

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY?

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

Apparently our belief and proclamation of dispensational, pretribulationism has made a great impact upon, not just the religious community, but society in general. There have been a rash of articles and some books that propagate the idea that people who believe in the rapture, a coming tribulation and the modern state of Israel are dangerous people. The alleged danger, according to some, lies in the supposed fact that our simple belief in such views could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. How could this be brought about?

DANGEROUS DISPENSATIONALISTS?

There is a wide-ranging group of people in society who are voicing their opinion that we are a dangerous group of people. Many from liberal leftist to right wing conservatives warn their constituency about the supposed real dangers that our message poses. Frankly, such scare tactics are nothing more than an attempt to demonize those within our camp as a tactic to smear us in the eyes of the public in general. Other than some political power that we are capable of exerting at the polls, dispensationalists in no way pose a threat to anyone.

The late Grace Halsell, a secular, non-Christian wrote in 1986 concerning a feared "Israeli-U. S. fundamentalist alliance," and concluded the following:

. . . it can last long enough to cause a catastrophe of far-reaching consequences. If we do not recognize the danger they pose, the extremists will have time enough in their unsacred alliance to trigger a war that would not end until we have destroyed Planet Earth through self-fulfilling prophecy.¹

We are dangerous because we are said to pursue a self-fulfilling prophecy. That our prophecy views could be the catalyst for nuclear war is such an extreme stretch that even rapture-hater Gary DeMar cannot buy it and says of Halsell: "This is not an accurate picture of the Armageddon scenario."² Halsell came out with another book, entitled *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture---And Destruction of Planet Earth.*³

Recently Jane Lampman of the Christian Science Monitor has written an article on the supposed dangers of dispensationalism in an article entitled "Mixing prophecy and politics."⁴ She says that some Christians and Jews are speaking out against the prophetic view of dispensationalism, "which they see as a dangerous mix of religion and politics that is harmful to Israel and endangers prospects for peace with the Palestinians."⁵ Lampman quotes Timothy Weber saying, "The danger is that, when people believe they 'know' how things are going to turn out and then act on those convictions, they can make these prophecies self-fulfilling, and bring on some of the things they predict."⁶ Preterists, especially full-preterists,⁷ often teach that dispensationalism is such a dangerous viewpoint that they fear it will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of World War III.⁸

A number of anti-dispensationalists are painting the following scenario concerning the implications of dispensationalism: The United States is the only significant country

that regularly supports Israel, thus enabling the Jewish state to be a strong military force in the Middle East. If it were not for American support it is likely that Israel would not be the supposed bully that they are to the poor, oppressed Arabs in Israel. The U. S. is Israel's enabler. Within the United States it is because of the influence of dispensational, Christian Zionists that are a swing influence politically. If American foreign policy were left to the normal geo-political factors and not the result of religious influence, then we would have a more balance policy toward the Middle East; one that would be more cordial to the Arab world. Since, so many American Evangelicals are pro-Israel, this has provoked the Arab and Muslim world to attack us. If it were not for dispensationalism, they say, we would not have had the first Gulf War, the current war in Iraq or Afghanistan, 911 would have never happened, oil would not be at \$45.00 a barrel, and the economy would be much better. It almost sounds as if there would be no real problems in the world if it were not for Israel and their prime enablers, dispensationalists, to hear them talk. Further, those on the program regularly speak of how afraid they are of where dispensationalism is leading this country and they often say that this will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy⁹

Pro-Palestinian evangelicals like Don Wagner imply the same kind of criticism in *Anxious for Armageddon* and *Dying in the Land of Promise*.¹⁰ He says, "the Christian Right pose[s] a risk for the future of a peace settlement."¹¹ British anti-dispensationalist Stephen Sizer makes the self-fulfilling prophecy claim in a series of video lectures against Christian Zionism.¹² The liberal Presbyterian Church, USA, passed a resolution in the Summer of 2004 in which they "officially disavow Christian Zionism as a legitimate theological stance."¹³ Dispensationalism is increasingly being declared a dangerous theology by various voices from all walks of society. These people are out to demonize us through distorting our views and declaring us to be more extreme than we really are. This is an unethical approach.

A PUBLIC IMPACT?

Gary North and many of the Christian Reconstructionist, anti-dispensationalists of the 1980s and 90s were critical of the supposed lack of social and political impact that dispensationalists were said to not have.¹⁴ He has complained that dispensationalists have not been engaged socially and politically because of their pessimistic view of Bible prophecy. We were said to be so heavenly minded that we were of no earthly good. Now many of the same critics are complaining about "the political support by fundamentalists."¹⁵ Which is it? Are dispensationalists not involved politically, or are they too involved?

Timothy Weber says that dispensationalists have been for the most part observers of history and not social or political activists. "Most dispensationalists were satisfied to be mere observers of the Zionist movement," notes Weber. "They watched and analyzed it." Weber points out that American William Blackstone "was one exception to the general pattern."¹⁶ Even though Weber appears to believe that dispensationalists will create a self-fulfilling prophecy throughout his book, he does come to a final conclusion that is exactly the opposite. Note Weber's final conclusion at the end of his book as follows:

Since the end of the Six-Day War, then, dispensationalists have increasingly moved from observers to participant-observers. They have acted consistently with their convictions about the coming last days in ways that make their prophecies appear to be self-fulfilling. It would be too easy—and

completely unwarranted—to conclude that American prophecy believers are responsible for the mess the world is in, that their beliefs have produced the current quagmire in the Middle East. Given the history of the region, the long-standing ethnic and religious hatreds there, and the attempt of many nations, both Western and Arab, to carry out their own purposes in the Holy Land, it is easy to imagine the current impasse even if John Nelson Darby and his views had never existed.¹⁷

Hey, . . . I think the Arab Muslims of the Middle East deserve a little credit for some of the international conflict we are now experiencing. I don't believe that a few thousand dispensational Christians should take all the credit for the collapse of Western civilization. I think that unbelievers should get some credit for such an accomplishment.

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY?

When one thinks through the idea, in terms of what dispensationalists actually believe and teach, that we are so dangerous that we could provoke a self-fulfilling prophecy, it is absolutely ridiculous. How could we provoke a self-fulfillment of the rapture? Perhaps someone could identify all born-again Christians and send a global e-mail suggesting that on a given day we all go hide. How do you fake the rapture? How does one set off a chain of natural events that culminates in the rapture? Perhaps some New Ager could suggest a scenario. Let's face it, those of us who believe in the *Left Behind* theology genuinely believe that the rapture will be a supernatural event and such an event cannot be staged or provoked by human action in any way. If God does not do it, then it will not happen. If God does it, then there is nothing that anyone will be able to about it any way. So where is a genuine basis for concern over such an event as the rapture?

Some say that dispensationalists are dangerous because we believe that the Temple must be rebuilt during the tribulation. Liberal Jewish commentator Gershom Gorenberg says, "Millennial movements have resorted to terror ever since the Jewish Zealots who rebelled against Rome nearly two thousand years ago." Gorenberg concludes that, "believers must expect that redemption is very near, and that it depends on human action."¹⁸ The problem with Gorenberg's analysis is that the dispensational prophetic viewpoint sees these events as things that will be brought about after the rapture by the Jewish people or genuinely supernatural, something only God can bring to pass. Thus, there is no compulsion within our mindset that "depends on human action." The only human action that some dispensationalists might see impacting prophetic fulfillment would be our responsibility to live a holy life unto the Lord and engage in tireless evangelism. These are things that are said to be valued by all evangelicals and not thought to be dangerous activities, except by the world.

For the last twenty years or so I have attempted to keep up on news about relating to prophecy beliefs. There have been a number of events by religiously motivated groups or individuals that have caught the public's attention. Events that have caught the public's eye in the last few years have included some of the following: Jim Jones and his leadership of the mass suicides in South America were certainly not dispensationalists in any way shape or form, instead they were left-wing socialists. David Koresh and the Branch Dividians were a splinter group within the Seventh Day Adventist church who believed that the second coming would occur in 1995. Yet, even though they were premillennial, they were clearly not dispensational. Following the Adventist tradition,

they were not even futurists, as are dispensationalists, but historicists. Historicists have a long tradition of taking matters in their own hands and acting. Dispensationalism has almost nothing in common with such prophetic views.

"In October 1994, fifty-three members of the Solar Temple, a small French-speaking sect, were found dead at two spots in Switzerland and another in Quebec."¹⁹ This cult was not even Christian and was certainly not dispensational. Instead, they were some kind of an environmental, ecological cult. There were the thirty-nine members of the quasi-Christian cult, Heaven's Gate, who committed suicide in Rancho Santa Fe, California in 1997. They believed that they would be transported to a flying saucer in outer space in order "to take them to 'the level above human.'"²⁰ This hardly has anything to do with dispensationalism. In Japan, sect leader Asahara Shokou predicted that Armageddon would occur in 1999 and perpetrated a sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. The cult "mixed Buddhist and Hindu ideas with predictions from the Book of Revelation and a dose of anti-Semitic conspiracy theory."²¹ Such views are far removed from any kind of dispensationalism. Even the more recent events involving Monte Kim Miller and his group of Concerned Christians whom some thought would attempt to carry out some supposed prophetic events in Jerusalem were not dispensational in their thinking.²²

For most critics of dispensationalism who believe that we are dangerous and on the verge of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, the Temple Mount is said to be the most dangerous spot on planet earth. One such critic said, "The most explosive possibility relates to the prophecy that the Jewish temple will be rebuilt on the Temple Mount, where Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque now sit."²³ Over the last few decades there have been a few attempts by a couple of individuals to blow up the Dome of the Rock in order to make way for the next Jewish Temple. Yet, once again, none of these attempts were performed by anyone from a dispensational viewpoint.²⁴

CONCLUSION

In the past many have noted that dispensationalists tend not to be politically active. There are many great exceptions to this, even if it has been generally true. Tim and Beverly LaHaye would certainly be an exception. Many unbelievers, as well as left-leaning Christians have complained about their social and political efforts. Nevertheless, regardless of the actual degree of social and political activity, dispensationalists believe that God is going to supernaturally fulfill prophecy. This is likely the reason that I have never heard of one who is a dispensationalist that has tried to take matters into their own hands and resorted to some kind of human action like trying to remove the Dome of the Rock from the Temple Mount. It could be possible that someone who is a dispensationalist might do something, but it would definitely be out of character with a belief system that leads one to believe that if God doesn't do these things then they won't get done.

Even though there are currently millions of Christians around the world who hold to a dispensational view of the prophetic future, I do not think that they will become frustrated at some point in the future and take matters into their own hands. I think this is the case, because we also believe that we do not know when these events will take place. Although many of us do believe that we are likely near the time of the rapture and subsequent tribulation period, we never know when they will actually occur before the rapture does occur. Thus, there is not the pressure to act, as critics often contend. Instead, we believe that we should be busy about the Lord's business,

while waiting eagerly for His any-moment return to rapture His church into the clouds.
Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986), pp. 197-98.

² Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 314.

³ Grace Halsell, *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture---And Destruction of Planet Earth* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1999).

⁴ Jane Lampman, "Mixing prophecy and politics," *Christian Science Monitor* (July 7, 2004), Internet edition accessed July 14, 2004.

⁵ Lampman, "Mixing," p. 1.

⁶ Timothy Weber as cited in Lampman, "Mixing," p. 2.

⁷ Partial preterists believe that most Bible prophecy has been fulfilled in the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but still look for a future second coming. Full preterists believe the second coming took place in A.D. 70 and do not look forward to any future prophetic fulfillment.

⁸ Full Preterists John Anderson and Don Preston regularly have scare programs on the dangers of dispensationalism on their daily radio program that can be heard on the Internet at the following: <http://www.lighthouseproductionsllc.com/broadcast.htm>

⁹ Listen to John Anderson's "Voice of Reason" program at the above Internet address for this kind of rhetoric.

¹⁰ Donald E. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995); *Dying in The Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000* (London: Melisende, 2003).

¹¹ Wagner, *Dying*, p. 280.

¹² Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionists: On the Road to Armageddon* (Colorado Springs: Presence Media, 2004), 4 lectures.

¹³ "Major US Christian Denomination Backs Divestment From Israel," Arutz Sheva, Israel National News.com, July 16, 2004. Internet edition.

¹⁴ For example see Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism is Paralyzed* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993), pp. 87-90.

¹⁵ Gary North, "Fundamentalism's Bloody Homeland for Jews," LewRockwell.com, p. 5.

¹⁶ Timothy P. Weber, *On The Road to Armageddon: How Evangelical Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 103.

¹⁷ Weber, *Armageddon*, p. 266.

¹⁸ Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), pp. 227-28.

¹⁹ Gorenberg, *End of Days*, p. 211.

²⁰ Gorenberg, *End of Days*, p. 211.

²¹ Gorenberg, *End of Days*, p. 211.

²² Gorenberg, *End of Days*, pp. 212-15.

²³ Lampman, "Mixing," p. 5.

²⁴ Gorenberg, *End of Days*, pp. 107-37.