

Interpreting The Signs
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Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21 (The Message)

"Yes, I'm on my way! I'll be there soon! I'm bringing my payroll with me. I'll pay all people in full for their life's work. I'm A to Z, the First and the Final, Beginning and Conclusion.

"How blessed are those who wash their robes! The Tree of Life is theirs for good, and they'll walk through the gates to the City.

"I, Jesus, sent my Angel to testify to these things for the churches. I'm the Root and Branch of David, the Bright Morning Star."

"Come!" say the Spirit and the Bride.
Whoever hears, echo, "Come!"
Is anyone thirsty? Come!
All who will, come and drink,
Drink freely of the Water of Life!

He who testifies to all these things says it again: "I'm on my way! I'll be there soon!"

Yes! Come, Master Jesus!

The grace of the Master Jesus be with all of you. Oh, Yes!

Today is the last day of 2006, tomorrow a new year dawns, and it seems that whenever we get to the end of the year, people begin talking about whether or not there will be another year.

We want to know what the future holds, what tomorrow will bring. And how do we find that prophecy about the future?

- some turn to ouje boards
- or we drive out to the local fortune teller
- or we call up Madam Cleo

But for us Christians, those methods seem to me to be inappropriate. Unless of course, we label it "end time prophecy."

The web is full of “christians” who are more than happy to tell you the future for a fee.

Are we coming to the end of time?

Well for just \$6.50 a month, you can join the Left Behind Prophecy club which promises:

The Left Behind Prophecy Club is a website and newsletter to **help you understand** how current events may actually relate to End Times prophecy. **Each week you will get Interpreting the Signs**, an online newsletter featuring Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins, Mark Hitchcock and other End Times scholars. You also have access to **exclusive online message boards** where you can discuss these important issues with fellow Christians.

It is our hope that by studying Bible prophecy and world affairs, those who believe will be bold in their faith and those who don't will begin to understand the link between **what is happening today and what was foretold in the Bible.**

Join the club and they will give you the answers to questions such as:

- Are we living in the end times?
- Could the events of today signify that the Rapture and Tribulation will occur during this generation.
- Are ATM's and other revelations in global banking foretelling the mark of the beast?
- Is the U.N. a precursor of the One World Government prophesied in the Bible?

It's all right there!

The site is maintained by self-proclaimed “prophecy scholar” Tim LaHaye and writer Jerry Jenkins, they of the wildly popular Left Behind series. To date, LaHaye and Jenkins have sold over 63 million books, spawned a less-than-stellar movie, and have become two of the most popular speakers and authors in evangelical Christianity.

The franchise includes 18 books in the original left behind series, 40 kids books, 6, kids live action audio, 13 Audio sounds and dramas, 10 graphic novels (comic books), 3 books in a military series, 3 books in a political series, and 4 bible study books.

In a post-9/11 world, the series has become even more popular, showing a

“fictional” account of what the authors predict will be real-time, end-time events.

The \$6.50 a month buys you LaHaye and Jenkins’ particular view of the end of time — the Rapture (when “true Christians” are all instantly taken up into heaven), the seven years of Tribulation for those “left behind,” the creation of one evil world government ruled by the Antichrist, and so forth. LaHaye makes no bones about his political/theological predictions.

For example: “I wouldn’t be surprised in today’s geopolitical situation — and I address this in my new book *Babylon Rising*, where the United Nations and the European Common Market will gradually grow together and join other countries of the world against the United States, and gradually they will move the center of government to Iraq.”

When asked: **Are we really living in the end times?**

Tim LaHaye states: “I believe we are. We have more reason to believe he will return in this generation than any other generation before us.”

No matter what the world event, the Left Behind franchise has an answer to today’s toughest questions. All it takes is a credit card.

What is it about the future that so fascinates us?

What LaHaye and Jenkins are selling isn’t anything that is new. Christians have been writing and commenting about the end times for centuries. Predictions have been made, world events interpreted and preparations competed for the return of Jesus.

Do you remember in the book of Acts when Jesus ascends to heaven. The disciples don’t know what to do. Some angels come and speak to them.

“You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky?

This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.”

Eventually they finally accept the notion that Jesus is gone from them bodily, but still present through the Holy Spirit — it is then that they are able to get on with the work of the Christian movement.

It seems to me that sometimes we are too busy looking up at an empty sky.

Before the Left Behind series, we had the *Late Great Planet Earth* and its many sequels and spin offs by Hal Lindsey in the 70’s. For Lindsey, writing in the midst of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and China were the agents of the Antichrist.

Unfortunately, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end time prophets were forced to look elsewhere to find a new antichrist.

I have to be honest with you, I have had a hard time trying to figure out what the appeal of the Left Behind series is. I just didn't have a clue, and I have not read the books. But by surfing the leftbehind.com site I think I figured it out.

The idea that the trials of this world can be avoided by one pass of God's heavenly hoover, sucking the "good" Bible believing people up away from the chaos and into the great beyond is a great selling point.

It's the stuff great thrillers are made of. Good wins out in the end and enemies are left smoldering in the ashes. It's no wonder that these prophets are making a profit.

But before you run out and join the Left Behind Prophecy Club maybe there is a question that we need to try and answer?

Is this really the point of the whole Bible?

That we simply fly off to heaven in the end and too bad for you if you're not on the plane?

Is that all there is?

No validation to this life other than as a torturous preparation for the life to come?

Is the primary focus of our Christian life to simply get off this third rock from the sun before it's blown away?

For some reason, as I read the Bible, I don't think so.

If the Christian life was merely about getting into heaven, then why is the bible filled with all this other stuff?

Why does it take 66 books to give us all that stuff about loving neighbors and enemies, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, being stewards of the environment, and taking up our crosses?

Is it merely something to do while we await the trumpet sound, or is there more to it than that?

I've got the answer to that one, and it doesn't require you to join a web site for \$6.50 a month.

It seems to me that it is time that we got our noses out of the novel and into the Book!

If you have read the entire book of Revelation, you know, that the reason that it is the last book in the Bible is that it brings full circle what God has been doing since the opening words in Genesis.

God created the world — God creates the humans in the world — and God calls it “very good.”

The entire Biblical story is how we have tried throughout history to make God’s creation less than good — through sin — through corruption — through our creative ways of screwing up what God so freely gave to us.

The biblical prophets constantly called people back to God and back to the work of being God’s people. And they did it without a book deal.

Despite our repeated attempts to the contrary, God is constantly:

renewing,
remaking,
and reforming God’s creation;

even to the point of coming himself in Jesus Christ to give us a lesson on how to properly live in that creation with God and with each other.

The church’s role is to be the agent through which God is already at work bringing in the kingdom.

John’s revelation simply announces to churches struggling with the task, with opposition on every side, that the work will eventually be completed, whether it’s tomorrow or 10,000 years from now.

Jesus certainly is “coming soon” (22:7), no doubt about it. Not to take us away, but to take over.

In the meantime, we need to quit looking up and start looking at the world around us — the world that you and I are supposed to be working to change, not escape. Instead of spending \$80 a year to be a “prophecy insider,” invest it in a homeless shelter, or soup kitchen, or your church’s youth ministry.

World events will continue to happen, and we’ll continue to have little we can actually do to prevent or provoke them. Better to focus on what we can do — what we’re called and commanded to do: Forget about escaping the world and get on with engaging it with the grace and love of God.

The other day I saw this bumper sticker:

“Jesus is coming. Look busy.”

The question is, when Jesus returns in whatever way that’s going to happen, what will Jesus find us busy doing? Will we be caught looking up, scanning the latest newspaper, or reading a novel?

Or, like his disciples and the great cloud of witnesses before us who have “washed their robes” in the blood of the Lamb (22:14), will we be found doing the work of the kingdom here and now, making this world more and more into what God created it to be in the first place?

Taking care of this world in the here and now is what God wants. And you don't need a subscription — just Scripture — to tell you what to do.