

*Shepherds' Conference 2007*

[First Message]

By John McArthur

This morning I, I am really not going to preach a sermon; I have a deep, deep concern in my heart that I want to unload on you. I don't want you to take it personally; it is not an attack on anybody. It's just a concern that I've had for a long, long time for a beloved area of Scripture that I think needs careful, far more careful attention than it has been having. So I want to speak on sovereign election, Israel and eschatology.

That's not the title; that's just the subject. And I want to begin with a sentence that I am going to read to you. It's a very long sentence so don't hold your breath waiting for a period.

"It is one of the strange ironies in the Church and in reformed theology that those who love the doctrine of sovereign election most supremely and most sincerely, and who are most unwavering in their devotion to the glory of God, the honor of Christ, the work of the Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, the veracity and inerrancy of Scripture, and who are the most fastidious in hermeneutics, and who are the most careful and intentionally biblical regarding categories of doctrine, and who see themselves as guardians of biblical truth and are not content to be wrong at all, and who agree most hardily on the essential matters of Christian truth so they labor with all their powers to examine in a Berean fashion every relevant text to discern the true interpretation of all matters of divine revelation, are –that's the main verb- in varying degrees of disinterest in applying those passions and skills to the end of the story and rather content to be in a happy and even playful disagreement in regard to the vast biblical data on eschatology as if the end didn't matter much." Period.

Or, another way to say it, how many of you have attended an Amill prophecy conference? Maybe we could say it this way: What other category of theology starts with the alpha privative and labels itself as believing that something does not exist, unless it's atheism?

Does the end matter? Does it matter to God? Should it matter to us? I think it matters to God. I think it's the whole point of history. I know it's the whole point of history.

History is headed to a divinely designed and revealed end, and if it matters enough to God to reveal it, it should matter enough to us to understand the revelation of it.

Did not God fill Scripture with end time prophecies? Some say that nearly one-fourth of Scripture relates to the prophecies of the end. Did God in this significant volume of revelation somehow muddle His words so hopelessly that the high ground for theologians is simply to recognize the muddle and abandon any thought of the perspicuity of Scripture with regard to eschatology? Is in fact working hard to understand prophetic passages needless and impossible because they require a spiritualized or allegorized set of interpretations that says the truth is somehow hidden behind the normal meaning of the words so any idea of what it might mean is as good as any other idea of what it might mean since it doesn't mean what it says?

Are you comfortable with the notion that the hard and fast, tried and true principles of interpretation have to be set aside every time you come to a prophetic text. There are a number of Amillennialists who feel that way; and, by the way, we will talk just in broad terms about Amillennialism, and if any Postmillennialist are left out, you can simply attach to yourself the new label for Postmillennialism which is "optimistic Amillennialism." because they are the same. If you are a Postmillennialist or an Amillennialist, you are saying the same thing. You're saying the kingdom, as identified in the Old Testament and promised to Israel, will not happen, and you are saying that today this is either not the kingdom or it is the kingdom. But it doesn't change what it is. So if you want to be a pessimistic Amillennialist or an optimistic Amillennialist, you get the same in the wash.

O. T. Allis, writing in *Prophecy and the Church*, a well-known Amillennialist writes, “The Old Testament prophecies, if literally interpreted, cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or being capable of fulfillment in the present age.” That was a problem for him.

Floyd Hamilton in *The Basis of the Millennial Faith* said, “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.”

Another Amillennialist said, Loraine Boettner in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, “It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, that they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations.”

In all three cases, that proved to them to be a serious problem and required a severe alteration in hermeneutics at each of those prophetic passages in order to avoid a Premillennial conclusion, a fate worse than death.

So to protect some kind of preconception it is necessary to change the rules of interpretation. Now if we’re going to change those rules, I think we need a word from God. We better have a word from God because He cares that we get it right.

I don’t think God wants us to change the rules of interpretation when we go to Genesis 1 to 3. I don’t think God is pleased when we come up with progressive creationism, theistic evolution or any kind of day-age view of Genesis 1 to 3. I think God is exalted as the Creator in the full glory of His creative power when we take Genesis 1 to 3 at face value. There is no other way to take it because there is nothing in the text that gives you any kind of mandate to indicate that this is something other than specific, literal, normal, factual language. Really you can’t even justify calling it poetry because that doesn’t work. Recent studies conducted by one of our professors at the Masters College, ducing [?] that linguistically to a computer program and graphing the comparison between prose and poetry, led to the very interesting conclusion--that there is no way ( 99.9% something) that this is poetry. We don’t want anybody tampering with the beginning. Why are we so tolerant of people tampering with the end? And why, when we don’t want to arbitrarily allow somebody to introduce their own hermeneutics to Genesis 1 to 3, are we content to allow people to introduce their own hermeneutics into prophetic passages throughout the Bible and particularly in the Book of Revelation? Where is the divine mandate on the pages of the Bible to do this? What passage is it in? What verse? Where is it? And who decides then the new rules for engagement? Now, back to the original sentence. The irony is that those who most celebrate the sovereign grace of election regarding the Church and its inviolable place in God’s purpose from predestination to glorification and those who most aggressively and militantly defend the truth of promise and fulfillment, those who are the advocates of election being divine, unilateral, unconditional and irrevocable by nature for the Church, unashamedly deny the same for elect Israel. That is a strange division. As it does, the perpetuity of the elect Church to salvation glory so the Scripture in similar language and by promises from the same God, affirms the perpetuity of ethnic Israel to a future salvation of a generation of Jews that will fulfill all divine promises given to them by God. In both cases this is the work of and the result of divine, sovereign election.

Now that leads to my title: “Why Every Self-respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist.” Now it’s too late for Calvin, but it’s not too late for the rest of you. And if Calvin were here, he would join our movement. But bottom line here, of all people on the planet to be Premillennialist, it should be Calvinists, those who love sovereign election. Let’s leave Amillennialism for the Arminians. It’s perfect. It’s ideal. It’s a no-brainer. God elects nobody and preserves nobody. Perfect. Arminians make great Amillennialists. It’s consistent. But not for those who live and breathe the rarified error of sovereign, electing grace. That makes no sense. We can leave Amillennialism to the process theologians who--or the openness people who think God is becoming what He will be; and He’s getting better because as every day goes by, He gets more information; and as He gets more information, He’s figuring out whether or not, in fact, He can keep some of the promises He made without

having to adjust all of them based upon lack of information when He originally made them. Let's leave Amillennialism to the Charismatics and the semi-Pelagians and other sorts who go in and out of salvation willy-nilly; it makes sense for their theology. Sure, Israel sinned, became apostate, killed the Son of God. That's it. You're out. Forfeits everything. Church gets it all if they can do better than Israel. So far doesn't look real hopeful.

But for those who get it, for those of us who get it, that God is sovereign and listen, and He is the only one who can determine who will be saved and when they will be saved, and He is the only one who can save them, Amillennialism makes no sense because it basically says Israel, on their own, forfeited all the promises. Do you think, on their own, they could've done something to guarantee they'd receive them? What kind of theology is that? That's Arminian theology. You think Israel lost their place in God's economy because they didn't, on their own, do what they were supposed to? When you look at the idea of election in the Bible, the great reality, you only have four specifics-- specific persons that are mentioned in regard to being elect. The Holy angels are elect.

1 Timothy 5:21, "the elect angels." Christ is elect, Psalm--Isaiah 42, I should say, and 1 Peter 2:6. Christ is elect and those elections are forever, are they not? And there are only two people elections in Scripture; Israel an eschatological group of ethnic Israelites that will constitute the future nation who will receive the promises of God, and the Church. There's no reason in the Bible to mingle the two; or because the Church is elect, therefore, cancel Israel's election. Isaiah 45:4 calls Israel "My elect." God says, "For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called thee by thy name." Isaiah 65:9 again, speaking of Israel, "My elect" and that they will inherit the promise. Isaiah 65:22, the same thing, "My elect." God has repeated it a number of times--those are just a few--that Israel is God's elect.

Now all that leads us to this: If you get Israel right, you will get eschatology right. If you don't get Israel right, you will never get eschatology right--never. And you will migrate from one view to another just depending on the last book you read or the last lecture you heard or the last influence that came down. If you get eschatology right, it's because you get Israel right. You get Israel right when you get the Old Testament covenants and promises right. You get the Old Testament covenants and promises right when you get the interpretation of Scripture right. You get the interpretation of Scripture right when you're faithful to a legitimate hermeneutic, and God's integrity is upheld. Get your hermeneutics right, you get the Old Testament promises right. Get the promises right, you'll get Israel right. Get Israel right, you'll get eschatology right.

The Bible calls God "The God of Israel" over 200 times. The God of Israel. There are over 2000 references to Israel in Scripture. Not one of them means anything but Israel. Not one of them, including Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16, which are the only two passages that Amillennialists go to, to try to convince us that that cancels out the other 2000. There is no difficulty in interpreting those as simply meaning Jews who were believers, the Israel of God. Israel always means Israel; it never means anything but Israel. Seventy-three New Testament uses of Israel always mean Israel. It should be noted that Jews still exist today. That's interesting, isn't it? You ever met a Hittite? How 'bout an Amorite, a Hivite, or a Jebusite? Anybody know any of those folks? How 'bout an Agagite? Do you know that the Israeli Immigrant Bureau in the land of Israel requires DNA tests where Jewish ancestry is questioned, and they know what Jewish DNA looks like? Somebody asked John Stott in the European conference, "What was the significance of the existence of Israel today?" and he replied, "It has no biblical significance." Really? That's a strange answer. They're here. They're here. Seventy percent of Scripture is the story of Israel, and I think that the whole point of the story is to get to the ending. And it doesn't go up in smoke.

So, here's how to get the foundation for an accurate understanding of eschatology. Get election right and get Israel right. Those two go together, they're inseparable. How is it that we have come to get number one right and totally miss number two so often? I'm confident that God did not reveal prophetic truth in such detail to hide or obscure the truth, but to reveal it for our blessing, our motivation and ultimately His glory.

So, my words to you today are really a call. This is a call to reconnect these two great realities. Return the sovereignty of God in election to its rightful place and, therefore, return the nation Israel to its rightful place in God's purpose, and all eschatology will unfold with magnificent beauty and with the normal hermeneutic, and you can take every passage and when it's saying something that's very clear like "the desert will blossom like a rose," that's exactly what it means. And if you tell me it doesn't mean that, then I'm done talking to you because you don't have any further revelation. Now that the Spirit of God is moving the Church to reestablish the glorious high ground of sovereign grace in salvation, it is time to reestablish the equally high ground of sovereign grace for a future generation of ethnic Israel in salvation and the Messianic earthly kingdom, with the complete fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel.

Now, if I can be personal for a minute, I've thought about these great realities for almost fifty years, and the clearer I understand sovereign, electing grace, the clearer the place of Israel becomes to me and the clearer eschatology gets. I haven't moved away. People have said, "Have you changed your eschatology?" I have not moved away from the biblical eschatology I was convinced of when I began. My *ordo eschaton* hasn't changed. This is very encouraging to me because one of the benefits of being in this church for nearly forty years is you just have to keep moving. You can't preach old sermons. These dear people--can you imagine hearing the same preacher for almost forty years? What a death sentence! Not so good for them, but really good for me because I basically have had to continually teach the Bible just to keep moving. I'm getting close to the end of Luke -- that's a relative idea -- then I only have Mark left. For forty years I have taught and preached through every verse, every phrase, every word in the New Testament, gone back and written commentaries on it, gone back and written books and all kinds of other things, preached through one verse at a time every single verse of the New Testament. All I have left, as I said, is a little bit of Luke, which already I've covered much of in Matthew, and will again do Mark, which will be much of what is in Matthew and Luke. Through all of this, through writing all the commentaries, eschatology has had to stand the test of every New Testament verse. And my conviction has been strengthened. I've preached through many Old Testament books, Genesis, other sections early in the years here. I started in Genesis, went kind of rapidly for a number of years and ended up in Psalm 73 before I sort of passed off the opportunity on Wednesday nights to some of the other men who were here. I have preached through the prophetic books of the Old Testament. I've preached in and out of Daniel and Ezekiel. I've preached in and out of Isaiah and Ezekiel, preached through Daniel verse by verse, through Zechariah, through the Minor Prophets, written all the notes for the study Bible, and again, the fair test of a cohesive eschatology is to drag it through every single text. I would be absolutely lost in the Old Testament if I couldn't take the Scripture at its face value. If you tell me it doesn't mean what it says, I'm lost. I am unwaveringly committed to the sovereign election of a future generation of Jews to salvation and the full inheritance of all the promises and covenants of God given to them in the Old Testament. God's Word is at stake.

Now at this point, I feel the vibe coming from those of you who are saying, "Oh no, we came to a pastors' conference, and it's turned into a Dispensational conference. Next thing he's going to do is drag out Clarence Larkin charts, and we're going to get a really nice leather-bound Scofield Bible, and then we're all going to get the Left Behind series. Ah, we're reduced to rapture fiction. Then he's probably going to tell us there are seven Dispensations, two kingdoms, two new covenants, two ways of salvation. Relax. Forget Dispensationalism. I'm not talking about that, even though every one of you is a Dispensationalist. You are! You believe that God dealt with man one way before the fall, after the fall, before the Law, after the Law, before the Cross, after the Cross, now and in eternity, right? Okay, that's what I thought. I confess. I reject the wacky world of newspaper exegesis. I reject the cartoon eschatology. The crazy interpretations like the locusts of Revelation 9 being helicopters and crazy things like that. If you preach that, take that out of the tape. And I don't think that Henry Kissinger is the antichrist and that Hillary Clinton is the harlot of Babylon. I just...I can't see that. Apparently you hadn't heard that interpretation. But let me tell you something, folks, as wacky as that world of Dispensational eschatology is, it is no more wacky than the interpretation of many Amillennialists whose fictional eisegesis reads everything into 70 A.D., and I've read that kind of stuff and it's just as crazy. You say,

well, didn't the Dispensationalists invent Premillennialism? Well, in the modern era two books really reintroduced Premillennial view--the biblical, the straightforward biblical view--neither of them written by a Dispensationalist. The first one was called *The Premillennial Advent*. It was written in 1815 by an Anglican named William Cunningham. The second one that reintroduced this into the more modern era was a publication in England in 1827 written by Emmanuel de Lacunza y Diaz, a Jesuit. So there is not a necessary connection between all that is strange in Dispensationalism and this clear understanding of the kingdom. When Frederick the Great asked his chaplain for proof of the truthfulness of the Bible, he said, "Give me a brief defense." His chaplain replied, "I can do it in one word. Israel." Israel. They exist. There they are. Israel, understood as a people preserved by God for an eschatological kingdom, has immense apologetic value. Immense. We have to get the whole counsel of God right. We have to give the world the truth about the end of history and the climactic glory of Christ and the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and the Church.

So let's get started. That was just the introduction. I'm just going to ask you a series of questions, okay? Is the Old Testament Amillennial? Is that a fair question? Is the Old Testament Amillennial? Now a note here please. It is not legitimate to interpret the Old Testament as secondary to the New Testament as primary. Okay? That's not legitimate. Otherwise, the Old Testament was literally darkness, not light. If you say that the Old Testament cannot be rightly interpreted apart from the New Testament, then you have denied the perspicuity of the Old Testament, and as Walt Kaiser puts it, "Now you have a canon within a canon". The question must be answered: Does the Old Testament itself propound an Amillennial view? You cannot remove the Old Testament from having a true interpretation on its own and make Old Testament promises relate to the Church, which is by Paul's own statement, a mystery unknown in the past. You cannot, therefore, make the Old Testament unintelligible and irrelevant to the reader. But the idea that the New Testament is the starting point for understanding the Old Testament is exactly where Amillennialism comes from, reading it back into the Old Testament; and, of course, you damage the perspicuity or the clarity of the sensibility of the Old Testament in and of itself; and it leads, I think, to an even more grand kind of spiritualizing that goes beyond just prophetic texts and gives license to spiritualize all kinds of things and read New Testament Christianity and New Testament Christian principles back into those texts in the Old Testament where they do not belong. Some of you have read in years past *If I Perish, I Perish*, the wacky Christian life interpretation of Esther, or a series I talked about in one of my books on Nehemiah where Nehemiah is the Holy Spirit and the fallen walls of Jerusalem are the fallen walls of human heart; and the Lord wants to rebuild your fallen heart by the use of mortar, and mortar is speaking in tongues. That was a six or eight tape series I listened to. Why not? Why not? If that's your New Testament theology, you have every right to read it in wherever you want. This goes on all the time. Honestly, I rarely hear somebody preach on the Old Testament and interpret the Old Testament the way a person living at the time it was written would have interpreted it. We can use it as an illustration; we can use it to elucidate it; we can use it as an example. These things are written, right, as examples Paul told the Corinthians. But it has to have its own meaning to its own people. It must have clarity and perspicuity. And if you say all those promises to Israel really were to the Church, they were meaningless and unintelligible to them. Replacement theology, this is called, by the way, and scholastically often referred to as supersessionism. It demands that the Old Testament promises be viewed through the lens of the New Testament. It also strikes a strange dichotomy since all the curses promised to Israel came to Israel, right? Literally, and they're still coming. If you wondered whether the curses in the Old Testament were literal, they are going on right now. Israel right now is not under divine protection. They are under the promise of God that they will be perpetuated as an ethnic people, but this current--this current group of Jews that live in the world today and in the nation Israel are not now under divine protection. They are apostate. They have rejected their Messiah. They are under divine chastening, but they are still a people and will be to the end. What a staggering apologetic that is for the truthfulness of Scripture. You can't abandon that without a huge loss of competence in Scripture. All the curses promised to Israel for disobedience to God came true literally on Israel, and now all of a sudden we are supposed to split all those passages that give blessing and cursing and say all the blessings that were promised to Israel aren't coming to Israel; they are coming to the Church instead? Where is the textual justification for such a split interpretation? And wouldn't you think that whatever way the curses were fulfilled would set the standard for whatever way the blessings would be fulfilled? Or to put the question in another

context, wouldn't you expect that all of the prophecies that came to pass when Jesus came in a literal fashion would set the pattern for how the prophecies connected to His second coming would come to pass? There is no place for splitting up these interpretations. So, in answer to the question: Is the Old Testament millennial? Of course not. If you affirm a normal hermeneutic, the perspicuity of the Old Testament, of course it pronounces clearly covenants and promises and a kingdom to come to Israel. I am not going to have time to develop all of this, but I want you to just think for a minute about the Old Testament covenants so that you understand something of their nature. The Old Testament must be interpreted, preached and taught as clear revelation from God that is to be understood, believed and applied by the people to whom it was given. So what did God promise Israel? Let's look at the twelfth chapter of Genesis and obviously this is a study beyond our capability to dig into all the details; but it's clear, it's not difficult, straightforward. I want you to see the connection between these covenants and divine, electing sovereignty. Genesis 12, "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house.'" Now there you have a great illustration of election; that's almost like a Damascus road experience, isn't it? What did Abraham do, or Abram as he is called here? What did Abram do to set this in motion? What? Nothing. Nothing. Abram plays no part in this covenant. Now follow the use of the expression, "I will." "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." "I will." "I will." "I will." "I will." Five times. Sovereign, unilateral, unconditional election. To seal that, go to the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, and this, by the way, is repeated in the thirteenth, the fifteenth, seventeenth and on through to the patriarchs who followed Abram. But in the fifteenth chapter I think it's wonderful to see the picture here, starting in verse 8. Abram wants a little bit of confirmation; this is a big step, "So Lord God how may I know that I shall possess it? How do I know this is really going to happen?" So this is what God said, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon." He brought all these to Him, cut them in two, laid each half opposite the other. He didn't cut the birds – it would just be a pile of feathers. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses and Abram drove them away. So now what has he done? He has taken these animals; he has cut them in half; he set them opposite each other; he has got a little path going through these split animals and the two dead birds, one on each side. This relates to the term in Hebrew to "cut a covenant." When you "cut a covenant" you put blood sacrifices as a way to demonstrate the seriousness and to bind yourself, as it were, by blood to fulfill your promise. So God prepares what would be a very traditional, very typical way to engage in making a covenant. Only this is very different because in verse 12 the sun was going down; a deep sleep fell upon Abram; God anesthetized him. Terror and great darkness fell upon him, and God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." Oh, four hundred doesn't mean four hundred. No. A thousand doesn't mean a thousand. Forty-two months doesn't mean forty-two months, it can't mean that. How accurate is that? How accurate is that before the Exodus? That's prophecy. Well, God puts him to sleep and God says this is what is going to happen. Verse 14, "I will also judge the nations whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age," and so forth. And then down in to verse 17, "It came about when the sun had set, and it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces." God put Abram out, anesthetized him, and God alone went through the pieces—unilateral, unconditional, irrevocable promise that God made with Himself. There were no conditions for Abraham on his own to fulfill. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. It is to be a covenant that does not end. Chapter 17 verse 7, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout your generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your descendants after you." God elected Abram, elected the nation that would come out of His loins, and made a covenant and a promise with them to be their God. This is the foundational covenant in the Bible—the foundational biblical covenant, the promise of God, unilateral and unconditional. When God gave the Mosaic covenant, it became very apparent how sinful Israel was. Even in the midst of Israel's blatant sin, apostasy, idolatry, violation of God's law, they still continued to be the object of His covenant love. Read Ezekiel 16. In Ezekiel 16 there is this staggering chronicle by God of His choice of Israel. And I can't take you all through it, but He talks about in graphic terms electing Israel like finding a baby

thrown away in a field. Verse 4, "...on the day you were born your naval cord was not cut nor were you washed with water for cleansing; You were not rubbed with salt"--which they did as a disinfectant--"or even wrapped in cloths. No one looked with pity on you to do any of these things. No one had compassion on you. You were thrown out in an open field, abhorred the day you were born. God says, 'I passed by you, I saw you squirming in your blood. I said to you while you were in your blood, Live! I said to you while you were in your blood, Live!'" There again is that sovereign election. And then the story goes on about how God took Israel and, as it were, married Israel, cleaned Israel up, made Israel His people. If you go over to verse 28, "...you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied, you even played the harlot with them and still you were not satisfied". You had an insatiable lust for adultery with other gods and other people. "...your lewdness," verse 36, "poured out, your nakedness was uncovered, your harlotries with your lovers, all of your detestable idols," just indictment after indictment after indictment. God is furious with them and you come down to the end of the chapter, "Nevertheless," verse 60, "I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth." What attribute of God does that describe? His faith-ful-ness. "I will establish an everlasting covenant with you, you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, your older, your younger, I will give them to you as daughters but not because of your covenant. Thus I will establish My covenant with you. You shall know that I am the Lord in order that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done," the Lord God says. Wow, a reiteration of the terms of the covenant in the face of Israel's history of defection, disobedience and apostasy. Israel is like, well, Hosea, right? The prostitute. The harlot. Listen, God's decision to set His love on Israel was in no way determined by Israel's performance; not determined by Israel's national worthiness -- purely on the basis of His independent, uninfluenced, sovereign grace. Read Deuteronomy 7: 7 and 8. He chose them because He predetermined to set His love on them for no other reason--election. The survival of the kingdom of Judah, despite the blatant sin of its rulers, depended on covenant promises God had made. Read Psalm 89. Read Psalm 132 where these are reiterated. God's unilateral covenant declares that the Lord alone is the sole party responsible to fulfill the obligations. There are no conditions which Abram or any other Jew could fulfill on his own. It's no different than your salvation--chosen. But you didn't come to Christ on your own. You were given life by the Spirit of God in God's time. God's unilateral covenant declares that the Lord alone is the sole party responsible to fulfill the obligations. Now listen to it this way, obedience is not the condition that determines fulfillment. Divine sovereign power is the condition that determines obedience which leads to fulfillment. When God gave the unilateral covenant, He knew He would have to produce the obedience in the future, according to His plan. And He gave the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel--we won't look at it, but 2 Samuel 7, just maybe--well, you can refer to it on your own, where promise comes to David that he will have a greater son who will have an everlasting kingdom. That is an expansion, by the way; that is an expansion of the Abrahamic covenant. Verse 12, just quickly, "...I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." God promises to Abram a seed, a land, a nation and now--and of course that embodies a kingdom--and now comes the promise of a king. This is an expansion of the Abrahamic covenant; and what's notable here, again please, in verse 12 of 2 Samuel 7, "I will raise up your descendant...I will establish his kingdom...I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." "I will," "I will," "I will," again. This is not to say that the Abrahamic covenant is only for Israel. We all participate in its blessings, spiritually, and we will millennially. The Abrahamic and the Davidic covenant--we all will participate in, even though it is not of Israel, because we'll participate in salvation and be in the kingdom.

There's a third covenant, the New Covenant, and this one I do want to draw to your attention. Jeremiah 31, there can be no fulfillment of the promises God gave to Abraham or David apart from salvation, apart from salvation. Through history there has always been an Israel of God, there has always been a remnant, there have always been those who did not bow the knee to Baal. God always has had a people; there have always been His chosen. Not all Israel is Israel; that is to say, not all Israel is the true Israel of God, true believers. But God has always had a remnant, always had a people, always, as Isaiah 6 says, a "stump," a "holy seed," throughout history. But in the future there will be a salvation of ethnic Israel on a national level, and that's the message of Jeremiah 31. Here is the New Covenant; it is given to Israel. We like to talk about the New Covenant because

we participate in the salvation provision of the New Covenant ratified in the death of Christ, but the application of the New Covenant is in a special way given to a future generation of Jews. Listen to this, verse 31, “Behold days are coming,” declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.’” That is unmistakable. “...not like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt....” Not like that Mosaic covenant; that was not a saving covenant. “My covenant, which they broke although I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord, ‘But this is the covenant which I will make again with the house of Israel.’” What warrant is there to say that does not mean Israel? Why? It does mean Israel. “I will.” I will.” I will.” I will.” I will make the covenant with the house of Israel. “I will put My law within them and on their heart. I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” End of verse 34, “...I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Did you ever see so many “I will’s”? All over the place. Unconditional, unilateral, sovereign, gracious, irrevocable. You say, “Well maybe God changed His mind.” Go to verse 35, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Who gives the sun for light by day And a fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The Lord of hosts is His name: If this fixed order departs from before Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease.’” I haven’t noticed that that’s happened, have you? Anybody noticed that? There isn’t any other way to understand that. If it doesn’t mean what it just said, it is incomprehensible. And the New Covenant promises the salvation that then includes the reception of all the promises in the Abrahamic covenant, Davidic covenant and all the extended promises throughout the whole Old Testament. And what is the key feature of this? “I will put My Law within them. On their heart I will write it. I will be their God. I will forgive their iniquity.” You see how sovereign that is? “I will do it, I will do it in my time.” Look at Ezekiel 36 because this is a parallel. It’s familiar, I know, to you, but I think it’s good to just be reminded. Ezekiel 36:24, “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My spirit within you....” It’s overwhelming, isn’t it? “...cause you to walk in My statutes, you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” How could anybody walk in His statutes and obey and observe His ordinances? Only if He caused you to do it. And “You will live in the land that I gave your forefathers; so you will be My people and I will be your God.” And then verse 32--just a good reminder, “I am not doing this for your sake.” Huh! I’m not doing this for your sake? “...let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!” I am not doing this for your sake.” Wow, you say, for whose sake is He doing it? His own. His own sake. Go to the end of verse 38, “When I do this, then they will know.” What? “I am the Lord.” You can read the 37<sup>th</sup>. Same thing. So when God gave unilateral, unconditional, as primary cause, sovereign, gracious promises to an elect people guaranteed by divine faithfulness to be fulfilled like all His salvation work by divine power, and when God says such covenant promises are irrevocable, we cannot without impunity and guilt for any seemingly convenient idea or assumption say these are void. Why? You say, well, what about Israel’s apostasy? Doesn’t that cancel the promises? Doesn’t Israel’s apostasy cancel the promises? Do you understand that the New Covenant promises given in Jeremiah and Ezekiel were given to Israel at the time when they were under divine judgment for apostasy? They weren’t given to them when all was well and they were living and flourishing in obedience to God. They were so apostate they were out of their land, and then the covenant was given to them and God was saying, “Don’t get the idea that what’s going on by way of apostasy changes my promises.”

You say, well, wait a minute, didn’t they reject their Lord and Messiah? That did it. They rejected him; they killed Jesus, That’s in the plan. One of the wacky ideas of Dispensationalism is that Jesus came and offered a kingdom, and because the Jews didn’t accept it and killed Him, He went to the church. He came up with Plan B. The Cross is not Plan B. What do you think Zechariah 12:10 is saying when it says, “...they will look on Him whom they have pierced”? Read Psalm 22. It describes the Crucifixion. Read Isaiah 53. It describes the Crucifixion. It’s in the plan. It’s in the plan. Zechariah 12:10, Zechariah says, “they will look on him whom they have pierced,” and then in chapter 13 verse 1, a fountain of cleansing will be opened to Israel. Israel will

be saved, the New Covenant will be fulfilled, and you keep reading into chapter 14, and the kingdom comes. No other way to interpret Zechariah 12 to 14. So, is the Old Testament Amill? No.

II. Okay, are you still with me here? Okay. Were the Jews in Jesus' day Amill? No. Emil Schurer's helpful study of Jewish eschatology in the day of Jesus published in 1880 by T&T Clark in Edinburgh--a new edition of it out in 1998 by Hendrickson Publishing --he does a great job of studying the Jewish Messianic eschatological mindset at the time of Jesus. Schurer is his name, S-c-h-u-r-e-r. They believed that the Messiah was coming, preceded by a time of trouble. They believed that before Messiah, Elijah the prophet would come. They believed that when Messiah came, He would be the personal Son of David, He would have special powers to set up His kingdom, and all Abrahamic covenant and Davidic covenant promises would be fulfilled. They also believed that Israel would repent and be saved at the coming of Messiah. They believed the kingdom would be established in Israel with Jerusalem at the center and would extend across the world. They believed that peace and righteousness would dominate the world, all people would worship the Messiah, there would be no war--only gladness and health. They believed in a re-instituted temple worship, and the fulfillment of the covenants included the renovation of the world, a general resurrection, final judgment and after that the eternal state. That's Jewish pre-New Testament eschatology. Dead on target. That's what Zacharias the priestly father of John the Baptist believed. Read Zacharias' great benedictus in Luke 1:67 to the end of the chapter, and what is he saying? Every single phrase that is in that comes from an Old Testament text on the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, or the New Covenant. Every single one of them. He knew what was happening. The covenants were to be fulfilled.

III. Was Jesus an Amillennialist? This matters. Right? Was Jesus an Amillennialist? Turn to Acts 1. Acts 1. This has just been sitting there for a long time, by the way, like all the rest of the Scripture, and I don't know if we always look closely at these things. This is post-Resurrection, "[The] first account," verse 1, "I propose [?] to Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen." There is that election again. So, he had spent time before His ascension with the apostles. Now verse 3, "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs appearing to them over a period of forty days." Literally appearing to them over forty days. It must have been intense. Can you imagine the level of teaching a resurrected Jesus would give His own over a forty-day period? What kind of a seminary education would that be? And what was He talking about? "...speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." Oh, this is perfect. This is perfect! For forty days He talked about the kingdom of God. This is His moment. If Jesus is an Amill, this is where He has to tell them. Their apostasy--that's a given. Their rejection of the Messiah--that's a given. The execution of the Messiah--that's a given. This is the perfect place for Jesus to launch Amillennialism. Go down to verse 6, "So when they had come together, they were asking Him saying, 'Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'" Now, what do you think He said? "Where did you get such a stupid idea? Where did you ever come up with that concept? Haven't you been listening for forty days?" "I'm an Amillennialist." "What a bizarre thought--that I am going to restore the kingdom to Israel!" "You don't listen." This is it. If Jesus is Amill, this is His moment! He's got to say, "No, the Church is the new Israel." Yeah. Is this the time the Father is going to restore..., according to Jewish sources the technical eschatological term for the end time. They were using a term that was a part of their eschatology. Is this the end time when You are restoring the kingdom to Israel? Forty days of instruction on the kingdom, and they knew one thing for sure, the kingdom for Israel was still coming. And all they wanted to know was, what's the question? WHEN? That's all. And He said to them, "It's not for you to know the times or seasons." You can't know timing. He didn't say "Wait, wait, wait, there isn't going to be a kingdom." He said, "It's not for you to know times and seasons". By the way, "...which the Father has"—what?—"fixed by His own authority." There's that sovereign election again. It's sovereign. They knew that. "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom?" They knew that it was a divine work to do it. This is a perfect opportunity for Jesus to straighten things out. Dig a little into the text, verse 7, "which the Father has fixed." *Tithemi*: set, appointed. I love this. "Fixed" is in the aorist middle—"fixed for Himself." Fixed for Himself. It's about His glory. Right? It's about His exaltation. It's about the whole world finally seeing paradise regained. It's about God finally being

glorified, who is so dishonored throughout human history. It's about the glory of God and the honor of Jesus Christ. And God the Father has fixed for Himself that time by His own authority. It is singular, unilateral. There is no other way to understand it. There's no replacement theology in the theology of Jesus! There's no supercessionism. This is a movement to establish that there is no earthly kingdom for Israel. That is absolutely foreign to the Old Testament and completely foreign to the New Testament. Jesus didn't say, "Where'd you get that crazy idea? Haven't you been listening?" They just couldn't know the season, the time. The Cross was always the plan. He said, you remember, in the eighteenth chapter of Luke, also recorded in Matthew and Mark, He said "We're going to Jerusalem. And you know what's going to happen?" If you put those three accounts together, "I'm going to be betrayed, I'm going to be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, they're going to condemn me, they're going to hand me over to the Gentiles because they can't execute me." All this is in exact order. "Then when I'm handed over to the Gentiles, I'm going to be mocked, mistreated, spit on, scourged, crucified, and I'm rising again." That's not Plan B. In fact, if you think that's Plan B, you're a fool! And Jesus called you one, "Oh fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have said," Luke 24.

So wherever this Amill thing came from, it didn't come from the Old Testament, it didn't come from New Testament Jews, and it didn't come from Jesus. You say, "Well, were the apostles Amill? How about Peter—was Peter Amill?" Acts 3. Maybe Peter was the first Amill guy. I love this. Acts 3:1,. Peter's preaching away, "Men of Israel," and so forth. Verse 13, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up"—there's that primary and secondary element-- "...and disowned in the presence of Pilate, whom he decided to release to you, you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life." Oh my, what an indictment! It couldn't be any worse, couldn't be any more horrific! Look what you've done! Verse 18, "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He's thus fulfilled." That's literal, isn't it?! That's literal, isn't it?! "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The "times of refreshing" is a kingdom phrase. "...that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you"—set for you, fixed for you—"whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration"—another kingdom term—"of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." And then I especially love verse 25, "And it is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers." Does Peter cancel the covenant? What does he say? "You are the sons of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed,' For you first, God raised up His servant, Christ, sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." And He will do that; you're still the sons of the covenant. Perfect opportunity to cancel those promises.

How about James, the head of the Jerusalem church? Was he millennial in his view? In the fifteenth chapter of Acts and verse 13, James answered, "Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After these things I will return, I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' says the Lord, 'Who make these things known from of old.'" The acceptance of the Gentiles is not the cancellation of promises to Israel. After Gentile conversion, after the times of the Gentiles are over, "I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, ...rebuild its ruins, and...restore it." Davidic covenant promises, Messianic promises will be fulfilled.

Maybe the writer of Hebrews was an Amill. Chapter 6, verse 1,: "...when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying 'I will surely bless you, I will surely multiply you.'" "I will. I will." No hesitation. No hesitation. And He calls on our understanding of swearing. "...men swear by one greater than themselves, with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose,

interposed with an oath.” God swears, makes an oath! And it’s “...impossible,” the next verse says, “for God to lie.”

Maybe the apostle Paul was the first Amillennialist. Look at Romans 3, verse 1, “...what advantage has the Jew? Or what benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all...they were entrusted with the oracles of God. What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?! May it never be!” And this is where Paul should have said, “Absolutely! Absolutely it nullifies the promise of God! Unquestionably it nullifies the promise of God!” Doesn’t say that. Chapter 9, and verse 6, “...it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.” That is to say, they are not all true Israel, that is, believers. “...neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendant, but: ‘Through Isaac your descendants will be named.’ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of promise as regarded as descendants.” There are children God has elected to fulfill His promise in. And He goes on to describe it, saying something as blatant as this, “Jacob I loved”-- verse 13--“Esau I hated.” Verse 1, “I’ll have mercy on whom I’ll have mercy, I’ll have compassion on whom I have compassion.” Verse 16, “...it doesn’t depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” Verse 1, “He has mercy on whom He desires, He hardens whom He desires.” This is back to this whole idea of sovereignty again! Just because there are some Jews that don’t believe, does not nullify the faithfulness of God. Just because there are some that God chooses, doesn’t mean that He’s not going to choose a whole, duly-constituted generation of Jews to fulfill His promises.

And then, perhaps most notably (and we’re hurrying a little bit) Romans 11. And I don’t need to go into this—you know it very, very well. Romans 11:26, “...all Israel will be saved.” How can you interpret that? One way! You tell me that’s not Israel?! Where in the text does it say it’s not Israel? I would understand if it said, “And God has cancelled His promises to Israel.” But it says all Israel will be saved just as it is written “The Deliverer will come from Zion, will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.” Yes, they are enemies at the present time, but that is for the sake of the Gentiles. Verse 29, “...the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” And now we’re back to where we started, right? Look, if it depended on them to obey on their own, was it was impossible from the start. Only the one who made the promise can enable the obedience that is connected to the fulfillment of the promise.

Now much more could be said about Romans 11. So when Jonathan Edwards wrote this: “Promises that were made by the prophets to the people of Israel concerning their future prosperity and glory are fulfilled in the Christian Church according to their proper intent.” I say, where did he get that? Where did that come from? Didn’t come from any passage that I can find. Let me just conclude with some effects and there is a lot more I could say. That’s what we always say when we’ve just run out of material. You’ve really endured lengthy--but just a couple more comments.

I suggest for your reading *Israel and the Church* by Ronald Diprose. We should have some in the bookstore. It first appeared in Italian. It was a Ph.D. dissertation. It has no connection to traditional Dispensationalism. It’s a really, really fine work on replacement theology. It shows the effect of this idea as forming the Church of the Dark Ages, explaining how the Church went from the New Testament concept of the Church to the sacerdotal, sacramental institutional system of the Dark Ages that we know as Roman Catholicism. Diprose lays much of that at the feet of replacement theology that rises out of Augustine and the few before him, Origen and Justin. Where did the Church ever come up with altars? There is no altar in the New Testament. Where did the Church ever come up with sacrifices? Where did the Church ever come up with a parallel sign to circumcision? Where did the Church ever come up with the priesthood? Where did the Church ever come up with ceremony and ritual and symbolism? Where did the Church ever come up with the idea that you should reintroduce mystery by speaking in a language that the people there couldn’t understand? He replaced preaching with ritual. From the formation of the Church in those early centuries to the system of Roman Catholicism, all the trappings fit Old Testament Judaism. And the hierarchical, institutional, non-personal, non-organic, sacerdotal

approach to the Church he traces largely to the influence of causing the Church to be the new Israel. Replacement theology justifies bringing in all the trappings of Judaism.

Another effect of replacement theology is the damage that it does to Jewish evangelism. Here's a little scenario: You are talking to a Jew. You say, "Jesus is the Messiah." "Really, where is the kingdom?" "Oh, it's here!" "Oh, it is? Well, why are we being killed all the time? Why are we being persecuted and why don't we have the land that was promised to us? And why don't we--why isn't the Messiah reigning in Jerusalem, and why isn't the peace and joy and gladness dominating the world, and why isn't the desert blooming and...?" "Oh, no, you don't understand. All that's not going to happen. You see, the problem is you're not God's people any more. We are." "Oh! I see, but this is the kingdom, and Jews are being killed and hated, and Jerusalem is under siege. This is the kingdom? If this is the kingdom, Jesus is not the Messiah. Can't be. It's ludicrous." No matter how many wonderful Jewish-Christian relationships we try to have with rabbis, this is a huge bone in the throat. Why can't Jesus be the Messiah? Because this isn't the kingdom. Unless you can say to a Jew "God will keep every single promise He made to you, and Jesus will fulfill every single promise, and that is why there are still Jews in the world, and that is why you are in the land and God is preparing for a great day of salvation in Israel; and Jesus is your Messiah. But look at Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12:10 and understand that He had to come and die to ratify the New Covenant before He could forgive your sin, and the kingdom is coming. THAT you got a chance to communicate. The rest doesn't make sense. Now, if you get election right—divine, sovereign, gracious, unconditional, unilateral, irrevocable election--and then you get God right, and you get Israel right, and you get eschatology right, and guess what, men, then you can just open your Bible and preach your heart out of that text and say what it says. How freeing is that? You don't have to scramble around and find some bizarre interpretation. Get it right and God is glorified. Get it right and Christ is exalted. Get it right and the Holy Spirit is honored. Get it right and Scripture is clear. Get it right and the greatest historical illustration of God's work in the world is visible. Get it right and the meaning of mystery in the New Testament is maintained. Get it right and normal language is intact and Scripture wasn't written for mystics. Get it right and the chronology of prophetic literature is intact. Get it right and you shut out imagination from exegesis. Get it right and a historical worldview is complete. Get it right and the practical benefit of eschatology is released on your people. Get it right. The kingdom theology of the eschaton is the only view that honors sovereign, electing grace, honors the truthfulness of God's promises, honors the teaching of Old Testament prophets, the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament writers; that will allow Christ to be honored as supreme ruler over His creation now temporarily in the hands of Satan; and the earthly millennial kingdom established at Christ's return is the only and necessary bridge from temporary human history to eternal divine glory. Make your church a second coming church and make your life a second coming life. Al Gore is not in charge of the end of the world, and history will not dribble to an incomprehensible end. And that's enough for me.

Let's pray. Father, what a day for us to begin! What a glorious transcendent theme! May we live in the light of the coming of Christ. May we know that the Word can be trusted, and that we can preach every verse and say, "This is what it says. This is what it means." And thus give glory to You. Thank You for these precious men who are here. Lord fill us all with joy in the truth and in the privilege of serving You. In Christ's name. Amen