

# The Troubling Worldview of the 'Rapture-Ready' Christian

by Bill Barnwell



When the subject of the "end-times" comes up, many Christians and non-Christians don't want to talk about it. Some Christians, annoyed with all the competing theories and terminology just say, "What difference does it make? Jesus is coming back and I just need to be ready." Non-Christians just assume that since Christianity isn't true, then the whole issue doesn't matter. Well, actually, it does matter. I will submit that the popular doctrines of the *Left Behind* series pose very real threats not only to Christianity, but also to the wider culture.

Probably most conservative Protestants (though not all of us) believe that humanity is certainly in the final generation of life on earth as we currently know it. Not that we "could be," but that "we must be." That's a big distinction. They believe this because of their views on a couple key Biblical texts. The first is the Olivet Discourse. This discourse by Jesus about the "end of the age" can be found in Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21. Dispensationalists – a group that believes God has two separate prophetic programs for Israel and the Church and generally believes that Christians will be removed from the earth before a final tribulation – see all of the events or signs spoken of by Jesus as referring to events that are happening now or going to happen very soon. Never mind that Jesus was first and foremost referring to events that would occur within his own disciples' lifetime (Matthew 24:34). They believe that nothing past chapter 3 in the book of Revelation has occurred yet. It is all in the future, and all relates to the tribulation period, which true Christians will avoid.

Another key text is Daniel 9:27. It is from this verse alone that we get the idea of a "seven-year tribulation" during the end times. But the New Testament says nothing about a seven-year tribulation. The book of Revelation refers to a 3.5-year period – five different times. They are most likely referring to the same time period. Dispensationalists believe by prophetic necessity a number of things. First, they assume that the world must get worse in just about all ways. Second, they assume that Daniel 9:27 calls for the rebuilding of a Third Jewish Temple at the site of the Dome of the Rock. Therefore, prophetic necessity demands that the current Islamic al-Aqsa mosque must be torn down to build this new Jewish Temple. Halfway through the tribulation period, the antichrist will come and exalt himself in the new Jewish Temple, stop sacrifices in the Temple, break a peace treaty he had earlier made with Israel, and proclaim himself to be God. They get all this from cutting and pasting Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15, 2 Thessalonians

2:4 together and then associating those passages with everything that will be going on in Revelation 4–19.

Once you begin thinking of the implications involved, you begin to see why this doctrine is so dangerous to everybody. Dispensationalists seem to have a preoccupation with war. In fact, right now, dispensationalist mega-church pastor John Hagee is preaching that a war with Iran is not only the right thing to do, but is prophetically inevitable. Apparently, Bible prophecy demands a showdown with Iran. You see, if you aren't on the side of war, then you aren't on the side of God. Talk of peace now becomes irrelevant. It's *God's will* that we be militarists. In fairness, not all dispensationalists are militarists. Our own Laurence Vance is an example. But they are in a definite minority. The prevailing worldview of dispensationalism glorifies war, militarism, and the State.

The dispensationalist view of Daniel 9:27 provides some troubling implications as well. They don't care that tearing down the al-Aqsa mosque would result in a regional war and cause all sorts of global distress. This would not be a bad thing in their minds. They believe that it was all foreordained and is a sign that the end of the world would be soon upon us.

Also, if you buy into these interpretations, talks of peace in the Middle East are futile. Jews and Muslims must continue killing each other at high rates. And who will be the one bringing peace to the Middle East in this popular end-time paradigm? Not Jesus, but the Antichrist. Therefore, talk of Middle East peace during this current "dispensation" is not from Jesus, but the Antichrist. When dispensationalists hear talk of peace summits or treaties in the Middle East, they assume it must have evil origins and be antichristic. If that's the cause, why bother trying to make the world a better place? All we need to do is be good Christians and wait for our ticket out of this earth and make way for the Antichrist.

Dispensationalists are numerous and popular. Well-connected preachers like Hagee have political connections. Dispensational preachers and lobbyists have the ear of the White House and are directly trying to influence foreign policy based on their very questionable theological views, which, by the way, are less than 200 years old. This is more than just a quirky theology that doesn't affect those who do not hold it. Dispensationalists want to bring about world events that would have catastrophic implications for other Christians and for non-Christians.

If they are correct, why should any of us bother trying to make the world a better place? Dispensationalists get very annoyed at this question. They say, "Final peace on earth will only come through Christ!" They basically insist Christians trying to do good in the world should only focus on "spiritual things." Trying to change social institutions for the better is futile and presumptuous. Apparently the only two options are handing the world over to Satan or believing that humans can do everything in their own strength. Not much room for nuance here.

Ironically, many dispensationalists are involved in the Religious Right movement and want to stem abortions, ban gay marriage and make America more Christian. But at the same time they believe in a theology that says the world can only get worse, that there's nothing any of us can do about it, and that it's about to get so bad Christians are going to be taken off of the earth. If the ship is irreversibly sinking, why try and patch up the leaks?

If you need more proof that many dispensationalists hold troubling worldviews, just take a visit over to the Rapture Ready message board. (<http://www.rr-bb.com/>) The main site is one of the bigger dispensationalist/pretribulationist sites on the web. You can read for yourselves how they view the world, how they can't wait to escape it, and their obsession with war.

One angry pre-tribber wrote me a few weeks back. He had this to say:

When the RAPTURE of the CHURCH takes place, and mark my words it will, maybe then you will see the light! After you have been left behind you are going to look back on all the people that you deceived, who will probably be in your face at that time, and hopefully repent of the false gospel that you were teaching! It's not too late to be saved during the 7 year tribulation period but it will be harder when you hear that Christians, who become Christians after the Rapture of the Church, are being beheaded for the witness of Jesus! Hopefully you and those who partake of your beliefs will see the light before Christ comes for the Church!

Notice in his mind I'm not even a real Christian. The reason? Because I happen to have a different position than he does on the issue of the "rapture." I'll also apparently be too much of a coward to "convert" during the "7 year tribulation" because other people who become Christians after the pre-tribulationist rapture are being beheaded. Ever notice with people who so strongly believe this doctrine that they assume everyone who will be "left behind" is going to be absolutely clueless? Maybe I too will just assume aliens came and abducted the "true Christians." Apparently I'd be too scared to be beheaded, even though I'd find myself instantly in heaven along with all the real Christians who were taken up in the rapture.

Finally notice the great confidence of this guy. He is so convinced of his position that only an idiot or heretic would disagree. Well, I challenge people like this, and the crew over at Rapture Ready to actually put their interpretations up against the Scriptures and think about the logic and implications of their beliefs.

The logic and implications are clear. Society is going to Hades in a handbasket. There's little we can do to stem the tide of evil. The Middle East must further deteriorate. Anyone who disagrees with Israel's foreign policy is opposing God. The third most important site to Muslims must be crushed to make way for a new Jewish Temple. Good Christians should support the building of a new temple with new animal sacrifices taking place inside of it (compare Hebrews 10 to the theology of Darby and Hal Lindsey). And in a strange sense, war is kinda good and peace is kinda bad – since war is a sign that the end

is near and peace on earth is a sign of the Antichrist. Any Christian who doesn't agree with all this is deceived at best and a heretic at worst.

When you understand that millions of Christians believe this way, and that some of them are actually fairly influential on the political scene, you begin to see why this theology needs to be refuted. By refuting it, dispensationalists think you're trying to refute God. I would argue that you're being more faithful to God and the very Scriptures themselves. This is not just an in-house debate that only affects me and other Christians. Dispensationalists have a vision for the world and it is bad news for everybody. Therefore, it would do you all good to spend some time in the Bible and see what exactly the Scriptures have to say on this subject.

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