

Saturday, December 24, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 51
Darby On Trial: Debunking Attacks on the Pre-Trib. Rapture, Part 1

Introduction

- “The true origin of the truth of the pretribulation rapture (the pre-Daniel’s 70th week rapture) is the New Testament and this truth was recovered to the saints through the instrumentality of J.N. Darby in 1827.” (Huebner, 107)
- “Those who directly, or by inference, say that he lied about finding this in the Word of God fall into two classes:
 - Those who say he was influenced by the Jesuits Ribera and/or Lacunza
 - Those who say it came from a (demon-inspired) woman in E. Irving’s church (1832), or visionary/occult, tongue-speaking, Scots girl (1830).” (Huebner, 107)
- Dave MacPherson, author of *The Rapture Plot*, has done much to try to discredit the chronology and testimony we have presented in this class. James Lloyd, author of *The Rapture Cult: Dishonesty In Dispensationalism*, stated the following:
 - “To put it bluntly, John Darby and certain key lieutenants blatantly lied concerning the source of their teaching. This set the tone for the dozens of “thieves and robbers” that would follow in Darby’s footsteps. This completely dishonest practice of historical revisionism has been thoroughly documented in a series of books by several rapture experts—most notably a man named Dave MacPherson.” (quoted in Huebner, 34)
- As a posttribulationist, MacPherson has invested 30+ years seeking to credit a Miss Margaret Macdonald of Port Glasgow with having spoken of the pretribulation rapture in a “revelation” that she received. This lesson will be devoted to an examination of the major attacks upon the pretribulation rapture of the Body of Christ.

Was Franciscus de Ribera the Source of the Pretribulation Rapture?

- The postmillennialist, L. Boettner, thought that he had found the root to the “dispensational movement.” He wrote:
 - “But while the dispensational movement did not gain popular recognition until the rise of the Plymouth Brethren, its real origin is traced to a Jesuit monk, Ribera, who lived in the early Reformation era. The standard Protestant interpretation at that time was that the Pope was the Antichrist, and that the sins of the Roman Catholic Church were set forth in the 17th chapter of the Book of Revelation under the figure of the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet sitting upon the scarlet colored beast. In defense of the Roman Catholic Church the monk Ribera put forth the futurist interpretation of the Book of Revelation.” (quoted in Huebner, 113)
- Historicist Dr. H. Grattan Guinness, in his *Approaching End of the Age*, says:
 - “In its present form it (the futurist interpretation) may be said to have originated at the end of the sixteenth century with the Jesuit Ribera, who, moved like Alcazar (a Preterist) to relieve the Papacy from the terrible stigma cast upon it by the Protestant interpretation,

tried to do so by referring these prophecies to the distant future, instead of, like Alcazar, to the distant past.” (Guinness, 100)

- Eric C. Peters, author of *Antichrist and the Scarlet Woman*, states the following:
 - “The method was invented by the Jesuit Ribera, in 1585. Strangely, the modern Futurists make no mention of him in their writings, but, be that as it may, to Ribera goes the credit for starting the Futurist fire. . . It was first set adrift by the Roman Catholic Ribera, for the sole purpose of confusing Protestants. The truth of this statement cannot be denied, for copies of Ribera’s original book are still in existence.” (quoted in Huebner, 113)
- Dr. Oswald Allis, author of *Prophecy and the Church*, stated:
 - “The futurist interpretation is traced back to the Jesuit Ribera (A.D. 1580) whose aim was to disprove the claim of the Reformers that the Pope was the Antichrist.” He adds that, “Its acceptance by the Brethren was not due of course to any objection to the ‘Protestant’ interpretation as such, but to the fact that their literal interpretation of prophecy and their refusal to admit that predicted events were to precede the rapture made their acceptance of this system of interpretation inevitable.” (quoted in Huebner, 113)
- Huebner states the following regarding these allegations, “The truth is that in some measure Ribera returned to what some of the so-called apostolic fathers had taught, for there is doubt that they looked for Antichrist and then Christ (they were really posttribulationists—for the loss of the rapture preceding the tribulation, along with the rise of the clerisy, were amongst the first departures). Following this, it was expected that Christ would set up a 1,000 year reign on earth.” (Huebner, 114)
- “It is a piece of historicist myth-making, taken up by others, that the Jesuit Ribera started futurism. This is a sample of an attempt to stigmatize on the part of some opposed to the truth. Many antidispensationalists appear to be attempting to stigmatize futurism as Romanism and Jesuitism; even some Preterists do so, who seem to ignore the Jesuit Alcazar who interpreted the book of Revelation in a preterist sense. The historicist interpretation, i.e., the ‘Protestant interpretation,’ regarded the Pope as the principal Antichrist and so when futurists regarded the Antichrist as a single, future person, this was construed as assisting the Romanists by relieving the Pope of this charge of being the Antichrist. Ribera produced a commentary on Revelation in which he viewed the Antichrist as a future individual. Likely this was an anti-Protestant move. Be that as it may, futurism had an earlier history.” (Huebner, 114)
- Since early Christian writers held that the Antichrist was a future individual, Ribera was not the first to do so. Norman Cohn, author of *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, informs his readers that others who preceded Ribera held such a view:
 - “Moreover the eschatological tradition had long associated the Jews with Antichrist himself. Already in the second and third centuries theologians were foretelling that Antichrist would be a Jew of the tribe of Dan; and this idea became such a commonplace that in the middle Ages it was accepted even by scholastics such as St. Thomas Aquinas. Antichrist it was held would be born at Babylon; he would grow up in Palestine and would love the Jews above all peoples; he would rebuild the Temple for them and gather them together from their dispersion. The Jews for their part would be the most faithful followers of the Antichrist, accepting him as the Messiah who was to restore the nation. .

. In the compendium of Antichrist-lore which Adso of Montier-en-Der produced in the tenth century and which remained the stock authority throughout the Middle Ages, Antichrist, while remaining a Jew of the tribe of Dan, has become still more uncanny and sinister.” (Cohn, 77-78)

- Christopher Hill concurs with Norman Cohn when he writes:
 - “The (Antichrist) legend was summed up by the tenth-century French Monk Adso, and taken over by orthodox scholastics like Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus. The identification of the Pope with Antichrist by medieval heretics led to the assumption that Babylon must be Rome, where Joachim of Flora thought Antichrist had already been born. . . In general the widespread adoption by respectable protestant scholars of the view that the Pope was Antichrist led Roman Catholic interpreters to lay new emphasis on Antichrist as a Jew—men of great erudition like Ribera and Alcasar, Bellarmine and Malvenda.” (quoted in Huebner, 114)
- “E. B. Elliot was a very learned and well-known writer of the historicist school of prophetic interpretation. In one of his works he summarized the prophetic thought of Ribera. It is clear that his summary is not presented with a hidden bias in favor of futurism.” (Huebner, 114) Ribera is not a true futurist; his commentary of Revelation moves back and forth between a historicist view and futurist view.
 - “. . . Ribera has thought good to explicate the argument of the Apocalypse as if it were nothing else but certain commentaries upon our Lord’s prophecy in Matt. 24. . . he makes it begin with the early period of the Church. So his 1st Seal’s white horse and rider signify the gospel-triumphs of the apostolic era; his 3rd Seal’s black horse and rider, heresies; his 4th Seal, the violence of Trajan’s persecutions of the Church, and multitudes of deaths of Christians under it, by sword, famine, wild beasts, etc. At length in the 6th Seal Ribera explains the phenomena there figured as meant of the signs before Christ’s second coming spoken of in Matt. 24 and Luke 21: and constructs the sealing vision too, with all that follows in the Apocalypse, to have reference to the times of the Antichrist. . . The 144,000 of Apoc. 7 he makes to be Jews converted to Christ at the consummation, though inconsistently afterwards explains the 144,000 in Apoc. 14 of both Jews and Gentiles under Antichrist; and taking the number 144,000 literally. . . four first Trumpets he explains literally; . . . The locusts of the 5th Trumpet however he expounds figuratively of a woe of cruel and barbarous invading armies, (as barbarous as the Goths and Vandals of old,) with their crowned kings leading them on against the Church. . . In the millennium Ribera follows Augustine. It is the whole time from Christ’s resurrection to Antichrist’s kingdom; the new Jerusalem being viewed by him, Pareus seems to hint, as a figure of the Church of Rome.” (Elliot, 481-483)
- As one can see from this excerpt, Ribera is far from a Futurist. His explanation contains aspects of historicism, futurism, and Augustinian amillennialism. Early English Futurist Charles Maitland stated the following when discussing Jesuit views on the book of Revelation:
 - “In proportion as the life of the Reformation declined, Rome relaxed those efforts that had enabled her to hold her ground in the great theological strife. The Jesuits, no longer thinking it needful to grant so much, shut up the Apocalypse, and devoted themselves to those political intrigues that have made their names infamous in modern history.” (Maitland, 386)

- “To say that futurism is Jesuitism, as does L.R. Thomas, seems quite bitter, but for such a student of history as H.G. Guinness to say that “futurism was first invented by the Jesuit Ribera” is utterly excuseless.” (Huebner, 116)

Historicism and the Two-Stage Pre-conflagration Rapture

- “Joseph Mede is the father of English historicism. It is quite clear that he held a two-stage coming. He mistakenly thought that 2 Pet. 3:10 applied to a premillennial ‘conflagration’ to be followed by a renovation of the earth so as to be fit to dwell on for the millennium. This created the difficulty of what to do with the saints while the conflagration went on. The solution was to have Christ come in two stages, in the first of which the saints would be raptured and then when the conflagration and renovation were completed, the Lord would descend to earth with the saints. This influenced some of the subsequent writers, for Joseph Mede’s works were widely read.” (Huebner, 117)
- “Joseph Mede (1586-1638) lived long before July 1830. Mr. MacPherson says July 1830 is the point at which he found ‘the earliest mention of even a hint in Irving’s writings of a two-stage coming.’ Let us pause for a moment to ask: is that what this is about—merely finding a mention of a two-stage coming? Yes it is, and finding a ‘two stage coming’ is the basis of his claim of having found the origin of the pretribulation rapture in an utterance of Margaret Macdonald of Port Glasgow, in 1830.” (Huebner, 117)
- What, then, does MacPherson do with the following statement made by Joseph Mede in the early 1600s:
 - “I will add this more, namely, what may be conceived to be the cause of this Rapture of the saints on high to meet the Lord in the Clouds, rather than to wait his coming to the Earth. What if it be, that they may be preserved during the Conflagration of the earth and the works thereof, 2 Peter 3:10 that as Noah and his family were preserved from the Deluge by being lift up above the water in the Ark, so should the Saints at the Conflagration be lift up in the Clouds unto their Ark, Christ, to be preserved there from the deluge of fire, where the wicked shall be consumed.” (quoted in Huebner, 117)
- “Of course there is ‘a two-stage coming’ in that quotation, though Mr. MacPherson will not have it to be so. Moreover, there have been other historicists that thought in such terms. For Mr. MacPherson to admit that there were some who held a ‘two-stage coming’ before the time when he alleges Margaret Macdonald did, would undo his 30+ year mission, and expose his litany of ad hominem attacks and calumnies for what they really are. . . Implicit in holding a premillennial conflagration, based on 2 Pet. 3:10, is a historicist, two-stage coming, with a pre-conflagration rapture, and a return to earth after the conflagration has passed and the earth has been renovated.” (Huebner, 117)
- Increase Mather (1639-1723) stated the following in, *A Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion of the Jewish Nation*, written in 1709:
 - “The living Saints at Christ’s coming shall be caught up into the air, that so they may escape the Deluge of Fire, which will be Perdition of ungodly Men, Luk. 17:34; 1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Pet. 3:7. But before this rapture of the living, the dead saints shall be Raised. Therefore the Apostle says, They that remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not

prevent them which are asleep. i.e., They, as to their Bodies, shall not be with Christ before the Bodies of Saints asleep in the Grave shall be with him; but the dead in Christ shall rise first, and, after that, the living saints will be caught up to meet the Lord coming in the Air, 1 Thess. 4:15, 16. . . As when the flood came, there was a Difference made between Noah's Family and the rest of Mankind. Thus when the world shall perish by Fire, no Saint shall be hurt by that fire, but sinners shall." (quoted in Huebner, 118)

- The following quotations are taken from Reiner Smolinski, *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather, An Edition of "Triparadisus."* *Triparadisus*, published posthumously, gives Cotton Mather's (1663-1728) matured views on the subjects treated, one of which is the conflagration, to which much space is given, based on viewing 2 Pet. 3:10 as introductory to the millennium (p. 190). One of the last things to happen to the saints, before Christ comes, is the persecution by Antichrist (p. 225). The saints "shall be caught up to meet the Lord" (p. 225). "Our GOD having thus made up His Jewels, and snatched away all that He had any Value for, the Earth is now left with none but the Wicked upon it. . ." (p. 227). The "Vials of Divine Wrath are poured out upon the World. . ." (p. 233). "Now, why should it be thought a Thing Incredible to you, That GOD should bring upon the Earth a Conflagration which will at once carry all before it! Since the World is as Wicked now, as it was before the Flood. And there will be a far greater Number Saved out of the Conflagration, than there were out of the Inundation. The Saved will be far more than Eight Persons. 'Tis to be hoped, there will be no fewer than One hundred and forty four Thousand of them; From whom the NEW EARTH, will be Replenished. . ." (p. 242). During this time the saints will be safe: ". . . Caught up to the Place, where the LORD will have His Holy Ones with Him, at such a distance from the Earth as to Deliver them from the Wrath to Come, and from the Flames of a World on Fire; they will be then again returned unto the Field prepared for them, and be on the New Earth. . ." (p. 273). The Antichrist will perish during the Conflagration (p. 330). (quoted in Huebner, 118)
- Other historicist writers that held to some form of a Pre-Conflagration Two-Stage coming include the following:
 - John Gill (1697-1771), wrote *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*
 - Thomas Burnet (1635-1715), published *The Sacred Theory of the Earth: Containing an Account of the Original Earth and of All the General Changes Which it Already Hath undergone, or is to undergo, till the Consummation of All Things* 1719.
- In the writings of the Calvinist Baptist, Morgan Edwards (1772-1795) we have a historicist who taught that the rapture would occur before the 1260 days, i.e., a mid-tribulation rapture. This is further evidence, despite MacPherson's claims to the contrary that people were teaching a two-stage coming before Margaret Macdonald of Port Glasgow, in her supposed "revelation" received in 1830. Let us consider Morgan Edwards in his own words before looking at MacPherson's dismissal of the evidence.
- In *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the Following Titles; Millennium, Last-novelties*, published by Dobson and Lang in 1788 we find the following words of Morgan Edwards:
 - II. *The distance between the first and second resurrection will be somewhat more than a thousand years.*

- I say, somewhat more; because the dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ's " appearing in the air" (1 Thes. iv, 17); and this will be about three years and a half before the millennium, as we shall see hereafter: but will he and they abide in the air all that time? No: they will ascend to paradise, or to some one of those many "mansions in the father's house of God" (John xiv: 2), and to disappear during the foresaid period of time. The design of this retreat and disappearing will be to judge the risen and changed saints; for "now the time is come that judgment must begin," and that will be "at the house of God" (1 Pet. iv. 17): (Edwards, 7)
- He appears in the air and my shout, "Blessed is he that commeth in the name of the Lord" (Mar xviii.39). The other witness, viz. John, will preach to the Gentiles; for people, nations, tongues, and kings are applicable to none but them. When these witnesses will appear is hard to say; for though their time of prophesying is sackcloth is 1260 days or three years and a half (allowing thirty days to a month) yet they may preach out of sackcloth long before; for the 1260 days reset only to the time that the holy city and the outer court of the temple shall be trodded under foot of the Gentiles (or Antichrist and his army) viz. 42 months, which make exactly 1260 days, allowing 20 to a month (Rev. xi. 2): but the ministry of the witnesses requires many more years to perform than the time of their wearing sackcloth; and there are no more than about 204 years between now and their death: I should therefore expect that their appearance is not far off. I have hinted before that the two witnesses and Antichrist will be in Jerusalem during the said 42 months: they in the temple defending it: and Antichrist and his army in the town besieging the temple: and he will prevail. (Edwards, 18)
- The struggling of Antichrist towards the mastery of the world and his assumption of Godhead will also precede the millennium. Who this Antichrist will be is hard to say. I take him for the last of them, who have plagued the world under the names of Popes; for Antichrist is to be destroyed at Christ's coming to reign (2 Thess. ii.8.);
- 5. Another event previous to the Millennium will be the appearing of the son of man in the clouds, coming to raise the dead saints and change the living, and to catch them up to himself, and then withdrawing with them, and observed before, This event will come to pass when Antichrist be arrived at Jerusalem in his conquest of the world; and about three years and a half before his killing the witnesses, and assumption of godhead. (Edwards, 20-21)
- The last event, and the event that will usher in the millennium, will be, the coming of Christ from paradise to earth, with all the saints he had taken up thither (about three years and a half before). . . (Edwards, 24)
- Huebner reports the following regarding MacPherson's view of Morgan Edwards, "MacPherson's view must necessarily be predetermined by insisting on maintaining that he is the discoverer of the source of the pretribulation rapture, i.e., in Margaret Macdonald of Port Glasgow, in 1830. Apparently he is incapable of seeing a pre-1260 days rapture (mid-Trib.) and the subsequent appearing of Christ, as presented by Morgan Edwards." (Huebner, 123)
- In *The Rapture Plot*, MacPherson makes the following statement about the pre-1260 days rapture articulated by Edwards:
 - "Edward's scheme of a rapture three and a half years before the end of a 1260-year tribulation has the same tiny gap a futurist would have if he were to teach a rapture three

and a half days before the end of the 1260 day tribulation! Since such a futurist view would be seen as a posttrib view, Edwards should be classified as a historicist posttrib.” (MacPherson, *Rapture Plot*, 268)

- Huebner correctly points out the following implicit admission on the part of MacPherson,
 - “Even so, that would be a ‘historicist posttrib’ holding a two stage coming. So, after all, even with his humbug explaining away the plain fact that Morgan Edwards viewed the 1260 days as days, not years, he ends with the implicit admission of a two-stage coming, trying to minimize the thrust of this by referring to a ‘tiny gap’ of 3.5 days. It sounds like a biased ‘claim game’ is at work, not sobriety in investigation. Can such a person be trusted to tell us what the writers quoted above thought, or what Margaret Macdonald thought, or what J.N. Darby thought?” (Huebner, 123)

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