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A Review of Hank Hanegraaff's The Apocalypse Code

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HANK HANEGRAAFF'S *THE APOCALYPSE CODE*
Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

For the last fifteen years or so when I have heard Hank Hanegraaff, host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio program, field questions on eschatology (end times prophecy) it was very clear that he has been decidedly against the futurist perspective. Hanegraaff has told his audience for years that he was studying the field of eschatology and would announce his views in a book one day. Hanegraaff's book has now been released, entitled *The Apocalypse Code*¹, and has confirmed his rhetoric and tone heard for the last fifteen years on the radio as Hanegraaff has been treating dispensationalism as if it were a cult. Yes, Hanegraaff has been "culting" dispensationalism! Even though Hanegraaff always insisted that he was open to and had not adopted a specific view of eschatology, it has always been equally clear to anyone who is schooled in the various views of the end times that he had all along rejected dispensationalism and embraced his own version of a preterist/idealist scheme. Yet, he has never admitted this; and even after the release of his book, he still refuses to classify his own conclusions in spite of the fact that he assigns labels to virtually everyone else.

SOME FACTUAL ERRORS

As I first started reading the book, I noticed a number of factual errors. Let me chronicle just a couple of them. Hanegraaff says Tim LaHaye is "Unlike early dispensationalists, who believed that the Jews would be regathered in Palestine because of belief in their Redeemer."² Hanegraaff gives no documentation for this statement, which is factually in error. In fact, J. N. Darby (the earliest of dispensationalists) believed that the Jews would return to their land in unbelief. He says, "At the end of the age the same fact will be reproduced: the Jews—returned to their own land, though without being converted—will find themselves in connection with the fourth beast."³ Historian David Rausch in his Ph.D. dissertation entitled: *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism 1878–1918*, says, "The Proto-Fundamentalist believed that the Jewish people would return to Palestine, the 'Promised Land,' without converting enmasse to Christianity."⁴ More examples could be given, but it is clear that most dispensationalists have always agreed with LaHaye on this matter.

Another error in fact by Hanegraaff is his statement that Author James Balfour "was raised on a steady diet of dispensationalism."⁵ Lord Balfour was foreign secretary when the British government issues a statement in 1917 supporting the reestablishment of a Jewish state in Israel called the Balfour Declaration. Balfour was a Zionist, but his views were not based upon eschatology, let alone dispensationalism. His sister and biographer said the following:

Balfour's interest in the Jews and their history was lifelong. It originated in the Old Testament training of his mother, and in his Scottish upbringing. As he grew up, his intellectual admiration and sympathy for certain aspects of Jewish philosophy and culture grew also, and the problem of the Jews in the modern world seemed to him of immense importance. He always talked eagerly on this, and I remember in childhood imbibing from him the idea that Christian religion and civilization owes to Judaism an immeasurable debt, shamefully ill repaid.⁶

Historian Barbara Tuckman tells us that Balfour was “not ardent but a skeptic, not a religious enthusiast but a philosophical pessimist, . . . that Christian religion and civilization owes to Judaism an immeasurable debt, shamefully ill repaid.”⁷ Hardly one influenced by dispensationalism, as Hanegraaff would have his readers believe. In fact, it is probably true that none of the Christian Zionists of the early twentieth century in Britain were influenced at all by dispensationalism. Most of the Christian Zionists in Britain at this time were usually members of the Church of England.⁸

HUMBLE HANK

Humble Hank Hanegraaff ridicules Hal Lindsey’s 1997 book, *Apocalypse Code*⁹, as one who claimed to understand the book of Revelation. “Until the present generation,” declares Hanegraaff of Lindsey, “the encrypted message of the Apocalypse had remained unrealized” until Lindsey cracked the code.¹⁰ Now Hanegraaff meekly declares of the release of his new book: “I think it will create a major paradigm shift in our understanding of the end times that is long overdue.”¹¹ He modestly predicts that his book will lead a movement of Evangelicals away from dispensational futurism and toward his preterism/idealism scheme.

Hanegraaff contends that his book is about “Exegetical Eschatology to underscore that above all else I am deeply committed to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation rather than to any particular *model* of eschatology.”¹² If that is his goal then he has fallen far short of the mark! Hanegraaff’s proposed interpretative approaches, if implemented, would send the church back to the Dark Ages hermeneutically. He may want to produce only a method of interpretation, but the moment anyone applies a method it produces an outcome or model of eschatology. Further, the book of Revelation is not written in code (where does Revelation say that?); thus, no need to break the code as Hanegraaff contends.

The great majority of the book is a rant against Hanegraaff’s distorted view of dispensationalism in general and Tim LaHaye in particular. There is precious little actual exegesis, if any at all, to support his preterist/idealist eschatology; however, there are great quantities of some of the most vicious tirades against LaHaye and many other Bible prophecy teachers that I have ever read in print.

Hanegraaff appears rather proud to tell readers that the *principles* of his methodology is “called Exegetical Eschatology or e²,”¹³ as if no one before he came along had ever produced a view of eschatology from proper exegesis. Interestingly, for someone who claims such a deep commitment “to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation,”¹⁴ it is stunning to realize that Hanegraaff’s “method” is stated as principles, rather than an actual method like the historical-grammatical, contextual approach.

“I have organized the principles that are foundational to e² around the acronym LIGHTS,”¹⁵ says Hanegraaff. The letters of the acronym LIGHTS stands for the following principles: L refers to the literal principle, I represents the illumination principle, G stands for the grammatical principle, H for the historical principle, T means the typology principle, and S is for the principle of scriptural synergy.¹⁶ Only half of Hanegraaff’s principles can even be classified as interpretative methods, the other three are best classified as theological beliefs.

Illumination is a work of the Holy Spirit on the believer that enables him to see or understand God’s Word. An unbeliever is blinded to the truth of God (1 Cor. 2:14); however, a believer is in a state in which he is able to see and understand God’s truth (1

Cor. 2:9—3:2). This theological truth is not an interpretative method. Typology is not a method for exegeting Scripture; instead, as Paul says, some Old Testament events were types, patterns, illustrations, or examples to help us live the Christian life (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). Hanegraaff defines his principle of scriptural synergy as a belief “that the whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its individual passages. . . . that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture.”¹⁷ Traditionally this is called the analogy of faith, that Scripture interprets Scripture. This also is a theological outcome and not a method. This principle also presupposes that one already properly understands the meaning of all of the other passages that are supposed to shed light upon the one in dispute. Such is not the case.

TIM LAHAYE RACIST AND BLASPHEMER?

Hanegraaff’s new book anoints Tim LaHaye as the head of this new cult, replacing Hal Lindsey (the former whipping boy), and is the prime target in his sub-Christian attack on LaHaye and other Bible prophecy advocates. Strangely, Hanegraaff is known for often quoting the famous maxim: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”¹⁸ So where are the liberty and charity in practice that he advocates in theory? Charity and liberty towards those he disagrees with is totally absent in Hanegraaff’s new book. In fact, his new book actually competes with the writings of Gary North for the most invective per paragraph and makes Gary DeMar appear to have a moderate tone. It is one thing to disagree with another Christian (Hanegraaff and any other Christian has a right to voice their disagreement with other Christians), but to call his fellow brother in Christ a racist¹⁹ and a blasphemer²⁰ because he advocates a different view of Bible prophecy goes well beyond the pale.

“Furthermore,” says Hanegraaff, “there is the very real problem of *racial discrimination*.”²¹ Watch how Hanegraaff plays the race card: he takes LaHaye’s commonly held view that Israel has a future in God’s plan, adds a touch of his famous misrepresentation of another’s view, and presto, LaHaye has become a racist. It would seem to me that the same Hanegraaff logic applied to God in the Old Testament would also make the Lord a racist for choosing Israel “out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut. 6:6–8). It follows that if you side with God on this issue then Hanegraaff would believe that you believe in salvation by race instead of grace. Yes, LaHaye believes that God has chosen Israel, but like all dispensationalists, he also believes that Israel will be saved in the future by the same gracious gospel that is available to all mankind—Jew or Gentile.

ANTI-ISRAEL AND PRO-PALESTINIAN

Hanegraaff’s blend of preterism and idealism produces an eschatology that is viciously anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian. His brand of replacement theology teaches that national Israel has no future since she is replaced by the church.

Just as Joshua is a type of Jesus who leads the true children of Israel into the eternal land of promise, so King David is a type of the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” who forever rules and reigns from the New Jerusalem in faithfulness and in truth (Revelation 19:16; cf. 19:11). In each case, the lesser is fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater.²²

As is typical within systems of replacement theology, Hanegraaff renders much of the Old Testament obsolete by what is said to have happened in New Testament theology. He says, the “relationship between the Testaments is in essence typological.”²³ Future prophetic promises, which usually relate to Israel, are rendered as mythical or mere types and shadows of something else, but never what they actually say. Through alleged hermeneutical ideas, such as Hanegraaff’s so-called, “typology principle,” he interprets future promises to Israel allegorically as fulfilled through the church. He actually says, with a straight face, that some of the symbols in Revelation, such as the dragon (Rev. 12) are “fantasy imagery.”²⁴ Such deconstruction of God’s Word renders the future promises to Israel as mythological and not true historical records of God’s veracity.²⁵ Thus, the reader should not be surprised to learn that Hanegraaff does not believe that the seventy weeks of years (490 years) in Daniel refer to literal years that actually elapse in specific history. Instead, he says, “the seventy sevens of Daniel encompass ten Jubilee eras and represent the extended exile of the Jews that would end in the fullness of time—the quintessential Jubilee—when the people of God would experience ultimate redemption and restoration, not in the harlot city, but in the holy Christ.”²⁶ Hanegraaff regularly calls Jerusalem “the harlot city.”

CONCLUSION

This book is not only filled with factual error throughout, but teaches that most Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled and advocates the following preterist viewpoints: Nero was the beast of Revelation (i.e., the antichrist), Christ’s Olivet discourse and most of the Book of Revelation were fulfilled by events surrounding the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, and the tribulation was also fulfilled in the first century. Hanegraaff is certainly no lover of Israel since he teaches that God divorced the harlot Israel (he needs to read the end of Hosea) and took a new bride—the church, supports the pro-Palestinian claims against Israel, and even accuses Israel of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Hanegraaff embraces and argues for many viewpoints that are detrimental to sound Bible study and interpretation. Not surprisingly, I do not recommend this book, unless one is looking for an example of how not to study the Bible for all its worth. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says About The End Times and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 300 pages.

² Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. xxii.

³ John Nelson Darby, *The Hopes of the Church of God, in Connection with the Destiny of the Jews and the Nations as Revealed in Prophecy* (1840), *Collected Writings*, (Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, reprint 1971), vol. 2, p. 324.

⁴ David A. Rausch, *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism 1878–1918: A Convergence of Two Traditions* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), p. 64.

⁵ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 183.

⁶ Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour: First Earl of Balfour, 1848–1906* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1937), p. 324.

⁷ Barbara W. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: Ballantine Press, 1956), p. 311.

⁸ For an overview of the history of Christian Zionism see Thomas Ice, “Lovers of Zion: A History of Christian Zionism” at the following internet site: <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=295>.

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- ⁹ Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1997).
- ¹⁰ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. xv–xvi.
- ¹¹ Hank Hanegraaff, www.gather.com/viewArticle.jsp?articleId=281474976960023.
- ¹² Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 2.
- ¹³ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. xxvii.
- ¹⁴ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 2. Italics original.
- ¹⁵ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. 3–10.
- ¹⁷ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 9.
- ¹⁸ Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004), p. 395.
- ¹⁹ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. xx–xxiii.
- ²⁰ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. 189, 225.
- ²¹ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. xx. Italics original.
- ²² Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 201.
- ²³ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 170.
- ²⁴ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. 32–35.
- ²⁵ Hanegraaff realizes that his typological principle would come across as allegorical interpretation so he attempts to deny this, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. 171–72.
- ²⁶ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, p. 194.