

Sunday, May 13, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 67 When Was the Mystery no Longer a Mystery? Advancements in Pauline Truth 1870-1900, Part 3

Things to Come: A Journal of Biblical Literature, 1894-1895

- The first issue of *Things to Come: A Journal of Bible Literature with Special Reference to Prophetic Truth* was first published in July 1894. The goal of the monthly periodical was to be the special organ of the prophetic Bible conference movement in Great Britain. According to the first issue, “It is clear that just as other Conferences and Subjects have their own organ, so these Conferences need, and should have their own special organ. The promoters are unable to use any existing journal, and feel strongly that such an organ ought not to be the private property of any individual, however excellent. . . its property and its editorship under a Trust, so that the maintenance of fundamental truth may not be jeopardized. . . The doctrines connected with the Lord’s coming are as liable to perversion as any others in Scripture. Hence our need of guarding, as far as we can, against any possible departure.” (Vol. 1:1)
- According to E.W. Bullinger’s chief biographer, Juanita S. Carey, the monthly publication of *Things to Come* engaged the efforts of Bullinger from the publication of the first issue in 1894 until his death in June 1913. “His own writings were printed in its pages before they were printed elsewhere; many of his books appeared there in serialized form. The columns “Signs of the Times” and “The Editors’ Table” became barometers of his concerns, prejudices, and views on current issues. The twenty-one volumes (nineteen edited during his lifetime and two published posthumously) of *Things to Come* are today the richest source of information on Bullinger.” (Carey, 111)
- “*Things to Come* was founded under a trust, with Sir Robert Anderson, Rev. Sholto Douglas, James E. Mathieson, and Dr. Bullinger as trustee. Bullinger was also editor in chief of the publication.” (Carey, 111-112)
- Due to the constraints of time, money, and accessibility the *Grace History Project* has only been able to conduct a doctrinal analysis of the first two volumes (July, 1894 to June, 1895; and July, 1895 to June 1896) of *Things to Come* at this time. Despite this limited sample, it is quite clear that Pauline Dispensationalism was a key theme of the periodical since its inception in 1894.
- The following summary of our analysis is but further proof that mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism was known, in print, and being widely disseminated before the year 1900.
- The magazine’s first article in the inaugural issue titled, “Things to Come” shows a clear understanding of the mystery as a unique Pauline revelation.
 - “And lastly, if we would know the “things to come” concerning the Church of God, the Body of Christ, we must remember that the Lord Himself expressly said of the Holy Spirit that He would “reveal things to come (John 16:13).” If we do this in obedience to the Lord and the Holy Spirit, we shall not look for, in the Gospels and the Acts, that which is revealed in the Epistles alone, concerning the Church which was the “Mystery,” or the secret hidden in God till revealed in Rom. 16:25, Col. 1:26, Eph. 3:1-10. Nor shall we so mix up the Epistles, the Gospels, and the Prophets as to confuse instead of edifying the children of God, as many do who darken counsel with words without wisdom.

To rightly divide the Word of Truth concerning things to come we must not mix up “things new and old,” “earthly and heavenly,” in hopeless confusion. . .” (Vol. 1:2)

- “The Purpose of the Ages” is the text from a sermon delivered by E.W. Bullinger at a prophetic conference in May, 1894. The August, 1894 issue of *Things to Come* includes the following text for that message.
 - “What are we to do with it then as the word of truth? *To rightly divide it.* The secret of all our differences is found in the fact that we do not rightly divide the Word. In proportion as we rightly divide it we shall learn, and agree in its truth. “Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” What a precious study this is. The praise of men is our great snare, and fear of man is another great snare. God deliver us from both. . . Now this word of truth is occupied with three great subjects. One concerns the Jews, the other concerns the Gentiles, and the third concerns the church of God; and every portion of the word concerns one of these three. Unless we rightly divide the word we are apt to commit robbery. There is already a good deal of robbery in the chapter headings. The blessing which God pronounced upon the Jews and Jerusalem have been robbed in many cases, and given to the church of God; and there is one peculiar thing about this robbery; viz, that the judgments are never stolen in that way. The Judgments of God pronounced over the Jews and Jerusalem are all left to them. We shall never commit such robbery if we rightly divide the word, and interpret of the Jews the scriptures that relate to the Jews. . .

The Jew is baptized by the Holy Ghost into the body of Christ, and thus becomes a member of the church of God. He ceases to be a Jew as to his standing, his hopes, and his destiny. The Gentile is baptized by the Holy Ghost into the body of Christ. He becomes a member of the church of God. He ceases to be a Gentile as to his standing, his hopes, and his destiny. . . That is the secret which was never made known in the Old Testament scriptures; viz, that God was going to save both Jews and Gentiles, and make of the two ONE new body, which he was going to call the church of God. . . That is to say, God is using the church of God now, i.e., the body of Christ, to make known to these principalities and powers in heavenly places—whoever and whatever they may be—in order to unfold to them His own “manifold wisdom.” (Vol. 1:22-23)
- The August 1894 issue also contains the first essay in a series titled, “The Epistle to the Romans: And the False Gospels of To-Day.” Paul’s epistle to the Romans is viewed as being “the most complete exposition of the gospel of the Grace of God in all the inspired writings. . . The epistle to the Romans sets forth the gospel of God’s grace on the basis of justification by faith alone, and to fall away from the truth of this portion of God’s word in our doctrinal teaching or social or ethical systems is to “fall from grace.” (Vol. 1:33)
- In September, 1894 *Things to Come* printed the text from another sermon of Bullinger’s titled, “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth.” Not only does this essay clearly teach that the observed confusion in Christendom stems from a failure to rightly divide the word of truth, it also touches on the mechanics of positional truth for members of the body of Christ.
 - “You have need to do this (rightly divide) with regard to the two natures. The old nature and the new nature, I mean. The old heart and the new heart. The old nature which can never be improved, and the new nature which “is created in righteousness and true

holiness.” The old nature which cannot do right, and the new nature which cannot do wrong. Unless you rightly divide the word of truth with regard to what is said of these two things, you must have error, and confusion, and shame.” (Vol. 1:49)

- The August 1894, issue also contains part two of “The Epistle to the Romans: And the False Gospels of To-Day,” in which Bullinger is completely clear on the fact that the Gospel of the Grace of God was committed to Apostle Paul.
 - “It is essential to remember that the trial of man had come to end when God communicated the Gospel of the Grace of God to the Apostle Paul. He did not receive it through the Twelve Apostles, nor by reading the Four Gospels, for the earliest of them was not written until years afterwards. He received his Gospel by special revelation (Gal. 1:12).

Evangelists who preach only from the Four Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles, altogether ignoring the gospel of the Grace of God as set forth in the Pauline Epistles, apparently forget that the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles describe historically how Christ and His teaching were rejected, and how after His crucifixion and resurrection the testimony of the Holy Spirit was rejected also.

The Four Gospels and the Book of Acts belong to the historical portion of Holy Scripture, and are as integral a part of Jewish history as the Book of the Kings or the writings of the Prophets.

The Gospel of the Grace of God is not found in Matthew, indeed the word “grace” does not occur once in Matthew or in Mark.” (Vol. 1:53)

- December, 1894 saw the publication of a short essay titled, “St. Paul and Prophecy.”
 - “So long as the “mystery” concerning the “body of Christ,” which was the subject of a special revelation to the Apostles St. Paul, is not spiritually understood, the study of prophecy will remain, as at present, a confused and often unedifying theological occupation. . . Not until Christian teachers obediently take the position to which we are called by God’s infinite mercy and wondrous grace in the Pauline Epistles, will their expositions of prophecy be profitable, either for instruction or edification. . . After He (Christ) was rejected, as related in all four Gospels, the special testimony through the Holy Ghost was given, as in the Acts of the Apostles; but the Holy Spirit was resisted, and the offer of forgiveness and restoration of the kingdom was refused. Then came God’s great love and mercy in sending a special gospel of grace and forgiveness to lost man, when every mouth was closed and all the world guilty before God. . . To begin therefore with the four evangelists and the Acts of the Apostles, which belong to the historical portion of Holy Scripture, instead of with God’s specially declared Gospel of His Grace in the Epistles, is to disregard the clearest direction of the Lord Himself, as well as to confuse the Gospel of the Kingdom with the subsequently declared Gospel of the Grace of God. . . No, not until the first eight chapters of the Romans are accepted as God’s present message to a lost world, will it be possible to show men the correct way to divide the Prophetic Word, or to give them a clear outline of Scripture Eschatology.” (Vol. 1:101-102)

- Many other articles on a host of dispensational subjects could be quoted from the first Volume of *Things to Come* alone. Time and space will simply not allow us to share everything of significance. Interested parties are encouraged to seek these writings out for further consideration.
 - “The Rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom: As Related in the Four Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles” (Vol. 1:134-135)
 - “How to Study Prophecy” (Vol. 1:154)
 - “Will the Church, Or Any Part Of It, Go Through the Great Tribulation?” by F.E. Marsh (Vol. 1:183-187)
 - “The Epistle to the Romans” (Vol. 1:211-212)
 - “Divine Healing” by William G. Carr (Vol. 2:52-54)
- The *Grace History Project* is hopeful that in the future we will be able to conduct a systematic dispensational analysis of all 21 Volumes of *Things to Come*. For now, we humbly submit to the above findings as further testimony as to the state of Pauline truth prior to the year 1900. Mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalism was being disseminated worldwide through the distribution of the *Things to Come* journal for many years before the turn of the century.

E.W. Bullinger’s, *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed*, 1895

- The chief contribution of the Second Volume of *Things to Come* was E.W. Bullinger’s *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed*. Originally published as a series of articles for *Things to Come* between September, 1895 and March 1896, this collection of essays was eventually compiled and published as one book. (Vol. 2:41-156; Carey, 237) In *The Mystery*, Bullinger articulates virtually all of the major doctrines of the mid-Acts dispensational position before there year 1900.
- *The Mystery* demonstrates clear doctrinal progression in understanding beyond that of even Holden and Mackintosh. Most importantly, *The Mystery* is soundly mid-Acts in its approach. At this time in his ministry (1895), Bullinger shows no hint of the Acts 28 position that would come to define his later writings.
- For the second paragraph of the introduction, *The Mystery* clearly differentiates between prophecy and mystery.
 - “God’s Gospel concerning His Son Jesus Christ had been promised through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, as we read in Romans 1:1-3, but the Mystery of the Body of Christ had never been revealed, and did not therefore form the subject of Old Testament Prophecy. It was the subject of a special revelation to Apostles, and Prophets, and Saints through Paul, to whom and by whom this Mystery was first announced in mortal ears. It was communicated only to the Saints who had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who had been justified by faith, and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise; only to those whom God, who is rich in mercy, was pleased to make known that which had

hitherto been hidden in Himself, and was never previously revealed unto the sons of men.” (9-10)

- According to Bullinger, the revelation of the mystery was the first truth that Christendom lost sight of as it descended into apostasy.
 - “When Christians left their first love in the earliest days of the history of Christendom, this precious revelation was apparently the first which became obscured and lost sight of. Then the true teaching concerning the Holy Spirit in the Church became less and less clear, especially while the simple foundation of the truth of justification on the principle of faith alone was also being departed from. These precious truths - by the Lord’s longsuffering patience and mercy, have been partially recovered in these last days out of the wonderful treasury of His Word, but never, perhaps, in their pristine freshness and clearness.” (10)
- Bullinger includes in the introduction to *The Mystery*, a brief history of the usage of the Greek word “*musteerion*.”
 - “Thus, it is perfectly clear and certain that the word Mystery, as used in the Scriptures, is simply a secret. But by the end of the second century after Christ the word *musteerion* had acquired an additional use. It was used not only of a secret, but of a secret sign or symbol. In this sense the Greek fathers employed it to denote any such sign, whether of words or actions. They spoke of the offering of Isaac as a *musteerion*, i.e., a sign or symbol of the secret purpose of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ. They also used it interchangeably with the words *tupos*, type; *symbolon*, symbol, and *parabolee*, parable. It has a sense, therefore, similar to these words. . . It is remarkable also that soon after we find the Latin version translating the word mystery (in Eph. 5:32) by the word *sacramentum*, i.e., sacrament. From this it is positive that at that time the word *sacramentum* or sacrament meant merely a secret sign or symbol! It had not then acquired its later theological use; but the word “sacrament” had reference merely to a symbol, or a symbolical act, a secret sign, shewing forth the Lords’ death. . . Thus, in our search for truth, two great errors are, at the outset, corrected: 1) The true meaning of the word Mystery in the Scriptures is not something that cannot be understood, but something kept secret—a secret truth or sign, revealed to those who are initiated; and 2) the theological word Sacrament is not some act of ecclesiastical jugglery, but a simple symbolical act, by which the Lord’s people show forth their Lord’s death.” (12-14)
- In Chapter One titled “The Secret of the Interval,” Bullinger distinguishes between the many secrets contained in Scripture and the one “great secret,” committed to the Apostle Paul. Bullinger views this distinction as the key to understanding how the suffering and glory of 1 Peter 1:10-11 fit together.
 - “There are several secrets which are there spoken of, and there is one that is called the “great secret.” They are all of them connected with the present interval between the first and second Advents of the Lord Jesus. That there was to be an interval at all between the “sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” was not revealed in the Old Testament. The “sufferings” themselves were no secret; neither was the “glory that should follow.” Both were subjects of Old Testament prophecy. Both are there fully and plainly revealed. What is very remarkable about those prophecies is this: that while we have many prophecies of the glory without any reference to the sufferings, we never have

a prophecy of the sufferings without finding, in the immediate context, a reference to the coming glory.” (15)

- In a section titled, “The Secrets of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:11, 35) Bullinger is explicitly clear that the parables describe the course of the kingdom and therefore have nothing to do with the church the body of Christ.
 - “In the Old Testament we have the kingdom prophesied. In the Gospels and Acts we have the kingdom rejected. In the Epistles we have the interval between this rejection; while future setting up of the kingdom in Divine power, judgment, and glory is foreshewn in the Apocalypse.

In the Epistles we have the interval, but chiefly in its relation to the Church. We do not learn in them what was to happen to the kingdom; the secrets concerning this are not there revealed. It is in Matthew 13 that the Lord Jesus, in seven parables, describes the course of the kingdom from the first sowing of its seed by the Son of Man, to the final setting up of the throne of His glory, and this without any reference whatever to the Church.

The Church, as we shall presently see, is not the subject of these parables, being itself another secret, emphatically called “the great secret.” These parables concern the kingdom, and we are clearly told why they were spoken, and what was their subject as well as their object. In verse 10, the disciples came and said unto Him, “Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?” He answered and said unto them, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries” (i.e., of course, the secrets) “of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given,” . . . It is clear, therefore, that we are not to look for the Church in these parables, but that, whatever we may learn from them, we must distinguish between these “secrets of the kingdom” and the “great secret” concerning Christ and the Church.” (19-20)

- Also in Chapter One, in a section titled “The Secret of the *Ecclesia*,” Bullinger plainly states that the “great secret” refers to the “Church which is the Body of Christ, or ‘Christ Mystical.’” After discussing the various uses of the Greek word *Ecclesia*, in the final section of Chapter One “The Great Secret” Bullinger expounds upon the three great passages that formally make known the revelation of the mystery.
 - Colossians 1:24-28—“Here we learn that this secret had never before been made known, and that to make it known was to “fully preach the Word of God.” Hence, today, the Word of God is not “fully preached” unless the Secret be proclaimed.”
 - Romans 16:25-26—“Here observe, that the same secret is referred to as being made known by a special revelation, and as having been kept in eternal silence, not a word having been breathed concerning it before.”
 - Ephesians 3:1-11—“Gentile blessing was no more a secret than Israel’s blessing. The same word that revealed the one, revealed the other also. It is impossible, therefore, for us to believe that the great secret, specially revealed with so much solemnity, and so

formally in the New Testament, referred merely to Gentile blessing, as such. This was not “hid in God;” this was not “hid from ages and from generations;” this was not “kept in silence through times eternal;” it could not be said of this that “in other ages it was not made known.” Language is useless if such expressions can possibly refer to that which was never hidden; never kept in silence; but was “made known” from the earliest times. NO! this was the secret: that a people should be taken out from among both Jews and Gentiles, who should with Christ be made a joint-body in Christ: (Eph. 3:9)—a peculiar ecclesiastical word which occurs only here; it does not mean that there was a body already previously in existence and that others became afterward in due time members of it, a Body of which Christ should be the glorious Head in heaven, and His people—the members of that body on the earth—“one new man.” This was the secret which was revealed to God’s “holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,” and which never entered into the heart or mind of mortal man—Christ Mystical.” (28-29)

- Chapter Two, “The Body of Christ” covers the constitution, growth, and end of the body of Christ. According to Bullinger, the body of Christ is comprised of those who have “reckoned themselves as having died with Christ in His death and resurrection. This is the truth which is bound up with the meaning of “the Body of Christ.”” (Bullinger, 32) Therefore the unity and oneness of the Body springs from the spiritual realities of I Corinthians 12:13. “There is no other way of being “in Christ.” We cannot be in Christ Personal; we can be “in Christ” only by being members of His Mystical Body. Therefore, if we are “in Him”- when He, the Head, died, then we, the members must, in the eternal purpose and judgment of God, have died in Him. When He, the Head, rose again, then we, the members, must be risen in Him. If He, the Head, is in Heaven, then we, the members, are seated in the heavenlies in Him. . . Our aims and mind, and thoughts will be heavenly not earthly. “For ye are dead,” and you are now, as to your standing before God, living in another sphere, and on another plane where all is spiritual. Carnal rules and ordinances do not enter into the growth of the Body at all. All is spiritual, heavenly, and eternal.” (Bullinger, 32-36)
- Bullinger states the following regarding the end of the body in Chapter Two:
 - “The secret of the Body has so far been revealed, as to its place in the purposes of God, as to its constitution, and as to its growth. Now, as to its end, another special revelation is needed, and it is given. It flows naturally from its relation to Christ as shown in Colossians 3. Seeing that the members died jointly in Christ, and rose in Christ, our life is in Christ. Though we may fall asleep, our “life is hid with Christ in God.” Therefore, the next thing is “when Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:3-4). It were impossible to be otherwise, inasmuch as the Head and members cannot be separated. Hence, the secret is revealed in I Corinthians 15:5, “Behold, I show you a Mystery” i.e., “Behold, I tell you a Secret.” What is it? “We shall not all sleep.” What? Not though it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27)? Must we not die? No, blessed be God. It is not necessary! The members of the Body were judged with the Head, and were “crucified with Christ,” and therefore there is no reason why they should ever die at all, and no reason why they should ever come into judgment. They may “fall asleep,” but “not all.” . . . This, then, is the end of Christ Mystical. “The perfect man” is formed; the Body is complete, and when it becomes completed, it is received up in glory!” (Bullinger, 36-38)

Works Cited

Bullinger, E.W. *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed*. 1895.

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

Things to Come Vol. I. July, 1894 through June, 1895.

Things to Come Vol. II. July, 1895 through June, 1896.