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Methods of Interpretation



When Shall These Things Be? - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses methods of interpretation of Scripture, specifically the principles of hermeneutics and how they are applied to specific passages in the Bible. He notes that dispensationalism is one way of interpreting Scripture, and dispensationalists believe in a consistent literal interpretation of prophecy, while amillennialists tend to spiritualize prophecy. However, Gregg argues that even dispensationalists switch to a non-literal interpretation of prophecy in certain passages, and that there is not always a clear distinction between the hermeneutics of dispensationalists and non-millennialists.

Transcript

I'd like you to turn to the page in the handouts I've given you to the one that says Interpretation of Scripture. It's four pages long. It's the longest, I think, handout for any one lecture.

And I usually can easily fill one lecture with the contents of a single page or less in my talking. But what this is mainly made up of is quotations from people. And the reason is I want to give you a good representation of what is said by two basically opposing sides on the question of how Scripture is to be interpreted.

And particularly prophetic Scripture, because as I mentioned in our introduction in our last class, the dispensational system, which is the modern, best-known system of interpretation today, has as one of its distinctives the insistence that a literal interpretation of Scripture is the only way to do justice to the interpretation of Scripture. I want you to become acquainted with a word which you may already know, but if you don't, this will be the end of your ignorance on this. The word is hermeneutics.

And hermeneutics is a funny-sounding word to our ears, but it actually means the science of interpretation or the rules that are applied to gaining the understanding of the meaning of a thing. That is the science of hermeneutics. And so we're going to be talking in this session about correct hermeneutics or hermeneutical principles, which are to be applied in understanding specific passages of Scripture.

Because the difference between the conclusions of the dispensationalist and the

conclusions of somebody who's not a dispensationalist will rest upon, in most cases, a difference in the hermeneutical approach given to any particular passage of Scripture. Now, it is the claim of the dispensationalists that dispensationalism applies a consistently literal hermeneutic, and that all who are not dispensationalists are inconsistent in their application of hermeneutical principles. And therefore, the dispensationalist claims to have the higher intellectual and moral ground over all other viewpoints because they take the Bible literally, they say.

And this is what I want to examine, because I'd like to suggest that this is not necessarily true, that the dispensationalist does take some verses of Scripture literally, which non-dispensationalists do not take literally. But it is not the case that they consistently take Scripture literally, or that they even take it literally more often than their opponents do. The fact is, I'll just state it at the outset, that all Christians take some Scripture literally and take some scriptural statements non-literally.

And to simply say, well, our view is the only one that seriously takes a literal approach to Scripture is simply to fog the issue in a way that is not entirely true and may give false impressions. And so, in order to understand how we are going to reach correct conclusions about what the Scripture teaches about end times prophecies, we need to have some idea of which hermeneutical approach to Scripture is to be preferred. Now, there are essentially two ways of looking at the Scripture.

One would be the dispensational way, or the way in which dispensationalism is a good example. And that is that, you know, as often as possible, things are taken literally. As often as theological orthodoxy will permit it, things are taken literally.

So that Israel is always going to be Israel. It's never going to be a reference to the Church, for example. The promises made to Israel could never be applied to the Church, which is not Israel.

That Jerusalem is always going to be literal Jerusalem, the city. It can never be a picture of the Church, for example. And so forth.

The thousand years is a literal thousand years. And therefore, it could not be taken as the amillennial takes it, as a symbolic period of time. Now, the other pole, the other method of interpretation, different from the dispensational, would be the amillennial.

Now, I introduced you to several millennial positions in our introduction, but the distinctive hermeneutical approaches are best illustrated in the dispensational on one side and the amillennial on the other. Because the amillennialist takes many things symbolically or spiritually, which is a practice that is sometimes called spiritualizing. Sometimes it is called allegorizing, though these are not really the same things.

To allegorize is not the same thing as to spiritualize. But sometimes the

dispensationalist, who wants us to take everything literally, he says, will simply talk about all non-literal interpretation as if it was allegorization or spiritualization or something. You know, they just use these terms synonymously.

As a matter of fact, an allegory is one thing. A spiritualized interpretation is not necessarily the same thing. But what I'd like to suggest to you is that the amillennialist is always the classic example of the non-literalist in these controversies, whereas the dispensationalist is the literalist, at least represents himself as such.

Now, you might say, well, where does the postmillennialist fall in this business? Or the premillennialist who's not dispensational, where does he fall in this? Well, it depends on the individual. There are premillennialists who are not dispensational, who spiritualize Scripture a lot the way that amillennialists do. There are postmillennialists who do, well, postmillennialists take some things literally that a dispensationalist would take literally, and some things they would spiritualize that a dispensationalist would take literally.

And therefore, on some passages, a postmillennialist will be more like a dispensationalist in his interpretation, and on other passages, more like an amillennialist. But the two poles in this dispute are those represented by the dispensational approach, which argues that we must take a literal interpretation, and the amillennial approach, which does not agree with that. However, exactly what the amillennial approach is has often been misrepresented or misunderstood by its critics.

And so I want to actually use quotes from dispensationalists and from amillennialists on this question and examine what is the correct way to interpret Scripture. Now, you might say, I mean, I don't know, I can't anticipate whether you find this an interesting subject going into it or not. I hope you shall find it stimulating, challenging, and interesting as we go through the material.

I don't know if you anticipate this topic being an interesting one, but I will say this, that when you hear a dispensationalist defending his views against any other view, he's going to say this. He's going to say, the reason I am a dispensationalist is because I believe I should take the Scripture literally. And that's what dispensationalism, they say, consistently does.

And this, of course, sounds like a very good thing. We Americans, being part of the Western culture and most of the literature produced in our culture, being written in a literal fashion, or more or less literal fashion, we're accustomed to more literal forms of expression. And it just seems natural.

Of course you would take things literally. How else would you take them? We forget that the Bible was not necessarily written by a Western thinker. All of the thinkers were essentially Asians, Middle Easterners, with the possible exception of Luke, who might have been a Greek.

He would have been a Western thinker then. But apart from Luke, all the other writers of Scripture were Jewish. The Jews are Asians, and they are Orientals.

And Oriental methods of expression are not always the same as Western methods of expression. And it seems clear that we should understand the prophecies, whether we're doing so literally or non-literally, we should understand them the way they were intended to be understood. It should not be necessarily thought that the only way that a person can express himself is in literal language.

He might use figures of speech. He might use parables. He might use allegories.

He might use any number of ways of expressing a point. The point he makes is still true. He is expressing truth, and he's doing it in a way that is intended to communicate truth.

But his way of communicating it may be through some method of communication that is not the same thing as a literal, precise, scientific description. And that we need to take into consideration, I think. Now let's just introduce the topic.

I'm going to be quoting largely from dispensationalists Charles Ryrie and John Waldward, partly because they are, in modern times, two of the most respected spokesmen for that position. Charles Ryrie is the author of the notes in the Ryrie Study Bible. He is also the writer of many books, including one called *Dispensationalism Today*, where he basically sets out the distinctives of dispensationalism, as is widely held.

And he's a pretty good spokesman for the subject. Many of my quotes will be from his book, *Dispensationalism Today*. Others will be from other books of his.

John Waldward was, until recently, the leader, I forget what they call it, the chancellor or president or something, of Dallas Theological Seminary, a dispensational theological institution. And a very recognized and respected spokesman for that view. I'll also be quoting from some amillennialists to make amillennial points, but I want to show you how these people talk about the interpretation of scripture and how they talk about their own as opposed to their opponents in the debate view of interpretation.

I'd like to begin with a quote from Charles Ryrie in his book, *Dispensationalism Today*. On page 86, he defined hermeneutics for us, and I wouldn't say I necessarily disagree with anything in his definition. Charles Ryrie said, And hermeneutics is that science which furnishes the principles of interpretation.

These principles guide and govern anybody's system of theology. They ought to be determined before one's theology is systematized. But in practice, the reverse is usually true.

At least in the awareness of most people, hermeneutics is one of the last things to be considered consciously. That is to say, most people arrive at their understanding of

scripture without sitting down first and saying, Well, how should we interpret scripture? They just kind of instinctively understand it a certain way and without being aware of what rules of interpretation are being applied by themselves. And as such, they develop theological presuppositions from their initial impressions of things.

And then if they get around to talking about hermeneutical principles, they, of course, use the system of theology they've already developed on their own as sort of a guiding point to determine what principles of hermeneutics they use. Ryrie says it should be the other way around. We should sit down first and decide what the governing rules of interpretation are, and then apply those rules in reading the scripture, and in so doing, arrive at theology from that method.

And I don't know that I would disagree with that. I think that's a fairly reasonable suggestion. Although it is true, I don't think that I personally arrived at my theological understanding after sitting down and systematizing rules of interpretation.

But that doesn't mean that I didn't use certain rules of interpretation, whether I was aware of them or could give names to those rules or not. I think everybody uses certain rules, and some rules are rather instinctive. Some rules are simply common sense.

And if you do not know what rules of interpretation you are using, that doesn't mean you're not using any. And so it's not necessarily the case that you have to do a study in hermeneutics in order to know what the Bible says. But it certainly doesn't hurt to be able to recognize why you are interpreting something literally or non-literally or whatever, and what factors determine how that should be understood.

Here's what Ryrie says about dispensationalists in general, about their hermeneutic principle. He says in his book *Dispensationalism Today*, he said, Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation which gives every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking.

This is sometimes called the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation, since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations." Now, I would agree somewhat with what Ryrie says here. I think that dispensationalists do aim at literal interpretation in the way he describes it here. I don't think they consistently apply it, but I think they do aim at that.

That is their stated conviction. I would point out, however, that he gives the impression that when we talk about the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, that we are necessarily talking about the method used by dispensationalists. That is a very literal interpretation.

That is not always the case. Virtually every conservative Christian uses what they would

call the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. That doesn't always mean literal.

It means the method of interpretation that historically, in the historical setting, would have been applied by the readers, and what the grammar would have been understood to mean by the historical readers. So, that's not necessarily, in itself, presupposing literalness. It's just presupposing that the material was written in a form that was understandable to the people, using their grammar and given their historical background.

Okay. John Waldward, another dispensationalist, in his book, *The Millennial Kingdom*, on page 59, represents what he thinks is the amillennial view. Now, he's writing about his opponents here.

He doesn't believe in amillennialism. But he speaks for most dispensationalists. Most would say this about their opponents, the amillennialists.

He says, there is a growing realization in the theological world that the crux of the millennial issue is the question of method of interpreting Scripture. Premillenarians follow the so-called grammatical-historical literal interpretation, while amillenarians use a spiritualizing method." Now, this statement, or one very much like it, can often be found repeated by dispensationalists when speaking about amillennialists. They say, amillennialists use a spiritualizing method, whereas dispensationalists use a literal method, as he used, again, the expression grammatical-historical interpretation.

Now, let me tell you what amillennialists say about their own method of interpretation. This comes from William E. Cox, a former dispensationalist who became an amillennialist, a Baptist minister. In his book, *Amillennialism Today*, on page 14, he said, conservative amillenarians interpret the Bible in exactly the same manner claimed to be used by conservative millenarians.

That means, in this case, he means dispensational premillenarians. In each of the other schools, all conservative groups, including the futurists and the dispensationalists, claim to use the grammatical-historical literal method of interpreting Scripture, unquote. That is to say, this man who is an amillennialist says, listen, we're not really any different than dispensationalists in the claim that we make, that we use the grammatical-historical interpretation, literalist interpretation.

We do take most things literally, as do the dispensationalists. That is, in fact, the case. And this even is acknowledged later on by some of the dispensationalists.

But let me read another amillennial writer, Floyd Hamilton, in the book *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, on pages 53 and 54. He said this, but if we reject the literal method of interpretation as the universal rule for the interpretation of all prophecies, how are we to

interpret them? Well, of course, there are many passages in prophecy that were meant to be taken literally. In fact, a good working rule to follow is that the literal interpretation of prophecy is to be accepted unless, A, the passages contain obviously figurative language, or B, unless the New Testament gives authority for interpreting them in other than a literal sense, or C, unless a literal interpretation would produce a contradiction with truths, principles, or factual statements contained in non-symbolic books of the New Testament.

Another obvious rule to be followed, he continues, is that the clearest New Testament passages in non-symbolical books are to be the norm for interpretation of prophecy rather than obscure or partial revelations contained in the Old Testament. In other words, we should accept the clear and plain parts of Scripture as a basis for getting the true meaning of the more difficult parts of Scripture." Now, this doesn't sound like a person who is departing from the grammatical historical method, though he's an amillennialist. He says that it is probably a good rule, a good working rule to follow, that literal interpretation of prophecy is to be accepted unless, and then he gives three exceptions.

It's interesting, we had a premillennialist come speak here last year because we wanted to present both sides here, and he's a good man, a good friend of ours, a pastor locally, and he, in his presentation, said that as a literalist, as a dispensationalist, he believed that we should take things literally, except, and he gave three examples there, the same three here. In fact, he practically quoted this passage. In fact, my impression from listening to him was that he thought he was quoting a dispensationalist, but he was actually quoting this passage.

He quoted from it fairly closely, and that's okay. I mean, basically, a dispensationalist would agree with this too. In fact, it is an amillennialist who made this statement, and he speaks for most amillennialists.

Most amillennialists would agree very much with this statement, as would most premillennial dispensationalists. In fact, John Walvoord, in his book, *The Millennial Kingdom*, refers to this quote I just gave you from Floyd Hamilton, an amillennialist, and John Walvoord, who's dispensational, says this about it, quote, Now, this statement is made by John Walvoord, a dispensationalist, who says you've got to take it all literally, and now he says, obviously, some passages in the Old Testament have a figurative meaning, meaning a non-literal meaning. What's more, he says that most premillennarians, which he is one, would agree with what Hamilton said in this statement about, you know, normally we take things literally, except with these kinds of exceptions.

The exceptions are very reasonable. They're sort of common sense kind of exceptions. And so what I'm trying to demonstrate is that while it is often said, especially by dispensationalists, that the difference between a dispensationalist and an amillennialist

is his method of interpretation, because they say the dispensationalist takes everything literally, and the amillennialist takes everything spiritually, that's not really the case at all.

In fact, dispensationalists have to admit some things must be taken figuratively, and amillennialists say most things should be taken literally. In other words, the statement by Floyd Hamilton is a very good one for amillennialists and most dispensationalists, too. So it seems like the dichotomy is falsely drawn.

If we say, well, one group takes things literally, the other non-literally. Also in his book, *The Millennial Kingdom*, John Walvoord makes this statement on page 62. He said, quote, The amillennial method of interpreting scripture is correctly defined as the spiritualizing method.

It is clear, however, that conservative amillennialists limit the use of this method and in fact adopt a literal method of interpreting most of the scripture, unquote. Now this is the same man who we read earlier in the same book, and I quoted him earlier. He said there's a growing realization that premillenarians follow the so-called grammatical-historical-literal interpretation while amillenarians use a spiritualizing method.

And now he says, well, really, conservative amillennialists most of the time follow a literal method. And he also says we dispensationalists have to admit that some of the times a figurative meaning attaches to an Old Testament prophecy. In other words, what is he saying? On one hand, he says we dispensationalists take it literally.

The amillennialists take it spiritually. Then a little later he says, well, we dispensationalists take some things figuratively. And later still he says amillennialists take most things literally, only some things figuratively.

It begins to look like there's not really the same kind of dichotomy that is represented here. That, you know, one party is taking everything literally and the other is taking everything non-literally. As a matter of fact, all Christians who are conservative take most things in the Bible literally.

But all also take some things figuratively. The difference, in fact, is simply in the choice of which things are taken literally and which things are taken non-literally. This is a quote from Charles Ryrie in his book *Dispensationalism Today*.

On page 89 he says, of course, literal interpretation is not the exclusive property of dispensationalists. Most conservatives would agree with what has just been said. What then is the difference between the dispensationalist use of this hermeneutical principle and the non-dispensationalist? The difference lies in the fact that the dispensationalist claims to use the normal principle of interpretation consistently in all his study of the Bible.

He admits that the non-dispensationalist is a literalist in much of his interpretation of scriptures, but charges him with allegorizing or spiritualizing when it comes to the interpretation of prophecy. The dispensationalist claims to be consistent in his use of this principle. He accuses the non-dispensationalist of being inconsistent in his use of it." Well, this gets down to a little more putting a finer point on this.

It's not so much that amillennialists don't take anything literally and they spiritualize everything. Ryrie says the difference really is that dispensationalists extend the principle to prophecy as well as other scripture, but the amillennialist, the non-dispensationalist, breaks down at that point. He says the amillennialist applies it literally to everything except prophecy, and then when it comes to prophecy, he takes it all spiritual.

Now this, I'm afraid, is yet still an oversimplification and not exactly precise, but it is putting a finer point on it. It's admitting that amillennialists take most things literally too. John Walvoord in his book, *The Millennial Kingdom*, page 63, said, Amillennialists use two methods of interpretation, the spiritualizing method for prophecy and the literal method for other scriptures.

Now, see, this again is what Ryrie said. Walvoord and Ryrie both say essentially the same thing. These amillennialists, they're inconsistent.

They take one method of interpretation for prophecy and another for everything else. We dispensationalists, by contrast, he says, are consistent. We use the same method for prophecy and for the other parts of scripture.

Ryrie again in *Dispensationalism Today*, page 91, says, The non-dispensationalist position is simply that the literal principle is sufficient except for the interpretation of prophecy. In this area, the spiritualizing principle must be introduced. Ryrie gives an example in his book.

I don't quote him, but I'll tell you what he says. He gives an example of people who depart from a literal method of interpretation and therefore he thinks they're mistaken. In Ezekiel 38 and 39, there's a prophecy about Gog and Magog coming up against the land of unwalled villages.

They come on horseback. They come with swords and spears and bows and arrows and armor. Their weapons are burned for seven years after the battle is over and it takes seven months to bury all the dead.

Some of you may be familiar with that prophecy. Many people apply it to a future invasion of Israel by Russia. I don't believe that's the best way to apply it, but I once did because that's what I was first told.

And that is a very widely held view. But what's interesting is, of course, if this is a future war that Ezekiel's talking about, it talks about swords and spears, horseback cavalry,

talks about bows and arrows, wearing armor and so forth. It sounds like an ancient battle, not a modern one.

Now, most dispensationalists actually will say, well, of course, these represent modern weapons. You know, when they talk about bows and arrows and stuff, we should understand that to mean rifles and missiles and things like that. But Ryrie is more consistently literal.

He actually criticizes those who don't take bows and arrows literally in this passage. He actually says, listen, if it says bows and arrows, it means bows and arrows. And he actually believes there will be a future battle, thought, Russia invading Israel using bows and arrows and spears and so forth.

Now, I'm not saying this to ridicule him. I'm simply representing what he believes. And I'm saying that this is not necessarily what all dispensationalists would believe.

It seems to me that most dispensationalists I know, including my former pastor who I first learned it from, he believed that the war between Russia and Israel will be a modern war fought with modern weapons. Hal Lindsey, who is also a popularizer of this view, certainly believes that also. And I think most dispensationalists do.

Ryrie is simply unusual in this respect, that he takes even that literally, even the types of weapons and so forth. Now, Hal Lindsey does believe that the Russians will come in on horseback. But he tries to argue that modern Cossacks in Russia have a tremendous cavalry and they'll come in.

But I don't think he really believes in bows and arrows and spears and swords being the weapons that will be used. In fact, it's suggested that Russia has started using a plant product, a wood product, sort of pressed lumber instead of steel for some of their battle machines. And he thinks that maybe that's why they'll burn for seven years.

Cossacks are a tribe of ancient people who live in the region of Russia. Anyway, the point is that Mr. Ryrie even criticizes those who would not take literally the swords and the spears and the bows and arrows in a passage like Ezekiel 39. He is not speaking for all dispensationalists in that, but he thinks it's inconsistent to take, for example, Micah 5.2, literally which says the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

We do take that literally, of course, but not to take literally the swords and spears and bows and arrows in Ezekiel 39. Now, Ryrie also says in the same book, quote, If the Bible says like chariots or like Bethlehem, then there may be some latitude in interpretation. But if the specific details are not interpreted literally when given as specific details, then there can be no end to the variety of meanings of a text, unquote.

I think that Ryrie probably lapses into the unfair use of hyperbole here, as do many who say similar things to what he says, to say that if we don't take it literally, there's no end

to the possible meanings. Frankly, I think there would be some end to the possible meanings, even if we don't take it literally. But I don't think it can mean just everything.

For example, I don't think that swords and spears probably represent toy balloons. I mean, there is some limitations to what we might make those things represent. If we're talking about a war, and we consider that it's cast in the language of an ancient war, but in fact it refers to a modern war, we might indeed say that bows and arrows might be substituted today with guns or missiles or tanks.

But there would not be a limitless range of things that we would apply it to. It would obviously refer to some kind of weaponry. Now, I'm not even one of those who makes that passage be a passage about modern war.

I personally think that passage is about an ancient war. But I'm saying that it's certainly an overstatement. It strikes me as an overstatement when Ryrie says if we don't take it literally, there's no end to the possible interpretations.

Well, that is making it sound as if you need the literal interpretation, or else you'll be cast adrift in this chartless sea without an anchor or a sail or a star to guide by. You won't have any clue what something is about. I think that even if you don't take it literally, there's often many clues as to what the right way to understand it might be.

It's not necessarily the case that you're just left with a total borderless range of possible meaning. So I think he's lapsing a bit into unfair use of hyperbole when he says if specific details are not interpreted literally, when given as specific details, then there can be no end to the variety of meanings of a text. There certainly could be an end to the variety of meanings, although he may be right in saying we wouldn't be sure which meaning is correct.

Now, when we are told that it's best to take a literal approach to prophecy, perhaps we would be justified in asking why. Why is it best to do that? I mean, just because someone says we should, or is there some real good reason why prophecy should be taken literally all the time? Well, dispensationalists have given, to my knowledge, three reasons. And in your notes, I've given you actual quotes from them, although, I mean, some of these are quotes, some are just summaries of what some of these men have said, but one reason is a philosophical reason.

And Ryrie gives these reasons in his book *Dispensationalism Today*. He said, philosophically, the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation. Language was given by God for the purpose of being able to communicate with man.

So, he says, the purpose of language itself would require literal interpretation. I'm not sure why this would be. If I say I have a frog in my throat, I'm not speaking literally, but I don't think I'm having any trouble communicating.

I'm using language the way language is commonly used. I'm not using a literal method of saying what's really going on in my throat, but no one has any trouble understanding my meaning, because I'm using an idiom common among us. And therefore, it is not, I don't see how it would be a given that language itself implies a literal interpretation.

If I say I have a frog in my throat, I'm using language, I'm using it legitimately, I'm using it intelligibly. Everyone knows exactly what I mean by that, but I'm not speaking literally. So, I would have to disagree with this first reason for taking everything literally.

A second reason he gives is, he says, the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ, his birth, his rearing, his ministry, his death, his resurrection, were all fulfilled literally. Therefore, there is no non-literal fulfillment of these prophecies in the New Testament. I'm going to have to dispute that point with him, but I'll hold that off until a little later here in the discussion.

But, it is a common statement of dispensationalists that, of course, we have to take prophecies literally, because we can see in the examples of prophecies already fulfilled. The 300 prophecies from the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled in his lifetime, it's commonly said, these were all fulfilled literally, and therefore, all prophecies should be understood literally. I'm going to suggest a little later and give documentation that the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled from the Old Testament were not all fulfilled literally, and this starting point of this assumption is simply not correct.

When he says there is no non-literal fulfillment of these prophecies in the New Testament, in a few moments I'll show you that that statement is fairly irresponsible. A third reason that we're to take everything literally is, he says, if one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost. What check would there be on the variety of interpretations which man's imagination could produce if there were not an objective standard which the literal principle provides? To try to see meaning other than the normal one would result in as many interpretations as there are people interpreting.

Once again, I think this is a tremendous overstatement. He asked the question as if there is no valid answer that could be given. The question being, what check would there be on the variety of interpretations which man's imagination could produce if there were not an objective standard which the literal principle provides? I dare say there would be some limit to the possible interpretations, even if we don't have an objective standard, but I'd even like to suggest that we do have an objective standard, but it isn't necessarily the objective standard of the principle of literal interpretation.

For example, if we found that the New Testament writers took a prophecy non-literally, and we said, well, I'm going to go along with what the New Testament writers thought it meant, and that means that I don't take it literally, I take it the way they took it. Do I have an objective standard? Of course. That standard is the usage of the New

Testament, how the New Testament writers understood the passage.

As they were inspired by the Holy Spirit, I believe that they understood it correctly. Therefore, I have an objective standard that does prevent me from going hog-wild in my interpretation of passages. I do have something I measure it by.

It just isn't the same thing as what Ryrie uses. Ryrie has what seems to me an arbitrary standard. He decides that literal interpretation is the standard.

There's no obvious biblical reason why this should be the standard, but that's the standard. He says, now that gives us an objective basis for understanding prophecy. It keeps us from going all over the place with our interpretation.

It's true, it does. The question is, is that the right standard? Is there not any other possible objective standard? Like, for example, the teaching of the New Testament, could that be an objective standard? It seems to me that it could be. Anyway, Ryrie gives the standard arguments for why we need a literalist method of interpretation.

John Walbridge says in his book, *The Millennial Kingdom*, on page 71, quote, it was shown that the only rule which could be followed by the amillenarian was hopelessly subjective. The figurative method was used whenever the amillenarian found it necessary to change the literal meaning of Scripture to conform to his ideas, unquote. Let's keep this in mind, because John Walbridge is not the only one who says this.

This is the accusation made against non-dispensationalists, that they'll use the literal method until it doesn't conform with their preconceived ideas, then they have to twist the Scripture in order to make it fit, and therefore they resort as a convenience to a figurative interpretation. Not because of any objective standard for taking it figuratively, but because it's convenient for them because of their preconceived ideas. Therefore, they're left to only a subjective norm of interpretation, it is said.

However, let me turn your attention to certain passages of Scripture and see how conveniently the dispensationalist switches over to a non-literal interpretation of prophecy from time to time. The dispensationalists now, the ones who believe themselves literal, look at Daniel chapter 9. In Daniel chapter 9, verses 24 through 27, we have a famous prophecy, usually called the Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks. I don't have time to go into it in detail right now, but just for the sake of giving you a frame of reference, the Seventy Weeks, actually in Hebrew is the 77s, not weeks, and therefore it's not talking about periods of seven days, as we mean when we say a week, but really periods of seven-somethings.

Almost all scholars, both dispensational and non-dispensational, almost all agree that a week in this case is seven years. Therefore, 70 weeks would be 70 periods of seven years, which would be 490 years. Now, just with that as a backdrop, it says in verse 24,

70 weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, etc., etc.

Moving down there, it says in verse 26, And after the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, which means a military invasion in many Old Testament prophecies.

And until the end of the war, desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to the sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abomination shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.

Now, I'm assuming if you've never heard teaching of this passage that that passage was not immediately real understandable. It's got some difficulties in understanding, but the essential message is this. There is a period of time predicted, four hundred and ninety years, seventy-seven.

It is broken down in the prophecy to three parts, seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and a final week. Now, if you add that up, that's seventy weeks. Sixty-two and seven is sixty-nine, and then you've got one left.

Now, what the dispensationalist believes is that sixty-nine of these seventy weeks expired with the triumphal entry. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, that was the end of the sixty-ninth week. The seventieth week, or the seventieth period of seven years, has not yet happened.

That will be the great tribulation at the end of this present era. Therefore, they say there is a gap between the sixty-ninth week's closing and the beginning of the seventieth week, and that gap has already extended very nearly two thousand years. Now, on this view, there was not, in fact, a full period of four hundred and ninety years, as the angel said.

There's a period of over two thousand four hundred and ninety years encompassed in this prophecy, because there is a gap of two thousand years between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week. I don't mean to confuse you, and especially if you've never heard teaching on this, it may be very confusing, but let me simply say this. It is for the sake of convenience to the dispensational system that the dispensationalist finds a gap of two thousand years in this prophecy.

There's not one mentioned. No literal interpretation of this passage would ever yield the view that the period of time in view is actually two thousand four hundred and ninety years. The actual period of time encompassed is four hundred and ninety years.

I've sometimes likened it to, if I would say, could someone drive me home after class? I really, my car is not running, I need a ride. And you say, well, how far do you live from here? I said, ten miles from here. And you said, okay, I can do that.

So, we get in your car and we head off and we drive on out of town and we go nine miles, ten miles, eleven miles, twelve miles, fifteen, twenty, thirty, fifty miles, a hundred miles. And you say, are we getting close yet? Oh, it's a little ways yet. Oh, I thought you told me it was only ten miles to your house.

And I say, well, it is only ten miles to my house. It's just I didn't tell you that between the ninth and the tenth mile was a space of two hundred years, or two hundred miles. You know, it's really only ten miles, but I didn't mention this gap in here of two hundred miles that you've got to traverse between the ninth and the tenth mile.

Now, this would be an exact parallel because the angel said, there's a period of time here and all these things are going to be fulfilled in this period of time. It's four hundred and ninety years. But the dispensationalist says, well, that doesn't quite work.

There's certain things about this passage that doesn't work for the dispensationalist system. I can't go into them right now. I can tell you if we have more time, but we don't.

But there's reasons why this total fulfillment in four hundred and ninety years doesn't work for their system. So they say, well, the last of these seven year periods hasn't even begun yet. There's this hidden gap there.

Hidden indeed. Very well hidden. It's not mentioned in Scripture anywhere.

It certainly does not reflect a literal interpretation of the passage. But why? It's not convenient. It is a non-literal approach adopted by who? The omnilinear? No, not in this case.

In this case, it's adopted by the dispensationalist for convenience, for preconceived notions. You will not, by any literal approach to Daniel 9, find a two thousand year gap anywhere in the seventy weeks. Another example, look at Matthew 16, 28.

We saw this verse in our last session, in our introduction, but I want to draw attention to it from another angle here. Matthew 16, 28, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, There are some standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Now, what's interesting here is that in Matthew 24 and verse 30, it says, Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Now, according to dispensationalism, Matthew 24, verse 30 is talking about the second coming of Christ at the end of time, still future. But the same language is used. You see

the Son of Man coming in his kingdom in Matthew 16, 28 is not applied to the second coming of Christ.

Why? Well, because he said it would happen within the lifetime of some standing there. Now, frankly, I'm not being critical of the dispensationalists in making a distinction. There may be very good reason.

But what I'm saying is the reason they depart from the same interpretation, literal in both cases, is because it's not convenient in Matthew 16, 28. If Jesus had not said, some of you standing here will not taste death before, and then he referred to the coming of the Son of Man, they would certainly have understood the coming of the Son of Man would be the actual literal second coming. But because it doesn't work out, they understand, well, this is not literal.

That's fine. So do I. I also see it that way. What I'm saying is that they see it my way on this.

I'm not a dispensationalist, but they are departing from a literal hermeneutic, because they are recognizing the coming of the Son of Man as something other than his literal coming. It is a figure of speech. It means something else.

Usually they apply it to the transfiguration, but even that's not a literal coming. He didn't come anywhere. He actually just stood still and the glory came to him.

There was no movement on his part there. And while he may have been referring to that event, we have to admit, and all have to admit, that's a figure of interpretation of his words, not a literal one. But that's okay.

Non-dispensationalists are not ashamed to say that we take a non-literal approach to some things because we believe Scripture necessitates it. Scripture properly should not be taken literally sometimes. What we're saying is that the dispensationalists who argue against that proposition nonetheless do the same thing that everyone else does, and take things non-literally when theological presuppositions require it.

Look at one other example over in the book of Revelation. Maybe more than one, but I don't want to take too much time with this. All I'm trying to show, and I'm not trying to put anybody down, I'm just trying to show that it is not the case.

That dispensationalists take everything literally. And then the amillennialist comes along and takes everything literally until it's inconvenient. So he lapses into a figurative mode, which, of course, dispensationalists would never do.

In Revelation 1, it says, And in verse 3, at the end of that, it says, Now, there's a very obvious literal meaning to those words, is there not? These things must shortly take place. The time is near. That's not too hard to understand literally.

It means the things he was writing about were about to take place. The time was near for their fulfillment. That's a very natural and literal way to understand that.

However, the dispensationalist does not believe that the events in Revelation have already occurred. And therefore, they were predicted 2,000 years ago almost. And therefore, if they have not yet occurred, then they did not shortly come to pass.

They did not take place. The time was not at all near when it was written. Now, one can either decide against a futuristic approach to Revelation and say, Well, maybe Revelation did in fact predict things that did happen shortly after, just like John said they would.

Or else, if one holds on to the futuristic view of Revelation, which the dispensationalist does, they have to take these verses non-literally. They have to say, well, maybe from God's point of view, you know, a day to the Lord's is a thousand years. Well, that's not how the readers would have understood.

I thought we were supposed to take things in the plain way they would have been understood in human language. Not God's language. Human language.

God didn't write it to God. He wrote it to humans. Therefore, presumably, he used the language of humans.

And to say that something is near when it's in fact 2,000 years off is not stating things correctly if we're using human language. So, I mean, again, the dispensationalist is entitled, as far as I'm concerned, to take some things non-literally if he has overriding theological presuppositions that require it. So is the amillennialist entitled to.

What the dispensationalist is not entitled to do is to claim that he's doing something different than what amillennialists do. He is doing just what they do. Both sides have what they consider to be overriding theological truths that they consider to be definitive of eschatological viewpoints.

And each view understands some passages non-literally, partially, in order to fit it in with those propositions. There may be other reasons, too, but it is not the case that the dispensationalist takes it all literally. They are simply making a boast about their position, which is not accurate.

Let me, you know, the book of Revelation is a very good example of finding, if someone's going to hold to a literal hermeneutic, very tightly. Because Revelation is the hardest book in the Bible to take literally. It's got many things in it that nobody takes literally.

And yet, when a person says, well, we believe that prophecy is to be taken literally, just like all other parts of the Bible, no one can dispute that Revelation is prophecy. So, if prophecy, as well as all other parts of Scripture, are to be taken literally, Revelation

certainly is prophecy and should be taken literally. As a matter of fact, most dispensationalists really claim that they do take Revelation literally.

Let me give you a quote from a dispensational writer. Henry Morris, who is better known for his writings on the subject of creationism, and a very good defender of the creationist doctrine, also wrote a commentary on Revelation. And he is a dispensationalist in his approach.

His commentary is called *The Revelation Record*. And he said, in his introduction to that book, he said, quote, I have tried to follow a strictly literal and sequential approach to the events narrated on the assumption that the best interpretation of a historical record is no interpretation, but simply letting the divine author of the record say what he says and assuming he says what he means. The student may well find, he mentions his commentary, to be the most literal approach he has encountered.

Unquote. So, Morris states it as his intention to take the most literal possible approach to Revelation and indicates that he does so, that he is a literal interpreter. And he, by the way, reading his commentary, I'd have to agree, he's fairly literal, much more than I am in my approach to Revelation.

But just as an example, when he's talking about the four horsemen, you know, the white horse and the red horse and the black horse and the pale horse and so forth, that come in Revelation chapter six when the first four seals are broken, he comments on that in his commentary, he says, quote, in heaven, the symbolism of four great horses and their fearsome riders is employed. On earth, the terrible judgments which they unleash are very literal and real. Unquote.

Now, I would have to agree with that. Although I'm not, I don't claim to take a literal approach to Revelation, I would agree that the symbolism of the four horsemen is in fact that, symbolism. I don't know very many people who expect real horses to ride across the sky.

Most recognize that each of these horsemen represents something, something very real that happens on earth. But it is symbolic. The description is symbolic.

Like I said, unless we believe that there will be real horsemen riding through the sky, carrying things like swords and balances and things like that, then we take a non-literal approach. But what seems interesting is that Dr. Morris doesn't seem to realize that he's taking a non-literal approach. He mentions the symbolism of the horses, but he wants to, he says, I don't want to interpret, I just want to take it all literally.

He also says on his comments on that, he says, these horses, of course, are clearly symbolic. There are no horses in heaven. Well, I think I agree with him.

I don't think there are horses in heaven. But I guess I wonder, if there are no horses in

heaven, if he takes that symbolically, then how does he know what things in Revelation to not take symbolically? Interestingly, he believes that when Jesus is seen riding on a white horse in Revelation 19, that that is a literal second coming of Christ on a white horse. But there is simply, even in this man who tries to put out the most literal commentary on Revelation available, and may have succeeded in fact, even he is not able to take everything in Revelation literally and wisely.

Wisely he does not, because you can't. And this is a very good proving ground for the validity of the literal interpretation principle. Is it, does it work? Can it be applied consistently to prophecy? Revelation is the best place to find that out.

Charles Ryrie himself wrote a book called *The Living End* about eschatology. And in his book he raises this question. He says, how do we make sense of all those beasts and thrones and horsemen and huge numbers like 200 million? Answer, take it at face value.

So he says, when we read about horses and when we read about just all these different things, these beasts and horsemen and huge numbers, we just take it at face value. That's the obvious way to take it. In other words, take it literally.

However, in the same book, when he's talking about the locusts that come out of the pit with tails like scorpions and so forth, in Revelation 9, he says, John's description sounds very much like some kind of war machine or UFO. Now, Ryrie is not the only interpreter to think that those locusts might refer to some war machine or UFO. I don't agree with that interpretation myself, but many people do.

The problem is not with his interpretation. I think he's entitled to think that those locusts represent war machines or UFOs, but how can he say that about them and still say the answer is we take everything at face value? Well, if you take it at face value, then what you're looking at is not war machines, you're looking at locusts coming from a bottomless pit with scorpion tails, faces like men, hair like women, breastplates of bronze. These are not war machines if it's literal.

And what I'm saying is that both Morris and Ryrie and really every dispensational writer on Revelation eventually has to admit, well, some of this stuff isn't exactly literal, but what they really say is we're still being literal. Let me show you another example from Ryrie. This comes from his commentary on Revelation.

He's discussing in his commentary on Revelation the angel that falls from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and lets the locusts out. Now, he doesn't think it's a literal star because it talks about a star falling from heaven. And it says, Ryrie says, quote, sometimes the word star refers to a heavenly body, as in Revelation 8.12, like we talk about stars.

He continues, but the word is often used to refer to some kind of intelligent creature,

usually an angel, gives examples. Both meanings are perfectly consistent with plain normal interpretation. In English, we use this word in the same two ways.

Literally, a star means an astronomical entity. And equally literally, though a figure of speech, we use the word to mean a person like a star of a football game, unquote. Now, my problem with Ryrie is not in the content of his statement.

I agree fully that we use the word star of an astronomical object. We also use the word star of a movie star or a star of a football game. And the Bible may well use that similarly.

What I have a problem with him saying is that it's equally literally, though a figure of speech. That is, when we talk about a star in the heavens, we're speaking literally. When we call a movie star a star, that's equally literal.

No, it's not equally literal. He even says it's a figure of speech. He says equally literally, though a figure of speech, we use the word to mean a person.

Now, this tells you how the dispensationalist is able to maintain his claim that he uses a consistently literal hermeneutic. A consistently literal hermeneutic can mean figures of speech, symbolic language, non-literal things. But you're still using a literal method of interpretation.

Well, I'd say if that's what literal means, then I guess I use a literal method of interpretation. I'm not sure of anyone who doesn't. Apparently, literal can mean anything.

I actually quoted Ryrie and critiqued him on this in my original introduction to my book on Revelation. I eventually edited it out because I didn't want to say too many caustic things against dispensationalists. This didn't make the final edit.

But in my comments on this quotation from Ryrie in my original draft, I wrote this, referring to Ryrie's statements. I said, one is tempted to ask whether there is any method of interpretation that would be regarded by such an interpreter as recognizably non-literal, since the use of a figure of speech is regarded, when convenient, to be equally literal as the ordinary lexical meaning of a word. The applicability of the term literal to such usage suggests an almost infinite flexibility in determining what may be called plain, normal, and literal interpretation.

I have frequently heard teachers claim that, when convenient to their interpretation, literal interpretation does not preclude the use of symbolism, parables, or figures of speech. I think these people are giving the word a novel new flexibility. I am using the word literal as the dictionary, and most people understand it.

That is, as meaning, quote, according to the exact meaning, not figurative, unquote. In

other words, I'm using it literally. So, one difference between me and Ryrie is that we both use the word literal, but I use the word literal literally.

And he uses the word literal figuratively. He believes that if you use figures of speech, symbolism, and so forth, you're still being literal. Okay, well, as I understand, I decided to look in the dictionary and say, I wonder, maybe I'm missing something here.

And by the way, I had a dispensationalist scholar look at my manuscript before this was edited out. And he critiqued my manuscript for me. He's a friend of mine.

He's a scholar, writes books. He's a dispensationalist. By the way, he believed there are horses in heaven.

He disagreed with Morris. Morris said, obviously, the horses are symbolic. There's no horses in heaven.

This author and scholar said, well, who says there's no horses in heaven? And so, I mean, dispensationalists are different in their degree of literalism here. But he said that I am misunderstanding what literal means. Because literal can mean figures of speech and symbolic and all that stuff, too.

And I said, well, I better look in the dictionary and see what literal means. And it says, according to the exact meaning, not figurative. And that's what I thought it meant.

I think that's what most people think it means. In other words, in order to have a consistently literal hermeneutic, the dispensationalist has to come up with a new definition of literal. But by the new definition of literal, which allows some figures of speech, some symbolic imagery, some parables, some allegory, you can have some of that in literal interpretation.

Well, by that means, they lose their higher ground above all millennials. Because all millennials do the same things they do. What I'm saying is there isn't this clear distinction in hermeneutics between the dispensationalists and non-millennialists that is so often claimed.

Both parties take most things literally and some things non-literally. The difference is dispensationalists say they're being consistently literal all the time, no matter how they're taking something. If it is true that we're usually supposed to take things literally, but not always, and sometimes we shouldn't, then the question should arise, when should we be literal? Where in scripture, under what circumstances, can we discern that a literal interpretation is implied? Well, I have quotes from some dispensationalists here answering that question.

I've given you three laws. I've named them, these laws, based on the statements of the dispensationalists. And I have neglected in my notes to cite the source of the first one.

I've quoted somebody, I don't remember who it was. And I should have cited them. I cited the other ones.

I think this was from, I think this was from John Waldward. I believe this was a quote from his commentary on Revelation, but I'm not positive. He says, quote, All agree that the number 1,000 is used symbolically in Psalm 50.

Talk about the cattle on a thousand hills. But the phrase, a thousand years, occurs six times within the narrative of Revelation 20, unquote. Now, he says this as an argument for taking the thousand years from Revelation 20 literally.

How do we know when to take it literally? He says, well, all agree that thousand is non-literal in Psalm 50. But in Revelation 20, well, it's used six times. It says a thousand years six times.

So I have called this the law of frequent mention. Apparently, one way we know when we're supposed to take things literally is if it's frequently mentioned. The fact that the word thousand is used only once in Psalm 50, but six times in Revelation 20, is the clear indicator here that one is symbolic and the other is literal.

Now, frankly, I disagree with this proposition, but it is often said. I have heard it said by many dispensational writers. The quote here actually could be duplicated from the books of many dispensationalists.

They say, listen, how can those all millennialists take that thousand non-literally? Can't they see it appears six times right there? A thousand years, a thousand years, a thousand years. It says it six times. Obviously, it's literal.

Well, as I point out in your notes, the term lamb, as a reference to Christ, occurs 22 times in the book of Revelation. Yet, I don't know anybody who believes that Jesus is a literal lamb. Lamb is a symbolic designation for Christ.

Yet, he is called it 22 times. I guess by the law of frequent mention, we'd have to be literal. Jesus isn't a human.

He's an animal. This law, I'm not trying, I'm being sarcastic, of course, but I'm not trying to be abusive. I'm trying to say that this law does not apply well consistently.

And dispensationalists do want us to be consistent in our principles of interpretation. If the law of frequent mention is an argument for taking something literally, then there's a great number of things we'll have to take literally that they do not take literally. That's what I'm saying.

How about this one? This comes from Tommy Ice and Wayne House, two dispensational writers who wrote a book called Dominion Theology, Blessing or Curse. They're

critiquing, actually, post-millennialism. But they say in the context of that book, quote, This genre, the thousand years in Revelation 20, is not poetic.

It is prose nonfiction, unquote. Now, what they're saying is poetic genre might be not literal. And I would agree with them.

In poetic writings, there's much non-literal language. In the Psalms, for example, or even in the English poetry, non-literal language is fairly normal in poetry. But they're saying the genre determines when to take it literally.

And in this case, they say prose nonfiction you don't take in a non-literal fashion. You take that literally. Well, I would tend to agree that most of the time, such a genre does use a literal method.

Although, as I say, if I speak of, if I say, Yesterday I had a frog in my throat, I'm giving, what I'm stating, it's a statement of prose. I'm not using, I'm not reciting a poem. And it's nonfiction.

It's a true story, you know. But you can still use figures of speech, non-literal usage, even in prose nonfiction. Furthermore, I would certainly disagree as to whether the book of Revelation is to be classified as prose nonfiction.

Certainly, every scholar I ever heard of, who did extensive study on the book of Revelation, said that Revelation belongs to a genre called apocalyptic, which is a recognizable genre of literature, of which there are many representative samples from the same period. And they have distinctive characteristics and distinctive canons of interpretation apply. To interpreting apocalyptic literature.

This is the first time I read from any writer that Revelation was a genre of prose nonfiction. I always, I don't think most scholars would agree with that, even if they're dispensationalists. I think most would say, no, this is a genre called apocalyptic.

It's very different. Anyway, the law of genre, we'll call that. If you're in a literal genre, you have to take it literally.

Well, I would say most of the time that's probably true. But even in a more or less literal genre, like prose nonfiction, you might find some figurative language. You couldn't be sure that it's always literal, in my opinion, even if it is that genre.

Here's another argument. This comes from the revised Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. The original Treasury of Scripture Knowledge was originally written by someone who was either amillennial or postmillennial.

But it's been revised by a dispensational writer. And it's much bigger now and has more notes in it. And the dispensational writer who wrote the notes in it said this, quote, that

there will be blood sacrifices in the future millennial temple service is set forth in such detail in Scripture that it is not possible to deny their literality.

Apparently, such sacrifices look back upon the finished work of Christ as they once looked forward, unquote. That's a quotation that you'll find in the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, a notation at Jeremiah 33, 18. He says, the blood sacrifices, he says, we cannot deny their literalness because they're set forth in such detail.

So we'll have to call this the law of detailed description. If there's a lot of detail given about something, it must be literal. Therefore, when we have an exact detailed description of the beast, he's a red beast, he's got seven heads, ten horns, on each of these horns there's a crown.

He's got a mouth like a lion. He's got feet like a bear. He's more or less like a leopard.

This is a fairly detailed description. A lot of detail is given. It talks about what comes out of his mouth, what he does, and so forth.

A lot of detail. But does that mean we believe in a literal four-footed animal with seven heads and ten horns ruling the world? I don't think so. I don't think anyone believes that.

I think that everyone recognizes the beast as a symbol, an image of something else, a person or a political system or something, but not an animal. That is a symbolic description, though very detailed. You cannot be sure that an author using a symbolic image would not give great details about that symbolism.

And therefore, I would have to disagree with the law of detailed description. These laws, I gave them the names and I based them on the dispensational writer's statements, that apparently you know, according to them, that you need to take something literally. By the law of frequent mention, if something is mentioned enough times, it eventually has to wear down your resistance of a literal interpretation.

You have to actually break down and say, okay, I guess it's literal because it says it six times. The law of genre, if it's a certain genre, then it must be literal, especially if it's prose nonfiction, which these authors claim revelation is. It's a very strange claim to make.

And finally, the law of detailed description, which if there's a lot of detail given, it must be literal. Frankly, that doesn't work. None of those laws work.

And dispensations do not follow them themselves consistently because you can't. Just because something is mentioned several times, because the same image is used figuratively several times, doesn't mean that it stops being figurative just because it's been used so many times. Just because a great detail is described of a vision or of an image that is symbolic, it doesn't change the fact that it's symbolic.

And just because something appears in a certain genre does not guarantee it will always be literal because there is no such thing, there's no known genre of literature that forswears the use of all figures of speech. But of course, remember, the dispensationist doesn't mind. Figures of speech are still literal.

But we're going to say, let's follow the literal definition of literal and say that dispensationalists and amillennialists are about equally literal in terms of how often they apply truly literal understanding of things. They just differ about which things. Now here's an amillennial alternative.

This is what the amillennialist says about the proper hermeneutic. And this is not, this is instead of what's called a consistent literal hermeneutic. We've been hearing from the dispensational writers that the correct and necessary interpretation of Scripture must be necessarily literal.

That is the hermeneutic principle of choice. The amillennialist has an alternative hermeneutic principle to suggest. This comes from Albertus Peters in an article he wrote in the Calvin Forum called Darbyism versus the Historical Faith.

Darbyism is dispensationalism. Darby invented it. Appeared in May 1936 in the Calvin Forum.

But Albertus Peters said, Calvin and other amillennial scholars taught the now generally accepted grammatical, historical, literal interpretation, so far as the Scriptures in general are concerned. That they retained the spiritualizing method in expounding many of the prophecies was because they found themselves forced to do so in order to be faithful to the New Testament. Unquote.

This is certainly what my impression is. I am called an amillennialist. My views fall in line with amillennial views.

But when I became an amillennialist, I didn't know what an amillennialist was. I'd never read one. I'd never heard of one.

I didn't know what they were. I had just read my Bible for, at that point, probably 8 to 10 years, carefully, hard, diligently, read it through many, many times. And over a gradual period of time, I began to sort of instinctively see, oh, well, the New Testament uses these Old Testament figures this way.

The Old Testament writers quote these Old Testament passages and apply them this way. And just over a period of time, you begin to realize, well, these guys are not taking this literally. These guys are giving a spiritual meaning to this passage over here in the Old Testament.

And I wasn't looking to change my hermeneutic principle. I wasn't even looking to

change my eschatology. I was just looking at the Bible.

I was just trying to study the Bible and find out how I'm supposed to understand it. And what I found was that the apostles and Christ himself quoted a great deal of the Old Testament. And it was not too hard to do my homework and look at the passages that they were quoting back in their original context and see whether they were being quoted literally or not.

Generally speaking, they were not, though sometimes they were. Sometimes a prophecy was taken literally, sometimes not. And therefore, I later found out what amillennials were and found out that I am one.

I didn't know I was one, but I am one. And Albertus Peter speaks very much, although I've never been familiar with this man, so I changed my views. He basically states it exactly as I would state it, that you retain the spiritualizing method only where you are compelled to do so in order to be faithful to the New Testament.

You don't apply it whenever it's inconvenient for your theology to take it literally. You apply it when it's inconsistent with the New Testament to take it literally. In other words, the decision about when to take something spiritually as opposed to literally is made not on the basis of theological convenience, but on the basis of how did the apostles take this? How did Jesus apply this? And then allowing the New Testament to tell us what it means rather than our imagination or some artificial standard like a literal hermeneutic that we impose upon it.

If Jesus didn't take it literally and Paul didn't take it literally, I'm not sure on what basis we can say we should take it literally. A couple of amillennial writers, Crenshaw and Gunn, wrote a book called *Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*. These men were both graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary, a dispensational school.

They went into the seminary as dispensationalists. They studied nothing but dispensational eschatology there because that's all that's ever taught at Dallas. And they came out, I think they were still dispensationalists when they came out, but later they changed.

In their own studies of scripture, they changed over and became amillennial. Their journey was very much like my own. I started out dispensational also and very gradually became something else.

But in their book *Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, which title is probably a play on words because they studied under Ryrie. He was a professor at Dallas. And Ryrie wrote the book *Dispensationalism, Today*.

So they wrote *Dispensationalism, Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*. And they did an interesting, it's really a series of chapters written alternately by these different guys. But

one thing, they have become Calvinist reformed and of course I'm not Calvinist.

And in that sense I'm not reformed. But amillennial eschatology is sometimes called reformed because Calvin was an amillennialist also, as was Luther and all the reformers. But Crenshaw and Gunn say, This is a much better and more accurate statement of how amillennialists interpret scripture.

Than the statement of the dispensationalists that well those guys may just use a spiritualizing method. Or they use a literal method until it comes to prophecy, then they just spiritualize prophecy. That's not true.

Amillennialists take many things literally in prophecy, which dispensationalists don't take literally. Because we do this based on what the New Testament says. That's essentially the only governing key.

How do I understand prophecy? I find out how Paul understood it, or Peter, or Jesus, then I'll tell you. I'll agree with them. And that is the reason why the vast majority of Christians throughout history have been amillennialists.

But it was dispensationalism's rise in 1830, and with it the assumption that literal hermeneutics are better, that caused this view to fall out of favor. Now I'm not saying that because something was believed by most Christians throughout history that it's true. We have to judge that from scripture.

But I'm saying the reason it was accepted so broadly throughout history is because it does appear to support scripture, and the dispensational claim that you take everything literally is, A, not true. They don't do it. They only reinterpret literal in order to say that they're doing it.

And B, it's just not biblical to do that. Now, I said earlier that the strongest reason for taking things literally, according to dispensationalists, is because all the scriptures that were fulfilled by Christ in His first coming were literally fulfilled. Remember we had a quote a few pages back here.

Under reasons for choosing a literalist method, according to Ryrie, number two reason was the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ, His birth, His rearing, His ministry, His death, His resurrection, were all fulfilled literally. There is no non-literal fulfillment of these prophecies in the New Testament. That's simply not true.

But it seems strangely irresponsible for him to say that. But he says what they always say. Wayne House and Thomas Eist in their book *Dominion, Theology, Blessing, or Curse* make this statement, very much like Ryrie's.

When we look at the prophecies of Christ's first coming, we see that they were fulfilled in a literal manner rather than figuratively. And then they list 31 examples of such

prophecies. Then the quote continues.

None of these fulfillments were taken in a figurative way by the New Testament writers. Now, this is the most outlandish statement that a scholar could possibly make because he lists 31 examples. And even in the examples he lists, many of them are not literal.

For example, he quotes, he gives this. Prophecy number 10. Christ would be a stone of stumbling for the Jews.

And he gives us a scripture reference, Psalm 118, verse 22. Well, he got the wrong scripture. He's actually referring to Isaiah 8, 14 that says Christ would be a stone of stumbling to the Jews.

Psalm 118, verse 22 doesn't say anything about him being a stone of stumbling. It calls him a stone, which the builders rejected. It doesn't call him a stone of stumbling.

But let's grant it. I mean, the Bible does, in fact, say that Christ would be a stone of stumbling. Is that literal? What is a stone, by the way? Is that plant, animal, or mineral? As I understand it, stones, in the literal sense, are minerals, not plant or animal.

Was Jesus a mineral, or was he plant or animal? But as I understand it, he was a human. Therefore, if it says he was a stone of stumbling, we have a non-literal statement. He was not a stone.

He was what we mean by a stumbling block, a stumbling stone. People were stumbled by him, but even that's a figure of speech. No one really fell over him, as far as we know.

Therefore, this is one of the examples of the 31 that are given of literal fulfillment. This is not literal. Number 11, he gives, Christ would be the light to the Gentiles, Isaiah 60, verse 3. Once again, he quotes the wrong verse.

Isaiah 60, verse 3, doesn't say he's a light. Well, actually, it does. But Isaiah 49, 6 is the scripture he really refers to, because he gives Acts 13, where Paul quotes Isaiah 49, 6. But the point is, is Christ a literal light? Well, on the Mount of Transfiguration, he kind of glowed a bit, but that was not to the Gentiles, that was to three of his disciples.

They were all Jews. Has Christ become a literal light? I know what a literal light is. So do you.

I don't read anywhere in the Bible that Jesus ever became such a literal light to the Gentiles. His message went out figuratively like light to enlighten the Gentiles, but that's a figure of speech. That's not literal.

Example number 14 that they gave says, Christ would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, Zechariah 11, 12. Well, you can look at Zechariah 11, 12 if you want, and you find a passage. You just see if it says, Christ will be sold for 30 pieces of silver.

What you'll find there, in fact, is that the prophet Zechariah is told to go and play a role. He probably did it in a vision, though he might have done it literally. He's told to take two shepherd's staffs, and he's supposed to go shepherd the flock.

And then he breaks one staff, then he later breaks another one, and he goes to his employers, and he says, give me whatever you think I'm worth, and they pay him 30 pieces of silver. And he's disgusted by that amount that he's paid, because he's worth more than that, so he says, cast it to the potter in the house of the Lord. Well, that prophecy, I do believe that that does foreshadow Jesus being betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.

But in Zechariah 11, nobody is betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Christ is not mentioned, although I believe that Christ is symbolically alluded to here, but there's no mention of the Messiah in that chapter. There's no mention of any betrayal for 30 pieces of silver.

There's a payment, severance pay is given to him, but Jesus didn't literally receive 30 pieces of silver from anyone. Judas did. There's no literalness here.

The only thing that that prophecy shows is that the Jews would evaluate Christ at that price. And they showed that they did by paying Judas that price for him, but there's no literal prediction of a betrayal for 30 pieces of silver. I think the man who listed these should have read his own examples a little more carefully, because he's trying to prove a point that he's disproving by these examples.

Example number 31, giving Amos 8-9, he says, darkness would come over the land. On this last example, he writes, in example 31, darkness literally occurred. It may also have symbolized the darkness of sin, but it got physically dark as well.

So he's talking about when Jesus died on the cross, it physically got dark. So he believes that the darkness mentioned in Amos 8-9 might symbolically refer to sin as well, but first and foremost, it's literal. Interestingly, though, he doesn't suggest that light in example number 11 was literal as well as symbolic.

And he does admit that darkness could be symbolic. And I would dare say that Amos 8-9 doesn't talk about the darkness of when Jesus was on the cross at all anyway, but the point here is he admits the symbolism here. And if he insists on the literal darkness, why doesn't he insist on the literal light? On example number 11, Christ would be a light to the Gentiles.

You see, I'm not just picking straw men here to criticize. I'm not picking, you know, goofy examples of dispensationalists. These men are, in fact, saying what virtually all dispensationalists tend to say when we talk about hermeneutics and what they are saying you need to understand in its context.

They say, well, Christ fulfilled all the prophecies literally when he came the first time. We

should take all prophecies later. Wait a minute, did he? Crenshaw and Gunn, the two guys I mentioned who graduated from Dallas, but wrote the book *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, they list in their book Old Testament prophecies about Christ.

Yeah, they list 97 Old Testament prophecies. They look at each one and they identify the nature of each fulfillment, whether it was literal or whether it was figurative. They found that only 34 prophecies of the 97 were literally fulfilled.

That's 35.05%. About a third of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled were fulfilled literally. I've given you in the notes just a few of them, just the first ones you run into in the first two chapters of Matthew. There's a prophecy that the virgin would conceive and bring forth a child.

That's literal. There's a prophecy that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem. That's literal.

Then there's a prophecy, out of Egypt I have called my sons, supposedly. This is supposed to be literal? It's not. If you look at Hosea 11.1, it's a reference to Israel coming out of Egypt.

It is applied typologically to Christ by Matthew, but it certainly is not literal. Then in Matthew there's a reference to Rachel weeping for her children when Herod slew all the infants. Really? Was she literally weeping there? Is that a literal fulfillment or a figurative fulfillment? There's a reference to the scriptures saying that he should be called a Nazarene.

There's actually no case in the Old Testament where it says he should be called a Nazarene, but some people believe that this is based on the fact that he came from Nazareth, and he is called the branch, *Nepser*, in the Old Testament. Therefore, since he comes from Nazareth, which means the town of the *Nepser*, the town of the branch, and the Old Testament called him the branch, that that is particularly fitting that he should be called a Nazarene. But that's not a literal application of any Old Testament passage.

There's a quotation in Matthew 3.3 of Isaiah 40 verses 3 through 5 about John the Baptist. A voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight a path for the Lord. Well, John the Baptist was in the wilderness, but he also said every mountain is going to be brought down and every valley is going to be brought up and all the crooked places are going to be made straight.

He's speaking figuratively there. That's not literal. John the Baptist didn't excavate.

He didn't get a bulldozer out there and move the mountains around or even do it with faith. He didn't move any mountains. He didn't fill up any valleys.

This is spiritual. It's non-literal. That's the typical way it was spoken.

In Matthew 4 verses 15 through 16, there's a quotation of Isaiah 9, 1 and 2, which says, Those who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And Matthew says this was fulfilled when Jesus preached in Galilee. Well, those who were in spiritual darkness saw a great spiritual light, but that's spiritual.

That's spiritualizing. If we're going to take it literally, then those who were in the dark literally saw light literally. That'd be like if you were sitting in a dark room and you couldn't see anything and then some eternal light, you saw light.

That'd be literal. Those who sat in darkness saw light. But that didn't happen literally.

That's spiritual. That's a spiritualized fulfillment. Be careful.

Dangerous. You see, all you have to do is go one by one through the prophecies that Jesus actually did fulfill the first time and see, was this one fulfilled literally or was this figurative? You'll find, as they did, at least with the 97 examples they considered, only 34 of those 97 were literally fulfilled. The rest were non-literal.

They were figurative or typological or some other non-literal way of understanding or spiritual. Therefore, only 35.05% of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled were really literally fulfilled. The rest were not.

And yet, we find it again and again. There is no non-literal fulfillment. All the prophecies were fulfilled literally.

That simply is not true. It's irresponsible reporting. A person needs to just look at the details to convince himself of this.

The real crux for the dispensationalism about literalism is whether you take Israel literally or not. And that's the big deal. Ryrie says, As the dispensationalist studies the words church and Israel in the New Testament, finds that they are kept distinct and therefore concludes that when the church was introduced, God did not abrogate his promises to Israel nor enmesh them in the church.

All of this is built on an inductive study of the use of the two words, not a scheme superimposed on the Bible. In other words, it is built on a consistent use of the literal, normal, plain method of interpretation without the addition of any other principle that will attempt to give respectability to some preconceived conclusions. In other words, you take Israel literally all the time because of the literal interpretation you apply all the time.

Unfortunately for them, Paul didn't use that literal interpretation all the time. He said, If you belong to Christ, even though you're Gentiles, then you are Abraham's seed and the heirs according to the promise. He speaks to Gentiles and said, They are Abraham's seed.

Not literally, of course. Spiritually. In Galatians 6, he refers to the church as the Israel of God.

In Romans 2, he says, He is not a Jew who has run outwardly. He is a Jew who has run inwardly. Jesus himself says, I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews but are not, that they are the synagogue of Satan.

They are Jewish by birth, but they are not real Jews as far as Jesus is concerned. Jew, Gentile, the New Testament writers and Jesus himself use those in a non-literal way, sometimes referring to spiritual qualities. We'll talk about that another time, but we've run out of time for this session.

The point is, everybody spiritualizes sometimes. It's just that dispensationalists and non-millennialists don't do it all at the same place.