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A Summary of Dispensational Predictions Concerning Future World Events

This article marks the beginning of a series of articles on dispensational eschatology. Dispensationalism is an erroneous theological system that promotes the idea that Israel is the earthly people of God and the church is the heavenly people of God, and that God in the immediate future is going to separate these two peoples. Repeatedly they stress the immanency of this separation, claiming that current events indicate it could happen at any moment, and that many are going to be left behind and will have to go through the horrible events leading up to Armageddon.

Dispensationalism is extremely popular. A number of movies and many books have been very effective at promoting the movement. So much so that *the* nonfiction bestseller of the 1970s was a popularization of the movement—Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). Since the mid-1990s, Tim LaHaye’s novels in his Left Behind series have been read by tens of millions of people, and have been referred to as “the most effective disseminator of dispensationalist ideas ever.”¹

What makes these books fascinating to many is that the authors take current world events and claim that these specific events were prophesied in Scripture. Then they proceed to give details about what they say Scripture indicates is going to happen next. Thus many people are attracted to the books the way sinful man has always been attracted to fortune-tellers. And when one adds to this an action-packed plot, as is often found in the novels and movies used to promote the dispensational movement, it is not surprising that they have become a raging success.

A prime example of dispensational prophesying is found in the *New York Times* best seller with the catchy title, *Armageddon, Oil and Terror: What the Bible Says About the Future of America, the Middle East, and the End of Western Civilization*. Written for the most part by Dr. John F. Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1986 and one of the primary architects of contemporary dispensationalism, this work is said to bring to life what the prophets saw so many years ago. War in the Middle East, nuclear technology in the hands of “rogue” states, instability in oil markets, terrorist attacks on United States’ soil, new alliances between Russia and the Middle East, and attempts to wipe Israel “off the map,” are all said to signal the rapid approach of Armageddon.

Although there may be some differences among dispensationalists on the precise order of events, this book is extremely popular and provides a good summary of current dispensation teaching concerning world events. An overview of the predictions of Dr. Walvoord, who is credited with teaching prophesy in a way that everyone can understand, is helpful to get the big picture of what dispensationalism is, and of why it is so popular. The following are some of the main predictions he makes, along with some of the prooftexts he uses to support his position. The events are listed roughly in chronological order.

Global terrorism and strife over oil indicate that Western civilization is about to crumble.

The worldwide need for oil leads to a global struggle centering in the Middle East, which has the largest volume of known oil reserves. The Middle East gradually becomes the political and economic center of what will soon become a world government.

Islamic terrorism rises in response to this, fueled by a hatred for Israel and the West, who are striving to dominate the region. This rapid rise in terrorism indicates that an invasion of Israel is soon going to take place. The imminent danger of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons leads many people to seek a strong central worldwide government to preserve peace.

1. Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 15.

All true believers suddenly disappear when God raptures them into heaven.

Suddenly all the New Testament Christians who have died will be resurrected, and the believers who are still living will be taken up into heaven (I Th. 4). When this Rapture takes place, the Holy Spirit's influence through the church will be removed from the earth (II Th. 2:6-7), with the result that evil will progress in the world like never before.

The disappearance of all believers will have a profound effect on the nations of the world, but especially on the United States, which is said to have a greater percentage of Christians. This sudden large decline in population is expected to be one factor that will lead to the decline of the United States. This decline will be significant, for it will make way for the rise of a new superpower consisting of an alliance of European and Mediterranean nations.

The Roman Empire revives.

Ten leaders, predominantly from Europe, and the nations they represent will form an alliance which will constitute a revival of the Roman Empire (Dan. 7:7,24). These ten leaders are said to be symbolized by the ten toes in Daniel 2 and the ten horns in Daniel 7. The present European Union is thought to be the forerunner of this future ten-leader group. This "Group of Ten" will control the nations and geographical regions that used to be under the dominion of ancient Rome.

This alliance will be viewed as necessary for the very survival of Western civilization. Disruption of the West's oil supply and the rapid increase in terrorism will so threaten the Western nations, that such an empire will be viewed as necessary to put down the violence, guarantee peace in the Middle East, and secure the flow of oil to the West.

Power is centralized in one leader, who makes a seven-year covenant of peace with Israel.

One of these ten leaders will subdue three of the others, and rise to become the head of the Group of Ten (Dan. 7:8; 9:26). This man is the Antichrist, who will make a seven-year covenant of peace with Israel (Dan. 9:27), in an attempt to settle the Arab-Israeli controversy, bring terrorism under control, and stabilize the world economy. Some speculate that this covenant may involve Israel returning some conquered territory in exchange for international guarantees that Israel will not be attacked. In any case, this covenant will mark the beginning of a seven-year period that will end with the battle of Armageddon and the bodily return of Christ.

During the first three and a half years of this leader's administration there will be worldwide peace, while the new leader consolidates his power. During this period of peace the Jewish temple will be reconstructed (Mt. 24:15), and sacrifices will once again be offered (Dan. 9:27; 12:11).

The armies of Russia and her Islamic allies invade Israel and are annihilated by God.

The armies of Gog and Magog mentioned in Ezekiel 38:1-7 are said to refer to an alliance of Russia and a group of Islamic nations, including Libya, Sudan, Turkey, Iran, and the Islamic nations of the former Soviet Union. These nations, which are not part of the Group of Ten, will attack Israel from various directions. Refusing to submit to the Antichrist, and having an extreme hatred for Israel and the West, these nations will invade Israel at a time when she will be at rest, having been lulled into a false sense of security by the peace agreement the Antichrist has made with her (Ezek. 38:11).

These nations will endeavor to take control of Palestine, striving for more land, more wealth, and the destruction of Israel. But by attempting to destroy Israel, they will be cursing God's chosen people. And God, who has promised to curse all those who curse His people, will directly intervene to annihilate the armies of Russia and her Islamic allies. As a result of this divine intervention, God will be sanctified in the eyes of the nations (Ezek. 38:14-16), and many—both Jews and Gentiles—will turn to the Lord (Ezek. 39:22).

More and more Israelites are converted and come to Christ.

During this period multitudes of Jews will be killed, but there will also be many Jews who will be converted to Christ. These Jews, recognizing that prophecy is clearly being fulfilled before their eyes, will come to the startling realization that the Messiah has already come, and that His second coming is near. Thus Christ's words will be fulfilled in which He promised that He would not return until Israel would say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:39).

The recent return of Israel to Palestine is said to be a precursor of this. Ezekiel's vision of the resurrection of the dry bones is said to have been fulfilled when unbelieving Israel was restored to their ancient homeland. Although Israel remains in unbelief, this return to the promised land is said to have been a physical restoration. The spiritual restoration and conversion to Christ is expected to follow, but not until after this attack by the forces of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 39:22).

The Antichrist breaks his covenant, deifies himself, and declares himself world ruler.

Once the armies of Russia and her allies are defeated, the Antichrist will have no check on his power. Recognizing this, he will break his seven-year covenant with Israel at the halfway point (i.e. after three and a half years), and will declare himself world ruler (Dan. 7:8).

Making use of satanic wonders to prove his deity, he will demand to be worshipped as god (II Th. 2:4). He will insist on maintaining absolute control over the economy, and will not allow anyone to buy or sell without his permission (Rev. 13:17). The duration of his absolute rule will be three and a half years (Dan. 12:11; Rev. 13:5), which amounts to the second half of the seven year period mentioned above.

Israel is fiercely attacked by all nations for three and a half years.

No longer protected by the Antichrist's world government, Israel will be fiercely persecuted for this three and a half year period—a period known as the Great Tribulation, or the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7; Mt. 24:21,22). During this time the Antichrist will invade Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and attempt to exterminate the Jewish people (Dan. 7:25; 8:24; 9:25-26; 11:44; Mt. 24:15; Rev. 13:7). Although he will not reach his goal, he will succeed in killing two thirds of the Israelite population (Zech. 13:8).

Many Jews will flee for safety into the wilderness (Rev. 12:13-17), as they will be hated and persecuted by all nations (Zech. 12:2,3). This will be the culmination of Satan's attempt to destroy Israel, God's earthly people (Rev. 13:4), with the Antichrist attempting to finish what Hitler started.

The Antichrist makes Iraq the new economic center of his world rule.

References to Babylon in Scripture are said to refer to modern Iraq, since Iraq is situated where Babylon once was. Iraq (Babylon) will be rebuilt in the end times (Zech. 5:5-11), and will become a headquarters for the Antichrist (Rev. 17-18).

It will first become the center of a new world religion. The world church, void of true believers after the Rapture, will unite with adherents of other religions to form a powerful religious and political institution that will be centered in Iraq, and will put to death all those who refuse to join with it (Rev. 17:6).

This "superchurch" will align itself with the antichristian empire. The whore riding the beast, mentioned in Revelation 17, is said to be a symbolic portrayal of this unholy alliance. The Antichrist will make use of this whore during the first half of his reign—the period in which he will be at peace with Israel. But once he declares himself to be the world ruler, he will destroy this false religious system and replace it with the worship of himself (Rev. 17:16-17).

At that time the Antichrist will set his eastern capital in Iraq (Babylon), where he will be able to control the world's oil reserves. He will remain in control there for a short period, until the sudden, cataclysmic destruction of the city takes place, right before the final coming of Christ (Is. 14:1-7; Rev. 18:9-19; 19:11-21).

China, probably out of a desire for oil, challenges the Antichrist and destroys Iraq.

China will lead a group of eastern nations to invade the Middle East—a movement that will constitute part of the gathering of the nations for the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16). The prophecy of Daniel 11:35 speaks of a king who battles against forces from the north, south, and east (Dan. 11:35). This king is said to be the Antichrist, and these forces are said to be Russia (north), the Islamic nations (south), and China and his allies (east). These eastern forces will be enormous, consisting of two hundred million troops (Rev. 9:13-16)—an army larger than there has ever been. The massive size of this army, which is referred to in Revelation 9, is said to provide further support for the idea that is referring to China, and perhaps India, seeing as these are the great population centers of the world.

One third of the world's population will be slaughtered by this massive army (Rev. 9:15,18), which will invade the Middle East after God miraculously dries up the Euphrates River. When these forces from the Orient succeed in destroying Iraq (Babylon), the Antichrist will retreat to Israel. These eastern armies will then quickly follow, leading to the final great battle between east and west.

Disaster after disaster greatly reduces the world population.

During this last three and a half year period the seven seal judgments (Revelation 6–8), the seven trumpet judgments (Revelation 8–9), and seven bowl judgments (Revelation 15–16) will be poured out. Through the haze of the destruction, the sun will become black and the moon will become as blood. There will be stars falling from heaven, and drastic changes to the earth's climate. Floods and other weather disasters will wipe out much of the world's food supply. Great famines, and epidemics will cause millions to perish (Mt. 24:7; Luke 21:11). As the period draws to a close, there will be great earthquakes and geological upheavals that will cause mountains and islands to fall into the sea. These disasters along with extreme violence will result in the earth's population being reduced to only a fraction of what it was before.

The nations come together against Israel at Armageddon for the greatest and final world war.

Russia, although defeated earlier, will be able to put together another army to attack Israel from the north. A great army from Africa, including Egypt, will attack Israel from the south. And China and its allies will attack Israel from the east. These armies, it is maintained, will meet at Mount Megiddo in northern Israel, since the Scriptures say they will meet at Armageddon, and the term Armageddon means Mountain of Megiddo (Rev. 16:16). This location, although too small to contain all these forces, will be the geographic focal point for this last battle.

Although the people will be motivated by a desire for world power, the devil and his demons will be working behind the scenes to assemble the people to attack Christ when He returns (Rev. 16:13-14). Millions will perish in what will be the greatest war of all history (Dan. 11). Yet there will also be many Israelites who will be converted to Christ.

Christ returns in the body and destroys the armies attacking Israel.

While this world war is still going on, Christ will descend from heaven, accompanied by His angels and the raptured Christians. Many Israelites will now have been converted to Christ, and will welcome the Messiah whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10). The rebellious armies that have met at Mount Megiddo will see Christ descending, and will unite together in a vain attempt to fight Him and His heavenly host.

Christ's feet will come to rest on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, at which moment the mountain will be divided, resulting in a great valley that will stretch into the Jordan Valley. This is one of the ways in which Christ's second coming will drastically change the geography of the earth.

All nations and the Jews are judged by Christ.

Christ will annihilate the multitudes gathered at Mount Megiddo, and then proceed to judge the surviving people one by one. All living Jews will be gathered together. Those who have trusted in Christ will be the first

citizens of Christ's new kingdom on earth, and those who have remained in unbelief will be put to death.

The surviving individuals of all nations will be judged in Jerusalem, and those judged will fall into two classes—the sheep and the goats. The sheep, which are the ones who helped Israel when she was persecuted, will be invited to enter Christ's kingdom. To befriend and help a Jew during this time will be irrefutable proof that one has genuine faith in Christ and a correct understanding of the Scriptures. The goats, who showed cruelty to the Jews, will be thrown into everlasting fire.

Israel rules over the nations of the world for a thousand years.

All the believers who have survived will now enter the millennial kingdom of Christ, yet will remain in their mortal bodies. Those believers who died either prior to Pentecost or after the Rapture will now be raised from the dead, and will receive their new, resurrected bodies. These saints in their resurrected bodies will also be present, and will help to administer this new kingdom of Christ on earth.

Thus the earth will be free from unbelievers when the millennial age begins. But this will not last forever. As the children mature and as new babies are born, each individual will have the opportunity either to rebel or to believe. Thus as time goes on the number of unbelievers will grow. Nevertheless, it will still be a thousand-year utopia, in which Israel will reign over all the nations of the world.

This summarizes some of the common dispensational predictions concerning future world events, and is provided as an overview of current dispensational teaching on eschatology, before proceeding to investigate some of these teachings in more detail. It will also be necessary to consider some of the central ideas that underlie the movement, and some of the main reasons why it has become so popular. While doing this, it will be good not only to refute the error, but also to set forth the truth over against it, providing explanations of some key passages of Scripture. But enough for this article. We will continue with this study, Lord willing, next time.