

Progressive Revelation

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For Discussion: The rapture is not Biblical
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It started when a woman named Margaret MacDonald put herself into a trance and had a 'vision' that the 'church' would come out of the world BEFORE the Great Tribulation. She wrote this 'vision' down in a letter and a British theologian in the United Kingdom name **John Darby** ran with it! He came to the United States in 1830 and brought with him the teaching of the rapture. This spread like wildfire throughout our country in 1830. A man by the name of C. I. Scofield published the first ever reference Bible at the end of the 1800s. In the footnotes of this Bible, Scofield referenced what the rapture was. His Bible grew in popularity, but we need to understand WHY. It was 'rapture theology that the people liked; the footnotes Mr. Scofield wrote; not the actual 'Word of God itself. <https://www.sungazette.com/opinion/letters/2024/04/the-rapture-is-not-biblical/>

See also:

https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_1203.cfm
<https://www.gotquestions.org/progressive-revelation.html>

What is progressive revelation?

The things that God revealed to humanity were not all given at once. His revelation was given in stages. This is known as progressive revelation.

Romans 16:25-26 – Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations

Paul made a distinction between the revelation which God formerly gave and that which He was presently giving.

How should we regard the Old Testament in light of progressive revelation?

Progressive revelation means that God did not unfold His entire plan to humanity in the Book of Genesis or, for that matter, in the entire Old Testament.

- The Old Testament revelation, though accurate, is incomplete.

The New Testament simply completes the revelation that was began in the Old Testament...

Jude 3 – I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints

The complete canon of Scripture has now been once and for all delivered. Nothing needs to be added to it and nothing should be subtracted from it.

Paul foretold of the sign gifts going away which authenticated those speaking for God during the time of the Apostles...

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 – whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

The reference *that which is perfect* to has to be the completed canon of Scripture. The Apostles laid the foundation of God revelation with the New Testament.

- And with that, sign gifts were no longer needed for the authentication of those speaking for God... we have the complete Word of God to do that.

Are there contradictions between the Old and New Testaments?

Progressive revelation does not contradict previous revelations but rather clarifies and develops the things previously revealed. Jesus said the Law would be entirely fulfilled, not broken.

Matthew 5:18 – For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Jesus did not contradict the Old Testament law - rather He fulfilled it.

How was there limited knowledge before Christ came?

After His resurrection the meaning of his death became more and more clear. Jesus promised them that more revelation from God was to come after He left this world...

John 16:12-13 – I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth

Why is it important to recognize progressive revelation?

The Bible would seem contradictory if progressive revelation is not understood. There are a number of passages that are at odds with each other if not understood in their historical setting.

If one does not recognize the progressive nature of God's revelation to humankind then they will be forced to admit contradictions in Scripture. There are a number of passages that are at odds with each other if not understood in their historical setting. A few examples:

- Abraham's descendants were commanded to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10) but Galatians 5:2 tells us that circumcision means nothing.
- Exodus 20:8 commands Israel to observe the Sabbath but Acts 20:7 instead recognizes the first day of the week and Colossians 2:16-17 says we are not to be judged regarding Sabbath observance.
- In Matthew 10:5-7 Jesus commanded His disciples not to preach to the Gentiles but the Great commission says go to all the nations (Matt 28:19).

Why did God employ progressive revelation? Why didn't He reveal the essentials from the beginning?

Progressive revelation served His purpose in teaching mankind important lessons during the various dispensations.

Ephesians 3:2 – *indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you*

The English word "dispensation" is translated from the Greek noun *oikonomia*, often rendered "administration" or "stewardship" in modern translations. The Greek word *oikonomia* is a compound of *oikos* meaning "house" and *nomos* meaning "law." Taken together the central idea in the word *dispensation* is the administration of the affairs of a household. The verb *oikonomeo* refers to managing a household.

Galatians 3:24 – *the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*

What are the lessons learned from the various dispensations?

- Innocence – free will is revealed in man's sin nature
- Conscience – man's conscience is insufficient for righteousness
- Human Government – man's corporate efforts will not restrain evil
- Promise – man's pursuit of blessings apart from God will fail
- Law – man's efforts to meet God's standard will fail
- Grace – man's efforts at faith apart from God will fail

- Kingdom – man will still sin even with Satan bound and a perfect environment

Is it important to remember the various lessons learned from the different dispensations?

Yes...

Acts 17:30 – *these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent*

People will be judged on their response to information God has revealed in each of the ages.

Luke 12:48 – *to whom much is given, much will be required*

What objection might people bring up regarding progressive revelation?

Some charge that those holding to progressive revelation espouse two different methods of salvation—one that was in place before the first coming of Christ, and another that came after His death and resurrection.

Were those living before the first advent of Christ saved in a different way than people are saved today?

No, there is only one way to be saved and that is by the power of God made possible through the sacrifice of Christ...

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works*

What is the basis of salvation in every age?

The death of Christ; the requirement for salvation in every age is faith; the object of faith in every age is God; the content of faith changes in the various ages.

- In the present Age of Grace, we are saved by faith in God's provision: Jesus paid our sin-penalty by his death on the cross
- In prior dispensations people were saved in having faith in God's provision suspecting it had something to do with the Messiah

As a result of progressive revelation, we know the mechanism God used to satisfy the requirements of the Law; previously people didn't know how God would accomplish it but knew that He would.

Genesis 15:6 – *he (Abram) believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

And there is also this:

Habakkuk 2:4 – *the just shall live by his faith*

When did Old Testament saints begin expecting their salvation had something to do with the Messiah?

With the Protoevangelium (the first mention of the Gospel)...

Genesis 3:15 – *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel*

Such expectation for the Messiah is in many places; for example:

John 4:25 – *I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us*

What are the prophetic implications of progressive revelation?

In what might be better termed as “progressive illumination...”

Daniel 12:4 – *Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.*

This tells us that what we need to know about the future has been revealed in the full canon of Scripture.

- But these revelations will not be fully understood *until the time of the end...* thus, progressive illumination.

The Prophet Daniel certainly did not understand what God had revealed through him...

Daniel 12:8-9 – *Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?” And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.*

What does it mean that *many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*?

Many have taken this as a reference to increased travel and access to knowledge being greatly increased.

- Certainly, more people are traveling today and at a faster speed than most of human history
- The Internet gives the average person unprecedented access to information

But this is not what this verse is talking about; in context, it is referring to the increase of prophetic understanding. The *going to and fro* is *going to and fro* in the Scriptures as did the Bereans...

Acts 17:11 – *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

What kind of things about *the time of the end* are people better understanding today?

- How it is possible that no flesh would be saved if the Tribulation did not end (Olivet Discourse)
- How the whole world will see the two prophets of Revelation killed and resurrected
- How the Mark of the Beast and Image of the Beast are possible

What popular argument against the pre-trib rapture is refuted by the doctrine of progressive revelation?

The idea that John Darby “invented” the doctrine of the rapture of the church in the 1830’s. This is not actually true as a plain reading of the rapture passages reveal it. And there is plenty of evidence that even the early church fathers believed it.

- The fact the doctrine of the rapture was popularized starting with John Darby is however just one more manifestation of progressive illumination.

Why wasn’t the doctrine of the rapture popular before John Darby?

Because of the practice of allegorizing Scripture which began with Origen (A.D. 185–254) who later influenced St. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430).

Allegorizing Scripture became the practice of the Roman Catholic Church which eventually led to Martin Luther initiating the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

- The Protestant Reformation revived the practice of literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics to all Scripture except for eschatology.
 - But Martin Luther retained the Roman Catholic Church’s amillennial view of the end times.
 - It wasn’t until the 1800’s that theologians began to challenge the allegorical approach to eschatology
- Thus, we see progressive illumination in action!

What did the prophet Sir Isaac Newton have to say about progressive illumination?

“About the time of the end, a body of men will be raised up who will turn their attention to the Prophecies & insist upon their literal interpretation, in the midst of much clamor & opposition.” – Sir Isaac Newton

Sir Isaac Newton (1642 – 1727) was an English mathematician, physicist, astronomer, and theologian. He was a key figure in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment that followed.

- The earliest scientists were Christians seeking to better understand the Creator by studying His creation.
- God blessed this motivation by their making discoveries that benefited Western Civilization

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- The reason for progressive revelation is dispensational lessons learned.
- Progressive revelation & illumination reveals we are living in *the time of the end*
- Citing John Darby as the inventor of the rapture is lame!