

5-1-1939

Harding Bulletin May 1939 (vol. 14, no. 12)

Harding College

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Recommended Citation

Harding College. (1939). Harding Bulletin May 1939 (vol. 14, no. 12). Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hubulletins/21>

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Harding College on Premillennialism

A MESSAGE TO BE READ AND HANDED TO OTHERS



George S. Benson,
President,

whose faithfulness and loyalty to the truth has been abundantly proved by his long years of service in China—and his unselfish work at home.

PREMILLENNIALISM

BY GEORGE S. BENSON

A Christian college assumes a great responsibility in accepting within its doors hundreds of young people from good Christian homes throughout the land. These parents who entrust to us the care and the instruction of their sons and daughters have a perfect right to understand the attitude of faculty members, and the teaching of faculty members on any moral principle or upon any Bible theme.

At the present time a great deal of emphasis is being placed upon the subject of premillennialism. Many parents are accordingly asking about the teaching at Harding College upon this subject. We are glad to answer these inquiries and glad for our teaching on this subject to be thoroughly understood.

I wish to say in definite terms that premillennial views are **not** taught at Harding College in any way, shape, form or fashion. Teachers in the Bible Department so testify in this bulletin. All members of the senior class—those students who have been longest in the institution—likewise so testify in this bulletin. We accordingly invite your attention to the following paragraphs and also invite you to visit Harding College and make your own investigation any time you may be able to do so.

We are also sometimes asked what is done at Harding College to prepare students to meet premillennial arguments in their various forms.

The following paragraphs will reveal that much is also being done along that

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FACTS YOU WANT TO KNOW!

BY L. C. SEARS

—
"Ye shall know the truth and the
truth shall make you free—"
Jesus.

—
"How do you stand on premillennialism?" is apparently the question of most consuming interest in the church today. While we regret that a theory based upon three obscure verses of a book that is most difficult to understand should have become so prominent as to arouse the interest and the opposition of a great brotherhood we must nevertheless recognize with sorrow that this has come to pass. It is necessary, therefore, that we continue to make clear the position of those who have the management at Harding College, that the influence of this great institution may support the cause of righteousness and truth as it has in the past. For in times of strife and dissension it is easy for misunderstandings to arise even between faithful men, and for misinformation to be circulated to the injury of the entire church. We are always anxious, therefore, that the brotherhood may know the position of the management of Harding College on this or any other disputed matter.

The Practical Point of View

The practical mind is naturally opposed to visionary speculations. It asks for facts and definite evidence before arriving at conclusions. It is the type of mind which is likely to be developed by long years of rigid mental discipline such as men receive in colleges and universities, where the logical analysis of facts is a part of the daily routine.

This type of mind may account in part for the natural dislike which leaders in our Christian colleges have toward speculative theories of any kind, including those popularly known as "premillennialism." The numerous and conflicting interpretations of the Book of Revelation indicate how impossible it is for any man to speak with absolute certainty in matters of unfulfilled prophecy. The prophetic books have lent themselves to every form of speculation and every type of theory. The scholarly man, however, asks "Where is the evidence for your theory?" And he is not satisfied with doubtful evidence that is capable of more than one interpretation. For such men are acquainted with the progress of the church from the beginning. They understand how unprofitable speculations and doctrines arise, how for a time they arouse strife and bitterness, and how later they die out and are for-



L. C. Sears,
Dean,

whose thirty years as teacher and student in Harding College and its predecessors lets him speak with authority about its teaching.

gotten by succeeding generations, while truth goes on. Such men do not, therefore, clutch at each new hobby, but hold to and teach those truths about which they have definite evidence.

They are consistently conservative. For this reason there is far less likelihood of finding "premillennial" tendencies and speculations among college men than among any other group in the brotherhood.

Attitude of Harding College

In this respect Harding College has been no exception. I first entered Cordell Christian College, a progenitor of the present institution, in 1909. During the years following I had work in Bible under J. N. Armstrong, S. A. Bell, and other faithful teachers. One of the things that impressed me was the intensely practical, common sense nature of the Bible work, and the spirit of devotion and love with which it was conducted.

There was no visionary speculating, no unprofitable theorizing, no dogmatic contention over untaught questions. On obscure and uncertain matters I discovered that teachers could say, "I do not know". These teachers followed the advice of Paul to Timothy to avoid disputings over untaught questions. But where the word of God was clear and definite it was applied in such a practical way to our every day living that the Bible became a living message of truth. The whole emphasis was upon the practical, the usable, and the clear. I did not realize it then, but this was the attitude I might have expected in men of scholarship and trained minds, who were conscientious about giving students the truth just as it was revealed without mixing it with human speculation.

On one occasion years ago at Cordell Christian College, before any disturbance had arisen over questions of unfulfilled prophecy, Brother Bell was asked to give some lectures at the school. He wrote that he could speak on Genesis, Matthew or Revelations. I well remember Brother

Armstrong's writing him to use Matthew or Genesis, and his reply, "What's wrong with Revelations in itself. But the incident illustrates the feeling that has dominated the Bible teaching at Harding College always. Brother Armstrong felt that the other books were far more practical and less given to unprofitable speculation.

Coming up under such practical and common sense teaching, I became frankly doubtful of any attempt to interpret unfulfilled prophecy. When P. J. Martin visited the school once, giving his lectures on Revelations, I questioned him earnestly about some of his conclusions, and I could never discover sufficient evidence for them.

It was not until 1922 that I had opportunity to talk with any one who advocated "premillennial" theories, but again I was impressed, from my point of view, with the speculative nature of these ideas and the lack of conclusive evidence. While I recognize that many conscientious brethren hold these views, I would say in all kindness to them that I believe such theories result from a mistaken literalism in interpretation, and I have found it impossible to accept them, just as I found it impossible to accept the theories of P. J. Martin and his father and others. I have felt for years that while matters of unfulfilled prophecy are interesting for study, they are too uncertain to justify dogmatic attitudes, and I prefer to teach what I know and what seems to me to have practical value. This, in my judgment, has also been the attitude of the Bible teachers in the college during the thirty years I have been connected with it.

Testimony of Teachers and Students

But that you may have even more definite proof than my own experience, I would let these Bible teachers speak for themselves.

B. F. Rhodes, who has been connected with the Christian school work for thirty-five years and more, having taught at Bowling Green, Kentucky; Odessa, Missouri; Cordell, Oklahoma; Thorp Springs Christian College and Abilene Christian College, makes the following clear-cut statement:

"I have never taught what is called premillennialism in my classes in Harding College or in any other of the Christian colleges in which I have been employed.

"All my teaching and preaching on the subject has been unfavorable to premillennial views."

Signed: B. F. Rhodes

Equally clear-cut is the following statement of R. N. Gardner, who has also been connected with Christian school work for about thirty-five years:

"I do not believe or teach that Christ will return to the earth before the end of the world to reign a thousand years over any kind of kingdom.

"I do not believe that the Jews will ever be restored to Jerusalem to fill any special place in the Lord's kingdom.

"I do not believe, do not teach, and never have taught any form of premillennialism."

Signed: R. N. Gardner

S. A. Bell, a Bible teacher at Harding College, who has been more than thirty years in this kind of work, also makes the following very definite statement:

"In my thirty years experience as a Bible teacher in our Christian colleges, one of my guiding principles has been to avoid untaught questions. I have never believed, and have never taught premillennial theories, either privately or publicly. My belief and my teaching on the kingdom question has always been contrary to the premillennial views."

Signed: S. A. Bell

The most clear-cut and definite statement I have read from any man against the "premillennial" theories is that made by J. N. Armstrong, President Emeritus and Dean of Bible, back in 1934. Too often in the discussion of "premillennialism" preachers have only a hazy notion of what it is all about, and the ordinary Christian knows practically nothing about it. In this statement, which was published as an article in the Firm Foundation and later sent out as a bulletin to every congregation we could reach, Brother Armstrong lists in absolutely definite form the contentions of "premillennialists" and gives his definite conviction on each contention:

"Some Things I Do Not Believe

"1. Though many Bible students believe in the return of the Jews to Palestine—Bible students far superior to me—I do not believe it; I see no indication of it.

"2. I do not believe Jesus will ever

reign in earthly Jerusalem on a material throne and thus establish a material kingdom.

"3. I do not believe that Christ will ever sit on the literal throne of David, but I believe he is now sitting and reigning on all the throne on which he shall ever sit.

"4. I do not believe that the Roman Empire will ever come back and be again the world power that it once was. Surely there is no Bible proof of this. I think nobody would have ever thought of such a thing had it not been needed to complete a theory.

"5. I do not believe that, because Christ was rejected by the Jews, the Lord turned from his original purpose and gave the church as a 'substitute'; and that at his coming again he will carry out his original plan and will restore, or establish, a kingdom with Christ on David's throne in Jerusalem.

"Some Things I Do Believe

"1. I believe the kingdom spoken of by Daniel was the kingdom established by Jehovah on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

"2. I believe that this kingdom, spoken of by Daniel, preached by John the Baptist and by the seventy, and that was established on Pentecost, is the only kingdom that God and Christ will ever have on the earth.

"3. I believe that through the reign, now going on, all earthly rule is now being undermined and destroyed to the extent that the principles of this kingdom of Christ take root in the hearts and lives of its citizens; that, to this extent, swords are being beaten into plowshares, and the citizens of this kingdom refuse to learn war any more.

"4. I believe that Christ now has all power and a'l authority in heaven and on earth; that when he was crowned king of kings and lord of lords he was made 'to sit at his right hand' 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only of this world, but also in that which is to come."

When the above very positive statement from Brother Armstrong, together with his emphatic condemnation of those who would press these or any other theories to the disturbing of the brotherhood, was sent out as a bulletin to all the congregations, one of the most outstanding preachers in the church today commended it highly and urged that it be published in the papers also. The fact that it had already appeared in the Firm Foundation indicates how little even our best men read our religious journals. This neglect has made it difficult to get the truth concerning the views of teachers at Harding College before the brethren everywhere. We shall therefore appreciate your handing this information on to others. The welfare of the entire church depends upon our understanding one another correctly. Many differences would be quickly removed if we could only know the facts, and many times facts are unintentionally or knowingly misrepresented. If a man today wanted to build up his own power by injuring another, the

quickest way would be to label his enemy a "premillennialist." God forbid that such methods should prevail, and may all misunderstandings about good and faithful men be cleared up.

But finally we would give you also the testimony of the entire senior class of Harding College, some of whom have been in the institution for four years and others, including the academy and training school, as much as sixteen years. On April 15, 1939, under the caption "For Correct Understanding" the class stated:

"We, the members of the Senior Class of 1939 at Harding College, hereby affirm that throughout our experience in Harding College we have never heard any teacher advance to any of the students the doctrines of Premillennialism. This means that we have not heard them advance the idea of a material reign of Christ here on the earth at the close of the church dispensation; that we have not heard them advance the idea of the Jews returning to Palestine for a special place of honor during a material reign, etc. We have, however, heard these ideas definitely taught against time and again at Harding College.

"We make this statement because we understand that some are in doubt regarding the teaching of Harding College on this subject. We, therefore, offer this statement for the sake of correct understanding."

Signed:

- James E. McDaniel, William D. Medearis, Mack Greenway, Ralph H. Bell, Ellen A. Spears, Avanelle Elliott, Maurine House, Mary Mae Alston, Mary Nell Blackwell, Sidney L. Hooper, R. T. Clark, Jr., Cecil Garrison, Tommie Jean Davis, Julian Dewberry, Alice Ann Davis, Franklin Boshell, Raymond L. Vaughn, Carroll Cannon, Maxine Brittel, Eunice Turner, Lois Maple, Paul Miller, Norman Smith, Jess Rhodes, A. D. Behel, J. J. Hopper, Alstone L. Tabor, Lowell B. Davis, Argyll Allen, James A. Warren, Vertie Davis, Florence Lowery, Rogers Bartley

These positive, clear-cut statements from teachers and students indicate the perfect safety of the Bible teaching at Harding College, and against such safety no fault can be found.

Do We Teach Against It?

But some may be ready to ask, "Do you teach your students against premillennialism? Do you allow this question to be discussed and do you give them the truth about it?"

The facts given above ought to be conclusive answer to these questions. For when Bible teachers give their students the truths of the Bible, these in themselves are sufficient condemnation of the errors.

But in further answer to these questions, I doubt if any Christian college has taught so clearly and so continually the truth on all these matters, and so persistently pointed out and refuted false notions and theories. I will give you some of the facts and you can judge.

For the thirty years I have been in the school and for years before that we have had, besides the Bible classes, a meeting each Monday night in which all students come together for the discussion of some Bible question of vital interest. Most

years there have been two and three meetings a week for this purpose. I doubt if a year has ever passed that the whole question of the kingdom has not been thoroughly discussed by both students and teachers—the prophecies concerning it, its establishment, the spiritual reign of the Christ, the nature and work of his kingdom, and his return and delivery of the Kingdom to the Father. Often several meetings each year are spent on these subjects and every student has had opportunity to learn the truth on them.

In addition to this, however, in 1935-36 the college arranged for L. S. White to spend an entire week in the fall lecturing both morning and evening on "Premillennialism" in its various phases. Brother White had met Charles R. Russell in debate, and we knew of no one who was so thoroughly acquainted at first hand with the errors of this form of premillennialism.

In the spring of the same year Brother H. Leo Boles came for another week of lectures on the same subject. Brother Boles had handled the debate with R. H. Boll in a masterly and yet gentlemanly way, and we felt that no one was so well qualified to give our students the truth on every phase of the subject.

The same spring we had also arranged for C. R. Nichol to lecture for a week on the same subject. No one can doubt Brother Nichol's ability to handle this or any other question involving religious error. No one among us perhaps has a wider acquaintance with every form of sectarian error and the best method of meeting it. Though Brother Nichol promised to come and wrote several times renewing the promise, he finally found it impossible to come before the close of the year. We were disappointed that he could not be here.

The same year J. L. Hines of Dallas, wrote, asking if he could speak on the subject. He received a cordial invitation, and in the spring he spoke to the entire chapel on the subject.

All of this persistent teaching, both from within the school and from the strongest men we could secure outside, came during a single year. The next year Brother Benson lectured on the subject for a week in chapel, and it was again discussed in Monday night meetings. In one of these meetings Woodrow Whitten, George DeHoff, and Granville Tyler made splendid speeches, outlining the entire question as clearly as I have ever heard done by experienced men, pointing out and refuting the various speculative views.

In 1937-38, Brother Nichol spent three weeks with the school, lecturing twice a day for two weeks, and conducting a

Bible class another hour. In these lectures and classes he was asked to cover the whole question of premillennialism as well as other religious errors, and he did so in a most interesting and effective way. At the same time the student and teacher discussions in Monday night meetings still continued.

This year we have continued the same policy. Brother G. C. Brewer, who has no superior in handling the great truths of the Bible, gave two weeks to the discussion of this and related subjects. Brother Benson again lectured on it in the school and over the radio. His lecture was mimeographed for the use of the students.

What More Could You Do?

Such has been the method used at Harding College in establishing young people in the truth regarding these and other vital questions. It has been most effective. Over a period of time these people become thoroughly acquainted with every kind of religious question and know pretty well how to meet any kind of error.

Before the last Monday night meeting on the premillennial question, the young men who spoke went to hear Brother Foy E. Wallace in a lecture on the same subject. After our meeting a woman who has been with the school for years expressed surprise and disappointment that they had brought back nothing new or different on the subject. "Their speeches were fine," she said, "but the arguments they gave were just what I have heard in the school here all my life. I was expecting something new."

So the policy of the school in grounding young men in the truth has evidently been effective. This is indicated by their acquaintance with disputed questions and their ability to handle them. It is also indicated by the records of these students after they have gone out from the institution. Of the forty-one missionaries in foreign fields today, twenty-five are former Harding students. The fourteen missionaries in Africa are all Harding students. At home in a single year Harding students preached over 5,000 sermons and baptized over 750 people.

But of all those who have gone abroad no Harding student has ever proved unfaithful to his trust or been recalled. No student who has remained long enough in the school to complete the work for his degree, or who has received his Bible background at Harding College, has ever gone out teaching premillennial doctrines. What more would you want?

In an educational institution where parents want their children to learn at least some English, mathematics, science, and

FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS AND FRIENDS

If you are interested in attending Harding College now or later, please cut out this form and return it to us with the information requested. You will receive the later bulletins as they appear.

Name Address When do you wish to enter? Age now Sex In what work or profession are you interested? Please list any others who might be interested in attending, giving addresses:

Mail to Harding College, Searcy, Arkansas



THE DEAN OF BIBLE TEACHERS

J. N. Armstrong, head of the Bible Department at Harding College has an outstanding record for distinguished service which reaches back to the days of Harding and Lipscomb and carries on the spirit of those great men to a new generation. For nearly forty years he has been on the front lines in the fight for the simple truth of the gospel, for the unity of the church, and for high standards of Christian living. Perhaps no one living among us today has inspired more young men and women to consecrated Christian service. He has touched and influenced the lives of more than half of our foreign missionaries as well as thousands at home, who are appreciated for that humble devotion to truth which makes their lives a service of love.

J. N. Armstrong Dean of Bible

the various other matters necessary to fit them for a life of practical usefulness, it is impossible to feed them on anti-premillennialism for breakfast, dinner, and supper through a four-year period. Young people get nauseated after too much of the same fare, and when they have the gorge you cannot give them more. It is possible to disgust a man even with good food and once a young person decides a teacher is a crank on a subject, he immediately discounts everything he says.

How much further our teaching at Harding College could be carried without such unhappy results is a question, but we believe it is safe to say that we have done as much teaching on this subject and as persistently as has any other Christian school. These are facts which cannot be denied. Let no one henceforth tell you a different story. What more could you do?

PREMILLENNIALISM

(Continued from p. 1, col. 1)

line. In fact, it would appear to me that no one really acquainted with the facts in the case could expect more to be done.

We do not hesitate to teach on this subject as occasion demands. Just as long as some men teach premillennial views it will be necessary for those of us who do not believe them to teach against them. This we are doing and shall continue to do.

My Kingdom Is Not of This World

When Jesus came into the world two thousand years ago many of the Jews were unable to understand his message because they were definitely expecting a material kingdom. Jesus, on the contrary, had come to establish a spiritual kingdom. He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world."

It is my firm conviction that those who expect the Master to establish a material kingdom upon his second advent will be likewise disappointed. I believe He will still say, "My kingdom is not of this world."

A millennial reign on the earth over a material kingdom would require two general resurrections—a resurrection of the righteous preceding the beginning of this reign and a resurrection of the wicked at the close of the millennial reign but before the final judgement.

I believe the Bible teaches one great universal resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous upon the return of the Lord. If this be true then there can be no millennial reign on the earth between the two resurrections. In my opinion, the following scriptures establish the idea of one such great universal resurrection.

1. In Matthew 25:31, 46 we find Jesus himself giving a description of his return "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all the nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."

This can be nothing but the final judgment, for the wicked depart into "eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels." Since it is eternal it is final—everlasting. Yet there was a separation of the righteous and the unrighteous, indicating that both kinds came before the Lord at the same time. Otherwise there could be no separation. This gathering before the judgment seat of the Lord, upon his return of both righteous and unrighteous, and this sending away of both groups to their final and permanent abodes allows no place for a millennial kingdom on the earth.

2. Again in John 5:28, 29 Jesus said "Marvel not at this, for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall

hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgement."

Here Jesus describes the great resurrection hour, when all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice and shall come forth. If all come forth, there will be none left to come forth a thousand years later. This passage stands forth as an apparent picture of one universal resurrection of all, unto the resurrection of life, and some unto the resurrection of condemnation, and likewise allows no place for a millennial reign on the earth.

3. Again in II Thess. 1:7-9, Paul in giving encouragement to the righteous declares, "to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed in that day."

Paul is here very clearly referring to the final coming of the Lord, from heaven, with his angels, giving rest to the righteous, and rendering vengeance to the unrighteous. This vengeance is "eternal destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his might." In other words, when the Lord appears to the righteous he also appears, meting out vengeance—eternal vengeance—to the ungodly. Since this vengeance is eternal it can only be the final judgment so clearly referred to by Jesus himself in Matthew 25:31-46, and this passage appears to further preclude any possibility of a thousand year reign on the earth between the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous.



BULLETIN HARDING COLLEGE

» ON PREMILLENNIALISM «

VOLUME XIV

MAY 1939

NUMBER 12

Entered as second-class matter July 28, 1934, under Act of August 24, 1912. Published monthly by Harding College, Searcy, Ark.