

Sunday, November 11, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 79
Rightly Dividing E.W. Bullinger: The Emergence of Acts 28ism, Part 4

The Companion Bible is Released in Sections

- “With Bowker’s and Welch’s assistance, Dr. Bullinger was able to proceed swiftly on *The Companion Bible*. By the end of 1909, *Part I, The Pentateuch*, with fifty-two appendices, was released. It caused a considerable stir among Christian circles and prompted reviews, many of them enthusiastic, in leading publications.” (Carey, 181) Individuals interested in reading the initial reviews of *The Companion Bible* are encouraged to consult pages 181-183 of Juanita Carey’s biography of Bullinger. Carey reports that despite a smattering of negative reviews, *Part I* of *The Companion Bible* sold many copies and was widely distributed. (Carey, 183)
- “*Part II, Joshua to Job*, became available in September, 1910. It was issued with the following notice:
 - In compliance with several requests, it has been decided to issue the Old Testament in four parts instead of three. As many have expressed the desire to have the Psalms at an early date, arrangements have been made to issue the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon (with their Appendices) as Part III, and the Prophets as Part IV.” (quoted in Carey, 184)
- In July 1911, *The Companion Bible, Part III, Psalms to Song of Solomon*, was issued. By autumn of the same year, EWB sent *The “Great Cloud of Witnesses”* to the printer for publication. The book was a compilation of his articles on Hebrews 11 that had originally appeared in *Things to Come*. (Carey, 190)

Bullinger Fully Endorses the Acts 28 Position

- “In the autumn of 1911, Dr. Bullinger also wrote a short editorial in *Things to Come* to clarify one of his newer scriptural positions: the dividing of the Pauline Epistles with respect to Acts 28:28. Bullinger had been reworking the question of the canonical versus chronological order for the Epistles since his meeting with Charles Welch in 1908. He began teaching his findings early in 1911 at Trinitarian Bible Society meetings.”
- In October, Bullinger wrote:
 - “We have had several letters from our readers asking questions concerning difficulties which they have met in connection with the dividing of the word of truth at Acts 28... We must not forget that difficulties must need arise in cutting the tether of traditions in which we have all been so long bound and tied. Some are almost afraid to use their liberty so newly found; others are in danger of using it too freely. Some stand still for fear of moving in the wrong direction; others go forward stumbling, for fear of standing still... This being so, we propose, in our Editorials commencing next month, to examine the very FOUNDATIONS of Dispensational Truth; and endeavor to place them so truly,

and fix them so firmly that, once we are well grounded in them, we may build upon them with such certainty that our difficulties will be removed, and our readers will find themselves in a position to answer all their own questions as they may afterwards arise. What we ask for now, therefore, is *patience*. Let us hold all questions as to this or that *particular* difficulty in abeyance until we are grounded in the great general principle. We are not “directors of the conscience,” but “ministers of the Word,” and our desire is, so to minister it as to leave individual readers to direct their own consciences by the Word.” (quoted in Carey, 192-192)

- Reading between the lines, it is clear that a portion of Bullinger’s readership were not buying the new dispensational position being espoused in *Things to Come* after 1908. The fact that Bullinger took it upon himself to explain this, despite Welch’s involvement in the publication, speaks also to the skeptical nature with which Welch was received by the readership of *Things to Come*.

The Lord Hath Spoken: The Foundations of Dispensational Truth (1911-1913)

- The editorial in question first appeared in *Things to Come* in 1911 under the title of *The Lord Hath Spoken: The Foundations of Dispensational Truth*, and continued for the next two years. This series of articles was not collated and published in a single volume titled, *The Foundations of Dispensational Truth* until Truth for Today Bible Fellowship did it in 1993. (Carey, 244)
- Even a cursory study of *The Foundations of Dispensational Truth* erases any doubt as to whether or not Dr. Bullinger ever fully embraced the Acts 28 position before his death. This work represents a full scale departure from the doctor’s earlier writings. The work fully endorses Acts 28 dispensationalism from start to finish. Since the volume consists of 287 pages, time and space will not permit an exhaustive analysis of the entire work, however, we will consider enough of the book’s key points to establish that it is an Acts 28 document throughout.
- Structurally, the first half of the book is organized around Hebrews 1:1-2. The second half of the book focuses on the Acts of the Apostles. See the copy of the Contents page for a more complete breakdown of the books structure.
- In Chapter IV, titled “By Them That Heard Him,” Bullinger shares some preliminary thoughts regarding the book of Acts and the fallacious nature of the Acts 2 position.
 - “It follows, therefore, that in the Acts of the Apostles, the twelve were not commissioned to form or found a church, but to repeat the call of Jesus Christ to repent; to confirm His proclamation as to His person; and to re-offer the King and the kingdom on the one condition of national repentance. . . (regarding Peter’s Pentecostal address EWB states) There is no founding of a church in all this. There was no beginning of a church on that “Day of Pentecost.” Language is useless for the purpose of revelation if such language can be so interpreted. . . Again we ask, Where is the founding of a church in all this (as Rome teaches)? Where is the “church beginning at Pentecost” as some others teach? Such teaching has blinded the minds of thousands and made it next to impossible for any

to arrive at a clear understanding of what God has written for our learning. This has become “a tradition of the elders” which has made the New Testament of none effect, as surely as the teaching of the Pharisees had made the Old Testament (Matt. 24:3, 9).” (35)

- On these points the mid-Acts view is in one hundred percent agreement with the Acts 28 view. No new church or dispensation began in Acts 2; rather you have the continuation of the Apostles ministry that began in the Gospels.
- Bullinger views Peter’s message in Acts 3:19-21 as indicative of and governing the entire period covered by the book of Acts. In other words, Israel could have repented all the way up until Acts 28. Moreover, EWB also teaches that Paul was proclaiming the same message to the Jews that Peter was in Acts 3 until he arrived in Rome in Acts 28.
 - “This re-proclamation to repent, and this repetition of the promise of the sending of Messiah as the direct consequence, was carried throughout the whole of the Acts of the Apostles by Peter and the twelve in the land and elsewhere; and by Paul and others in the synagogues of the dispersion, until it was brought to a head in Rome, where “many” of “the chief of the Jews,” on a day being appointed, agreed not among themselves (Acts 28:17-25). Then it became the apostle Paul’s special and solemn duty to repeat once more, and for the third and last time, the solemn pronouncement of judicial blindness, first spoken through the prophet Isaiah (6:9-10). (35-36)
- In Chapter VIII on “The Pauline Epistles” EWB states the following regarding how Paul’s Epistles should be viewed with respect to the book of Acts.
 - “When we come to the Epistles of Paul, we have to treat them chronologically, and to divide them into two categories—earlier and later. The earlier series was written before Acts 28 and the later written after the formal rejection of the proclamation of the offer of the King and Kingdom by Peter and the twelve during the Dispensation covered by the Acts of the Apostles. . . During the whole of the Acts of the Apostles, all testimony centered around Israel and Israel’s earthly blessings. The olive tree was still standing. Some branches had been broken off, and the Gentile branches were being grafted in. But now that the olive tree has been cut down, into what are we Gentile believers to be grafted?” (81-84)
- Chapter VIII also includes EWB’s chronological breakdown of Paul’s Epistles with respect to Acts 28. Please see Appendix A to view a comparison between Bullinger’s paradigm in 1911 with that of Welch’s in the first edition of *The Berean Expositor* in 1909. A comparison of the two paradigms reveals that they are virtually identical.
- With respect to Paul’s commission, EWB states in Chapter VIII that Paul was continuing the testimony of the twelve apostles, thereby indicating that there was nothing unique or distinct about Paul’s ministry during the book of Acts.

- “The whole of Paul’s commission is only gradually revealed. It was probably announced to Paul at one and the same time, but revealed to others only in due time, according as the purposes of God were developed. Not till nearly the close of the first part of Paul’s ministry do we learn all that was said in Acts 9, so that we must not mix up with the first part, that which related to the second part, in connection with the great secret (or the Mystery). His full commission is made known to us only in the later and supplementary accounts recorded in Acts 22:12-21 and 26:12-20, as he approaches the dividing line. In Acts 9, the time had not yet come for making known anything related to the later ministry; and until it did, he joined his testimony to that of the twelve. . . (Regarding the establishment of the church in Thessalonica EWB goes on the write) here we learn, therefore, how Paul confirmed the teaching of the twelve, and did not go beyond it. On this teaching, the assembly in Thessalonica was based, and in it they were nurtured. . . While Paul thus “became as a Jew to the Jews,” joining with the twelve in confirming the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and conveying Peter’s proclamation of the kingdom throughout the synagogues of the dispersion, we may be sure that his testimony in no wise clashed with that of the twelve . . . If he had heard, or knew, anything of the “great secret” (the Mystery) before the close of the Acts, this is certain: he had not committed it to writing; nor did he receive any commission to do so until after Acts 28. . . If Paul knew anything personally about the Mystery before Acts 28 he could hardly have made it known, even to individuals, without entirely upsetting their Dispensational standing.” (87-92)
- In Chapter IX, EWB contradicts clear statements made by Christ in Luke 13:6-9. In the Parable of the Fig Tree, Christ asks that Israel be given one more year before the tree is cut down. One year is precisely the amount of time between the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 (Israel is dunged, i.e., fertilized) and the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. Ignoring these clear statements of Christ, EWB speaks of a period of forty years of probation for Israel.
 - “Another forty years of probation for Israel was given between the Crucifixion of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem—a period which was nearly covered by the Dispensation of the Acts of the Apostles. It must be evident to all who will give their attention to the great dominating fact of Peter’s proclamation following immediately on Pentecost, that the whole of that Dispensation was unique. It had one purpose, one subject, one object, one testimony, given by one special class of witnesses, and by no others. All is summed up in Acts 3:19-26 . . . (Speaking of I Thessalonians) This was the first written Scripture of that Dispensation after the proclamation of Peter in Acts 3:19-26. All besides I Thessalonians was oral. Unless we are to believe that God was really mocking His people Israel, that He had no intention of fulfilling His promise to “send Jesus Christ” and “restore all things,” and fulfill all prophecies, we must believe that His first written Scripture which followed that proclamation would necessarily have had special reference to it. . . (commenting on I Thess. 4:13-18) Paul was here confirming what the Lord had said in Matt. 24. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days” (which would have taken place within those forty years of probation covered by the Acts of the Apostles, the wonders in heaven and on earth would have been seen, as already

foretold by Joel (2:30-31), which Peter declared to be “that” which was signified and portended on the Day of Pentecost). . .” (93-99)

- Still commenting on I Thessalonians 4:13-18 in Chapter IX, EWB sees this passage as referring to Israel, not the body of Christ. In short, this passage is not viewed as referring to the rapture, catching away of the church, but is applied to Israel.
 - “. . . He (Paul) was not speaking of the Church or revealing the Mystery, but he was revealing a further fact concerning resurrection. . . It is we who have robbed Israel of the promise of I Thessalonians; and as is often and proverbially the case, there is the usual disagreement over stolen property. . . We need not rob Israel of its postponed hope. For instead of being “caught away into the air” (I Thess. 4:17), we have the glorious promise of a “calling on high” (Phil. 3:14). Instead of raising “the dead in Christ” (I Thess. 4:16), we have the promise of “an out-resurrection from among the dead” (Phil. 3:11). And yet because “the hope of Israel” is in abeyance, some of us fancy that we have lost something! Surely we can afford to leave their hope, (quotes Phil. 3:14). Our hope now “in Christ” means much more for us than I Thess. 4 did for Israel then. We also are waiting for God’s Son; our *polituema* (or seat of government) [already] exists in the heavens (quotes Phil. 3:21). This is our “blessed hope.” May the Lord speedily bring it to pass!” (98-106)
- In his comments on II Thessalonians in Chapter X, Bullinger views the Thessalonians as living during the time period described by Christ in Matthew 24.
 - “The tribulation had not set in, but troubles were increasing on all hands for those who “received the word” (Acts 2:41, I Thess. 2:13). “The beginning of the birth-pangs” of the tribulation were being felt, as the Lord had foretold (Matt. 24:9). . . “But he who endures to the end, he shall be saved.” The Thessalonian believers were beginning to experience the truth of these words. So much so, that the apostles were falsely reported to have said or written that “the day of the lord had actually set in” (II Thess. 2:2). This was the immediate reason why Paul wrote this second Epistle to these Thessalonian receivers of the word.” (107-108)
- We have already seen that EWB does not think that I Thessalonians 4 applies to the body of Christ. Yet in Chapter X, the good doctor hedges with respect to the pattern of events laid out in I Thessalonians 4. Despite seeing the hope of the Church in Philippians 3, he writes that I Thessalonians sets the pattern for the events discussed in Philippians 3.
 - “We can quite understand, and fully sympathize with, those who, like others, have spoken or written on I Thessalonians 4 as being the great character of our hope of the Lord’s coming (EWB did in *The Mystery*, pages 36-38). But we ought to thankfully relinquish it when we find we have a better hope; which we can enjoy all the more because we need not report ourselves with having robbed Israel of their hope, which is only postponed, and will yet have a wondrous and literal fulfillment for them. It may,

after all, be *the pattern* of our hope, as presented in Phil. 3:11, 14. The realization of our hope may be framed on the same model as theirs. The order of the two events may well be the very same—*First*, our “out-resurrection” (*exanastasis*) corresponding with their resurrection (*anastasis*), and *second*, our “calling on high,” corresponding with their being “caught up.” What do we lose? Is it not a gain? And a glorious gain? All we have to do is to make a restitution of stolen property, to give up what we have taken, and rejoice in what is really our own by *a special gift* from our Savior, for Whom we look.” (112)

- In Chapter XII, EWB presents his thoughts on the book of I Corinthians. In his comments on Chapter 15 verse 51, Bullinger argues that this verse has nothing to with the church in this dispensation.
 - “We are concerned with I Cor. 15, and with showing that what is revealed in that chapter, though it makes known a great deal of precious truth connected with revelation, yet does not go beyond I Thess. 4. It explains that which had been kept a “secret” by God till then (I Cor. 15:51). He says, “Behold I tell you a secret; we all shall not fall asleep (in death), but we all shall be changed,” etc. That would be a resurrection from among the dead. But our point now is that neither of these was the out-resurrection out from among the dead. That was still a secret, a further secret which was not made known till afterwards in Phil. 3:11. The one in I Cor. 15:12, 13, 21, 42 is *anastasis nekron*, or *ton nedron*, the resurrection of the dead. The other in Phil. 3:11 is THE EX-*anastasis ten ek nekron*, THE OUT-RESURRECTION (one) OUT from among the dead. The latter was not revealed till after the close of the Dispensation of the Acts of the Apostles, but was kept secret until it was made known in the new Dispensation of the Mystery. It is connected with and related to our prize, which is our CALLING ON HIGH, or the heaven-ward call of Phil. 3:14. This wondrous truth is still a secret to thousands because it has been hidden from all readers of the Authorized Version. There, the *adverb* “ON HIGH” is translated as though it were an adjective, “HIGH,” as though merely qualifying the nature of the calling. Whereas the *adverb* has to do with describing the *direction*, or manner, of the calling.” (128)
- Not only does EWB resort to correcting the text of the AV to make his case Chapter XII but the chapter is also notable for what it not discussed. Bullinger says nothing about I Corinthians 2:7-8 nor does he comment on I Corinthians 12:12-13. One must ask themselves why would that be. Both of these passages present problems for the Acts 28 position. I Corinthians 2:7-8 clearly states that Paul was speaking the wisdom of God in a mystery during the Acts period, a point that is not consistent with Acts 28 dispensationalism. Moreover, I Corinthians 12:12-13 discusses the formation of the body of Christ by spiritual baptism. This is a problem for Acts 28ism because it clearly demonstrates that the body of Christ was already being formed before the close of the Acts period. The result is a problem that the Acts 28 position has never adequately been answered; if their paradigm is correct there was more than one body of Christ.

- Chapter XV brings EWB's explanation of the book of Romans with respect to the dispensational boundary being drawn in Acts 28. Bullinger says there are two great points to remember when considering the book of Romans.
 - "That being the last of the earlier Pauline Epistles, it was nearer to the close of the Dispensation covered by the Acts of the Apostles; and consequently, that as it was written before Acts 28:25-26, we may expect to find in it some special references to the *Dispensational changes that were drawing near.*"
 - That being one of the earlier Epistles, we must expect to find the same references in Romans as to the special *facts which characterized that then present Dispensation*, as we find in those Epistles.
- If Dr. Bullinger were alive today the *Grace History Project* would like to ask him, "Does the book of Romans tip God's hand with respect to the revelation of the mystery? Does it deal with the "present dispensation (Pentecostal Dispensation)," or does it contain "special references" to impending dispensational changes that were not revealed till after the close of the Acts period? The doctor cannot have it both ways and remain consistent.
- In his comments on Romans 11, EWB insists on speaking in the present tense with regard to the passage, when it is clear from Romans 11:11-12 that Israel has already fallen. In other words, before Paul writes the book of Romans, in Acts 20 Israel has already fallen. Once again instead of acknowledging the plain meaning of verses 11 and 12 Bullinger tried to have it both ways. His explanation has Paul making reference to an impending dispensational change that is supposed to have been a secret until after Acts 28.
 - "All these are references to the then impending change of Dispensation. There is nothing here of the doctrine of the Prison Epistles which treat of, and unfold "the glory of God's grace," and reveal the fullness of the secret which "from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God (Eph. 3:9)."

Romans, being one of the earlier Epistles of Paul, partakes therefore of the dispensational character of the Acts of the Apostles, so far as the standing of Jew and Gentile before God is concerned. But it has also the same reference to Dispensational change (which was conditioned by the repentance of Israel) as we find in all the other Pauline Epistles which were written during that dispensation. And being nearer than any of them to the coming crisis, we may expect to find still more definite reference to it." (148)

- In an attempt to escape the clearly destructive nature of Romans 9, 10, and 11 to his paradigm, Bullinger goes so far as to suggested that perhaps these chapters were added along with the "postscript (Rom. 16:25-26)" five years later after Paul arrived at Rome. This is nothing less than serious hedging for which there is no Scriptural proof.

- “There are other phenomena connected with this Epistle, and its special relation to the Prison Epistles. For example, the question as to the date when it was completed and issued by the apostle in its final form. The remarkable postscript (16:25-27) was added at least five years after the Epistles was commenced in A.D. 58 (how does he know?). This postscript, as we have more than once pointed out (not in his earlier writings), refers to the double ministry of the apostle—(I) the gospel of the grace of God, which had been promised before in the writings of the prophets; and (II) the ministry of the Mystery of Christ and the Church, which was not the subject of promise, but was made known to the apostle by direct revelation from GOD, as set forth in Ephesians.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 form a remarkable section, and are of the nature of an appendix. If these chapters were added by Paul as late as the postscript, their connection with Acts 28:28 would be very apparent. Chronologically, therefore, Romans is connected both with the earlier and later Epistles; and its deep spiritual teaching is the true foundation for the later Epistles, as we have often seen.” (157-158)

Works Cited

Bullinger, E.W. *The Foundation of Dispensational Truth*. Decatur, MI: Invictus (Truth For Today Bible Fellowship), 1993.

Carey, Juanita S. *E.W. Bullinger: A Biography*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000.

Appendix A

Comparison between Bullinger's breakdown of the Pauline Epistles With Respect to Acts 28 with that of
Charles Welch

Bullinger's Paradigm as presented on page 86 of *The Foundation of Dispensational Truth*

- I Thessalonians, A.D. 52, Corinth
- II Thessalonians, A.D. 53, Corinth
- I Corinthians, A.D. 57, Ephesus (Spring)
- II Corinthians, A.D. 57, Ephesus (Autumn)
- Galatians, A.D. 57, Corinth (Winter)
- Romans A.D. 58, Corinth (Spring)

○ ACTS 28:25, 29, A.D. 62

- Ephesians, A.D. 62 (Spring) From Prison in Rome
- Colossians, A.D. 62 (Spring) From Prison in Rome
- Philippians, A.D. 62 (Autumn) From Prison in Rome
- I Timothy, A.D. 67 Corinth
- Titus, A.D. 67, Corinth
- II Timothy, A.D. 68, Rome (Prison)

Welch's Paradigm as presented in the Volume 1 of *The Berean Expositor* page 83

- I Thessalonians A.D. 52
- II Thessalonians A.D. 53
- I Corinthians A.D. 57
- II Corinthians A.D. 57
- Galatians A.D. 57
- Romans A.D. 58

Pentecostal and Transitional Period. Kingdom truth and preparatory teaching by Paul for the impending change.

○ ACTS 28:25-27 A.D. 62 THE DISPENSATIONAL BOUNDARY

- Ephesians A.D. 62 Prison
- Colossians A.D. 62 Prison
- Philippians A.D. 62 Prison
- I Timothy A.D. 67 Prison
- Titus A.D. 67
- II Timothy A.D. 68 Prison

The dispensation of the Mystery—Standard truth for the time.