan will come back, lead the rebellion which will be the final rebellion in history, crushed by the Lord. All those who are in that rebellion sent into hell, in the Lake of Fire with all the rest of the ungodly of all the ages and then the New Heaven and the New Earth. All that is given in detail in the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament which also talks about the New Heaven and the New Earth, especially in the book of Isaiah.

Now if you would like to get a better handle on that, take your MacArthur Study Bible, not now but some other time, and look at the back and you will find a doctrinal statement in the back. If you have one of the newer editions, or one of the older ones, the doctrinal statement is in each one. You can read the section and last things and you'll have a detailed understanding of what I've just said to you with the related passages that you can look up. If you have one of the new MacArthur Study Bibles done on the NAS, or one of the new New King James versions that has a concordance, you will also find a topical index which has a whole section on matters related to eschatology or last things. So you can look in the back of the Study Bible, you can look at the Index, you can also look at the doctrinal statement and get a lot more detail.

Now, what we're going to do in the future, and I gave you, that's the sweep. In the future, we're going to kind of pick that all up one thing at a time, one element at a time, one component at a time and survey that so we have a better understanding.

Through the years I have taught on all of these things many, many times. In teaching through the entire book of Daniel, and teaching through the entire book of Zechariah, in teaching selected portions of Isaiah and Ezekiel, in teaching through Matthew and Luke and teaching through 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, Revelation twice, all of that material has been covered in those messages and the commentaries that have been written on the passages that relate to eschatology. So they have a lot of material if you want to pursue. There's also a book on the Second Coming and we'll be giving you, coming up pretty soon, the new condensed, compressed commentary on the book of Revelation so you'll have tools to dig a little bit deeper.

Now, remember that this is a particularly great fascination for people to know about the future. Everybody wants to know about the future. It is a massive industry resting on people's interests in what is coming, the science fiction industry with books and movies and videos, horoscopes, palm readers, tarot cards, all kinds of false prophets and false prognosticators even in the name of God and Jesus Christ abound and they make a fortune because there's such an immense interest in this.

Now they all guarantee, and I will also guarantee you, one thing, I will guarantee you one thing about the future if you follow them...you will have less money. And that is all I will guarantee. You will not know anything about the future but you will have less money. However, God who alone knows the future has revealed much of it to us, all that He does want us to know and what He has revealed is absolutely the truth. So for the next number of weeks, oh there are obviously some misses as we go for the next few weeks anyway, we won't be doing this on Sunday night, but as we get going and gather some momentum in this, you can tell your friends and acquaintances to come and hear the real truth about the future. So I'm giving you kind of fair warning, this is a great opportunity for you to captivate these people who are already preoccupied and interest with the future so that they can know the truth about the future.

All right, that's all kind of introductory and what we have begun with is this important linch pin that holds everything together, God's purpose for Israel, God's purpose for Israel. If we get this right, then we get the Kingdom right and everything moves or works around the Kingdom. So we have to get God's promises to Israel right and the Kingdom right and then basically everything else works around that. Simply put, God made covenants and promises to a people, a people that came out of the loins of Abraham, that came through the patriarchs, became known as the people called Israel. God made promises with them. God made covenants with them that define the nature and the character largely of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ which is the final, great, glorious end of human history on this earth so that the future is centered on this Kingdom which while including all the redeemed of all the ages, we'll all be there in glorified form or in still living form, is still uniquely designed to fulfill promises to Israel. We will enter in to the blessing of the Kingdom, just as we enter in to the New Covenant promised to Israel, just as we enter in to the promises given to Abraham, we are in a sense spiritual children of Abraham by faith. So we participate in all the good things that God promised to Israel, but not to their exclusion but in company with His promises being fulfilled to them.

The bottom line in the future, there will be a generation of Jews who will come to faith in Jesus Christ collectively as a people. And when that happens, Jesus will return to give them His promised Kingdom, it awaits their salvation...it awaits their salvation. Now again the Bible is clear on this, the Bible speaks of this with frequency, unmistakably. These are divine promises, I told you last time, they are unilateral, that is they are made by God alone, they are irrevocable, God promises that He will not rescind them, and still there are some among us, that is among evangelicals, who deny the future Kingdom established by Christ on earth. They deny the Kingdom and they deny the Jewishness of the Kingdom. Some deny both, some deny one. Some will say, "Well yes there will be a Kingdom, but it will not be a Kingdom with Jewish characteristics fulfilling Old Testament promises to the Jews. That is called historical premillennialism, Christ will come, set up the Kingdom but it won't have the Jewish character that we anticipate from Old Testament promises it would have because those promises were cancelled to Israel and given to the church. So there will be a Kingdom but it will be a church Kingdom. Saved Jews will be there but it will not be uniquely and particularly for Israel. That's called historic premillennialism, to differ it only from what we believe called futuristic premillennialism which simply is to say there will be a Kingdom on earth and it will bring to pass all the promises that God ever made to Israel. And that is not to be rescinded and those promises are not to be given instead to the church.

This is not a minor matter because if you don't get it right, then it disrupts completely eschatology. And I will tell you this, the only people who work with prophetic texts with precision and care and specificity are those who interpret the Bible literally and end up as premillennialists. Once you say it doesn't mean what it says, then all precision is gone. So all those who work with prophetic texts with precision and specificity are premillennialists. The folks who deny the reality of these things, let's call them amillennial, or postmillennial, or whatever, they can't deal with prophetic texts with specificity because if in fact they don't refer to Israel, then we really don't know what they refer to and that's why there's a certain indifference to these matters among those.

Now we call this amillennialism and I told you about that last week, so I won't do that again. A-mill means a-alpha privative in the Greek, negates something, no millennium, no millennium. This is the view that there is no Millennial Kingdom, that there is no Kingdom in one sense or another. Oh yes, there's a spiritual kingdom, there's a heavenly kingdom, they would affirm that, but no earthly Kingdom, a-millennial, no earthly Kingdom. Or this is the earthly Kingdom, that would be called postmillennialism, we're sort of in it now, they might say, or we bring it and at the end of it Jesus comes, but there is no Second Coming in which Christ establishes an earthly Kingdom fulfilling all His promises to Israel as well as embracing all the redeemed of all the ages in the glory of the reign of Christ in the world. The irony of this is that a-millennialism is most popular among Reformed people that is reformed in their theological sense, meaning they are believers in divine, sovereign election, divine, sovereign election. They believe in the doctrine of election, that's basically what it means to be reformed. You believe that God chooses who will be saved, God makes promises and then God by His sovereign power keeps those promises. This is very strange that they would believe in sovereign election, they would believe in the doctrine of election and not believe that God will keep His promise to elect Israel, "Israel Mine elect," He says repeatedly in the book of Isaiah, "Israel Mine elect." This is an election by God and in Romans 11, the election or the callings of God are not revokable, but strangely these people who believe in divine

election and believe that God does what He determines and fulfills His promises and whoever He elects He will bring to salvation, strangely while believing that think that the promises God made to elect Israel have been forfeited by Israel's unbelief cancelled and now given to the church and there is no future for Israel.

That's called replacement theology. That's a theological term for it, it's called replacement theology and it is the idea that the church replaces Israel...the church replaces Israel. Very popular that some theologians call it supersessionism, you don't need to worry about that word, it's just the technical word I say for some of you technical people in case you see it and wonder what it means, another term for replacement theology. The church replaces Israel. Why? Because Israel disobeyed God. Because Israel became apostate religiously. Because Israel rejected Christ, because Israel said no to the Messiah, rejected the Messiah. They therefore went so far as to crucify the Messiah and in so doing they forfeited permanently all the Old Testament promises of God which therefore are transferred to the church. We then receive all the promises. The Jews get nothing but the curses. And this is an assumption, by the way, because nothing in the Scripture says this. There's no where in the Bible you're going to go and say or find that the Bible says the promises given to Israel originally are now transferred to the church. You will not find that anywhere in the Bible. It's not there. You will not find a statement about Israel's disobedience, apostasy, rejection of Christ, bringing about the forfeiture of their future salvation and the Kingdom of Christ. And even the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of temple worship is prophesied by Israel. That will happen. Nothing is said in the Scripture that revokes it. It is an assumption and it is a huge assumption.

Now I want to help you understand this a little further, so I kind of laid out a series of questions that we're going to try to answer. And we'll do it in a negative sense. I want to approach this subject of premillennialism and the coming Kingdom and the future of Israel from the negative side, I want to approach it from the a-mill side, if I may, because that, I think, is both instructive and destructive. It is instructive of the truth and destructive of the error at the same time. So here are the questions I want to ask. Is the Old Testament amillennial? Second question, were the Jews of Jesus' day amillennial? Third question, was Jesus amillennial? Fourth question, were the prophets amillennial? Fifth question, were the early theologians amillennial? And then we'll draw some critical conclusions. That's a fair question, isn't it? If we're going to buy into amillennialism, that there is no future Kingdom on earth and there is no future Kingdom in which the promises to God to Israel are going to come to pass because they're now coming to pass spiritually in the life of the church either on earth in the church age, or in heaven, if that is our view, then we would expect that somewhere in the Bible somebody would affirm that...like Old Testament writers, the Jews of Jesus' day, Jesus Himself, the prophets and Apostles of the New Testament and even the early church theologians. Somebody has got to come up with this in and around Scripture.

So let's ask the first question. Is the Old Testament amillennial?

Now I've got to stop here for a minute, take you off on a little bit of a detour, may I? A caution here...a caution here. To say that the writers of the Old Testament were amillennial when they were writing about a Kingdom is a strange thing to say, right? To say that they were writing about a Kingdom that

they knew was not going to come, it's a very strange thing. And one would have to ask, how could they be inspired to writing details about a coming Kingdom promised to Israel and through Israel to the Gentiles as well, a great glorious Messianic Kingdom, you can't imagine that they were receiving this revelation from God, writing it down and at the same time they were writing it down they knew it wasn't so. That's absurd. Of course they would believe it was true.

Take that a little further. If the only way they could know that it wasn't true was if they had the New Testament, which is what amillennialists have to do, and they knew that Judaism became apostate and Judaism rejected Jesus and crucified Him, if then the only way they could have a true interpretation of what they wrote was to have the New Testament, then what they wrote had no meaning to them. It is not legitimate to interpret the Old Testament only by the New Testament. It is not legitimate to say that the Old Testament is this oblique, mysterious, hidden book with all kinds of things that you can't know about apart from the New Testament, that is to give the primacy of interpretation to the New Testament. This is what Walter Kaiser(?), great scholar, says is having a canon within a canon, having a rule within a rule. This then means that the Old Testament can't be interpreted on its own, that people who are writing it and reading it can't have any idea what it is that they're writing and reading. If Old Testament promises were actually for the church and not for ethnic Jews, ethnic Israel, then those Old Testament promises are meaningless, they are utterly unintelligible and they are irrelevant to the Old Testament reader. But this is essentially what you're left with if you take an amillennial view. The New Testament is the starting point for understanding the Old Testament. And what you've just done is damage any meaningful interpretation of the Old Testament on its own.

And this is basically what leads to what we call spiritualizing the Scripture...spiritualizing the Scripture. That is, taking texts out of their literal sense, spiritualizing them into some other than literal sense. I'll give you an illustration. Many years ago there's a book out called If I Perish, I Perish, it was a book on the book of Esther. And the whole idea of the book was a study of the believer, the believer's nature and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. That's not in the book of Esther, none of it is in the book of Esther anywhere in the book of Esther. It was simply imposed upon the book of Esther. The book of Esther is about God protecting His people Israel providentially. That's what it's about. It's a great book. It is not about the Spirit-filled life.

I listened to a series of tapes on the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is about people of Israel going back, rebuilding, building a wall, reconstituting their nation, the city of Jerusalem, reestablishing worship. Again it's the story of God preserving, protecting, restoring His people. I listened to, I think, eight tapes and it went like this. "Nehemiah is the Holy Spirit, the fallen walls are the fallen walls of human personality. What God wants to do is send the Holy Spirit into your life to rebuild the fallen walls of your personality. And the middle of the city where they were building the wall, there was...you remember...a fountain. The series said the fountain is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit wants to baptize you, wants to come into your life, rebuild the fallen walls of your personality and the mortar between the bricks was speaking in tongues. So the Holy Spirit wants to come, baptize you, teach you to speak in tongues so you can rebuild the walls of your fallen personality." That's the book of Nehemiah. I want to grab for a skyhook and go to heaven when I hear that kind of stuff. Get me out of here! That is

horrific. And people are sitting there saying, "This is deep...this is deep stuff, I never saw that...I never saw that. Wow, what insight." That's not insight.

I had a...I heard a preacher speak...Patricia and I were at a conference with our kids, he preached on the Rapture of the church from John 11, the resurrection of Lazarus. That's right, the Rapture of the church from John 11, the resurrection of Lazarus. "Lazarus, come forth," Jesus said, and he launched off into the Rapture of the church. And, you know, he was manipulating that thing, it was really clever. And afterwards he came to me and he said, "Have you ever seen that in that text?" I said, "No, sir, and neither has anybody else, because frankly it is not in that text." This is very, very, very common stuff. Many of you have grown up in churches where people did that to the Old Testament all the time.

So, when you take the New Testament concepts, theology, ideas, teaching, instruction, revelation, impose it upon the Old Testament, twist and turn the Old Testament like a piece of clay into whatever shape you want it to, you really have adulterated the authorial intent of the Old Testament which can stand on its own. But, you see, replacement theology demands the Old Testament be viewed through the lens of the New Testament. It demands that the Old Testament be viewed through the apostasy of Israel which they could never have known about.

It also strikes a very strange dichotomy because all the curses pronounced on Israel in the Old Testament have been fulfilled literally to Israel. And in the passages which pronounce cursing and blessing, cursing and blessing, back and forth, you obey, you get blessed, you disobey, get cursed. We know the history of the cursing. There was Israel cursed. It is Israel who disobeyed. It is Israel who then feels the weight of the punishment of God. All of the curses we could say were fulfilled literally on Israel, why would we say all the blessings will be fulfilled literally on the church? You can't split. You can't create that dichotomy in a given passage because you have convoluted the intent of the passages. If it is literally Israel that gets curses, it will be literally Israel who will get the blessings. There is no biblical support for such a split hermeneutic. Hermeneutics comes from a Greek verb *hermeneuō* which means to interpret, to explain.

Another way to look at it is all the prophecies regarding Jesus' first coming were fulfilled literally, right? Bethlehem, the donkey, the colt, the foal of an ass, betrayed by a friend, detail after detail after detail. Even in the Psalms it said that He would say, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That He would be thirsty and want something to drink. That He would be pierced. That His legs would not be broken. All of that is in the Old Testament, detail, detail, detail, detail. If all of the prophecies regarding His first coming were fulfilled literally, then that establishes the precedent that all of the prophecies related to His Second Coming will also be fulfilled literally. Then there's no place for any artificial divisions and arbitrary arbitration of the hermeneutics.

So, we ask the question again...is the Old Testament amillennial? Using normal language, normal interpretation, understanding the clarity of the Old Testament, understanding that it stands on its own, we simply need to see what it says. The Old Testament must be interpreted, preached and taught and believed as clear revelation from God that is to be understood. And we're held responsible for it.

Now, let's get it right out of the Scripture. Turn to Genesis 12...Genesis 12. The promises of God that relate to Israel's future basically are bound up in three covenants...three covenants. The promises of God that relate to Israel's future are basically bound up in three covenants. The first one is called the Abrahamic Covenant. And we'll do well even to work our way even a little bit into this. Chapter 12 verse 1, Genesis, "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you and I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great and so you shall be a blessing and I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you, I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" That is what is known as the Abrahamic Covenant. What strikes you, first of all, is the little verbal phrase, "I will" five times, five times. I will show you, I will make you, I will bless you, I will bless, I will curse...I will, I will, I will, I will, I will. This isn't some kind of agreement between God and Abram, this is unilateral and unconditional and sovereign. God is simply saying this is what I will do...I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, make your name great, you will then become a blessing, I will bless those who bless you, curse those who curse you and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. There are no ifs, ands, or buts, right? There's no caveats, that's why we call it an unconditional covenant. It is an unconditional promise. It is unilateral. It is given by a sovereign who has all authority and all power.

From there it really does expand. Go to chapter 13, in further conversation with Abram who lived up in Ur of the Chaldees. "The Lord said to Abram...after Lot had separated from him, verse 14... 'Now lift up your eyes, look from the place where you are northward, southward, eastward and westward. For all the land which you see I will give it to you and your descendants permanently.'" So, I promise you a nation, I promise you blessing, I promise you to be the blessed to bless the world, and I promise you land toward the north and the south and the east and the west, for all the land which you see I will give it to you and your descendants permanently. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, I will give it to you. Again, "I will, I will, I will, I will," over and over again. This is what I will do. This is not an agreement between two parties, this is simply a promise from one to the other.

Now look at the fifteenth chapter of Genesis...the fifteenth chapter of Genesis. This is a very, very important portion. Verse 8...in verse 7 He says, "I will give you this land." And he said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?" This is one guy saying, "You're going to give me what? You're going to give me all this land all the way from the coast to the Euphrates River, Mesopotamia Valley north to south, You're going to give me this massive land which at the time is occupied by all kinds of people, all kinds of tribes, all kinds of nations, all kinds of ethnic groups, You're going to give this to me, right? How may I know that I shall possess it? How...how would I ever come to believe that that could happen? How am I going to know that?"

And in effect, God says, "I'm going to make a promise called a covenant." This is what He says to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, three-year-old female goat, a cow and a goat, three-year-old ram, turtledove and a young pigeon. Collect a little menagerie for Me." This is God telling Abram. Brought all these to Him. "Cut them in two, cut them in half." He knew what was going on. The Old Testament word for making a covenant is to cut a covenant because when people made a covenant, when people made a promise, they sealed it in blood. And the way they did that was they cut animals in half, split the animal on two sides, together they walked through the pieces. And what they were doing by that gesture was sealing the promise by blood. They call it cutting a covenant. And so, Abram knew exactly what was going on here. God was making a promise and there was going to be a covenant. There was going to be a visible, symbolic ceremony to affirm the covenant. Typically both parties in a covenant would walk through the pieces and that would be a way by blood to seal your vow. So he brought all these to Him, cut them in two and laid each half opposite the other, didn't cut the birds, you cut a bird, you just get a pile of features and bones, so you leave the bird in tact, put one dead bird on one side, one dead bird on the other side and the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, of course. All that dead flesh and Abram is there chasing away all the vultures, while the bloody pieces lie on the ground. And he's there waiting for something to happen in the midst of this bloody, butchered mass and the birds that are trying to eat it.

"When the sun was going down...verse 12...a deep sleep fell upon Abram." This is divine anesthesia, God knocks him out, God puts him to sleep. "And behold, terror and great darkness and fell upon him." Even in the midst of sleep, there was a terrifying dark foreboding reality in his sleep consciousness, like a nightmare of sorts. Why? Because God had moved in and God is fearful and frightening and terrifying and God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in the land that is not there, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years...precisely 430 years...and I will also judge the nation whom they will serve. And afterward they will come out with many possessions." Talking about the Exodus, all prophesied. "As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace, you shall be buried at a good old age. Then the fourth generation they shall return here for the iniquity of the Amorite or the Canaanite is not yet complete. When the iniquity of the Amorites was complete, then God would bring Israel into the land and take over the land."

Then verse 17, "it came about when the sun had set, it was very dark, behold there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch," that's God, "which passed between the pieces." God, there's this dark foreboding sense of His presence and then a flaming torch, smoking lamp, moves in space between these pieces. This is God moving between the pieces. "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, the Kenite, the Kenizzite, Kadmonite, Hittite, Perizzite, Rephaim, Amorite, Canaanite, Girgashite, Jebusite, I give you all of it.'" But notice this, Abraham...Abram never passed between the pieces because this is not a conditional covenant, this is not dependent on Abram, this is a unilateral, irrevokable, divine promise by God. God goes through alone, binding Himself to His own promise. He anesthetizes Abraham, Abraham is not a part of this, it doesn't involve him. This is God's will...I will, I will, I will, I will, I will, this is what I will do, it is set, it is fixed, I will give you that land. Footnote, they have never had it yet. They've never had it yet...never yet. But God has bound Himself.

How are we to understand that? There's no way to understand that other...in that context...than to understand that God was giving him that land. He describes the rivers, He describes the people who live there. He knew exactly what He was talking about. He was not talking about spiritual blessings to the church. There's no ambiguity in this whatsoever.

If you move a little further in to chapter 17 when Abram was 99 years old, "The Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty. Walk before Me, be blameless, I'll establish My covenant between Me and you.'" He repeats it to him a number of times. "I'll establish My covenant between Me and you, I will, I will, I will, I will multiply you exceedingly." The "I wills" are ubiquitous in every one of these declarations by God. "Abram fell on his face and God talked with him. As for me, behold, My covenant is with you. You will be the father of a multitude of nations, no longer shall be named Abram, your name shall be Abraham, meaning father of a multitude." Abram means a noble father, Abraham means a father of a multitude. "I'll make you a father of a multitude of nations, I'll make you exceedingly fruitful, make nations of you. Kings will come forth from you. I'll establish My covenant between Me and you, your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you and your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for your everlasting possession, permanent possession, I will be your God." Verse 13 He adds at the end, "My covenant for you is an everlasting covenant." Verse 19, the end of the verse, "My covenant is an everlasting covenant." God seriously binds Himself.

It continues this way in chapter 22 and verse 15, "The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven saying, 'By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you've done this thing...that's the incident with Isaac...have not withheld your son, your only son. Indeed I'll greatly bless you, I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, the sand of the sea which is on the seashore. Your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies and your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you obeyed My voice. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed," that is not seeds, that is seed and in Galatians Paul says that refers to whom? Messiah. So what was in the Abrahamic Covenant? Land...first a nation, a people, land, influence, blessing to the world and even the Messianic promise. And through the Messianic promise salvation would come to Israel and to the Gentiles.

It doesn't even end there. It is repeated again and we don't have time to read it all. But just know how it's reiterated. For example, in chapter 26, we now move to Isaac. And the Lord appears to Isaac in [Genesis 26:24](#), and the Lord says, "I am the God of your father, Abraham. Do not fear, I am with you, I will bless you," there the "I wills" again, "And I will multiply your descendants for the sake of My servant Abraham." Again God reiterates His promise to the subsequent patriarch who is Isaac. If you go to chapter 28, Jacob, the next one, whose name is changed to Israel, "Behold the Lord stood there...verse 13...above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give it to you and your descendants. Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, spread out to the west, the east, the north, the south and in you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'" "

God kept making promises to...are you ready for this?...sinful patriarchs. Abraham was sinful, Isaac was sinful, Jacob was sinful. God kept making these promises because that is His intention, to give to this people that came out of the loins of Abraham a future and a Kingdom and blessing and salvation, and a seed, a Messiah. And this has never been abrogated. It has never been canceled. In Exodus 19 verse 5, "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My Covenant," this is the covenant of law, the Mosaic Covenant on Mount Sinai, the law, "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My Covenant, you will be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel. So Moses came, called the elders of the people, set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him and all the people together answered and said, 'All the Lord has spoken we will do.' Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold I have come to you in a thick cloud in order that the people may hear when I speak to you and you also believe ??? so believe in you forever. Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord.'" Hey, Lord, the people, they want to obey You, they want to follow You, they want to do what You say.

That was a nice gesture, wasn't it? Over in chapter 24...in chapter 24 they even had a ceremony, a blood ceremony, we won't read it, a blood ceremony in which they affirmed that commitment. We're going to obey the Law, we're going to obey the Law, we're going to obey the Law...what did they do? They didn't obey the Law. You say, "Well, that's it. Cancelled."

Turn to Galatians 3...[Galatians 3:15](#), Paul, "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it." Covenants are covenants, and they're irrevokable. "Now...he says...the promises were to Abraham and to his seed. And He does not say to his seeds, as referring to many, but rather to one, to your seed, that is Christ. What I am saying is this, the Law which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."

First comes the Abrahamic Covenant, much later comes the Mosaic Covenant. They say they will obey, they don't obey. But even that does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God. Did...did God ratify the Abrahamic Covenant? Yes He did, by passing between the pieces and binding Himself. It does not nullify the promise. "For if the inheritance is based on Law," that is if the promises of God only come because you obey, it is no longer really a promise. But God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise."

Here Paul is simply saying disobedience to the Mosaic Law does not cancel the Abrahamic Covenant. You see that? That's the whole point. It doesn't abrogate it even when Israel proudly and eagerly and, I think, honestly said, "We will obey...we will obey," and went through a blood ceremony in which they were sloshed with blood to signify their commitment to obedience. Even when they made that public affirmation and did not follow through, blatantly violating the Law of God, still they continue to be the people of promise, for that promise is not based on their ability to keep the Law. You see it illustrated in

the book of Hosea. Hosea marries a woman who is a prostitute. He marries her. She goes away. She goes and lives a dissolute life. She's so wretched as a prostitute that she is basically put up on a block stark naked and sold in the marketplace. Guess what? Hosea goes and buys her back to keep his covenant to her. And this is a symbol of God buying back the prostitute Israel because He made a covenant.

I want you to see one other text, Ezekiel 16...Ezekiel 16. And with this one, we'll have to close although we're really going slow. It's all your fault. (Laughter) Ezekiel 16, this obviously, you take one look at it and you say, "O brother, sixty-three verses." We're not going to cover a whole chapter, but...you need to read this chapter if you haven't ever read it. It is one of the most staggering chapters in all the Bible. It's about God's unconditional love for Israel. And it's in graphic terms. Verse 3, the Lord God speaks to Jerusalem. He says, "Your origin, your birth are from the land of the Canaanite. I rescued you out of the land of the Canaanite. Your father was an Amorite, your mother a Hittite." That's...you came from pagan origins, of course. "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths." You were like a...you were like a baby born, came out of the mother's womb and never cared for, never cleaned, cord never cut, bloody. You were taken without pity...verse 5, "No eye looked with pity on you," do any of these things for you, have compassion on you. "You were thrown into an open field." This would be a way to dump a child and this was common in ancient times, as it is even today when you find children in dumpsters. This is a baby born, the umbilical cord isn't cut, baby's not rubbed with salt, that's how they disinfected the child as it came into the world, just thrown out into a field in its blood. Nobody cared. "When I passed by...verse 6...I saw you squirming in your blood and I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live! I gave you life.'" Abrahamic Covenant right there. "I made you a people. I made you like numerous like plants of the field. You grew up, you became tall, you reached the age of fine ornaments, your breasts were formed, your hair had grown. You were still naked and bare, I passed by you, I saw you. Behold, you were at the time for love. Spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness to protect you from those who would rape you. And I swore to you and I entered into a covenant with you and you became Mine. And I bathed you with water and I washed off your blood from you and I anointed you with oil and I clothed you with embroidered cloth."

See, this is where figures of speech come into play in literal interpretation of Scripture. We all understand that the literal meaning here is that God establishing His covenant with Israel doing it in beautiful figures of speech could have put a necklace on your neck, ring in your nose, earrings in your ears, beautiful crown on your head, adorned you with gold and silver. I gave you everything...everything.

Well jump to verse 28, it goes on. It's just absolutely magnificent descriptive language. "You weren't satisfied with Me...middle of the verse, verse 28...you played the harlot with the Assyrians and a whole lot of others, the Egyptians. And you still weren't satisfied. You multiplied...verse 29...your harlotry with every merchant that showed up." Israel bedded down with every false god there was. It's a sad story....sad, sad story. And it goes on and on and on and on.

Go down to verse 53. "Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity...He says...regarding the captivity of Sodom, the captivity of Samaria." God has it in His heart to restore. Even Samaria, even Sodom.

But far more than that, go to verse 60. "Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you." There is no way that this covenant can be cancelled, no matter how wretched you become, no matter what a harlot you are, there is no way the covenant can ever be revoked. The time will come...I love this, verse 61..."You will remember your ways, you will be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger, I will give them to you as daughters, not because of your covenant, thus I will establish My covenant with you and you shall know that I am Lord." Again, I will, I will. "I will establish My covenant in order that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth any more because of your humiliation when I have forgiven you for all that you have done, the Lord God declares." This is staggering stuff. At the end of the whole story of wretched unfaithfulness on the part of Israel, God says, "I will remember My covenant, I will establish an everlasting covenant, I will forgive you of all that you have done. You will know that I am the Lord. You will be ashamed...this is repentance. You will never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation. You will be shamed into silent penitence when I forgive you". This again is the unconditional, irrevokable, divine promise of God.

God's decision to set His love on Israel is in no way determined by Israel's performance, no way is it determined by Israel's national worthiness. It is purely His own sovereign will. And some day in the future, all that was promised to Abram will come to pass.

Listen to [Deuteronomy 7:6](#), "You are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you or choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, you were the fewest, but because the Lord loved you and the Lord kept the promise that He swore to your forefathers. Know therefore that the Lord your God, verse 9, He is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant and His loving kindness to a thousand generations." God keeps His covenant. He keeps His promise.

Chapter 9 verse 4 in Deuteronomy, "Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess the land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness, or the uprightness of your heart that you're going to possess the land, it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." God is doing what He's doing because He promised to do it, not because you deserve it. You don't get it because you deserve it. You don't forfeit it because you don't deserve it. And so does God promise to Israel the future land, Kingdom, Messiah, blessing and world salvation influence. And it's all based on God's own covenant.

Now our time is gone. But since I can't do this again for a little bit, I want to close with two Psalms, and I am going to close. Psalm 89...Psalm 89 and I need to do this in order to sum it up. Psalm 89, "I will sing of the loving kindness of the Lord forever, to all generations I will make known Thy faithfulness with my

mouth, for I have said lovingkindness will be built up forever." Lovingkindness will be built up forever. "In the heavens Thou wilt establish Thy faithfulness. I have made a covenant with My chosen. I have sword to David, My servant. I will establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations."

Drop down to verse 30. "If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with a rod and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness, I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever. His throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon and the witness in the sky is faithful."

Verse 49 speaks of the lovingkindness again and the faithfulness of God. And in this case, of course, it makes reference to the promises to David which we'll look at next time which are an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant. The next covenant is the Davidic Covenant which is an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant. What God promises, He does.

Chapter...well 132 Psalm, verse 13, "The Lord has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it." God says, "That's My place, that's My home, and I'm going to dwell there, I'm going to be there." That's His promise.

So God unilaterally gives a covenant. He is the sole party responsible to fulfill its obligations. Obedience is not the condition. Listen to this final thought. Obedience is not the condition that determines fulfillment. Divine sovereign power is the condition that determines fulfillment because divine sovereign power is the condition that determines obedience. God has to turn their hearts. God Himself has to save them. God Himself has to transform them...transform them so that they can obey, therefore it is all the work of God that will bring about the fulfillment. It will come because He said so. It will come when He wills it to come at a time of His own choosing. Only God can produce the faith, repentance and obedience that brings about the fulfillment. And in the future, in some future generation the sons of Abraham physically, ethnic Israel, will be saved and they will receive the Kingdom promised to them.

Now next time we'll look at the next phase of God's promise, the Davidic Kingdom to which we already saw references in Psalm 89.

Father, in a great day, a wonderful evening, we've covered a lot of ground, Your Word is so consistent, so powerful, so rich and You are a faithful God. We celebrate that faithfulness because how You treat Israel and how you fulfill the promises You made to them has tremendous implications for how much we can trust You to fulfill the promises You made to us in Christ. We know you'll be faithful to Your promises to us, not because we're worthy, just as You are faithful to Your promises to Israel because they are not worthy, but because You have chosen them. So the future depends on Your eternal choice. Bring it to pass, Lord, for Your own glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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