

# **Ultra-Dispensationalism**

## **Did Jesus and Paul Have a Different Gospel?**

An Evaluation of Ultra-Dispensationalism

By Dave DeWitt

**Thesis:** Dispensationalism is simply the result of taking a literal view of Scripture, which observes that there are different ages, which are distinguishable administrations (KJV *dispensation*, Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; Colossians 1:25) in the outworking of God’s purpose on earth—such as the Mosaic Law, our age of grace, and the future Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Ultra-dispensationalism [sometimes called “Mid-Acts Dispensationalism” or “the Grace Movement”] perverts that by saying only the writings of the Apostle Paul are for our age of grace, and Paul’s gospel was different than the gospel of Jesus and Peter. **I shall here demonstrate that the whole New Testament was written to the same church which began in Acts 2, and all the New Testament authors proclaimed a consistent gospel message.**

### **A Statement of the Ultra-dispensational Position from Grace Bible College:**

[1011 Aldon SW, Wyoming (a suburb of Grand Rapids), Michigan]

In the view of the college and others in the “Grace Movement,” Christ and Peter’s mission was solely directed to the nation of Israel and sought to fulfill Old Testament promises of a messianic kingdom to Israel. Paul’s mission is distinct in that it is directed to the entire world... (as opposed to the “Kingdom Church” of Christ and Peter). Christ is the “head” of the Church, the Body of Christ, not the “king,” as he is for the Kingdom Church... All scripture is “for” members of the Body of Christ, but only the Pauline epistles are “to” the Body of Christ. Accordingly, even Christ’s and Peter’s teachings and practices may not be strictly normative for Christians today, especially if they are not consistent with the teaching of Paul... The College maintains that Paul never regarded water baptism as necessary for full participation in the Christian community and that, as he continued to receive revelation from Christ, it became obsolete. [plexuss.com/college/grace-bible-college]

### **Not All Ultra-Dispensationalists believe the same thing about everything, but here is what most of them believe:**

1. Ultras believe that all four gospels (some would say just the synoptic gospels), the epistles of Hebrews, Peter, James, John, Jude, and Revelation, are only written to Jewish Christians of the “Kingdom Church,” not to us today. Only the books of Paul (and some say only Paul’s “Prison Epistles”) are a directive to the church, the body of Christ.
2. The book of Acts (some say up to Acts 9, some say up to Acts 28) is a short dispensation addressed to the Jews or a Jewish “Kingdom Church.”
3. Acts 2 is Peter presenting the Kingdom of God to the Jews, not the beginning of our grace church age.
4. Water baptism, and (some also say the Lord’s Supper Communion) were only for the “Kingdom Church,” so these are not for the church today.
5. Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is only taught in the epistles of Paul. All other books of the New Testament teach a works’ salvation. Hence, Paul had a “different gospel” than Jesus or Peter.

### **Six Basic Errors of Ultra-Dispensationalism**

1. **The first basic error of the Ultras is to assume that the meaning of a passage can be determined by the understanding of the audience.**

Some ultra-dispensational claims are based on the fact that the Jews, and the early apostles, expected Jesus to begin the kingdom. It is clear that the Jewish community of Jesus’ day believed in a Messiah that would come and start an earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6). But Jesus and the apostles never taught that.

What the apostles understood, in fact, what any audience understands, should never be used to determine what a speaker or author meant. Readers and listeners have all kinds of different ideas about what an author presented. This error is commonly used for defending feminism, homosexuality, and Judaizing the church. The meaning of an author comes from the author, not the audience. Jesus was trying to change the understanding of the apostles, not conform to it.

## 2. The second basic error of the Ultras is to assume the gospels were not written to the church.

That assumes the teaching of Jesus, recorded in the gospels, was for the Jews, not for the church. The problem is, the gospels were not written by Jesus to the Jews. The gospels were written by the apostles to the church, after the beginning of the ministries of both Peter and Paul.

Paul was converted in the A.D. 30s. His First Missionary Journey was in the mid-40s. He wrote Galatians in A.D. 49, the year of the Jerusalem Council. James was written about the same time, so these were the first New Testament books. Paul's Second Missionary Journey was in the early 50s. He wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians in A.D. 51 or 52, 1 Corinthians in A.D. 55, and Romans in A.D. 57. [These are Ryrie's dates. The chart is from biblegateway.com.] The gospels of Matthew and Mark were written in the late 50s, Luke in the 60s, and John in the 70s or 80s. The church, not Israel, had been the only people of God for 20 years before Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written and 40 years before the Gospel of John. Paul's gospel had been clearly established from his first two missionary journeys and early epistles, years before the gospels were written. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that the gospels were written to the church, not to Israel. The authors of the gospels clearly intended to present the teaching of Jesus to the church.

James: AD 44-49  
Galatians: AD 49-50  
Mark: AD 50-60  
Matthew: AD 50-60  
1 Thessalonians: AD 51  
2 Thessalonians: AD 51-52  
1 Corinthians: AD 55  
2 Corinthians: AD 55-56  
Romans: AD 56  
Luke: AD 60-61  
Ephesians: AD 60-62  
Philippians: AD 60-62  
Philemon: AD 60-62  
Colossians: AD 60-62  
Acts: AD 62  
1 Timothy: AD 62-64  
Titus: AD 62-64  
1 Peter: AD 64-65  
2 Timothy: AD 66-67  
2 Peter: AD 67-68  
Hebrews: AD 67-69  
Jude: AD 68-70  
John: AD 80-90  
1 John: AD 90-95  
2 John: AD 90-95  
3 John: AD 90-95  
Revelation: AD 94-96

## 3. The third basic error of the Ultras is to assume the word “gospel” always refers to the plan of salvation.

This includes the primary error of thinking Paul's statement *my gospel* (Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8) was a different plan of salvation.

The word for “gospel” is εὐαγγέλιον (*euaggelion*). The word εὖ (*eu*) means “good” as in euphoria, euthanasia, and eugenics. The word ἀγγέλιον (*aggelion*) means “message,” as an angel [ἄγγελος (*aggelos*)] is literally a “messenger.” The meaning of the word “gospel” is “good message.” And the message is good in the sense of being true, not necessarily “good news.” There is nothing in the word “gospel” that tells us what that message is. The message has to be determined from the context. In the New Testament, the word *gospel* [εὐαγγέλιον (*euaggelion*)] refers to:

- The message that Jesus was the Messiah to Israel (Luke 4:16-21)
- The message Jesus proclaimed everywhere He went (Mark 1:1; Matthew 4:23; Luke 16:16)
- The message of the plan of salvation proclaimed by the apostles (Romans 1:16)
- The message of Paul's whole ministry (Romans 1:1)
- The message of the appearances of Christ (1 Corinthians 15)
- The message being proclaimed during the future tribulation (Matthew 24:14)
- The message of the angel flying in the midheaven during the future tribulation, which is *Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come...* (Revelation 14:6-7). Notice this *gospel* is bad news.

Conclusion: The word for “gospel” often refers to the plan of salvation, but not always.

#### 4. The fourth basic error of the Ultras is the idea that Jesus only came to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matthew 10:6).

Jesus sent His disciples out on a specific mission to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. But Jesus also went *in the way of the Gentiles* (Matthew 15). He ministered to Romans (Matthew 8:5-13), Canaanites (Matthew 15:21; Mark 3:8; Luke 6:17), and Samaritans (Luke 17:16; John 4). Jesus often included, if not prioritized, the Gentiles in His teaching, such as the repentance of *the men of Nineveh* (Matthew 12:41), *Tyre and Sidon* (Luke 10:13), and the *compassion* of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33). Jesus went out of His way to tell a Samaritan woman, and then her whole village, that the Jewish/Gentile distinction is over.

*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers* (John 4:23).

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus predicted the coming church age with several parables:

- In Matthew 13, the wheat and the tares and the parable of the dragnet full of fish describe the church being in the world until separated at the end of the church age.
- The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in the bread describe the growth of the church.
- In Matthew 21:28-31, the parable of the two sons describes the formation of the church from Gentiles being obedient after they were disobedient.
- The wedding feast describes a king who sent out his servants (representing the apostles), saying, “*Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.*” This is a description of those invited to salvation during the church age (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

Jesus addressed (mostly condemned) the Jews of His day. But the gospel authors were not addressing Israel (Exodus 33:2; 34:24; Psalm 78:55). The gospel writers wanted their readers to know that Jesus was both presenting Himself as the Messiah to the Jews **and** preparing the apostles to start the church.

#### 5. The fifth basic error of the Ultras is to assume that Jesus and Paul taught different ways of salvation.

Some Ultras teach that Jesus only offered an earthly kingdom. But quite the opposite is true. What Jesus did, that turned the teaching of the Jewish leadership upside down, was to move the whole focus from earth to heaven. Jesus’s message was all about heaven:

- Matthew 5:3, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of **heaven**.*
- Matthew 5:10, *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of **heaven**.*
- Matthew 5:12, *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in **heaven** is great.*
- Jesus referred to God, as a *heavenly Father*, eight times.
- The gospels have 23 references to *eternal life*.
- Matthew records Jesus talking about **heaven 32 times**.
- Mark records Jesus talking about **heaven 14 times**.
- Luke records Jesus talking about **heaven 26 times**.
- John records Jesus talking about **heaven 11 times**.
- John 14:2-3, *In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a **place for you**. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, **that where I am, there you may be also**.*

What has that got to do with a physical kingdom of God on earth?

Almost every significant thing we learn comes progressively, one step at a time. That does not mean the earlier incomplete steps are contradictions of later more complete ones. At MSU, I was a math major, so I had to learn calculus. When I was taught algebra in high school, I had no thoughts of learning calculus.

That did not mean algebra taught a different math than calculus. The New Testament is a non-contradictory, progressive revelation of the same, consistent, unchanging message.

## **6. The sixth error of the Ultras is their teaching that, in Acts chapter 2, Peter was presenting a kingdom of God on earth to the Jews.**

The idea, that Peter was still presenting an earthly kingdom to the Jews in Acts 2 and 3, is based on the idea that Jesus was presenting an earthly kingdom to the Jews and Peter continued to do that. Louis Barbieri writes “He had come to offer to His own people the kingdom promised through David centuries before.” [“Bible Knowledge Commentary,” Matthew 15:26] So, I would like to ask the question: “Where do we get the idea that Jesus ever offered the Jews a kingdom of God on earth?” Consider:

- The disciples mistakenly thought so (Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6), but Jesus was continually correcting them about that. He claimed to be the Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of the world (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Matthew 17:22-23; John 12: 27, 47), not one who would start an earthly kingdom if the Jews accepted Him. It is the Second Coming, not the acceptance by the Jews, that starts the Kingdom.
- It is Jesus in a glorified resurrected body who starts the earthly Millennial Kingdom (John 12:16), not Jesus before He died and rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.
- Jesus told the disciples that during the Millennial Kingdom, *you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matthew 19:28). But, at this time, ten of those tribes were scattered all over the world. *The twelve tribes of Israel* are gathered after His angels *gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other* at the Second Coming (Matthew 24:31).
- Jesus said that the temple in Jerusalem, the capital of the earthly Millennial Kingdom, would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2), which happened in A.D. 70. That would be a pretty short kingdom.
- If Jesus was actually offering an earthly kingdom to the Jews, it would have to be one they could actually accept. It is not an actual offer if it cannot be actually accepted. If it was accepted, there would be no death of Jesus for our sins and no salvation for anyone. It would also nullify Isaiah 53, *He was pierced through for our iniquities...the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him*. At the time of His death, referring to His death, Jesus said, *“for this purpose I came to this hour”* (John 12:27).
- The *different gospel* Paul objected to was not different from the gospel of Jesus or Peter. Paul objected to the *different gospel* of works presented by the Judaizers and Christian Pharisees who said the Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved (Galatians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 11:4). Peter and Paul were on the same side of that issue at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The argument Peter and Paul had in Antioch was not about salvation but whether there should be two churches, one for Jews and one for Gentiles.
- When quoting Isaiah 61 to the Jews in Nazareth, Jesus stopped in the middle of verse 2, before the text of Isaiah referred to the beginning of the earthly Millennial Kingdom (Luke 4:18-20).

## **Conclusion**

The New Testament has one consistent message. The different authors added different brush strokes to the painting, but they were all painting the same picture. Jesus, Peter, Paul, and the other authors, all point to the same gospel, the same plan of salvation, the same standard of righteousness. The same church, the body of Christ which began in Acts 2, will end with the Rapture described in John 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.