

COVID-19 Shows Why Pastors Must Be Careful Not to Sensationalize the End Times

A new LifeWay Research study on the end times conducted prior to the novel coronavirus pandemic reveals that evangelical and historically black denominational U.S. pastors believe current events are indicators of Jesus' return in the coming days.

Theological scholars Dr. Darrell Bock and Joel C. Rosenberg today joined Scott McConnell of LifeWay Research for a webcast hosted by Dr. Mitch Glaser of Chosen People Ministries to analyze the relevancy of survey results while warning against sensationalizing the current pandemic as a judgment from God.

"When we look at pestilences and plagues and how they function in Scripture, what we see is that God doesn't always use them with a specific signature to explain why He is doing it," said Bock, executive director of cultural engagement at The Hendricks Center and senior research professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. "Rather, He uses them as a reminder to us of our need for Him, our dependence upon Him, the fact that we are mortal and don't control what is going on around us, that we need to pursue a relationship with Him and be aware of what He asks of us as human beings made in His image."

The LifeWay Research study, which consisted of a phone survey of 1,000 pastors from evangelical and historically black denominations, was conducted Jan. 24 to Feb. 11, 2020, to assess how American evangelicals view eschatology, the study of the end times. Notable results include:

- Eighty-eight percent of pastors see at least some current events matching those Jesus said would occur shortly before He returns to earth.

–Seven out of ten evangelical and black Protestant pastors (70%) say the modern rebirth of the state of Israel and the regathering of millions of Jewish people were fulfillments of prophecies in the Bible.

–Approximately 2 in 5 pastors (39%) agree that the establishment of the United States Embassy in Jerusalem is a sign of the end times.

–Eighty-nine percent surveyed say that communicating the urgency of Christ's return is important.

–Ninety-seven percent of pastors agree that Jesus will literally and personally return to earth again.

Only 27% of surveyed pastors agree that interpreting the end times is a divisive issue within their congregation, which scholars said points to American evangelicals being “spooked” by some individuals who sensationalize Bible prophecy.

“There are multiple geopolitical, economic and social implications of the COVID-19 crisis we are going through right now—as fear and anxiety increase, we are seeing an increase in Americans turning to the Bible and prophecy for answers, and this a positive development,” said Rosenberg, a *New York Times*’ bestselling author, Middle East expert and founder of The Joshua Fund. “It is critical, therefore, that pastors and ministry leaders teach about biblical prophecies wisely and carefully, avoiding any hint of sensationalism. Teach about the coming return of Christ. Teach about the importance of living for Christ and sharing the gospel with urgency and compassion. But be careful not to speculate about exactly when Christ will return or veering into other ‘foolish controversies.’”

Glaser, president of Chosen People Ministries, who lives in New York City, where countless number of Americans have passed away from COVID-19, adds, “One day we will hopefully look back and see the good work our heavenly Father accomplished through

this epidemiological trial. We pray that blessings will be discovered in the midst of the pain and suffering and that lessons learned in the darkness, about having greater empathy and consideration for our fellow man and the importance of aligning our values with God's purposes will be remembered in the light."

To watch the full webcast, visit .

The LifeWay Research study was sponsored by Chosen People Ministries, Alliance for the Peace of Jerusalem, Rich and Judy Hastings and the Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary.

For a complete report of the study results, visit .