

## **1. What made you write this book?**

*Sigmund Brouwer's response:* When Hank and I first discussed writing fiction that would show an alternative view to the Left Behind series, I was lukewarm until I started digging into the history and discovered the amazing events during a pivotal four-year period from A.D. 66 to 70. It truly was a battle between the ultimate personification of evil—Nero, the beast—and the ultimate personification of good—Jesus, the Lamb, and those who followed him. What was at stake was the future of western civilization. If the first generation of Christians were destroyed, there would be no Judeo-Christian foundation that changed the world.

*Hank Hanegraaff's response:* Fiction is a great truth-conveying medium. As Left Behind has become the vehicle for indoctrinating millions of believers into an end-time theology invented in the nineteenth century, so we intend The Last Disciple series to bring a biblical balance to the debate over which end-times perspective corresponds to reality. While our eschatology resonates with history and extra-biblical evidence, its ultimate validation is found through interpreting end-times passages in light of the whole of Scripture. Readers of *The Last Disciple*, then, will develop the necessary skills for reading Scripture—particularly the book of Revelation—for all its worth.

## **2. How did working as co-authors go?**

*Sigmund:* It was very enjoyable for me, especially as I learned more about the natural way of interpreting the Bible from Hank. Tying the history of the events into the cultural context, and seeing all of that in the light of both the Old and New Testaments, gave me a much better understanding of Revelation, and I was able to use that backdrop for the characters. Hank and I spent hours storyboarding, but he provided me the freedom to create artistically honest characters who self-determine, as it were, how they think, act and respond throughout the series.

*Hank:* From the very beginning I knew in my heart of hearts that Sigmund was the right person to work with me on this project, and time has clearly born out the correctness of my intuition. Sigmund is extraordinarily creative and a fabulous storyteller who is first and foremost committed to understanding and communicating truth.

## **3. Why do you believe your understanding and depiction of the end times is more biblically and historically accurate than the portrayal in the Left Behind series?**

*Sigmund:* First, the historical and cultural context of Revelation from our perspective can be verified by outside sources, in the same way that archaeology, for example, again and again verifies biblical events. I'm aware that some will disagree with our early dating of Revelation, but the single source—Irenaeus—for a late dating not only gives just one ambiguous sentence on the subject but is also the same historian who wrote that Jesus was fifty years old when he died. There is also remarkable evidence for Nero as the Beast and his persecution as the great tribulation.

*Hank*: The pretribulational rapture model featured in the Left Behind series interprets Revelation 13, for example, in a strictly literal fashion. Thus, Antichrist dies and resurrects himself physically in order to vindicate his claim to be god. The following passage from *The Indwelling*, volume 7 of the Left Behind series, communicates the point:

Carpathia catapulted himself to a standing position in the narrow end of his own coffin. He turned triumphantly to face the crowd, and David noticed makeup, putty, surgical staples, and stitches in the box where Nicolae's head had lain.

Standing there before now deathly silence, Nicolae looked as if he had just stepped out of his closet where a valet had helped him into a crisp suit. Shoes gleaming, laces taut, socks smooth, suit unwrinkled, tie hanging just so, he stood broad-shouldered, fresh-faced, shaven, hair in place, no pallor. Fortunato and the seven were on their knees, hiding their faces, sobbing aloud.

Nicolae raised his hands to shoulder height and said loudly enough for everyone to hear, without aid of a microphone, "Peace. Be still." With that the clouds ascended and vanished, and the sun reappeared in all its brilliance and heat. People squinted and covered their eyes.

"Peace be unto you," he said. "My peace I give you. Please stand." He paused while everyone rose, eyes still locked on him, bodies rigid with fear. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in me."

Murmuring began. David heard people marveling that he was not using a microphone, but neither was he raising his voice. And yet everyone could hear.

It was as if Carpathia read their minds. "You marvel that I speak directly to your hearts without amplification, yet you saw me raise myself from the dead. Who but the most high god has power over death? Who but god controls the earth and sky?" (*The Indwelling*, 366-67).

In sharp contrast, The Last Disciple series exegetes Revelation 13 in light of the whole of Scripture. Thus, Satan can *parody* the work of Christ through "all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9), but he cannot literally do what Christ did—namely, raise himself from the dead.

What is at stake here is nothing less than the deity and resurrection of Christ. In a Christian worldview, only God has the power to raise the dead. If Antichrist could "raise [himself] from the dead" and control "the earth and sky," Christianity would lose the basis for believing that Christ's resurrection vindicates his claim to deity. Further, if Satan possesses the creative power of God, this would subvert the post-resurrection appearances of Christ in that Satan could have masqueraded as the resurrected Christ. Moreover, the notion that Satan can perform acts that are indistinguishable from genuine miracles suggests a dualistic worldview in which God and Satan are equal powers competing for dominance.

Not only is the end-time model presented in Left Behind hermeneutically false in that it attributes powers to the beast that belong only to God, but it is historically false because it places the beast in the twenty-first century. While Daniel was instructed to seal up prophecy because the time of fulfillment was in the far future (Daniel 8:26; 12:4, 9; cf. 9:24), John was told not to seal up his prophecy because its fulfillment was fore future

(Revelation 22:10). John's repeated use of such words and phrases as *soon* and *the time is near* demonstrate conclusively that John could not have had the twenty-first century in mind (e.g., Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6). Conversely, in *The Last Disciple* series, the beast is placed squarely where he belongs—in a first-century milieu. For example, the apostle John tells his first-century audience that with “wisdom” and “insight” they can “calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666” (Revelation 13:18). No amount of wisdom and insight would have given them the ability to figure out the number of a Nicolae Carpathia character in the twenty-first century.

#### **4. What do you hope readers take away from this book, or what is the most important truth/lesson you'd like them to grasp?**

*Sigmund:* As the characters in the novel deal with tribulation, they are sustained by the hope of resurrection that Jesus gives all of us, not with a belief that they are meant to be taken away from trouble by a rapture.

*Hank:* The book of Revelation, like all of Scripture, was not written *to* us but *for* us. In other words, Revelation was not written to twenty-first-century believers but to first-century Christians facing the mother of all tribulations. As such, the apostle John describes himself as a “brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation,” which the early Christian church was enduring (Revelation 1:9). Unlike the *Left Behind* authors, we believe that when John in Revelation says ten or more times that the events about which he is writing “must soon take place,” or for which “the time is near,” that is precisely what he means.

The horror of the great tribulation included not only the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple but the persecution of the apostles and prophets who penned the Scriptures and formed the foundation of the Christian church of which Christ himself was the chief cornerstone. Thus, the great tribulation instigated by Nero is the antitype for every type and tribulation that follows before we experience the reality of our own resurrection at the second coming of Christ.

#### **5. Much was made of the end of the world as we approached the year 2000, and similar apocalyptic pronouncements and predictions ensued after September 11, 2001. If he or she relies on the Bible, though, what should the average Christian expect?**

*Sigmund:* Christians who rely on flawed interpretations will be disappointed as they have been time and again. But properly read, the Bible will never disappoint anyone, and instead offer the ultimate hope and comfort.

*Hank:* In the history of apocalyptic speculations only one thing has been truly predictable—prophetic speculations have been virtually one hundred percent wrong one hundred percent of the time. For example, in 1999 Tim LaHaye suggested that Y2K “could trigger a financial meltdown...leading to an international depression which would make it possible for the Antichrist or his emissaries to establish a one-world currency or a one-world economic system which will dominate the world commercially until it is

destroyed” (quoted in *Time*, 18 January 1999). In like fashion, other prophecy pundits imposed newspaper theology on Scripture to predict 2000 as the year of the rapture. They began with the notion that 40 years after Israel was regathered in Palestine in 1948 (minus 7 years for the tribulation) Jesus would return in a secret rapture of the church. When that did not pan out they speculated that the prophetic time clock began ticking in 1967 after the capture of Jerusalem in the Six-day war. Again they added 40 years according to their interpretation of Matthew 24, subtracted 7 years for a tribulation period, and came up with 2000 as D-day. Since Y2K, their theories have continued to evolve.

In our view the great and glorious hope of believers is not found in rapture but in the blessed hope of resurrection. Thus, in the ebb and flow of history, we will continue to experience periods of relative peace and periods of tribulation until Christ comes again, the dead are resurrected, and the problem of sin is fully and finally resolved.

## **6. Why do you believe the theology behind the Rapture, etc., as depicted in Left Behind is flawed?**

*Hank:* Prior to the nineteenth century all Christians—including all premillennialists—believed the rapture or the resurrection of believers and the second coming of Christ were simultaneous events and not two distinct happenings separated by at least seven years. Thus, from the perspective of history the pretribulation rapture hypothesis is of rather recent vintage. In *The End Times Controversy*, Tim LaHaye himself warns believers to examine new ideas carefully. Invoking the words of Dr. Harry Ironside, whom he calls “one of his preacher heroes,” LaHaye writes, “Whenever you hear something new, examine it carefully because it may not be true.” In applying LaHaye’s warning to the pre-trib rapture hypothesis, three things immediately come to mind.

First, there is not a single passage in Scripture that teaches a pretribulation rapture. LaHaye acknowledged as much in a book titled, *No Fear of the Storm*: “One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture is that no one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of His Second Coming separated by the Tribulation. This is true. But then, no one passage teaches a post-trib or mid-trib Rapture, either.”

Furthermore, the passages that Dr. LaHaye uses as validation for the pre-trib rapture hypothesis are at best a stretch and at worst entail a bad case of eisegesis. For example, in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, he claims that “the first teaching on the Rapture in Scripture” is found in John 14:1-3. In his view, “Verse 3 is a reference to the Rapture, when Jesus takes His ‘bride’ the Church up to the Father’s house to be with Him.” As should be obvious to any unbiased reader, LaHaye reads his own eschatological presuppositions into our Lord’s words rather than taking our Lord at his word. In like fashion, LaHaye takes great and glorious resurrection passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and reads his pretribulation rapture presuppositions into them. Despite the fact that Paul in context clearly communicates that he does not want believers to be ignorant of the great and glorious hope of resurrection, LaHaye reinterprets Paul to say he does not want “new Christians to be ignorant...concerning the rapture phase of our Lord’s second coming.”

Finally, far from teaching a *secret* coming of Christ in which believers will be raptured, plus a *second* coming of Christ in which believers will return with Christ to

reign in a cursed creation for a thousand years prior to the resurrection of unbelievers, the whole of Scripture proclaims that when Christ comes again “*all* that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). Plain and simple: There is no biblical warrant for LaHaye’s hypothesis that believers will be resurrected some one thousand seven years before the resurrection of unbelievers.

## **7. What is your theological alternative to the Left Behind/Dispensational viewpoint?**

*Hank:* The Last Disciple series presents an alternative to the Left Behind understanding of end-times events based on a *methodology* called *exegetical eschatology* ( $e^2$ ). I coined the phrase *exegetical eschatology* to underscore the fact that above all else I am deeply committed to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation rather than to any particular *model* of eschatology. Put another way, the plain and proper reading of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm. (More on this in an upcoming book titled *Exegetical Eschatology*, to be published by Tyndale House.) Thus, Revelation must be interpreted in its natural sense rather than being a wax nose twisted to fit LaHaye’s theological preconceptions.

In short, the symbols in the book of Revelation are worth a thousand words because they are deeply rooted in the revelations of the Old Testament. Thus, when John speaks of “The mark of the beast” he is not enticing us to engage in “pin-the-tail-on-the-antichrist” newspaper theology but is drawing our attention to a host of Old Testament passages ranging from Genesis to Zechariah. To the biblically literate, the mark of the beast in Revelation is a parody of the mark of the Lamb—not a high tech computer chip implanted in the bodies of twenty-first-century followers of the beast. In  $e^2$  my goal is to provide readers with a simple and easy to understand guide to the art and science of biblical interpretation. Armed with the tools for proper biblical interpretation they will no longer fall for *The Tim LaHaye Study Bible* interpretation that Revelation 14:20 is intended to communicate that in a twenty-first-century battle of Armageddon the blood of Christ’s enemies will create a literal river of blood one hundred and eighty miles long that rises to the level of a horse’s bridle. Nor will they be tempted to buy into LaHaye’s figurative reinterpretation of words such as *soon* and *near*. John’s repeated use of such words and phrases as *soon* and *the time is near* demonstrate conclusively that John did not have LaHaye’s twenty-first-century apocalypse in mind. In the end they will be equipped to read the Bible for all its worth and in the sense in which it is intended.