

Jewish Apocalypticism and Protestant Fundamentalism

By

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Although apocalypticism has been a rather constant theme of Christian history from the first through the twentieth centuries, in the period since the French Revolution it has developed wide-spread importance throughout the English-speaking world. During the early nineteenth century it became a major factor in both Great Britain and North America. In the 1830s and 1840s, literally hundreds of thousands of Americans and some Canadians were swept up in the Millerite movement. Christ was coming in 1843 or, when that date failed, in 1844 or on a half dozen or more later dates. About the same period Joseph Smith and his Latter-day Saints were expecting the Lord to come to a new Zion somewhere in America. Later in the same century, various Adventists, Bible Students (Jehovah's Witnesses) and a great number of main-line Evangelical clergymen proclaimed that Christ would soon come for his saints and, shortly thereafter, would smash the nations with a rod of iron.

In the twentieth century - in spite of the rise of theological liberalism, neo-orthodoxy and other movements which have often de-emphasized Christian apocalypticism - apocalypticism has continued to increase. Today millions upon millions of sectarians such as the Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals and numerous offshoot groups from those movements

throughout Europe and the Third World proclaim the imminent return of Christ and the destruction of the world as we know it. Significantly, too, many Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans and United Churchmen seem to be touched by the same ideas, just as were many of their grandparents a century ago.

In many ways this is not surprising. Since Christ's day Christians have placed great importance on his second coming or advent - his parousia. Furthermore, the Olivet Sermon or Little Apocalypse, especially as discussed at Matthew 24 and at Luke 17 and 21, describes the end of this world as coming cataclysmically. The Apostle Paul also stresses the same thought (2 Thess. 1:5-10) as does 2 Peter 3 and most importantly, the Revelation is in large measure a continuing description of the terrible events that must precede the end of this age of sin, suffering and death.

What is rather surprising, however, is how Jewish in outlook Anglo-American, Protestant nineteenth- and twentieth-century apocalypticism is in comparison with most traditional apocalypticism. And it should be noted, too, how stridently pro-Zionist or Israeli it frequently is. For example, on 18 June 1982 at the very moment that Israeli military forces were "blasting their way into Lebanon," Prime Minister Menachem Begin was hosted in the United States as guest of honor by an Evangelical organization known as the "Lover of Israel." According to the popular press, evangelist Mike Evans told Begin that he was on a "divine mission." The "Lovers of Israel" assured the Israeli prime minister of their "prayerful support."

Significantly, although perhaps more stridently pro-Israeli than

many Evangelical, fundamentalist and sectarian Protestants in the United States, Canada and other parts of the world, the "Lovers of Israel" were and are in many ways typical of them, as anyone can easily see by visiting a few Evangelical bookstores. Protestant dispensationalists, in particular, emphasize over and over again that "natural" Israel is still playing a major role in salvation history and that in these "last days" the God of Heaven will protect his chosen people against the hordes of Islam and the machinations of modern atheistic Communism. In The Final Countdown, Charles Ryrie presents prophetic accounts of what is soon to take place. According to him and other Christian dispensational apocalyptics such as Christian and Missionary Alliance Church "Pastor Bill" R. Goetz of Abbotsford, British Columbia, the Jews are being regathered to Palestine or Israel as part of God's design. Furthermore, they are aligned with the ten nation confederacy which grows out of the Roman Empire (supposedly the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image described at Daniel 2 and by apocalyptic interpretation the countries of the Common Market) and soon they, the Israelis, will be attacked by the forces of Godless Communism which will come down as the "king of the North" from Russian itself. Necessarily this will lead to the rise of the Antichrist, the rapture of the saints, seven years of tribulation on the earth, the conversion of Israel to Christ and, finally, Christ's return to earth with his saints to establish his millennial kingdom and rule over the earth from the city of Jerusalem itself.¹

Just how far some of this apocalyptic can go is demonstrated by a small leaflet entitled "Why All the Vultures" by Joel Darby.

published by Evangelical Tract Distributors P.O. Box 146 Edmonton, Alberta, it reads in part:

"THE VULTURES are circling in the valley of Armageddon. God is preparing a feast of seven months for these vultures to feed upon. And a new breed of vultures has appeared in Israel, a breed never seen before. These vultures are multiplying at three times the normal rate in Israel. This is a sign of the end times," writes former Rabbi Michael Esses in his new book, "Next Visitor To Planet Earth" (Logos, Plainfield, N.J. 07060).

I checked carefully to authenticate this thrilling development before passing on this information. I phoned Pastor Archie MacKinney, leader for many years of the world-wide ministry to the Jews, American Messianic Fellowship. Archie was one of the five of us who founded BOOK FELLOWSHIP 30 years ago. For a number of years he has been conducting tours of Israel, and knows the situation over there very well. YES, he assured me, it IS true, very true indeed. They call them buzzards over there and my old friend tells me that whereas the buzzard normally lays one egg at a time, they are now laying FOUR, and swarms of them are surprising the people in northern Israel. WHY, they wonder, are there such increasing hordes of these winged scavengers?

Well, according to the Bible, they have a huge feast coming and at the rate God has arranged for them to multiply, it must be SOON. Nothing catches our Lord by surprise. His prophecies always come true, right on time and no needed preparation is omitted. There will be plenty of buzzards to take care of the vast army of slain men and horses, an army which will soon set out from the North to conquer Israel and to capture its vast resources and strategic military location. There is more than a trillion dollars worth of chemicals in the Dead Sea alone, and many other natural resources besides the ideal location for a nuclear power to use in the capture of the vast oil deposits in nearby Arab lands. God knew that this wealth was there long before man discovered it. He knew very well the nature of man, and the greedy grab that the godless forces of the Kremlin and her satellites were going to make for it some day.

Darby then goes on to tell how God is going to slay 5/6 of the Soviet Army with hailstones in spite of Soviet attempts to outwit the Israelis. Because the Israelis have modern radar and could detect an attack by Soviet planes, tanks or other war machines made

of metal, the Communist legions of the "King of the North" are going to advance on Palestine across Asia Minor and Syria on horseback carrying weapons made of "lingostone," a "stronger-than-steel wood product made in Holland." As Darby proclaims: "According to Reuters News Agency, Russia has brought large quantities of powerful archery equipment from the British, also draught horses from all over the world. We reported to you the story of the amazing lingostone many months ago. Pastor MacKinney has some of it. Scraps of it burn like coal in a fireplace, and Ezekiel said the Israelites would be burning the abandoned weapons in place of other fuel for seven years!"

In a more (or less) sober vein, even popular gospel singers take up this theme or are, at the very least, influenced by it. In her recent popular hit "Song of Praise," evangelical songstress Amy Grant intones the Hebrew words "El Shaddai, El Shaddai El-Elyon na Adonai; El Shaddai, El Shaddai Erkamka na Adonai" to hundreds of thousands of Christian youth throughout North America in adulation of the God of Israel.

Christian fundamentalists argue, of course, that this is all as it should be and quote their favorite proof texts to support their particular interpretation of Heilsgeschichte. Sectarians do, quite understandably, vary the basic interpretation given by "main line" dispensationalists such as Ryrie, Goetz and the best known of them all - Hal Lindsey. Nevertheless, the teachings of Adventists, Christadelphians, the Church of God (Faith of Abraham), the World-Wide Church of God, Jehovah's Witnesses and a dozen other such sects are little more than variations on a common theme; and this

should therefore indicate to the historian that all are born from the same womb - whether "legitimately" or "illegitimately."

What distinguishes this particular brand of Christian apocalypticism from other types thereof? And why is the Jewish aspect thereof so pronounced? The answers to these questions are complex but emerge rather quickly when one does a little historical research to discover the sources of what for simplicity's sake may be dubbed "dispensational apocalyptic." But before discussing those sources at length, a few points should be made.

First, the idea that "natural" or "fleshly" Israel continued to have a specific role to play in the unfolding of salvation history after the first years of the development of the Christian church is a rather new and somewhat novel one. While Hal Lindsey makes a good deal of the idea that the return of the Jews to Palestine is one of the signs which "proves" that we are living in the "last days" or "end times," there is certainly nothing to show that the writers of the New Testament had any such idea. As Stephen Travis says: "To begin with, there is not a whisper about this in the New Testament. Chapters 9-11 of Paul's Letter to the Romans speaks at length about the destiny of Israel, but Paul's great hope there is for a spiritual return of the Jewish people to Christ. Paul says nothing about Jews returning from all over the world to the land of Palestine." ² Furthermore, Paul and the early Church as a whole stressed the idea that the Church itself was the Israel of God. The Jerusalem Council mentioned at Acts 15 applied the words of Amos the prophet to the Church - not fleshly Israel - to support Paul's idea: "After this I will return, and will rebuild the tabernacle of David

which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom My name is called, says the Lord who does all these things. Known to God are all His works from the beginning of the world." (Acts 15:16-18 NKJV). And if this were not enough, the Apostle Paul himself stated: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29 NKJV)

Secondly, the Church has seldom attempted to give a literal interpretation of Revelation chapters 7 and 14 where the 144,000 members of the twelve tribes of Israel (minus the tribe of Dan) are described as standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb of God. Expositors have generally been wise enough to realize that these passages are clearly symbolic, for if the 144,000 are literal Israelites, they are also all male virgins who have "not defiled themselves with women." Yet there are literalists who, through strange systems of "logic," manage to ignore this fact.

Thirdly, from the time of St. Augustine until the nineteenth century, most Christians - Protestants as well as Catholics - tended to be post-millennialists rather than pre-millennialists. As a consequence, the idea that the Church was the "Israel of God" was strengthened significantly. For this particular eschatological schema left no place for the fulfillment of biblical prophecy on fleshly Israel.

It must be asked again, then, how the present, largely philo-Jewish, pre-millennialist, dispensational Evangelical and sectarian Protestantism came into being? And why, too, have

English-speaking lands been free, at least to a somewhat greater degree, of the most serious types of anti-semitism that have affected many Catholic and some other Protestant lands?

In the first place, it must be recognized that pre-millennialist ideas were common in the early Church, and with them a general belief that Old Testament prophecies with respect to Israel would be fulfilled literally here on earth. Justin Martyr is quite specific on this point in his exegesis of Revelation 20. He ties that text in with a prophecy of Isaiah and indicates that many - although not all - good Christians believed in a future earthly millennial kingdom with Christ ruling from Jerusalem.⁴ On top of this, the Old Testament cannon had not as yet been clearly defined, at least in so far as Christians were concerned. Thus apocalyptic concepts could be and were borrowed from the apocrapha and the pseudepigrapha. Consequently apocalyptic estimates as to the time of Christ's second advent are found in the early Church in such works as the Epistle of Barnabas. And, curiously, some of these have been picked up by modern, English-speaking Protestants.

For example, many early Christians evidently accepted the idea, taken from the slavonic Enoch and Barnabas, that the thousand-year reign of Christ would follow 6,000 years of human history from the time of the creation of mankind in Eden. Interestingly, that idea was common among British and American apocalypticists from the seventeenth century on to the present, and is still found in the thinking of various Adventist sects. Jehovah's Witnesses, in fact, selected 1975 for the beginning of the Great Tribulation precisely because they believed that that year marked the end of 6,000 years

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of human history.

Important, too, is the fact that many ideas common to much of modern Anglo-American apocalypticism came from post-biblical Judaism, through medieval Catholicism, the Reformers, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestantism (in virtually all its forms) and into the nineteenth century. Take for example the so-called year-day principle.

Although the basis for the year-day principle - in which prophetic days in Daniel and Revelation are interpreted as years - is found at Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6, the idea was not applied to any other prophecies within the Old Testament until the time of Rabbi Akibah ben Joseph (A.D. 50-132). Then it was to the "seventy weeks" of Daniel 9:24-27. Only during the ninth and tenth centuries was it used as a general rule to exegete "day prophecies" within Daniel. That, too, was done by various Jewish rabbis.⁶

Eventually, however, the year-day concept was introduced to Christendom by that most fascinating medieval apocalyptic, Joachim of Floris, and through his followers - many of whom were mendicants - to the Wycliffites and the Reformers. Consequently, in the nineteenth century, as in previous centuries, this so-called principle was taken up by many Protestant divines and became a standard exegetical tool to determine the timing of the Second Coming. Basing his work on the long tradition of apocalyptic studies carried out by such men as Joseph Mede, John Napier, Sir Isaac Newton and even King James I of Great Britain, the Reverend E.B. Elliot produced his important and influential Horae Apocalypticae, which advocated the year-day principle. So a concept

still followed by many sectarian Protestants came from medieval Jewery, through apocalyptic Catholicism into Protestantism and to modern Anglo-American dispensationalism and sectarian Protestantism.

But why have these and other ideas with a Jewish origin blossomed with such vigor in the world of Evangelical and sectarian Anglo-American Protestantism? The answer in part seems to be: (1) the "flat plain" concept of the nature of the Holy Scriptures as developed in Calvinism and disseminated throughout Britain by Calvinists within the Presbyterian, Anglican and separatist traditions; (2) the insistence upon a historicist interpretation of the book of Revelation as a continuation of Daniel's prophecy in order, largely, to picture the Church of Rome as the Harlot of Babylon; and (3) the peculiar speculations of a number of early nineteenth-century British Evangelicals, most of whom were members of the Church of England.

Once the "flat plain" concept of the nature of the Scriptures became general currency in the English-speaking world, much attention began to be given to Old Testament prophecy. Since, however, many Old Testament prophecies had not been fulfilled literally on Israel, Protestants began to try to determine how they would be fulfilled on the Church. Then, too, with a historicist interpretation of Revelation, they often began to explain the New Testament in terms of the Old in a literal fashion rather than in a spiritual one as had been done more commonly by Christians in past centuries. To many such Protestants a wooden bibliolatry replaced the Christ event (that occurrence through which the Word became flesh

and dwelt among us) as the centre of Christian hermeneutics; and the Good News of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension with the sealing of the Church for salvation began to be replaced with another "good news" - the good news of a future, far more literally "Jewish" messianic kingdom, often seen as occurring here on earth.

Eventually this outlook, coupled with the events of the French Revolution, caused a number of British Evangelicals to come together to establish what has amounted to the basic eschatology for the type of philo-Judaic, pre-millennialist eschatology which in its many forms dominates so much of fundamentalist and sectarian Anglo-American Protestantism and which is coming to influence many others as well. These men gathered together in what were known as the Albury Park Prophetic Conferences, held just outside London, and later in the Powerscourt Conferences in Ireland.⁸

Among those who ^aattended the Albury Park Conference were a number of men of first rate importance for the later history of Evangelical Protestantism. These were, specifically, Lewis Way, Henry Drummond, Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby.

It was Way (1772-1840), a wealthy barrister, who took over the leadership of the Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews and published its journal, The Jewish Expositor. As Carl Olof Jonsson says: "Under the pen-name Basilicus, from 1820 to 1822 Way published a series of articles in that journal on Christ's second coming, expounding his premillennial views. These articles, as well as his earlier Letters on the same subject (published in 1816), strongly influenced many students of the prophecies, among them

Henry Drummond." ⁹ Thus Way did much to promote the idea that the Jews still had a major role to play in salvation history; and it was he who first suggested the Albury Park Conference, largely as a Christian antidote to current liberal ideas. ¹⁰

But the roles of many of the other figures who attended the Albury Park Conferences are generally better known. John Nelson Darby, a major figure at those Conferences and later, at the Powerscourt Conferences as well, became a major figure in the spread of many of the ideas generated at Albury Park as has been discussed in detail by Ernest Sandeen. ¹¹ Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, of whom he became ~~a major~~ ^{an} organizer and spokesman, became the "little bump that fermented a great loaf" or - in some persons' views - a whole series of loaves of rather half-baked bread. For it was Darby and the Brethren who spread the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture of the saints and the "two stage coming" of Jesus Christ at the beginning of the millennium - ideas still expounded by persons such as Ryrie, Goetz, Lindsey and others. Futhermore, it was these concepts as plagiarized and expounded by great numbers of orthodox Protestant clergy that have come to influence the Dallas School of Theology, Jehovah's Witnesses and the World-Wide Church of God, to name but a few.

But where did these strange and rather novel ideas originate? In The Incredible Cover Up, Dave MacPherson claims that the "secret rapture" or "two-stage coming idea" originated in the ecstatic utterances of a Miss Margaret Macdonald of Glasgow, Scotland who was early associated with Edward Irving of the Catholic Apostolic Church and Darby himself. ¹² But in a recent article in The Bible Examiner,

Carl Olof Jonsson demonstrates clearly that it was Henry Drummond
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who was responsible for them.

Influenced by Irving's translation from the Spanish of The Coming
a pseudonym for the Jesuit
of Messiah in Glory and Majesty by Juan Josafat, ¹Manuel de Lucunza,
Drummond produced what Jonsson calls "the embryo of the secret
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pre-tribulation rapture theory or the 'two stage coming' idea."

But what does this peculiar concept have to do with the Jewish
nature of modern pre-millennial, Anglo-American fundamentalist and
sectarian apocalypticism? Evidently a great deal. For it was
Drummond himself who made the idea of the restoration of fleshly
Israelites to Palestine and their ultimate conversion to Christ part
and parcel of what is now the dispensational system of apocalyptic.
Writing in the tract "The Lord is at Hand," published in 1828,
Drummond wrote:

"The day of the Lord" consists of many parts, like every
other day, and different acts are to be performed in
different parts of it. The morning is that which is fixed
for the resurrection, as Bishop Horsley has well shown on
Psal. XXX.3,5. The restoration of the Jews from all lands,
and establishment in their own, is not an act that can take
place in the twinkling of an eye, but must be gradual and
progressive; the resurrection of the dead saints, and the
changing of the living, is not a gradual and progressive,
but a sudden and instantaneous act; consequently the latter
must take place at some moment of the progress of the
former. . . .

During the war, then, which succeeds the changing of the
elect, the only witnesses for Jehovah which will be left on
the earth, will be the Jews, and a promise is still to them
that they shall be brought out of all trouble, and
re-establish in their own land; and that at the very moment
of their greatest strait, the Lord shall manifest himself on
their behalf. Thus the appearance of the Lord to raise his
saints, and his manifestation again, in order to save his
national Israel, seem to be distant from each other by all
that period occupied by the war of Armageddon, during which
time the Lord may be, though on earth, yet invisible to all

but his risen saints.

This all shows very clearly that the full-blown tradition of modern philo-Judaism within Evangelical Protestantism goes back at least to 1828. Fortunately, it has been responsible for a sympathy towards the Jews among English-speaking Christian conservatives which, in all probability, has helped greatly to blunt the extreme anti-semitism which has affected other parts of Christendom so seriously in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet it has had its negative side, too. Often it has led to the unwarranted speculation of apocalyptic date-setting as with the Millerites, Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Sometimes it has brought about a quietist retreat from social issues or, more recently, to involvement in right-wing politics in the style of the Moral Majority, a Rios Mont in Guatemala or a Ronald Reagan in the White House. And curiously, it has led to a really strange perversion of the Jewish and Christian traditions in the attitude of former American secretary of the Interior James Watt: "If Jesus is coming to take us home soon, there is no particularly good reason to preserve the environment." Furthermore, Christ can restore it anyway. But even more seriously, it has frequently given to Anglo-Saxon Protestant Christianity a strangely legalistic, Jewish cast out of harmony with the spirit of primitive Christianity itself. And finally, all too often as with the "Lovers of Israel," it has caused Christian dispensationalists to take a political position towards the modern state of Israel which is altogether too lacking in moral discrimination. Their motto frequently seems to be "Israel, right or wrong. But still God's people."

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, The Final Countdown (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1972. William R. Goetz, Apocalypse Next Beaverlodge, Alta.: Horizon House Publishers, 1980).

² Stephen Travis, The Jesus Hope (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 81.

³ For a general overview of the various concepts relating to the millennium, see Loraine Boettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974).

⁴ "Dialogue with Trypho," Chap. lxxxix as published in Vol. I of The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Erdmans, 1973), p. 240.

⁵ The Watchtower, 15 August 1968, pp. 494-501.

⁶ LeRoy Edwin Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), Vol. II, pp. 124, 195-6.

⁷ A detailed account of the year-day concept may be found in Froom's four-volume set, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers.

⁸ Ernest R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1970), pp. 18-20, 34-8, 61-2.

⁹ Carl Olof Jonsson, "The True Originator of the Two-Stage Coming Idea" in The Bible Examiner, November-December 1982, p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹ Sandeen, pp. 62-80.

¹² David MacPherson, The Incredible Cover-up (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1975), pp. 36, 54, 62 (ftn. 21) and the Appendix on pp. 151-7.

¹³ Jonsson, pp. 12-19.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵ Pp. 14-16.