

The History of Eschatology

It is true that few of the writings of early Church Fathers contain clear teaching about the Rapture, and this is understandable when we consider the history of the Church in the first four centuries. This was the period of the ten pagan persecutions under the Roman Empire which terminated in AD313 with the Edict of Toleration. Constantine eventually declared Christianity the State religion bringing an end to the persecution of Christians.

We can understand that, in a time of intense persecution, some Christians would think that the Tribulation had come and that they were already in the Tribulation. Some Christians at Thessalonica thought this in Paul's day and had to be corrected. In his second epistle (Chapter 2:7-8) Paul made it clear that Antichrist would not come until the Holy Spirit, who indwells the Church, was removed.

"He (the Holy Spirit in the Church) who now hinders, will hinder (the appearance of Antichrist), until he be taken out of the way. And THEN shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

With such intense persecution it would not be surprising if some early Church writers thought that they were already in the Tribulation and were expecting Antichrist to appear. However, we can look back in history and see that those terrible days were not the Great Tribulation and that Antichrist did not appear at that time.

Before the time of Constantine (AD305-337), the predominant view was that Christ would return after the Tribulation and reign for 1,000 years. However, when Christianity gained political power throughout the Roman Empire, **many thought the kingdom of God had come** and that they had been wrong in interpreting the Bible literally. The symbolic interpretation of Scripture flooded the Church with false doctrine even challenging the Deity of Christ.

By early in the 5th century it became very apparent that the Roman Empire was not the kingdom of God, and Augustine of Hippo wrote his book, *The City of God* in which he spiritualized scripture and denied the premillennial return of Christ.

Augustine still maintained that the kingdom of God had come but that it was being established in the Catholic Church, which he referred

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to as “The City of God.” He placed emphasis on salvation through the Church which is an essential element of Roman Catholic doctrine. Augustine’s works dominated the theology of the Catholic Church through the thousand years of the Dark Ages and were adopted by the Reformers after the Reformation began in 1517.

So the truth about the history of eschatology is that neither Darby, Irving, nor Ribera “invented” the truth of the Rapture; it was always in the New Testament and history shows that the Church Fathers of the first four centuries were predominantly premillennial. Reformation theologians however, clung to the baggage of Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church. We have already shown that Dr Watson’s research revealed that there always were men of God who believed the Scriptures literally. It was when the leaders of Christendom followed Augustine and spiritualized the scriptures, that error flourished.

The Testimony of Victorinus

About AD258-260, Victorinus, a Bishop in what we today would call Slovenia, wrote a commentary on the Book of Revelation. He was martyred in AD304 during the reign of Diocletan.

Victorinus taught Chiliasm which is the Latin word for 1,000. Chiliasm was the name given to the Biblical truth that Jesus Christ will return and reign on the earth for 1,000 years.

Before the time of Constantine, Chiliasm was the generally held view in the christian church but after Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, many ceased to look for the Lord to return to establish his kingdom because they believed the kingdom of God had come.

In AD398 the Latin Father, Jerome, revised Victorinus’ commentary in order to delete any reference to Chiliasm (that Christ would reign 1000 years on earth). He did this to make it conform to the Nicean/Constantinople Creed of AD381, which opposed Chiliasm. However, an original copy of the commentary has been preserved from which we learn that Victorinus believed in the Tribulation, that the Jewish Temple would be rebuilt and the Jews would be converted in the last days. He taught that Christ would return and reign for 1,000 years.

Although Victorinus spiritualized parts of Revelation, he believed that Mystery Babylon (Rev.17/18) was literal Rome located on seven hills and that Nero was Antichrist whose “deadly wound” occurred when he cut his own throat. He thought Nero would rise from the dead.

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Victorinus wrote that the Tribulation plagues will strike “when the Church will have gone out from their midst” (p.35 of his commentary) but also speaks of saints in the Tribulation.

Victorinus’s writings are further evidence that early Christians were premillennial in doctrine and that after Constantine the church attempted to wipe out Chiliasm (millennialism).

Prophecy was Sealed Up by God Until the End Time (Dan.12:4)

That the truth of the Rapture has become clearer today is strong evidence it is the correct interpretation of Scripture. When Daniel finished his prophecy of events in the Tribulation, Antichrist and the return of Christ, he said,

“I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?”

God told him to

“Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Dan.12:4).



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This prophecy that knowledge would increase no doubt is true of scientific knowledge in the secular world but primarily it applies to the knowledge and understanding of the prophetic Scriptures because that is the context in which he spoke. When he said, *"I understood not"*, he certainly was not thinking about his understanding of science.

Paul urged greater diligence *"AS YE SEE the day approaching"* (Heb.10:25) thus indicating that prophetic truth would become clearer toward the end times.

In the 19th and 20th centuries world events began to indicate we were drawing near to the coming of the Lord for His Church and that the world was becoming ripe for judgment. Two world wars saw the slaughter of millions of people and it continues today. The population explosion, the rise of radical Islam and Communism, Israel's return to nationhood, apostasy in Christendom and the days of Lot and Noah, are obviously upon us together with violence and the global gay agenda.

Global famine is a real possibility within a matter of weeks if transportation systems are disrupted. Knowledge has increased and with so many scriptures fulfilled, we should expect that our understanding of Bible prophecy would increase. Fulfilled prophecies in our day cry aloud, *"The coming of the Lord is drawing near!"*

Any thinking person who listens to world news can see that history is reaching a climax and a global holocaust is imminent. God has promised that the Church will be removed BEFORE the coming Tribulation and it is with a sense of urgency that we turn to the New Testament to see what God has said about the rapture of the church.

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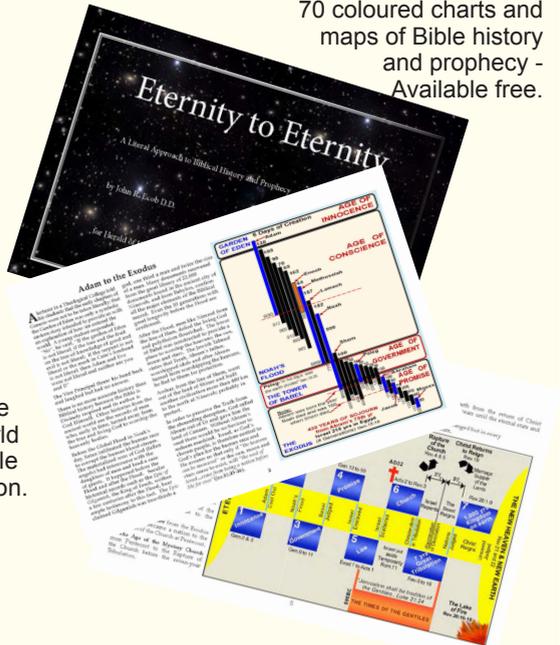
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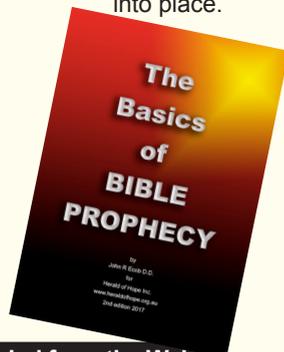
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