

The Chronology of Bible Prophecy

by
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PREFACE

God has always told in advance what He was going to do and why He was going to do it and when He would do it (Gen. 18:17; Dan. 2:19, 22, 28-47; Amos 3:7; Rev. 1:1, 11, 19)! Bible Prophecy is primarily for believers (1 Cor. 14:22) and is to warn (Mt. 24:15-18; Lk. 21:20-22) and to encourage (Mt. 24:6) and to comfort (1 Th. 4:18) them. The study of Bible Prophecy should lead the believer to a deeper, spiritual life (Jer. 25:11; Dan. 9:1-19). The fulfillment of Bible Prophecy is irrefutable proof that the Bible is inspired by God (2 Pet. 1:19-21). There are no other holy books, of any religion, that has ever dared to predict future events and people.

The revelations from God of future things involving people and places and events yet to be, by way of his prophets and priests and kings, can be found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. A number of them were to be used to prove the identity of the promised Messiah when He came [His first Advent] and after He left (Gen. 3:15; 2 Sam. 12-13; Ps. 132:11; Isa. 9:6; 53; Jer. 23:5; Dan. 9:25; Mic. 5:2; Mt. 1:18-2:11; Lk. 2:1-7; Jn. 1:1, 14; Heb. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). Those people who came to trust Y'shua of Nazareth, as being the promised Messiah, after His ascension into Heaven (Acts 2:1), did so because of the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Him (Lk. 24: 44-47; Acts 17:10-12).

The early Church took the subject of Bible Prophecy very seriously! This included those prophecies involving people and places and events that had already been fulfilled and those prophecies that had yet to be fulfilled. The Bible clearly records that the Lord Jesus came UNTO His own [His 1st Advent] (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Th. 4:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-53) and then He would return WITH His Own [His 2nd Advent] (Rev. 19:14). What gave the early Church the hope necessary to press on were those prophecies that looked forward to when the Lord Jesus would return for them. This is the return we know today as, "The Rapture."

The Church's view of the Rapture and the 2nd Advent of Christ and other prophetic events that were as described in the Bible completely changed in a profound way with the teachings of a man named Origen. His teachings took root soon after Constantine, Emperor of Rome, made Christianity the official state religion in 313 A.D.

Origen was a scholarly Christian philosopher who lived from 185 to 254 A.D. During his life he became a leading teacher of theology and philosophy at the influential catechetical school of Alexandria, Egypt, in the early years of the third century. Origen desired to harmonize the New Testament with the philosophy of Plato. To do this he introduced the allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures. Origen taught and spread this

method of interpretation particularly in the area of prophecy. According to Church historian A. H. Newman in his "A Manual of Church History", "Origen was the first to reduce the allegorical method of interpretation to a system. His method of Scripture interpretation was soon adopted throughout the church, and prevailed throughout the Middle Ages. In this particular instance Origen's influence was bad, and only bad."

Origen's allegorical method of interpretation caused the development of the idea by Church theologians that the Israelites had permanently forfeited all their covenants when they rejected the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. This view led them to conclude that these covenants now belonged to the Church and that the Church was the only true Israel, now and forever. This view also taught that the Jews will never again have a future as a Divinely chosen people and that the Messiah will never establish His Messianic Kingdom on earth as it was promised to them [Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 1, p. 507].

It was a man named Augustine who subsequently systematized the allegorically based teachings of Origen into a cohesive theology that would dominate Christianity for more than one thousand years! Augustine, who became a famous man and was known as the Bishop of Hippo, lived from 354 to 425 A.D. He taught two important things concerning the Jews which were to become widely quoted and applied during the Middle Ages. First, he taught that the Jews should be allowed to live among the Christian communities because their wretched circumstances were an evidence of the truthfulness of the Old Testament prophecies that predicted their rejection and dispersion. Second, he taught, on the basis of his allegorical interpretation of Psalm 59:12, that the Jews should be restricted in their privileges and continually humiliated [Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 8, p. 655].

These teachings along with the unavailability of the Bible for the common man caused the Church to enter into a period of time known as The Dark Ages. The teachings of the "Rapture" and of the 2nd Advent of Christ ceased to be taught and were unknown to almost all of organized Christianity during this time. This is confirmed by Charles C. Ryrie in his book, "The Rapture" in which he writes, "During the Middle Ages and the Reformation periods, the idea of an actual kingdom was not taught by mainline groups, some of whom considered such teaching heretical." It would not be until after about 1,500 years of neglect, by most of organized Christianity, that Bible Prophecy would once again become a subject of interest and discussion to the Church at large.

THE REDISCOVERY OF BIBLE PROPHECY

The doctrine of the Rapture was rediscovered during the 1740's by a young man named Morgan Edwards who was born in Monmoughshire, Wales, about 100 miles from Bristol, England, on May 9, 1722. He was baptized in the Established Church of England but at the age of 16 was converted and joined a Baptist church in Wales. Morgan Edwards studied at Trosnant Academy in Wales [1740-1742] and at Bristol Academy in England [1742-1744] where he learned Latin and Hebrew and Greek.

Morgan Edwards wrote a book entitled, "Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the Following Titles: Millennium, and Last-Novelties" between the years 1742 and 1744 while he was a student at Bristol Academy in England. It was in this book that Mr. Edwards wrote of the Rapture of the Church. He was the first man to do so in almost 1,500 years! This book would finally be published by Dobson and Lang, Second Street Between Market and Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1788.

The first pastorate for Mr. Edwards was a small church in Boston, England. Seven years later he became pastor of a Baptist church in Cork, England. It was here he was ordained to the ministry in 1757. In 1760 he became pastor of the Baptist church in Rye, England. It was on May 23, 1761, when Mr. Edwards arrived in America to become the pastor of the Baptist Church in a town of 11,000 called Philadelphia. It was Dr. John Gill, predecessor of Charles Spurgeon, who recommended Mr. Edwards to this church. There were less than seventy Baptist churches in all of the 13 colonies at this point in time.

Morgan Edwards was instrumental in the starting of Rhode Island College. In 1767, he went to Ireland and England to raise funds for this newly established college. He resigned the pastorate after ten years and in 1771, he became an itinerant evangelist while helping the churches of the Southern colonies for the Philadelphia Baptist Association.

Mr. Edwards was a Calvinist but strong on giving an evangelistic appeal. He accepted "The Philadelphia Confession of Faith" that was derived from "The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689" even though it had no direct statement on "The Second Coming of Christ" at all.

Morgan Edwards was a literalist so far as the New Testament was concerned, but not as much so with the Old Testament. He believed that Abraham looked for a real and literal city and acknowledged the Bible as the Word of God, while not denying the textual difficulties. He was highly influential in the Baptist life of America and was the first Baptist historian in America. It was known that Mr. Edwards disliked a commentary on "The Book of Revelation" written by John Rogers, an influential Baptist leader in New Jersey.

Since he sympathized with the British cause during the American Revolutionary War, Mr. Edwards was placed under house arrest on his farm in Delaware and forbidden to travel or speak out until the war had ended. Afterwards he developed some personal problems including some drinking and other questionable activities and was excommunicated from his church from 1781 to 1788. He was restored in 1788 and once again became an influential Baptist leader. It is said that he wrote at least forty-two volumes of sermons with twelve sermons to a volume. However no one seems to know where they might be today.

"A History of the Baptist Church in the United States" by Henry Newman in 1894 relied strongly on the writings of Mr. Edwards. He became, "one of the most important and influential Baptist leaders during the latter part of the eighteenth century" in America. He died January 28, 1795, in Delaware and his body was buried under one of the aisles of the

Baptist Church of Philadelphia. "The Life and Works of Morgan Edwards" by Thomas R. McKibbens, Jr., and Kenneth L. Smith, was published by Arno Press, A New York Times Company, New York, in 1980.

The early part of the nineteenth century was marked by an increased interest among many Christians in the subject of Bible Prophecy. This interest was largely a result of the French Revolution and the thought, of some, that Napoleon was the coming Antichrist. In the year 1812 a book was published entitled, "The Coming of the Messiah in Hope and Glory". It was written by a Roman Catholic named Manuel Lagunza and concerned the teaching of the Rapture.

It is rumored that Edward Irving [1792-1834], the founder of the new "Catholic Apostolic Church," Edward Irving (1792-1834), taught about the Rapture of the Church. Mr. Irving emphasized spectacular manifestations of the Spirit and was a very early proponent of what later became known as the Pentecostal Movement. He was formally excommunicated from the Church of Scotland after his book, "The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature" was deemed heretical in 1833. He died the following year after taking up a new career as an itinerant preacher. Another rumor has it that a woman named Margaret MacDonald also spoke of and taught about the Rapture in 1830 during a revival. There is little that is known about this woman and even less to support the rumor. It is possible that she was a follower of Edward Irving.

Although he is not now widely recognized, John Nelson Darby, was and is the single most influential figure, in regards to the subject of Bible Prophecy, since the 3rd century! The profound impact that this one man had on the evangelical world of his own time has carried over to this very day. The extensive oral and written ministry of John Nelson Darby focused on theological teachings that were little known up to and including the middle part of the nineteenth century. Some of the teachings that he suffered ridicule and accusations of heresy for daring to espouse were: 1. Dispensational Theology; 2. Prophecy; 3. The Priesthood of Every Believer; 4. The Pretribulation Rapture. All of these teachings are now considered "foundational" by most conservative, fundamental, Bible-believing, born-again Christians today.

John Nelson Darby was born on November 18, 1800, in Westminster, London, England. He was the 6th son and the 8th of 9 children born to John and Anne Darby. He was baptized according to the rites of the Church of England on March 3, 1801, at St. Margaret's Church. On February 17, 1812, John Nelson Darby entered the Westminster public school. This school was not the most fashionable of England's public schools but was considered one of England's greatest. He graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1819.

He was called to the Irish Chancery Bar but soon after took Deacon's orders from Archbishop Magee in 1825 and the next year became a priest in the Church of Ireland. He was appointed to the Wicklow parish of Calary. His belief that the Scriptures teach the Church to be independent of the State caused him to resign his curacy in 1827. The next year, in 1828, Mr. Darby broke from the State Church and became affiliated with,

and then a leader of, the "Plymouth Brethren Movement", which was to become a forerunner of home Bible studies and independent Bible churches.

During his lifetime Mr. Darby ministered in virtually all of the English-speaking world and much of Europe as well. His written ministry included translations of Scripture into French, German and English. Many of his books are still in use today. He was instrumental in the establishment of dozens of new churches and had a major personal impact on other great Bible teachers with two of the most notable being D. L. Moody and C. I. Scofield. His life ended on April 29, 1882.

In his book, "The Rapture", Ryrie states that the first Bible Prophecy Conference in the United States was held in 1878. However, the purpose for this conference was more to protest against the rapid takeover of protestant denominations by modernism and the social gospel than it was to discuss Bible Prophecy!

It was during this time that a new teaching was being introduced called "post-millennialism" which teaches that there will be a world conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ prior to His 2nd Advent. Neither logic or an honest examination of the Scriptures is enough to dissuade those who hold fast to the false optimism of this teaching! The proponents of post-millennialism either ignore or spiritualize or allegorize the many biblical passages throughout the Old and New Testaments that clearly point to a horrendous time of world-wide trouble and destruction and death prior to the 2nd Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 24:17-23; Jer. 30:7; Mt. 24:21-22).

CONCLUSION

Our Bible understanding and the study of future things, called "Eschatology", has greatly expanded since the rediscovery of the teachings of "the Rapture" and "the 2nd Advent of Christ in the 18th century". Yet, most professing Christians seem to be unwilling to take the subject of Bible Prophecy seriously or personally in our day and age! This was true of most people at the 1st Coming of the Lord Jesus (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 12:56; 19:44).

It is also true that most people in our present day and age are ignorant of the fact that the Scriptures declare, "...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). In other words, the whole testimony of the Lord Jesus, as to who He is and what He did and when He will return is dependent upon and based on Biblical Prophecy. The fact of the matter is that without Bible Prophecy there would be no Christianity. It is only logical to believe that interest in Bible Prophecy will increase as people search for reasons and answers to what they see taking place throughout the world as the time draws ever closer to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. Bible Prophecy will soon be a subject that most people will not be able to ignore or refute no matter where they live in the world.
Maranatha!