

Inside the Mind of 'Left Behind' Author Tim LaHaye, Who Reinvigorated End-Times Debate

When I set out last year to interview Bible experts for a book project aimed at collecting, distilling and presenting the ever-complex debate over the biblical end times, Dr. Tim LaHaye was among the first individuals who popped into my head.

I knew that LaHaye, who co-authored the monumentally popular *Left Behind* book series along with Jerry B. Jenkins, would add a fascinating and absolutely essential perspective to my book, *The Armageddon Code*. The pastor, theologian and author died last week at the age of 90, though he left behind a rich legacy as one of the most prolific experts on eschatology.

After spending decades studying and delving deep into the prophecies embedded in both the Old and New Testament, he proceeded to craft a timeless, 16-part book series that both invigorated interest in the end-times and transformed the broader discussion about prophecy.

I knew that there were few people with as much knowledge and passion on the subject matter, so when he agreed to do a rare interview with me late last year, I was absolutely elated. In doing so, he joined around 20 other Protestant experts—individuals who hold deep disagreements with one another over an array of end-times theories—in contributing to the discussion in *The Armageddon Code*.

Through the book, LaHaye, among others, helped me deeply explore, through a journalistic voice, the diverse Christian views surrounding what the Bible really teaches us about the

last days.

When I called LaHaye to discuss these issues, it didn't take long to notice that, even at 89 years of age, he was still filled with the passion and excitement that I had always recalled seeing him exhibit in past interviews and appearances. Age had done anything but hamper his love for the Scriptures, as it was clear throughout our sweeping discussions about the Antichrist, the tribulation, the Millennium and other biblical constructs that his mind was still incredibly sharp.

Topic by topic, he took me through the biblical narrative to explain exactly why he subscribed to a pretribulational, premillennial worldview. Perhaps more remarkable was his complete awareness of his critics' qualms with his end-times theology. In fact, he had no problem responding to their critiques with ease, offering pushback to each rebuttal, all while doubling down on his literal approach to Scripture.

Some obviously disagree with LaHaye's perspectives on these issues, but few can deny his passion for the subject matter. And absolutely no one can ignore the profound impact that the *Left Behind* series has had on end-times theological narratives over the past 15 years. Much of our discussion was included in *The Armageddon Code*, but I've shared some additional portions below in an effort to provide a lens into LaHaye's worldview. Enjoy:

Billy: How important is prophecy to God?

Tim: Well ... 28 percent of the Bible—Old and New Testament—was prophetic at the time it was written, so obviously if God would have almost 30 percent of his holy Scriptures being prophecy of things to come, it must have been important to God. In fact, one of the cornerstone verses that I use when understanding prophecy—and I've just about memorized the verse—but you remember the Old Testament prophets spoke for

God and that's where we get the inspiration of the Bible. "Only men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," Peter said.

Billy: What convinces you that a pretribulation rapture will unfold, and why do you think so many people reject that notion?

Tim: I've been writing books in answer to those very questions for many years. In fact, I have about 60 books in print, plus fiction books. I call it prophetic-based fiction, with Jerry Jenkins ... God has blessed my ministry. I've pastored four churches, started several and several organizations and say all that but nothing compares with what God has done with those [*Left Behind*] books. It was just a gift from God and I'm convinced it has had an impact on the church ... The key to understanding prophecy is to take the prophecies literally and there's been a conflict and that's been the cause, the differences of opinion about end-time events. The conflict has been whether you take prophecy literally. ...

I believe that God meant for the end-time prophecies to be a way of proving that He is supernatural. Those of us who believe that when we spell out the events for the future, we're very dogmatic about the fact that we believe that Christ is going to come before the tribulation and that He's going to save the church out of the tribulation by the rapture and then the world will go through the tribulation described basically in Revelation and outlined a little bit by Daniel. We'll find that those things are really going to happen because the Bible is true, even prophecy, so the Achilles' heel is the authority of the Bible.

The Bible says, Pope Paul says this: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, and righteousness, that the man of God that really understands the word of God, will be thoroughly furnished, thoroughly outfitted for all truth," and so we've got the mistaken idea

that because a person goes to a seminary, I call them a cemetery, and gets a doctor's degree, that he's qualified to speak for God. No, it's whether or not he believes in the authority of both the Old and New Testament and what God says has happened, is happening and will happen in the future.

Billy: Why do you think so many people are confused by prophecy?

Tim: They don't know anything about Bible prophecy. Their pastor doesn't teach it or he teaches the wrong view of interpretation of prophecy and it takes it spiritually or allegorically or some other way and instead of taking it literally. They can sit for 50 years or a lifetime under the preaching of somebody who doesn't take prophecy literally and they'll never understand it. It's one of the sad features of our times.

Billy: Some people say that there's no rapture to be found anywhere in Revelation, scripturally speaking. How would you respond to that sort of critique?

Tim: The book of Revelation is not about the rapture primarily; it's about the Tribulation. The seven-year Tribulation that is outlined carefully several times in that book was designed by God to shake this world so dramatically that the unsaved who have not rejected Christ can hear about Him, and it's interesting. In the seventh chapter, you have one of the things that really warms my heart like nothing else in the Bible hardly, is that God seals 144,000 apostle Paul types. They're Jews with the fire of God in their heart and they go out and they reach a multitude which no man can number, from every tongue and tribe and nation.

That's in the first three years of the tribulation period during which the Antichrist has come here to the focus and he's taking the world because the world leaders who are secularists. They don't believe in God so they don't believe

in the Bible, or prophecy. They're trying to solve a mess that the world is in. We think we're in chaos today. This is nothing like it's going to be during the Tribulation period when God pours out his wrath ... and we find that the prophet Daniel was very accurate from chapter 11, verse 36 on to the end. You'll find that he is picturing the very things that Revelation talks about and I don't see a difference when you understand what era the writers were writing. The two great prophets besides Jesus, are of course John in the end times and Daniel in the Old Testament.

Billy: When it comes to Daniel 9 and the Antichrist, and that parallel between Revelation and Daniel, some critics would say it was a prophecy about Antiochus and nothing more. How do you view Daniel 9 and the discussion of the Antichrist and who is being spoken about there?

Tim: Antiochus Epiphanes, he was the worst, most evil king that ever existed. He did unmistakable evils to human beings and persecuting them, blinding people, just deliberately torture their lives and so on, and he's finally murdered by his own family, he was so evil. Anyway, he is a type of the anti-Christ in the Tribulation period. [The Antichrist is] going to come on the scene with a glib voice and talking wonderful and butter would melt in his mouth. You know the type—and he's brilliant and attractive, and he cons his way in to leadership and he controls the whole world and then he is killed by the uprising when Christ comes.

He's a symbol of evil. That's what he is and then he actually desecrated a temple but he also demanded that people worship him as a god. When you do that, you cross the Rubicon with God and you're going to be destroyed but the Antichrist is going to do the same thing. He's going to offer world government and leadership and peace in our time and then he's going to get buffed up and the false prophet comes along and makes an idol for him and then they demand the same thing that they demanded in the Old Testament of Daniel, that he worship the king. Now

the king there didn't want to be worshipped. They tricked him into it but Daniel was the type there of what Satan is going to do in the Tribulation period and he'll demand that people worship him. Of course, that's untenable for Christians.

Billy: Do you think Daniel was able to see a projection beyond Antiochus Epiphanes, one that looked into the future at the final Antichrist?

Tim: Remember, he only saw visions that came from God and I don't think he understood some of the nuances for the end times that we're living in. He was more interested in the times in which he lived and then getting the children of Israel right with God and get back to rebuilding our temple and so on and reestablishing their mandate with God, but then he also wrote down what his vision was but I don't think he understood the end time parts the way we do.

Billy: Now, let me ask you about the modern state of Israel. How do you view Israel today? Is it prophetic? How do you respond to those who would say that there's no future fulfillment of prophecy involving Israel?

Tim: I think that's a lie of the devil. The church is not Israel and Israel is not the church. ... Israel is fulfilling prophecy and it helps us to understand that God keeps His word by the way which He's kept Israel alive, when you think the children of Israel have been persecuted more than any nation in the history of the world.

They're [thousands of] years old and they still exist. Where are all the Hittites, and all the Amorites, and all the many people referred to in the Bible? In fact, some of the skeptics used to ridicule the Bible, because it mentioned so many nations that couldn't be proven until the archaeologists spades got to digging around and some of the antiquities and they found references to coins that have the Hittite names on them and so on. We have all kinds of evidence.

In Matthew 24, which is repeated in Mark and Luke, the Olivet Discourse, is the most important prophecy passage in the whole Bible. Jesus sums it up by saying in verse 32, and now behold the fig tree, which is symbolized by Israel, through three Old Testament prophets, in my book *Target Israel* I list the three prophets that predicted that Israel would be drawn back into the land. And, here they are in our lifetime brought back into the land, and they're still alive and well.