

Come Quickly, Lord Jesus

Biblical prophecy was the foundation of the Protestant Reformation.

From the first, and throughout, that movement [the Reformation] was energized and guided by the prophetic Word. Luther never felt strong and free to war against the papal apostasy until he recognized the pope as antichrist. It was then he burned the papal Bull. Knox's first sermon, the sermon which launched him on his mission as a Reformer, was on the prophecies concerning the papacy [the Man of Sin]... All the Reformers were unanimous in the matter...¹

The Reformers believed Jesus could not return until the Man of Sin/Antichrist was revealed (2 Thess. 1:13). Now that the Man of Sin had been identified, their attention turned to the events that would lead to the second advent.²

To the Reformers, the books of Daniel and Revelation in symbolic language contained the prophetic history of the whole Christian Age—from Pentecost down to and including the return of Jesus and the destruction of this world. The Antichrist was Papacy. The time periods in Daniel of 1260, 1290, 1335 and 2300 days were symbolic. Each day symbolized a year as revealed in Ezekiel 4:6—"I have appointed you a day for a year."

What Next?

Now the Reformers focused in on the next prophetic events that would lead up to the second advent of Jesus. After identifying the Man of Sin, the next milestone would be the end of the 1260 years marked by a severe blow to Papacy. On the basis of Revelation 11:4, 7 and 13 many mainline clergy predicted the details of the French Revolution that would result in the collapse of Papacy between 1795 and 1799 at the end of the 1260 years. The incredible point is they made this prediction 50-160 years before the event.³

What happened?

The aged pope [Pius VI] was dragged from the altar ... His rings were torn from his fingers, and finally, after declaring the temporal power abolished, the victors [the French Revolutionary Army] carried the pope prisoner into Tuscany,[where he died]. The papacy was extinct: not a vestige of its existence remained.⁴

However, the historical record also shows that the papacy revived.⁵ The papacy destroyed and revived—this was incredible. It was the most momentous phenomenon in church history. Revelation 13:3 clicked in the minds of many Protestant leaders the world over. Surely they reasoned this was the deadly wound of Antichrist that was temporarily

healed. In great expectation the floodlight of Adventism swept across Europe and the United States. With the ending of the 1260 years, mainline Protestants now believed the second advent of Jesus was eminent. This wave of Adventism was a logical sequence in the prophetic heritage of the Reformation.⁶ The much sensationalized William Miller was actually a late comer to this worldwide Adventist phenomenon.⁷ The prophetic faith of the Reformation seemed to be locked into a nineteenth century expectation of the second advent. Martin Luther predicted Jesus would return 300 years from his time. This would be between 1830-1850.⁸ In the latter 1700s John Wesley, founder of the Methodist denomination, like many of his contemporaries predicted 1836 for the date of the second advent.⁹

Joseph Wolff, world renowned missionary, preached 1847 as the date of "the coming glory and personal reign of Jesus Christ..." In 1836 Wolff was invited to present his second advent message before the United States Congress and the legislatures of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.¹⁰

What Went Wrong?

All of the expositors of Adventism were generally correct by marking the 1790s as the conclusion of the 1260 years resulting in the severe setback to papacy. Then they variously calculated from 1836-1855 as the ending of the 2300 years when the sanctuary class [the church] was to be cleansed (Daniel 8). Actually, a nucleus of the sanctuary class, the church, was finally cleansed at that time from the defiling errors of papacy. But they erred by assuming that the second advent would occur when the sanctuary was cleansed.

Many Protestant clergy from all denominations were involved in Adventism during the first half of the 1800s. Why was William Miller singled out for ridicule, especially when he appeared on the scene later with much of the same prophetic reasoning of those which preceded him? Miller was an evangelist. He unfortunately used a date for the end of the world to scare thousands to convert or be damned eternally. It's not that Joseph Wolff and others didn't try. Miller was no different than the fundamentalists today who threaten all with eternal torment if they don't accept Jesus before his eminent return. They warn—"Will you be ready if Jesus comes tomorrow?"

Actually the 19th century Adventists were close in their calculations of the 1260 and 2300 day/years. The ending of the 1260 years of the persecuting power of papacy (Daniel 7:21, 25) and the cleansing of the sanctuary (church) from the defiling errors of papacy were milestones on the church's road to the Second Advent. See the book *THY KINGDOM COME*.¹¹

Twentieth Century Fundamentalists

Fundamentalists of the 20th century look with disdain at the prophetic struggles of their 19th century brethren. The secret rapture, seven-year tribulationists of the 20th century with their literal Man of Sin concept and future literal 1260 days (3 1/2 years), departed from the prophetic faith of the Reformation. Ironically, their prophetic heritage traces back to the counter Reformation of the Jesuits.¹²

What has been the prediction record of these seven-year tribulationists? Basic to their concept is the "eminent coming" of Jesus. They claim that ever since Jesus' ascension, no prophetic event had to happen before his return—for centuries he could have returned on any day. In the words of John F. Walvoord, President of Dallas Theological Seminary¹³—"the Lord could come at any moment and there are no necessary intervening events." The obvious inconsistency is their seven-year tribulation must precede Jesus' return. They cover here by claiming Jesus will secretly return to rapture his saints. First a "secret presence" then "every eye shall see him."

Still this is a false prediction. Actually, John Darby back in the mid 1800s sold the seven-year tribulation concept to some fundamentalists. During the balance of the 1800s up until 1948 many fundamentalists preached that Jesus could return any day. On May 14, 1948 a prophetic miracle happened—the rebirth of the State of Israel. This proved a prophetic event had to occur before their concept of the second advent. Hal Lindsey, the student of Walvoord, unwittingly destroyed the "eminent coming" theory when he admitted¹⁴—"The one event which many Bible students in the past overlooked was this paramount prophetic sign: Israel had to be a nation again in the land of its forefathers." If they believed their "eminent coming" theory was true, then they were wrong all the years before 1948 in saying Jesus could return any day. Israel restored proved their "eminent coming" theory was a failed prediction.

After 1948 Hal Lindsey and many fundamentalists, on the basis of Israel and the generation of Luke 21:29-31, predicted that Jesus would return within 40 years of 1948.¹⁵ Well, 1988 came and passed without their secret return of Jesus to rapture the church—another failed prediction of the seven-year tribulationist.

Many set the date of 1988 for other reasons than the 40-year generation. When that failed they predicted 1989 for the return of Jesus. Yet none of their seven-year tribulationist brethren accused them of being false prophets.

For several years before 1994, Harold Camping of Family Radio fame vigorously on radio and by printed page predicted the return of Jesus in 1994. Another failed date among the seven-year tribulationists, and of course, fundamentalists would not call Camping a false prophet. Both the 19th century Reformation Adventists and the 20th century fundamentalists have had their share of failed predictions. But we should view kindly their attempts to have the Lord Jesus "come quickly."

ible Students agree with our seven- year tribulation friends that the prophetic events of Matthew 24 are signs of Jesus parousia (Matt. 24:3), but we disagree on the definition of parousia. We believe it is wrongly rendered "coming" in some translations. In the last fifty years, archaeologists have found hundreds of 1st and 2nd century documents in which the Greek word parousia is used to denote presence. There is no longer a question—parousia does mean presence. Therefore, Bible Students believe that the prophetic events in Matthew 24, such as the rebirth of Israel are proofs that the Lord is present, not coming.

Just as our seven-year tribulation friends believe, the Lord will first return secretly before every eye shall see him, so Bible Students believe that the prophetic events listed in Matthew 24 prove that Christ is now secretly present (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3) before the revelation fulfilling Revelation 1:7—"every eye shall see him."

Endnotes

1. H. Gratten Guinness, ROMANISM AND THE REFORMATION (Toronto: S.R. Briggs [N.D.]), 250.
2. LeRoy Edwin Froom, THE PROPHETIC FAITH OF OUR FATHERS, Vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 739.
3. RISE AND FALL OF PAPACY (New York: The American Protestant Society, 1801), 178-190.
4. George Trevor, ROME: FROM THE FALL OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1868), 439.
5. Aruthur Robert Pennington, EPOCHS OF THE PAPACY (London: George Bell and Sons, 1881), 450.
6. Froom, Vol. 3, pp 263, 264.
7. Froom, Vol. 4, pp 406, 518.
8. THE FAMILIAR DISCOURSES OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER, trans by Henry Bell and revised by Joseph Kerby (London: Baldwin, Craddock and Joy, 1818), 7, 8.
9. Froom, Vol. 3, p 602.
10. Froom, Vol. 4. pp 323, 324.
11. Order your copy from Bible Students, PO Box 144, Edison, NJ 08818-0144.
12. Joseph Tanner, DANIEL AND THE REVELATION (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1898), 16, 17.
13. John F. Walvoord, BIBIOLTHECA SACRA, April-June 1976.
14. Hal Lindsey, THE LATE GREAT PLANET EARTH (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 43.
15. Ibid, p 54.