

Examining Hank Hanegraaff's *The Apocalypse Code* by Dillon Burroughs

Hank Hanegraaff's *The Apocalypse Code* begins by noting some of the more radical interpretations of Revelation by Hal Lindsey. He follows by claiming that Tim LaHaye (co-creator of the *Left Behind* series) has become the leader of modern prophecy in Lindsey's place. Yet, even from the start there is a major problem here as these two men hold vast differences regarding the interpretation of the end times, yet *The Apocalypse Code* begins by suggesting they are very similar in their teachings.

Furthermore, page xx in the Introduction states that to hold to a distinction between Israel and the church is a form of racial discrimination, suggesting that LaHaye's writings (and those similar to his) are racist in their interpretation. Does holding to a view of dispensationalism really cause people to suggest, "Furthermore, there is the very real problem of discrimination" (p. xx)?

In addition, page xxii notes that early dispensationalists believed Jews would be regathered to Israel because of their belief in their Redeemer. However, this is not the norm in dispensational writings. It is rather due to their *unbelief*. In fact, dispensationalists teach that Israel would return to its nation in large numbers without converting to Christianity. In this instance, this interpretation has nothing to do with race, as suggested by *The Apocalypse Code*.

In Chapter 1, "Exegetical Eschatology," page 5 suggests a pretribulational rapture is the by-product of a fertile imagination: "In chapter 2 you will be equipped to determine whether the pretribulational rapture is the product of faithful illumination or *the by-product of a fertile imagination*." Really? A brief survey of this chapter shows remarks that are very anti-LaHaye, with at least 12 specific references to him as a person in the first chapter. Is this a fair and accurate representation of the pretribulational rapture or a personal attack? Even a reader unaware of the viewpoints involved might wonder what LaHaye did to upset the author so much.

Chapter 2, "Literal Principle," notes that "Tim LaHaye's definition of literalism is virtually meaningless" (p. 15). Why? Because "...it is so vague as to be utterly useless" (p. 16). Since Dr. LaHaye has written at length in other works on Bible interpretation, and the author of *The Apocalypse Code* is very aware of this fact, this comment comes across as very pointed and inaccurate.

Chapter 3, "Illumination Principle," begins by comparing the growth of Darwin's evolutionary theory with John Darby's growth of dispensational eschatology, noting that Darby even left the Church of England the same year Darwin left England aboard the HMS *Beagle*. Why does he believe the two are similar? Dispensationalism teaches that God has two distinct peoples (Jews and Gentiles) with two distinct plans and two distinct phases. This chapter also attacks the research of Grant Jeffrey that the pretrib view was held as early as the 300s AD (p. 56), though more research would be necessary to adequately defend this claim.

The remaining four chapters chronicle many traditional Bible interpretation concepts, along with occasional further examples noted throughout to discredit dispensational beliefs. Chapter 5, “Historical Principle,” for instance, argues heavily for an early date for Revelation in order to disprove pretribulationism and promote a preterist viewpoint. Chapter 6, on typology, is perhaps the most problematic in terms of interpretation since it claims that all major typology was fulfilled in Jesus.¹

In summary, *The Apocalypse Code* suggests it is about exegetical eschatology, or interpreting prophecy based on the context of Scripture. However, the text of the book reveals that the major focus consists of personal attacks against Tim LaHaye and *deconstructing* dispensationalism. Why? The answer is not clearly given. Interestingly, there is not even a conclusion offered to end *The Apocalypse Code*. However, the motives appear to be to focus attention on Hanegraaff’s preterist view put forth in his own coauthored end times novel series, of which the third title is promoted in the back of the book to release later this year.

Unfortunately, this book has already sold several thousand copies and reached the Top 50 Christian Bookseller’s Association list. I say “unfortunately” because this title, unlike many of Hank Hanegraaff’s other quality books, relies heavily on personal attacks and his own predetermined biases for the evidence presented in many of his arguments. Rather than develop his own theological viewpoint for the reader to evaluate, he deconstructs and criticizes dispensational authors (especially LaHaye) with extreme examples that strengthen his argument with little support for his own viewpoints.

As another review has pointed out, the book, “...is not only filled with factual error throughout, but teaches that most Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled and advocates...Nero was the beast of Revelation, Christ’s Olivet Discourse and most of the book of Revelation were fulfilled by the events surrounding the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, and the Tribulation was also fulfilled in the first century.”² As Dr. Norman Geisler has further mentioned, “In general *The [Apocalypse] Code* repeatedly takes the Old Testament promises to Jews out of their original context by replacing Israel with the New Testament church. The ‘Replacement Theology’ is a classic example of taking texts out of their context.”³

Two additional extreme exaggerations are important to note as well. On page 44, *The Apocalypse Code* makes the grossly unfair comment dispensationalism is associated with the “cultic fringe” like Mormonism. A second highlight labels pretribulationism (the belief in rapture before a seven-year literal tribulation) as “blasphemous” (see pages 63-64).

In conclusion, while the encouragement to interpret the Bible in light of itself and its exhortation toward exegetical study are to be commended, the author fails to take the advice himself in some of his own examples, leaving more questions than answers for the reader and more confusion and clarity for those desiring helpful information regarding Bible prophecy.

¹ For more on this issue of typology, see Norman Geisler, "Review of Hank Hanegraaff's *The Apocalypse Code*." Accessed at <http://www.normgeisler.com>.

² Thomas Ice, "Hank Hanegraaff's *The Apocalypse Code*," *Midnight Call*, July 2007, pp. 22-27.

³ Norman Geisler, "Review of Hank Hanegraaff's *The Apocalypse Code*." Accessed at <http://www.normgeisler.com>.