***The Age of the Kingdom, No. 6

DS12A***

We have been making a comparison between the two primary views of interpreting Scripture. One is called the premillennial view and the other is called the amillennial view. Sometimes people think that this is simply a debate on how to interpret Revelation 20 which speaks about a 1,000-year reign of Christ here upon the earth. You don't want to make that mistake. Premillennialism is far more important than that because it actually affects the entire interpretation of all the Scriptures. If you are a premillennialist, the Word of God will come out meaning one thing. If you are an amillennialist, it will come out meaning something else. So it isn't something that is simply a debate upon a place that happens to deal with prophecy.

If someone were to come up to you now and say, "What is the big difference between a premillennialist and an amillennialist," what would you say? The thing you should say is that the big difference is that premillennialist takes a literal interpretation, and the amillennialist follows a spiritualizing method of interpretation and dealing with Scripture. That is the point of primary difference between these two positions. The non-literal method is used by the amillennialist because they begin with the idea that God is finished with the Jews; and, that God is not going to give the Jews the golden age which was promised them in the Old Testament Scriptures, and which they never had. So in order to get rid of all that mass of Old Testament Scripture that promises and describes this age, the amillennialist in desperation says that the Bible doesn't always have to be interpreted according to the meaning of the words--at least not in prophecy.

Now there are three main millennial views that we have presented. One is the postmillennial view which is now pretty well dead. The amillennial view, which is one of the primary views, is that there is no millennium at all. Then there is the premillennial view which believes that Jesus Christ is actually going to come to this earth and be its ruling King, its universal sovereign, of all nations for a 1,000-year period here on this earth. We showed you what records we have of the people who were the students and the disciples of the apostles themselves and of the people that they taught. These are called the church fathers. These fathers who left written records, every one of them in the first century, indicated that the view that he held of these two views was the premillennial view.

I think that's very important to understand. We want to go back and say, "Well, what did the people who talked to the apostles believe on this?" What they understood and what they taught was what we call premillennialism today. They called it chiliasm which comes from the Greek word for 1,000. It was their same word, identical in meaning, to what we call premillennialism.

I'd like to look briefly now at the second century; that is, what happened from the year 100 A.D. to the year 199 A.D. This gets us well away from the last apostle, John. We'll just briefly mention several names. We have records concerning these men and what they believed. That's why they're important to us.

**Pothinus**

Number one is a man named Pothinus. He lived from 87 A.D. to 177 A.D. He pastored two churches: one at Lyons; and, one in Vienne. These churches were premillennial in doctrine. He was followed in these pastorates by another church father named Irenaeus. Irenaeus confirmed in his writing that both of these churches, when he took them over, he found the congregation to be premillennial in their viewpoint. Pothinus taught that there was a resurrection which takes place before the millennium. Now that is pure premillennialism.

The premillennialist says that a resurrection takes place; then 1,000 years go by; and, then there is a second resurrection. There is a first resurrection and a second resurrection. In between is the reign of Christ. The first resurrection is believers only. The second resurrection is unbelievers only. The amillennialist says, "No, there is no resurrection before the millennium. There is only one resurrection that comes after the millennium, and at that point, believers and unbelievers are all raised." So when Pothinus taught his congregations that the resurrection came before the 1,000 years, that was a clear indication that he was a premillennialist--living from 87 A.D. to 177 A.D.

**Justin Martyr**

A second man is Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr lived from 100 A.D. to 168 A.D. Justin Martyr has left us a considerable record, and I'd like to read part of what he wrote concerning this issue of what Christians believed in his day--right there at the start of the early part of the second century--what they believed concerning this issue of the millennium.

He says: "But I, and whatsoever Christians are orthodox in all things, do know that there will be a resurrection of the flesh and 1,000 years in the city of Jerusalem: built; adorned; and, enlarged according as Ezekiel, Isaiah, and other prophets have promised. For Isaiah said of this 1,000 years (Isaiah 65:17), 'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. And the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind, but be glad and rejoice in those which I create. For, behold, I create Jerusalem to triumph, and my people to rejoice,' and so on. Moreover, a certain man among us whose name is John, being one of the twelve apostles of Christ, in that Revelation which was shown to him, prophesied that those who believe in our Christ shall fulfill 1,000 years at Jerusalem. And after that, the general, and in a word, the everlasting resurrection and last judgment of all together. Whereof also our Lord spoke when he said that 'Therein, they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal with the angels, being made the sons of the resurrection of God.'"

Please notice certain things about this statement that we read from Justin Martyr. The first thing is that he has a definite premillennial character in the things that he has said. Premillennialism, he says, was the testing point of what was orthodox. He says it in so many words: "All those of us who were orthodox were premillennialists." Period. There was no discussion about the matter. Furthermore, Justin Martyr also indicates that there are going to be two resurrections with 1,000 years in between. Now you couldn't express anything more premillennial than that. Obviously, no postmillennialist would have said a thing like that, and no amillennialist would have said a thing like that. There is no doubt that Justin Martyr was a cold-blooded premillennialist.

**Melito**

Number three is a man name Melito who lived from 100 A.D. to 170 A.D. He was bishop of Sardis, one of the churches to which the seven letters in the book of the Revelation was written. Fragments of his writings have come down to us. In those writings, there is a definite premillennial viewpoint. Nobody questions it and nobody doubts. All accept that his view was premillennialism.

**Hegisippus**

Number four is Hegisippus who lived from 130 A.D. to one 190 A.D. He is called "an advocate of sensual chiliasm" by the historian Neander. The historian Neander was not sympathetic to the premillennial. As he would research what was left from the writings of this man, he came across the writings of Hegisippus, and he found that this man was very distinctly premillennial. When he describes him as having "a very sensual chiliasm," he means that he actually talked about Jesus Christ being on this earth; the Lord ruling from a throne; the governments of this world being controlled by the Lord; perfect peace; perfect righteousness; a fantastic world order; and, so on. He considered that very sensual. It bothers the amillennialists to think of Jesus Christ having a spiritual kingdom on the face of the planet earth.

**Tatian**

Number five is a man named Tatian who lived from 130 A.D. to 190 A.D. Tatian was a disciple of Justin Martyr. He was instructed by him and by the premillennial views that Justin Martyr so clearly held. Tatian clearly reflects those same views.

**Irenaeus**

Then came Irenaeus who lived from 140 A.D. to 202 A.D. Irenaeus was born and educated in Asia Minor under the ministry of two premillennials that we learned about last time who were in the 1st century, Polycarp and Papias--these who had direct contact with the apostle John. Irenaeus was instructed by them. His views are premillennial.

**Tertullian**

Tertullian lived from 150 A.D. to 220 A.D. Tertullian is regarded by all as premillennial.

**Hippolytus**

Hippolytus lived form 160 A.D. to 240 A.D. Hippolytus was a follower of Irenaeus. Irenaeus was as a premillennial because of instruction by Polycarp and Papias. Hippolytus reflects the same concept of premillennialism, and he fixed the end of the dispensation of grace at 500 A.D., which of course did not come to fruition. Most of these men didn't try to set dates.

**Apollinaris**

Then there was another man, Apollinaris. Apollinaris lived from 150 A.D. to 200 A.D. He is conceded to be a premillennial.

These are the major church fathers within the segment of time from 100 A.D. to 199 A.D., about in that area. We would put them in the second century. There is not one voice of opposition to premillennialism, thus premillennialism was the standard viewpoint of the church up to the year 200 A.D. In general, through the whole first century and through the second century, there was a solid premillennialism. That's important. It's embarrassing and it's uncomfortable to the amillennials. Why is there such entire unanimity among all these writers on premillennialism?

If you were to ask some of the amillennial scholars, one of the amillennial scholars would answer you this way: He would say, "There was no debate on the millennium in the first two centuries, and therefore that shows that everybody favored amillennial." Now how he comes to that, I don't know. But there it is, right in the book. You can read it for yourself. He says that there was no debate on the issue of the millennium in the first two centuries, and that proves that everybody was amillennial. Do you know what it really shows? What it really shows--the reason there was no discussion about the millennium and every one of them indicates premillennial--it just shows that premillennialism was everywhere accepted. Nobody ever thought about being anything but a premillennial. The few kooks around who may have come up with a different idea were not entertained very seriously.

**Cyprian**

Now we come to the third century, and we mention, first of all, a man named Cyprian who lived from 200 A.D. to 258 A.D. He was admired and imitated by the premillennial Tertullian. He was regarded as defending the millenarian faith with candor and with moderation. In other words, the historians look at his writing and say, "This fellow is a premillennial."

**Commodian**

Commodian lived from 200 A.D. to 270 A.D. He is regarded as a definite premillennial. Again, Neanderthal, the historian, in his writing the general church history, censures this man for teaching a gross chiliasm. He was very clearly a premillennial.

**Nepos**

Then we come to this man Nepos who lived from 230 A.D. to 280 A.D. Nepos was an outstanding defender of the premillennial position in his day. Among all historians, there is absolutely no dispute that this man was premillennial.

The idea of amillennialism began in the city of Alexandria, as we shall see in a moment, under the direction of men who began moving away from the literal interpretation of Scripture. Nepos strongly attacked the Alexandrian school of thought which was being promoted at the end of the second century, and in the third century, this view is beginning to come into force--the amillennial view. Nepos was a man who gave them considerable difficulty. He was an adept debater. He was a knowledgeable man in Scripture, and he gave the men who were attempting to interpret Scripture by spiritualizing the words a really hard time. There is no doubt in anybody's mind that he was a clear-cut premillennial.

**Coracion**

Then there was Coracion who lived form 230 A.D. to 280 A.D. He is classed as being in the same category as Nepos, and therefore a clear premillennial.

**Victorinus**

Those Victorinus who lived from 240 A.D. to 303 A.D. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, calls Victorinus a premillennialist. He's listed as being sympathetic also to the position of Nepos who was clear-cut premillennial.

**Methodius**

Another man is Methodius who lived from 250 A.D. to 311 A.D. He is conceded by historians to be a premillennial.

**Lactantius**

Also, Lactantius lived from 240 A.D. to 330 A.D. Jerome, the same German who translated the Latin Vulgate, made fun of Lactantius because of his premillennial views. The historians describe Lactantius as "a zealous chiliast."

**Amillennialism**

During the third century, we still have solid pretty millennial instruction and solid premillennial beliefs. However, all of a sudden, on the scene now begin to appear opponents of the premillennial viewpoint. Do you see what has happened? This has gone for about two-and-a-half centuries. For the first two-and-a-half centuries, there was not a whisper of the amillennial view. Then it begins to suddenly arise.

**Caius**

One man was named Caius, or sometimes called Gaius. He wrote at the beginning of the third century. We don't have his writings but we have what other people said he believed. The people who are reporting to us were strongly anti-premillennials. So we may not be sure that they are truly reporting what Gaius thought. However, in any case, we will classify him as an opponent of premillennialism.

**Clement of Alexandria**

Here was the man who was the real bugaboo: Clement of Alexandria. Clement was a forceful teacher in the school at Alexandria from 193 A.D. to 220 A.D. He had a fantastic ministry as a teacher. He was a powerful influence against the premillennial point of view. He was the man who taught those who came later who formed the Roman Catholic Church viewpoint concerning the millennial question. As you know, the Roman Catholic Church is amillennial. It was Clement of Alexandria that set that viewpoint into motion, particularly with the people he taught.

Clement of Alexandria was a philosopher. He was of the Platonic school. The Platonic philosophy abhorred anything that was temporal; material, or, spatial. Plato would say, "Everything that is material is dirty. I won't have anything do with it." Therefore, Plato was always looking heavenward. He was always looking out there to the ideas. He had an idealism. Clement of Alexandria had that frame of reference. Therefore, you can imagine as Clement of Alexandria, steeped in the Platonic philosophy of idealism, when he started studying the concept of premillennialism; Jesus Christ sitting upon a throne of David ruling from the city of Jerusalem; all nations looking to the city of Jerusalem for instruction in God; all over the world, peace and safety and instant justice; a kingdom of righteousness, joy, and absolute material prosperity every place in the world; and, no shortages of anything needed. He shook his head and said, "That's terrible. We have to get rid of that view. That can't be what God means."

**Origen**

So he began the concept of taking the words of the Bible and saying, "You know, the trouble is that the secret is underneath the words. What the Bible says in these prophetic areas is not what it means. The spiritual truth is underneath, and that's where you have to look for it." Well, one of the people who took this to heart was one of his students, a fellow named Origen who lived from 185 A.D. to 254 A.D. Origen carried what his teacher, Clement of Alexandria, taught him. Origen carried it to its logical conclusion. He spiritualized everything, including the resurrection. Even the amillennials today won't do that. An amillennial today will make it very clear to you that he only wants to move away from literal interpretation in prophecy, but for the rest of the Bible, he wants to be straight literal.

Well, Origen was very consistent. He was like the liberals today and he allegorized everything. He hated premillennialism with a vengeance. He popularized the non-literal approach to Scripture.

**Dionysius**

Another man was Dionysius who lived from 190 A.D. to 265 A.D. He was bishop of Alexandria, and he was in public controversy with the premillennial, Nepos, the man that we spoke of earlier. Nepos and Dionysus carried on extensive public debate and controversy over the question of the millennium and of the premillennial view particularly. Many Christians were won over by the views of Nepos. Churches which had been under the influence of Dionysius tore away from him, and they went with Nepos and the premillennial view. This was even while this school was coming into great power and wide sympathy. Yet, there were believers who, by and large, would not buy the amillennial point of view. Consequently, they simply turned their back upon it.

Let me read you a summary of what we have been saying. George N. H. Peters, in his book The Theocratic Kingdom, has made a declaration in summary concerning the views of the millennium during these first centuries. Here's what he said:

"Now let the student carefully weigh this historical record, and he will see that the church history indubitably seals our faith as the general prevailing belief for the most that can possibly be said respecting the opposition (that is, amillennialism) is that in the closing years of the second century, men arose who started an antagonism distinctively presented and urged in the third century, and which culminated in the fourth and succeeding century. Hence, our proposition is abundantly confirmed by the doctrinal status of the early church. Indeed it is if our line of argument, respecting the apostolic belief remaining unchanged concerning the kingdom, is conclusive, it is the very position that the church, in its introduction, must occupy. How illogical and non-scriptural, therefore, for men to strive to weaken the testimony of those fathers, and to apologize in their behalf by making them ignorant, superstitious, sensual, and so on; thus tracing the church established by inspired men and their selected successors through ignorant superstitious and central believers; until the learned, enlightened and spiritual Clement, Caius, Origen, and Dionysius arose and brought light which the consciousness of the church appreciated."

He's getting a little sarcastic. He's saying that here were the apostles, and the apostles were so ignorant that they delivered their information to a bunch of dummies who went off on all of these weird notions about Christ ruling on this earth, and that's where all this was invented. However, when Clement of Alexandria came along, and Origen and Caius and Dionysius, these men of great enlightenment, then we got back to what the Lord Jesus Christ had taught. Well, history does not bear that out, nor does history bear out that these men whose names I read to you here were ignorant men, but were indeed students of the Word and substantial scholars in their day.

**Daniel Whitby**

Another writer, Daniel Whitby, who lived in the 17th century, wrote in a book called A Treatise of Traditions this summary on the millennium that I'd like to read to you also. I think it sort of puts it all together. He says, "The doctrine of the millennium, or the reign of saints on earth for 1,000 years, is now rejected by all Roman Catholics and by the greatest part of Protestants. And yet it passed among the best Christians for 250 years for a tradition apostolical. And as such, as delivered by many fathers of the second and third century who speak of it as the tradition of our Lord and His apostles and of all the ancients who lived before them, who tell us the very words in which it was delivered, the Scriptures which were then so interpreted, and say that was held by all Christians that were exactly orthodox.

"It was received not only in the eastern parts of the church, by Papias in Phrygia and Justin in Palestine, but by Irenaeus in Gaul, Nepos in Egypt, Apollinaris and Methodius in the west and south, Cyprian and Victorinus in Germany, and Tertullian in Africa, and Lactantius in Italy, ... and by the Council of Nicaea about A.D. 323. Even in his treatise on the millennium in which he endeavors to set aside the ancient faith by his substitution of a new hypothesis, he acknowledges, according to Justin and Irenaeus, that there were three sorts of men: One, the heretics, denying the resurrection of the flesh and the millennium; two, the exactly orthodox asserting both the resurrection and the kingdom of Christ on earth; and three, the believers who consented with the just and yet endeavored to allegorize and turn into a metaphor all those Scriptures produced for a proper reign of Christ, and who had sentiments rather agreeing with those heretics who denied, than those exactly orthodox who maintained this reign of Christ on earth."

So again, we have a declaration by the historians that we cannot debate the fact that the early Christians believed the premillennial view; and, that the early leaders when they got up and taught those congregations, they taught premillennialism. What the amillennials say is that for 250 years everybody was deceived, until the Alexandrian school straightened them out.

Well, what happened after the third century is that the Emperor Constantine purportedly became a Christian. The church was then recognized, and henceforth patronized by the Roman Empire. While Christians were under persecution and under attack, the premillennial view was generally held. This was very easy to be a premillennial when your life was in danger of the fang of a lion. The Christians who held the premillennial view naturally were looking forward to the Lord's return and to the setting up of the kingdom of Christ upon this earth. If there's anything those early Christians looked forward to, it was getting the Roman Empire off the control of the earth and putting Christ in place of it. So it was very natural for them to hold the premillennial view.

However, once the church became dominant and prosperous, the leaders of the church gradually began looking out upon the situation that had arisen. Suddenly, the idea began permeating the religious leaders that, "We must have made a mistake. Look how prosperous the church is. We, who are the bishops, have actually become princes here in the kingdom of God upon this earth." Gradually the idea took hold, "We made a mistake. God is not going to have a kingdom in the future. The kingdom of the millennium is right now. And guess what: we are the royalty." Thus began the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church of clergy in various stages separated from the laity down below. It all began because the church decided it had already entered the millennium.

Consequently, they began to look at a world which was going to be conquered by the church, and things were going to get better. In the fourth century, the universal premillennial view, held by the apostles and held for 250 years, began rapidly to be discarded and abandoned, and to be replaced by the amillennial viewpoint. The Roman Catholic Church turned against premillennialism, and when the reformers came along, they did nothing to restore it.

Now there are a lot of problems in churches which have come down the Reformation line today. There was a time when you could scoff at God having any future for the Jews. That's tough to do today. There was a time when you could scoff at the idea that science and technology were not going to improve life for us. That is really hard to do. Every time somebody has to sit in line at a gas station to get gas (or has their hard drive destroyed by a virus), that is really hard to accept that technology is constantly going to make life better and better for us. Actually our technology is gradually running us into the ground. This is one of the greatest indications of the approach of the return of Jesus Christ. The world is coming to a place where it just cannot go on. It cannot even survive except in some jungle-like condition which certain historians believe is exactly where it's going to go back to.

**Augustine**

The Roman Catholic Church went solidly against premillennialism. It did this under the influence of one of the church doctors named Augustine. He lived from 354 A.D to 430 A.D. Augustine said, "We are in the millennium now." Augustine said, "Satan is bound now." Augustine attacked premillennialism as a sensual idea of pleasure. Augustine said the first resurrection meant your spiritual birth at salvation. Augustine said that the church is ultimately going to triumph over the world, and things are going to get better. Just to appreciate Augustine, you have to remember that over the centuries, here was the situation. You came along, and you had the apostle Paul. Paul, of all the apostles, was the primary apostle of revelation concerning church truth. Then, centuries went by, and the Reformation came along, and you came along to a man named Martin Luther. Martin Luther was, again, another high point in the theological experience of the world. First there was Paul, and then ultimately, down the line, was Luther.

However, in between there was another high point of consolidation of Bible doctrine viewpoint, and that was this man Augustine. Augustine was actually in between Paul and Luther as the crystallizer of divine viewpoint. These three men were used fantastically by God to consolidate the views of Scripture. Many marvelous insights of the Word of God were given us through the study and the capacities and the gifts of Augustine. However, when it came to the millennium, Augustine missed the boat completely. Consequently, he came up with a study (a viewpoint) that was contrary to the Word of God. He did it because, again, due to his platonic influence and so on, he didn't like the idea of a material spiritual kingdom.

When Luther and the other reformers who followed Luther came along, they were faced with the Roman Catholic Church which was telling people that you get to heaven according to a series of sacraments. The church was telling people that they could please God by crossing themselves; by sprinkling holy water; by attending church on sacred days; and, by doing all of the things that had once been taught in the Babylonian cult religion which were now transferred under the dress of Christianity right into the local Christian assembly. In that condition, superstition ran rampant, and the Middle Ages were not only dark, but they were a jungle.

Now along comes Luther and the reformers, and you have to try to convey yourself back there to that ignorance to realize what these men had to recover of truth. It was all there in the Word, but nobody knew it anymore. Nobody knew the Word of God. Nobody was around to instruct people. Naturally, they were going to fight out the things that first needed to be dealt with, which was the doctrine of salvation; the person of Christ; and, so on. However, when it came to prophecy (eschatology), they didn't explore that. They saw nothing wrong with what the Roman Catholic Church had been teaching, so they just picked that up and that's what they accepted as reformation theology.

Now here's what's happening in churches which have descended from the Reformation. Many of them are in considerable trouble today. Their people read a book like Hal Lindsey's books about Satan and about the earth, and they read things that they and their denominations have never heard. They begin to look at this and say, "What is this that we're reading here? Are you serious that people actually believe this? Is this really what's in the Bible?" They begin reading these Scriptures, and they go back to their pastors. Their pastors, who come out of these great denominations which came out of the Reformation, are in a tough way. They're going back to Augustine's point of view. Whereas, the premillennials today (like us at Berean Memorial Church) are going back to the doctrinal instruction that was delivered to us through the apostle Paul. People in the denominational churches descended from the Reformation are finding today that their theology does not fit the scene of the world today and where the world is moving. Pastors who are in those churches are under fire by their own congregations because people are beginning to suspect that there is something more which they have not been told. And the worst thing about it, they suspect that their pastor doesn't know it either.

So the reformers gave little time to the study of prophecy. You can't really say they rejected biblical premillennialism. All you can say about Luther and Calvin and Zwingli that they were ignorant of it. They didn't rejected; they just didn't know about it. All they knew was what the Roman Church had taught them, and that's what they accepted.

Well, Augustine came along, and Augustine said that the millennium is here on earth. When he lived, he said that we've used up 400 years of the 1,000 years. Then, of course, as the centuries went by, the amillennials said, "We have to change that. Augustine must have been wrong about the millennium being on earth, so they just took it and said, "What he meant to say was, 'It's in heaven--all the joys and happiness of heaven.' So the millennium is in heaven, and that removes the problem of the 1,000 years." That's what amillennials believe today.

The reason that amillennialism is so popular is because, in most Christian denominations, you need that flexibility. The liberals need a great deal of flexibility. Amillennialism enables them to believe anything they want to believe. Roman Catholicism needs that flexibility. Certain conservative Christians who are amillennial also want to have that kind of flexibility. So the amillennials today generally do not debate the issue of the millennium.

Also, please remember that if you believe in premillennialism, you have to believe in dispensations. Do you understand that? If you believe that the sun is going to rise, you have to believe it's going to get light too. If you believe that the sun is going to set, you also have to believe that it's going to get dark. So don't go around saying, "The sun is going to set here at 8:45 tonight. I wonder if it's going to get dark out." And when it rises in the morning, you needn't wonder if it's going to get light. That's the idiocy of it. The amillennials are trying to divide us. Those of us who are in the premillennial camp--the amillennials are trying to divide us. Do you know how they're doing it? They're saying, "Well, we don't really object to premillennialism, but that dispensation isn't good. That's terrible. And that's what we don't like. We don't like that dispensationalism, but premillennialism is OK. However, that's as idiotic as saying the sun is going to set, and it's not going to get dark. That's because premillennialism is part of the package of dispensationalism. We are talking about one "dispensation" in which Christ is going to come before any other "dispensation."

So, the amillennials today generally don't deal on Scripture with the premillennial question. They just try to do it mainly by ridicule. However, the doctrine of premillennialism was lost for many centuries until it was again recovered after the Reformation. The doctrine of premillennialism was not recovered in the reformation. This came subsequent in Bible study movements hardly over 100 years ago. Do you understand that? Hardly over 100 years ago, premillennialism was rediscovered again as the result of movements which began in Europe of returning to the study of the Word of God. As people began studying the Word of God, out of this they realized there was a different view of Scripture than that which the church commonly held. I'm happy to say that premillennialism produces the best Bible expositors in the world. Premillennialism presents the sharpest pastor-teachers you can find anywhere. This is not because of the individuals, but because the system is the key to opening Scripture. That's the point.

Premillennialism is the key that opens the Scripture. Amillennialism is the key that keeps a great deal of the Scriptures in the dark. It's the key that will not unlock the riches of doctrine to the believer today. It is a very crucial issue. Also, premillennial churches have sent out the greatest onslaught of missionaries around the world. Premillennial churches have produced the most influential evangelists. The premillennials come through every time.

One of the attacks that I should mention here is that dispensationalism is a new thing. The reason I say that is because only a little over 100 years ago did we recover this truth about the millennium. So they say, "Oh, dispensationalism is a new thing. However, dispensationalism is part of premillennialism, and we have seen already from the very first (from the time of Christ on), premillennialism was on the scene. Actually, dispensationalism and premillennialism, which is an expression of dispensationalism, is older than the amillennial view. We thank God that we have a key--the key that opens doctrine to us. Without it, much of Scripture would be lost to us as it was to millions of people who live in those unfortunate centuries of the Dark Ages under the Roman Catholic domination.

**Ultra-Dispensationalism**

I hate to teach you bad words, but I have to teach you one now. One of the dirty words against us as dispensationalists is the addition of the word "ultra," resulting in the term ultra-dispensationalism. Ultra-dispensationalism began with the writings of a man named Ethelbert Bullinger. He lived from 1837 to 1913. He was an ordained Anglican clergyman in the Church of England. He was educated at King's College in London. He wrote 77 books, and he was a fantastic scholar. He edited a magazine called *Things to Come*, and he was an accomplished musician. However, he taught some very heretical doctrines. He believed that the soul is extinguished between death and resurrection (soul sleep). He was really silent on the doctrine of the condition of the lost in eternity. Those who were his pupils drew some conclusions on the basis of what he taught them, and his pupils were very often annihilists. Their answer to what happens to people who are lost in eternity is that God wipes them out of existence. This is just like Jehovah's Witnesses teach today.

Bullinger divided the church age into two dispensations. Here's the issue. We have the departure of Christ and the return of Christ, and the church age is in between the two. We say that this forms one dispensation. From Pentecost to the Rapture is the dispensation of the church. Bullinger came along and said, "No, there are two dispensations. There are two eras of the church. One is the Jewish church, secondly is the gentile church." So, according to Bullinger, we have the Jewish church and the Gentile church. Now that's what ultra-dispensationalism basically is. In the process of this, the teachings of Bullinger had some effects concerning several other doctrines.

There are two types of ultra-dispensationalists. One is the very extreme. Let's look at that first. It takes the book of Acts, and it divides the book of Acts into three portions. In Acts 1-9, the extreme dispensationalist will say, "This is the kingdom being re-offered to Israel." First of all, make sure that you understand that when Jesus Christ came, He actually came to take over the world. I found somebody last week who was amazed at that, and came and asked me if that's what I really said. That's what I really said. Jesus Christ came to take over the world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He came to fulfill the Davidic Covenant. Period. The reason He didn't fulfill it is because the nation rejected Him, and thus God postponed the fulfillment of those covenants.

Now, Bullinger properly recognized that that was true. The extreme ultra-dispensationalists say that the first nine chapters of the book of Acts was giving Israel a second shot at that kingdom, and they rejected it again. Then they say that Acts 10 through Acts 28:27 was a period of Jew and gentile opportunity. Then beginning with Acts 28:28, the apostle Paul turns away from the Jews, and the nation of Israel is rejected, and the gentile church begins. Some of the extreme ultra-dispensationalists believe in annihilation. Some believe in universal reconciliation--that everybody's going to be saved. They believe that only the prison epistles apply to the Christians. They believe that churches should only study four books of the Bible: Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; and, Philemon. These are the four epistles which Paul wrote during his first imprisonment.

Then there is the moderate ultra-dispensationalist. He's not quite so bad. They have sponsored a group known as the Berean Bible Society. They are now known generally as the Grace Gospel Fellowship or the Worldwide Grace Testimony. Some of their outstanding leaders, and these again in Chicago, were Cornelius R. Stam, J.C. O'Hair, and Charles F. Baker. I used to hear them on the radio as a teenager. They have a magazine called the *Berean Searchlight*. Some of you may have seen that. They have a school in Grand Rapids, Michigan called Grace Bible College.

They hold that the church did not begin on Pentecost. One of the things that all ultra-dispensationalists believe is that the church did not begin on Pentecost. That's one of their primary errors. They believe rather that it began after Acts 2. One of the moderate groups says it began in Acts 9, and another one says it began in Acts 13. They will observe the Lord's Supper, but they will not observe water baptism. The extreme ultra-dispensationalist won't observe either one of the ordinances. They believe it is Jewish. They say that the Great Commission does not apply to Christians, but it applies to the Jewish church. They say that there is a difference between Paul's earlier and later ministry. They say the church is not the bride of Christ, but Israel is Christ's bride. The moderate ultra-dispensationalist will study more than the four prison epistles of Paul, but they still will only study the epistles of Paul.

So here's the difference. Ultimately, what is the difference between us, as dispensationalists, and ultra-dispensationalists? It is the fact that we have a difference of opinion on when the church began. We hold that it began on the day of Pentecost. They hold that that was the Jewish church that began on Pentecost, but the Gentile church began later. The gentiles indeed did come into the church later, and we're not going to go into the doctrinal analysis of this. I just want you to be acquainted with it. Even Dallas Seminary sometimes is called the ultra-dispensational school. People who are ignorant and don't understand these things have accused us of being ultra-dispensationalist at Dallas, and we're not. They just don't understand what the term "ultra" means, but it does sound awfully bad. For anybody to be an "ultra," that's an extremist, so that's why they use it.

What is an ultra-dispensationalist? Well, basically he thinks there is more than one dispensation between Pentecost and the rapture. He thinks there are at least two, and some of them think there are four. Some of the opponents say, "Well, we don't care what you say. If you're a dispensationalists, you just haven't gone to the logical conclusions, and if you did, you would be an ultra-dispensationalist. That's not true, but it is again one of those desperate attempts of the amillennials to defend their situation.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1970

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