

Acts 089

How the New Testament Uses the Old, Part 4

Acts 15:18c


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Let us open our Bibles this evening to Acts 15:18. We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts. We are in that third section of the Book of Acts. The Lord gave us the outline there in Acts 1:8, which says: *"And you shall be My witnesses...even to the remotest part of the earth."* This is the longest section in the Book of Acts. It starts in Acts 13 and goes through Acts 28.

Structure (Acts 1:8)

- Jerusalem (Acts 1–7)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12)
- **Remotest part of the earth (Acts 13–28)**
 - 1st missionary journey (Acts 13–14)
 - Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1–35)
 - 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)
 - 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17)
 - Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18–28:31)



Paul and Barnabas left the borders of Israel in Acts 13-14 and went on that first missionary journey into southern Galatia. There were tons of Gentile conversions during that missionary journey, to such an extent that so many Gentiles were getting saved, that they had to have a church meeting to figure out what to do with all these Gentiles. The issue is not can a Gentile get saved? They already knew that from the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. The issue is, does a Gentile, who is now a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, have to come under the Law of Moses to join the church?

Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch up north there at the northern tip of Israel. They go to where the apostles were in Jerusalem, to have a meeting and get an answer to this question.

Acts 15:6-21 is a description of that meeting. The meeting has been convened (Acts 15:6) Peter has spoken up verses (Acts 15:7-11) and said, "Us Jews have done a lousy job keeping the Law for the last 1,500 years. How in the world do we expect the Gentiles to keep the Law?" Paul and Barnabas speak up. They talked about how God just gave the Gentiles favor through many conversions on the first missionary journey without the Law at all.

Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

- I. Occasion (1-5)
- II. Declarations (6-21)
 - A. Meeting convened (6)
 - B. Peter's address (7-11)
 - C. Barnabas' & Paul's testimony (12)
 - D. James' address (13-21)
 - 1. Introduction (13a)
 - 2. Addresses (13b)
 - 3. Peter's address (14)
 - 4. Old Testament citation (15-18)
 - a) Introduction (15)
 - b) Amos 9:11-12 (16-18)
 - 5. Conclusions (19-21)
- III. Decision (22-29)
- IV. Delivery (30-35)

Finally, James, the half brother of Christ, speaks up (Acts 15:13-21). He makes a quick reference to Peter's address (Acts 15:14). Then he moves into the heart of his argument (Acts 15:15-18). He says, "All the prophets agree on this point." Then he quotes the Book of Amos. Amos would be an eighth century prophet who made a prophecy about the coming Millennial Kingdom.

As you study the Book of Acts, it is a book where God speaks frequently and visions take place frequently, but there is no vision here, and no dream here. No Peter when he saw the sheet with the animals on it, earlier in the book. Nothing like that happens. Nothing like where the Spirit said, as with Philip in Acts 8:29, or where the Holy Spirit said (Acts 13:2). None of that happens here like when a vision appeared to Paul (Acts 16:9).

How do you resolve an issue like this when God is not speaking? They have to go to the Bible that they had, and the only Bible they had was what we call the Old Testament. That is why James, as he is making his point that the Gentiles do not have to come under the Law of Moses to join the church, he is quoting Amos 9:11-12.

Let us pick it up there in Acts 15:14-18. James, the half brother of Christ, is speaking. He refers to Simeon, which is Peter's Aramaic name and Jewish name combined there.

"Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. With these words the Prophets agree, just as it is written" (Acts 15:14-15).

In other words, all the prophets agree on this point. Then he quotes the Book of Amos beginning in Acts 15:16:

*""After these things I will return,
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen,
And I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will restore it,
So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,"
Says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago"" (Acts
15:16-18).*

What in the world is James doing here? He is quoting a passage about the Millennial Kingdom, the thousand-year Kingdom yet future. He is basically saying, "When the Millennial Kingdom comes one day—and you guys believe it is coming, right? We are supposed to pray for it, "Thy kingdom come"—when it comes, the Gentiles are going to be full citizens in it.

If that is the case, and he is reasoning analogically from the future back to the present, let us let the Gentiles into the church now without making them submit to the Law of Moses. This is actually a common way of arguing in the Bible. It will give you a futuristic statement, and then it will reason backwards as to how that applies to us, like in 2 Peter 3:10, where it says:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

Now that is a statement of what is going to happen to this world after the Millennial Kingdom has run its course. God is going to take this whole world and burn it by fire. If you are into global warming, that is where you would find it, at the end of the Millennium.

"Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11).

A knowledge that this world is going to be destroyed by fire influences our behavior in the present. We do not want to be invested too heavily in this world because the whole thing is going to burn. That is an example of taking a futuristic statement and reasoning backwards to the present. That is all James is doing. James is doing the same thing, saying, "When the Millennium comes, Gentiles will be full citizens. So let us let the Gentiles into the church now without making them submit to the Law of Moses."

James has to reason this way because you do not have a direct word from God. What I have just explained—and we spent last time dealing with this is the basic standard interpretation in our camp—is not some weird teaching. The Scofield Reference Bible going back to the early 1900s, has a note in it on this verse. It says:

"James showed that there will be Gentile believers at that time, as well as Jewish believers; hence he concluded that Gentiles are not required to become Jewish proselytes by circumcision."¹

This is the interpretation that was given to me by my professor J. Dwight Pentecost. He writes:

"James found this in keeping with the prophetic program...In that kingdom Gentiles would not be made into Jews; instead they would be in the kingdom as Gentiles. This allowed James to conclude that if God had a program for Gentiles as Gentiles in the future Davidic kingdom established here on earth, there was no reason to deny that God could include Gentiles as Gentiles in this present form of the theocracy."²

All of that is stuff we have covered, and that is what I think is the right interpretation of Acts 15:18.

One of the things that I am really interested in as your pastor is not telling you what to think, as much as I am interested in telling you why. It is not so much the "what" question, that is dogmatism and indoctrination. But why do we think the way that we think? In other words, as a good follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have to be able to answer not just the "what" question, what do we believe? Why do we believe it?

The only way to really help with that is to give you the opposition and what they say about this passage, because they think we are nuts with this. They believe in something called Kingdom Now theology. When they look at Acts 15:16 and James is talking about how David's tent, the tabernacle of David, which I am interpreting as Millennial yet future, they basically believe that the fallen tabernacle of David's throne is restored now in spiritual form.

It is a doctrine called Kingdom Now theology. Sometimes it is called Replacement Theology. Sometimes it is called Amillennialism. Sometimes it is called Postmillennialism. It is this idea that what James is saying is that Jesus, right now, is not just at the Father's right hand functioning as High Priest, which is our belief, but He is actually reigning as the Davidic king from David's throne, which got miraculously transferred from the earth to heaven. This is what they believe.

Unless I explain to you why they think the way they think, you will never be in a position where you can defend the why question. All you will be able to do is explain what you believe. We are interested in helping people understand why they believe something, because the truth of the matter is, if a teacher is only dealing with the what question and talks you into something, then someone else with greater oratorical skills could talk you out of it. If you are only taught what to believe with oratorical pizzazz, then someone

¹ C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1520.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 279-80

else can come along later in your life with greater oratorical pizzazz and talk you out of that position.

If you are just dealing with the what question without the why question, that is the position you find yourself in. I do not want that to happen to you. I want you to stay on the right path on this particular issue of the Kingdom. The only way I know how to do that is to expose you to the writings of people that are arguing that we are in the Davidic Kingdom now in a spiritual sense. They say there is no future Davidic Kingdom, and that all of Israel's promises are being fulfilled now, symbolically.

To do that, I have some quotes here from Kim Riddlebarger in his book "A Case for Amillennialism." "A" is a negation meaning "without millennium," which means a thousand years. He does not believe in a thousand-year Kingdom. The subtitle of his book is "Understanding the End Times." This is a 2003 book, and I just want to read to you what he says about this verse that we just covered in Acts 15:16-18. This is their key verse that they use to try to argue that we are in the Davidic Kingdom now.

"In Acts 15, the church in Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas to report to the Jerusalem Council regarding the salvation of the Gentiles and to seek help in resolving the question that had been troubling the church as a result. Should Gentile converts be circumcised in order to be saved? Once in the city, Paul and Barnabas reported to the elders and the apostles on all the things that God was doing among the Gentiles (v. 4). When certain converted Pharisees declared that Gentiles must be circumcised and obey the law of Moses (v. 5), Peter refuted their arguments by pointing out that it was God who had given these Gentiles the Holy Spirit."³

So far so good. He is just narrating the circumstances of the decision that is being handed down in Acts 15. Riddlebarger goes on and he says:

"'We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are' (v. 11). Then James, the leader of the church, spoke (vv. 13ff): 'God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written in,' and James cited a passage from Amos 9:11-12: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent, its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' that have been known for ages.'"⁴

He is just repeating what we have taught in terms of the circumstances of this decision, but he is going to move very fast into trying to argue that the Amos passage started being fulfilled in the Book of Acts, and it is being fulfilled right now in a celestial, non-

³ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 39-40.

⁴ Ibid.

literal sense. I am sharing this with you because a lot of people ask me or they email me, and say, "I have been sitting in such and such a church for 20 years, and they never mentioned Israel."

I am trying to explain to you why that is true. I am giving you the theology of the church that you are sitting in and why they do not mention Israel. They basically believe that the New Testament waves a magic wand over the Old Testament and changes the meaning. People say, "I am in this church. It is really peculiar. I noticed that they are boycotting the nation of Israel." Why would a Christian church do that? Why would they boycott the nation of Israel and act like Israel that we read about in the papers is some kind of oppressor? I am giving you the reason why they think the way they do.

They are not going to come out and tell you. A lot of times it is subterfuge; it is hidden under the table. "There was a terrible event on October the 7th, 2023. I go to this church. I have been in this church for 20 years. I noticed that the preacher never mentioned at all what happened to the Jews on October 7th, 2023." That was the worst attack the nation of Israel has ever experienced other than the Holocaust itself. On a per capita basis, it would be the equivalent of our 9/11.

"Why am I sitting in this denominational church? They never mentioned the event at all." I am giving you the reasons why. I am quoting their material, and giving you their theology. Here it comes. Riddlebarger says:

"James saw the prophecy as fulfilled in Christ's resurrection and exaltation and in the reconstitution of his disciples as the new Israel."⁵

Do you see what he just did there? He just changed the church of Jesus Christ into the new Israel. Even though the word Israel is used about 73 times in the New Testament, and guess what it always means? It means Israel, it never means the church. They have a theology which says the church is the new Israel, spiritually speaking. The church has taken over Israel's place.

A fancy name for this is Supersessionism, meaning that the church now supersedes national Israel. All of Israel's blessings have been transferred to the church through an allegorical, non-literal method of interpretation. For example, it talks in the Book of Ezekiel about a river coming out of the temple in the Millennium and flowing into the Dead Sea, and the Dead Sea starts to teem with life, biological life.

Why do they call the Dead Sea the Dead Sea? Because everything in the sea is dead. It is a prophecy about biological life coming back to the Dead Sea in the Millennial Kingdom. Your Supersessionists, your Amillennialists will say, "You do not really think that is literal, do you? That is just talking about the soul of the lost sinner being born again." They took something literal and they repackaged it. They do this all of the time

⁵ Ibid.

with Israel's prophecies and promises, particularly in the Old Testament. That is what they mean by "fulfilled."

Riddlebarger goes on and he says:

"The presence of both Jew and Gentile in the church was proof that the prophecy of Amos had been fulfilled."⁶

They say, "Do not look for a future restoration of the Davidic throne. The Davidic throne is being fulfilled now, spiritually speaking, with Jesus in heaven. Do not expect Jesus to come back here and rule from David's throne, from Jerusalem. That is not what the Bible teaches. That has all been changed. Jesus is ruling from David's throne in heaven. David's fallen tent has been rebuilt by Christ."

It is very different from what I am communicating. James is maintaining the context of Amos's prophecy. That is a millennial prophecy, and he is reasoning backwards by way of analogy. That is not what these guys are saying. They are saying it is fulfilled.

"In Amos's prophecy, 'after this' indicated that the prophecy referred to what God would do for Israel after the exile. When James applied this prophecy to the church, was he spiritualizing an Old Testament text?"⁷

I would say these guys are guilty of spiritualizing, but they do not want it to be called spiritualizing. They are trying to wiggle out of the nomenclature. Spiritualizing is where you use the text as a vehicle to bring in a higher meaning that is known only to the interpreter.

For example, you look at the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2). There are four rivers there: Euphrates, Tigris, Pishon, and Gihon. If you ask me what that means, I would say, "In Eden there were four rivers." It is kind of a boring interpretation. Pishon, Gihon, Euphrates and Tigris. Philo, a spiritualizer of the past came along and said, "Those are four parts of the soul."

One of the first sermons I ever heard as a Christian was related to the walls that Nehemiah built around the city of Jerusalem. There is something there called the Fish Gate. What is the Fish Gate? It means they took fish in and out of the gate. That is what it means. But they would say, "No, that is about evangelism. Because Jesus said, 'Go make fishers of men.'" There was also something called the Water Gate. What is the Water Gate? They took water in and out of the gate. They would say, "Oh, no. The water is the Holy Spirit. That is speaking of the Holy Spirit."

People throughout church history got wrapped up in this kind of thinking because it sounded better. It sounded more spiritual. The problem is that one interpreter says the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

fish means evangelism, and another interpreter can come up with something else. I noticed in that sermon that they never commented on the Manure Gate. There is a Dung Gate. Do you guys know that? What does that mean? They took manure in and out of the gate. What would that be? They never talked about that in that sermon. Would that be sin?

You can see how this whole thing gets out of control because you are de-historicizing the text, and as a result the Bible becomes very subjective, so brittle.

Riddlebarger says:.

"When James applied this prophecy to the church, was he spiritualizing an Old Testament text? Or was James reading the Old Testament through a Christ-centered lens typical of the greater light of the messianic age?"⁸

Doesn't that sound spiritual? Don't you want to read the Bible through a Christ-centered lens? I guess if you do not want to read the Bible through a Christ-centered lens, you are not Christ-like. In Riddlebarger's mind, what James has done is introduce this higher meaning, the spiritual meaning. Jesus is reigning on David's throne now in a celestial heavenly sense, and therefore all of the earthly literal promises to Israel you can just get out your white out and start crossing things out of the Bible that are earthly related to Israel.

By the way, Riddlebarger says: "James saw the prophecy as fulfilled." As James is speaking, does he use the word "fulfilled"? Look back at Acts 15:15: "*With this the words of the Prophets agree.*" Do you see the word "fulfilled" there? He does not use the word "fulfilled." The Greek word he uses here is "symphoneo," where we get the English word "symphony," which is a musical presentation that is only enjoyable if everybody plays in harmony with each other.

That is all James is saying. The prophets all agree on this point. He is not saying that Amos is fulfilled in the Church Age. There is a completely and totally different word for "fulfilled." It is the Greek word "pleroo," which is used in Acts 1:16: "*Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled*" speaking of prophecies related to Judas's death.

My point is that the biblical writers know how to say fulfilled. They do not say "fulfilled" here. So when Riddlebarger tells us that James said the prophecy was fulfilled, he is rewriting the text. It never says it was fulfilled. It is there by way of analogy, not fulfillment.

Riddlebarger goes on and he says:

⁸ Ibid.

"This question lies at the heart between amillenarians and dispensationalists—"9

Amillenarians are Replacement theologians. Who are the dispensationalists? That is us. That is our doctrinal statement. We are not amillenarians here. We are dispensationalists, meaning that we do not think that the church is fulfilling Israel's program. If the church is not fulfilling Israel's program, then when is it going to be fulfilled? The answer is during the seven-year Tribulation Period and subsequent Millennial Kingdom. That keeps the promises of the Old Testament literal.

Here they go. Here comes the attack against the Scofield Reference Bible. If you listen to Candace Owens—I recommend you do not; I cannot anymore, because I do not have the blood pressure to handle it—it is so outrageous the stuff that she says, married to her Roman Catholic husband, who is Replacement Theology to the core. She is always attacking the Scofield Reference Bible. I do not agree with every little thing of the Scofield Reference Bible, but a lot of the notes in it can be extremely helpful, like the one I just read to you concerning Acts 15. She thinks that she can tear down belief in a future Israel because she is really anti-Semitic, when you get right down to it.

She does not like Israel. She thinks the Israelis killed Charlie Kirk. Ad nauseam, ad infinitum, she goes on with these conspiracy theories, and she thinks that if she tears down the Scofield Reference Bible, she can tear down the church's support for Israel, when all the Scofield Reference Bible does is tell people to take God's Word in the Old Testament literally. Her problem is not with the Scofield Reference Bible. Her problem is with God.

The same with Tucker Carlson. He brings people on, like John Rich, who try to say that the Scofield Reference Bible is connected to the Illuminati and all this kind of stuff. Here goes Riddlebarger, over 20 years ago, attacking the Scofield Reference Bible. The reason I am bringing up Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, and these people is because the things that are debated in the academy eventually hit the laity.

It has been about 20 years, and finally the laity are being exposed to the same, Replacement Theology arguments that I was exposed to to some extent when I was involved as a student in academia. Riddlebarger goes on, and he says:

"The famous notes of the Scofield Reference Bible (1909) say that from a dispensational perspective James's speech is the most important in the New Testament. According to Scofield, James is describing what will happen after the church age concludes ('after this') i.e., the millennium, when God will reestablish the Davidic rule over Israel."¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The Davidic reign has not been restored. We are in a different age right now, called the Church Age. The Davidic Kingdom is not canceled, but it is in a state of postponement as we speak. These guys are trying to say that it is in a state of fulfillment.

"If this is true, when Paul and Barnabas sought guidance for a concern that was immediate to them, (Should Gentile converts be circumcised?), James responded by pointing to a future millennium thousands of years distant."¹¹

That is why they do not agree with our view. You cannot take some distant thing and then draw an analogy to the present. They think that what you need to do is say that the passage is fulfilled. That is why I showed you 2 Peter 3:11. The Bible does this all the time.

"Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way [after the Millennium], what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct [in the present]?" (2 Peter 3:11).

When he says the future cannot inform the present, he is dumping onto you a pre-understanding or an assumption or a presupposition. I remember when I was in seminary doing some work over at SMU, Southern Methodist University. They have an outstanding library, by the way, but it was about as liberal as you can get. They have a school over there called Perkins School of Theology. We used to joke and say it is Perkins School of Mythology.

I remember getting into a discussion with one of the students over there about Isaiah 53, which is a prophecy about Jesus 700 years in advance. He would say, "There is no way that could be a prophecy about Jesus." I said, "Why not?" he said, "Because that was 700 years into the future. How could that apply to Isaiah's day?"

This is a lot of what Riddlebarger is saying. He is regurgitating things that I have heard from liberal theologians for a long time. He does not think that you can take a prophecy about the Kingdom and apply it to the Church Age by way of analogy. He thinks you cannot do that. Whereas I think you can. I think that is what James is doing.

I do not have to rewrite the kingdom passages. He does though. He thinks you have to say that the kingdom passages are being fulfilled now. That is the only way this makes sense. Even though the word "pleroo" or "fulfilled," is not found in the text.

Riddlebarger goes on and he says:

"Here is one instance in which dispensational presuppositions get in the way of the plain sense of the text."¹²

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

What presuppositions is he talking about? That the future can inform the present. He calls that a presupposition. I call that a plain reading of 2 Peter 3:10-11. He thinks he is standing for the plain sense of the text.

"Scofield interprets the text literalistically, not literally. Dispensationalists are often forced to reinterpret any New Testament data that does not fit in their Old Testament-derived prophetic scheme."¹³

Like a Ponzi scheme, right? Notice the language, "their scheme." It is not a scheme at all; James is keeping Amos' statement in its original context, based on the interpretation that I am giving.

"Dispensational presuppositions will not fit with much of the interpretation supplied to Old Testament data by New Testament authors."¹⁴

You poor simpletons. When you read the Old Testament, you are taking it at face value. You really believe Jesus is going to come back and rule from David's throne in Jerusalem? You poor, naive, ignorant, simple people. Don't you understand that the New Testament has come along and filled those Old Testament texts with a higher meaning? The fact that you do not understand the higher meaning indicates that you are really not spiritual. (I am being facetious, of course, but I just want you to see how this little game is played.)

"A thorough survey of both Old Testament and New Testament eschatological categories will demonstrate the dispensational hermeneutic to be untenable."¹⁵

What does this mean? We interpret the text not literally, but literalistically. What does that even mean? That is common disparaging talk by these guys because they think what we mean by literal interpretation is that we do not recognize figures of speech. We just take things in an ironclad literal way. When the mountains clap, we think they have hands that are clapping. When the eyes of the Lord roam to and fro, seeking someone to strengthen, we think God has eyeballs. I guess He needs His prescription changed periodically. Maybe God wears glasses. That is what they think we mean when we say consistent literal interpretation, but that is not what we mean.

We believe that generally the Bible is to be understood literally. Another name for that is denotatively. However, there are examples in the Bible where there are obvious figures of speech, and when we see that we interpret the Bible figuratively or cognitively, and that is how language functions.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

This morning my wife asked me, "How did you sleep?" I said, "I slept pretty well. I slept in till 8 a.m. and I slept like a log." She does not say to me, "What does 8 a.m. mean? Is that some kind of symbol of something?" No, because obviously there I am speaking denotatively.

When I say that I slept like a log, when I throw the word like in there, that is a simile equating two things with like or as. She does not say to me, "Did you turn into a piece of wood last night?" I know our last name is Woods, so maybe you actually turned into a piece of wood last night. She would not interpret what I am saying that way because she can understand literal versus figurative speech.

The Bible is the same way. You generally try to take the Bible at face value unless there is a very conspicuous, obvious figure of speech. Charles Ryrie says:

"Literal interpretation '...might also be called plain interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rule out figures of speech.'"¹⁶

Ryrie is the literalist's literalist, and he says that we obviously take into account figures of speech when they are conspicuous.

If you want a good book on this, it is by E.W. Bullinger. His book is still a classic. It is about a thousand pages. In that book, he goes over every possible figure of speech you can imagine, and then some figures of speech you have never heard of: apostrophe, hyperbole, simile, metaphor, using Biblical examples. It goes on and on for a thousand pages. This guy was as liberal as they come. He even takes my view, or I take his view, that Babylon in Revelation 17-18 means Babylon. He was saying all that stuff back in the 1900s. Yet he is very sophisticated in explaining figures of speech.

Just because you are a literalist does not mean you throw out figures of speech. When they say we interpret the text not literally, but literalistically what they are trying to say is that we do not respect figures of speech, which is total propaganda.

Riddlebarger goes on and he says:

"More importantly, such a survey gives us the proper framework and external controls to interpret prophetic sections of Scripture correctly. The irony is that dispensationalists' practice of interpreting all prophetic texts in a literalistic fashion amounts to a repudiation of the historic Protestant hermeneutic and the principle of the analogy of faith."¹⁷

What is the analogy of faith? That sounds so academic and spiritual. Let us discover what he means.

¹⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 86.

¹⁷ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 39-40.

"If amillenarians adopt the New Testament writers' interpretation of the Old Testament, are they not following the literal sense of Scripture, even if the New Testament writers universalize something that was limited to Israel in the Old Testament?"¹⁸

Those prophecies are not limited to Israel. You have to read them through the right Christological hermeneutic, meaning you read the New Testament back into the Old Testament to discover the true meaning."

"The dispensationalists' literalistic reading of prophetic passages must not be confused with a literal reading. A literal reading—a reading that gets the plain sense of the text—will allow the New Testament to interpret the Old."¹⁹

"I have been in a church for 20 years and they never talk about the Old Testament. Pastor never leads a study through Daniel, Isaiah, Genesis, or Exodus." Why is that? Because the pastor of that church thinks that studying the Old Testament is a waste of time, because the New Testament changes the Old Testament. If the New Testament changes the Old Testament, like he is saying here, then everything that God spoke in the Old Testament is a lie, is it not? Can God lie?

"God is not a man, that He should lie" (Numbers 23:19).

"God who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).

"It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).

"It is amillenarians, not dispensationalists, who interpret prophecy literally in that they follow the literal sense of how the New Testament writers interpret Old Testament prophecy."²⁰

The New Testament has rewritten all of those prophecies. That is what they are saying of the Old Testament.

When I started working here, I got a call from a Lutheran pastor. He wanted to talk to a dispensationalist because he had never met one, like an endangered species or something. He called me on the phone and I was talking to this guy. It was the weirdest conversation because we were talking and all of a sudden he asked me, "So you take all those Old Testament prophecies literally, do you?" I said, "Yes, we do."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

He started talking again, and after a couple of minutes elapsed, he came right back to the same question. "You really take all that literally?" I said, "Yes, we do." He talked a little bit more, and then he circled back again. "You take all of that literally?" I said, "Yes, we do."

It was obvious to me in this conversation—if you can call it that—the difference between us. We were never going to agree theologically on things like this because he does not think those prophecies are meant to be understood the way they were written. I do. That is why I have to have a future Kingdom in my belief system, because there has to be somewhere in Biblical history for those prophecies to be literally fulfilled.

He does not think there is a future Kingdom. He thinks the New Testament rewrote those passages, meaning that everything God said to Abraham was a fib. "Hey, Abraham. Just fooling. I really did not mean what I said. You are going to have to wait 2,000 years to get a New Testament understanding, but you will come around." This is how the game is played.

What about this promise here: Abraham, you are going to possess a piece of real estate from modern-day Egypt to modern-day Iraq. It is a clear promise in the Bible. The amillennial answer is that God was just fooling. He did not really mean what He said. You are going to have to wait 2,000 years for the New Testament to come along to give you the true meaning. That means when God spoke these words, He was not telling the truth entirely.

We do not read the Old Testament through the grid of the New Testament. We interpret the New Testament in light of what has already been revealed in the Old Testament. Do you see the difference? When we get to the New Testament in this church, we are interpreting it in light of what has already been revealed. If you are in a Reformed type of church, they are going the opposite way. They are going strictly New Testament and using it to rewrite the Old Testament. They are two totally different approaches to Bible study.

What about these promises in Isaiah? Jerusalem is going to be the center of worldwide authority politically one day. There is going to be perfect justice in the world, world peace, peace in the animal kingdom. There will be universal spiritual knowledge. What do you do with these prophecies here? The Kingdom is going to be established by God. It is going to be eternal. All of these are Old Testament texts.

The Kingdom is going to be directly ruled by Jesus. It is going to be on planet Earth. It is going to be where the land promises that God promised to Abraham are fulfilled. Israel will be elevated again over the nations. God will immediately answer prayers. There is going to be a millennial temple, a millennial David, and perfect righteousness. The curse is curtailed. There will be peace on the earth, agricultural prosperity, and profound topographical changes. What do you do with all of that?

You say, "Those really do not mean what they say because the New Testament is going to come along and explain those to you." If that is true, then what was God saying in the Old Testament? "He was speaking to people as if they were children because they really could not get the whole picture."

Here is John Calvin in his commentary on Amos. This is how he handles the passage that James is quoting:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sow a seed; and the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt" (Amos 9:13, KJV).

How would John Calvin interpret that passage as an amillennialist? He writes:

"Here the prophet speaks the felicity which shall be under the reign of Christ; and we know that whenever the Prophets set forth promises of a happy and prosperous state to God's people, they adopt metaphorical expressions; and say, that abundance of all good things shall flow, that there shall be the most fruitful produce, that provisions shall be bountifully supplied, for they accommodated—" ²¹

Do you see that? The people back then were so ignorant they thought there was going to be a future kingdom. So God accommodated their misunderstanding.

"For they accommodated their mode of speaking to the notions of that ancient people; it is therefore no wonder if they sometimes speak to them as to children." ²²

The people in Amos' day, that is all they knew. They were a bunch of hillbillies and farmers. They did not know anything about the finished work of Christ, so God spoke to them as hillbillies and farmers. You have to wait till the New Testament to get the real meaning of what God said in Amos. That is what John Calvin is saying.

As much as everybody is trying to put John Calvin on some kind of pedestal, I do not think he is any friend at all to our method of interpretation here, because I do not think when God gave promises to Israel, He was speaking to them as children. I think He meant what He said.

"At the same time, the Spirit under these figurative expressions declares, that the kingdom of Christ shall in every way be happy and blessed, or

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Amos 9:13*.

²² Ibid.

that the Church of God, which means the same thing, shall be blessed, when Christ shall begin to reign."²³

All the Bible is saying is that when Jesus comes, He is going to bring in a spiritual kingdom. Now the poor folks in the Old Testament never understood. They were just children. They could not understand it that way, so God put up with them. They were at the kindergarten level, so God spoke to them as kindergartners and talked about a restoration for Israel. We all know that is not what God meant. We all know that He was talking about the glorious kingdom that we are in now. This is John Calvin saying these things in the 16th century.

Now there is a view called Already, Not Yet. They believe in a future kingdom of some kind, but they think there are two Davidic thrones. One that Jesus is now on, in heaven, and a future one that He will reign from on the earth—already, not yet.

George Ladd of Fuller Seminary was a big proponent of this. It is called Historic Premillennialism and he works really hard at getting Jesus onto David's throne now. Look how he does it:

"The new redemptive events in the course of "Heilsgeschichte" [salvation history] have compelled Peter to reinterpret the Old Testament. Because of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter transfers the messianic Davidic throne from Jerusalem to God's right hand in heaven. Jesus has now been enthroned as the Davidic Messiah on the throne of David, and is awaiting the final consummation of his messianic reign...This involves a rather radical reinterpretation of Old Testament prophecies, but no more so than the entire reinterpretation of God's redemptive plan by the early church. In fact, it is an essential part of this reinterpretation demanded by the events of redemptive history...Jesus is enthroned as the Messiah...He must reign until he has put all his enemies are made a stool for his feet."²⁴

George, I have a question. If David's throne is on the earth, how can you all of a sudden throw it up into heaven? How do you do that, George? "The New Testament reinterprets David's throne."

My point is, if you want to move into this Kingdom Now theology, which a lot of people do, apparently you have to abandon literal interpretation. You have to believe that the New Testament is altering the Old Testament.

A big movement within Dallas Seminary is Progressive Dispensationalism, also teaching Already, Not Yet. Darrell Bock, one of the progenitors of Progressive Dispensationalism, says:

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 336–37.

"The Davidic throne and the heavenly throne of Jesus at the right hand of the Father are one and the same."²⁵

Already, not yet. We are in an "already" phase of the Davidic Kingdom, but there will be a "not yet" phase later. Jesus is reigning on David's throne in heaven, but He will reign on David's throne one day on the earth. It is a compromise between our side and the amillennial side. What He has done with this is he has gone into the middle. I call it middle ground mania, the mushy middle. The problem is, when you read the promises of the Davidic throne, it is always involving Jesus reigning on this earth, never from heaven.

Second Samuel 7:12-16 is a classic passage talking about the Davidic throne of Christ. John Walvoord says:

"The covenant with David is not only given twice and it is major content—namely 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17—but it is also confirmed in Psalm 89. In this and other Old Testament references there is no allusion anywhere to the idea that these promises are to be understood in a spiritualized sense as referring to the church or to a reign of God in heaven."²⁶

That is the way Dallas Seminary used to think: David's throne is earthly. Nothing in the New Testament changes that, so we expect Jesus in the thousand-year Kingdom to be reigning from David's throne from Jerusalem. It will be so physical and so literal that you will actually be able to go up to Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom and shake His hand, and He will not even have to give a campaign contribution for the privilege.

"Rather, it is linked to the earth and to the seed of Israel, and to the land."²⁷

In other words, you cannot even have the Davidic throne until you have a repentant Israel.

"There is no indication that this kingdom extended to a spiritual entity such as the church nor that the throne in view is the throne of God in heaven rather than the throne of David on earth...Such a situation does not prevail in this present age and is not related here or elsewhere to the reign of Christ from the throne of His Father in heaven."²⁸

Even though that is what Dallas Seminary stood for, here come these progress dispensationalists throwing Jesus' Davidic throne up into heaven, which is a total

²⁵ Darrell Bock, "Evidence from Acts," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom*, ed. Donald Campbell and Jeffrey Townsend (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 194.

²⁶ John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 84-85, 87.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

change of the Davidic promises. The Davidic promises are earthly, but they are trying to say, "No, Jesus is fulfilling those promises from heaven." The people over which the throne will exist will be Israel, but they are saying, "No, He is reigning over the church right now." The Davidic throne needs a converted Israel, but they are saying, "No, you can have it in a spiritual sense, even though Israel has not been converted, as she will be in the events of the Tribulation Period."

How in the world does Darrell Bock do this? He has come up with a new hermeneutic called complementary hermeneutics. The principles of traditional hermeneutics interpretation will not allow this, so you come up with a new hermeneutic. He says:

"...the New Testament does introduce change in advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary additions, however, it does not jettison Old Testament promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise."²⁹

If you confront him on this and you say, "We still believe in a future kingdom. Jesus is going to reign one day on earth. But wait a minute, you are saying He is reigning now in heaven?" They say, "We believe that, too." "How do you get that to work?" "You have to buy into our new method of interpretation called complementary hermeneutics. When the New Testament, like James, quotes the Old Testament, the Book of Amos, it adds a layer of meaning that Amos never gave.

They are not doing what Riddlebarger is doing where they are saying the New Testament cancels the Old Testament. These guys are way too slick for that. They are finding a middle ground position between the two camps—already, not yet. There is a spiritual reign of David's throne now, but a future reign later. When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament it adds a layer of truth that the Old Testament writers never knew—complementary hermeneutics.

This is an abandonment of traditional interpretive principles. Milton Terry writes:

"A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture."³⁰

Is that not the truth? Traditional hermeneutics, which is the view I represented this church, is that texts only mean one thing. When James quotes Amos, he is not changing the meaning at all. He is applying it, not changing the meaning. These guys

²⁹ Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 392–93.

³⁰ Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947), 205.

are saying that James added a layer of truth that Amos never saw. Riddlebarger is saying that James' use of Amos cancels what Amos originally meant.

What we are saying is that when James quoted Amos he was maintaining the integrity of the context of Amos, but he was reasoning from the future back to the present. Do you see the differences?

Bernard Ramm rightfully states:

"But here we must remember the old adage: 'Interpretation is one, application is many.'"³¹

Texts mean one thing; they always mean one thing. You can apply it in many different ways, but the meaning is stable and it means only one thing. When James quotes Amos, he is not changing what Amos said, he is applying it.

"This means there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study. But a given text or a given passage may speak to a number of problems or issues. Five or six different kinds of sermons could be preached from the text, 'You must be born again' (John 3:7). What application the preacher makes of the text is determined by the purposes of the sermon. But the preacher must always distinguish between the initial primary meaning of the text from the particular application he makes with it."³²

As a preacher, I believe texts mean one thing. I can apply them all kinds of different ways, but I am not changing the meaning. These guys are changing the meaning. Robert Thomas correctly says, concerning this new movement called Progressive Dispensationalism:

"Blaising and Bock...interpret Babylon in Revelation 17-18 as representing Rome and Rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates, and in addition, in 'the sweep of history' it could refer to any city since the world empire's center is always shifting."³³

"Hey, progressive dispensationalists, what is your interpretation of Revelation 17-18? What do you believe about that? Do you believe the literal view that it is literal Babylon?" "Yes, we believe that, but it could also be Rome. It could also be Jerusalem. It could be San Francisco, it could be Las Vegas, it could be Washington, D.C., it could be Mecca and Medina." Do you see what they are doing here? They are removing us from the hermeneutical principle that meaning is one and stable.

³¹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 113.

³² Ibid.

³³ Robert Thomas, *"Evangelical Hermeneutics,"* 362.

If the apostles are adding layers of meaning that the Old Testament writers never saw, how could the Bereans have tested Paul? Think about that for a minute. Acts 17:11 says:

"Now these [Bereans] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so" (Acts 17:11).

The Bereans would hear Paul preach, and they would say, "Not so fast. Does what he is saying line up with what we already know?" If Paul is adding these layers of truth that the Old Testament writers could not have foreseen, nor did they give, how in the world can the Bereans test Paul? You cannot test him because he is giving a higher meaning.

The church at Ephesus was commended for putting the apostles to the test (Revelation 2:2).

"But examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

How could they ever do that with apostolic teaching if the apostles are adding layers of meaning that the Old Testament writers did not see? That is my best shot at giving you, as Paul Harvey used to say, "the other side of the story." The correct understanding is that when James quotes Amos he is not changing Amos at all. He is saying, "In the Millennium that is coming, the Gentiles are going to be full-fledged citizens, so let us let them into the church now."

He is not arguing that we are in the Davidic reign now. He is not using the New Testament to cancel the original intent of the Old Testament. He is not adding this complimentary layer that Amos could not have foreseen. If you were in a normal church, we would have been finished with this chapter by now, but since this is a hot issue, I wanted to bring you up to speed on that. I hope that helps a little bit.