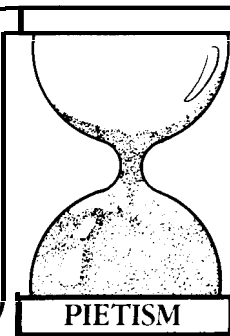


# Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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## PREPARING FOR PESSIMISM

by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th. D.

The times we live in are truly fraught with moral and social concern. Witness the soaring national debt, the exploding crime rate, the unabating use of drugs and abuse of alcohol, the persistent educational crises, increasing family dissolution including spousal and child abuse, the consistently high rate of abortions-on-demand, the controlling secularistic mind set, widespread hedonistic amorality, the rampant spread of AIDS, the proliferation of pornography, the continuing publication of the Scofield and Ryrie Study Bibles, and such. No thinking Christian would deny that we live in dismal times, times defined by "profound social and cultural transition."

But is such *all* we may expect in the historical *long-run*?

Are our children doomed to *perilous times*?

Does the Bible demand a *relentlessly* dismal expectation of cultural decline?

In short, *must* we be pessimistic regarding the future development of world history?

### If That's All There Is, Let's Keep Dancing

For most Christians today these queries are merely rhetorical questions having foregone conclusions. This is because 60% of Christians are premillennial.<sup>1</sup> Premillennialism - and particularly its most prominent form, dispensationalism - teaches the inevitable decline of history as we approach more closely to the return of Christ.

Because of such dispensational commitments the prevailing mindset among Christians is one of gloom: "We know that our efforts to make society Christianized are futile because the Bible doesn't teach it. [Paul and Peter] assumed that civilization as a whole is hopeless and subject to God's judgment"<sup>2</sup> "[W]e do know that in the last days men shall become worse and worse. That's plainly set forth. . .,"<sup>3</sup>

### Perilous Prophecies

It is certainly true that the Bible contains prophecies of great misery and horror, warning of "perilous times" (1 Tim. 3:1). And what evangelical Christian committed to Scripture's inspiration, inerrancy and authority would dispute the credibility of these prophecies?

Yet it is my firm conviction - along with an increasing number of like-minded Christians - that these terrifying prophecies speak of calamities *impending during biblical days*, not our own. In this brief series I will provide succinct introductory studies of five of the principle passages leading dispensationalists to historical pessimism: Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24:1-36, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Revelation 13:1-18, and Revelation 17. The studies will provide my readers with

capsule overviews of the dispensational view of these passages as well as my Famous Dr. Gentry's Prescription Antidote to Dr. North's Diagnosed Rapture Fever.

These are crucial passage for eschatological pessimists - whether classic, revised, or progressive in their dispensational commitments. You cannot be truly depressed, despondent, dejected, discouraged, and dismayed in order to maintain the appropriate level of spiritual sensitivity to the times without considering these passages.

In chapter five of Timothy Weber's *The Future Explored* he points to four apocalyptic sections necessary for understanding the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. His headings are: "Daniel's Prophecy," "The Olivet Discourse" (i.e., Matthew 24); "The Second Letter to the Thessalonians"; and "The Book of Revelation." LaHaye lays down a rule of discrimination: "As a general rule, those who believe the pre-Trib Rapture accept Tribulation teachings in Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, Matthew 24, and Daniel 9 literally." In several of his works Walvoord draws on these five passages, as does Ryrie.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, I firmly believe we hopelessly (no pun intended) misinterpret these prophecies when we apply them to *our own* future. Furthermore, as an evangelical Christian I am convinced that the prophetic record of Scripture is infallibly certain - when properly interpreted.

But what of these eras, characters, and events forming the basis of our study? Are they looming in our future? Without a doubt these lay off in the future *when origins/ly written*. But so did the birth of Christ, which was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, and the crucifixion of the Lord, recorded in Psalm 22. Though Isaiah 7:14 and Psalm 22 are biblical prophecies, they are not future to our own times. Despite popular dispensationally-induced, mind-altering populism, neither are the terrifying prophecies we will study.

### My Strategy

If Christians would lay aside their *National Enquirer* newspapers along with their related prophetic preconceptions, I believe that they can be shown by sound exegesis that the leading eschatological passages commonly applied to our future have already been fulfilled. It is my experience from radio talk shows, Bible conferences, and letters of response to my books that Christians who genuinely are open to the Scriptures are being convinced of the error of their outlook,

We have a huge market out there to reach.<sup>6</sup> I hate for us just to wait for the year 2000 to prove them wrong; I am afraid I will get drowsy. Besides, we waited for 1988 and all we got was a recomputation of dates based on the retaking of the West Bank of Jerusalem in 1967, rather than the establishment

of Israel in 1948, (I am amazed that these prophecy pundits aren't aware that the calendar is off by four to six years, making the 2000th year since the birth of Christ really around 1994 or 1995. They missed some quick sales!)

Let us challenge their supposed biblical presuppositions. Let's hand them copies of our newsletter series to begin in October. We need to encourage our dispensational friends to take an un-annotated Bible in hand and to carefully reconsider the pessimistic passages their despairs are based on.

Beginning in October I will provide studies of five key prophetic passages. They will be written in a way to challenge a dispensationalist; I will cut out the cutting up, and dish out the doctrine. Each of the next few newsletters will be self-contained studies of the passages mentioned above. They will be suitable for handing out to depressed dispensationalists. They will be somewhat like North's 75 *Bib/e Questions* book: short and to the point,

You should urge your dispensational friend to "search the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so" (Acts 17: 11). (Of course, you might want to go ahead and buy his property first, when he puts it up for sale at bargain prices in anticipation of the Rapture. Hal Lindsey has some long term real-estate investments that he hung on to through his 1988 expectations. But now he says he doesn't plan on being around for the celebrations for the turn of the millennium: "Just for the record: I'm not planning to attend. In fact, looking at the state of the world today, I wouldn't make any long-term earthly plans.")'

#### The Importance of the Future

Our study will be a significant one in that the Christian's outlook for the future is terribly important for a soundly biblical worldview, for "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). An erroneous future orientation is detrimental to a fully biblical Christian endeavor. As the prophet laments: '(My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge' (Hos. 4:6). I hope these brief studies will help you clean up the world by washing away the pessimistic foundations that support a false understanding of these leading judgment prophecies.

Unfortunately, the ominous features of certain eschatological passages are more interesting to Christians than the uplifting prospects of others. Among dispensationalists for instance, studies of "last days" evil far outnumber those focusing on their conception of the glorious (though fictitious) millennium. The runaway Hal Lindsey best-sellers, such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, are cases in point. According to the CBA's

Bookstore Journal his current best-seller is *Planet Earth 2000-Will Mankind Survive?*

Yet, if Christians would extricate themselves from the morass of pessimism and adopt an optimistic vision of the future, I am convinced that we could "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6), as did our forefathers. But this will require a reorientation of their thinking on the judgment passages of Scripture that play such a large role in Rapturism.

#### Addendum

I will be speaking on eschatology in Savannah, Georgia, on November 3-5. Contact: Rev. Brian Nicholson 912-355-3844.

I am available for additional conference engagements, if interested, write me at: 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636 (FAX: 803-277-01 33)

Studies available: Tape sets: #26 "Postmillennial Hope" (\$20); #49 "Comparison of Millennial Views: Walvoord, Lillbeck, & Gentry" (\$5); #49 "God's People & Their Mission" (\$25); #51 "Israel & the New Covenant"; #54 "Miracles & Healing" (\$20); #55 "Christianity Supreme" (re: Judaism) (\$1 5), Photostat: Gentry debate: #AR 23 "Defense of the Faith" (\$5).

1. Rodney Clapp interview of Alister McGrath, 'Why Christianity Has a Future,' in *Academic Alert* 4:1 (Winter, 1995):1,

2. *Christianity Today*, 6 February 1987, 9-1.

3. John F. Walvoord, in "Our Future Hope: Eschatology and Its Role in the Church," *Christianity Today*, 6 February 1987, 5-1, 6-1.

4. Gleason Archer, in *ibid.*, 6-1. Emphasis mine.

5. Timothy P. Weber, *The Future Explored* (Wheaton, I ll.: Victor, 1978), ch. 5. LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, 50-51. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*, chs. 6-8, 10, and 12 and Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), ch. 3. Ryrie, *The Final Countdown*, ch. 8.

6. Gary North once wrote in an advertising letter for one of his books that he wrote the book for those who might not have read his previous one - and there are 4,5 billion who did not,

7. Lindsey, *Planet Earth --2000 A. D.: Will Mankind Survive?* (Pales Verdes, Calif.: Western Front, 1994), 305.

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