

2.6.3 Billy Graham (b. 1918) and the Eschatological Gospel

The following brief synopsis of Billy Graham's early life was taken from the Encyclopaedia

Britannica Online:

William Franklin Graham, Jr. was born November 7, 1918, in Charlotte, NC, to a dairy farmer. . . . In 1934, while attending a revival meeting led by the evangelist Mordecai Ham, he underwent a religious experience and professed his 'decision for Christ.' In 1936 he left his father's dairy farm to attend Bob Jones College (now Bob Jones University), then located in Cleveland, Tenn. . . . transferred to Florida Bible Institute (now Trinity College), graduated in 1940, and was ordained a minister by the Southern Baptist Convention. Convinced that his education was deficient, however . . . enrolled at Wheaton College in Illinois . . . where he met and married Ruth Bell, daughter of L. Nelson Bell, a missionary to China . . . and graduated from Wheaton in 1943 . . . He joined the staff of a new organization called Youth for Christ in 1945 and in 1947 served as the president of Northwestern Bible College in Minneapolis, Minn. . . . In the late 1940's Graham's fellow evangelist in Youth for Christ, Charles Templeton, challenged Graham to attend seminary with him so that both preachers could shore up their theological knowledge . . . but in 1949, while on a spiritual retreat in the San Bernadino Mountains of southern California, he decided to . . . simply "preach the gospel." After his retreat, Graham began preaching in Los Angeles, where his crusade brought him national attention (www.britannica.com/Billy-Graham:1-2).

The Los Angeles Crusade of 1949 proved to be the beginning of probably the most well-known and beloved evangelist of modern times. In 1950, Oral Roberts met Billy Graham at his Portland, Oregon Crusade, where Graham asked Roberts to open up that night's meeting with prayer. It was also at that Portland Crusade that Graham confided in Roberts that he and Cliff Barrows had attended one of Oral's tent meetings in Florida in 1948 and that, although he believed in healing, God had not "called him to pray for the sick, but has given you (Oral) the gift." During that same Crusade, Oral Roberts was met by Dr. Harold Jeffreys, "one of Billy's sponsoring pastors and the pastor of the very large local body of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel," who asked Oral to bring his big tent to Portland in one year's time (Roberts 1995:128-130). This began the lifelong friendship, mutual respect and an agreement (of sorts) for the division of labor in the "harvest fields" between these two great evangelists of the twentieth

century. And as it shall now be shown, both men also maintained a kindred spirit and belief when it came to preaching/teaching the Eschatological Gospel of those who had gone before them in the faith.

In his 1992 book *Storm Warning*, Graham made the following comments about the Eschatological Gospel, while referring to his earlier work *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1983) (addressed in Rev 6:1-8 and Matt 24:3-37): “Both of these narratives are presented in the context of my own ministry on six continents spanning nearly fifty years,” and there is a new order/utopia/dawn coming in Jesus: “Christ is our hope and peace both now and for the future” (1992:8-9, 312-3). This is confirmed in Graham’s 1983 book speaking of John’s message of Revelation or Apocalypse as being “ultimately a message of good news—the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ” and that the return of Jesus provides hope for both Christians (as His Second Coming) and Jews (as their First Coming of Messiah) for Him to set up His Kingdom and conquer evil and the Evil One (1983:25, 226-7). According to Kyle, “Venerable evangelist Billy Graham is a premillennialist. His *Approaching Hoofbeats* best expresses his end-time views. While he has avoided the date-setting trap, he is also convinced that humanity is living in the Last Days” (1998:118). This theme is also mentioned in Graham’s 1981 book *Till Armageddon: A Perspective on Suffering*, where he records his answer to Sir Winston Churchill’s question about hope as being in “the plan of salvation and the Return of Christ” (1981:19).

Finally, Graham also touched on the Eschatological Gospel in the introduction to his 1965 book, *World Aflame*, where he stated that “Matthew 24 contains the Bible-based philosophy of world events,” and that sin and redemption were dealt with at the cross, but that the climax of history will be dealt with through the kingdom of God with a new heavens and new

earth (2 Pet 3:13) (1965:xv-xvi). From these references, it is clear that Billy Graham believes and has preached an Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus for the fifty-year span of his ministry. Next, his good friend and fellow evangelist Oral Roberts will be discussed.