

Dispensational Bible Studies

Lessons 103 & 104 on the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times

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The Millennial Age

After the Millennium-What? Lesson CIII.

IN OUR last lesson we concluded the Dispensational Study of the Bible, so far as the treatment of its separate books was concerned, but we have left ourselves two more lessons in which to consider the deeply engrossing and widely expanding question at the head of this article—After the Millennium-What?

In the last lesson the subject was purposely left as if the Millennial Age were immediately followed by the Eternal Age, for we were not desirous of projecting a subject upon the class too suddenly for which many of its members were perhaps entirely unprepared. And yet it will be recalled that at the very beginning of the present course allusion was made to an age following the Millennial, and preceding the Eternal, which was designated as the "Dispensation of the Fulness of the Times." Again and again have we met with indications of this age in the teaching of the Scripture. but no special attention has been called to it until now.

THE CLOSE OF THE MILLENNIUM.

The Millennial Age, as we have seen from Revelation 20, is to close with a general insurrection against Christ as King, thus revealing the true condition of the world, even throughout that blessed period, as in sad correspondence with all the ages preceding. The difference between them and it being, in a word, that in them sin was active and open, while in it it was suppressed and concealed. Now such a kingdom, as more than one Scriptural student has pointed out, such a kingdom where a great proportion of the race is held in subjection only by divine power, and rendering at the best only a forced or feigned obedience to its Head, can not be that perfected and all-glorious reign which even a casual study of the prophets leads us to associate with the future manifestation of Jesus Christ.

"Oh, yes," some one may say, "but is not that perfect and all-glorious reign identical with the Eternal Age which is just to follow? Hardly so, for that seems to be spoken of as "the kingdom of the Father," (Matthew 13), or "the kingdom of God" distinguished from that of Christ as Mediator (1 Corinthians 15:24). What then, can this perfect and all-glorious reign of Christ really be, and where, and how do the Scriptures refer to it?

THE PERFECT REIGN OF CHRIST.

Turn, for example, to the well-remembered passage in Philippians 2:9-11, which we can not afford space to quote, and compare it with what we have already learned of the Millennium. The last-named as to its location will be on this earth, apparently limited thereto; its center will be Jerusalem; its duration 1000 years; its moral character one of suppressed sin; its end a scene of bloodshed and war. But that referred to in Philippians shows us vastly more than an earthly domain with Israel supreme. Therein the things of Heaven and Hell also, as well as those of earth are brought under Christ's sceptre, and he himself is reigning, not personally or by deputy in Jerusalem, but absolutely at the right hand of God. And yet although this is something beyond, something greater than the Millennial Age, it is at the same time not the final, not the Eternal Age, as the closing words of verse 11 indicate. God, i.e., God the Father, or God as distinguished from Christ the Mediator, is not yet seen as the All in All of 1 Corinthians 15.

Now take a further reference to this reign in Ephesians 1:20-23, where the language is nearly identical with that of Philippians. Or turn to Revelation 5:9-13. In this last instance, quoting loosely from George F. Trench, in his notable book, "After the Thousand Years," we have in verses 9 and 10 a picture presented of the first or Millennial reign of Christ, including within it men of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation "upon the earth;" and gradually expanding until every created thing in the Heaven. and an the earth, and under the earth gives honor to him as the Lamb. To quote the same author literally: "This splendid vision presents the growing glory of the "little Lamb," beginning with his claiming the roll or title-deed of sovereignty, and expanding first, to include the church's homage, then that of angelic myriads, then that of the Millennial earth, and lastly, that of the whole creation."

In the same connection reference may be made to Revelation. chapters 21 and 22. Here we have the now heaven and earth; the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven; the tabernacle of God with men; all tears wiped away; no more sorrow, death or pain. This, of course, is not the Millennial Age, as we have seen. It was assumed in the last lesson to be the Eternal Age, but there is one feature mentioned which, in the judgment of some, precludes this latter supposition, viz.: that the Lamb is still upon the throne (22:1). This, as Trench says, shows it to be an age intervening between the two; the age, doubtless, of the fulness of the times already spoken of. The Lamb as such, i.e., Christ as Mediator, will not be reigning in the Eternal Age, but then God will be All in All.

Finally, in further confirmation of this, look more particularly at 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. Here Christ's second coming is spoken of, with the resurrection of the saints accompanying it, and "Then cometh the end." This "end," we observed in an earlier lesson, will not follow immediately on the second coming, but be preceded by the Millennial Age. And, we may now add, will be preceded also by the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. This latter conclusion is based upon a careful and comparative study of the verses following. For example, at this "end" Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father." But before doing so, he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power;" even death itself shall have been put down or destroyed. The only being excepted from this subordination is God himself (verse 27). When this subordination of all shall have been completed, then the Son as Mediator subjects himself to God that the latter may be all in all. Now this can not mean the end of the Millennial Age, for the reason at least, that the end of the Millennium is not a time of universal subjection, but rather of insubjection. On the earth at least, it is only Israel and the elect of other nations which are subject to Christ, and the others rally to the standard of Satan as soon as it is again set up (Revelation 20:7-9). At the end of the age here referred to, however, when Christ delivers up the kingdom to God, it is a time when he shall be able to display to all God's universe in a new heaven and a new earth, what his been the outcome of the sacrifice on Calvary. He shall be able to show the willing and loving submission to his gentle sway of souls whom his blood has cleansed, and his Spirit quickened. The principalities and powers of the angelic world will render homage to him, the inhabitants of all the spheres will bend the knee to him. This will characterize the universal sovereignty of the MAN CHRIST JESUS, but this is not what is set before us as the consummation of the Millennial Age, but seems to point almost of necessity to another age to follow it, before be gives up the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM ONE.

Mr. Trench, at this point, cautions his readers with a caution I should like to repeat, that we are not to suppose from the above that there are more kingdoms than one over which Christ is to reign. As he says very truly, "The kingdom of Christ is one. Into that kingdom, believers, members of his body, the church, have already been translated as a kind of first-fruits of the coming harvest. Its next stage will be reached when, at his coming, he unites the living saints with those who sleep in him, in one complete, harmonious company, and presents unto himself, a glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing. His reign in Israel will follow this, lasting for a period of a thousand years, while yet the world at heart will be unsubdued. Then finally, will come that stage when the unity of the kingdom will be seen in the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times." It is involved somewhere in this program that he will enter upon the acquisition of his angelic throne (see Hebrews 1:6), but just at what instant this occurs seems difficult to say, although Trench supposes it will be after the rapture or translation of the church, and just before the reign begins in Israel.

AN OBJECTION CONSIDERED.

Some one may say, granted that the Millennial Age ends in revolt, and that the kingdom which Christ presents to his Father is one in which all revolt is put down, and where everything, God only excepted, is made subject to him; still, may not this state of subjection be brought about very rapidly at the end of that age, and without involving the introduction of another age? This is indeed true, but it seems repugnant to the whole tenor of Scripture so far as it refers to the manifested glory of Christ, whose perfected kingdom is always described as of long continuance. More of this will appear in the following and closing lesson of the course.

Boston, Mass. (September 17, 1903)

After the Millennium-What? Lesson CIV.

THIS is a continuation of the last lesson which considered the question, After the Millennium-What?

We begin this by referring again to the moral character of the Millennial Age. We have found it to be one of suppressed sin, but have been governed largely in that determination by the circumstances foretold in Revelation 20. But what if the Old Testament also, in prophesying of that age, should speak of it in the same way? Three times in the Millennial psalms, for example, we find the peace and submissiveness of the nation during that period referred to as superficial and unreal. See the margin in each instance, of Psalm 18:44, 66:3, and 81:15, where the word "submit" is rendered by the phrase "yield feigned obedience." There are many other psalms, indeed, which refer to the same condition of affairs only in other language. But add to these teachings in the Psalms those in the prophets, e.g. Isaiah 66:23,24, and Zechariah 11:16-19, where we are plainly taught of punishment that shall fall upon the nations during the Millennium which refuse homage to the God of Israel; and that, too, in language which convey the impression that it may be a condition of things lasting throughout the whole of that age.

Add to this again, those other prophetic allusions which show that many of the Millennial blessings, generally supposed to be universal throughout the earth, will really be limited to Israel. Isaiah 65:25, last sentence, is an illustration in point, but only one of many. Gentiles will do the menial service of their masters of Israel in that day, Joel 3:1-8, especially 8. Also Micah 7:16,17. Of course, wherever humble and godly souls among the Gentiles submit themselves to Jehovah, they will be blest as such are blest now, but where they refuse to do this they will feel the rod of iron.

THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES.

In Ephesians 3:11, the Apostle Paul speaks of "the purpose of the ages," (Revised Version, margin), and this suggests some inquiry as to why the human race has another chance in the Millennium before the "Dispensation of the Fulness of the Times." It is simply, as George F. Trench suggests in the volume quoted in the last lesson, because the divine plan is never to displace the old and corrupt nature at a single blow, but to work out the change by degrees till the transformation is complete. He illustrates this very beautifully in the experience of the individual Christian, who is inhabited by two natures, and in whom the old, though condemned, too often prevails over the new. It would, as he says, be quite as unreasonable and un-Scriptural to view the believer's present life as the complement of his human destiny, as to consider the Millennium the complement of that of Jesus Christ. He is destined to reign in and over a kingdom as perfect as the future life of the saint shall be, but like the latter, its development is by progressive increments until the end is reached.

And yet, speaking of the "end," let it again be emphasized, as in the previous lesson, that the reference is not to the essential kingly glory of Christ as the Second Person of the Godhead, which of course, is without end, but rather to that of the Man Christ Jesus. In John 17, verses 5, 22, and 24. These two glories, or kinds of glory, are spoken of: the essential glory as God in verse 5, and the bestowed glory as man in verses 22 and 24. As to this latter glory, that of Christ as Mediator, we have already seen it to be revealed in four stages, and these, as our author intimates, are outlined very concisely but distinctly in that wonderful 8th Psalm, verses 5 and 6, especially as they are quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8.

(1) "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels," refers to his earthly birth and sufferings, whereby, through his resurrection from the dead, he became the Head of the body—his church.

(2) "Thou crownedst him with glory and honor," refers to his present personal exaltation, and possibly includes his exaltation to the angelic throne.

(3) "Thou didst set him over the works of thy hands," refers to his coming kingdom in Israel on earth.

(4) "Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet," refers to his universal reign in the post-Millennial Age.

THE POST-MILLENNIAL AGE DESCRIBED.

Referring further to this Post-Millennial Age, described in Revelation 21 and 22, and spoken of in an earlier lesson, let us look at one or two details not dwelt upon previously. It is commonly supposed, for example, that the New Jerusalem, the bride, mentioned in 21:2, is synonymous with the church, and this, indeed, may be the case. But let us hold our minds open to conviction on the proposition that it may rather mean Israel. The very name "Jerusalem," hints at that, and so does the names of the tribes in the gates, and of the twelve apostles in the foundations of the walls. The location or the city also suggests this. It comes down to the earth, the abode of Israel, while the church's calling is Heavenly. Let no one suppose from this, however, that the church, is in any sense secondary to Israel. On the contrary, she is far greater. She is one with the Head, not as related to him, by marriage, but united to him as part of a vital organism. She reigns not merely over the earth as does Israel, but over the wider sphere of angelic principalities and powers, and all worlds, this world included (over which Christ as her Head will be supreme).

But to return to the question of the brideship or wifehood of Israel, a further corroboration of the idea is found in the frequent Old Testament allusions to that relationship, notably, Isaiah 62:5, Jeremiah 3:14, Ezekiel 16:6-14, and, indeed, the first three chapters of Hosea. Compare further with reference to the interpretation of this city, Hebrews 11:8-10.

The time when this city descends, however, is not Millennial, as we have seen, but post-Millennial. And yet can it be the Eternal Age? We have already called attention to an argument against it in the fact that the Lamb is still seen upon the throne. But this will not be true in the Eternal Age. Our author puts this matter thus:

(1) In the Millennium we have the reign of the Lamb (Revelation 5:6-13).

(2) In the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, or the kingdom, as he terms it, we have the reign of God and the Lamb (Revelation 22:1-3).

(3) In the Eternal State we have the reign of God alone (1 Corinthians 15:28).

THE ETERNAL AGE.

But if the Post-Millennial Age is that referred to in those Scripture passages hitherto applied to eternity, what remains in revelation to be applied to that age? To that I am unable to reply at present. Perhaps nothing remains, or very little. Eternity and infinity are one, and belong to God. He has given us some measure of knowledge of the finitudes, but what if he please not to reveal anything of infinitude? He himself is Eternal, and we in Christ have eternal life. We know that, but we know little more. And yet, there is something more, alas! We know that the lost, because rejected of Jesus Christ, shall suffer eternal punishment. "But of the localities, the sceneries, the glories, the pursuits, the conditions of those states, we have to possess our souls in patience."

To guard against any misconception here, however, let me say with the Bible scholar to whom I have already acknowledged my indebtedness for much in these last two lessons, that there is no question of the Eternity of the Manhood, the Risen Humanity of our Lord. He quotes, Psalm 21:4, here: "He asked life of Thee, Thou gavest it him, even length of days forever and ever." That which is given over to God at the close of the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times is simply his official, governmental glory as Man. Nor is there any question of his eternal Oneness with the saints as their Risen Head. It is simply that the reign of Christ as Man shall cease, that the reign of Christ as God may take its place and continue forevermore.

I am quite aware that many of my readers may not be quite prepared to accept this teaching in every detail; and, indeed, I am not altogether satisfied teaching a part of it myself; but it appears, as far as I have been able to examine it, to be perfectly Scriptural. I would recommend those who wish to consider it more at length to consult the work I have referred to, and which is published by Morgan & Scott, London, but is obtainable, I think, through the Revell Publishing Co., in this country.

Boston, Mass. (September 27, 1903)