

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 7

HERMENEUTICS, PART 7; ANALYZING AMILLENNIALISM

Gerstner changes this Scripture and makes it a reference to the present age, but it is clearly looking ahead to the Davidic Kingdom. That's why Gerstner only deals with verse 6 instead of dealing with the whole chapter. The context of 6 is unknown without going back at least to verse 1 and you can go back into chapter 10 as well. As much as Gerstner argues about context in his argument, he repeatedly ignores it and even denies it.

He grudgingly admits that if the Scripture was referring to animals and to a future time, then literal hermeneutics would be in order.

Then he puts words into the mouth of the dispensationalist by saying they would use figurative hermeneutics if verse 6 referred to human beings in this dispensation. This is an assumption in which he is taking the liberty to assume this is a true statement when no such agreement has been made by any dispensational theologian. It is also begging the question because he simply assumes the point he is trying to prove is, in fact, without question true. It isn't as simple as saying, "Well, if we assume my point is, in fact, the real, true situation, then you would agree that it must be spiritually interpreted." We assume no such thing and we make no such concession. This is a red herring designed to confuse the issue. Playing "what if" games isn't exegesis and it isn't the way to debate the issue.

It is shocking for him to say that hermeneutics is not the issue in the interpretation of prophecy. He denies that hermeneutics is the issue and instead asserts that context is the issue. He undermines his own argument by making hermeneutics the issue and ignoring the context. Context is always a part of the exegetical process. For Gerstner, context is itself interpreted according to his theology, which is his hermeneutic, thus nullifying any literal understanding it carries. It is interesting to note that he resorts to using Augustine as support for his argument. Augustine, of course, hated literal hermeneutics and denied they had any value at all. According to Augustine and his likeminded Alexandrian theologians, literal hermeneutics was only appropriate for use by the unsophisticated, uneducated class. That is the situation I was trying to show by giving the history of Philo, Clement, Origen, and Augustine. Not one of those men is an appropriate role model for employing proper hermeneutics when interpreting the Scriptures. Gerstner simply proves my point that the antibiblical hermeneutics these men introduced into the early church are still with us and still undermining a proper

understanding of God's program for history—and Gerstner subscribes to their thought. The tragedy is that he and the other pastors and theologians who subscribe to his theology have taught millions of people these unbiblical doctrines.

He resorts to more assumption and manipulative propaganda when he says, “Dispensationalists would no doubt generally agree” so far. No, we don't. He is correct when he says the context determines whether or not we take the wolf and the lamb literally, but he ignores the context and totally relies on his theology for the interpretation. Then he generates an ad hominem attack by alleging “that the dispensational theological system tends to push the hermeneutic in an extremely literal direction.” That is an attack on dispensational theology and on literal hermeneutics. Notice the pejorative use of the word “extremely” as though a literal understanding of the written word has various degrees of being literal or not from extreme to, I assume, what his definition of literal really is which must be the opposite of extreme. He claims the “total teaching of Scripture” cannot be “referring to a literal fellowship of wolf and lamb in a literal millennial kingdom.” Why not? For Gerstner, it can't be literal because his theology does not allow that conclusion no matter what the words say.

For Gerstner, the “total teaching of Scripture” means the teaching of Scripture according to tradition, which is another logical fallacy, and according to Reformed theology. That includes the theological construct they call the covenant of grace and either amillennial or postmillennial Eschatology. The Scriptures are not the starting point for Gerstner; his theology is the starting point. That's why he denies the truth of a literal Millennial Kingdom. He denies that the 1,000 years of Revelation 20:1-6 are literal years and he refers to that as “no *clear* evidence of a Millennium, in fact, he goes on to say there is “no evidence” in the Bible for a Millennium.

It is interesting to note, in his discussion of Matthew 16, our pastor commented on the fact that the religious authorities of Jesus' time had rejected Jesus because they were stubbornly and rebelliously clinging to their theology despite the revelation they were privileged to have in the Old Testament. They rejected the truth of the Scriptures and, as a result, they were rejected by the Lord. Isn't that the same thing Gerstner and his fellow like-minded theologians are doing? They are elevating their theology to be the controlling factor in their interpretation of the Scriptures despite any evidence to the contrary and they are stubbornly and rebelliously clinging to it. I'm not saying they are rejected by the Lord or not saved, but I am saying they place their theology in a controlling, priority position over the Scriptures just as the Pharisees of Jesus' day did.

We will briefly define amillennialism and postmillennialism and then start an examination of premillennial Eschatology.

ANALYZING AMILLENNIALISM

We will define amillennialism according to one Reformed theologian who is an amillennialist. “Amillennialists hold that the promises made to Israel, David, and Abraham in the Old Testament are fulfilled by Jesus Christ and his church during this present age. The millennium is the period of time between the two advents of our Lord with the thousand years of Revelation 20 being symbolic of the entire interadvental age. At the first advent of Jesus Christ, Satan was bound by Christ's victory over him at Calvary and the empty tomb. The effects of this victory continued because of the presence of the kingdom of God via the preaching of the gospel and as evidenced by Jesus' miracles. Through the spread of the gospel, Satan is no longer free to deceive the nations. Christ is presently reigning in heaven during the entire period between Christ's first and second coming. At the end of the millennial age, Satan is released, a great apostasy breaks out, the general resurrection occurs, Jesus Christ returns in final judgment for all people and he establishes a new heaven and earth.” [Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, 31-32].

He claims the miracles are evidence of the Kingdom of God. That's not correct. The miracles are for one purpose and that purpose is to authenticate the message and the messenger. In this case, they identified and authenticated Jesus as the Messiah which also served to authenticate His offer of the Kingdom. He was offering the Kingdom; it wouldn't be implemented until it was accepted—which it wasn't.

One factor effecting the Reformed definition of amillennialism is their doctrine that the primary purpose of God in history is redemption. Everything that happened in the past has been part of the historical redemptive program that culminated in Christ's First Advent and in His death and resurrection. According to this theology, everything in the Bible is oriented towards this redemptive program. This eliminates any recognition that Israel is an entity separate from the church and it destroys and denies any biblical presentation of the Messianic Kingdom program, the rapture, the Tribulation, and a literal Kingdom with Christ ruling on the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. Israel as a nation has no place in this plan of redemption and it has been replaced by the church. Individual Jews may be saved but national Israel is finished and the Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom in existence now within the Christian sphere.

It is biblically untenable to suggest that Satan is now bound. After the resurrection, Peter specifically said that Satan is still roaming around trying to destroy people. The only way to arrive at this conclusion is to use a hermeneutic other than literal.

Revelation 20:1–3 ¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of

old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

1 Peter 5:8 ⁸Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Amillennialists have to make up a fictional account of the binding of Satan in order to justify their unbiblical claim that Satan is bound in this age. One reason they give for their interpretation is the genre hermeneutic; Revelation is apocalyptic literature and therefore must be interpreted according to a symbolic interpretation. "If Satan were not bound, there could not be a church—much less one that endures through the centuries despite heresy and schism. Yet Christ promised that he would build his church and that not even the gates of Hades would be able to withstand its assaults (Mt. 16:18).... It is true, as Grudem observes, that Revelation 20 speaks not only of Satan being bound but of his being thrown into the bottomless pit. Yet here again it is quite consistent with prophecy, especially apocalyptic, to understand this as a telescoping of this action, encompassing both the period of his being bound (now) and the consummation of his judgment (destruction in the future). Hebrews 2:14 speaks of Satan as having been 'destroyed' through Christ's death, and yet we know that Satan will be cast into the lake of fire at the end of history. He still 'prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour' (1 Pe 5:8), but this is consistent with an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 12, where Satan is cast out of the heavenly sanctuary, unable to affect the outcome of redemption, and yet persecutes the church.... Grudem refers also to 2 Corinthians 4:4, where it is said that 'the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.' Yet it is precisely Satan's being bound that finally thwarts this effort. To the ends of the earth, the blind see 9vv. 3, 6). Grudem also refers to 1 John 5:19, where it is said that 'the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.' However, when we read together with the many passages indicating that the kingdom has been inaugurated and is progressing through the gospel, and that all authority now belongs to Christ in heaven and on earth, such passages reveal that the imprisonment of the world is precisely *the condition that Christ's kingdom of grace is overturning*. At present, he is looting Satan's kingdom, liberating captive hosts in his train. [Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way*, pp. 941-942].

Another factor is their reliance on the extra-biblical covenants of works and grace at the expense of the biblically identified covenants God made with Israel. Their position is the unconditional, biblical covenants are subservient to the theological covenants they made up and on which they based their entire system of theology. In this system, the

unconditional, biblical covenants God made with Israel are subordinated to the covenant of grace and are made to refer strictly to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross which results in the church. This completely eliminates the promises God made to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant and the only promise left is the promise to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). "Keeping in mind the distinction between these two kinds of covenants—promise and law—we can now turn to the two overarching covenants, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, under which all these individual covenants of law and promise fall. This is important to keep in mind because the covenant of works and the covenant of grace progressively unfold throughout the Old Testament, and the way they do says much about the eschatology of both testaments.... [T]he particular covenants God made with his people were repeated ratifications of the one covenant of grace which God first promised in Eden after the fall, then later ratified with Abraham, the father of all who believe.... The great redemptive events found throughout the Old Testament are unintelligible apart from this covenantal structure and an emphasis on God's promise of a coming Redeemer, who is also the covenant Mediator." [Riddlebarger, pp. 46-47]. Suggesting the biblical covenants cannot be understood apart from the theological covenants of Reformed theology destroys the literal meaning God intended through those unconditional, biblical covenants. The theological covenants must be used in this system to interpret the Old Testament because a literal interpretation abrogates amillennial Eschatology and affirms the dispensational claims that national Israel remains in God's plans for the future.

By creating a covenant of grace that includes, subordinates, and alters the literal meaning of the biblical covenants, history is forced to represent one seamless redemptive program from Genesis chapter 3 on. In their thinking, dispensational theology disrupts the flow of redemptive history. The Old Testament is restricted in meaning to only promises about the Redeemer and the New Testament is the fulfillment of those promises in Christ. Dispensational theology understands redemption to be only part of the Bible's content and dispensational theology flows from the recognition of the entire plan of God for Israel, for the church, and for mankind. Amillennialists deny this. "The central character of the story, even in the Old Testament, was the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and sinful humans. He lay hidden in Old Testament shadows but was revealed in the New. Seeing the flow of redemptive history in this light helps explain why the Reformed are concerned about the dispensational tendency to interpret the New Testament in light of the Old and why we believe eschatology must be Christ centered. Our eschatological expectation should not be epoch centered [meaning a literal Messianic Kingdom] or even centered in an earthly gold age as in postmillennialism. Nor should eschatology be a correlation of current and certain verses which supposedly explain them. The story of redemption is nothing less than the story of Jesus Christ and his kingdom which is manifest in the covenant of

works, the covenant of grace, and finally the new creation. God's kingdom is the consummate manifestation of his covenant with the elect, originally made with Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world." [Riddlebarger, pp. 51-52]. Notice his criticism of literal hermeneutics. The reason he doesn't like correlating "current and certain verses" of the Bible to explain Eschatology is because the Bible doesn't confirm his theology; it denies it. If we don't use the Bible as the basis for understanding Eschatology, then we are reduced to making it up according to the presuppositions of our theology and that is just what is being done by this man and those who believe amillennial Eschatology.

Amillennialists cannot allow any understanding of the New Testament by viewing it as a consequence of the Old Testament events and prophecies because they have placed the church into the Old Testament which necessitates reinterpreting it with the New Testament. Remember, that's what Riddlebarger called the true literal hermeneutic. This thinking completely defeats the purpose of language which is to communicate thoughts from one person to another in a clear, understandable manner. He denies a literal Kingdom when he says that Eschatology should not be "epoch centered" which doubles as a criticism of dispensationalism. The Kingdom we would call the Millennial or Messianic Kingdom is not literal to the amillennialists; it is spiritual and it is in existence now. Their concept of the Kingdom is identified by the theological covenants of works and grace they made up. The covenant of grace is made only with the so-called elect, the people God chose to save in eternity past, and with Christ.

He does, in part, have one valid criticism of dispensational theology. There have been too many instances of dispensationalists making the claim that prophecy is now being fulfilled in current events. It is more biblically correct to say that various events are setting the stage for prophetic fulfillment and whether or not any single event is significant only time will tell. Everything is inexorably moving the world towards its one world climax, but to say that any one event is a definitive fulfillment of prophecy now is a mistake. That mistake has given the opponents of dispensational Eschatology a lot of ammunition in their attack on our dispensational theology and premillennial Eschatology. There is only one current event that is an on-going specific fulfillment of prophecy and that is the regathering of Israel from the diaspora back into the land in unbelief. Ironically, that is the major prophetic issue Replacement Theologians claim has no significance whatsoever; it is merely an accident of history. We will discuss that issue later.

Amillennialists deny any future for national Israel; they are completely sold out to Replacement Theology. "Another significant eschatological theme in the Old Testament is the promise that the nation of Israel will be gloriously restored in the distant future. Leading dispensationalists believe these prophecies refer to national Israel even

though the authors of the New Testament apply them to the church.... According to Reformed theologians, the promised restoration of Israel pointed ahead to the church.... The prophets predicted a glorious and redeemed Israel which the New Testament writers contended was fulfilled in the church, the mystical body of Jesus Christ. To have a prophetic foretelling of the church in more literal terms would have been unintelligible to Old Testament believers." (Riddlebarger, pp. 54-55]. He admits that a literal reading of the Old Testament does, in fact, promise national Israel a restored Kingdom. His theology will not allow that literal interpretation of the Old Testament to stand; therefore, he uses his theology to reinterpret the Old Testament with what he thinks the New Testament teaches—but does not—which is the replacement of Israel with the church. It is noteworthy that his most relied upon sources are Reformed theologians and the theology they have developed that results from reinterpreting the Old Testament with the New Testament. It is obvious the church would have been unintelligible to Old Testament believers; it wasn't part of the covenant promises—and it still isn't! There are certain New Testament proof texts they consistently use to justify their replacement of Israel with the church. We will examine Replacement Theology more closely in the future and examine those verses at that time.

One of the theological devices used to justify Replacement Theology is the "already/not yet" doctrine that represents a partial fulfillment of the Kingdom now and a complete fulfillment later. "As the New Testament unpacked this Old Testament expectation [of the promised coming of the Redeemer] and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, it soon became clear that the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the messianic age and the blessings Christians can enjoy in the present age were a major step toward a final and glorious fulfillment to come. This is known as the *already*, the 'realized eschatology,' or as George Ladd speaks of it, 'the presence of the future.' Because of Jesus Christ and his coming, the Christian possesses the complete fulfillment and blessings of all the promises of the messianic age made under the old covenant. But the arrival of the messianic age also brought with it a new series of promises to be fulfilled at the end of the age. The fulfilled promises pointed to a more glorious and future fulfillment. This is called the *not yet* or future eschatology. It is this *already/not yet* tension which serves as the basis for understanding much of New Testament eschatological expectation." [Riddlebarger, pp. 60-61]. This concept of "already/not yet" results in understanding the messianic age to be one age revealed in two different ages: "'this age' and the 'age to come.' This means that the coming of Jesus Christ marked the beginning of a glorious new redemptive age with a corresponding set of blessings. Yet this new age is not fully consummated and will be fulfilled in the future. This *already/not yet* structure gives the New Testament a strong forward looking focus." [Riddlebarger, p. 61].

Anthony Hoekema puts it this way. "There is a deep conviction that the redemptive workings of the Holy Spirit which are now experienced are but the prelude to a far richer and more complete redemption in the future, and that the era which has been ushered in by the first coming of Jesus Christ will be followed by another era which will be more glorious than this one can possibly be. In other words, the New Testament believer is conscious on the one hand of the fact that the great eschatological event predicted in the Old Testament has already happened, while on the other hand he realizes that another momentous series of eschatological events is yet to come." [Hoekema quoted by Riddlebarger, pp. 61-62].