

Sunday, November 4, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 78
Rightly Dividing E.W. Bullinger: The Emergence of Acts 28ism, Part 3

Introduction/Review

- In the previous lesson we tried to demonstrate how EWB’s dispensational views changed between 1898 and 1907 when he published *How to Enjoy the Bible*. Moreover, we tried to prove the assertion that these changes in Bullinger’s thinking were precipitated by his friendship with Sir Robert Anderson. We concluded Lesson 77 by considering the following point:
 - As of 1907, Acts 28ism is in an embryonic state. Many of the ingredients are present but they have not yet fully germinated. Neither Dr. Bullinger nor Sir Robert Anderson, as of 1907, has formally suggested that Paul’s epistles need to be divided into two distinct groups. In 1908, during a conversation between Dr. E.W. Bullinger and Mr. Charles Welch the embryo of Acts 28ism will be fully fertilized by Welch’s suggestion that Paul’s epistles need to be divided between those written before and after Acts 28. Once this suggestion is embraced and applied, the Acts 28 position emerges from its embryonic state into full bloom. The decision to divide Paul’s epistles into two groups is the *sine qua non* of Acts 28 dispensationalism.
- In this lesson we want to consider EWB’s decision to produce and publish the *Companion Bible* as well as his fateful 1908 conversation with Charles Welch. The goal of this lesson is to demonstrate how Welch’s suggestion that the Pauline Epistles should be divided led to the full flowering of Acts 28 dispensationalism.

The Emergence of the Acts 28 View, Continued

The Companion Bible

- *Things to Come* had carried Bullinger’s work farther afield than any of his other publications. Its readers had spread throughout Europe and reached as far as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Africa. It was Mr. William Barron of Gisborne, New Zealand, a devoted reader of *Things to Come*, who first suggested the concept of *The Companion Bible* to Dr. Bullinger. Mr. Barron had been introduced to *Things to Come* early in the century and shortly afterward had begun a correspondence with Dr. Bullinger. During a trip to England in 1907, Barron went to see him in London. (Carey, 175) Barron would later recount his conversation with Dr. Bullinger:
 - “Five years ago (in 1907), I went home to see my mother and relation and also Dr. Bullinger with whom I had been corresponding for six or eight years. This proved to be the beginning of the “The Companion Bible.” For three years previous to this, I had been writing and trying to show forth the need of such a work, in which he could bring forth all that the Lord had been pleased to give him. Until we met we could not understand how this could be done apart from a new translation (which no doubt would have been excellent) but which never could have taken the place of the A.V. amongst the Common

people. “The Companion Bible” will be the gathering together of all his great labors, and the growing part of all his works while it will bring much glory to God even our Father and much help to his dear ignorant and misguided people. (quoted in Carey, 175-176)

- “With Barron’s promise of financial support, Bullinger set to work immediately, characteristically undaunted by the immense task before him—the compilation of a lifetime of biblical study. Beginning with the word studies that had been the genesis of the *Lexicon and Concordance* in the late 1860s, the new bible would also contain Bullinger’s research on figures of speech, Old and New Testament chronology, the spiritual significance of numbers, the stars, weights and measures, meaning of proper names, definition of terms, historical records, and explanations of Eastern manners and customs. Contemporary biblical scholarship, including Ginsburg’s *Massoretico-Critical Text of the Hebrew Bible* for the Old Testament and for the New Testament, and textual critics such as Griesback, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Trengelles, and Alford would be cited. Places where the biblical text had been altered by the translators were to be noted, as well as recent archaeological discoveries in Assyria, Egypt, and Palestine.” (Carey, 176)
- “Bullinger decided upon a system of marginal notes wherein the reader could have the explanation side by side with the text. Items of particular importance or difficulty requiring more space were to become separate appendixes. Two special innovations in *The Companion Bible* were the extensive use of the information in the Massorah, never before present in any text of the Authorized Version, and the first systematic attempt to indicate and analyze structure.” (Carey, 176-177)
- EWB was careful to explain why he had chosen the name *The Companion Bible*:
 - “It is called THE COMPANION BIBLE because its wide margin is intended to be a Companion to the Text; and the whole is designed as the Companion of all readers to the Bible. . .

To the same end, this BIBLE is not associated with the name of any man; so that its usefulness may neither be influenced nor limited by any such consideration; but that it may commend itself, on its own merits, to the whole English-speaking race.

It is NOT A NEW translation

It is NOT AN AMENDED translation

It is NOT A COMMENTARY (Bullinger, v)

- “Bullinger did not want his name associated with his new project because he did not mean it to be printed on the title page of the Bible. He wanted to avoid *The Companion Bible* even becoming known as “Bullinger’s Bible.” He was content, he said, to let the crowning achievement of his life’s labors stand on its own merits.” (Carey, 177)
- “It is interesting to note, that in choosing the format for the Bible, Bullinger went counter to the third rule of the Trinitarian Bible Society’s “Laws and Regulations,” which stated that the Society

would circulate only Holy Scriptures without note of comment. The regulation prevented the Society ever acquiring the copyrights or being able to use their own channels for its distribution. Nevertheless, the Society would eventually profit from future sales of *The Companion Bible* because of the terms of Bullinger's will." (Carey, 178)

- "Anxious to get the bible into print quickly, Bullinger decided to issue it in four parts with each volume priced as inexpensively as possible. Mr. Henry Frowde, a well-known publisher connected with Oxford University Press, agreed to publish the Bible." (Carey, 178)
- *The Companion Bible* was added to Bullinger's already full schedule with already included obligations to both *Things to Come* and the Trinitarian Bible Society. These activities forced the then seventy year old EWB to be at his desk and working by 4:00 am in order to fulfill his obligations. Bullinger was forced to limit his correspondence to only that which was absolutely necessary. This was the situation in Bullinger's life when he first met Charles Welch in late 1908. (Carey, 178)

1908 Conversation with Charles Welch

- "Charles Welch was born on April 25, 1880, in Bermondsey, London, in the shadow of Mary Magdalene Church, the site of Ethelbert Bullinger's first curacy twenty years before. . . One day in November 1900, while Charles was walking in London, someone handed him an announcement about a forthcoming meeting on "Skeptics and the Bible." Curious, he went to the gathering. For the first time in his life, he came across people who actually believed that Scriptures were true. The following night, Romans 10:9 was taught and he confessed Jesus as Lord in his life. The skeptic had become a believer." (Carey, 179)
- According to Mr. Welch's autobiography, in March 1904, after scoring highly on a test following a series of lectures by Rev. James Neil on "The figurative language of Scripture," Welch was appointed the General Secretary to the Bible Training College. During this time Welch commenced an active period of Bible study and teaching, combined with open-air testimony among the Jewish population of London. By December 1906, Welch had begun participating in a Bible study at the home of Mr. F.P. Brininger which placed Welch on a doctrinal collision course with the Bible Training College. On September 25, 1907, Welch terminated all his connections with the Bible Training College. (Welch, 75-76)
- While Welch was still with the Bible Training College, the school changed its focus from being a "training college" to seeking to reestablish the "primitive church" founded on the principles of "the Sermon on the Mount" and Acts 1 and 2, according to Welch. At the same time, Welch was involved in a series of studies on the book of Ephesians during which he came to understand that the church of this dispensation was not built upon the "Sermon on the Mount" or Acts 1 and 2. It was at this point that Welch's dispensational ideas began to blossom. (Welch, 75)
- Welch seems to indicate that he first became aware of the writings of E.W. Bullinger when he was ministering to the Jewish population of London in late 1906, "A lady of the meeting had

passed on to one or two fellow members a few copies of *Things to Come* edited by Dr. Bullinger.” (Welch, 69) Regarding the Bible Training Colleges’ opinion of EWB, Welch writes,

- “In the early publications connected with the Bible Training College, the writings of Dr. E.W. Bullinger were reviewed, quoted and advertised, but as the ‘primitive church’ idea prevailed, Dr. Bullinger’s name was dropped, and finally any mention of his works forbidden. I was definitely assured that Dr Bullinger was as bad as, if not worse than, a higher critic because he ‘cut up’ the Word of God!” (75)
- After separating from the Bible Training College in September 1907, Welch drafted a letter to the leadership of the school in early 1908. While it appears that Welch never sent the letter, it is included in his autobiography as evidence of his dispensational beliefs in early 1908. Regarding this letter Welch states, “. . . the general lines of Dispensational Truth were perceived, and which were seen more clearly when complete freedom was attained. . . This letter was written when I was not quite twenty eight.” (Welch, 76-77) Space will not permit us to quote the entire letter; however, we have included those portions below that are most significant to our purpose.
 - “. . . In the movement of 1840, the blessed truth of the standing and calling of the Church was re-discovered, and for a time J.N.D. and those with him saw the distinction and emphasized it, but made some unwise and far-fetched statements. B.W.N. saw the tendency and went to the other extreme and practically denied the peculiar element that characterizes the epistle of Paul*. What do we really find? Malachi is not the end of inspired Jewish history, neither is Matthew. Inspired Jewish history reaches to the last chapter of the Acts, there the nation of Israel is recognized as such, blessing is promised to them upon repentance, and Gentiles blessed through them. . . That gospel teaches that Christ came as the Messiah. His opening proclamation is concerning the kingdom. He gave its laws, and He was, as king, rejected. After His ascension the final testimony was given to Israel accompanied by signs and wonders. Every accompaniment of Pentecost was Millennial, the preaching was purposely addressed to Israel, and the promise was made of the return of the Lord upon their repentance. It seemed to me an ominous evidence of the power of one’s own opinion which led you to give public utterance to the idea that Peter made a mistake in Acts 1 and 3. In Acts 3, Peter was but following out the principle expressed in the parable of the Nobleman who had gone into a far country to receive a kingdom and return. The final rejection of Israel and the use of Isaiah 6 in Acts 28 is crucial. . . If you will compare the epistle to the Ephesians with the epistles written before Acts 28 you will see a noteworthy difference. For example, the Jew is personally addressed in Romans and occupies a considerable space in that epistle (chapters 2 to 4; 9 to 11). In chapter 11 it is definitely taught that Gentile blessing is through the Jew, and the associations, with the hope as set out in Romans 15 are Millennial. So in 1 Corinthians the gifts were a witness to Israel, they are called in Hebrews the powers of the age to come. . . The dividing line which affects us is Acts 28. . . From Acts 2 to 28 gifts, assemblies and the position of Israel - all were prophetic of and foreshadowing the Millennium. After Acts 28 it is the New Creation that is foreshadowed.” (Welch, 78-80)

- Welch’s autobiography also makes reference to a “penny note book” which contained his “earliest indication of the way in which truth was sought and discovered.” The first page contains notes on “the Mysteries of Scripture and their connection with Israel.” On page two the following notations can be found, “Inspired history ends at Acts 28” and “Acts 28 the turning point. Before Acts 28 and after.” Later in the notes there is another significant entry that reads “Acts 28 and the epistles on earth side.” Welch calls this notation “epoch-making” so far as the witness of *The Berean Expositor* is concerned. Regarding these notations Mr. Welch writes, “These were the themes, with which this new quest for truth opened.” (Welch, 89)
- According to Welch’s testimony, he first reached out to Dr. Bullinger toward the end of 1908. Regarding this initial contact, Welch states,
 - “Toward the end of 1908 I felt moved to write to Dr. Bullinger. I had seen a copy of *Things to Come* while still acting as Secretary to the Bible Training College, and although I had been warned against the Doctor’s ‘heretical’ teaching, much that I read struck a familiar chord. After an interval, I again saw an issue of *Things to Come* and was amazed to see an article which I could have duplicated from my own notes. Evidently I thought, whoever wrote that article had moved along similar lines to myself, and so, with some trepidation I plucked up courage to write to the Doctor, asking him for an opportunity to see him and talk over one or two important points in which I felt bound to differ from his findings.

One of the points raised in the letter reads:

“Are we not liable to be using transitional things if we do not discriminate in epistles like Corinthians and Romans - truth tempered to suit the time when the Jew was a factor to be reckoned with, but not so now?” (Welch, 92)

- Welch reports that, “After some delay, the Doctor granted me an interview at the offices of the Trinitarian Bible Society, Bury Street, London, and that hour’s interview proved to be the most critical turning point in my life and ministry. The Doctor invited me to say what was troubling me, and I feared that, after all, he would smile indulgently, pat me on the shoulder and tell me to go home and forget all about it. Again I plucked up courage and here is a transcript of our conversation.
 - Welch—From your writings Doctor, I believe I am right in saying that you do not believe ‘The Church’ began at Pentecost, but rather, that the Dispensational Boundary must be drawn at Acts 28?
 - Bullinger—That is so. I have made that quite clear.
 - Welch—Well, what seems to me to stultify the position you have taken regarding Acts 28 is that you nevertheless treat the whole of Paul’s epistles as one group, starting with Romans, ending with Thessalonians, with Ephesians somewhere in the centre.

To my amazement and joy, the Doctor looked at me for a moment, then slapping his thigh with his hand said:

- Bullinger—That scraps half the books I have written. But we want the Truth, and the Truth is there in what you have said. (Welch, 92)
- Before proceeding further with this conversation it is important to notice the following points: first, Bullinger acknowledges that Welch had understood him properly that the dispensational boundary should be drawn in Acts 28; second, prior to this exchange, Bullinger had not considered dividing Paul’s Epistles written before Acts 28 with those written after. The *Grace History Project* believes that at this exact moment the Acts 28 position is born. What makes Acts 28ism is its division of Paul’s epistles into two different groups.
- Reflecting back upon these events in 1908, Welch recollects and writes, “I felt that here was indeed ‘grace’. Dr. Bullinger was a man of world repute, a scholar and an elder. I was a young man of twenty-eight years and unknown. We spent the remainder of our brief interview in considering the dispensational implications that arise from observing the relation of Paul’s epistles to the boundary line of Acts 28 thus:

Epistles Before	Acts 28	Epistles After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Galatians • Ephesians • 1 Thessalonians • 2 Thessalonians • Hebrews • 1 Corinthians • 2 Corinthians • Romans 	<p>Dispensational Boundary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephesians • Philippians • Colossians • Philemon • 1 Timothy • Titus • 2 Timothy (Welch, 93)

- The *Grace History Project* believes that at this point EWB made a critical mistake. Bullinger went along with Welch’s division of the Epistles rather than choose to rethink and redraw his dispensational boundary line. All Bullinger would have had to do is retreat back to his earlier dispensational teachings in *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed* (1895) or *The Church Epistles* (1898). By embracing Welch’s suggested division of Paul’s Epistles, more problems were created than solved. Being the elder statesmen in this case, Bullinger should have exercised more caution. It seems that Bullinger may have been overwhelmed in trying to juggle *The Companion Bible*, *Things to Come*, his secretary duties for the Trinitarian Bible Society, and his domestic responsible. In essence, what EWB did is turn over his editor duties for *Things to Come* to a man he hardly knew.
- According to Welch, before their conversation closed, Bullinger asked Welch to begin writing for *Things to Come*.
 - “I will now let you into a secret. I am just commencing what I feel sure will be my last work *The Companion Bible*. I have prayed that someone be sent along to relieve me of some of the pages in *Things to Come*. You’re the man.” (Welch, 93)
- Welch recounts that upon first being asked by Dr. Bullinger to write for *Things to Come* he was hesitant and only complied at the Dr.’s persistence.

- “At first I demurred. I felt that the standard set by the articles in *Things to Come* was above my attainment and I was also rather intimidated as I visualized the caliber of its readers. At the time, when I was to all intents a pagan, many of the readers of *Things to Come* were advanced Christians. However, the Doctor persuaded me that the call was of the Lord, and so in March 1909 there appeared an article entitled ‘The Unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3).’ (Welch, 93)
- In April of 1909, Welch began writing a series of articles for *Things to Come* titled “Dispensational Expositions.” This series would continue to appear in *Things to Come* until the magazine ended in 1915. Meanwhile, in February 1909, Welch started his own magazine titled *The Berean Expositor*. The first page of the first number of *The Berean Expositor* opens with the following headline:

Acts 28:17-31

IT’S BEARING UPON THE PRESENT DISPENSATION

An introductory study to prepare the way for future expositions on vital dispensational subjects

Conclusion

- From this point forward (late 1908) Dr. Bullinger fully embraced, supported, and propogated Acts 28ism. This will be clearly seen in our next lesson when we consider the last book EWB penned before his death in 1913, *The Foundation of Dispensational Truth*.

Works Cited

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