The *ABUSE* of Bible Prophecy

Dr. David R. Reagan

I want to begin with a paradox: We worship a God of prophecy and yet we either abuse or ignore the Prophetic Word.

That our Creator God is a God of prophecy is firmly established by a proclamation which He made through Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 46:9-11):

> . . . I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure . . . Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

This passage makes it clear that the God of the Bible has the knowledge to predict the future, the audacity to proclaim it in advance, and the power to see that what He predicts will come to pass.



As the year 2000 approached some Bible prophecy fanatics began to predict that all computers would melt down and that society would collapse. These biblically unfounded predictions caused much derision to be heaped on Bible prophecy.

Being a God of prophecy is one of the many proofs that the God of the Bible is the one and only true God. This was emphasized through Isaiah on another occasion when God spoke through him to mock the false gods made of wood and stone (Isaiah 41:21-24 LB):

> "Can your idols make such claims as these? Let them come and show what they can do!" says God, the King of Israel . "Let them try to tell us what occurred in years gone by, or what the future holds. Yes, that's it! If you are gods, tell what will happen in the days ahead! . . . But no! You are less than nothing, and can do nothing at all. Anyone who chooses you needs to have his head examined!"

A Sad Heritage

Yet, despite the fact that the God of the Bible clearly establishes His credentials as the one and only true God by pointing to and emphasizing His prophetic powers, the Church has a sad heritage of both ignoring and abusing prophecy.

In fact, there is probably no other portion of the Bible that has been more ignored and abused in the Christian heritage than the prophetic scriptures.

Prophecy has been abused by apostates, spiritualizers, and fanatics.

The Apostates

The apostates are those so-called believers who mock the very idea that the Bible contains prophecy. They, in fact, hate prophecy with a passion because they reject the truth that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Rather, they argue that it represents Man's search for God and therefore is full of legends and superstitions.

If there truly are fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, then the book would have to be supernatural in origin. Since they are unwilling to admit that, they steadfastly refuse to admit that the Bible contains prophecies. They either write off prophetic passages as "poetry" that has no literal meaning, or they argue that the prophecies were written after the events they prophesied.

This is the reason that the book of Daniel has been so castigated by liberal apostates. In the book, Daniel precisely prophesies a whole sequence of world empires. He also prophesies many events that occurred during the inter-testamental period between the close of the Old Testament and the writing of the New Testament. The apostates dismiss Daniel as a fraudulent book that was written 500 years later than it purports to be.

Of course, this allegation about the book of Daniel flies in the face of the fact that Jesus quoted the book and treated it as sacred scripture (Matthew 24: 15-22).

I had a rather brutal, first-hand experience with this attitude in the early 1980's when I was asked to speak at a mainline Protestant denomination in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. After a few words of introduction, I asked the congregation to turn to the book of Daniel. The pastor, who was sitting on the front row, suddenly jumped to his feet and protested: "We don't allow the book of Daniel to be read in this church." When I asked why, he sneered at me and said, "You obviously are not a seminary graduate, because if you were, you would know that the book of Daniel is a fraud."

The Spiritualizers

Another group of abusers are the spiritualizers. These are people who believe the Bible does contain prophecy, but they argue that it never means what it says. Instead, it means whatever they want it to mean.

People love to spiritualize scripture because it enables them to play the role of God since they can use the spiritualizing process to make a prophetic passage mean whatever they want it to say.

A good example of what I am talking about can be found in a writings of Amillennialists who do not believe that Jesus would ever return to this earth to reign for a thousand years, They always spiritualize the meaning of Zechariah 14:1-9.

That passage clearly and simply states that in the end times when the city of Jerusalem is surrounded by the forces of the Antichrist and is about to fall to him, the Messiah will return to the Mount of Olives. When His feet touch the mount, it will split in half. The Messiah will then speak a supernatural word, and all the forces around Jerusalem will be instantly destroyed. The passage closes by asserting that on that day, the Messiah will become 'king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9).

Amillennialists totally destroyed the plain sense meaning of this passage by cleverly spiritualizing it to mean something else. They argued that the Mount of Olives is a symbol of the human heart. Thus, the enemy forces surrounding Jerusalem represent the evil in the world that surrounds the human heart. When a person receives Jesus as his Lord and Savior, his heart (the Mount of Olives) breaks in contrition, and on that day, Jesus becomes the king of his life. So, the passage has nothing to do with the Second Coming of Jesus. Instead, it is a passage about individual salvation!

I grew up in a spiritualizing church where we were taught that the Bible never means what it says when it is speaking prophetically. Because we spiritualized prophecy, we were Amillennial in our eschatology, denying that Jesus would ever return to reign on this earth.

Our preachers seldom ever spoke about Bible prophecy, but when they did, they would always confidently proclaim, "There is not one verse in the Bible that even implies that Jesus will ever put His feet on this earth again." That was our prophetic mantra, and I heard it over and over again.

So, you can imagine how shocked I was one day when I was about 12 years old and was flipping through the Bible, and it happened to fall open to Zechariah 14. It was easy to read and simple to understand. The message was clear: the Messiah is returning to the Mount of Olives, and when His feet touch the ground, the mount is going to split in half. I couldn't believe my eyes!

The next time I went to church, I confronted my pastor in fear and trembling with the passage. I reminded him of his teaching that "there is not one verse in the Bible that even implies that Jesus will ever put His feet on this earth again." I then showed him Zechariah 14 and asked him to read it. He did so — over and over. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, he looked up at me, stuck his finger in my face, and said, "Son, I don't know what this passage means, but I'll guarantee you one thing, it doesn't mean what it says!" When I asked why, he bellowed, "Because it is Apocalyptic!"

I didn't know what that meant, but it sure sounded authoritative, so when I started preaching in my 20's, I used the same technique to put down anyone who would question my assertion that Zechariah 14 did not mean what it said. I would just growl, "It's Apocalyptic!"

And then one day I read the entire book of Zechariah, and I noticed that it contains several prophecies about the First Coming of the Messiah, and every one of them meant exactly what they said. Consider:

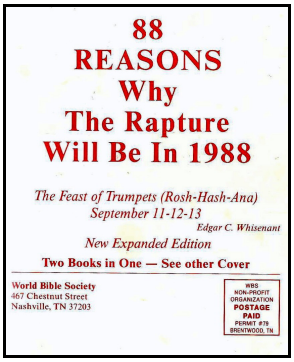
> The Messiah will come humbly, riding on a donkey (9:9).
>
> He will be hailed as a king (9:9).
>
> He will be betrayed by a friend (13:6).
>
> He will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (11:12).
>
> The betrayal money will be used to purchase a potter's field (11:13).
>
> The Messiah will be forsaken by His disciples (13:7).
>
> The Messiah will be pierced (12:10 & 13:6).

After discovering these prophecies and realizing that they were all literally fulfilled in the life of Jesus, it suddenly dawned on me that if the First Coming prophecies in Zechariah were literally fulfilled, then there was no reason to assume that the Second Coming prophecies in the same book would not be literally fulfilled. I realized that "Apocalyptic" was nothing more than a smoke screen to hide the true meaning of the prophecies.

The Fanatics

Unlike the apostates and the spiritualizers, the fanatics truly believe in Bible prophecy to the point of being obsessed by it. Where they go astray is that they view prophecy as a playground for fanciful speculations.

You can spot a fanatic easily. They are always trying to guess the identity of the Antichrist or else they are attempting to set a date for the Lord's return.



Edgar Whisenant is a good example. In 1987 he published a little pamphlet entitled "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988."[2] Over 300,000 copies of 88 Reasons were mailed free of charge to ministers across America, and 4.5 million copies were sold in bookstores and elsewhere. When 1988 came and passed without the Lord returning, Whisenant wrote another pamphlet giving 89 reasons why the Lord would return in 1989!

One characteristic of prophecy fanatics is that they never learn from their mistakes. The classic example is Harold Camping who owned one of the largest Christian radio networks in the United States.[3] He used that network to proclaim his conviction that the Lord would return in 1994. Did he learn his lesson? No! In 2010 he cranked up his prognosticating machine once again and set another date for the Lord's return: May 21, 2011. And when nothing happened on that date, he proceeded unabashed to revise the date to October 21, 2011.



Harold Camping

Needless to say, the fanatics do great harm to Bible prophecy. Their reckless speculations produce disillusionment and mocking. They cause the whole study of Bible prophecy to be held in contempt.

Prophecy Ignored

Another form of the abuse of Bible prophecy is the tendency of Christian leaders to completely ignore it. Many excuses are given for doing so.

Some argue that it is just too complex: "You have to have a doctorate in hermeneutics to understand it." That, of course, is not true. What you must have is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a conviction that prophecy can be understood, and a willingness to study it.

But instead of studying, many pastors have decided to take refuge in the worn out joke that says: "I'm not Premillennial or Amillennial or Postmillennial. I'm Panmillennial because I believe everything will all pan-out in the end." That's an admission of being too lazy to study the subject.

Another common excuse for ignoring prophecy is that it is too other-worldly: "It's all pie-in-the-sky and has no relevance to the present." This is absolutely false, for if you can convince a person that Jesus really is returning and that He could return any moment, the person will be motivated to holy living and evangelism. Also, the promises of Bible prophecy provide great hope in the midst of a world that is descending into hopelessness.

Some pastors tell me that they avoid Bible prophecy because it is too controversial: "It is too divisive and therefore must be ignored to preserve unity." They fear it will divide their congregations.

There is some validity to this concern. Bible prophecy can be controversial and divisive if it is taught in a dogmatic way by a teacher who is determined to prove that everyone else is wrong except him. But this doesn't have to be the case. When prophecy is taught right out of the Bible with a focus on Jesus, it will provide spiritual strength.

Among Christians in general I have discovered that one of the most important reasons for ignoring prophecy is fear: "Bible prophecy is too frightening to read because it is all about the wrath of God." This viewpoint was expressed to me in a letter I received years ago from a young man who said he was afraid of prophecy because, "It's all about blood and gore and beasts and things that go bump in the dark!"

It is true that Bible prophecy contains a lot of bad news concerning the future of this world. But all that news is for unbelievers — for those who have rejected God's gift of grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. For believers, Bible prophecy contains only good news — incredibly good news. So good, in fact, that the Apostle Paul exclaimed, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). That statement is a mouthful! Think about how horrible all the suffering is in the world today. Yet, Paul says it is nothing compared to the blessings that believers will receive when the Lord returns. And those incredible blessings are spelled out in detail in Bible prophecy (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

A Conspiracy

The bottom line is that Satan does not want anyone to read and understand Bible prophecy because it clearly reveals his ultimate defeat at the time of the triumphal return of Jesus. The message of Bible prophecy is "**Believers win in the end!**" That is a message that Satan does not want anyone to know.

So, Satan has convinced most Christians that the book of Revelation is a Chinese puzzle that no one can understand. The result is that most Christians have never read the book. It's like reading a novel through to the last chapter and then tossing the book aside, never to discover how the story ends.

A Fresh Assault

In these last days, Satan has launched a fresh assault on Bible prophecy, mainly because he does not want anyone to realize that we are living in the season of the Lord's return.

Particularly disturbing to me are the attacks on Bible Prophecy that are coming today from so-called Evangelicals. As disturbing as this may be, I see this development as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Consider, for example the following prophecy by the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 3:3-4):

> Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

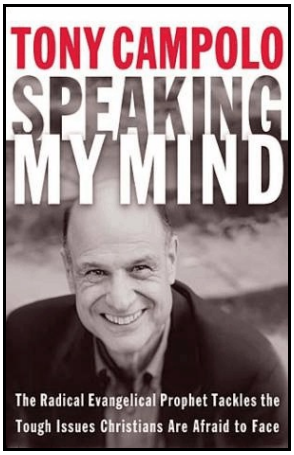
In other words, there will be those in the end times who will mock God's Prophetic Word. I used to think this referred to non-believers, and, of course it does. But they are not the ones who are outspoken because they could care less. The sad and tragic thing is that most of the open scoffing today is coming from Christian leaders, causing much confusion within Christendom at large. Consider:

1) Rick Warren



In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, he mocks Bible prophecy when he states: "If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy." He goes on to characterize prophecy as a "distraction" and says that anyone who lets himself get involved in distractions like studying prophecy "is not fit for the

kingdom of God."[4]



2) Tony Campolo

In his book, *Speaking My Mind*, he attacks believers in Bible prophecy with these words: "Rigid Christians who believe in the possibility of Jesus' soon return are a real problem for the whole world." He then proceeds to blame them for wars and a host of other evils.[5]

3) Bill Moyers

He is the PBS journalist who is a Baptist seminary graduate. He gave a speech in 2005 in which he denounced Tim LaHaye as a "religious warrior who subscribes to a fantastical theology." He then claimed that those who believe in Bible prophecy desire environmental disaster "as a sign of the coming apocalypse."[6]

4) The National Council of Churches

In December of 2008 the National Council of Churches joined the chorus of scoffers by issuing a denunciation of all those "who consider the state of Israel to be divinely ordained and scripturally determined, with a central role in ushering in the end of history . . ."[7]

5) Rob Bell

He is one of the leaders of the Emergent Church Movement. Here is one of his many put-downs of Bible prophecy:[8]

> I would argue that in the last couple hundred years, disconnection has been the dominant way people have understood reality. And the Church has contributed to that disconnection by preaching horrible messages about being left behind and that this place is going to burn — absolutely toxic messages that are against the teachings of Scripture, which state that we are connected to God, we are connected to the earth, we are connected to each other

6) Brian McLaren



He is the leading spokesman of the Emergent Church Movement. Writing in *Sojourners* magazine in April of 2009 he stated that any theology that stresses a special end time role for Israel is: "Terrible . . . deadly . . . distorted . . . biblically unfaithful . . . and morally and ethically harmful."[9]

He further stated that those who take the end time prophecies about Israel seriously, "use a bogus end-of-the-world scenario to create a kind of death wish for World War III, which — unless it is confronted more robustly by the rest of us — could too easily create a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Or consider this incredible statement from his book, *Everything Must Change*:[10]

> The phrase "the Second Coming of Christ" never actually appears in the Bible [Hebrews 9:28??] . . If we believe that Jesus came in peace the first time, but that wasn't His "real" and decisive coming — it was just a kind of warm-up for the real thing — then we leave the door open to envisioning a Second Coming that will be characterized by violence, killing, domination, and eternal torture.
>
> This vision reflects a deconversion, a return to trust in the power of Pilate, not the unarmed truth that stood before Pilate, refusing to fight. This eschatological understanding of a violent Second Coming leads us to believe that in the end, even God finds it impossible to fix the world apart from violence and coercion . . .
>
> If we remain charmed by this kind of eschatology, we will be forced to see the nonviolence of the Jesus of the Gospels as a kind of strategic fake-out, like a feigned retreat in war, to be followed up by a crushing blow of so-called redemptive violence in the end.
>
> The gentle Jesus of the First Coming becomes a kind of trick Jesus, a fake-me-out Messiah, to be replaced by the true jihadist Jesus of a violent Second Coming. This is why I believe that many of our current eschatologies, intoxicated by dubious interpretations of John's Apocalypse, are not only ignorant and wrong, but dangerous and immoral.

His reference to "the gentle Jesus of the First Coming" in this quote immediately reminded me of the words of Jesus in Revelation 2 where He speaks a strong word of warning to the church at Thyatira for tolerating a false prophetess in their midst. Speaking of her, Jesus says (Revelation 2:22-23):

> Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

That statement alone should be sufficient to dispel the myth of the supposedly "gentle Jesus of the First Coming."

McLaren also ridicules the teaching of the Rapture and the Millennial rule of Jesus, and he dismisses Dispensational teachings about the end time as 'pop-Evangelical eschatology." Yet Dallas Theological Seminary (a Dispensational school) recently invited him to speak to all their students!

Conclusion

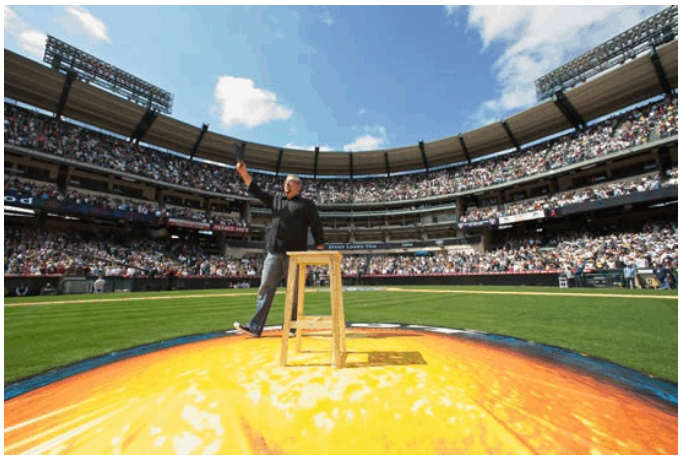
What appears to be happening in the Evangelical Movement today is that it is being hijacked by people who are advocating the old liberal Social Gospel together with Dominion theology.

Increasingly, they talk about the responsibility of the Church to "restore God's creation." The mission of the Church, according to them is to take the world for Christ, solve all the world's political, economic, social, and ecological problems, and then

present a restored earth to Jesus.

In April of 2010 when Rick Warren unveiled his PEACE plan before 30,000 people at the Angels Baseball Stadium in what he called his "Sermon on the Mound," he said:[11]

> I'm looking at a stadium full of people who are telling God they will do whatever it takes to establish God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.



Rick Warren presenting his "Sermon on the Mound."

The Truth

The truth is that the Church was never given the task of conquering the world for Christ or solving all the world's political and social problems.

We were commanded to preach the Gospel and make disciples. And yes we were instructed to stand for righteousness.

But the restoration of God's creation is a task that will be accomplished by Jesus when He returns to reign in glory and majesty from Mt. Zion in Jerusalem.

The sad thing is that the new apostasy concerning Bible prophecy is distracting people from the truth that we are living in the end times and that we are right on the threshold of the Tribulation when God will pour out His wrath on those who have rejected His grace, mercy and love.

Satan must be very pleased, because that is a truth he does not want anyone to know.

The formidable task we face as believers in God's Prophetic Word is to stand firm and continue to urge the study of God's Prophetic Word while proclaiming the truth of the Lord's soon return to as many people as we can, as quickly as we can. ✣

Notes:

1) Pamela Starr Dewey, "Edgar Whisenant's 88 Reasons," www.isitso.org/guide/whise.html.

2) Alyssa Newcomb and Lyneka Little , "Harold Camping: Doomsday Prophet Wrong Again," http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/business/ 2011/10/harold-camping-doomsday-prophet-wrong-again.

3) Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), page 286.

4) Tony Campolo, *Speaking My Mind* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).

5) StarTribune of Minneapolis, Minnesota, January 30, 2005, "Bill Moyers: "There is no tomorrow."

6) National Council of Churches, "Dangers of 'Christian Zionism' are cited in new NCC brochure," www.ncccusa.org/news/ 081202christianzionismbrochure.html, 2008.

7) *Relevant* magazine, "Rob Bell tells it like it is," January/ February edition, 2008.

8) *Sojourners* magazine, "Four Points Toward Peace in the Middle East" by Brian McLaren, April 16, 2009, http://blog.sojo.net/ blogs/2009/04/16/four-points-toward-peace-middle-east.

9) Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2nd edition, 2007).

10) Don Koenig, "Rick Warren's Global P.E.A.C.E. Plan is Dominionism," www.thepropheticyears.com/comments/Globel%20Peace%20plan.htm.

Sir Isaac Newton and Bible Prophecy

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) is considered to be the single most important contributor in all of history to the development of modern science. This fact is ironic since he was a strong believer in both God and the Bible.

What makes it ironic is that the scientific community today takes the position that a belief in God disqualifies a person as a legitimate scientist. But Newton, whose methodology was strictly logical, believed deeply in the necessity of God. He reasoned that the beauty and complexity of the universe could only "proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."



Sir Isaac Newton

Another fascinating thing about Newton is that he was a student of Bible prophecy. He wrote a commentary on both Daniel and Revelation.

Perhaps his best known comment about Bible prophecy is a prophetic one: "About the time of the end, a body of men will be raised up who will turn their attention to the prophecies, and insist upon their literal interpretation, in the midst of much clamor and opposition." ✣