

Theocracy Alert

Is the 'Rapture' a rupture?

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July 16, 2005—Is the "Rapture" of Evangelical Christianity really a rupture from biblical truth?

For thousands of years certain Christians have been predicting the end times. Armageddon and the Second Coming were just around the corner—but not before the rise of the Antichrist and seven years of battle. These Christians also believe the "Rapture" the Bible supposedly spoke of would allow certain true believers to be swept up to heaven to watch the end times, like the War in Iraq from their living room TVs.

Yet scholars say the word "Rapture" is not anywhere in the Bible. So the first rupture is from the reality of the good book. In fact, the man who really hoisted the "Rapture" was not a biblical scribe or prophet, but John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), the founder of premillennial dispensationalism, his vision of the Christian end times. With great missionary zeal, he brought his *teachings* from his native Ireland to England and across Europe and North America to convert a generation of evangelical clergy and lay people.

Darby's dispensationalism teaches that there are seven ways, "dispensations," (or time frames), in which the Creator deals with people. We're in frame six, dispensation six, and that will be followed, thank God, by a 1,000-year reign of peace, the Millennial Kingdom. But the time before that will be hell, leading to the final the battle of good against evil at Armageddon, actually a valley northwest of Jerusalem in the real world.

Darby too believed some will get a pass on the mess and get swept up in the rush of the "Rapture".

But "Rapture's" history can't be discussed without looking at an earlier idea in Christian eschatology (or end times theory). It said Jesus would come back and put together his Millennium Kingdom after the world had been evangelized. Another notion from England gave a big role to revamping Israel for the end times as well. This ideological coupling gave Christian Zionism the jump on Jewish Zionism. One of the leaders in this movement, Sir Henry Finch, power lawyer and member of British Parliament, wrote a treatise in 1621, putting forth the notion that the government and its people should rally for Jewish settlement in Palestine. This was in order to fulfill what he perceived as a biblical prophecy. Three hundred eight-four years later settlement has turned to the state of Israel, with the Palestinians hanging on for dear life.

Obviously, Darby successfully spun Finch's idea into the warp and woof of his teaching. His followers put a major effort into making it happen as well. Most notably in the 20th century, there were British prime ministers Lord Arthur Balfour and David Lloyd George, two of the era's most powerful men—both reared in dispensationalist churches. And here we slide gently as an invading force across the borderline from theology to politics, as they used a Zionist agenda to colonize the region. The "Rapture" is used to rupture the real estate from Palestinians based on a religious political agenda.

Of course, America caught the "Rapture." Back in 1891, William Blackstone, a Darby believer, author of *Jesus Is Coming* (1882), initiated the first of a long line of Zionist lobbying efforts. He had powerful help from J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, Charles Scribner and other high-rollers, sponsoring a newspaper

blitz for President Benjamin Harrison to back the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. And so it began and ended: in a stream of wars of appropriation and rebellion, from 1948, 56, 67, 68–70, 73, 78, 82 to the Intifada of 1987–93 and the Gulf War of 1990–1991 and on.

In 1999, we arrived in the new light of a century and millennium with the usual fear of apocalypse lurking like Y2K. Yet those Christians who saw themselves as given a pass by the "Rapture" held to the idea of rebuilding Solomon's Temple on Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The problem was that the space was filled by the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque, two of Islam's most sacred sites.

In that same year, more than 60 fundamentalist Christians were corralled and expelled from Israel by court order, and most of them were Americans. Fourteen were members of Denver-based Concerned Christians, who were arrested and deport because the authorities feared a suicide shootout with police on the Temple Mount. In October 1999, Israeli cops tossed out 21 Christians who had squatted around the Mount of Olives to wait for Christ's return. Now theology was challenging public law and safety. One of the deported blamed the group's arrest on the devil: he didn't like them preaching Jesus in Israel. And so it went. And so it goes. The "Rapture" ruptures itself from law in the name of absolute religious truth, which is neither absolute, really religious nor the truth, but a belief system designed for and by a certain sect of people to gain specific ends.

These convictions of Christian end time seekers, blended with those of Israeli Zionists, evolve again into political disaster, rupturing into the Intifada of 2000. It continues on and off to this day, with more hostilities and bloodshed, pitting Palestinians fighting for their remaining homelands against Israelis with a missionary zeal to appropriate them.

In fact in February of 2005, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon finally agreed to a withdrawal from the Gaza strip and four West Bank settlements. Settlers who opposed the separation rallied radical right-wing Jews and even Christian Zionists for help. In the US, where military recruitment is down for Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of Jews and Christians wait for the call to join the "struggle" of Gaza settlers, an event slated for this month. And the missionary zeal perpetuates the military and political insanity. And of course, given the evangelical thrust from Bush, his White House and supporters, this only adds oil to the fires of conflict and apocalypse.

The "Rapture" Ruptures America

The power of this vested evangelical force in America today is not to be underestimated. A 2002 Time/CNN poll showed that 36 percent of Americans believe the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken quite literally. Fifty-nine percent believe the events in the Book of Revelation are a done deal. And close to a quarter think the Bible predicted the WTC attack. Remember the Bible teaching that many are talking about, that word, has been tainted and translated by the likes of Darby and Blackstone, not to mention contemporary "Rapture" seekers, through the skewed focus of their own lenses.

Rising among "Rapture" powers today are authors Jerry B. Jenkins and the Rev. Tim LaHaye, also a Christian Reconstructionist and co-founder, with Jerry Falwell, of Moral Majority. In fact, in that name you have the problem. First, the self-anointed handle of moral, assuming what, that everyone else is immoral? Second is the assumption that they are a majority, and therefore entitled to exercise their beliefs on public policy, in violation of the constitutional separation of church and state. But then, in their estimation, they answer to a higher power, and of course, its "Rapture".

Jenkins and LaHaye have written a series of 12 *Left Behind* screed-novels. They deal with the abandoned no-accounts who become true believers, and in their new zeal, battle the seven-year reign of the Antichrist, not to mention the plagues of the Seven Seals. Their books lay on the Darby doctrine and pound out biblical infallibility from the Book of Revelation: bodies of water turn to blood and heavyweight hailstones rain on non-believers. They include the beyond Hollywood script of *Revelations*, 9:7–10, in which hordes of hungry locusts, looking like teeny horses with human faces, long hair, and golden crowns on their heads, attack.

Left Behind, which seems an apt assessment of the authors' writing skills, nevertheless turns out to be the all-time, best-selling Christian fiction series, topped only by the Bible itself. Sixty-two million books sold, 1 million around the world, more than 10 million copies of the series for kids. Add to that movie rights and audiotapes and they're raking in big bucks for the "Rapture". The last book in the series, *Glorious Appearing*, with sales in the millions, lays out the Second Coming of a kick-ass, blood-sucking Jesus, an "avenging Jesus who slaughters non-believers by the millions." All right, just what we needed. Peace, baby.

If this tilts your stomach, it must be because you're a liberal. LaHaye declares that "liberalism has so twisted the real meaning of Scripture that we've manufactured a loving, wimpy Jesus that wouldn't even do anything in judgment." If that makes your eyes spin, watch out. In the dynamic duo's version of the last judgment, nonbelievers' eyes melt in their heads, tongues disintegrate, and flesh drops of the bones.

Okay, so that's what you're dealing with. And LaHaye, some say the tougher of the two, was picked, according to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals' newsletter, as the most influential evangelical leader in the United States. He's founder of the Tim LaHaye School of Prophecy, to help you interpret biblical predictions, just in case you've come up short after the 12 "novels." There's also the Pre-Trib Research Center that puts out *The Pre-Trib Perspectives*, to keep you on "the cutting edge of prophetic events as they unfold." In case, you need a quick hit, there's RaptureReady.com, for all your Pre-Trib "Rapture" and related end time prophecy needs. Reality once more bests fiction, or at least this fiction is ruptured from reality as we know it.

But don't worry. There's even a Rapture Index based on weekly events, sort of like a Dow Jones of end time happenings. Bless these folks, they think of everything. The question is what do you think about it? Maybe it's time to look at your Bible. And this time read the small print real close . . .

"For these days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled . . . for the power of heaven shall be shaken . . . This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled." (Jesus to his disciples in *Luke 21:22–32*, and with similar wording from *Matthew 24:30–34* and *Mark 1:24–30*).

"Verily I say unto you, There are some of those standing here, who in no wise shall taste of death, until they have seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Jesus to his disciples in *Matthew 16:28* and also in *Mark 9:1* and *Luke 9:27*)

I can only add to this scripture this chestnut that "beauty is in the mind of the beholder." And in this case so are the meanings of those lines, and the Bible itself. Unfortunately in this battle of compromised meanings, it seems the future of America and the globe itself are precariously balanced.

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