THE GOSPELS: TO WHAT "DISPENSATION" DO THEY BELONG? – Chapter 6

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM – With an Examination of DISPENSATIONALISM and the "Scofield Bible"

by Philip Mauro: 1928

I have sought to show in the preceding pages that the Kingdom of God which was the subject of Christ's preaching and teaching is just what all Christians have understood it to be until recent times, that is, a purely spiritual realm; and further that it had not been postponed when His parting words to His disci ples were spoken (Acts 1:3). I do not see how any testimonies as to this could possibly be clearer or stronger than those we have cited from all the four Gospels; or how, in the light of our Lord's own words, there can be any question that the long accepted Christian doctrine as to the true Israel and as to the Kingdom foretold by tile prophets, is founded squarely upon Christ's own teaching. Yet the "Scofield Bible" as serts (in its "Introduction to the Gospels") that the long accepted views of Christ's followers concerning those supremely important subjects, were not derived from His teaching:, but were "a legacy in Protestant thought from post-apostolic and Roman Catholic theology."

The statements in this note are so radical, and they involve matters of such superlative importance to all mankind, that I purpose now to give them a thorough examination in the light of the Old Testament, as well as in that of the New. For those statements raise a question both as to "the Old Testament foreview of the Kingdom," and also as to what Kingdom it was that Jesus Christ announced as at hand.

But before undertaking that examination, there is something

that should be said as to the truly calami tous effects of such a note as that just referred to (quoted more fully below) when placed at the fore front of the Gospels. It is a specimen of the means whereby it is sought to fabricate a semblance of sup port for the novel and exceedingly pernicious doctrine that the life and ministry of our Lord belong—not to this era of grace, to "these last days" in which God has "spoken unto us by His Son" (Heb. 1: 1, 2), but—to the era of law; and that the commandments of God the Father spoken by Jesus Christ (specially the Ser mon on the Mount) pertain—not to those who are saved by grace now, but—to the Jewish people, a re constituted earthly nation of a yet future "dispensa tion."

In view of the peculiarly tender affection with which the Lord's people, throughout the centuries of our era have regarded the four Gospels, and of the fact that those particular parts of the Word of God have ever been specially cherished by all the household of faith, it is a mystery indeed, one of the greatest of "the mys teries of the Kingdom," how this new doctrine, which takes away from the redeemed people of God their priceless treasurers, and relegates them to a conjectural future generation of "Israel after all flesh," has ever found even a foothold among them.

We will now take notice of the way the Gospels are handled in the notes of the Scofield Bible with the in tent to make an opening for the new doctrine we are examining. That publication, in its "Introduction to the Gospels," says:

"In approaching the study of the Gospels the mind should be freed, so far as possible from mere theolog ical concepts and presuppositions. Especially is it necessary to exclude the notion— a legacy in Protest ant thought from post-Apostolic and Roman Catholic theology— that the church is the true Israel, and that the Old Testament foreview of the kingdom is fulfilled in the church."

First we have here what appears to be merely a gen eral word

of caution; namely, that “in approaching the study of the Gospels,” we should free our minds “from mere theological concepts and pre-suppositions.” This seems reasonable enough; for who would dispute that it were well to have our minds freed from mere theo logical concepts, not only “when approaching the study of the Gospels,” but at all times?

But Dr. Scofield was not concerned, when he penned the above words, with “theological concepts and pre suppositions” in general. For his aim plainly was to cast discredit upon the view always held by the house hold of faith touching the Kingdom of God the Gospel of God and the Words of Jesus Christ, and to intro duce in its stead a new doctrine radically different there from.

The editor of the Scofield Bible was aware, of course, that the great theme of the Gospels is the King dom of God; for that is evident to the most careless reader, and further he must have known that, from the very beginning of the Christian era it had been accepted as indisputable truth that, not only the prophecies con cerning the glorious reign of David’s promised Son, but also the announcements by John the Baptist and Christ Himself that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, had their realization and fulfilment in that Kingdom of God’ s dear Son, into which those who are saved through faith in Jesus Christ are forthwith translated (Col. 1:12,13). He must have known it to be the universal, age-long, and elemental teaching of Christianity, that the Kingdom foretold by the prophets, and that announced by the lord and His forerunner, was realized in the blessed company of those who are called and saved through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And since it was the editor’s purpose to introduce to his readers a kingdom-doctrine “diverse” from the above, and “strange” to Christian ears, he must needs begin by an attempt to discredit and to shake their confidence in the long established and universally accepted Christian doctrine of the Kingdom of God. This he pro ceeds to do in the two sentences quoted above.

The first sentence deals in generalities, the obvious intent being to create suspicion of the accepted teach ing by referring to it contemptuously as a “mere theo logical concept.” The second sentence, however, is quite explicit. Here the accepted doctrine of the king dom is termed a “notion”; and the assertion is boldly made that it is “necessary to exclude” it. Why “neces sary”? For no other reason, so far as appears, than that it stands squarely in the way of the new doctrine the editor and those of his way of thinking have under taken to propagate. We do not question in the least that their intentions are good, their motives pure, and their purposes sincere. But that does not make their doctrine any the less a startling innovation and a dan gerous heresy. Most certainly it is “necessary to ex clude” either that doctrine concerning the Kingdom of God which all Christians have held from the beginning of the gospel era, or else to exclude this new doctrine that is now offered as a substitute; for there is irrecon cilable antagonism between them. It is some satisfaction to me that Dr. Scofield recognized this; for it makes quite evident that a sharp issue has been raised, and that a choice must be made between the two conflicting views.

But now we come to a more serious matter. For the assertion is made that this “notion” is ~ not pro perly a part of true Protestant doctrine at all, but merely “a legacy in Protestant thought from post-apostolic and Roman Catholic theology.”

Here is a statement of fact; but one for which not a scrap of evidence has ever been produced, and for which, I confidently declare, not a scrap of evidence exists. The history of christian doctrine continues in an unbroken line from apostolic times to our day; and if it had been possible to produce from the copious writings of the “Church fathers,” any proof that the doctrine concerning the Kingdom of God taught by the Scofield Bible and by certain Bible Schools of our day was ever held by Christians, real or nominal, in times past,

it would have been produced long ago; seeing that the present writer and not a few others have been chal lenging this new doctrine, and largely upon the score of its entire novelty, for ten years past.

My first answer therefore, to the above quoted state ment is that it is not true; and that on the contrary the teaching here referred to as a "notion," and as a legacy from post-apostolic theology is the teaching of the New Testament itself, and has been the teaching also of sound and evangelical teachers and expositors of the Bible from the days of the Apostles to the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, the assertion in the above quotation from the Scofield Bible that what is therein termed a "notion" is a legacy from "Roman Catholic theology" is an evil mixture of innuendo and misrepresentation. If it were true that Roman Catholic theology teaches the same doctrine of the Kingdom of God that has been accepted heretofore by all evangelical christians, that fact would be not at all to the discredit of the doctrine itself. It would be just as fair and just as reasonable to attempt to cast discredit upon the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, or that of His bodily resurrection, or that of the inspiration of the Scriptures, by pointing to the fact that Rome has given a place to those doc trines in her theology.

But the truth of the matter is that the Romish doc trine of the Kingdom, in the respects wherein it differs from the accepted Protestant doctrine, presents a striking resemblance to ancient rabbinism and to modern dispensationalism. For the essential feature of each of those three systems of error is that "the Old Testament foreview of the Kingdom" was a Kingdom of earthly character. In respect to that cardinal feature of the great kingdom heresy, Judaism, Dispensational ism, and Romanism are all in perfect agreement. Where they differ among themselves is that the first two say the earthly Kingdom foretold by the prophets was to be Jewish, and the last says

it was to be Romish —and as between those two variant views it makes little difference, to my mind, which is preferred.

And not only is the new “dispensational teaching” in accord with both Judaism and Romanism in holding the Kingdom of God to be of earthly character, but it is, in respect to another of its distinctive features, closely akin to another great heresy of today, Russell ism. For the outstanding doctrine of the latter is that, following this gospel era, there is to be another “dis pensation” (the Millennium) in which salvation is to be on a wholesale scale. Dispensationalism does not go to the length of teaching that there is to be universal salvation in a coming day; but it comes dangerously close to it. For it avers that every person of Jewish descent is to be saved; and that they will be constituted into a nation on earth. And further it is sometimes expressly taught by dispensationalists, and always is implied in their doctrine, that there will then be other saved nations (and indeed none but saved nations) in the world; for it is a prominent feature of this teach ing that the Jews are to be the chief of the nations, and in some sense are to exercise authority over all the na tions on earth. So this comes, I say, dangerously close to Russellism.

But if there be any truth at all in this doctrine of abounding salvation in a coming day, it is clear that the apostle Paul did greatly err in saying, “Behold, NOW is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2): for that designation would justly belong to the coming Millennium.

I expect to return to this subject in a subsequent chapter.