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**The Road to Armageddon:
American Culture and Politics during the Late Cold War, 1970-1991**

A Dissertation Submitted

by

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Abstract

Bible prophecy has long engaged the American mind. By the late Cold War, Biblical prophecy increasingly shaped the political beliefs of millions of Americans within the evangelical community. The group most impacted were dispensationalist Christians who interpreted the Atomic Age through the lens of end-time prophecies. Dating as far back as the seventeenth-century, American colonists living on the frontier of the British empire in North America embraced millennialism and, at times, interpreted current events through the lens of Bible prophecy while anticipating the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the Battle of Armageddon. Through the centuries, Bible prophecy became a reoccurring theme that culminated in the late 1800s under the eschatological teachings of John Nelson Darby. Following Darby, a string of ministers, evangelists, and, by the mid-twentieth century, televangelists merged Cold War foreign policy with premillennial dispensational teachings that the end of the world was near. No other figure in the twentieth century shaped Bible prophecy more than Hal Lindsey whose prophetic teachings in *The Late Great Planet Earth* provided the common language evangelicals needed to establish a widely held view of current events in the late Cold War. This dissertation will argue that dispensationalists increasingly influenced American culture and politics throughout the Cold War, culminating in the 1970s and 1980s. First within evangelical culture then spreading into popular culture through influential artists such as Larry Norman and filmmakers Donald W. Thompson and Russell Doughten, premillennial dispensationalism emerged as a distinguished religious ideology during the late Cold War. As dispensationalism gained popularity throughout the second half of the twentieth century, public political discourse about the end times increased, culminating during the Ronald Reagan administration.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

We Begin Bombing in Five Minutes

Enjoying a weekend getaway at his ranch home *Rancho Del Cielo* in Santa Barbara, California, also known as the Western White House, President Ronald Reagan gazed across the estate's large pond toward the horse stables where he and the first lady, Nancy, both enjoyed riding their mares. Reagan was especially fond of "El Alamein," a gift from the President of Mexico a few years prior. His ranch only ten miles off the California coast, Reagan delighted in some of the most favorable weather in the nation. The temperature that morning rested comfortably in the low 70s. Reagan returned inside where some of his administrative staff and a technical crew waited for him. Since his presidential address was for radio and not television, Reagan dressed casually in a short-sleeved khaki Cuban collar shirt instead of the more formal suit and tie. Reagan tapped the papers of the speech that he worked on throughout the week against the table and waited for the cue that he was being broadcasted live across America.

By that morning on August 11, 1984, Reagan had already given over a hundred and fifty weekly radio addresses as president, and his experienced rhetoric and ease of tone had been forming since his twenties when he started a career in radio as a sports announcer and later perfecting his delivery while acting in Hollywood and on television. Joking with the audio engineers after being asked to perform a soundcheck, Reagan applied some of his refined humor that often peppered his speeches and conversations. Instead of reading from the first line of his script, which would have read "My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you that today I signed legislation that will allow student religious groups to begin enjoying a right they have too

long been denied.”¹ Instead, Reagan jested, “My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you today that I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever.” Reagan spoke in his usual presidential tone, as laughter erupted in the room around him. After a brief pause, Reagan concluded with one of America’s most infamous presidential jokes: “We begin bombing in five minutes.”² While only producing temporary embarrassment for Reagan and his administration, the black humored remark came to symbolize a fear that permeated not only Reagan’s thoughts but those of millions of Americans. The fear of nuclear war and Armageddon—whether in the form of a Biblical apocalypse or a temporal, doomsday scenario—deeply shaped American culture and politics throughout the Cold War.

Research Questions and Methodologies

The doctrine of Armageddon, while a cyclical theme throughout America’s history, peaked in popular culture and political interest at the height of the Cold War. The methodological approaches applied to this project borrow from religious, intellectual, cultural, and political history. Rarely explored by scholars, this dissertation also provides historical understanding into the role of Biblical prophecy in America. To accomplish this, the following research questions will be explored: How has the doctrine of Armageddon shaped American culture and politics, especially at the height of the Cold War? Who were the leading figures promoting doomsday ideology throughout the Cold War? Why did American dispensationalists so strongly link Biblical prophecies concerning Armageddon with Cold War geopolitics,

¹ Reagan would go on to open his radio address by discussing legislative progress on the Equal Access Legislation—a bill that Reagan favored and would later be passed as the Equal Access Act of 1984—allowing high school students to meet for religious or political meetings outside of school hours.

² For the full address, see *Reagan Library*, “President Reagan’s Radio Address on Congressional Inaction on Legislation on August 11, 1984,” video, 1984. <https://youtu.be/f1XHIPCRZxo>. For more about how the media and foreign policy backlash that emerged as a response to the audio being leaked, see “Reagan Said to Joke of Bombing Russia Before Radio Speech,” *The New York Times*’s August 13, 1984.

especially concerning the Soviet Union and the Middle East? How did both Hollywood and Christian-based evangelical media, such as film, music, television programming, literature, and other forms of information and entertainment, promote Armageddon theology? Reaching as high as the White House, did the doctrine of Armageddon play a significant role in Cold War defense and foreign policies during the climax of the Cold War? And finally, what were President Ronald Reagan's eschatological views, and how did they differ from preceding Cold War presidents? This dissertation's conclusion reflects upon and attempts to provide clarity as to the legacy of the late Cold War Armageddon phenomenon in the evangelical church and American culture.

This project draws substantial inspiration from Paul Boyer's scholarship, especially his 1992 publication of *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Boyer's work remains the scholarly standard for understanding the history and significance of the doctrine of Armageddon during the Cold War but lacks a full assessment of its influence upon the late Cold War and American defense and foreign policies. Written thirty years ago, a proper reassessment of the topic has yet to emerge that incorporates recent research on Cold War era culture and politics, the more recent revisionism of Reagan historiography, and the long-term influence of doomsday ideology into the twenty-first century. The most recent scholarship attempting to expand on Boyer's work is Matthew Avery Sutton's *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, which will be introduced alongside other works in the historiography section of this chapter.

While examining the doctrine of Armageddon primarily among American fundamentalists, this research project also explores the eschatological views of other prominent faiths in America in the late Cold War era. This project intends to answer why mostly American fundamentalists linked dispensationalism to Cold War geopolitical policies. The conversation

was not exclusive to religious folk though. While not all Christians agreed that the end of the world was nearer than ever during the Cold War, the threat of nuclear holocaust was a prevalent concern among those with nonreligious, temporal concerns as well. Millions of Americans were merely afraid of a nuclear holocaust. The emphasis that millions of Americans placed on a nuclear Armageddon resulted in intense debate throughout the 1970s and peaked during the 1984 presidential election. Central to this project is the desire to understand why American interest in the doctrine of Armageddon increased significantly in the 1970s, peaked by the mid-1980s, and remained relatively high through the end of the century. With the Gulf War in the 1990s and post-9/11 interventions in the Middle East, including the Iraq War, why did the doctrine of Armageddon—despite being culturally and politically present—not resurge with the same intensity as the late Cold War?

Terminology

Since this research project crosses several disciplines including theology, several theological terms used throughout the research require definition. A term generally applied in many contexts throughout this work, *Armageddon* is defined here as the Biblical unfolding of the end of times marked by a final battle between good and evil. Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and nearly every religious institution has a different vision of the end of the world. This project focuses primarily on premillennial dispensationalist eschatology. *Dispensationalism* is another term that is used widely but primarily refers to individuals who held beliefs that the history of the world is Biblically divided into seven distinct periods, or dispensations. According to John Nelson Darby, the father of dispensationalism, and the later influential theologian Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, known widely for his 1909 Scofield Reference Bible, the Bible frames history into seven ages: Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace, and the

Millennial Kingdom.³ According to Darby and Scofield, mankind is currently living during the dispensation of grace. Related to dispensationalism and specific to this study is the wide held belief in *premillennialism*. Followers of this eschatological view believe that Jesus Christ, as foretold in Revelation 20, will return to earth before the millennium, or the thousand years of peace on earth. Belief in the apocalypse and Biblical prophecy coexisted in colonial America alongside representative government, freedom of religion, and other Western ideals.

Just as republican ideals were sowed into America's foundation, belief in the apocalypse—one of America's oldest literary genres—and millennialism also took root in the nascent nation. American interest in the doctrine of Armageddon may have peaked at the height of the Cold War in modern times but appeared in American society as early as the first British settlements in North America. Unique to the twentieth century, a new doctrine of Armageddon known as Armageddon theology emerged alongside the arrival of nuclear weapons. Armageddon theology was embraced by millions of Americans throughout the Cold War, believing that a nuclear war would erupt between the U.S. and Soviet Union. End-times developments, whether based on religious interpretations of the Bible or the imagination of popular culture, dominated not only cultural mediums such as film, television, music, and literature but also American politics. By the 1980s, the theological certainty of Armageddon reached as high as the White House with President Reagan expressing his concerns that Biblical prophecies regarding the end of days pointed toward a final conflict involving a Soviet attack on Israel. Far from a fatalist, Reagan's deeply held religious convictions eventually resulted in defense and foreign policies directed at eliminating the threat of nuclear war. This dissertation seeks to build upon the assessment of Boyer's work by incorporating a greater focus on how the doctrine of

³ Darby, Scofield, and other prominent religious leaders will be assessed in chapter two.

Armageddon shaped American views concerning the relationship between the United States, Soviet Union, and Israel in popular culture and politics.

Historiography

The study of the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon in American culture and politics remains an underdeveloped field of history. As a result, the historiography reveals large gaps in publication and scholarly interest within the field of history. And since this area of research remains an outlier among mainstream history, several historiographies of scholarship are evaluated and applied to provide proper background and context for this study. The best place to begin an examination of the historiography is with an assessment of the leading historian in this field of study. Paul Boyer—Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison—researched *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985) and *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (1992) throughout the early 1980s at the height of the Cold War when anxiety of a nuclear holocaust was the prominent topic in virtually every aspect of American culture, politics, and religion. By the end of the 1980s, fear waned but interest remained in apocalyptic topics. In his 1985 work, Boyer argued that the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 “profoundly affected American thought and culture” and that fear of nuclear holocaust emerged afterward in “cultural cycles.”⁴ The first cycle lasted from the end of the World War II through the early 1950s then reemerged in the mid-1950s through 1963, ending with the Limited Test Ban Treaty.⁵ The third cycle emerged at the height of the Cold War in the late 1970s through the

⁴ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), x.

⁵ The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 was an agreement between the U.S., Great Britain, and the Soviet Union that banned nuclear weapon testing in the atmosphere, outer space, and under water.

mid-1980s. While Boyer's initial work focused on the impact of the nuclear age on the American psyche, his follow up work explored a fringe area of American culture untouched at the time by serious scholarly assessment.

When Time Shall Be No More is the first scholarly assessment of the role of the doctrine of Armageddon in modern culture and politics. In his work, Boyer focused on the intellectual roots of the doctrine in American mainstream fundamentalism and its influential spillover into popular culture and politics. Boyer argued that Armageddon eschatology and Biblical prophecy belief is more influential than historians previously acknowledged. Central to his argument, Boyer stressed that following World War II, America's foreign policy—especially regarding the Cold War and the nation of Israel—was influenced by premillennial dispensationalism. Boyer, as with many historians, found Ronald Reagan to be a polemical leader for premillennialism in his first term only to switch efforts to deescalate the arms race in his second term. Boyer's scholarship serves as a critical foundation for this research project.

Another foundation of critical scholarship for this project, Professor of American History at the University of Cambridge, Andrew Preston, focused on the relationship between religion and U.S. foreign policy in *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (2012). Preston argued that religious faith shaped America's understanding of its role in the world, resulting in foreign policy that was often either driven by or, at minimum, wrapped in religious rhetoric. The historian offered a strong defense that religious influence on America's foreign policy, especially during times of war, was as much bottom up in its origins as it was political leaders from the top leading the charge. Individuals and their religious convictions played a substantial role in shaping American foreign policy. Historically, American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews promoted religious causes, contributing to the national political discourse by

championing their faith. According to Preston, Billy Graham and Ronald Reagan embraced fundamentalism and Armageddon rhetoric to frame U.S. foreign policy as a battle between good and evil.⁶ A theme that will be carefully explored in this research project.

For a wider scholarly assessment of the doctrine of Armageddon, the historiography of millenarianism along with the development of dispensationalism and the emergence of the fundamentalist movement in American culture and politics provides the best foundation for major portions of this study. These three fields of study do not exist in individual vacuums but rather intersect and, at times, amalgamate. While these terms are not synonymous, their historiographical treatment often falls under the scholarship of many of the same scholars. Scholars in this field are numerous, but the most notable historians and their works related to millenarianism, dispensationalism, and fundamentalism include Ernest Lee Tuveson's *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (1968), Ernest R. Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British & American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (1970), Nathan O. Hatch's *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (1977), George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (1980), Timothy P. Weber's *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (1983), Mark A. Noll's *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (1992), D. G. Hart's *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (2002), Darren Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (2010), as well as

⁶ Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 597.

Matthew Avery Sutton recent work *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (2014).

In *Redeemer Nation*, Ernest Lee Tuveson—former Professor at Brown University—was the first to properly assess the role of millennial beliefs in American culture and its relationship to the creation of American foreign policy. Tuveson’s work built upon H. Richard Niebuhr’s classic assessment of American religion *The Kingdom of God in America* (1937), which divided America’s perception of its role in God’s kingdom into three phases: the sovereignty of God (early colonial period), the kingdom of Christ (late colonial period through the Civil War), and the kingdom of earth (post-Civil War through the Progressive era). For Tuveson as well as Niebuhr, Christianity was working historically toward building God’s kingdom on earth before Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ. Tuveson argued that since America’s founding, literal interpretations of biblical prophecies impacted American foreign policy and shaped diplomacy. Tuveson’s analysis of millennialism at different periods in American history and its origins in English tradition provided a scholarly basis for later studies in the field.

While Tuveson is generally the accepted first step toward understanding millennialism in American history, Ernest R. Sandeen—former James Wallace Professor of History at Macalester College—argued that American fundamentalism was not the 1920s kneejerk reaction to the liberalization of Christianity in America. Instead, Sandeen contributed a transatlantic approach to the historiography, arguing that Anglo-American millenarianism was present since the birth of America and “gave life and shape to the Fundamentalist movement.”⁷ Important to this research project is the tracing of America’s obsession with the doctrine of Armageddon to its historical,

⁷ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), xv.

millennial roots. Sandeen's scholarship aids in explaining the long-term influence of millennialism in American politics, while Nathan O. Hatch's *The Sacred Cause of Liberty* deemphasized the importance of the Great Awakening and its leading figures who were central to Tuveson's work. Instead, Hatch transferred the origins of political, or civil, millennialism to the sermons and political insight of New England clergymen as they merged republican political theory with millennial theology into something that Hatch refers to as "republican eschatology."⁸

Sandeen's lasting argument that premillennialism was central to the fundamentalist movement forms the foundation for numerous scholarly works that followed, including Timothy Weber's *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*. Weber—theologian and former Professor of Church History at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—focused less on the political implications of millennialism and its complex networks of beliefs and instead focused more on the cultural influence of premillennialism. Weber acknowledged that by the early 1980s (when he published his research) "eschatology has come to close to reaching cult status in American society."⁹ Astutely, Weber concluded that what Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism* did for the scholars, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* did for non-evangelical Americans, i.e. both works placed a spotlight on a largely ignored area of American culture and politics: America's continued obsession with Biblical prophecy. In a critical statement, Weber asserted "The premillennialists in Sandeen's study are the forerunners and spiritual ancestors of those who currently read and believe Lindsey's book."¹⁰

⁸ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 12.

⁹ Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

Published more than forty years ago, George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture* continues to dominate modern scholarship surrounding fundamentalism. In his work, Marsden—Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame—argued that the fundamentalists movement that existed by 1980 was the product of the religious, cultural, and political tensions that rose out of the Fundamentalist-Modernist debates of the 1920s. In his oft-repeated retort, a modern fundamentalist was “an evangelical who is angry about something.”¹¹ By this, Marsden meant that fundamentalists were not silent bystanders but religiously active, especially in political matters dealing with cultural issues. This would later evolve to include a growing interest in foreign policy. In the recent third edition (2022) of his defining work, Marsden provided a comparison between 1920s fundamentalism and 1970s fundamentalism. Marsden concluded that since the advent of Ronald Reagan and the lasting impact of the Religious Right, fundamentalism is distinguished from the earlier generations by “its deep involvement in mainstream national politics.”¹² As a result, Marsden redefined fundamentalism since the 1970s. Using the descriptor *fundamentalistic evangelicalism*, Marsden described the subgroup:

The Religious Right (which also includes Catholics and Mormons) includes ‘fundamentalistic’ militants who from not only separatist fundamentalists groups, but also from almost the whole spectrum of evangelicals, even though by no means all evangelicals, including self-styled fundamentalists, are politicized.

Published a decade after Marsden original publication of *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Mark A. Noll's *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* has become the standard text for studying the history of Christianity in college courses throughout

1. ¹¹ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991),

¹² *Ibid.*, 232.

the U.S.¹³ While his work covers Christianity broadly, his assessment of dispensationalism and the role of Armageddon and other Biblical end-times prophecies throughout American history cannot be ignored. Concerning dispensationalism, Noll argued that wide interest in the doctrine of Armageddon “may also have been a defensive reaction to an implicit realization that American culture was slipping away from evangelical Protestant control.”¹⁴

Departing from the usual analysis of American fundamentalist studies, D. G. Hart’s *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* exposed an ignored aspect of the conversation, namely confessional Protestants. Hart—Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary—argued that confessional Christians, such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, and other Reformed denominations, do not fit into the mainstream narrative of Protestantism and evangelicalism. Confessional Christianity ran counter to the apocalyptic obsessions of the dispensationalists, believing that it was not the role of the Christian to eagerly look for the signs nor try and hasten the return of Christ. While millennialism was not a major focus of Hart’s work, his contrast between the Confessionalists and other groups provided a needed argument to demonstrate that not all Christians participated in the late Cold War obsession with Armageddon.¹⁵ Moving away from the common broader studies of evangelicalism, dispensationalism, and fundamentalism, Darren Dochuk offered a regional narrative for the origins of these religious groups.

¹³ Noll’s survey was assigned to this researcher while working through undergraduate, graduate, and PhD courses in history at two different institutions.

¹⁴ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 345-346.

¹⁵ To cloud the matter even more, most all fundamentalists were dispensationalists, and some dispensationalists were Confessionalists. Reformed fundamentalists were Calvinist Christians in the evangelical community defending orthodox Christianity.

Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* explored the resettlement of southern religion in Southern California beginning in the early twentieth century. While his work is a regional history of Southern California, Dochuk argued that the Religious Right that developed in the 1970s grew more out of the evangelicalism and conservatism of Southern California than the efforts of the East Coast influences of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Adding to the historiography of evangelicalism, Dochuk argued that the evangelical love of individualism, capitalism, and shared distrust toward big government emerged out of the "Jeffersonian" mindset established by post-war (World War II) evangelicals in Southern California. Dochuk recent attempt to shift the narrative challenged nearly all preceding scholarship. Another challenge to established scholarship surrounding American evangelicalism and fundamentalism has emerged recently from Distinguished Professor of History at Washington State University, Matthew Avery Sutton.

In *American Apocalypse*, Sutton questioned Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture* definition of a fundamentalist, redefining the religious group as "an evangelical who is worried about the end of the world."¹⁶ In agreement with earlier scholars, namely Tuveson and Sandeen, Sutton claimed that fundamentalism is governed by millennialism. For Sutton, fundamentalists were overwhelmingly premillennial dispensationalists obsessed with the doctrine of Armageddon and other Biblical prophecies. Challenging Marsden's argument that the 1920s shaped American fundamentalism, Sutton contended that World War One was more important to its formation. In his review of Sutton's work, Chad E. Seales summarized Sutton's main argument: "Sutton offers an alternative historical chronology that tracks how . . . American fundamentalists transformed an obscure Christian tradition of millennialism into a cultural

¹⁶ Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3.

practice of using the Bible to decode history.”¹⁷ As of now, Sutton’s work is the most recent scholarly attempt outside of Boyer’s work to address the role of the doctrine of Armageddon in American culture and politics.

In addition to the study of the doctrine of Armageddon in millennialism, evangelicalism, dispensationalism, and fundamentalism, this research project will also explore numerous works of Biblical prophecy published throughout the Cold War. The years between 1970 and 1991 provide pivotal context for the focus of this dissertation. Two published works by Hal Lindsey serve as bookends for this study, Lindsey’s 1970 *The Late Great Planet Earth* and 1991 publication of *The Rise of Babylon and the Persian Gulf Crisis: A Special Report*. Other essential works by Hal Lindsey include *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (1972), *The Liberation of Planet Earth* (1974), *There’s a New World Coming: An In-Depth Analysis of the Book of Revelation* (1975), *The 1980’s: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980), and *Israel and the Last Days* (1991). His debut prophecy book *The Late Great Planet Earth* reignited widespread interest into end-times prophecies, influencing not only millions of Americans but millions more internationally as well as high-ranking military officials and politicians. His prophetic analysis of the Persian Gulf War, released months prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, painted the Gulf War Crisis as not the beginning of the battle of Armageddon but instead possibly setting the stage for a united Soviet-Arab attack against Israel, leading to a multinational war in the Middle East. In addition to Lindsey, other prophecy works will be explored such as Edgar Whisenant’s *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*.

¹⁷ Chad E. Seales, “American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism,” *Journal of Southern History* 82, no. 2 (2016): 471.

Along with an understanding of the historiography related to the impact of dispensationalism, premillennialism, and the doctrine of Armageddon in American religion and culture, it is necessary to take a step back and provide a Cold War historiography that includes both diplomatic history as well as national politics during the late Cold War. Because this dissertation also thoroughly explores Ronald Reagan's religious views and defense and foreign policies, a thorough examination of the historiography regarding Ronald Reagan and his presidency is provided.

Cold War historiography is among the most complex and divisive areas of scholarship. Politically charged and global in scale, four major schools of thought have emerged regarding the Cold War: traditionalism, revisionism, post-revisionism, and consensus. Traditional Cold War historiography defended America's containment policies, blamed the Soviets for starting the Cold War, and labeled the Soviet Union as the continued aggressors throughout the Cold War era. Notable scholars and their works include Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *Origins of the Cold War* (1967), Louis J. Halle's *The Cold War as History* (1967), and Herbert Feis's *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (1970). This school of thought dominated scholarship from the 1940s through the mid-1960s. In his article *Origins of the Cold War* published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Schlesinger—former intelligence officer for the OSS, speechwriter and special advisor for John F. Kennedy, and Professor of History at CUNY—defended the traditionalist interpretation of the Cold War and emphasized the centrality of Marxist-Leninist ideology as the cause of the geopolitical conflict.¹⁸ Schlesinger was highly critical of emerging revisionists, notably William Appleman Williams, condemning Williams's

¹⁸ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 47.

argument that the Soviet Union was a traditional nation-state on par with America. Williams, as well as other revisionists, removed responsibility from the Soviet Union and took a more sympathetic approach to Joseph Stalin and his policies.

Former Professor of History at the University of Virginia and foreign policy specialist, Louis J. Halle's *The Cold War as History* committed to the traditionalist perspective but argued, in the context of the Vietnam War, that America's successes prior to the Cold War made losing military and diplomatic fights extremely difficult to explain and accept as a nation.¹⁹ In contrast, the Soviet Union's long history of domestic difficulties and foreign policy failures meant that Moscow understood its limitations internationally better than Washington. American economic advisor to the League of Nations and former Professor of History at Harvard University, Herbert Feis reasoned in *From Trust to Terror* that a breakdown of trust between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was the main cause of the Cold War and that the continued secrecy between the two nations prolonged the crisis.²⁰ It was Reagan, Melvyn P. Leffler would later argue in *For the Soul of Mankind*, who reestablished trust between Washington and Moscow.

By the 1960s, many scholars challenged the traditional narratives of Schlesinger, Halle, and Feis, emphasizing America's role in contributing to Cold War tensions and focusing on America's global economic expansion. These revisionists, or New Left historians, dominated the scholarship from the late 1960s through the 1970s. Leading figures among the revisionists included William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), Denna Fleming's *The Cold War and its Origins, 1917-1960* (1961), Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic*

¹⁹ Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1967), 20.

²⁰ Herbert Feis, *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 12.

Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam (1965), and Joyce and Gabriel Kolko's *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (1972). Revisionist historians viewed the Cold War through the lens of America as an aggressive empire bent on nation building throughout the Third World.

William Appleman Williams—pioneer of Cold War revisionism and a former Professor of History at Oregon State University—rejected many of the claims championed by the traditionalists, arguing that America was an imperial power that sought global economic domination. For revisionists like Williams, capitalism, not democracy, was the primary motivator for American foreign policy and diplomacy, which were stilted with contradictions.²¹ Following in their scholarship and revisionist approaches to history, Fleming, Alperovitz, and Kolko broke away from the traditional historiography of the Cold War and established new methodologies. Most notably by applying Thomas A. Bailey and Samuel Flagg Bemis' development of diplomatic history to Cold War studies. This approach was eagerly adopted by the New Left historians.

Former Emeritus Professor of History at York University in Toronto, Kolko's *The Limits of Power* challenged America's ability to create policies to achieve their diplomatic goals abroad. Kolko argued that capitalism and the need for compatible trading markets shaped America's foreign policy and diplomatic approaches in Eastern Europe and Asia.²² For revisionists like Kolko, this was the primary cause for the Cold War and its continuation.

²¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 13.

²² Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 17.

Notable among the New Left in the early 1960s, Fleming and Alperovitz's reassessment of the Cold War dominated scholarly discussion. Specializing in early twentieth-century political history and serving as a Professor of History at Vanderbilt University prior to World War II, Fleming published one of the most popular and influential revisionist texts on the Cold War. In *The Cold War and its Origins*, Fleming contended that the Cold War was the result of the two world wars and a consequence of America's isolationist policies between the wars. For Fleming, American diplomacy failed to prevent the bipolar rivalry and was too eager to cast the Soviet Union as America's next enemy. Political activist and former historian at the University of Maryland, Alperovitz is widely remembered as the figure who helped Daniel Ellsberg leak the Pentagon Papers in the early 1970s. Years prior, Alperovitz published *Atomic Diplomacy*, arguing that President Truman's approach to diplomatic relations with Moscow set the precedent of "talking tough" for subsequent presidents to follow when dealing with the Soviet Union.²³ In addition, Alperovitz argued that nuclear weapons were not necessary to end the war with Japan but were used to shut out the Soviets in Asia and strengthen American diplomatic discussions with Moscow.

While the traditionalists blamed the Soviets and the revisionists blamed the Americans for the Cold War, the post-revisionists who emerged in the early 1970s and remained a dominate voice through the 1980s blamed neither side. Instead, this school of thought argued that the Cold War was too complex to place blame exclusively on either side of the conflict. Two of the most important scholars and their works in the field include John Lewis Gaddis's *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (1982) and Melvin Leffler's *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman*

²³ Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 32.

Administration and the Cold War (1992). Many scholars in this field, including Gaddis and Leffler, reevaluated their Cold War interpretations as a result of millions of released Soviet documents in the early 1990s and later contributed to formulating consensus historiography.

John Lewis Gaddis—Robert A. Lovett Professor of Military and Naval History at Yale University and informally recognized as the “Dean of Cold War Historians”—had dominated the discussion of the Cold War since the 1980s.²⁴ In *Strategies of Containment*, Gaddis explained that America’s foreign policy during the Cold War up through the 1980s reflected what he terms as “asymmetrical” and “symmetrical” containment. By this, Gaddis meant that American diplomacy and foreign policies were designed to apply America’s greatest strengths (military and economy) to exploit the Soviet Union’s worse weaknesses.²⁵ In contrast to the revisionists, Melvin Leffler—Edward Stettinius Professor of History at the University of Virginia—won the Bancroft Prize for *A Preponderance of Power*. In his work, Leffler focused on the early years of the Cold War, arguing that fear concerning the consequences of World War II and the power that America possessed in the atomic bomb, shaped American foreign policy and diplomacy. Leffler avoided placing blame for the Cold War on either side but surrendered to the notion that America failed in diplomacy by framing the conflict into a bipolar narrative, which helped perpetuate the conflict.²⁶ With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new era in Cold War historiography emerged as the newly formed Russian Federation released more than 70 years (1917-1991) of archival documents belonging to the former communist government.

²⁴ Priscilla Johnson McMillan, “Cold Warmonger,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 1997.

²⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 61.

²⁶ Melvin Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War*. (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 134.

Historians flocked to the Russian archives, which resulted in a new consensus school of thought as millions of archival documents reshaped Cold War historiography. This school of thought focused on the Soviet Union's policies following World War II as the primary cause of the Cold War—confirming many of the arguments of the traditionalists— and placed the blame back at the table of the Soviet Union. Leading advocates for the new Cold War historiography included many scholars who transitioned out of the post-revisionist school, most notable of these included John Lewis Gaddis with his highly influential works *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (1997) and *The Cold War: A New History* (2007), as well as Melvyn Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (2007). In his works, Gaddis revised earlier arguments and contended that the Cold War was best understood when the geopolitical space was assessed from the North Pole rather than the traditional Eastern and Western Hemispheres. Gaddis also doubled down on his argument that America had taken the right diplomatic and foreign policy approaches throughout the Cold War. According to Gaddis, America's escalation of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s was the only option to stop the Soviet Union from violating human rights in Third World countries. Furthermore, America was correct to contain communism early on, then move toward a policy of détente, and lastly, transition to Reagan's roll back of communism. Had America not taken the steps to contain and ultimately end the cold war, things would have been a lot worse.²⁷

In *For the Soul of Mankind*, Leffler reassessed the origins of the Cold War and reevaluated arguments in his previous work *Preponderance of Power*. Incorporating new archival evidence from the former Soviet Union, Leffer expanded his post-revisionist views of the Cold War's origins as a battle of ideology and power politics, integrating motivations from

²⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, Books, 2007), 122.

the Soviet perspective. For Leffler, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev did what no other national leaders prior to that point could do: speak diplomatically and make moves toward peaceful negotiations. Leffler also argued that it is Gorbachev that ultimately deserves credit for ending the Cold War.²⁸ Yet the historian contended that Reagan was essential in the process, especially in his ability to inspire trust.²⁹

In addition to these key schools of thought, Cold War scholars have also focused in recent years on the effects of Cold War policies globally, borrowing from a wide range of Cold War historiography and including additional insights from documents not considered by previous historians. Among these new historians include David S. Painter, Carole K. Fink, and Odd Arne Westad. The majority of Cold War studies have focused on the political and ideological conflicts between the U.S. and the Soviet Union with lesser attention given to how the international conflict played out in Third World countries outside of the proxy war narrative. Many of these new historians attempt to reveal the lasting effects of Cold War foreign policies initiated by the superpowers.

In his groundbreaking work *The Cold War: An International History* (1999), David S. Painter—Associate Professor of International History at Georgetown University—examined the Cold War as an international history, focusing on political movements and proxy wars throughout the world while also emphasizing that the conflict was far from a bipolar struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.³⁰ Approaching the Cold War with the same new

²⁸ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 448.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 462.

³⁰ David S. Painter, *The Cold War: An International History* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

perspective in her work *Cold War: An International History* (2017), Carole K. Fink—former Humanities Distinguished Professor History Emeritus at The Ohio State University—emphasized the roles of national leaders and movements outside of the normal U.S.-Soviet narrative and argued that the ideological conflict that evolved into the Cold War began with the rise of the Bolsheviks.³¹ Elihu Professor of History at Yale University and recipient of the Bancroft Prize, Odd Arne Westad acknowledged the importance of viewing the Cold War outside of the traditional narrative in *The Cold War: A World History* (2017) by revealing how the Cold War affected different regions throughout the world politically, culturally, and economically. For Westad, the lasting legacy of the Cold War is how it inspired Third World countries to fight for freedom and justice. Challenging Fink’s argument that the Cold War started in 1917 and other historians who traditionally place the start of the Cold War with the diplomatic breakdowns following World War II, Westad convincingly argued that the Cold War originated in the late 1800s with the Second Industrial Revolution and the rising conflict between capitalism and socialism.³² As the Cold War continues to be reassessed by historians by Painter, Fink, and Westad, Cold War president Ronald Reagan’s historiography has also undergone major reassessments in recent years.

At the center of modern American conservatism and national politics, few other political figures have received such diverse reaction by historians and pundits. Because of this, scholarly analysis of Ronald Reagan has suffered for the worse. In reviewing Edmund Morris’ derisive authorized biography of Reagan in 1999, popular presidential historian Joseph J. Ellis contended that Reagan historiography was now “ripe for a detached reappraisal of Reagan’s place in the

³¹ Carole K. Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017), 4.

³² Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 17.

presidential pantheon.”³³ The current state of Reagan historiography stands as a testament to the struggle historians endure to write dispassionately—especially in the arena of Reagan’s religious beliefs. When surveying Reagan scholarship, the historiography can be organized into three distinct periods: pre-presidential, traditional, and revisionist. Each period is characterized by conflicting schools of thought. While each phase has its critics and supporters, Reagan historiography was dominated by ardent, critical assessments throughout the 1980s and 1990s. By the 2000s, there was a scholarly shift to a more favorable, less critical view of Reagan and his policies.³⁴ Prior to his ascent to the presidency, Reagan’s life and politics were the subject of a handful of prominent journalists. Since scholars had not yet significantly assessed Reagan’s ideologies and policies until after Reagan secured the Republican nomination in 1980, the period prior to his presidency will be referred to as the pre-presidential period and was dominated almost entirely by journalist. This period incorporated examinations of Reagan’s early life, experiences in Hollywood, employment as a spokesman General Electric, connections to Barry Goldwater and other leading conservatives, as well as his eight years as governor of California.

Once elected to the presidency, a flood of journalistic and scholarly works emerged, establishing the traditional period of Reagan historiography. During this period, partisan politics dominated not only media coverage of Reagan but also led to the formation of the greater Reagan (proponents) and lesser Reagan (opponents) myths.³⁵ These politically charged myths filled bookshelves, news media, college lectures, and pulpits. Following the end of Reagan’s

³³ Joseph J. Ellis, “Role of a Lifetime,” *Washington Post*, October 3, 1999.

³⁴ This transition from a critical to a more favorable perspective on Ronald Reagan’s and his policies is expanded upon later in the essay.

³⁵ Tim H. Blessing and Anne A. Skelder, “Top Down: A General Overview of Present Research on Ronald Reagan’s Doctrinal Presidency,” in *Reassessing the Reagan Presidency*, ed. Richard S. Conley (Lanham: University of America Press, 2003), 2-4.

time in the White House, the traditional Reagan historiography continued throughout the 1990s but was overshadowed by a flood of Cold War studies and Reagan's announcement of his Alzheimer's disease diagnosis. Some historians consider the 1990s the lost decade of Reagan historiography.

The third phase of Reagan historiography emerged in the early 2000s, expanding as a renewed interest in Reagan emerged with the release of thousands of archival documents and his death in 2004.³⁶ A decade after the Cold War ended, scholars attempted to objectively reexamine Reagan and his presidency by focusing on the recently expanded historical record, attempting to avoid the mistake of bias that teemed traditional Reagan historiography. The most significant factor in promoting what has become known as Reagan revisionism was the release of tens of thousands of letters, radio transcripts, and other personal writings from the presidential archives.³⁷ The current state of Reagan historiography can still be categorized as revisionist with the trend continuing to bend even more toward a positive view of Reagan and his Cold War policies. While renewed interest in Reagan persists, there is still a significant lack of study relating to Reagan's faith and its role in policymaking.

A major question that this project seeks to answer is to determine Ronald Reagan's eschatological views and whether those beliefs influenced defense and foreign policy. Emerging

³⁶ In 2004, Gallup published a survey revealing that 73% of Americans viewed Reagan's presidency positively. Gallup contributed Reagan's diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease as one factor in reshaping the public's attitude toward Reagan. See Frank Newport, etc., "Ronald Reagan from the People's Perspective: A Gallup Poll Review," *Gallup*, June 7, 2004. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/11887/ronald-reagan-from-peoples-perspective-gallup-poll-review.aspx>.

³⁷ The Reagan Presidential Library is a trove of archival documents. Most of the collection is digitalized and easily searchable. Additionally, Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson compiled Reagan's writings into two works: *Reagan in His Own Hand* (2001) and *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (2003). These "papers" of President Reagan are invaluable. Douglas Brinkley has also curated several works, most notably *The Reagan Diaries* (2007). The researchers' notes provided, especially Brinkley's annotations, have been extremely beneficial to my research.

from revisionist historiography of the last twenty years, a renewed scholarly interest in religious studies concerning Reagan and his administration emerged in the early 2000s. Paul Kengor's scholarship is the penultimate examination into Reagan's religious beliefs and how Reagan's beliefs impacted his private and public life. In *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (2004), Kengor—Professor of Political Science at Grove City College—stopped short of placing Reagan in the context of religious movements and denominational rivalry of Cold War era America, revealing a gap in Reagan historiography.³⁸ This gap will be a major focus in chapter five of this dissertation. Building on Kengor's work, this project attempts to understand not only Reagan's theological views but also how those views were reflective of the wider religious culture in America. In addition to Kengor's religious studies of Reagan, Gary Scott Smith—former Professor of History at Grove City College—has offered one of the few analyses of the significance of Reagan's faith in shaping policy. In *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (2006), his chapter “Ronald Reagan: Making America God's Shining City on a Hill” emphasized that Reagan cannot be understood apart from an awareness of his religious convictions. Smith asserts that Reagan's faith affected many of his policies, most notably in defense and foreign diplomacy.

Chapter Overviews

The ensuing chapter will provide critical background for understanding the origins of millennial thought and the influence of the doctrine of Armageddon on the development of premillennial dispensationalism in America. Also discussed is the development and rise in popularity of dispensationalism along with its relationship to American evangelicalism and

³⁸ Other notable works by Kengor that contributed heavily to Reagan revisionism includes Kengor's *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (2006) and *The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan's Top Hand* (2007).

fundamentalism. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that Armageddonists and a wider popular interest in the end times were not unique to the late Cold War era but part of a cycle of popular interest in Biblical prophecies throughout American history. This background inquiry will support later chapters that specifically explore the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon in American culture and politics during the late Cold War. Specifically, chapter two focuses on cycles of popular interest in Armageddon that coincided with pivotal moments of major changes or conflicts from the seventeenth century through the early twentieth century. Focusing on these critical times in America's history, an examination of the role religious leaders, such as Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, John Willison, Henry Drummond, Lewis Way, William Miller, John Nelson Darby, William E. Blackstone, Cyrus I. Scofield, and John Frank Norris will be evaluated. The chapter deliberately stops short of the Cold War era. An examination of the cultural and political influence of premillennial dispensationalism following the end of World War II then takes center stage in chapters four and five, while chapter three effectively explores the publication of Hal Lindsey's 1970 bestselling non-fiction book.

The third chapter will be an analysis of Lindsey's seminal work *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This chapter will explore Lindsey's Biblical scholarship and prophetic evaluations of historical and current events surrounding publication, comparing his assessments with historical interpretations of the same prophecies during several cycles of Biblical prophecy as discussed in chapter two. More importantly, this chapter examines the impact of Lindsey's work on religious and secular cultural attitudes and political views from the 1970s through the end of the Cold War. The chapter will also explore popular dispensationalists and Lindsey's contemporaries with a focus on figures such as televangelists Pat Robertson (*The 700 Club*, presidential candidate),

Jerry Falwell (*The Old-Time Gospel Hour*, co-founder of Moral Majority), Jimmy Swaggart (*Jimmy Swaggart Telecast*), and Jim Bakker (*The PTL Club*).

The fourth chapter will survey key publications in film and music that reflect both secular and religious cultural interest in the doctrine of Armageddon and its subgenres relating to Biblical prophecies concerning the end of the world. Influential figures like the lesser remembered Christian filmmaker Donald W. Thompson (1970 *A Thief in the Night*) and Larry David Norman (the father of Christian rock music) will be integrated into an overarching argument that apocalyptic themes dominated early Christian films and music. Furthermore, Hollywood films, made-for-TV movies, popular music, and literature continued to be considerably influenced by the growing popularity of the doctrine of Armageddon throughout the late Cold War. Films analyzed include *The Omen* (1976), a supernatural horror originally inspired by producer Harvey Bernhard after a conversation with Robert Munger about Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In 1983, ABC Television Network made television history when more than 100 million people concurrently viewed *The Day After*, a made-for-TV movie about a global nuclear holocaust and its survivors. The film launched a national debate centering around President Reagan's escalation of the Cold War and the Nuclear Freeze Movement.³⁹ Popular music and literature will also be examined.

The fifth chapter will cover the influence of the doctrine of Armageddon among congressional members, White House staff, and the presidency between 1970 and 1991. Furthermore, this chapter will briefly focus on the eschatological beliefs of the Cold War presidents with an expanded study into Reagan and his administration. This chapter will also

³⁹ Peter Kerr, "TV Films Will Use More Social Issues," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1984.

contribute to the revisionist historiography underway among Reagan historians. Much like this project's indebtedness to Paul Boyer's scholarship, chapter five attempts to build on the religious study of Reagan and its impact on defense and foreign policy—most notably, expanding the scholarship began by Paul Kengor into Reagan's personal beliefs by placing Reagan in the context of the competing schools of Christian eschatology.

The last chapter will serve as a final analysis of the arguments presented in this research project and offer areas that still require further study. This chapter will also provide a brief analysis of the impact of late Cold War fears of a nuclear holocaust and the Biblical Armageddon since the close of the Cold War.

Conclusion

This dissertation strives to add to the long-standing conversation among historians concerning the relationship between American culture and politics. A major area lacking substantial scholarship resides among the influence of Bible prophecy on Americans generationally. Apocalyptic interpretations of world events dominated large segments of American society as early as the colonial period and remains a topic of interest to present day. Historically speaking, many Americans across various regions, religions, and political spectrums have possessed a deep-seated interest in Biblical prophecy—a belief that shaped their understanding of good and evil. Because of this, historians ought to consider what may seem a peculiar topic to also be a major factor in the motivations of large segments of Americans in how they have interpreted world events, elected political leaders, and viewed the role of the government throughout American history.

Historically, the divergence of historians from incorporating God's providence into their histories contributed to the rise of apocalyptic literature to fill the void. As exemplified by the leading American historian, George Bancroft, in the nineteenth century, history was a narrative that not only included worldly events but also God's plan for humanity. For many people, history and Bible prophecy are not separate fields of study but complimentary. Again, Boyer said it best, ". . . as teleology and divine causation disappeared from secular historical writings, prophecy writers filled the void."⁴⁰ When explaining how dispensationalism guides historical interpretation, Alva J. McClain, theologian and founder of Grace College and Theological Seminary, concluded that eschatology was the study of the historical events at "the end of human history."⁴¹ To clarify how eschatology writings differs from writing history, McClain explained "history can deal only with the present life, that which is temporal. History can have nothing to do with the world to come which is eternal."⁴² Wrapped in symbolism and prophetic riddles, generations of Christian scholars have worked to better understand history and current events to foresee future events and trends.

While this is where the study of history and the study of eschatology certainly departs, it is foolish to dismiss the degree in which history, current events, and eschatology merged to influence culture and politics throughout America's history, peaking in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For many Americans living during the Cold War, history and prophecy were not just unfolding before their eyes but was also building toward an end point—the end of the current

⁴⁰ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 313.

⁴¹ Alva J. McClain, "A Premillennial Philosophy of History," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113, no. 450 (1956): 113.

⁴² McClain, "A Premillennial Philosophy of History," 112.

dispensation of the Church that would begin with the horrors of Armageddon and Tribulation but end wonderfully with the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

It is imperative to note, as Andrew Preston did in the introduction of his masterful work of politics and religion *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy*, that religion does provoke ‘intense emotions’ and that “no historian is free of bias.” This dissertation has also taken due diligence to examine the doctrine of Armageddon and its influence upon America’s culture and politics “as objectively as possible.”⁴³

⁴³ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 4.

Chapter 2

Origins of Millennialism and Its Historical Influence Upon End-Times Prophecy and Premillennial Dispensationalism

“I always avoid prophesying beforehand, because it is a much better policy to prophesy after the event has already taken place.”¹

—Winston Churchill, Cairo Press Conference, February 1, 1943.

Introduction

In 1666, London—housed within a fifteen-hundred-year-old Roman city wall—burned for five days, resulting in thousands of Londoners fleeing the city and spreading stories of the end of the world that reached as high up as to the ears of King Charles II and as distant as Britain’s North American frontier colonies. As their world burned, Londoners scanned the skies for the return of Christ, believing that the apocalypse was no longer near but *here*.² Across the Atlantic, the great fire and the resulting anarchy stirred Increase Mather—a respected Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, president of Harvard College, son of the patriarch Richard Mather, and father to ill-famed Cotton Mather—to comment on the state of Christ’s possible return in the seventeenth century. Beholden to covenant theology, Mather thundered his beliefs about chiliasm, or millenniumism, and preached Christ’s imminent return “in time and space.”³

¹ Rhoda Thomas Tripp, ed., *The International Thesaurus of Quotations* (NY: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1970), p. 512.

² For more on the cultural reception of the London Fire of 1666, see Walter Bell, *The Great Fire of London in 1666* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1920) and Jacob F. Field, *London, Londoners and the Great Fire of 1666: Disaster and Recovery* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

³ Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 179.

For more than a millennia, the term Armageddon has invoked numerous images and feelings. The word has become “a metaphorical allusion to universal doom.”⁴ Historically, the word is rooted in a physical location and only mentioned once in the Bible (Rev. 16:16). It is a term that conjures images of the end of the world, total defeat, and annihilation. As a metaphor, the word has been repeated by countless billions and has punctuated the rhetoric of political figures, evangelists, and the common man. For example, in his 1912 failed presidential campaign to retake the White House, Theodore Roosevelt spoke to the political climate of the day, proclaiming that “we [Progressives] stand at Armageddon, and we battle for Lord.”⁵ *The New York Times (NYT)*, picking up on the public’s confusion as to what Roosevelt meant by Armageddon, commented: “Armageddon is the place mentioned in the Book of Revelation as the scene of the great battle between the forces of Good and Evil that will precede the millennial reign of Christ on Earth.”⁶ The *NYT* not only summarized the premillennial view of the end times but also included a summary of the Biblical prophecy of the Battle of Armageddon as well as providing a fully visual layout of archaeological sites and historical analysis about the physical location of the ancient city.

The doctrine of Armageddon may have eluded many Americans outside of the growing number of dispensational evangelical churches in the early twentieth century but by the second half of the century, the doctrine would not only gain wider exposure among millions of Americans recently enticed by a growing mainstream evangelicalism but, to an even larger

⁴ Lynn Ludlow, “Armageddon: History, Myth, Metaphor, and Place,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 48, no. 4 (1991-1992): 384.

⁵ “Armageddon Not Mythical But a Real Battlefield,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 1912.

⁶ Ibid.

extent, influence American media and national politics.⁷ Where does a researcher choose to begin and, more importantly, decide to end their inquiry into the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon in American history? The above examples of Puritan New England and twentieth-century American politics are just a minute demonstration of the power that end-times prophecy has had over the imagination and motivations of American Christians. Before delving into the doctrine's impact during the late Cold War era—which is the primary focus of this dissertation—it is necessary to first take stock of the doctrine's theological origins and understand its historic role in American millennialism, and, ultimately, the rising popularity of twentieth-century premillennial dispensationalism.⁸ With some exceptions, premillennialism did not gain traction until the nineteenth century. Therefore, it is an arduous task to trace the roots of dispensationalism and its related eschatological teachings and form a definitive narrative. Rather, the best historical analysis and narratives are found in the study of millennialism and by exploring religious leaders responsible for shifting eschatological views.

During the second half of the twentieth century, millions of Americans, and billions of others throughout the world, faced the fear of nuclear annihilation. For many, the fear of a nuclear apocalypse fit the Biblical prophecies concerning the end of days. World War III was not a religious or political talking point but an eventuality. The purpose of this background chapter is to provide context for why millennial thought flourished throughout America's history and how that millennial bedrock influenced the development of premillennial dispensationalism. At the

⁷ The extent of premillennial dispensationalism and the doctrines of Armageddon in the second half of the twentieth century is analyzed not in this chapter but in chapters three, four, and five.

⁸ Dispensationalism can best be described as a distinguishable era in God's plan of human history that is characterized by a new revelation given from God to man. Premillennial dispensationalism specifically addresses the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and places the Rapture of the Church, Tribulation, and Battle of Armageddon before Christ's Millennial Kingdom. For more information, see "Some Divine Distinctions" in Hal Lindsey's *The Rapture* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 47-66.

core of millennial and dispensational eschatology lies the doctrine of Armageddon—that is, the prophetic teachings about how the world will end according to unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible. These doctrines have had profound effects on American Christianity and the development of politically engaged evangelical movements throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But never had it impacted America’s culture and politics more than during the late Cold War era. Just as the fear of the Apocalypse reached the ear of the England’s king and flooded the newspapers and pulpits in 1666, so did it reach its peak once again as it reached as high as the President of the United States and became as talked about as an apocalyptic Hollywood film during the late Cold War.

The development of these eschatological beliefs can be traced through numerous American and European religious figures from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century. In this chapter, the impact of the following religious and political figures will be examined in the context of their times: Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, John Willison, Henry Drummond, Lewis Way, William Miller, John Nelson Darby, William E. Blackstone, Cyrus I. Scofield, and John Frank Norris. As with any researched-based project, the researcher is forced to make difficult choices as to which individuals, sources, and claims to include and which to leave out of the final work in order to craft a narrative that supports the goals of the research questions. This chapter was carefully crafted to provide background and context for research questions addressed in later chapters.

Origins

End-times prophecies such as the Rapture, Tribulation, the Millennium, and other eschatological beliefs related to the doctrine of Armageddon derived not only from the prophetic writings of John of Patmos and the teachings of Jesus Christ but also from the Old Testament

prophets, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah.⁹ While it is impossible to fully understand modern premillennial dispensationalism apart from these collected works, there is one book of the end times that forms the foundation of the belief system. Both venerated and scorned throughout history, no other religious text created as much debate over its meaning as the Book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse of John. The book's title derives from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means "unveiling" or "revelation." Also derived from the Greek, the term Armageddon is constructed from two words, har and mageddô. Har meaning "mountain" or "range of hills," this word originally described a physical location. Located in northern Israel and built by Solomon in the tenth century BC, Megiddo means "place of crowds."¹⁰ Rather than viewing John of Patmos' vision as an illusionary account of the end of the world, Florence Harkness Professor of Religion, Timothy Beal, suggests that John's vision "unveils the *edge* of the world" instead of its end.¹¹ By viewing the apocalyptic text through this interpretative lens, Revelation then becomes less about the end of this present world and more about the beginning of a new world.

According to premillennial dispensationalists, John of Patmos described the *edge* of the world as a seven-year tribulation period, culminating with the Battle of Armageddon followed by the Second Coming and the creation of Christ's temporal millennial kingdom on Earth and Satan's temporary captivity. While this is where the doctrine of Armageddon and end-times

⁹ For more scholarship on the study of the apocalypse outside of what is discussed in this chapter, see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); A. J. Garrow, *Revelation* (New York: Routledge, 1997); David Barr, *The Tale of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998); Amy Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Kelly J. Murphy and Justin J. Schedtler, eds., *Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Currents through History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016).

¹⁰ See 1 Kings 9:15 (ESV).

¹¹ Timothy Beal, *The Book of Revelation: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1.

prophecies often conclude, it is not yet the *end* of the world. After Christ's thousand-year reign, Revelation 20 describes Satan's release from the abyss to prepare for a final conflict against Christ and his armies before being thrown forever into the lake of fire. Following Satan's ultimate defeat, Revelation's author then described a new Heaven and Earth, officially closing out human history that began with the Hebrew's account of the creation of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

To better understand the historical interpretations of Armageddon and Biblical prophecies relating to the *edge* of the world, it is necessary to understand the dominate theological methodologies applied to interpret the end times. At the core of this eschatology is millennialism, or chiliasm—the belief that there will be a prolonged period of peace and prosperity on earth, often marked by a literal thousand years of Christ reigning temporally. Historically, there are three primary eschatological camps: premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial.

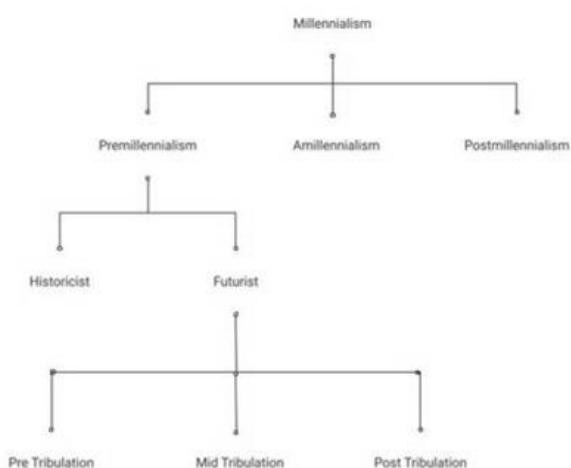


Figure 1. Premillennial Eschatology Chart.

Premillennialists believe that Jesus will appear in the clouds and rapture the Christian church before the establishment of his thousand-year reign. In contrast, postmillennialist argue that Christ will not return until after the church has preached the Gospel throughout the world, having already established Christ's kingdom on Earth through

the authority of the church. Approaching scripture from a different eschatological angle, amillennialists contend that there is no literal millennial period. For this theological camp, Christ reigns in the hearts of the saved and through the church.

While postmillennialists tend to be fewer in numbers since the rise of dispensationalism, there is little variance among postmillennial adherents due to centuries of established eschatological doctrines, especially among those who embraced covenant theology and followed in the tradition of the Westminster Confession (Reformed Theology). The same can be said of amillennialists, which was a term that emerged in the 1930s to help separate those who rejected both the traditional postmillennialist views and the emerging popularity of premillennialism.¹² Amillennialism reflects a uniform view of eschatology that dates back as far as the early Catholic Church and the writings of Augustine of Hippo—a Christian theologian from the 300s. This view is also the opinion of some Protestant denominations such as Lutheran, Anglican, and some reformed Christians.

Among premillennialists, there are two main camps concerning the “when” of Christ’s millennial kingdom. Historic premillennialists fall into the camp of the church being raptured after the Tribulation. For futurist premillennialists, there is no progressive, utopian promise of a better world prior to Christ’s return. Instead, futurists agree that humanity will continue to worsen until the Antichrist appears and initiates the Tribulation. According to futurists, the church will not have to endure the hardships of the end-times tribulations. Among the futurists, there are subgroups: pretribulationists, midtribulationists, and posttribulationists. Those that hold to pretribulationism, as mentioned earlier, believe that the church will be raptured from the Earth before the Tribulation.

Often categorized as a variance of pretribulationism, midtribulationists draw clarity from Daniel 9:27, “And he shall make a strong covenant with many of one week, and for half of

¹² Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 32.

the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” Those who hold this view find the needed evidence in Daniel to prove that the church will be raptured halfway through the tribulation. The *one week* translated in the English Standard Version (ESV) can also be translated as simply *seven*. Therefore, halfway through the seven years of tribulation, the Rapture of the church occurs. For those divining when the church will be taken from the Earth, some interpret scripture to mean that it will only occur after the seven years of tribulation. Referencing John of Patmos’ description of the first and second resurrection of the saints in Revelation 20:4-5, posttribulationists argue that those who died during the Tribulation and rejected the Antichrist will be raised from the dead to reign with Christ during the millennium. For posttribulationists, a plain reading of this passage strongly suggests that the church will endure life under the reign of the Antichrist and experience Armageddon along with its destructive fallout.

In addition to the centrality of millennialism to the doctrine of Armageddon and the systematic eschatology of dispensationalism, the Rapture and Tribulation serve as a prelude to Christ’s earthly return. According to Apostle Luke’s account in Acts 1:9-12, Jesus ascended from the Earth into the clouds forty days after his miraculous resurrection with the promise of returning one day by descending from the clouds. Prior to the Tribulation, Battle of Armageddon, and Christ’s millennial reign, dispensationalists maintain that Jesus will physically return to Earth, appearing in the sky and initiating the Rapture. Professor Sutton described the event, “all living Christians will mysteriously vanish from the earth and dead will rise to

heaven.”¹³ Despite the word rapture not appearing in the Bible, its construct is theologically rooted in Paul’s writings to the Thessalonians in Corinth. To the church, Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

From of these scriptures, dispensationalists recognize that the dead in Christ will rise before the living are taken up into the sky to meet Christ in the clouds. This event, according to dispensationalists, is not the Second Coming of the Lord. Christ does not physically return to the earth until after the Tribulation to establish his earthly kingdom.

Writing to another church in Corinth, Paul explained one of the mysteries of Christ that speaks to an end-time event that becomes a core tenant of dispensationalism. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Paul proclaimed: “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep [die a natural death], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...” Adding greater validity to the doctrine of the Rapture, dispensationalist interpret Jesus’ parable about the coming of God’s kingdom to support the argument that Christians will be taken from the Earth prior to the Tribulation. As explored later in chapter four, this pivotal event became the focal point for faith-based apocalyptic films such as *A Thief in the Night* and later in the popular novel series *Left Behind*.¹⁴

¹³ Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 18.

¹⁴ Donald W. Thompson’s evangelical thriller *A Thief in the Nights* and other films in the series will be a major focal point in chapter four. While Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins’ end time novels *Left Behind* were not

In the Gospels, both Matthew and Luke recounted Jesus' parable about the Rapture. In Luke 17:34-35, Jesus described the event, illustrating that "...in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." Matthew added into his manuscript a warning proclaimed by Jesus: "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44). This religious call to always be on guard and ready to meet the Lord punctuated sermons, Christian literature, and religious conversations among Christians since the founding of the Christianity. This call to be vigilant may not have been spoken and written with the same clarity as John Nelson Darby and other nineteenth and twentieth-century dispensationalists, but the warning has been the same throughout American history.

Former Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary known widely among evangelicals throughout the late 1970s through the 1990s for *The Ryrie KJV Study Bible*, Charles Ryrie (1925-2016) described dispensationalists generally as "conservative, evangelical Christians."¹⁵ Of the different types of dispensationalist, Ryrie concluded that pretribulation was the main eschatological framework held among nearly all evangelicals, expanding in the interwar period of the 1920s and dominating interpretations by the 1990s.¹⁶ Yet this theological understanding can be traced farther back, a topic which subsequent sections of this chapter will address.

published until 1995, a few years after the end of the Cold War and outside the scope of this dissertation, there is a discussion of these novels and their later impact on the doctrine of Armageddon in American culture and politics in the concluding chapter.

¹⁵ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 14.

¹⁶ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 173.

Born in Westminster in 1800 and one of the most influential scholars in England, John Nelson Darby, immortalized as “the father of dispensationalism,” did more for modern dispensationalism than any other figure prior to the twentieth century. While Americans rejected Darby’s ecclesiastical (view on the structure of the church), his eschatological teachings that focused on a pretribulation Rapture and seven dispensations of providential history became popular in the United States in the nineteenth century. His “evangelistic tours” throughout America promoted his dispensationalist teachings, visiting churches in the years following the American Civil War.¹⁷ Darby’s scholarship would later form the basis of the famous study bible: *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909). As institutions like the Dallas Theological Seminary and numerous prominent Christian pastors embraced—the not new but newly systematized—dispensationalist theology, religion and culture in America began to see the impact of a religious fervor that anticipated a frightful end of the world scenario following the disappearance of millions of Christians from the Earth during the Rapture. Dispensational theology is both a dreadful and joyful look at the edge of human history. Revelation’s prophetic warnings of war, famine, and massive population losses will be a focus of chapter three alongside the dispensationalist beliefs of a new, better Earth.

Darby’s futurist interpretations of the Rapture, Tribulation, and the Millennium contrasted the historicist views that the events in which Darby prophesized had been fulfilled throughout history. According to Darby, the current age was only one of seven dispensations outlined in the Bible and that most of what was prophesied by Daniel, Ezekiel and others in the Old Testament had not yet been fulfilled. Key to premillennial eschatology was the interpretation that many of the Old Testament prophecies were still unfulfilled but could be understood by an

¹⁷ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 16.

accurate understanding of history and current events. While the birth of the Messiah along with his death and resurrection satisfied key scriptures and brought about the end of Darby's fifth dispensation (Law), scriptures pertaining to Christ's earthly kingdom, the fate of the Jewish nation, and the end of the final dispensation (Millennium) were left unchecked by the time the scriptures in the New Testament were written. By popularizing a literal approach to scripture, Darby laid the path for people to interpret the scripture to speak to the present and future, while also contributing to a later fundamentalist movement focused on a literal interpretation of the infallible Bible.

Having examined the historical and theological origins of the doctrines of Armageddon, millennialism, and dispensationalism, it is now possible to make the connection between these ideological systems and their development throughout American history.

Seventeenth Century through Early Nineteenth Century

In recent scholarship, William C. Watson—Professor of History at Colorado Christian University—offers a fresh analysis of thousands of sermons and manuscripts written throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries concerning the millennialism and the doctrine of Armageddon. According to Watson, there is ample evidence in the historical record that dispensationalism did not emerge in a vacuum with Darby, but instead could be traced back clearly to early seventeenth century Western Europe.¹⁸ Watson argues that dispensationalism can be found in English religious writings, proving that numerous believers and theologians made

¹⁸ William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism* (Silverton, Oregon: Lampion House Publishing, 2020), 339-340.

clear distinctions between not only the order of end-time events but also the importance of Israel and the Christian church when interpreting prophecy.

Additionally, Ernest Lee Tuveson concluded in his influential work *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* that “some version of the ‘millennnialist’ doctrine has probably been among English-speaking Protestants since the later seventeenth century.”¹⁹ Tuveson defined a “millennialist” as an individual who “[believed] that history, under divine guidance, will bring about the triumph of Christian principles, and that a holy utopia will come into being.”²⁰ Both the role of Israel and the dispensation of God’s intervention into human history will be explored in this section as interest renewed between the seventeenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Interest in these subjects did not wane in the early nineteenth century though, but instead took on new dimensions by mid-century, which will be explored in a subsequent section.

Professor Watson provides overwhelming evidence that layman and clergy often approached scripture with a literal translation of the text and concluded that they generally agreed that the central theme of Scripture was to show the Glory of God and God’s providence in human events. This section will discuss the impact of these eschatological systems throughout the seventeenth and early nineteenth century, including relevant examples from Western Europe with a focus on the events of the French Revolution. It will also argue that the Mathers served as an example of how pessimism concerning social and spiritual declines contributed to an

¹⁹ Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 34.

²⁰ Ibid.

eschatological shift toward believing that tribulation would precede the establishment of Christ's thousand-year reign.

When examining colonial America (1607-1775), it is impossible to separate the religious and intellectual life of Britain's frontier colonies from the religious springs of Western Europe. It is also difficult to ignore in the historical record the emphasis that early Americans placed on God's providence. By examining the end-times beliefs held by the Mathers, the importance of eschatology in Puritan society and the willingness of its spiritual leaders to adjust their beliefs over a lifetime provides an enlightening understanding of how colonial society impacted colonists' understandings of God's providence and the millennia.²¹ Three generations of Mathers had cultivated the religious lives of Bostonian colonists. Patriarch of the Mather dynasty, Richard Mather, alongside his son Increase Mather and grandson Cotton Mather, faithfully served the spiritual needs of their sect of Puritan outcasts on the edge of the British empire. Increase and Cotton will be examined together and serve as a lens for understanding what was commonly preached in the Congregationalist churches of New England. This will be followed by a case study into the eschatological beliefs of Jonathan Edwards and the role millennialism played in the Great Awakening.²²

Former Professor of History at the University of California at Berkeley and Pulitzer Prize finalist, Robert Middlekauff contended that Increase Mather grew weary and progressively more expectant of Christ's return but fell short of foolishly predicting a date—a folly later exercised

²¹ The decision to focus on the Mathers was intentional, as the clerical dynasty provides an exemplary look into Millennial beliefs among colonial British Americans. For additional scholarship regarding millennialism and Puritan theology in early America, see Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²² A deeper look into the Great Awakenings is provided in the Nineteenth Century section of this chapter and incorporates Robert William Fogel's authoritative *The Fourth Great Awakening & the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

by his son, Cotton Mather. Cotton developed a more expansive eschatology than his father and attempted to calculate important dates tied to future history.²³ It was in his 1703 letter *Problema Theologicum* that Cotton predicted the bodily Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The letter is relevant and, in many ways, revolutionary on several fronts. First, Cotton fell into the trap of attempting to place a specific year as to when Christ would return to Earth—a foolish task that will be examined throughout this chapter. Second, Cotton provided an extremely detailed outline of end-time events. And most importantly, Cotton purported a premillennial eschatology that reflected his father's transitions later in life.

Before proceeding deeper into the role of millennialism and the doctrines of Armageddon, it is important to clarify the meaning of the terms postmillennialism and premillennialism in the context of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. These terms primarily referred to when the individual believed the final judgements will take place in the end times—rather it occurs before or after Christ's Millennial kingdom. Postmillennialists believe that the judgements occur after Christ's thousand-year reign, while premillennialists believed it occurs before. There is no clear concept and wide held belief of a Rapture found within the eschatological beliefs of this period—or at least how it is understood by later dispensationalists.

While Cotton Mather acknowledged in another letter to fellow minister and friend Nicholas Noyes that his earlier doomsday year of 1697 had been wrong, Mather proceeded to reference a second prediction of 1716. The Puritan cleric lived long enough to witness both of his prophetic statements to turn into false alarms. In his pretribulation interpretation of Christ's return and the following Tribulation, Cotton's descriptions were not far from some of the

²³ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 181.

language later used by prophecy proponents like Hal Lindsey in the 1970s. In *Problema Theologicum*, Cotton wrote:

I Expect, That the Exhibition which our Lord Jesus Christ, is going to make of Himself, will be in those Flames, which will produce a tremendous Conflagration upon this Lower world; The Righteous Lord, from His Throne in the Heavens, will rain Snares, Fire, & Brimstone, and an horrible Tempest, upon the Wicked Antichrist, who has been destroying the Foundations. But this Conflagration, wherein God pleading with a miserable World by Fire, the Slain of the Lord will be many.²⁴

And again, Cotton's response to the all too familiar apocalyptic question differed little from what had been and would continue to be asked by every generation of doomsday prophets. Mather posited:

How long shall it be to the End of these Wonders? Or, To the Beginning of the Happy State which we Expect for the Church in the Latter Dayes? Perhaps, It would puzzle any man Living, to prove. That the Second Coming of our Lord, may not surprise the Sleeping World Immediately, or, that it cannot arrive, even while You have this very Dissertation Concerning it in your hands [referring to Cotton's manuscript]. God help me to Live under the Power of such Apprehensions! But however, There is all the Reason Imaginable, to Think, That from the Beginning of the Captivity, which the People of God underwent in Babylon, to the Beginning of the Millennium, which will bring us all out of all Captivity, there are to Roll along, Two Thousand & Three Hundred Years. The last Period of this long Space, is to be the Reign of the Antichrist, which is for Twelve Hundred and Sixty Years; To Which there are to be added Thirty Years (which make them 1290) and Forty Five Years, (which make them 1335.) In which Latter Dayes, & the Temple of God is Cleansed . . . By this account, the Present Century should not run on long, before the Expiration of that Black Period; Yea, and it may be expired, before Men make such observation of it.²⁵

The Black Period illustrated by Mather referred to God's wrath upon the Earth: the sixth bowl of God's wrath, which will be explored more in Jonathan Edward's eschatological analysis later in this section. Despite failing to pinpoint an accurate year for Christ's return, social and political

²⁴ Cotton Mather, "Problema Theologicum" in Jeffrey Scott Mares, *Cotton Mather's 'Problema Theologicum': An Authoritative Edition* (American Antiquarian Society, 1995), 420.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 426-427.

changes that highlighted current events provided the evidence needed by Mather to sense that the end of the world was on the horizon.

According to Jeffrey Scott Mares' thesis, events earlier in the century such as England's Civil War, Oliver Cromwell's republican commonwealth, and the Restoration fueled millennial beliefs among the Mathers and other Puritan figures that Christ's return was, indeed, imminent. "[M]illennialism in particular retained a vitality and influence that persisted throughout the eighteenth century . . . [and] maintained through its clergy a large measure of political and social influence . . . and a way of making sense of political events, the course of history, and the Puritan way."²⁶ Despite the Civil War occurring before Cotton was born, his father—a child at the time—and grandfathers Richard Mather and John Cotton experienced firsthand how the war against the king, interregnum period, and the ultimate restoration of monarchy had shifted political and social allegiances within the colony.

An influential religious leader in the Bay Colony, Increase Mather promoted in his writings and sermons for most of his ministerial career the idea that there would be an earthly kingdom of Christ. In 1676, the elder Mather wrote to his contemporary, minister Samuel Sewall, that Boston could be a prototype of the New Jerusalem. Yet Mather did not always toe the line that the New Canaan (New World) would erect the required perfected society to usher in the Christ's thousand-year reign, as expressed in his 1670s correspondence with Sewall. A decade later, Mather wrote in his treatise *The New Jerusalem* that there would be no perfection of society before Christ's return.²⁷ The religious fervor and anticipation to witness Christ's

²⁶ Mather, "Problema Theologicum," 341-342.

²⁷ Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 69.

return and millennial reign in the New World—inseparable ideas that crossed the Atlantic a generation earlier with John Winthrop and John Cotton—revealed signs of weakening by the colony’s second generation of religious leaders. Born not in England like his father-in-law John Cotton but in the Bay Colony, Increase was one of the first-generation colonists to witness the growth in worldliness and increasing disinterest in the Puritan vision of John Winthrop’s “city on a hill.”

Despite the shared belief of postmillennialism among the majority of ministers in the Old and New World, Mather began preaching by the late seventeenth century a *type of* premillennial eschatology concerning the end times. Increase believed that Christ would return to a corrupted world and then establish his kingdom on Earth only after great tribulation. Increase insisted that “It is in [vain] for men to think or dream of perfection before that day.”²⁸ Similar to later futurist premillennialists, the aging minister grew pessimistic about the future. This is not to say that Mather fit the mold of futurist premillennialist and dispensationalists—far from it. Yet, there is evidence of an eschatological shift that occurred because of a more dismal view of colonial society and the original vision of those who stepped off the *Arbella* in 1630. There is little doubt that Mather’s pessimism was affected fundamentally by the societal changes and less-than-holy living of the British colonists who were now more than sixty-years removed from the mission statement employed in Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity.” New England simply would not become the prototype Jerusalem utopian that the original voyagers hoped would become the seat of Christ’s kingdom.

²⁸ Increase Mather, “The New Jerusalem” (1687), 33.

Later in life and in contrast to many faithful parishioners and ministers, Increase concluded that America's "city on a hill" would not be the New Jerusalem that would usher in the Millennia. Mather would reject not only many of his contemporaries who embraced a postmillennial belief that New England would house the New Jerusalem but also Samuel Sewall's argument that Christ's kingdom would not be in New England at all but, instead, in Mexico City following the defeat of the Spanish in the Battle of Armageddon.²⁹ For Mather, the New World would, indeed, not be the "New World." The end of human history would not culminate in perfection because of religious, political, and technological progress and utopian societies, but, instead, progressively worsen. While diverse eschatological beliefs existed in colonial America with the majority embracing a postmillennial belief rooted in covenant theology, there were also thin strands of premillennialism among the most devout Christians and respected Puritan theologians in the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries. Millennialism and the doctrine of Armageddon was not only a major feature of the cultural and political life during America's early British colonial period but also sustained relevance as those colonies transformed into states to make up a new American republic.

British America's later colonial period was dominated by revivalists who participated in changing the religious experiences and doctrinal beliefs of multitudes of frontiersmen. These experiences were not limited to just the powerful impact of Connecticut's Jonathan Edwards but also incorporated major figures from Western Europe, such as Englishmen George Whitefield and John Wesley. These revivalists sermonized the millennium and the Second Coming through mainstream postmillennialism. Up to this point, this chapter has argued that the Mathers served

²⁹ For the most recent research on Samuel Sewall and his millennial views, see Richard W. Cogley, "Millenarianism in Puritan New England, 1630-1730: The Exceptional Case of Samuel Sewall and the Mexican Millennium," *Harvard Theological Review* 115, no. 2 (2022): 274-293.

as an example of how cynicism concerning social and spiritual declines contributed to an eschatological shift toward believing that tribulation would precede the establishment of Christ's thousand-year reign. In contrast, most of the revivalists of the Great Awakening believed that social and political progress was making the world a better place and that a brighter not dimmer future lay ahead. Despite revivalist rhetoric often elucidating apocalyptic imagery, it was far more effective to preach Christ's thousand years of peace than the doctrines of Armageddon. In short, there were more reasons to embrace an optimistic view of the near future resulting in more chiliasm and less apocalypticism.

During the early eighteenth century, evangelicalism continued to flourish in revivalists' efforts in England and its American frontier colonies. While revivals were not unique to the First Great Awakening, the scale of influence and lasting impressions of the movement earns the spiritual episode special notice among historians.³⁰ Still rooted in a strict, Calvinistic Puritan tradition, the emotional and rhetorical style of revivalism transformed the religious expectations for many Christians in the eighteenth century. Just as true as it was a century earlier, Christianity continued to shape cultural and political norms just as much as societal and political events shaped Christian eschatology.

Not a premillennialist by any eschatological stretch but still influential to later developments in dispensationalism, Jonathan Edwards was what Perry Miller referred to as "the greatest artist of the apocalypse."³¹ For Edwards, the Final Judgement at the end of days was an effective motivator for bringing sinful colonists to repentance. The worse parts of the end times

³⁰ The Great Awakenings and their role in American millennialism is explored later in this chapter with an analysis of Robert William Fogel's *The Fourth Great Awakening*.

³¹ Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 233.

that were to follow Christ's millennial rule should to be avoided, if possible. Remembered in every American Literature course as the author of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" with its hellfire and brimstone descriptions, Edwards categorically preached more on love and the Millennial kingdom of Christ—a future free of sin and the pains of the current world—than hell and the apocalypse.³² In Edwards' journals, a collection of theological thoughts that has become known as *Miscellanies*, the theologian wrote concerning his understanding of human progress:

How happy will that state be [speaking of society], when neither divine nor human learning shall be confined and imprisoned within only two or three nations of Europe, but shall be suffused all over the world, and this lower world shall be all over covered with light, the various parts of it mutually enlightening each other; when the most barbarous nations shall become as bright and polite as England; when ignorant heathen lands shall be stocked with most profound divines and most learned philosophers; when we shall from time to time have the most excellent books and wonderful performances brought from one end of the earth and another to surprise us . . . in exploring the glories of the Creator, their hearts in loving and adoring him, their hands in serving him, and their voices in making the world to ring with his praise. . . . this world shall be more like heaven in the millennium"³³

A primer text for early dispensationalists, *History of the World of Redemption* collected a series of sermons given by Edwards in 1739 on the subject of God's providence and Christ's redemptive work in human history. The minister intended to turn the sermon series into a finished manuscript but failed to do so before his death. Collected and published in the early nineteenth century, the work endeavored to view history from the perspective of God's story of redemption through Christ's role in humanity's salvation. For Edwards, history was divided into three dispensations of providential time with the first and third phase offering mirrored versions

³² For more on Jonathan Edwards' sermons and other writings on God's love and desire to see greater societal and political progress in the world, see Gerald McDermott's *The Other Jonathan Edwards: Selected Writings on Society, Love and Justice* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

³³ Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies" (1739) in Harvey G. Townsend, ed, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: From His Private Notebooks* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Press, 1955), 207.

of redemption's work at two different spans of time in human history. These historical eras were important to Edwards, because the events proved "that when one thing is removed by God to make way for another, the new one excels the old."³⁴ In essence, God was making all things new through Christ's role in humanity's restoration, which the end times played the greatest role.

According to Edwards, the first dispensation ranged from Adam and Eve's exit from the Garden of Eden to the birth of Jesus Christ. The second expanse incorporated the life of Jesus Christ through his resurrection, which would be the only phase to not repeat in any form in a future dispensation. For Edwards, the third phase covered all events on Earth after Christ resurrection. Edwards compared five major events from phase one (the old) to their represented versions (the new) in phase three of God's redemptive history.³⁵

<u>Phase One</u> of God's Grand Design before the birth of Christ	<u>Phase Three</u> of God's Grand Design after Christ's Resurrection
Adam and Eve are removed from the Garden of Eden	Destruction of Jerusalem
Noah after the flood	Rise of Constantine
God's calling for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	Dominance of the Catholic Church
Moses in the Wilderness	Protestant Reformation
David's reign over the Jews	The defeat of the Antichrist

In all, Edwards viewed history and the apocalypse from a less pessimistic and more optimistic vantage. It was Christ's resurrection, which was not only at the center of history and prophecy but also the hope for humanity's salvation and societal progress. The ultimate goal of God's plan—which extended far into future unfulfilled prophetic events—was one of newness and betterment. Again, the new is always superior to the old—i.e., the New Heaven and New Earth

³⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *History of the World of Redemption* in Samuel Austin, ed, *The Works of President Edwards, Volume Two* (Worcester, MA, 1808), 377.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 375-377.

would be better than the Garden of Eden. Whether it was the coming apocalypse or the joy of witnessing the creation of Christ's kingdom on Earth, current troubles (wars, famines, economic depressions, sickness) were only evidence of Christ's redemptive work in the world.

Christ's redemptive work played out throughout every major event in history. Each event contributed to closing out the Biblical timeline and ushering in the New Heaven and the New Earth. According to Edwards "the whole dispensation, as it includes the preparation and the purchase, and the application and success of Christ's redemption, is here called the work of redemption."³⁶ And the end of Christ's redemptive work would soon finalize with the advent of Christ's kingdom. Edwards was not alone in his belief that the millennium was soon at hand.

A decade into the Great Awakening, more than seventy New England ministers, including Edwards, signed a manifesto claiming that the Millennium was just around the corner as evidenced by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost throughout the colonies and Western Europe.³⁷ Common apocalyptic rhetoric among revivalists drew heavily from Revelation 16's seven bowls of God's wrath, especially bowl number six. According to most revivalists, the fifth bowl had been unleashed already upon the earth as seen in the most recent events that took place during the Protestant Reformation. The sixth bowl would be the last before the seventh caused a massive earthquake, or some other great natural disaster, which would destroy the world. But for many preachers of the Word, the sixth bowl was the most important as it proved the nearness of Christ's return, as recorded in Revelation 16: 12-16. John of Patmos prophesized:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings of the east. And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet,

³⁶ Edwards, *History of the World of Redemption*, 13.

³⁷ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 70.

three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. (Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!) And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Since the Protestant Reformation, Christians have written on the sixth bowl claiming that it was the next step in God's final intervention in world history. This sixth vial would also continue to be a focal point for doomsday prophets and experience tremendous growth with the dispensationalist movement later in the nineteenth century. While postmillennialism dominated eschatological teachings and revivalist preaching during the Great Awakening, the urgency of Christ's return and the necessity to repent and avoid the final judgements of God that characterized Protestant Christianity continued throughout the eighteenth century—even more so as Britain's American colonies prepared to fight for independence.

In *When Time Shall Be No More*, Boyer argued that a renewal of interest in the millennium and belief that Christ's kingdom could be seated on the throne of his kingdom on the American continent soon took on new meaning for the Patriots.³⁸ Bernard Bailyn's arguments that republican ideology was the dominate ideology for the majority of those fighting for independence is hard to refute. Although Bailyn's groundbreaking work and development of the republican synthesis does leave out the vital role that eschatology played in the motivations and interpretations of some Patriots. In analyzing this segment of religious thought, Boyer suggested that instead of eschatological doctrines and prophetic rhetoric reflecting political events, perhaps the opposite was also true for some involved in the revolution. Boyer proposed that millennialism and other doctrines of Armageddon "added a vital yeasty ingredient that helped

³⁸ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 72.

transform a constitutional crisis into a popular movement.”³⁹ Millennialism influenced as much as it was influenced.

While millennial themes peppered rhetoric throughout the American Revolution, it was less religious and more political. Boyer’s conclusion reflected that of Nathan O. Hatch’s argument in *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*. In his revolutionary analysis of republican thought and its relationship with millennialism, Hatch argued that the millennial beliefs of the Great Awakening advocated by revivalists like Jonathan Edwards continued to push the social and political goals of progress throughout the eighteenth century. According to Hatch, Whig ideology and millennialism were wed together by New England ministers during the French and Indian War, which shifted interpretations related to the doctrines of Armageddon.⁴⁰ Instead of Rome and the Pope playing the role of Satan’s puppet, the narrative shifted politically to France and then to England. To explain the closeness of the American cause for liberty and millennialism, Hatch concluded:

Because the Antichrist had altered his tactics and sought to crush the church through civil oppression, the forces of righteousness could not expect Christian truth to flourish under arbitrary government. Throughout New England these conclusions about the nature of the apocalyptic struggle instilled the belief that two revolutions were necessary to initiate the millennium, the first a worldwide expansion of those principles of liberty realized in America, the second a proclamation throughout the world of the pure Christianity embodied in American churches.⁴¹

Concerning the importance of postmillennial eschatological beliefs, Hatch also drew a direct line between the millennial teachings purported throughout New England and the American

³⁹ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 74.

⁴⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 13.

⁴¹ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 17.

Revolution. “In this scheme the American Republic assumed ‘the soul of a church’ not by accident but as the direct result of those principles of republican eschatology which emerged in the years between America’s two Great Awakenings.”⁴² The edge of history was now playing out on the edge of the British empire.

As America transitioned from wartime to its early republic period, apocalyptic warnings emerged throughout Western Europe and America in response to civil unrest in France. Preaching in Scotland a century before the French Revolution, John Willison, a Scottish minister best known for his devotional writings expected the Catholic Church to soon fall along with the authority of the Pope, whom Willison interpreted as the present-day Antichrist. In his work *A Prophecy of the French Revolution*—an influential work that saw republication during the French Revolution—Willison captured best an extremist interpretation that France was the “tenth and [last] of the Kingdoms . . . and [France] gave Rome [denomination] of the [Beast] with ten Horns, [also] being the only one of the ten that was never conquered since its [rise].”⁴³ Therefore France would play a major role in the end times.⁴⁴ According to Willison, France would play a vital part in fulfill Biblical prophecy concerning the end of days. Painting lyrically in a sermon given at an unknown date prior to 1750, Willison wrote:

This blessed increase of Christ’s Kingdom includes the downfall of its enemies, and especially the overthrow of [Muhammad] and Antichrist, the ruin of Babylon, and the binding up of Satan, that grand enemy which excites all the [trouble]. This is foretold in Revelation 20:2. Now when once that time comes, that Satan shall be refrained and bound up from influencing rulers to persecute or oppress the Church, from instigating seducers to propagate errors; and from exciting fanatical and seditious persons to sow

⁴² Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 17.

⁴³ John Willison, *A Prophecy of the French Revolution, and the Downfall of Antichrist* (London, 1793), 23.

⁴⁴ It is important to note that the title of John Willison’s work does not refer to the historical event known as the French Revolution but instead the Biblical role that France would play as the last Horn (kings) of Daniel’s nightmarish vision of a united tyrannical government that would participate in the Antichrist’s kingdom. This work became widely read throughout the French Revolution.

dissention among the followers of Jesus; then the Kingdom of Christ will greatly increase in the world.⁴⁵

Like many from the Reformed tradition with strong Calvinistic theological roots, Willison believed that the position of the papacy served as the seat of the Antichrist. Willison's prophetic interpretations concerning France provided a literary foundation for others to shape the events of the French Revolution into a real-time Armageddon.

The French Revolution emerged as a major concern for Christendom with many Europeans and Americans interpreting the social and political upheaval through a Biblical lens. Another major revolutionary moment in Western history seemed to provide additional evidence that the end of the world was, once again, at hand. In his groundbreaking work on millenarianism and the roots of fundamentalism, Ernest Sandeen examined volumes of apocalyptic writings published in the 1790s and discovered a central theme among the religious interpretations of what was happening in France. According to Sandeen, Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 played a major role in confirming the fulfillment of several key prophecies. In both Daniel and Revelation, the prophetic authors wrote of a beast with ten horns that reigned for forty-two months. For many Protestant Christians, tradition interpreted the Beast as the head of the Catholic Church, the Pope.⁴⁶ In 1790, France's newly formed government placed The Civil Constitution of the Clergy under state control, divorcing Catholic clergy from Rome. Were the forty-two months of the horned beast's (i.e. Rome) rule coming to an end? Events eight years later confirmed for many that Biblical prophecy had been fulfilled, indeed.

⁴⁵ Willison, *A Prophecy of the French Revolution*, 13-14.

⁴⁶ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1970), 6-7.

Events in Rome between February 1798 and Napoleon's ascension to power in France eighteen months later sent Pope Pius VI into exile and the French temporarily taking governmental control of Rome. While this French victory was short lived, it none-the-less delivered a near-fatal blow to the Pope's authority not just in France but throughout Europe. More than a year later, a joint campaign made up of Austrian and Russian troops removed French presence from the Italian peninsula for a brief time.

After rising to power in France and successfully recapturing the Italian peninsula, Napoleon Bonaparte favored a political strategy designed to regain the Pope's support instead of resorting to military options to regain control of Rome for France. As a result of Bonaparte's crafty foreign diplomacy, Rome was annexed from Italy, which under the Concordat of 1801 created the Papal States. These events were less than satisfactory for those seeking lasting prophetic fulfillment of scripture. The head of the Beast had not been severed but, instead, reattached. Yet following the French Revolution, a renewed interest in prophetic scriptures and the doctrine of Armageddon spread throughout much of Europe and America. And while America had officially broken away politically from Britain, the intellectual and religious curiosities of Britain and its former colonies remained strongly intertwined throughout the early nineteenth century.

The French Revolution reignited interest in Biblical prophecy, resulting in the emergence of endless conversations surrounding Biblical prophecy, the doctrines of Armageddon, and how they related to current events. Religious conferences themed around prophecy and eschatological topics are not unique to modern evangelicals.⁴⁷ It originated far earlier than even Henry

⁴⁷ Hal Lindsey is a bestselling author of prophecy and the focus of chapter three.

Drummond's prophecy conference at his sizable, English estate in 1826.⁴⁸ Known as the Albury Conference, laymen and clerical notables were invited to discuss end-times prophecies. While Drummond's conference is historically significant for many reasons—for the purpose of understanding its impact on influencing dispensationalism a narrower view of its significance is explored here—the conference concluded with an agreement among many influential religious leaders concerning Bible prophecy that illustrated the continued importance of interpreting prophecy through current events. Allowing scripture alone to guide the members' end times conclusions of prophecy, several points stand out including the usage of the term “dispensation” to describe the current state of the Church, the role of the Jewish nation, and the conclusion that Daniel's 1260 years (Daniel 7 and Revelation 13) ended with the French Revolution. By the end of the conference, those who attended the conference agreed that “the vials of wrath are now being poured out and the second advent is imminent.”⁴⁹ Like the Mathers and Edwards, the world awaited God's sixth bowl of wrath and edged closer to the end of all things.

A topic not yet discussed in this chapter but emerged with greater interest in the century following the French Revolution is the role of the Jewish nation in end-times prophecy. At this point in the development of the dispensationalist timeline, a deeper dive into Protestant motivations for converting the Jews to Christianity is well-worth exploring before moving onto to Darby and the mid-nineteenth century.

The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century witnessed renewed interest in Jewish history and the “state of the Jews.”⁵⁰ This is not to imply that there was previously little

⁴⁸ Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

or no interest in Israel and its end time fate among many Christians in Europe and America. For example, Increase Mather grew increasingly interested in the conversion of the Jewish people. In his 181-page treatise, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, Increase contended that “all of Israel shall be saved” and that it had not yet fully happened mainly due to the fact that the Jewish people had “scattered even throughout the whole world more or less.”⁵¹ Missionary efforts toward the Jews existed since the early church era and continued through the centuries. Yet, a new fervor emerged in the nineteenth century.

Sandeen pinpoints this renewal to Lewis Way, a wealthy English barrister (trial lawyer) turned philanthropist and Anglican minister. After acquiring the financially struggling London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (LSPCJ) in 1809, Way refocused the society's mission from converting the Jews primarily in London to more outward endeavors by focusing on reaching Jews around the world with the Gospel. Way's missionary efforts resulted in a greater awareness of the conditions of the Jews throughout the world—especially in Western and Eastern Europe, reaching as far as Russia. While LSPCJ's mission statement failed to significantly convert Jews to Christianity in greater numbers, it laid the foundation for the renewal of Protestant interest in fulfilling prophecy related to the return of the Jews to Palestine. This interest extended beyond the Atlantic to many Protestant denominations in America. More than any prior time in modern Christian history, “the restoration of the Jews to Palestine—the return of the chosen people to the promised land—became firmly established as a plank in the millenarian creed.”⁵² The millenarian creed referenced by Sandeen is the futurist vision of

⁵¹ Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation, Explained and Applied* (London, 1669), 54.

⁵² Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 11.

Christ's millennial kingdom and the transformation of the world according to the doctrine of Armageddon.

Protestant interest in Zionism is not a unique feature of premillennial eschatology, Willison had also espoused the same task with great fervor a century earlier as had most Protestant since the Reformation. Serving as an example of eighteenth-century views toward the Jews, the Scottish minister believed that changing conditions in Europe would enable Jews to return to Palestine, writing:

Then the blindness of Jews shall be removed, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, [Romans 11:1, 25, 26]. There and many other prophecies about the increase of Christ's Kingdom and Glory do remain to be accomplished in the latter days, at least in the extent, such as those which foretell, that everything in Jerusalem shall be hold: the people shall be all righteous. The sanctuary shall be cleaned; and purity be both in the worship and worshippers in the temple, and no more a Canaanite in the House of the Lord. All nations shall be gathered to see his Glory. There shall be no more war between nations. The Jews shall be gathered out of all the countries where they are dispersed, and brought to their land; they shall be no ore separate kingdoms.⁵³

In nineteenth-century England, Way's eschatological shift from postmillennialism to premillennialism angered many of his Anglican contemporaries. Unintentionally, Way's anonymous writings under the penname Basilicus gained popularity among premillennialists and provided a first introduction to premillennial eschatology for many British, continental Europeans, and Americans during the 1820s. But why the push away from traditional postmillennial views, or even the lesser held amillennial eschatological stance? Sandeen summarized the nineteenth century reasoning for this growing shift among Christian's in the West: "converts to premillennialism abandoned confidence in man's ability to bring about significant and lasting social progress and in the church's ability to stem the tide of evil, convert

⁵³ Willison, *A Prophecy of the French Revolution*, 13-14.

mankind to Christianity, or even prevent its own corruption.”⁵⁴ Since the Church had failed to reflect traditional millennialism, the logical answer was that the Earth would need to be purged and the Battle of Armageddon won before Christ’s utopia could be established. Sandeen’s analysis reflects what not only European premillennialists were beginning to believe in greater numbers but also their counterparts in America.

It is necessary to reiterate that premillennialism, the advocacy for Jewish Zionism, and religious and political obsessions over the doctrines of Armageddon are not unique to the last hundred and fifty years of history. While Darby mostly repeated what previous theologians had penned for centuries—as demonstrated by the writings of the Mathers, Willison, Drummond, and Way—it was Darby who popularized premillennialism and married it to dispensationalism while also cementing the “two prophetic tracks” concerning the role of the Jews and the Gentiles in end-time prophecies. Paul Boyer explained:

Sometime soon, [Darby] taught, fulfilling the prophecies of Israel’s restoration, God’s chosen people would reestablish a nation in their ancient homeland and rebuild the Temple. At long last, after terrible persecution during Antichrist’s reign, a surviving remnant of Jews would embrace their long-rejected Messiah. Darby was far from alone in teaching a Jewish return to Palestine, but in placing this sentiment at the heart of dispensationalism system, he had profound long-term influence.⁵⁵

The importance of John Nelson Darby’s theological influence upon Protestantism has been alluded to already throughout this chapter. The next major development of millennial and apocalyptic thought came in the form of dispensationalism, a new eschatological system crafted by Anglo-Irish theologian John Nelson Darby. The following section provides an overview of

⁵⁴ Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 13.

⁵⁵ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 89.

the relationship between millennialism and the doctrines of Armageddon with American culture and politics from the Second Great Awakening through the dawn of the twentieth century.

Nineteenth Century

Advances in industrialization and democratic republican government best characterize nineteenth-century America and Western society. The early industrial fever that had begun in eighteenth-century England with innovations in technology and banking had quickly spread to continental Europe and its cousins overseas in the new American nation. By the end of the century, a second phase of industrialization would sweep through the modern world once again with greater technological changes and the creation of a new wealthy class that promised unlimited social and technological progress. By century's end, the industrialized world—more than any other period in human history—reflected what Jonathan Edwards had foretold in “Miscellanies”: that the nations would witness philosophical (role of government and human reasoning) and technological progress and “become as bright and polite as England.”⁵⁶ A century earlier, Edwards viewed England as an intellectual and cultural beacon in a morally corrupted world. Writing before the industrialization of Western Europe and America, Edwards understood that progress and social better would begin in the English-speaking world.

Despite the innovations of the nineteenth century, the period saw a bloody civil war in America that was not unlike what the seventeenth century had witnessed in England. While these internal conflicts were fought over different issues, the events none-the-less impacted the faith and theological views of those involved just the same. The English Civil War drove the Mathers to turn pessimistic regarding the ability of the church to establish the seat of Christ's kingdom.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” in Harvey G. Townsend, ed, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: From His Private Notebooks* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Press, 1955), 207.

Likewise, the American Civil War spelled doomsday, Tribulation, and Armageddon for those involved and watching from afar in Europe.

According to cliometrics pioneer and former Professor of Economic History, Robert William Fogel, the nineteenth century also witnessed two of America's four religious awakenings. Fogel's analysis of the spiritual, cultural, and political cycles divided America's major religious moments into four distinct periods, separating the religious phase from its political effects. Fogel argued that America's cycles of religious movements contributed profoundly to greater levels of democratization and equality as a result of the evangelical efforts originating in revivalism.⁵⁷ Fogel ranged the First Awakening from 1730-1760 and credits the revivalism with promoting equality and republicanism during America's colonial period. Fogel argued that the equality and benevolence presented in the first awakening contributed to the political cohesion needed for the American Revolution to be successful.⁵⁸

Following the birth of the new American republic, Fogel placed the Second Great Awakening between 1800 and 1840. The second spiritual movement introduced camp meetings and propagated millennialism more than previous centuries had. Social and political reform grew throughout the first half of the nineteenth, fueled by growing evangelical activism rooted in revivalism. With increased fervor, many Americans wanted to see their nation ready for the return of Christ. Of the many political and social issues, the antislavery movement saw its momentum turn into civil war by midcentury, which ended America's original sin of slavery.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening & the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening*, 11.

For Fogel, the Third Great Awakening began in the 1890s and lasted until 1930. Unlike the previous two awakenings, America's third spiritual awakening was even more focused on societal progress and looked to the government to make America a fairer place for all. This movement also resulted in a push toward a secular view of the Bible by attempting to universalize Christian doctrines. From this, labor unions and religious groups organized against big corporations and pushed equality with a Social Gospel message that—for some—moved toward Marxist views of wealth redistribution.⁶⁰ Attempting to set right universally held Biblical beliefs that had largely been held by most Americans a century earlier, revivalists returned to the original messages of *sola scriptura*, Christian ethics, and the millennialism of the previous revivals by reemphasizing personal accountability, personal religious experiences, and the role of the family rather than the government in bettering society.⁶¹ The Fourth Great Awakening began in the 1950s and ended in the late 1970s—a topic explored in more depth in later chapters.

Many nineteenth-century Americans carried with them the mindset and spiritual determination to rid the nascent nation of societal and political structures that did not reflect the kingdom of Christ. Boyer concluded that “postmillennialism underlay not only the utopian experiments of this era before the Civil War but also the crusades for social betterment—temperance, prison reform, the abolition of slavery, and so forth—that pervaded in the North, including the evangelical churches.”⁶² Although the antebellum period was relatively optimistic, premillennialism prevailed among numerous churches and nowhere more than among the Millerites of the 1830s. In a century themed by progress and increasing premillennialism,

⁶⁰ Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening*, 12-13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶² Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 89.

Tuveson contended that the century “[was] anti-progressivist in attitude,” emphasizing the notion that those who held these beliefs viewed the world as “[growing] worse and worse” and dominated by the view that “Jesus is . . . taking vengeance on his adversaries.”⁶³ No other group displayed the extremes of apocalypticism than William Miller and his followers.

One major theme that emerged from the Second Great Awakening was the arrival of new religious sects within Christianity that represented extremist interpretations of scripture. A Baptist and New York farmer who served as a captain in the War of 1812— William Miller predicted in the 1830s that Jesus would return in 1843. His prediction did not result in the end of the world but the start of the Millerite movement. The Millerites helped to usher in a renewed devotion to doomsday prophecies and eschatological studies. But not everyone enthusiastically rejoiced over the end of the world. Many remained critical of Bible prophecy and mocked those who failed to accurately predict Armageddon’s arrival. Miller labored over Biblical prophecies and concluded that the events recorded in Revelation had not yet occurred as historicists believed. In contrast with postmillennialists and historic premillennialists, most of the visions of John of Patmos were still yet to occur. Miller’s first prediction of the end of days, which was supported by his prolific production of prophecy tracts, Bible conferences, revivals, and numerous articles in religious magazines caught the attention of hundreds of thousands of Americans.⁶⁴

Millennium excitement was not unique to groups like the Millerites, America’s second spiritual awakening also encouraged participants to focus on bettering society and purifying the Christian church—and its various denominations—in preparation for the Second Coming of

⁶³ Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 34.

⁶⁴ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 81.

Christ. Written in the 1830s and summarizing the millennial beliefs of most coming out of the movement, Zionist songwriter William Walker penned the popular hymn *Millennium*. The last stanza expressed anticipation for the Millennium: “Let all who would wish to see Millennium begin, Come out, and be separate from sinners and sin. As soon as the churches are redeemed from sin, the Day of the Millennium will surely begin.”⁶⁵

Even after 1843 failed to witness Christ’s return, Miller doubled down, claiming that 1844 was the true date of the advent. Miller’s followers expressed deep disappointment that Christ had not returned, and that Miller was not the prophet many made him out to be. Boyer concluded, “the Millerite excitement underscores the pervasiveness of apocalyptic belief in antebellum America.”⁶⁶ In what became known as the Great Disappointment, the majority were left discouraged while others ventured into starting their own religious sects, resulting in the creation of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.⁶⁷ Millerism was as much about Miller’s demonstration that the Bible could be interpreted privately and literally using simple, nonacademic approaches to scripture as it was about his prophetic movement. Miller proved that the study of prophecy could be approached by anyone and that the mysteries of the doctrine of Armageddon were worth the pursuit—even if interpretations proved to be misguided. Just as the American government increasingly democratized civic participation, so had revivalists and Bible teachers democratized Bible prophecy. No one contributed more to this new momentum among growing premillennialists in America and Western Europe than John Nelson Darby.

⁶⁵ William Walker, “Millennium” (1831).

⁶⁶ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 82.

⁶⁷ While the Adventists are explored in this chapter, it is limited in scope. For a full understanding of the Adventists and their founding, it is suggested that the contributions and theology of Ellen G. White and her husband, James White, are well worth examining. See Arthur L. White *Ellen G. White: A Biography, Volumes 1-6* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1981-1985).

Born in London into an Anglo-Irish family in 1800, John Nelson Darby would come to dominate the religious world by the end of the century. At the age of twenty-five, Darby was actively engaged in ministerial work as an Anglican deacon, curate, and Bible teacher for the Church of Ireland. In political protest, Darby left the Anglican Church when George IV came to power over Ireland as the United Kingdom's new monarch and expected all members of the church to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown. While mostly holding to Calvinist doctrines, Darby posited that scripture could be understood apart from organized religion and only needed the assistance of the Holy Spirit. By the 1830s, Darby had developed a new theological system—a matrix that would continue to refine until his death in the 1880s. Having parted ways with the Anglican church, Darby, along with several other religious leaders, established a new religious sect: the Plymouth Brethren.

Darby spent the majority of the early years sharing his new ecclesiastical, theological, and eschatological views at Bible conferences and assisted in establishing Plymouth Brethren churches throughout Europe. Darby's travels extended overseas, circulating his eschatological views in the United States from the late 1850s through the 1870s. In the middle of his touring trips, the American Civil War raged and brought millions of Americans closer than ever to their religious faith. Of the denominations that eagerly received Darby's views, it was among the Baptists and Presbyterians that Darby's dispensationalist teachings took deeper roots. Hundreds of thousands of Americans began showing greater interest in Darby's premillennialism by the end of the 1860s but disregarded Darby's ecclesiastical ordinances and some theological doctrines.⁶⁸ These Darbyites—a pejorative term often applied by outsiders to those who followed

⁶⁸ Carl Edwin Armerding and W. Ward Gasque, *Dreams, Visions, and Oracles: The Layman's Guide to Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 58.

Darby's dispensationalism—in Europe and America were viewed by other Christians as fanatic converts who abandoned the progressive hope that the world would get better prior to Christ's return. As America devolved into civil war, the experience of total war would for millions feel like hell on Earth—confirming Darby's thesis that the future only progressively gets worse. Renowned religious studies scholar Mark Noll noted in the forward to *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War*:

To almost the same degree as in the nineteenth-century United States, the world today is filled with contemplations of divine providence, the fear of apocalyptic cataclysm, and the hope of millennial peace. The contemporary phenomena may differ in important ways from what is described [during the American Civil War], but careful historical attention to the precedents should have the spin-off effect of increased understanding, insight, and empathy for the present.⁶⁹

America in the years prior to the Civil War had become quite reflective of its role in God's providence and the coming millennium. That sense of uncertainty emerged not only from America's religious leaders and movements but also among its early novelists. James Fenimore Cooper, historian and novelist best known for *The Last of the Mohicans*, authored a satirical novel that condemned the growing industrialization and decline in America's ability to establish the utopian paradise envisioned by the early English colonist. In *The Crater* (1847), Cooper told the story of an island community that fights desperately to protect its territory from outsiders. Much of the novel's conflict results from religious schisms. Despite every effort to create a perfect world, the colony's island is destroyed in an apocalyptic volcanic eruption. The novel's protagonist, Mark Woolston, reflected on the coming millennium:

Among the many things that have been revealed to us [Woolston speaking of revelations from God], where so many are hid, we are told that our information is to increase [human

⁶⁹ Mark A. Noll, "Forward" in *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War*, edited by Ben Wright and Zachary W. Dresser (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), viii.

progress and divine revelations], as we draw nearer to the millennium, until ‘The whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.’ We may be far from that blessed day; probably are . . . empires, dynasties, heresies, and novelties, come and go like the changes of the seasons; while the only thing that can be termed stable, is the slow but sure progress of prophecy . . . But the signs of the times are not to be mistaken. Let any man of fifty, for instance, turn his eyes towards the East, the land of Judea, and compare its condition, its promises of today, with those that existed in his youth, and ask himself how the change has been produced.⁷⁰

Millennialism and the fear of the apocalypse became a regular talking point not only among America’s religious leaders but also those involved in the war effort. Despite evidence existing in the Civil War record, “historians have been slower to integrate the themes of providence, millennium, and apocalypse into their accounts of the conflict.”⁷¹ Concerning the relationship between apocalyptic beliefs and the Civil War, David W. Blight—Professor of History at Yale University—concluded:

A nation of Protestants came to interpret events, at least in part, as steps in their providential destiny. But it was believed that nations, like individuals, must suffer and be tested before they could fulfill their appointed destinies. Following biblical prophecy of the Apocalypse, many Northern Protestants had come to believe by the 1850s that their country was on the brink of such a rending, an apocalyptic war that would usher in a new era of peace and freedom.⁷²

Interest in dispensationalism increased during the Reconstruction period following the American Civil War. For the South, surrender at Appomattox left many Southerners confused about what had happened and about their own religious beliefs. For years, “[they] hunkered down to fight longer and harder, and they claimed that if Lincoln had his way, the South would

⁷⁰ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Cater; or, Vulcan’s Peak: A Tale of the Pacific* (Boston: Dana Estes & Company Publishers, 1894), 155-156.

⁷¹ Wright and Dresser, *Apocalypse and the Millennium*, 1.

⁷² David W. Blight, “Frederick Douglass and the American Apocalypse,” *Civil War History* 31, no. 4 (1985): 310.

be awash in a racial apocalypse.”⁷³ Among many defeated confederates, fear that newly freed slaves would rise in large numbers and seek revenge on former masters and their families reverberated throughout the South as many recalled Nat Turner’s rebellion and other insurrections. For the North, the Union’s victory and the abolition of slavery meant the economic apocalypse of the South. Northerner Frederick Douglass—a former slave and leading political figure whose career expanded most of the nineteenth century—viewed the war through the lens of “millennialism, apocalypticism, civil religion, the providential view of history, and the jeremiad.”⁷⁴ For abolitionist and black leaders like Douglass, the usage of prophetic language and jeremiads was effective rhetoric for expressing the sins of slavery leading up to emancipation. According to Blight, “Douglass believed what he preached. He believed in American mission, in a providential God who shaped history . . . Douglass’s millennialism was genuine.”⁷⁵ In Douglass’s millennial, there were no masters and slaves—only free children of God.

Other prominent dispensationalist figures and organizations emerged throughout the Reconstruction (1865-1877) and Gilded Age (1877-1900). Alongside millennial and prophetic teachings, the push for a new Christian creed gained momentum as the Evangelical Alliance expanded from England to America. Founded in 1846, the Evangelical Alliance “welcomed Darby’s strong emphasis on biblical authority and his literal reading of the prophetic texts,”

⁷³ Edward J. Blum, ““To Doubt This Would Be to Doubt God””: Reconstruction and the Decline of Providential Confidence” in *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War*, edited by Ben Wright and Zachary W. Dresser (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 224.

⁷⁴ Blight, “Frederick Douglass and the American Apocalypse,” 309.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

which reflected a growing fundamental movement for interpreting *all* scripture literally.⁷⁶ A core principle of fundamentalism is the literal interpretation of Biblical scripture, which dominated religious debate in the 1920s, culminating in the Scopes Monkey Trial. And just as Lewis Way had renewed interest in the eighteenth century concerning the role of the Jews in end-times prophecy by emphasizing missionary efforts and Zionism, William Eugene Blackstone advanced the cause and knitted the Christian Zionist movement tighter with dispensationalism. By the late nineteenth century, an early amalgamation of premillennial dispensationalism, end-times prophecy, Christian Zionism, and fundamentalism was preparing for the twentieth century.

Widely read and highly respected, Blackstone's evangelistic work mirrored that of his contemporary John Nelson Darby. A native of New York, Blackstone served his country during the Civil War as a medical services coordinator at General Ulysses S. Grant's headquarters. Following the war, Blackstone became an evangelist after being saved (accepting Jesus as his Lord and Savior) at a revival meeting. Soon after, Blackstone started preaching the Gospel, emphasizing Darby's dispensationalist eschatology while also advocating for the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. Two important works emerged from Blackstone's evangelistic outreach. In 1878, Blackstone authored *Jesus is Coming*, which saw several reprints throughout the century and the early twentieth century. After two decades of building support for the Zionist movement among evangelicals, Blackstone wrote and sponsored *Blackstone Memorial*.

In *Jesus is Coming*, Blackstone defended premillennial dispensationalism and offered answers to those who criticized the eschatology. Written to be an easy-to-understand handbook for believers, its preface set the tone for what would go on to sell millions of copies by the early

⁷⁶ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 89.

twentieth century: “we are more than ever confirmed in the faith that Christ’s coming will be pre-millennial, and this *all important* point we would emphasize, if possible, with the zeal and earnestness manifested by the early disciples, who repeatedly taught us to look for Jesus.”⁷⁷ The work organized key eschatological teachings in a question and answer format, while also educating the reader on basic eschatology and other belief systems held throughout the Christian church historically. With greater numbers of Darbyites gaining popularity in American near century’s end, Blackstone’s greatest impact would not be through his contribution to defending premillennialism but his advocacy for Christian Zionism.

The *Blackstone Memorial* reinforced a growing number of Christian churches that actively work to assist the Jews return to the Holy Land and the creation of the state of Israel. The formal request was signed by hundreds of influential figures from political, religious, and financial sectors, including several titans of industry like John Pierpont Morgan and John Davidson Rockefeller. Presented to President Benjamin Harrison in 1891, the petition asked:

Why not give Palestine back to them again? According to God's distribution of nations it is their home, an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. Under their cultivation it was a remarkably fruitful land sustaining millions of Israelites who industrially tilled its hillsides and valleys. They were agriculturists and producers as well as a nation of great commercial importance—the center of civilization and religion.⁷⁸

Along with the pamphlet, Blackstone also sent a formal letter explaining the context of the petition. After explaining that the request emerged from a Christian Zionist conference in Chicago, Blackstone provided motivation for the United States government to get involved,

⁷⁷ William E. Blackstone, “Preface,” in *Jesus is Coming, Revised Edition* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1898).

⁷⁸ William Blackstone, “Blackstone Memorial,” (1891).

recounting historical tragedies and current events. And to ensure that the President and the Secretary of State understood what scripture taught about the Jews, Blackstone wrote:

That all the European nations sympathizing with the sad condition of the Jews in Russia, and yet not wishing them to be crowded into their own countries, will, he believes, cheerfully assent to this restoration to Palestine as the most natural alternative . . . That there seem to be many evidences to show that we have reached the period in the great roll of the centuries, when the ever living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is lifting up His hand to the Gentiles, (Isa. 49:22) to bring His sons and His daughters from far, that he may plant them again in their own land, Ezk. 34, &. Not for twenty-four centuries, since the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, has there been offered to any mortal such a privileged opportunity to further the purposes of God concerning His ancient people,

May it be the high privilege of your Excellency, and the Honorable Secretary, to take a personal interest in this great matter, and secure through the Conference, a home for these wandering millions of Israel, and thereby receive to yourselves the promise of Him, who said to Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee," Gen. 12:3.⁷⁹

President Harrison, as well as several presidents through Woodrow Wilson, showed interest in the request but never managed to make it a focus of American foreign policy. Not until after World War II and the tragedies that followed the Jews in what has become known as the Holocaust did America and European nations get involved in the Zionist movement.⁸⁰ Contributing to the same evangelical movement as Darby, Miller, and Blackstone, Cyrus I. Scofield contributed the needed handbook for Christians to study and try their hands at Biblical prophecy.

Shaped by his experiences in the American Civil War, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield served the Confederate States of America in the Tennessee infantry in several key battles, including Antietam before deserting and taking an oath of allegiance to Lincoln's Union. Trained as a lawyer and spending several years at the Kansas state capitol serving in the House of

⁷⁹ William Blackstone, "Blackstone Memorial," (1891).

⁸⁰ The creation of the nation of Israel as a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is discussed in chapter three.

Representatives, Scofield became a Christian at least by the late 1870s having been a nominal Christian with some participation as an Episcopalian during his childhood and Catholicism while married to his first wife. Scofield volunteered at Dwight L. Moody's revivals in St. Louis and later worked for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which originated in London but grew in popularity throughout America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and offered both sportsmanship and religious instruction.⁸¹

In the early 1880s, Scofield became a Congregationalist minister and pastored a mission-driven church in Dallas, Texas. After a decade spent growing the small church into one of the largest in Dallas, Scofield was invited to pastor Dwight L. Moody's Trinitarian Congregational Church in Massachusetts. But it was not until Scofield's publication of *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, a widely circulated pamphlet that promoted dispensational views using a ten-point outline that included teachings on issues such as the role of Israel in history and the end times; Darby's seven dispensations; the doctrine of Armageddon including the Rapture; and concluding with a critique of those who were not "true believers" but merely "professors" of Christian theology. Scofield demonstrated the religious militancy that would come to dominate the fundamentalist movement and religious leaders like J. Frank Norris in the twentieth century.

In his introduction, Scofield contended that "[the] purpose of this Tract is to indicate the more important Divisions of the Word of Truth" so that Christians better understood the fundamentals of Christian doctrine.⁸² Scofield does not make any appeal to Darby or dispensationalism as the only theological framework to understand God's Word. Instead,

⁸¹ Howard Clark Kee, etc., *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History, Second Edition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 476.

⁸² Cyrus I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1888).

Scofield challenged his reader to “earnestly [exhort] not to receive a single doctrine upon the authority of this Tract, but like the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11) to search the Scriptures daily whether these things are so.”⁸³ Scofield’s appeal for readers to search the Bible to discover for themselves if what is presented in his writings are true was not uncommon among ministers and prophets, especially those introducing personal interpretations as *the* truth. The same approach would be taken by Hal Lindsey in the 1970s when presenting his geopolitical prophetic thesis that the signs of the time were proof that the end of days was near.

After leaving his position with Moody’s ministry, Scofield returned to Dallas and continued working on what became known as the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Its publication in 1909 elevated premillennial dispensationalism, skyrocketing Scofield to greater fame among evangelicals and an emerging fundamentalist movement. In the month preceding Europe’s eruption into war, Scofield founded a Bible seminary that would later become Cairn University. The *Scofield Reference Bible* quickly became the most popular reference Bible, reinforcing core teachings of premillennialism dispensationalism. The Scofield Bible—with its thousands of notes that ranged from topics dealing with the age of the Earth to Armageddon—remained one of the most studied reference Bible throughout the twentieth century. Scofield’s influence upon the emerging fundamentalist movement cannot be overstated. Its impact on religious leaders, politicians, and the general population reached far and wide into American culture and politics throughout the century, laying a foundation for hundreds of thousands of Americans to confidently defend their beliefs when challenged by an increasingly secular society.

⁸³ Cyrus I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1888).

Despite the widespread popularity of Darby and Scofield among evangelicals, other millennial groups emerged parallel to dispensationalism. Of these, Charles Taze Russell's Watch Tower Society gained the support and ire of American Christians. Russell, along with Nelson Barbour (a former follower of William Miller), published alternative eschatological views to the traditional millennial doctrines. In *Three Worlds*, the authors promoted a three dispensational view of human history: (1) Garden of Eden through the Great Flood; (2) the current age since the Great Flood; (3) and a third era that would follow the establishment of Christ's Kingdom.⁸⁴ According to Russell and Barbour, the Rapture would occur in 1878—a year after the book was published and Armageddon would occur in 1914 followed by the millennium. Years after Russell and Barbour parted ways, Russell continued to embrace the original calculated dates for the end of the world. In the *Watch Tower*, the prophetic clock counted down issue after issue. The opening statement of the January 1, 1914, edition reminded its readers that the current dispensation would end by year's end, initiating the world's final dispensation signaled by Armageddon.

From every point of view of the Year 1914 seems big with possibilities. The headlines of all the newspapers of the world tell that our Master's prediction of nearly nineteen centuries ago is being fulfilled . . . This awful condition is just what the Bible Portrays. So far as our judgment goes, the Year 1914 is the last one of what the Bible terms "Gentile Times" . . . The end of their "times" marks the date of the beginning of Messiah's kingdom, which the Bible declares is to be ushered in with a great tie of trouble, just as we see impending.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Chryssides, George D., *The A to Z of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 4.

⁸⁵ "Views from the Watch Tower," *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, vol. 35, January 1, 1914.

By Fall of 1914, the *Watch Tower* had warned that “it was possible that Armageddon may begin next Spring.”⁸⁶ Human progress and postmillennial optimism halted during the late summer of 1914. Industrialization and societal progress also meant increased militarism and imperialistic competition among European nations. While America engaged in similar actions, the consequences would prove far more consequential in Europe. The events that would come to dominate the twentieth century—two world wars, economic depression, the Holocaust, and the creation of the atom bomb—would reshape not only the world but how Biblical prophecy would be interpreted.

Early Twentieth Century

One of America’s premier authorities on the history of premillennialism, Timothy Weber argued that “No event in the fifty years after 1875 did more for the morale of American premillennialists than World War I. There at last was indisputable vindication of their dire predictions about the inevitable decline of the age.”⁸⁷ Weber posits that dispensationalists had not formulated scriptures to match the events that were ongoing in Europe, but instead the events of the growing war “seemed to follow an already existing and well-formulated premillennial script for the last day.”⁸⁸ In essence, the Book of Revelation was no longer contained in the Bible but written on every front page newspaper. The twentieth century witnessed a greater emphasis on the Antichrist, a consequence of eschatological studies during the Great War. This renewed obsession would expand into the depression era and resurface even stronger during World War

⁸⁶ “Armageddon Still Future,” *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, vol. 35, September 1, 1914.

⁸⁷ Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 105.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

II. Fear created about the Antichrist and the coming tribulation period was suppressed by a fierce belief in the Rapture. Christians may have to endure the war and any other events leading up to the unveiling but would avoid the worst of the end times. The Rapture was every Christian's ticket to avoid the coming apocalypse. And if the term Armageddon had not been a household word when Theodore Roosevelt used it during his 1912 comeback campaign (referenced in the introduction), it had by the end of the Great War.⁸⁹

When World War I started, not all premillennialists believed that the battle of Armageddon was just around history's corner. The Plymouth Brethren urged caution but seceded that "this tragedy of the age as [possibly] the great preliminary and way-preparer to the real end of our age."⁹⁰ The signs of the times were clearer than ever as premillennialists endured the trials of the twentieth century as Armageddon would continue to make headlines. George Harvey, an American diplomat who led the Republican opposition against Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations, proclaimed that those unsettling days of late August, "Europe [stood] at Armageddon."⁹¹ Then during the last days of the Great War, John Finley—former Professor of Politics at Princeton University and editor in chief of *The New York Times*—witnessed the battle of Armageddon (Battle of Megiddo) as a reporter and saw the end of the war alongside Lord Allenby of Megiddo.⁹² After the battle against the Turks was won and the armistice was signed by Germany, Finley "thought that the thousand years of peace" mentioned in Armageddon would

⁸⁹ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 101.

⁹⁰ "What is it? The Outcome," *Our Hope* 25, no. 4 (October 1914), 199.

⁹¹ George Harvey, "Europe at Armageddon," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1914.

⁹² The Battle of Magiddo was fought at the Biblical location believed to be where the future Battle of Armageddon will take place. From the viewpoint of someone who embraced Biblical prophecy, one of the last battles of World War was fought at this location. For more scholarship about this battle, see "The Battle of Megiddo" in Anthony Bruce *The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2002).

now spread throughout the world.⁹³ From the vantage point of viewing the horrifying end of the worst war yet experienced in human history, everything to Finley seemed apocalyptic and Biblical.

The hope of social and political progress and the promise that democratic Institutions would move Western Civilization into a brighter future seemed to have been only a dream of the non-dispensationalist world. And for better or worse, the end appeared nearer than ever before. World War One provided greater relevance for millennialism, the doctrines of Armageddon, and dispensationalism and more opportunity for these ideological systems to transform American culture and politics. Combined with an emerging fundamentalist movement of the 1920s, the 1930s would witness these religious beliefs enter American cultural and political conversations at an unprecedented level. Out of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, millions of Americans would eventually take a greater interest in social issues as well as foreign policies—eventually intertwining cultural, economic, and political issues even more to end-times prophecy.

Fundamentalism would not enter the evangelical lexicon until the 1910 to 1915 run of religious pamphlets called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to The Truth*. More than sixty religious leaders, each representing different denominations throughout America contributed to the ninety essays that made up the contents of the work. Collected in volumes and published for a wide audience, more than three million volumes circulated the United States during the early twentieth century. While not a hit initially, especially among academics and religious publishers, the pamphlets found its audience among millions of Americans smitten by dispensationalism and concerned about modernity. Marsden concluded:

⁹³ John H. Finley, “Five Years After Armageddon,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 1923.

The Fundamentals, however, had a long-term effect of greater importance than its immediate impact or the lack thereof. It became a symbolic point of reference for identifying a “fundamentalist” movement. When in 1920 the term “fundamentalist” was coined, it called to mind the broad united front of the kind of opposition to modernism . . . In retrospect, the volumes retain some usefulness in tracing the outlines of the emerging movement. They represent the movement at a moderate and transitional stage before it was reshaped and pushed to extremes by the intense heat of controversy.⁹⁴

Possibly the most controversial religious figure of the early twentieth century, John Frank Norris dominated the fundamentalists movement and fought fervently against modernism’s effects on American culture and Christianity. The 1920s witnessed the escalation of religious clashes between fundamentalists and the liberal Christians that had dominated the Social Gospel movements of the Third Great Awakening. Frank Norris influenced millions of Americans and encouraged political activism on behalf of fundamental Christian beliefs. C. Allyn Russell described Norris as “one of the most violent and controversial figures in the history of religion in America” who contributed to the growth of right-wing, religious politics in America.⁹⁵

In a sea of rising voices proclaiming that American needed to reject modernity and return to traditional Christian values, Norris pastored several churches, published several well-circulated newspapers, and became a pioneer radio preacher whose message went out weekly through twenty-seven radio stations that reached into virtually every corner of America. This trend of prolific religious media would continue throughout the century among evangelists and pastors of large churches with media appeal. What set Norris apart was not his fundamentalist views—his teachings and eschatological beliefs followed in the tradition of Darby, Scofield, and

⁹⁴ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 119.

⁹⁵ C. Allyn Russell, “J. Frank Norris: Violent Fundamentalist,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (1972), 271.

his fundamentalist contemporaries—but his willingness to attack institutions that challenged those views.

While fundamentalists double downed on premillennial dispensationalism, liberal Christians of the Modernists camp distanced themselves from the “extremist” evangelicals. 1924 would witness fundamentalist and modernist ideas clash with the publication of two popular books that shifted America’s attention to how the Bible should be interpreted: Harry Emerson Fosdick’s *The Modern Use of the Bible* and William Jennings Bryan’s *Shall Christianity Remain Christ? Seven Questions in Dispute*.

A pastor and leading modernist whom Martin Luther King, Jr. would call “the greatest preacher of the century,” Harry Emerson Fosdick represented a movement among Christian institutions to liberalize the Bible.⁹⁶ According to Fosdick, a new approach was needed when approaching the Bible. Interpreting the Bible literally made the Bible “a stumbling-block” and that the Bible should be taken allegorically only.⁹⁷ According to fundamentalists, such as three-time presidential candidate and congressman William Jennings Bryan, the issues raised by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy had nothing to do with “pre-millennialism or post-millennialism” or any other contending interpretation of scripture.⁹⁸ Instead, the controversy centered on the inspiration of scripture. Should the Bible be interpreted literally or allegorically? Premillennial dispensationalist had long settled the question by emphasizing a literal interpretation of the end times. Written a year before the Scopes Monkey Trial (*The State of*

⁹⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr. to Harry Emerson Fosdick, letter, “November 17, 1958” from Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers 1954-1968. Boston University. Boston, MA.

⁹⁷ Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924), 28.

⁹⁸ William Jennings Bryan, *Shall Christianity Remain Christ? Seven Questions in Dispute* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 9.

Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes), Bryan would be seen as an authority on the fundamentalist, literal approach to scripture and chose to take on the role as prosecutor for the state of Tennessee against John Scopes. The monkey trial, as the media labeled it, became America's first live court case broadcast. During the summer of 1924, fundamentalists engulfed themselves in defending their views of the Bible across America. Dispensationalists may have been fundamentalists, but not all fundamentalists were dispensationalists. Bryan believed in the infallibility of the Bible, but his beliefs had little in common with dispensationalist and held no consistent view on the millennium.

If the Bible could not be defended as scientifically dependable regarding the Genesis account of the creation of the physical world and humanity, then how could Christians defend what the Bible taught about the end times? While the subject matter shifted from prophecy to defending the Bible's authority, premillennial dispensationalism experienced continued growth throughout the 1920s as America entered new testing grounds once again following the Stock Market Crash of 1929. As the world's economy reacted to the financial crash and the ensuing Great Depression, hard times raised interest in end-times prophecy. Many premillennialists continued to defend the Bible and fight for America to return to its Judeo-Christian roots, but other events in Europe caught the attention of America's prophets and students of the apocalypse.

Dispensationalists turned their attention to the rise of new world leaders that filled the end-times mold for the Antichrist. In *American Apocalypse*, Sutton described the premillennial analysis of these world leaders in the 1930s:

Against the background of Hitler's persecution of Jews, Mussolini's restoration of the Roman Empire, Stalin's institutionalization of state atheism, and the global economic depression, the faithful believed that the Roosevelt presidency was marking the start of

the countdown to Armageddon in the United States. The president's will for power and global sensibilities seemed to augur the political philosophy of the Antichrist . . . For the faithful living in the 1930s, to support Roosevelt was to support the Antichrist.⁹⁹

Tracking his rise to power since the early 1920s, dispensationalists took great interest in Benito Mussolini becoming Italy's prime minister and the formation of his fascist government. The Roman Empire had collapsed in the fifth century, but its rebirth was the goal of Mussolini's new Italian empire. Sutton continued, "Since the time of Darby, the faithful had expected the Antichrist to take power through a ten-nation confederacy led by a resurrected Roman Empire."¹⁰⁰ Combined with the events occurring in Russia, the new Soviet Union pushed atheism and communism within its borders and beyond. The godless policies of Vladimir Lenin and, later, Joseph Stalin's administrations alarmed dispensationalists and fundamentalists alike in America. By the time Germany appointed Hitler as chancellor in 1933, American dispensationalists were among the first to recognize that Hitler's antisemitic policies meant the extermination of the Jews.¹⁰¹ And according to the doomsayers, things at home in America were not that much better off.

The economic crisis of the 1930s meant tough times in America. Dispensationalism and fundamentalism became indistinguishable among evangelicals throughout the decade. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies garnered opposition from the religious, right-wing branch of the Republican Party. The expansion of the federal government to combat a failing economic

⁹⁹ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 232-233.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 213.

¹⁰¹ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 220.

system became “the origins [for] fundamentalists antiliberalism.”¹⁰² Sutton posits that this moment in conservative, religious political history is the key to understanding the Religious

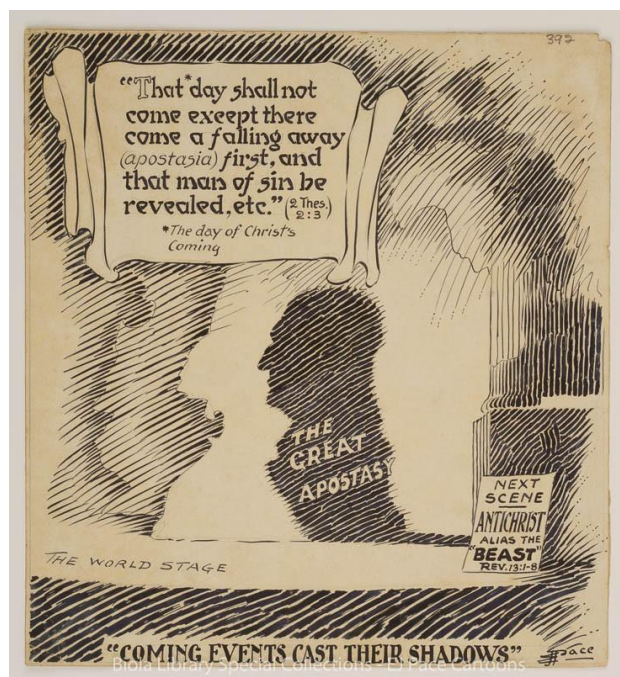


Figure 2. “Coming Events Cast Their Shadows,” E. J. Pace, *Sunday School Times*, May 25, 1924.

Right as it entered the early Cold War era. Sutton argues that (1) fundamentalists politics were not rooted in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the Fourth Great Awakening, or Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority but in the antistatist movement that emerged in the 1930s; and (2) fundamentalists became increasingly politically involved as a result of global issues, such as Zionist movement, communism, the international economic depression, and two world wars.¹⁰³ The

combination of dispensationalism, fundamentalism, and increasing interest in global issues set the stage for greater interest in Biblical prophecy and the doctrines of Armageddon.

Conclusion

As history advanced closer the edge of the end of the world, the role of Biblical prophecy and the doctrines of Armageddon took on greater meaning for millions of Christians. And in the context of nearly four centuries of millennial thought and the apocalypse’s influence on culture and politics, it is Hal Lindsey’s bestseller *The Late Great Planet Earth* that marks a major

¹⁰² Matthew Avery Sutton, “Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (2012): 1053.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1053-1054.

turning point in prophecy and premillennialism. By the 1930s, everything was in place for the next five decades of Biblical prophecy. The ideological marriage of dispensationalism and fundamentalism was solidified by the start of the Cold War. Numerous churches throughout America and overseas preached premillennial dispensationalism and could easily identify as fundamentalist. The core of these Bible-believing Christians resided among the Baptists, especially its offshoot of Independent Baptists which grew alongside dispensationalism in the late nineteenth century. Other groups included the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and other mainstream Protestant denominations that saw schism, such as Presbyterians and Methodists.

By the end of World War II, approximately three percent of the world's population had disappeared.¹⁰⁴ Approximately eighty-five million deaths during the war years were not a result of the Rapture or the Battle of Armageddon, but the consequence of a global conflict that reshaped nations and geopolitics. The war left the world wounded but had strengthened its Allied victors. Emerging uncontested as world powers, the United States and the Soviet Union immediately entered a five-decade long rivalry for political and economic influence throughout the world. The aftermath of the war and the emergence of the Cold War had far-reaching effects among American premillennial dispensationalists. Dispensationalists quickly reshaped their prophetic outlook to match the New World Order that emerged from the ashes of the worst conflict in human history.

By the 1930s, the roots of premillennial dispensationalism and fundamentalism were planted firmly throughout America's cultural and political institutions. The same doomsday

¹⁰⁴ Richard Overy, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

rhetoric and Biblical prophecy messages continued well into postwar American society. Biblical prophecy did not stagnate but continued to influence American culture and politics. The following chapter examines Cold War America and the publication of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a major turning in dispensational, prophetic teach

Chapter 3

The Cold War and the Road to Armageddon

Introduction

By the second half of the twentieth century, the Apocalypse was not only a serious talking point among premillennial dispensationalists but a concern for the majority of the civilized world as the fear of possible nuclear annihilation swept the globe. A nuclear arms race ignited in the fallout of the birth of the Atomic Age. America's arsenal was continually countered with Soviet advances, such as the Tsar Bomba tested in 1961—marking the devastating achievement of the most powerful thermonuclear bomb to ever be tested by any country. The Manhattan Project ended in 1946, but America continued its research into more destructive hydrogen bombs while the Soviet Union successfully gained nuclear capability in the deserts of Kazakhstan in 1949. By the late Cold War, the Pentagon—headquarters for the U.S. Department of Defense—employed a number of top generals and military bureaucrats who were concerned about a nuclear Biblical apocalypse as a result of geopolitical tensions worldwide. According to *New York Times* bestselling Bible prophecy author Hal Lindsey, some high-ranking officials at the Pentagon had concluded that apocalyptic warfare would begin over issues in the Middle East and lead to an inevitable nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union.¹ Invited by those same officials, Hal Lindsey spoke to a standing-room-only audience within the Department of Defense about what the prophets in the Bible foretold regarding the end of the world and the role that the Middle East would play in the final conflict.² With great interest, some military

¹ Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (West Port, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986), 47.

² Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 5-6.

leaders responsible for the nation's defense and the safety of over two-hundred million Americans sought the perspective of America's leading Armageddonist and other popular dispensationalists.³

While addressing the officials, Lindsey warned of the dangers of a future Soviet-Middle East coalition that would take up arms against Israel.⁴ Speaking to the military leadership in the early 1980s, the Soviet Union had already invaded Afghanistan with the goal of supporting communist governments throughout Southwest Asia. Acknowledging the importance of the Jews and the Middle East, Lindsey would typically recount Napoleon Bonaparte's early advocacy for the Jews' return to the Holy Land and even acknowledged that Megiddo (the location of the Battle of Armageddon) was tactically the greatest location on earth for a major battle.⁵ Revealing the centrality of the state of Israel in ushering in the end of days, Lindsey argued that the Tribulation "couldn't begin until the Jewish people re-established their nation in their ancient homeland of Palestine."⁶ And now that the Jews had returned to the Holy Land, Lindsey warned that "an incredible enemy will arise to its 'uttermost north'" to "plunge the world into a final

³ During the Reagan Administration, President Reagan, at times, requested influential evangelicals and Bible prophecy experts, such as Jerry Falwell, to attend National Council Meetings to offer advice in dealing with nuclear arms policies. For more information, see Grace Halsell's hostile yet eye-opening journalistic work *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (West Port, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986). While normally politically in nature, the Reagan Archives does contain evidence of his meetings with leaders of the Religious Right. For more information, see *Reagan Library*, "Meeting with Dr. Jerry Falwell," March 15, 1983, Digital Archives. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/president/presidentialbriefingpapers/box-027/40-439-5730647-027-014-2016.pdf>.

⁴ Hal Lindsey's invitation and presentation to the Pentagon is based solely on Lindsey's personal accounts recorded in several of his works in the 1980s. Lindsey does not provide an exact date of when the event occurred. While Lindsey does not provide details concerning what he spoke on that day, it is reasonable to determine that Lindsey would have focused his presentation on chapter four "Israel, O Israel" and chapter five "Russia Is a Gog" from *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

⁵ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "The History of a Metaphor: Christian Zionism and the Politics of Apocalypse," *Archives De Sciences Des Religions* 36, no. 75 (1991): 84; also see Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 154.

⁶ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 42.

great war which Christ will return to end” at the Battle of Armageddon.⁷ If World War III was not a question over “if” but “when,” then preparing for any possible war-time scenario should be the focus of the U.S. military. And if it were really the end of days, discussions surrounding keeping America safe were the most important foreign policy of the U.S. government. As a result of the threat of nuclear apocalypse, presidential administrations handled the preparation of such a cataclysmic event differently throughout the Cold War.

During the Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower administrations of the early Cold War, containment and brinkmanship dominated foreign policy. The goal was to contain communism and create enough nuclear firepower so that no one country dared to attack the other for fear of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). The John Kennedy administration that followed shifted from brinkmanship to a flexible response strategy that would provide more options rather than solely relying on nuclear deterrence during critical moments, such as the 1963 Cuban Missile Crisis. By the late 1960s, policies would change in response to the Vietnam War with the Richard Nixon administration’s desire to ease Cold War tensions by entering a period of détente. Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter’s administrations nurtured Nixon’s détente. By the 1980s, the Cold War era transitioned into its second phase—often referred to as the Second Cold War—as Reagan’s administration ended the stalemate of containment and détente in favor of a rollback strategy aimed at ending Soviet influence throughout the world. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the Cold War witnessed an increase in the fear of nuclear annihilation and interest in Biblical prophecy throughout America, especially concerning World War III and Armageddon. Coinciding with the Atomic Age, the Cold War became dominated by religious leaders who

⁷ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 59.

interpreted current events and the new world order through Bible prophecy, declaring that America was on the road to Armageddon.

This chapter later focuses on Hal Lindsey and his prophetic teachings, but first examines the origins of the Cold War and the rise of Armageddonists, such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson. The Cold War and its doomsayers are explored to provide context for the popularity of Lindsey's seminal work *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This chapter culminates in a deep dive into Lindsey's personal background and prophetic teachings concerning the nation of Israel, World War III, the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon, the Second Coming, the Millennial Kingdom, and the New Heaven and New Earth. This chapter focuses on four of his major works: *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *There's a New World Coming*, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, and *The Rapture*. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Lindsey's understanding of America's role in the end times in the context of the late Cold War and provides an introduction to the major questions addressed in subsequent chapters regarding the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon in American culture and national politics.

Origin of the Cold War

The Cold War developed in the late 1940s and lasted until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The term "cold war" was coined in the fall of 1945 by George Orwell—a British author and journalist best known for his dystopian works *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A month after the end of World War II in the Pacific, Orwell published "You and the Atom Bomb" in the *Tribune* and described the consequences of living in the shadow of the atomic bomb. In his essay, Orwell posited that "two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds, dividing the world between them" which would "put an end to large-scale wars at the cost of prolonging indefinitely a 'peace that is

no peace”” resulting in “a permanent state of ‘cold war.’”⁸ With little error in his thesis, Orwell described the emerging Cold War. Despite being an atheist, Orwell was no less a prophet of what would occur over the course of the next five decades of human history. And it was not only Orwell who saw what was developing in the fallout of World War II.

In early 1946, Winston Churchill delivered his “The Sinews of Peace” to Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. Better known as the “Iron Curtain Speech,” the address would become one of the most significant warnings for Western Civilization as it entered the Atomic Age. Churchill declared that the “iron curtain [which] descended across the Continent” following the end of World War II would result in two different futures for the Western world.⁹ According to the former Prime Minister, the United States and Britain needed to unite against communism and the moral decay Churchill observed emerging out of the Soviet Union. Churchill believed that “[i]t would nevertheless be wrong and imprudent to entrust the secret knowledge or experience of the atomic bomb” with any other country outside of the United States, Canada, and Britain.¹⁰ Despite every effort to limit knowledge of atomic energy, atomic capabilities would eventually bring other nations into the Atomic Age. Aided by spies within the U.S.’s Manhattan Project and Britain’s Tube Alloys program, the Soviet Union developed their own atomic bomb by the end of the decade.

Like Orwell, Churchill understood that a few nations would control the future and that nuclear weapons and ideological clashes were the central factors that would reshape history post

⁸ George Orwell, “You and the Atomic Bomb,” *Tribute*, October 19, 1945.

⁹ Winston Churchill, “The Sinews of Peace,” speech, Fulton, Missouri. Westminster College. March 5, 1946.

¹⁰ Ibid.

world war. In the same year as Churchill's "Iron Curtain Speech," George F. Kennan—historian and American diplomat to Moscow—stressed, as he had since the 1930s, to Washington, D.C. that the West should not cooperate with the Soviet Union but instead form an alliance to counter Soviet growth throughout Europe. While stationed in Moscow, Kennan submitted his 8,000-word telegram to Secretary of State James Byrnes in what has become known as "The Long Telegram." In his warning to Washington, Kennan provided details of what he had observed firsthand after decades of policy making with the Soviets. The fears of a divided political and economic world were, according to Kennan, a reality that already existed long before his telegram reached Washington. Speaking frankly, Kennan warned that "there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence" between the Soviet Union and the United States, which Kennan based on his observance of Soviet anti-capitalist policies and rhetoric.¹¹ In his plea to Washington, which went on to influence the Truman Doctrine, Kennan posited:

In course of further development of international revolution there will emerge two centers of world significance: a socialist center, drawing to itself the countries which tend toward socialism, and a capitalist center, drawing to itself the countries that incline toward capitalism. Battle between these two centers for command of world economy will decide fate of capitalism and of communism in [the] entire world.¹²

And concerning the Soviet Union's foreign policy goals, Kennan summarized:

Russians will strive energetically to [develop] representation in, and official ties with, countries in which they sense strong possibilities of opposition to western centers of Power . . . we have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with [the] US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi* that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure.¹³

¹¹ George F. Kennan, "The Long Telegram," Moscow to Washington, D.C., February 22, 1946.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Though not prophets, Orwell, Churchill, and Kennan discerned the times through their literary, historical, and political experiences and saw what a “cold war” created by the Atomic Age would mean for the world going forward.

The distrust at the nexus of the Cold War formed during World War II and continued throughout the century. Secrets and lies had characterized the relationship between the United States and Britain and the Soviets. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill worked cooperatively and secretly, keeping Premier Joseph Stalin in the dark about their atomic programs.¹⁴ Other areas of military strategy and foreign policy also generated increasing suspicion among the Big Three. The use of atomic weapons against Japan meant the cancellation of Operation Downfall, which cut the Soviet Union out of the final negotiations with Japan and its postwar occupation—voiding wartime agreements with Joseph Stalin at Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945).¹⁵ Yet the Soviets had also held their cards close to the chest as well at the Yalta Conference when promising to allow free elections among liberated countries in Europe. While the Soviet Union would gain control of conquered East Germany, the territories under Stalin’s government throughout eastern Europe would not be permitted to freely choose

¹⁴ Great Britain’s best scientists assisted in the Manhattan Project. The Soviet Union, despite being kept out of the loop with the West about advances in atomic energy, initiated its own atomic program in 1943 with the help of several spies within the Manhattan Project. For more about Britain’s contributions to the Manhattan Project, see Sir Ronald W. Clark and George Thompson, *The Birth of the Bomb: The Untold Story of Britain’s Part in the Weapon that Changed the World* (New York: Horizon Press, 1961). For more on the Soviet Union’s physics and atomic program, see David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Operation Downfall was the canceled Allied invasion of mainland Japan that would have used conventional forces in a Normandy-like amphibious invasion that would have been larger than D-day in scale and resulted in higher casualties. The operation was canceled after Japan surrendered following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Important to post-war occupation, by canceling the conventional invasion and opting for the nuclear option, the U.S. cut out Soviet participation concerning Asian occupation during the post-war occupation period. However, the Soviets would continue to extend their influence throughout parts of Asia, most notably North Korea.

their government but, instead, fall under the authoritarian influence of Soviet communism, creating the Soviet Bloc. Amid this distrust, a lack of commonality (with Germany defeated) added to the tension building between the Soviet Union and the Western powers, contributing to an expansion of their bipolar spheres of influence.

Following the end of World War II, American foreign policy took on an enlarged role as the U.S. emerged as one of two superpowers. The war had decimated continental Europe, leaving most of those involved bankrupt and in desperate need of rebuilding residential, business, and industrial infrastructure. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were the only two nations capable of influencing the restoration of Europe. Each superpowers thought that their ideologies and governance could work anywhere in the world—a faulty assumption that was later hard learned by both countries in the Middle East and other regions.¹⁶ Concerning the limitation in similarities between these two countries, John Lewis Gaddis—Professor of History at Yale University—explains: “Both the United States and the Soviet Union had been born in revolution. Both embraced ideologies with global aspirations: what worked at home, their leaders assumed, would also do so for the rest of the world.”¹⁷ Yet, Gaddis concludes that “[t]he differences, as any [outside] observer could have quickly pointed out, were much greater.”¹⁸ In each country’s revolutions there existed vast contrasts.

America’s revolution was rooted in distrust toward centralized authority and the belief that authority needed to be constrained in order to preserve life and liberty. A constitution that

¹⁶ For more information on the global consequences of the Cold War, see Carole K. Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017) and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

¹⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

limited power prevailed in America. While in Russia, the Bolshevik Revolution imposed central authority and “accelerate[d] history in 1917 by . . . imposing Marxism” upon an already failing state.¹⁹ Under Vladimir Lenin, there would be no gradual transition from socialism to capitalism. Lenin embraced authoritarianism as a means to achieve a communist state. In consequence, by 1945 the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin had become “the most authoritarian society anywhere on the face of the earth.”²⁰ This was far from the communist utopia envisioned by millions of Marxists worldwide throughout the late nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries.

In more recent scholarship, Odd Arne Westad—Professor of History at Harvard University—provides an analysis of why a capitalist United States remained the dominant power during the Cold War. According to Westad, the economic power of America rested in a few key ingredients that had not been replicated with as much success anywhere else in the modern industrial world.

Part of the US success was how its massive economic power intersected with the daily lives of American citizens. Other rising powers in history had seen their rise mainly benefit the elites, while ordinary people had to be satisfied with the scraps left at the table of empire. The United States changed all that. Its economic rise created a domestic consumer society that everyone could aspire to take part in . . . it was about transformation, a new beginning in a country where resources and ideas fertilized each other through their abundance.²¹

Democracy, capitalism, and the industrial revolution might have begun in Europe, but it was in America where innovation and democratization of society and politics had advanced rapidly since the enlightenment of the eighteenth century. With such dynamically adverse economic and

¹⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 8.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 20.

political differences between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, international issues were bound to flare up.

A rivalry was inevitable. The Soviets and the Americans represented opposing ideologies. The Soviets' efforts to bring other countries into the fold of communism with a focus on collective values that glorified the state over the individual contrasted the goals of individualism and economic freedom expressed by the United States and most of the Western world.²² A rivalry that began decades prior to the Cold War, Carole K. Fink—Professor of History Emeritus at the Ohio State University—posits that the ideological clash between America and the Soviet Union emerged during the Revolution of 1917. The rift only widened following the end of World War II.

The ideological chasm separating the USSR from the capitalist world was substantial. The Cold War began as a messianic contest. One side [Soviet] presented itself as a regime dedicated to removing economic and political exploitation and ushering in an era of international peace and brotherhood. The other side [U.S.] presented itself as dedicated to individual freedom, political democracy, and unfettered national and international markets. And both sides claimed that the other was a menace to their security and way of life.²³

Capitalists and communists equally approached their ideologies as dogma and with religious fervor. And in many ways, as Fink suggests, both ideological groups were missionaries.

While many historians have dissected the moral and ethical differences, Ronald Reagan in a 1964 speech for Barry Goldwater captured how the ideological rivalry between American

²² Carole K. Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017), 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

capitalism and Soviet communism manifested in political and social discourse throughout America.

We [Americans] cannot buy our security, our freedom from the threat of the bomb by committing an immortality so great as saying to a billion human beings now enslaved behind the Iron Curtain, "Give up your dreams of freedom because to save our own skins, we're willing to make a deal with your slave masters." . . . Admittedly, there's a risk in any course we follow other than this, but every lesson of history tells us that the greater risk lies in appeasement . . . and it gives no choice between peace and war, only between fight or surrender. If we continue to accommodate, continue to back and retreat, eventually we have to face the final demand, the ultimatum. . . and someday when the time comes to deliver the final ultimatum, our surrender will be voluntary, because by that time we will have been weakened from within spiritually, morally, and economically. [Nikita Khrushchev] believes this because from our side he's heard voices pleading for "peace at any price" or "better Red than dead," or as one commentator put it, he'd rather "live on his knees than die on his feet." And therein lies the road to war, because those voices don't speak for the rest of us.²⁴

Reagan's rhetoric is evangelical and political, reflecting the perspectives of millions of Americans across the country and appealing both to the religious and nonreligious. With the zeal of a Christian missionary desiring to save the world from eternal damnation, Reagan condemned those Americans who planted the seeds of doubt that the American way (democracy, capitalism, individuality, Judeo-Christian values, and freedom) was either inferior to Soviet communism or simply not worth preserving if it meant avoiding hard times. Just as those who share a common religious faith, Americans would need to endure the Cold War united in mission and values. This theme would dominate political and religious rhetoric throughout the era and would be best exemplified by Reagan and his administration during the late Cold War. Yet this was not unique to Reagan or any other politician. As will be explored in the following section, prominent

²⁴ Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing Speech," October 27, 1964

religious figures, such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, would define the Cold War through religious rhetoric and prophetic warnings.

Cold War Geopolitics and Apocalypse Prophets

In March 1947, President Harry S. Truman announced before Congress that it was the duty of the United States “to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”²⁵ What Truman meant by outside pressures was clear to everyone in Congress. The Soviet Union sought to expand its influence beyond its established borders into war torn Europe. What followed became known as the Truman Doctrine, a commitment to monetarily support nations threatened by Soviet communism. While it only specifically mentioned Greece and Turkey, it set a forty-year precedent for American foreign policy that would expand beyond Europe into the Middle East, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and South America.

For those listening with prophecy in mind, they might have been less drawn to the financial commitments to counter communism and more troubled by Truman’s analysis of current events. “The world is not static, and the status quo is not sacred . . . If Greece should fall . . . [then] confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East . . . [and] will be far reaching to the West as well as the East.”²⁶ Associate Professor of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin and former senior director for strategic planning on the National Security Council, William Inboden asserted that “the containment doctrine first articulated by George Kennan emerged as the dominant paradigm governing the United States’

²⁵ Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey,” March 12, 1947, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 178.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

role in the world.”²⁷ Inboden also concluded that for Truman, the necessity to contain communism was as much a religious mission as it was a foreign policy. It was a battle between God and atheism.²⁸ The first test of post-war peace and Truman’s commitment to stall the Soviet’s ability to dictate Cold War terms occurred in mid-June 1948.

Years after the Berlin Blockade incident, Nikita Khrushchev admitted that for the Soviet Union, Berlin was “the testicles of the West” and every time Moscow wanted to make the West scream, the Soviets squeezed on Berlin.²⁹ Those first signs of pressure manifested when Joseph Stalin cut off all transportation routes from the West to East Berlin. Gaddis admits that the historical record is inconclusive as to Stalin’s motivations for cutting off East Berlin from the West. In *The Cold War: A New History*, Gaddis proposes that Stalin either wanted to create conditions that would have removed the American, French, and British from West Berlin or had hoped to simply slow down the West’s progress in establishing a stable West Berlin.³⁰ In response to the blockade, American and British airmen delivered a steady supply of foodstuff and other necessities with the goal of waiting out the Soviets. World powers recognized that the crisis would test the ability of the West to maintain peace. Despite the applied pressure, Truman refused to use the military to unblock access to East Berlin, and Stalin refused to shoot down British and American aircraft. Washington and Moscow’s hesitation to use force was based on the fear that war could break out—and World War III was something both sides wanted to avoid.

²⁷ William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 106.

²⁸ Ibid., 107.

²⁹ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 407.

³⁰ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 33.

After nearly a year, the blockade ended and “accomplished nothing” other than Berlin becoming “an important intelligence site for both sides.”³¹ But the conflict did accomplish one thing, it provided support for those building a new paradigm for the inevitable apocalypse.

While US-Soviet relations broke down further during the Berlin Blockade, China found a victor in its twenty-two-year civil war. The People’s Republic of China defeated Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces, establishing China as the first Asian country to become communist under the military dictatorship of Mao Zedong. The United States had backed the Nationalists and received a devastating blow when the communists declared victory in 1949. At home, many Americans blamed the Truman administration for not doing enough to prevent the fall of Chiang’s government and exile to Formosa (Taiwan). According to Fink, “From Washington’s perspective, the Soviets had greatly expanded their power and now threatened Japan and Southeast Asia.”³² Once again wanting to avoid igniting another world war by coming into direct conflict with not only Mao’s forces but also potentially the Soviet Union, a year prior to the communist victory the Truman Administration had “abandoned its wartime ally [Chiang Kai-shek]” to avoid “direct US military intervention.”³³ Yet it would only take a year for the United Nations, led by General Douglas MacArthur, to become entangled in Korea’s civil war.

In 1950, the United States and the Soviet Union were the only countries with nuclear capabilities. By June, conventional war broke out on the Korean peninsula between the southern peninsula’s Republic of Korea—backed by the United States and the United Nations—and the northern peninsula’s Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which was created under the

³¹ Fink, *Cold War*, 70-71.

³² *Ibid.*, 70-75.

³³ Westad, *The Cold War*, 142.

guidance of the Soviets.³⁴ Gaddis argues that although “Stalin’s role in all of this was ambiguous,” it was in fact Stalin who “started the Korean War by authorizing the North Korean invasion” beyond the 38th Parallel.³⁵ As war intensified with gains and losses made by the United Nation forces, General Douglas MacArthur considered using the atomic bomb to either cut off Chinese military support, or, at minimum, disrupt Chinese supply lines into North Korea by creating fallout zones. At the time of MacArthur’s request, the United States possessed 369 atomic bombs while the Soviet Union held, at most, five functioning nuclear bombs.³⁶ The possibility of another global war, especially one starting rather than ending with nukes, was unfathomable to Europeans as it would bring the Soviets into the conflict on the opposing side, endangering all Western Europe. Europe was in no condition for a third world war.

At home, Americans reaction to the events in Berlin, China, and Korea did not go unnoticed. Central to dispensationalist reactions was the nuke and its new role in the end of the world—and no other evangelical figure captured more eyes and ears than Billy Graham. Professor of Sociology at Rice University, William Martin affirmed in his 1991 biography of Graham that throughout the early Cold War period the evangelist “had been deeply impressed with dispensationalist premillennialism and its detailed scenarios of the course human history was taking.”³⁷ Graham became a devoted Christian while still a teenager and was eager to attend seminary after high school, quickly finding his calling while at Florida Bible Institute—even

³⁴ While Britain participated in the Manhattan Project and continued researching into the 1950s, the United States had limited much of its nuclear program resulting in Britain not conducting their first nuclear test until 1952. In addition, China would not have a successful nuclear program until the 1960s.

³⁵ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁷ Martin Williams, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1991), 578.

paddling out to a “little island where [he] could address all creatures great and small, from

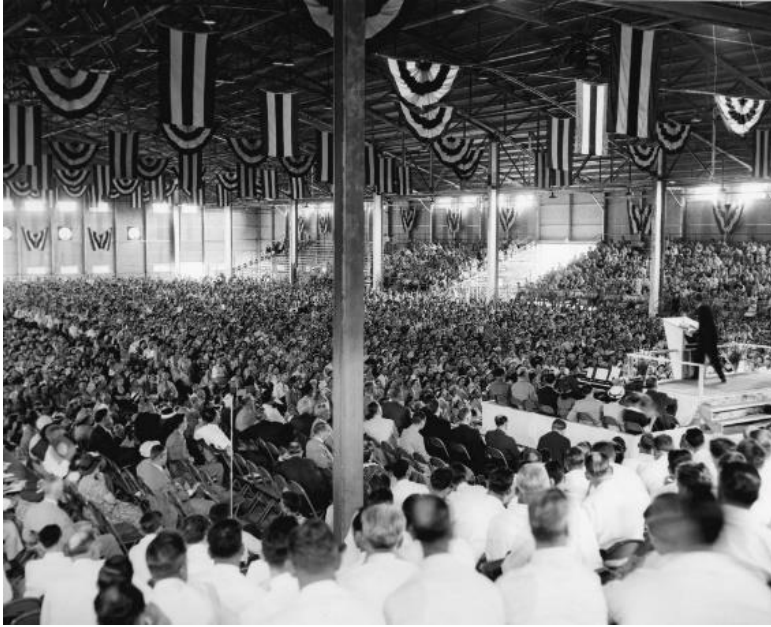


Figure 3. “Billy Graham preaching during his first crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina,” the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1947.

alligators to birds,” perfecting his gift of oration.³⁸ After finishing his theology degree, Graham transferred to Wheaton College to receive a liberal arts degree so that he could then pursue a professional degree.³⁹ After college and pastoring short-term at several churches, Graham launched *Songs in the Night* out of The Village Church of West Springs,

Illinois. The religious program was Graham’s initiation into the power of radio (and later television) to grow a ministry.

Billy Graham’s ministry coincided with rising tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Six months after Truman’s declaration before Congress, Graham began the first of hundreds of religious revivals themed as crusades. While his crusades started in Grand Rapids, Michigan, it was in his hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina that Graham first “[warned] against communism, a theme that would occupy a major place in his preaching over the next

³⁸ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 49.

³⁹ Billy Graham’s career quickly took off after completing an anthropology degree at Wheaton College, preventing him from pursuing a higher degree. Graham would receive an honorary doctorate in 1954 from Baylor University. Interestingly, Graham stated in his biography that he chose anthropology not just because of its creationist professor nor the degree’s reputations for being the easiest to earn, but because he believed that understanding other cultures would help him become more empathetic toward other cultures if he served on the mission field. See Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 66-67.

decade.”⁴⁰ During that inaugural campaign of what would become the staple of Graham’s ministry, the minister knew much of what was going on in war-torn Europe through his connections with Youth For Christ colleagues. Graham warned:

Communism is creeping inexorably into these destitute lands; into war-torn China, into restless South America, and unless the Christian religion rescues these nations from the clutch of the unbelieving, America will stand alone and isolated in the world. You Should see Europe. It’s terrible. There are Communists everywhere. Here, too, for that matter.⁴¹

By the second year of his campaign, the evangelist had developed an effective rhetoric that spoke to American fears of not only communism but a nuclear-ready Soviet Union. Once Graham learned of the Soviet’s successful nuclear test, the evangelist declared:

An arms race, unprecedented in the history of the world, is driving us madly toward destruction! Western culture and its fruits had its foundation in the Bible, the Word of God, and in the revivals of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Communism, on the other hand, has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion. Communism is not only an economic interpretation of life—Communism is a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.⁴²

Speaking to the current events of the early Cold War—especially communism and nuclear armament—Billy Graham incorporated the warnings of the prophets that the end of days would be filled with atheism and sinful living. If crime and an increasingly sinful American culture were not evidence enough to convince his listeners, then the plight of those living under communism would show that godlessness was growing.

⁴⁰ Williams, *A Prophet with Honor*, 101.

⁴¹ “Communism is Creeping,” *The Charlotte Observer*, November 23, 1947.

⁴² Williams, *A Prophet with Honor*, 115.

Church was not the only place Americans would hear about the wickedness of communism, dangers of nuclear annihilation, and the end of the world as a result of the Cold War and Atomic Age. In March 1948, *Time* magazine observed that “The most useful activity possible for men and nations in 1948 was the prevention of World War III.”⁴³ Drawing the same conclusions as Billy Graham and most U.S. politicians, *Time* emphasized that communism was the greatest threat to Europe’s economic and social recovery. The threat extended beyond governments and coupled tightly to an expanding general interest in end-times prophecy. Within twenty years from Graham’s first crusade, Associate Professor of History at Purdue University and former Fellow at Princeton University’s Center for the Study of Religion, Darren Dochuk, concludes:

[A] majority of Americans believed in Christ’s impending reappearance, with many subscribing to premillennialism, whose assumptions about earth’s cataclysmic end seemed to become more popular with each new cycle of war in the Middle East. Wanting to help Israel survive until prophecy could be fulfilled, and keen on converting its people before Armageddon, many Christians flocked to the Jewish nation with a sense that they were bearing witness to the last days.⁴⁴

Dochuk then highlights American fascination with the Jews and the extent in which millions of Americans had placed the nation of Israel in a prominent position within evangelical Christianity. The beliefs of dispensationalists like Lewis Way, J. N. Darby, C. I. Scofield, and Frank Norris became widely accepted during the early Cold War.⁴⁵ Dochuk explains, “Even while they [evangelicals] toured the Holy Land in record numbers, they began studying it with

⁴³ “The Nations: The Chances of World War III,” *Time*, March 15, 1948.

⁴⁴ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 366.

⁴⁵ See chapter two for more information on the growth of premillennialism dispensationalism in America and the role that these religious leaders played in popularizing the eschatology.

renewed seriousness in the United States.”⁴⁶ The foundation of these Bible studies was the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which saw numerous reprints and updated edition in 1967. In addition to the threat of worldwide communism and the nuclear arms race, American premillennialists became increasingly obsessed with the newly established nation of Israel and the role the Jews would play in the ever-coming end of days.

William Blackstone’s *Blackstone Memorial* might not have achieved its goal in his lifetime, but the seeds of his labor and countless other Christian Zionists were not sown in vain.⁴⁷ The road to a Jewish nation had been paved not only by Christian Zionists who understood the importance of the Jews’ return to the Holy Land, but also from Zionists within Judaism. “[T]here was a revival of nationalism among the dispersed Jews of Europe” that originated in the 1890s and was built upon leadership within the Jewish community that had focused on the “colonization of Palestine.”⁴⁸ Following World War II and the devastating aftermath of the Holocaust, serious discussion emerged surrounding the plight of the Jews in Europe.

With support from the United Nations, Israel declared its independence within the Palestinian territory in May 1948. Immediately upon inception, the United States recognized Israel as a sovereign country. Despite immediate conflict with the surrounding Arab nations, Israel was able to stave off repeated invasions. The United Nations brokered several cease-fires throughout Israel’s first year, the nascent nation’s first war—which Israel won—set a precedent

⁴⁶ Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 366.

⁴⁷ William Blackstone, Christian Zionism, and the *Blackstone Memorial* were discussed in chapter two under the “Nineteenth Century” section. On the seventy-fifth anniversary of Blackstone’s original plea to the Harrison administration to advance the cause of Zionism, the nation of Israel dedicated a forest in honor of his lifelong work on behalf of the Jewish people.

⁴⁸ Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983), 131.

for the rest of the twentieth century and became a major focal point for international foreign policy. For premillennial dispensationalists though, the significance of the creation Israel and its new role on the world stage were about more than just trying to make right historical wrongs. In *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, Timothy P. Weber contends:

The founding of the state of Israel in 1948 gave American premillennialists the reference point that they had been waiting for. The existence of Israel revitalized premillennialism and gave it, at least in its own eyes, undeniable credibility. More than any other event in the twentieth century, the rebirth of Israel meant that the prophetic clock was winding down, that premillennialists must press home their gospel of the near approach of the second coming and the end of the age. In short, since the late 1940s, premillennialists have achieved their greatest exposure and their widest hearing.⁴⁹

Reflecting on the importance of the Jewish nation to his foreign policy agenda and the role this significant moment played in Biblical history for millions of evangelicals in the United States, Truman “worried that not recognizing Israel would open it up for Soviet influence and cost him votes in the presidential election in the fall.”⁵⁰ A Baptist but not religiously akin to dispensationalism or Christian Zionism, Truman’s foreign policy and political viability, not his personal religious views, were heavily influenced by these religious movements. According to Gary Scott Smith’s assessment of the thirty-third president, “Truman . . . denounced communist atheism, and exuded postmillennial optimism that humans, empowered by God, could create a better world.”⁵¹ A democrat and the successor of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s domestic and foreign policies, Truman viewed the future much differently from the expanding religious conservative wing of American politics.

⁴⁹ Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 204.

⁵⁰ Westad, *The Cold War*, 154.

⁵¹ Gary Scott Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office: The Religious Lives of American Presidents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 259.

Rhetoric concerning communism and Armageddon were not the proprietorship of dispensationalists alone, the Religious Right would also incorporate the goals of evangelicals with those of a growing conservative, religious group that would gain political influence throughout the 1960s and 1970s through the activism and the political careers of individuals like William F. Buckley, Jr. and Barry Goldwater, culminating in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan.⁵² During this early Cold War period, other significant religious leaders emerged following Billy Graham's popularity and proven formula to draw millions, contributing to America's Fourth Great Awakening. This movement cemented Cold War politics permanently within Biblical prophecy throughout the era. Of these, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others serve as examples of what thousands of dispensationalist ministers throughout America preached routinely. By the 1980s, televangelists reached virtually every home in America and millions more worldwide.⁵³

Although Billy Graham was not the first to prove that revivals, outreach campaigns, radio, and television were effective in growing a ministry, Graham did provide a modernized blueprint for others to follow.⁵⁴ Graham's evangelistic crusades and radio program *Hour of Decision* inspired those entering the ministry in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955, Jerry Falwell founded Thomas Road Baptist Church and soon after created *The Old-Time Gospel Hour*. After serving in the Korean War as a U.S. Marine, completing a law degree at Yale, and earning a Master of Divinity degree from New York Theological Seminary, Pat Robertson founded the

⁵² The emergence of the Religious Right, Moral Majority, Christian Coalition, and the rise of American conservatism and its relationship with evangelicalism are explored in chapter five.

⁵³ Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 11-13.

⁵⁴ Billy Graham drew inspiration from earlier evangelists and their urban campaigns across America, such as Dwight L. Moody and William "Billy" Sunday.

Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in 1960.⁵⁵ Robertson's media company would go on to produce one of the longest running religious programs, *The 700 Club*, and capture the talents of Jim Bakker—who later established his own network and *The PTL Club*, a late-night style Christian talk show. Known for their nontraditional approach to ministry, Jim Bakker and his wife, Tammy Faye, met while attending seminary and entered the ministry together as cohosts on many of their programs.

And from the backwoods of Louisiana, Jimmy Swaggart took the Pentecostal message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and his talent for southern gospel music across the South. Swaggart gained local popularity from his music airing on religious radio programs, which grew his small Baton Rouge church throughout the 1960s. After founding his own radio broadcast station and breaking into television with the weekly program *Camp Meeting Hour*, Swaggart gained national attention on par with Falwell, Robertson, and Bakker. Like Graham, many of America's leading religious figures grew in popularity as the rise in televangelism became some of the most watched television programming with forty percent of Americans watching religious programs by the height of the Cold War.⁵⁶

Proclaiming that a nuclear apocalypse was looming became the central theme for premillennial dispensationalists. Talks of foreign threats in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East stoked the flames that kept the dreadful thoughts of nuclear annihilation burning hot. Declared from pulpits and from concert-sized stages in sports stadiums, preached over the airways via radio and television, and published in countless periodicals and books, the doctrines

⁵⁵ For more information on the creation of CBN, see *The CBN Story*, The Christian Broadcast Network, <https://secure.cbn.com/partners/video/premiumcontent/cbn/thecbnstory>.

⁵⁶ Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 11.

of Armageddon became a foundation for understanding the Atomic Age and explaining the decline in Western values in America throughout the Cold War. As explored in the previous chapter, premillennial dispensationalists believe that the sixth bowl of God's wrath was ready to be poured out upon humanity. In his iconic message at the height of the Cold War, Graham emphasized that the road to Armageddon would be similar to the road of destruction that led to Sodom's annihilation. Speaking about the end of days, Graham reminded the attendees of his crusade at Memorial Stadium (Camden Yards) that Armageddon "is west of the Jordan between Galilee and Samaria . . . The Bible teaches that the last, greatest war of history would be fought in . . . the Middle East."⁵⁷ Referencing Jesus' teachings in Luke 16, Graham explained:

Jesus outlines the problems of Sodom as the signs of the time that are going to take place just before [Jesus] returns. They had false security—and today, the false security that we have in America, it's unbelievable to me. We've set beside these two great oceans for so long that we think it could never happen here. And yet, bombs are poised at this moment with missiles that can deliver to any point in this country devastating destruction. And yet we seem to be unconcerned about it. [Jesus] talked about the economic strength of Sodom . . . [Jesus] talked about the military strength [of Sodom] . . . If you want to be saved as a nation, seek the Lord. You're not going to find it in military strength and power alone. That may be important, because I am not a pacifist, and I do not believe in unilateral disarmament. But I do believe that we have a factor in history now that's never been there before: the ability to destroy the whole human race in one great blast.⁵⁸

Graham left little room for individual interpretations of what Jesus' warnings meant for America. Unless God intervened, a nuclear holocaust awaited an increasingly sinful nation and only those who repented and believed the Gospel would be spared by means of a worldwide rapture of believers, warning more than ten thousand attendees at Nashville's Dudley Field that "there's coming a time when Jesus Christ is coming back and he's going to snatch away . . . those that are

⁵⁷ Billy Graham, Baltimore, MD, 1985, accessed from Our Only Hope, "Billy Graham—Road to Armageddon," *YouTube* video, 17:50 to 18:14, February 20, 2021, https://youtu.be/PRt_Q1k2AaM. Baltimore, MD. 1985.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18:55 to 22:09.

alive and remain [are] going to meet the Lord in the air.”⁵⁹ The Rapture and the coming apocalypse were just future historical events on the road to Armageddon. Along the road though, immorality and cultural decay would progressively worsen. And no other evangelical brought more attention to the moral decay of American culture and politics than Jerry Falwell.

The New York Times provided one of the best summations of Falwell impact on American culture and politics, describing him shortly after his passing in 2007 as a

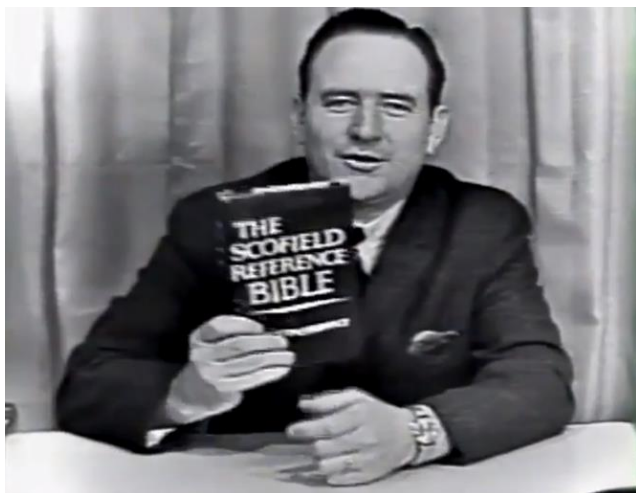


Figure 4. “Jerry Falwell promoting Scofield Reference Bible,” Thomas Roads Baptist Church, *The Old-Time Gospel Hour*, 1967.

“fundamentalist preacher who founded the Moral Majority and brought the language and passion of religious conservatives into the hurly-burly of American politics.”⁶⁰

Undoubtedly one of the most controversial religious and political religious figures by the late 1970s, Falwell began his ministry avoiding politics and focused primarily on

preaching the Gospel and warning his church members and millions more through his televised program *The Old-Time Gospel Hour* about the coming apocalypse. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Falwell took a note out of Graham’s playbook and stayed out of politics.⁶¹ Advocating for

⁵⁹ Billy Graham, Nashville, TN, 1979, accessed from Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, “Timeless Truth—Snatched Away,” *YouTube* video, 0:14 to 0:30, March 24, 2009, <https://youtu.be/a-0Iqy5G2lQ>.

⁶⁰ Peter Appleborne, “Jerry Falwell, Moral Majority Founder, Dies at 73,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 2017.

⁶¹ Until 1965, Jerry Falwell expressed regret for embracing a definition of separation of church and state that emphasized religious leaders not advocating for political policies. As domestic policies shifted away from conservative values, Falwell became increasingly vocal in American politics through his religious programming and media throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s, culminating in the establishment of the Moral Majority in 1979. In contrast, Billy Graham would later regret breaking his silence regarding political candidates with his vocal support of Richard Nixon in 1960.

political policies and declaring the results of immoral policies dangerous to the moral health of America are two different approaches for religious leaders to take. It was common for fundamentalist ministers to declare the ungodliness of domestic policies relating to issues such as abortion, but many stopped short of endorsing political figures and advocating for policies.

In *Nuclear War and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ*, Falwell warned of an inevitable nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Quoting 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV), Falwell interpreted the events in the epistle through the lens of the Cold War.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you be in lives of holiness and godliness waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

According to Falwell and other Armageddonists, the Bible appeared to describe nuclear destruction as the means God would employ to destroy the earth.⁶² But the earth would not be completely destroyed prior to the establishment of the New Heaven and New Earth at the end of human history. As previously explored in chapter two, Timothy Beal described the prophetic events of Revelation as more of a “edge of the world” occurrence rather than an “end of the world” finale.⁶³ Printed on the first page of *The New York Times*, one road sign pointing toward Armageddon read “U.S. Reports Soviet Flying Many Troops To Afghan Conflict,” just three

⁶² Jerry Falwell, *Nuclear War and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ* (Lynchburg, VA: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1983), 4-5.

⁶³ See chapter two “Origins” for more information concerning Timothy Beals arguments regarding the role of Armageddon in human history.

days after the official start of the Soviet-Afghan War.⁶⁴ Communism was alive and well in the Middle East.

As was common with most dispensationalists during the Cold War, communism played the leading role as the greatest threat not only to Christianity and but worldwide morality and peace. If America stood as the apex representing morality and opportunity, the Soviet Union's atheistic institution became the antithesis of faith and freedom. Attacking communism through televangelism and print as an economic and political threat to godliness served as a vital fight for Armageddonists. Like Billy Graham's "The Road to Armageddon" crusade at Memorial Stadium, Armageddonists recognized that there were warning signs on the way to apocalypse. Nuclear armament, communism, and troubles in the Middle East were but a few key factors pointing toward the day of the Lord.

Airing from his CBN studio in Virginia, Pat Robertson warned Americans that Israel would play the leading role in securing the Second Coming and the Battle of Armageddon. Explaining Israel's significance, Robertson described the land as "the naval of the earth . . . a place where a child is attached to its mother and God used this as the place where He entered into human history."⁶⁵ Pat Robertson



Figure 5. "Pat Robertson explaining how the nations of the world will move against Israel in the last days," Christian Broadcasting Network, *The 700 Club*, March 1980.

⁶⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Reports Soviet Flying Many Troops to Afghan Conflict," *The New York Times*, December 27, 1979.

⁶⁵ *The 700 Club*, March 28, 1980, accessed from Bacheuer, "Pat Robertson in 1980 Predicting Armageddon for 1982," *YouTube* video, 01:57 to 02:13, September 10, 2011, <https://youtu.be/uDT3krve9iE>.

cautiously prophesized in 1980 on a special edition of *The 700 Club* that he believed 1982 would be the year that Cold War geopolitical tensions would collide in the Middle East as “the United Nations and the nations of the earth . . . move against Israel.”⁶⁶ This global assault against Israel would inevitably result in Armageddon. As had Graham and Falwell, Robertson left no room for his television viewers to interpret which nations would play the leading role in moving against Israel. “Russia, the Bible says, is going to invade.”⁶⁷ Interpreting current events, Robertson argued that no Arab nation, except for Egypt, possessed an army large enough to successfully invade Israel. A year prior to Robertson’s on-air prediction of Armageddon’s approximate date, the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan with the goal of supporting their fledgling, pro-Soviet puppet government.

Communism and the nuclear apocalypse were not the only issues that troubled Pat Robertson about the state of the world. Like Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell, much of Robertson’s ministry focused on identifying and providing remedy for America’s cultural and political ailments. For dispensationalists, the cure for humanity’s problems would not be found in politics alone. The remedy was broadcasted regularly and based on Biblical prophecies that pointed to the Second Coming and the Millennium. In *Answers to 200 of Life’s Most Probing Questions*, Robertson stated:

We will have peace on earth when the Prince of Peace returns. Jesus Christ has told us, and the Bible assures us, that He will come back again. When he comes, several things are going to happen. First, the rebellion of man against God is going to be put down. For a thousand-year period, God will restrain the evil that is in man and will not allow nations to fight one another. When that happens, men will take the tools of war and turn them into the tools of peace. . . With Satan out of the way, and man restrained, there will finally be peace . . . There is no way that a United Nations, a League of Nations, peace treaties, disarmament treaties, or any other human instrument can bring about peace.

⁶⁶ *The 700 Club*, 02:22 to 02:29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 02:54 to 02:59.

Such things mean nothing when one nation desires the land and resources of another. A lasting peace will never be built upon man's efforts, because man is sinful, vicious, and wicked. Until men are changed, and Satan's power is removed, there will not be peace on earth. Until the day comes, all we can do is be strong enough to restrain the evil that is among us. To do anything other than that is utopian and based upon wishful thinking rather than upon reality.⁶⁸

Even if all social and political progress in the world was to steadily march toward destruction in the chaos of the Great Tribulation and the fire of the apocalypse, dispensationalists like Robertson made it clear that it was still the Christian's responsibility to actively promote a common good rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As early as 1960, Robertson had considered a political career and later received the opportunity of a lifetime as he used the popularity and authority garnered among American evangelicals to announce his run for the presidency.⁶⁹ Despite losing the nomination to the sitting Vice President, Pat Robertson's 1988 campaign to gain the Republican nomination proved the extent that Christians were committed to returning America back to its Christian heritage.

Dispensationalists remained interested in national politics and geopolitical affairs throughout the Cold War. While domestic issues such as abortion brought in a wider evangelical audience into the political conversation, the threat of communism and nuclear Armageddon remained the focal point for premillennial dispensationalists like Hal Lindsey. More than any other modern prophecy author, Lindsey's unique approach to eschatology and current events garnered a following that lasted beyond his retirement from public engagements in 2019. The

⁶⁸ Pat Robertson, *Answers to 200 of Life's Most Probing Questions* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 27-28.

⁶⁹ Pat Robertson, *Shout It From the Houseltops* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972), 120.

following section will explore Lindsey's personal background, ministry experiences, and provide an analysis of Lindsey's key prophetic teachings found in his bestselling prophecy books.

Hal Lindsey and *The Late Great Planet Earth*



Figure 6. “Back Cover,” Bantam Books, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, 1981.

“We are the generation the prophets were talking about! We have witnessed Biblical prophecies come true,” Harold Lindsey proclaimed in bold lettering on the back cover of over a million mass market paperbacks of *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Lindsey's non-fiction prophecy books could be found near the grocery store checkout counter alongside the latest Stephen King novel. By 1983, Lindsey could claim more than 18 million copies of his flagship work *The Late Great Planet Earth* being sold with 7.5 million of copies having been sold in the 1970s, making the book the bestselling nonfiction of the 1970s.⁷⁰ By the end of the

Cold War, Lindsey's seminal work sold more than twenty-eight million copies in fifty-two languages.⁷¹ According to the University of Oregon apocalyptic studies researcher Daniel Wójcik, Lindsey is “the most influential prophecy interpreter [of] the twentieth century.”⁷² And

⁷⁰ Ray Walters, “Ten Years of Best Sellers,” *The New York Times*. December 30, 1979.

⁷¹ Daniel Wójcik, *The End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

Matthew Avery Sutton, author of *American Apocalypse*, described “the heavily mustachioed Hal Lindsey” as the most significant evangelical of the 1970s who “tapped into evangelicals’ fascination with Armageddon.”⁷³ Lindsey’s international success can be attributed to a combination of factors. A Christian counterculture had emerged in America that not only rejected the mundane, daily lives of the “greatest generation” but also loathed the corruption of government and business (Vietnam, Watergate, Wall Street, etc.), geopolitical politics and economics (communism and gas shortages), and the growing material culture of the 1970s and 1980s.

Building on the counterculture leanings of the Jesus Movement, *The Late Great Planet Earth* became a guidebook for millions of Americans to interpret present-day problems through a Biblical paradigm. Dispensationalists and the millions of religious seekers across America shared the same disillusionment with American society as the Beatniks and their successors, the hippies. At the center of both groups’ counterculture worldview—millions were drawn to Lindsey’s prophecies—rested a cynicism toward social and political progress. While the hippies embraced sex, drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll along with a communal lifestyle, the Jesus People embraced a New Testament style Christianity that included a simplified, often communal, lifestyle with a focus on understanding God’s will, experiencing the supernatural, and embracing the outcasts of American society.⁷⁴ The movement that began in California under Charismatic figures like Chuck Smith, Greg Laurie, and Lonnie Frisbee also drew the support of Billy Graham and were

⁷³ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 345.

⁷⁴ The Jesus Movement, its adherents often referred to as Jesus People or Jesus Freaks, swept America and Europe in the 1960s and gained popularity throughout the 1970s before dying out in the 1980s due to numerous scandals among prominent members. The movement drew not only evangelicals from diverse backgrounds but also Catholics. See chapter four for more information on this movement and the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon on America’s Christian counterculture.

critical to the growth of the Campus Crusade for Christ, which launched the popularity of Hal Lindsey as one of its notable speakers prior to his success as an author. This topic is further explored in chapter four.⁷⁵

In this context, Hal Lindsey directed his prophetic interpretations toward those whose “hopes, ambitions, and plans [were] permeated with the subconscious fear that perhaps there will be no future at all for mankind.”⁷⁶ Despite Armageddon and the unavoidable truth that things would get worse before the end, Lindsey assured: “[Christians] believe there is a hope for the future, in spite of the way the world looks today. We believe that a person can be given a secure and yet exciting view of his destiny by making an honest investigation of the tested truths of Bible prophecy.”⁷⁷ In *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George M. Marsden described Lindsey as a “tour de force” and “an arch-typical example of fundamentalism in its apolitical mode.” Yet, Lindsey was no stranger to political controversy. Marsden also described Lindsey’s ability to tap into the economic and political insecurities of millions of Americans. “Lindsey predicted that as the end approached, apparently within the generation, the U.S. moral decline would ‘so weaken law and order’ that first the economy and then the military would collapse.”⁷⁸

In *Satan is Alive and Well*, Lindsey described the symptoms of the end times in relation to the failures of governments inability to promote morality and constrain the worse aspects of man’s sinful nature. As the end nears, Satan will “[manipulate] all forms of government for his purposes” and governments will “centralize control in the hands of a few” until a final one-world

⁷⁵ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 343-345.

⁷⁶ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁸ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 308.

government takes control under the rulership of the Antichrist.⁷⁹ Lindsey's mission was not to change the world by changing its institutions but to see people come to Christ and avoid the tragedy that lay ahead along the edge of history. Other fundamentalists, like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, would seek to influence government on behalf of Christianity. Lindsey described his ministry as evangelistic, stating that "God didn't send me to clean the fishbowl, he sent me to fish."⁸⁰ Throughout his works, Lindsey repeatedly applies his prophetic interpretations to the Gospel message.

Born in 1929, Hal Lee Lindsey grew up in Texas as an agnostic. In college, Lindsey majored in business and served in the U.S. Coast Guard during the Korean War before working as a tugboat captain on the Mississippi River. Lindsey converted to Christianity at the age of 26 and was instantly drawn to Biblical prophecy, obsessing over current events and history. Shortly after, he attended seminary at the Dallas Theological Society while John F. Walvoord served as the college's president. Under Walvoord's tutelage, Lindsey became well-versed in premillennial dispensationalism. At the time, Walvoord was one of the most widely read prophecy authors.⁸¹ After finishing seminary with a Master of Theology in New Testament Studies and Early Greek Literature, Lindsey worked for the next eight years for the evangelical ministry Campus Crusade for Christ.⁸²

⁷⁹ Hal Lindsey, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mi. Zondervan. 1972), 64; 96.

⁸⁰ "The Great Cosmic Countdown: Hal Lindsey on the Future," *Eternity*, January 1977, 21.

⁸¹ John F. Walvoord (1910-2002) served as the president of the Dallas Theological Seminary throughout the majority of the Cold War. A prolific prophecy writer, Walvoord authored more than thirty prophecy books, including the bestseller *Armageddon, Oil and the idle East Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) which became an instant bestseller fifteen years after publication with the start of the Persian Gulf War.

⁸² "About the Author," in Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

Throughout the 1960s, Lindsey served as “a missionary for the Campus Crusade for Christ in California, proselytizing [at] UCLA . . . and on other campuses,” before overseeing “the campus ministry at UCLA.”⁸³ While preaching on the college campuses, Lindsey created a series of Biblical prophecy lectures that became immensely popular, drawing large crowds and earning Lindsey a following of young Christians eager for prophecy. By 1970, Lindsey—with the help of collaborator Carole C. Carlson—published *The Late Great Planet Earth* through Christian publisher Zondervan. The book was an instant bestseller, skyrocketing Lindsey to national and international fame by the end of the decade.

An antagonistic *The New York Times* expressed its opinion concerning Lindsey selling over 1.6 million copies in 1973, earning his book a mention in the newspaper’s list of “Golden Millions,” alongside works such as Erich von Daniken’s *Chariot of the Gods?*. The article depicted Lindsey’s work as “bargain-basement eschatology based on Biblical prophecies. The end of the world is nigh—a Middle Eastern Armageddon—so prepare to meet thy God.” Critical reception was met as quickly as praise. One journalist noted the resurgence of Bible prophecy because of *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Since the earliest days of the Christian Church, Christians have periodically speculated that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. . . Now, despite the record of past prophets, the idea is having a major revival. . . Chief guru of the new movement is Hal Lindsey . . . Why the upsurge in interest in prophecy at this time? Some see it as a natural by-product of the current revival of fundamentalists religion. Others see it as a response to a general mood of frustration in American society. . . Others see the phenomenon as related to the new interest in astrology and the occult—areas where forces external to man and knowledge of the future also play an import role.⁸⁴

⁸³ Wójcik, *The End of the World as We Know It*, 38.

⁸⁴ Edward B. Fiske, “Second Coming: There Are Those Who Think It Is Imminent,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 1972.

Perhaps the greatest critique of Lindsey's work exists in his shared folly with Cotton Mather, William Miller, Ellen White, and Charles Russell: the folly of predicting the exact date for the return of Jesus Christ. While cautious—as Pat Robertson was when he predicted that Armageddon's start date would be 1982—Hal Lindsey believed, as Sutton phrased: “The church was now on the clock. Lindsey expected the rapture to happen by 1988.”⁸⁵

To understand why millions of people worldwide accepted Lindsey as an authority on Bible prophecy and current events—even embracing his belief that the Rapture would occur in the late 1980s—it is necessary to provide a proper assessment of Lindsey's prophecy teachings found throughout his publications during the late Cold War. In the following section, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *There's a New World Coming*, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, and *The Rapture* will be analyzed to better understand Lindsey's interpretation of key Biblical prophecies and how they related to the Cold War era. The section contains Lindsey's prophetic interpretations of the doctrines of Armageddon, including the Rapture, Great Tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon, the Second Coming, and Millennial Kingdom. Other topics, such as the Antichrist, one-world government and economy, Mark of the Beast, and end-time plagues are discussed in chapter four alongside the doctrine of Armageddon's influence on American culture.

Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Teachings

In her harsh criticism of the increasing influence of Armageddonists in American politics throughout the late Cold War, Grace Halsell—former Washington reporter for the *Houston Post* and speech writer for Lyndon B. Johnson—reported that Ronald Reagan had read *The Late*

⁸⁵ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 346.

Great Planet Earth (LGPE). This caused her, and those who opposed Reagan’s foreign policies, to suspect that it was possible Reagan “[believed] God had foreordained that we—especially those of us living in the present generation [1980s]—must destroy Planet Earth” to bring about the Second Coming.⁸⁶ While her research mostly detailed foreign policies concerns tied to evangelical influence during Reagan’s first administration, her work presented an undeniable truth: the fears expressed by those who opposed Reagan’s rollback and defense strategies could be traced back to their perceived notion that Reagan and his administration had embraced Hal Lindsey’s treatise. While Halsell provided a defensible argument, few historians have substantiated her claim that Lindsey’s dispensationalist views impacted foreign policy directly—a topic explored further in chapter five.

According to Matthew Avery Sutton’s analysis of Lindsey’s political influence, “The success of the book opened many doors for Lindsey, so did consulting for both the Pentagon and the Israeli government, giving him established cachet.”⁸⁷ Sutton also emphasizes perhaps the most divisive aspect of Lindsey’s views for those opposed to conservative politics: “It also gave him a platform for expressing his political views. Like so many other premillennialists, Lindsey was (and is) a staunch conservative.”⁸⁸ As will be discussed in this section, premillennial dispensationalism was more than just an eschatological theology attached to millions of Christians’ religious belief. It was also an undeniably effective ideological lens for millions of Americans and their elected leaders to interpret current events and effect policy. While much of

⁸⁶ Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 5.

⁸⁷ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 346.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

the political influence of the doctrine of Armageddon remains the focus of chapter five, the eschatological foundations for those beliefs are discussed in this section.

What was traditionally received in a church pew or under a revival tent became a popular national message reaching college campuses, sports stadiums, and television sets by the 1960s. Interest in prophecy resurged in postwar America and played a larger, more political role that aligned closer with the premillennialist view that *it only gets worse from here* than the postmillennialist utopian aspirations of America's previous spiritual awakenings. As discussed earlier in this chapter, prophecy played a prominent role in the ministries of Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others. By the height of the Cold War, end-times prophecy was not only on the minds of Christians and ministers but also discussed among many nonreligious people and American politicians. To understand Halsell's concerns and the resurgence and widescale appeal of Biblical prophecy throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it is necessary to recognize what Lindsey taught concerning the doctrines of Armageddon and their relationship with Cold War geopolitics.

The foundation of Hal Lindsey's teachings is found in *The Late Great Planet Earth* and its sequels: *There's a New World Coming*, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, and *The Rapture*.⁸⁹ Each successive work offers updated prophetic interpretations, making corrections where necessary. Lindsey sets his prophetic framework apart from his predecessors by claiming previous prophecy authors never discovered the key to unlocking the end-times timeline. At the nexus of Lindsey's thesis is the nation of Israel. It was Israel's return to the Holy Land in 1948

⁸⁹ *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* is also considered a sequel to Lindsey's *LGPE*, but the work focuses less on end time events and more on Satan's role in human history. While mentioned briefly in this chapter, *Satan is Alive and Well* is discussed more in chapters four and five.

that provided the interpretive key.⁹⁰ In *LGPE*, Lindsey scolds those who came before him, explaining that “in recent years [they] tried to fit the events of World War I and II [into] the prophetic signs” and “[their] failure discredited prophecy.”⁹¹ Here, Lindsey clearly addresses various groups, but most notably Charles Russell’s (*Watch Tower*) predictions that Armageddon would begin in 1914. Then referring to older religious sects like the Millerites, Lindsey asserts, “The people who have fled to the mountains to await the end of the world hadn’t had the faintest idea about the truths of Bible prophecy.”⁹² In other words, they did not possess knowledge of the critical role of Israel’s rebirth as a nation. Lindsey concludes: “The one event which many Bible students in the past overlooked was this paramount prophetic sign: Israel had to be a nation again in the land of its forefathers.”⁹³

Lindsey provides three key moments in Israel’s past, present, and future history that serve as way markers for determining the date of the Rapture, the start of the Great Tribulation, and every event to follow leading to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and beyond. Two critical road signs pointing toward Armageddon had already appeared by the publication of *LGPE*. The first signpost read 1948 and marked the creation of modern-day Israel carved out of Palestinian lands within the geography of the Old Testament. Nearly a century of Jewish and Christian

⁹⁰ It is worth noting that 1948 was a signal to numerous dispensationalists, including charismatic figures like Chuck Smith, founder of the Jesus Movement, who stated in *Snatched Away!* (Costa Mesa, CA: Maranatha Evangelical Association, 1976)—written a few years after Lindsey’s seminal work—that the Rapture would occur within a generation. And in 1978, Smith declared in *End Times: A Report on Future Survival* (Costa Mesa, CA: Maranatha Evangelical Association, 1978) that the Church would soon be gone because the Great Tribulation would begin in 1981, even hosting a New Year’s Eve celebration in 1981 to welcome the coming apocalypse. Smith’s misguided predictions cost the minister numerous congregants and damaged his credibility among some religious leaders.

⁹¹ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 43.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Zionist activism helped to end more than a millennium-long diaspora of the Jewish people across the earth. The second marker appeared in 1967 when Israel declared victory over its Arab neighbors Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. For Israel, June 7 marked a major moment in Jewish history, its importance conveyed by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan statement shortly after Israel's victory: "This morning, the Israel Defense Forces liberated Jerusalem. We have united Jerusalem, the divided capital of Israel. We have returned to the holiest of our Holy Places, never to part from it again."⁹⁴ The third in a series of major conflicts between these nations over territorial and shipping rights, the Six-Day War resulted in Israel growing four times its previous size after occupying Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and most significantly, the West Bank, which included East Jerusalem.

According to Lindsey, the third roadside billboard is still ahead. More than fifty years have passed since the Six-Day War and millions of Christians and Jews continue to hope for control of the site of the Dome of the Rock to be transferred from the Jordanian government to the Israeli government.⁹⁵ The Dome was built by the Muslims atop the original Jewish temples—the architectural designs and significance of the Dome evolving since its original construction in the seventh century. The site is considered by the Jews to be the navel of the Earth and the location of the sacrificial alter where God instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). According to the Tanakh (Old Testament) and Jewish tradition, the First Temple was built by King Solomon in the 900s BC, and its location of Mt. Moriah was chosen by his father, King David, following a vision from an angel of God (2 Samuel 24; 2 Chronicles 3). After its destruction five centuries

⁹⁴ "Statement at the Western Wall by Defense Minister Dayan," June 7, 1967.
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/statement-at-the-western-wall-by-defense-minister-dayan>.

⁹⁵ As part of the cease-fire agreement for the Six-Day War, Israel was allowed to retain Jerusalem with the agreement that the Ministry of Awqaf of Jordan could retain administrative control of the Dome of the Rock.

later by the Babylonians, the Second Temple was built in the ruins of the original sacrificial temple by the Jews following decades of captivity (Ezra 1). The Second Temple stood, as the first had, for another five centuries before its destruction in 70 AD when the Romans conquered Jerusalem.

For premillennial dispensationalists, the third and final sign of the end of days will be the rebuilding of the Jewish temple. According to Lindsey, the Third Temple will play a vital role in the rise of the Antichrist and, later, Christ's millennial kingdom. "There is one major problem barring the construction of a third Temple . . . [that is] the Dome of the Rock. This is believed to be built squarely in the middle of the old temple site."⁹⁶ Discussing Israel's role in the end of days, Lindsey refers to Daniel 9:27 to support his view that the Antichrist will reinstitute the "sacrifices and oblations of the Law of Moses" before breaking "his covenant with the Jewish people . . . and [cause] the Jewish temple worship . . . to cease."⁹⁷ The significance of the rebuilding cannot be understated when examining Lindsey's prophetic teachings. Everything hinges on Israel and its future. Lindsey illustrates the centrality of the small nation, recounting a conversation between Israel Eldad—Jewish historian and philosopher—and a national reporter:

[Reporter] Do your people intend to rebuild the Temple?

[Eldad] From the time that King David first conquered Jerusalem until Solomon built the Temple, just one generation passed. So will it be with us.

[Reporter] What about the Dome of the Rock which now stands on the temple site?

[Eldad] Who knows, maybe there will be an earthquake.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 56.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 57.

Lindsey's prophetic writings are infused with excitement over the idea that there was only a generation left until the first major event of the apocalypse, the Rapture. Having published *LGPE* in 1970, Lindsey was in his early forties and could very likely live long enough to not experience death but be taken up in the Rapture. Jewish and Christian optimism that the temple would soon be rebuilt meant the prophetic clock was nearer to midnight.

In Matthew 24:34 (ESV), the apostle recorded Christ's statement that "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Lindsey attributes Christ's mention of generation to mean those alive at the time of the rebuilding of Israel's temple, meaning the current generation would witness the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Anchoring his prophetic interpretations in Israel's past, present, and future history, Lindsey offered a bold prediction in 1970 that did not age well for his prophetic credibility because the temple was never built, the Cold War ended, and human history entered the twenty-first century still waiting. Lindsey claimed:

What generation? Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so.

Aware of the dangers of date-setting, Lindsey prefaces his predictions with *forty years or so* and *could take place*. He understood the poor track record of modern prophets. In *LGPE*, Lindsey explains his careful approach and hesitation in declaring absolutes. "What would you think of prophets today who would be willing to stake their lives on the absolute truth of their claims? They could not allow themselves errors in judgment or mistakes in the smallest detail."⁹⁹ For

⁹⁹ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 19.

Lindsey, prophetic interpretations of current events could only be as accurate as the evidence available at the time, which is the reason Lindsey emphasizes that prophecy was *only becoming clearer* as the end approached. In his “Introduction” for *LGPE*, Lindsey establishes transparency by making “no claim of knowing exactly when the world is going to end” but instead emphasizes letting “the prophets speak.”¹⁰⁰ Despite precautions, Lindsey predicted the next milestone would occur in the late 1980s. Lindsey posits that the Rapture would be the next major event on the dispensational timeline followed by the Great Tribulation, Armageddon, Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom, and the Last Judgment before history ended and eternity began with the New Heaven and New Earth.

Lindsey’s appeal arose from his ability to integrate traditional premillennial dispensational eschatology with current events and history in an approachable manner. As demonstrated earlier with dispensationalism’s long history of tying the fate of Israel with end-time events, Lindsey applies the same ideological approach every step along the road to Armageddon. He borrows much of the same visual language adopted by Billy Graham and other revivalists. In *There’s a New World Coming*, Lindsey themes the Rapture as “The Great Snatch.”¹⁰¹ In his defense for the Rapture and dispensationalism’s literal approach and plain reading of Biblical text, Lindsey addresses a major criticism from within Christianity. Christians skeptical of the Rapture often asked, “Why would Jesus promise that a special group of His people would be taken from earth to heaven without first dying as millions of other believers have done?” To this, Lindsey responds:

¹⁰⁰ “Introduction” to Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).

¹⁰¹ Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming: An In-Depth Analysis of the Book of Revelation. Updated Edition* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), 77.

The simple, wonderful answer is that they will be alive when God's striving with rebellious men turns into an avalanche of judgment upon the Christ-rejecting world and Satan himself—a judgment so terrible that God isn't going to let His Church go through it. This Tribulation isn't for God's people, but for those who have rejected His salvation.¹⁰²

For Lindsey, this judgment was certain because the increasing ungodliness described in Revelation was more evident since the 1960s than any other point in human history. Lindsey believes that Christians will endure hardships prior to the Rapture but would be spared from experiencing the seven years of tribulation that follows the event. Referring to Revelation 3:10, Lindsey explains that “scripture teaches clearly that believers will be kept *from* the ‘time of trial’ which God will send upon the world to try unbelievers.”¹⁰³

Yet, the road to Armageddon still needed to be traversed by humanity, including God's faithful. Like Graham, Lindsey references Sodom's destruction. “We're also told that Jesus' coming will have similarities to the destruction of Sodom . . . First a prophetic warning, then God removes His people, and judgment falls on unbelievers.”¹⁰⁴ In Genesis' account of Sodom and Gomorrah, God sent angels to instruct Lot's family to leave the city before its fiery destruction. According to Lindsey, Lot's exit from Sodom was a type of rapture that spared his family from destruction and would have spared his wife if not for her disobedience. Lindsey composed a concise list of twenty signs proving that the Rapture was near. The list reflects Lindsey's interpretation of geopolitical events and cultural shifts, most notably those experienced throughout Western society since the 1960s.

¹⁰² Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming*, 77.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 79-80.

1. The return of the dispersed Jews to Israel to become a nation again in 1948.
2. The Jews' recapture of the Old City of Jerusalem in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.
3. The rise of Russia as a powerful nation and enemy of Israel.
4. The Arab confederation against the new State of Israel.
5. The rise of a military power in the Orient that can field an army of 200 million soldiers.
6. The revival of the old Roman Empire in the form of a ten-nation confederacy.
7. The revival of the dark occultic practices of ancient Babylon.
8. The unprecedented turn to drugs.
9. The increase of international revolution.
10. The increase of wars
11. The increase of earthquakes
12. The increase of famines through the population explosion.
13. The coming of plagues.
14. The increase of pollution.
15. The departure of many Christian churches from the historic truths of Christianity.
16. The move toward a one-world religion.
17. The move toward a one-world government.
18. The decline of the United States as a major world power.
19. The increase in lawlessness.
20. The decline of the family unit.¹⁰⁵

Leading into the Great Tribulation, Lindsey's list mentions one crucial development that would begin pretribulation and quickly rise in significance during the seven-year period: the ten-nation confederacy.

Lindsey attributes the ten-nation confederacy—referenced in Daniel and Revelation—to the European Economic Community (EEC) established in 1954 with the original goal of allowing only ten nations membership. According to Lindsey, the ten-nation confederacy would be a resurrected Roman Empire that would establish a one world government and economic system, giving rise to the Antichrist who would come to power over all the nations. By the early 1970s, the charter included only nine nations (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom). Then in 1979, Greece joined. In *The*

¹⁰⁵ Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming*, 81-82.

1980s: Countdown to Armageddon, Lindsey explains: “Thus we have all five pieces of the prophets’ [Antichrist] scenario for the later days. All the powers—Israel, the Arabs, Russia, China, and the revived Roman Empire [ECC]—are fixed in place.”¹⁰⁶ Prior to Spain and Portugal’s admission into the ECC in 1986, Lindsey settled for the possibility that more nations would join after Greece. “It is possible that *more* than 10 nations could at one point be admitted. But in the final stages, it will number 10.”¹⁰⁷

Alongside the new Roman Empire, the Great Tribulation would also witness the Soviet Union (King of the North), the Arab nations (King of the South), and China (King of the East) come against Israel. Despite his miscalculated prediction of a 1988 rapture, Lindsey credits himself with accurately foreseeing the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, explaining as early as 1970 that the Soviets would spread throughout the Middle East—only to be destroyed during the Great Tribulation by the joint efforts of the revived Roman Empire (ten-nations confederacy) and the Chinese.¹⁰⁸ Prior to the Soviet’s destruction, Lindsey interprets Daniel and Ezekiel’s description as the Soviet Union’s invasion across the Middle East into Israel, which would also bring the new Roman Empire and China into devastating conflict.

In Daniel 11:40-41 (ESV), the prophet wrote:

At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack him, but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall.

And Ezekial wrote (Ezekial 38:14-16 ESV):

¹⁰⁶ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁸ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 160.

Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord God: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army. You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

As a result of Israel's nationhood, the Middle East would remain a nexus of conflict along the road to Armageddon.

The unity displayed among many Arab nations against Israel provided credence that the King of the South (mostly Arab nations) had already formed as a result of Israel's nationhood—at least in part. The Six-Day War in 1967 occurred just three years before *LGPE*'s publication and conflict surrounding Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and other territories remained a point of tension—a fuse that remained burning throughout the Cold War, lasting well into present day. Lindsey describes the role the Arabs would play, declaring that “the Arabs are portrayed as the spark that will light the fuse. Because of the 4,000-year-old animosity between these two ancient races, the Hebrew Prophets say they will fight a battle into which all of the world's nations will be drawn.”¹⁰⁹ Lacking a unifying goal, Lindsey explains that the Arabs found a reason to unite after rekindling their hatred for the Jews and growing their influence over the international oil supply, primarily through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).¹¹⁰

Concerning the King of the East, Lindsey proceeds to describe China's role in the last days as “terrifying” because the communist nation is posed to flood the Middle East with an

¹⁰⁹ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 53.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

“Asian army [that] will number 200 million soldiers.”¹¹¹ Following their victory in the Middle East, Lindsey interprets Revelation 9 as China waging war against every nation, killing “one-third of its population in the final great war known as Armageddon.”¹¹² According to Lindsey, China is the nation that will use nuclear weapons “[spewing] fire, molten substances and radioactive clouds.”¹¹³ The demonic force enabling China to fulfill such a horrific end-times prophecy existed not in its traditional Confucianism but in its embrace of communism. Communism—with its promotion of atheism and devaluation of the individual—is the means by which nuclear Armageddon would occur. At the time of Lindsey’s writing, China had only recently successfully tested its first nuclear bomb.

In *LGPE*, Lindsey titles his Armageddon chapter “World War III.” As already discussed, Lindsey claims that tensions between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East would be the spark that starts World War III. Based on mankind’s track record throughout history, Lindsey’s understanding of Christ’s assessment of man’s nature means worldwide war is not avoidable—only inevitable.

Jesus predicted that man would not learn from the past nor heed the warnings of the future; man would ultimately plunge the whole world into a war so vast, so utterly destructive, that only the personal return of Jesus Christ Himself to stop it would prevent the total annihilation of all life.¹¹⁴

The only cure for war would be for all of mankind to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and have its sinful heart replaced with a renewed heart—an event that could only occur worldwide

¹¹¹ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 89.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 148.

following the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Until then, people would continue to reject God and allow fear of another great war draw them “to accept the Antichrist’s solution for preventing war.”¹¹⁵ During a brief time of peace on earth, the Antichrist—the leader of the revived Roman Empire and whatever institution evolves out of the European Economic Committee—will sign a pact with Israel and provide protection from its Muslim neighbors, allowing the Jews to build the Third Temple and resume animal sacrifices. During the first few years of the Great Tribulation, Lindsey explains that the Antichrist will be praised as a peacemaker. As mentioned earlier, the Soviets invade and destroy the Arab nations but are then annihilated by the forces of the new Roman Empire (Antichrist) and China—ending the war against Israel and bringing peace to the Middle East. China’s victory will expand the war worldwide, resulting in a global nuclear holocaust. Lindsey describes what happens next as “The Greatest Battle of All Time,” which will be fought by the only two remaining “spheres of power.”¹¹⁶ These two great powers would include the West (the Antichrist’s forces and possibly other European nations and the United States) and China.

According to *LGPE*, the Chinese will be drawn again to the location of Armageddon “to march against the Roman Dictator in a challenge for world control.”¹¹⁷ The Antichrist will be motivated to destroy the Chinese with a united army, promising that a final conflict would be *the war to end all wars*. Lindsey describes the future final conflict through the lens of the Old Testament prophets, stating that all cities would be destroyed, islands sunk, mountains destroyed, and that the entire planet would be made desolate. The war would be waged by all the remaining

¹¹⁵ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 150.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

nations of the world but not won by either side. Instead, “as the battle of Armageddon reaches its awful climax and it appears that all life will be destroyed on earth—in this very moment Jesus Christ will return and save man from self-extinction.”¹¹⁸ What follows is the exact moment of human history that generations of premillennialists and postmillennialists hoped to bear witness: the moment in space and time that Christ returns to earth to establish the Millennial Kingdom.

Lindsey describes the Second Coming—not Armageddon—as “The Main Event” of the end times. The Millennial Kingdom would not be housed in 1600s Puritan Boston or Spanish-controlled Mexico City or even the great cities of Europe.¹¹⁹ Instead, Lindsey describes its future seat of governance in Jerusalem among the Jews who rejected the Antichrist and embraced the Gospel during the Soviet and Arab defeat prior to the Battle of Armageddon.¹²⁰ Christ’s earthly return will also include “a cloud of witnesses,” of which Lindsey interprets to mean the saints—every believer in Heaven including those who were raptured and the “resurrected saints of the Old Testament.”¹²¹ At his appearing, Christ “destroys all ungodly kingdoms” and saves a remnant of believing Jews.¹²² Referencing Revelation 20, Lindsey describes the establishment of Christ’s thousand-year kingdom in four stages.

¹¹⁸ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 168.

¹¹⁹ See chapter two for more historical views on where millennialists believed that Christ would establish His earthly kingdom.

¹²⁰ For more information on the conversion of the Jews during the Great Tribulation, see chapter fourteen “To Believe or Not to Believe—The Options” in Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming: An In-Depth Analysis of the Book of Revelation. Updated Edition* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), 185-194.

¹²¹ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 173.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 175.

The first stage is the binding of Satan. Satan is thrown into the same lake of fire as the Antichrist and the False Prophet for a thousand years. Satan is bound to prevent his influence upon the earth during the millennium. Lindsey warns that “even with Satan not active, there will still be a certain amount of sin during the Millennium. The Tribulation believers . . . and their children can choose to rebel against God, and some will.”¹²³ The second phase incorporates the last group of believers from the *first resurrection*. The initial *first resurrection* was when Jesus rose from the grave. The second *first resurrection* includes believers who were taken up during the Rapture. The third *first resurrection* applies to those resurrected at the Second Coming and given eternal bodies while still on earth. The fourth and final *first resurrection* will be made up of the “mortal believers who live through the thousand-year millennial Kingdom” because believers will not die—only unbelievers.¹²⁴ Following the thousand-year period, the third phase of Christ’s millennial reign results in the unbinding of Satan and the final judgement.

After a thousand years of living under Christ’s rule in a pristine world, a new generation that rejects Christ will be “deceived by Satan” following his release from the pit.¹²⁵ Satan alongside a massive new army of unbelievers will attempt to attack Jerusalem but will be destroyed by “fire from heaven” and “are annihilated.”¹²⁶ Afterward, Satan is judged and casted into the lake of fire for eternity. The last phase of Christ’s kingdom involves the Final Judgment. Lindsey prefaces his prophetic interpretations of the Final Judgment, stating: “God never made

¹²³ Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming*, 272.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 271-276.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 277.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 278.

hell for me. It was made for Satan and his demons.”¹²⁷ The Final Judgment applies to those who did not attend the first resurrections. The second resurrection “is that final gathering at the Great White Throne of God of all the bodies and souls of the unbelieving dead of all ages.”¹²⁸ By the fourth phase of Christ’s earthly rule, history has reached the farthestmost point of Timothy Beals’ *edge of history*. For Armageddonists, the eschatological beliefs explored in this chapter are more than just a religious faith and the promise of an eternity with God: they are a road map to the end of the world.

Conclusion

In his concluding remarks in *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, Timothy Weber proposed a warning for premillennial dispensationalists in the original 1982 publication and left it untouched in its 1987 reprint. He explained that there is an expiration date for eschatology that proves to repeatedly miss the mark when applying current events to the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. The most dangerous of these stray arrows is date-setting, and prophecy authors bore the weight of “premillennialism’s credibility.”¹²⁹ Weber believed that Lindsey and others would ultimately face the same fate as the Millerites. While still respected in many evangelical circles, Hal Lindsey’s predominance over Bible prophecy—and its popular appeal—did not as much disappear as was shelved for fictional alternatives, such as Tim Lahaye and Jerry B. Jenkins’ bestselling end-times series *Left Behind* or Frank Peretti’s New Age, occult-warning novels *This Present Darkness* and its sequel *Piercing the Darkness*. In the early 1990s, Lindsey returned to seminary and earned a Doctor of Theology degree. He also began

¹²⁷ Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming*, 279.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 242.

hosting the popular prophecy-themed news show *International Intelligence Report* on Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) from 1994 to 2005 before creating his own show *The Hal Lindsey Report*. His show aired weekly newscasts across several religious television stations until Lindsey's retirement in 2019.

Hal Lindsey's views no doubt reflected the fears of many Americans concerning the waning influence and military strength of the United States by 1980. According to Lindsey, containment and détente had positioned America in a dangerous place in the nuclear arms race. For the four kingdoms to gain dominance, America would inevitably be weakened—but not without a fight. In *Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey quotes Henry Kissinger's 1976 statement concerning America's perception of strength throughout the world: "It (the balance of military power) is shifting so rapidly against the U.S. that in a future confrontation like that with Cuba in 1962 or the Middle East alert in 1973, it will be the Soviet Union which will possess the quantitative superiority in strategic weapons [nuclear warheads and defensive systems]."¹³⁰ Because of this, Lindsey explains that the Bible supports a military buildup in America to prevent, or at least alleviate, what he believes the Bible teaches concerning America's political fate during the Great Tribulation. Lindsey argues that the most possible fate for the United States is a Soviet nuclear attack, which would result in a Soviet takeover of the American government and a defeated America's reliance on the financial support of the ten-nation confederacy (European Economic Commission).

Many of these end-time beliefs were widely known, but perhaps not generally held, by most Americans throughout the late Cold War. The impact of these beliefs in American culture

¹³⁰ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 149.

and politics is the subject of the following chapters. Chapter four will discuss the influence of premillennial dispensational Bible prophecy in American culture, including film, music, and literature in mainstream popular culture and among evangelical church culture. Lindsey's prophetic interpretations regarding the Antichrist, Mark of the Beast, one-world government and economy, Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the seven last plagues are explored in the context of culture. Chapter five then expands Lindsey's Bible prophecy and the influence of other Armageddonists at the height of the Cold War, primarily within the Reagan administration.

Chapter 4

The Doctrine of Armageddon in American Culture, 1970-1991

Introduction

“What if the Antichrist is alive today but he is a child and no one knows who he is?” An advertising executive for Billy Graham Ministries and born-again Christian, Robert Munger speculated about end times with his friend, Hollywood-producer Harvey Bernhard, after reading Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth (LGPE)*.¹ Terrified that his friend believed such a speculative prophecy yet fascinated with the idea of a supernatural horror film that explored the end of days through the eyes of dispensationalists, Bernhard crafted a story that he thought could be the next Hollywood box office success. Bernhard reached out to screenwriter David Seltzer to develop the story for the film. Initially rejecting the offer, Seltzer “later changed his mind . . . stating that it offered motivation to do something he had never done before—read the Bible.”² The result of Munger and Bernhard’s conversation became the 1976 summer blockbuster *The Omen*. Distributed by 20th Century Fox, the film starred Gregory Peck with Richard Donner (*Superman*, *The Goonies*, *Lethal Weapon*) helming the project as the film’s director.

According to popular culture scholar Brad Duren of Oklahoma Panhandle State University, Hollywood films like *The Omen* “built on a fringe interpretation of biblical prophecy known as Premillennial Dispensationalism” and challenged the traditional religious-themed

¹ Brad Duren, “Reckoning the Number of the Beast: Premillennial Dispensationalism, *The Omen*, and 1970s America.” in Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Ripper, eds. *Divine Horror: Essays on the Cinematic Battle Between the Sacred and the Diabolical* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), chap. 4. Kindle.

² Ibid.

horror narrative.³ Several years prior to *The Omen*, Hollywood discovered that films exploring the supernatural worlds of Christianity and Bible prophecy drew millions to the box office. Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and William Freidkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) were box offices successes and helped to establish demonic possession as a popular genre within American cinema. While Polanski and Freidkin's films focused on a Catholic worldview, Donnor's coming-of-age film of Damien Thorn, the Antichrist, departed from the usual Catholic worldview of the supernatural and resonated with millions of evangelicals who already had been swept up by end-times prophecies popularized by religious figures like Hal Lindsey, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson.⁴

Alongside the advent of Hollywood's newfound appreciation for prophetically themed horror, an underground motion picture phenomenon also emerged in the early 1970s with Donald W. Thompson's *A Thief in the Night*. Faraway from the studios of Hollywood, downtown Des Moines became a new geographical landmark for a series of films that would not stop short of horrifying its audience to make real the dispensationalist view of the end times. Thompson worked "as a radio disk jockey" turned television producer before founding Mark IV Pictures alongside Russell S. Doughten, Jr. to produce a low budget film that would "revolutionize the evangelical film industry and become the most popular [evangelical] film ever."⁵ Comparable to how Darby, Scofield, and Lindsey's commentaries placed Biblical prophecy at the core of Christianity, Thompson demonstrated the effectiveness of film as both a teaching and evangelizing tool to spread dispensationalism to more than 300 million viewers, especially

³ Duren, "Reckoning the Number of the Beast," chap. 4.

⁴ These religious figures were the focus of the previous chapter.

⁵ Randal H. Balmer, *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2002), 577-578.

among America's youth.⁶ Several sequels followed Thompson's unexpected hit film, inspiring other filmmakers to also explore end-time themes—such as the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast, and the Battle of Armageddon—both inside and outside of evangelicalism. In addition to film, dispensational themes found their way into both popular and religious music throughout the late Cold War with artists blurring the lines between the secular and the sacred.⁷

Of these, the most notable artist was Larry Norman—the father of Christian rock music. Larry Norman's religious zeal and musical talents brought him to Los Angeles in the late 1960s at a time when the Jesus Movement was building momentum. Employed by Capitol Records as a songwriter, Norman garnered favor with the studio and produced his debut album with full creative control. The result was *Upon This Rock*, the first Christian rock album, which borrowed heavily from Biblical prophecy and dispensationalism. Like Thompson's rapture-themed films, Norman and Capitol Records also ventured into marketing new media with no established genre. Norman's music emerged at a time when rock 'n' roll and gospel music were kept far apart within evangelical communities. Writing for the *Screen Stars*, J. S. Robbins favored Norman as “The Sergeant Peppers of Christian Rock,” likening Norman's music to a psychedelic experience

⁶ Dean A. Anderson, “The Original ‘Left Behind,’” *Christianity Today*, March 7, 2012.

⁷ While the historical record heavily favors evangelicals embracing the new forms of Christian media throughout the 1970s and 1980s, critics did emerge. Among those mentioned in this chapter, fewer evangelical trendsetters garnered more criticism than Larry Norman. Norman was vocal about his disdain for church—what he referred to as the “Church-ianity” that categorized most nominal Christians.⁷ To Norman, most Christians were not really following Christ but an organization. For many fundamentalists, remarks such as these resulted in their unwillingness to embrace Norman's merger of rock and gospel. As a result, some evangelical youths were denied access to Norman's music, which excluded their participation—at least while growing up in their parent's home—from participating in certain aspects of the Jesus Revolution. See Chapter 3 “Jesus Versus Organized Religion.” in Gregory Thornbury, *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music? Larry Norman and the Perils of Christian Rock* (New York: Convergent Books, 2018).

coming “straight out of a revival meeting.”⁸ Norman’s debut album featured “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” a song that would become not only a major promotional tool of Thompson’s *A Thief in the Night* but establish itself as a popular worship song in many evangelical churches.⁹

In *The Book of Revolution: A Biography*, historian Timothy Beal recounted his own youthful experiences as a Christian growing up in rural Alaska, having witnessed the power of Norman’s lyrics. Beal recalled the effectiveness of its message and imagery in an article for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Our youth group must have sung it more than a hundred times. No one made eye contact. We all looked at the floor, feeling the weight of the words, as if we were the ones Christ had left behind when he returned to rapture his followers up to heaven. The song invited us to imagine a time when it was already too late, when our ambivalence, our lack of faith, had left us each alone, without God and, perhaps more terrifying at that age, without friends.¹⁰

In an era when Lindsey’s *LGPE* was widely read among young evangelicals and referenced freely within evangelical circles, prominent figures like Thompson and Norman influenced a new generation of counterculture youth ready to challenge the status quo within American Christianity. As dispensationalism and the signs-of-the-times became common imagery among evangelicals, the fear of the atomic bomb continued to persist, seeping deeper into secular culture and its popular media.¹¹ By the end of the Cold War, Johnny Cash’s (1954-2003) prophecy-themed song “Goin’ by the Book” climbed the U.S. country charts in 1991 and serves as a

⁸ Gergory Thornbury, *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music? Larry Norman and the Perils of Christian Rock* (New York: Convergent Books, 2018), 56.

⁹ The lyrics to Larry Norman’s “I Wish We’d All Been Ready” are analyzed later in this chapter.

¹⁰ Timothy Beal, “The Rise of Rapture Horror Culture,” *Humanities* 34, no. 4 (2022). <https://www.neh.gov/article/rise-rapture-horror-culture>.

¹¹ The impact of the atomic bomb on American culture and policy is the primary focus of chapter five.

closing bookend to Norman's "I Wish We'd All Been Ready" for this dissertation's examination of the doctrine of Armageddon's influence in American music culture. Cash's hit song was one of the most explicitly dispensational songs to garner popular appeal, its tone and lyrics reacting to the Gulf War that began in August 1990. The kinship formed between dispensationalism and American culture persisted throughout the late Cold War as evidenced by the films and music explored in this chapter.

This chapter focuses primarily on the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon on American culture throughout the late Cold War across secular and religious entertainment with a primary focus on media that emerged among evangelical film producers and musicians. After surveying the literature, the largest gap in the historiography of the doctrine of Armageddon's influence on American culture remains, even after Sutton's masterful scholarship in *American Apocalypse*, in the areas of cinema and music. By examining popular films and songs, a deeper understanding can be gained of the apocalyptic themes expressed by dispensationalists and their role in nurturing an increased interest in end-time events among religious and secular participants. The first part of this chapter explores the background of the evangelical cultural mood of the late 1960s and early 1970s before moving on to how Bible prophecy was represented in apocalyptic films throughout the late Cold War. The subsequent section examines music influenced by end-times prophecy followed by a brief section that surveys the lasting impact of dispensationalism in American culture near the close of the Cold War.

Subcultures Colliding and the Road to Armageddon

In the Texas summer heat, nearly 100,000 young Christians and interested youths caught up in the excitement and emotional appeal of the Jesus Movement connected spiritually with God not through drugs but through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Organized by the

Campus Crusade for Christ, the Explo '72 event was heavily marketed and featured a lineup of talents ranging from the Reverend Billy Graham to musicians as diverse as Johnny Cash and Larry Norman.¹² The musicians and revivalists that took to the Dallas Cotton Bowl stage and the crowd that filled the football stadium in mid-June 1972 reflected the impact of spiritual revivalism that had swept the nation since the start of the Cold War. Regularly reporting on the evangelical movement since the 1960s, Edward B. Fiske of the *New York Times* interviewed Graham, who quickly labeled the event as a “religious Woodstock” while Fiske reported that others viewed the event as a “modern children’s crusade” on par with revivalism common to America’s religious cultural history.¹³ Fiske described the goal of the festival as a place for high school and college students to “sing, pray, study their Bibles and learn new techniques for winning souls for Christ.”¹⁴ Attendees did not only learn about the gospel and how to communicate it with others but also learned that they were living in the last days through Graham’s teachings, Bible studies, and songs like Norman’s “I Wish We’d All Been Ready.”

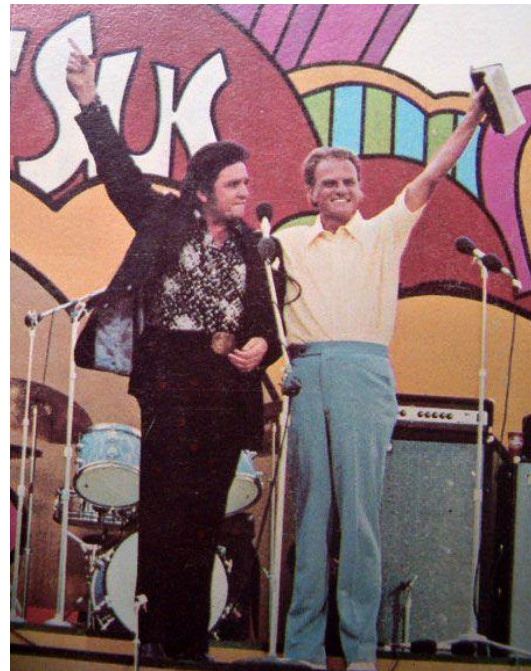


Figure 7. “Johnny Cash and Billy Graham at Explo '72,” Campus Crusade for Christ, *Jesus Sound Explosion*, 1972.

¹² A complete list of songs is not found in the historical record. Those who attended Explo '72 could request free of charge a special edition vinyl that would arrive by mail. The vinyl was produced by the Campus Crusade for Christ and featured thirteen songs, including Johnny Cash’s “I See Men As Trees Walkin’,” Armageddon Experience’s “One Way,” Larry Norman’s “Sweet Song of Salvation,” and several other notable Christian artists.

¹³ Edward B. Fiske, “A ‘Religious Woodstock’ Draws 75,000,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 1972.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The event's nighttime segments were headlined by respected music artists and prominent revivalists, but during the day youth attended intimate classes and larger seminars that covered topics ranging from sexual morality to biblical teachings about being obedient to parents. Used as a tool for evangelism and conversion, Bill Bright's *Four Spiritual Laws* were taught in workshops throughout the day.¹⁵ According to the event's organizers, the goal of the Explo' 72 event was to see a spiritual explosion among the youth of America. The event occurred at the height of the Jesus Movement and was the largest revival-style gathering of the movement, contributing to "revived interest in fundamentalist Christianity."¹⁶ The event was audacious, and its organizer Bill Bright—the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ—kept no secrets about the purpose of what was happening at the Cotton Bowl, explaining to the *Times* that the goal of "Operation Penetration" was for every young participant to go back home and "recruit five more persons for further evangelistic efforts."¹⁷

Campus Crusade for Christ's ministerial directive to gather a large number of youths to train as Christian ambassadors to the country might have culminated in Dallas, but its mission began years earlier in Berkeley, California during a fire storm of student protest. In January 1967, student political activism had reached a boiling point which resulted in the firing of the university's president. The situation deteriorated when newly elected Governor Ronald Reagan labeled the campus' counterculture activism as a "mess," explaining to the media that "sexual

¹⁵ Bill Bright's *Four Spiritual Laws* continue to be used as a ministry tool for evangelism. The laws include: (1) God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life; (2) Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life; (3) Jesus is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life; and (4) We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

¹⁶ Fiske, "A 'Religious Woodstock' Draws 75,000."

¹⁷ Ibid.

orgies so vile” characterized the immorality that ran rampant on campus.¹⁸ In response, Campus Crusade for Christ entered the free speech commons out in front of Sproul Hall and flooded the atmosphere with Christian folk music and the gospel. As tensions continued and antagonistic crowds swarmed the campus over the university president’s firing, the gospel was shared openly—and hecklers were challenged by the *Four Spiritual Laws*. The experience at Berkeley demonstrated that there were “two very different American subcultures: late-1960s Berkeley and evangelical Christianity.”¹⁹ This collision paved the way for modern evangelicalism to learn and adapt, acknowledging that the out-of-date folk-style Christian worship music could benefit by incorporating rock ‘n’ roll to reach the current generation.²⁰ Alongside the need to modernize Christian music, the new untapped potential of cinema became a secondary focal point for others—like Thompson—wanting to see the gospel and dispensational teachings dispersed into unreached areas of American culture.

Moments like Explo’ 72 demonstrated the need for a Christian alternative to the drug-infused spiritual journey that exemplified American secularism among those caught up in the counterculture. Idolized by the 1960s and 1970s hippies, Beatniks like Jack Kerouac glamorized sex and drugs as a means of spiritual connection to something divine, whether that was The Buddha or Jesus Christ. Explo ’72 made the choice clear for America’s youth with its hip phrase “One Way.”²¹ When interviewed by a local television reporter concerning the event’s

¹⁸ John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 119.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁰ Larry Norman and the emergence of rock ‘n’ roll among evangelicals is explored later in this chapter in the context of dispensationalist beliefs reaching traditionally unreached areas of American culture.

²¹ The origins of “One Way” have been widely attributed to Larry Norman. The phrase acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

comparison to the Woodstock music festival that took place in New York a few years earlier, Graham responded, “What I meant was the crowd was going to be a huge crowd of young people but gathered for a totally different purpose. We’re gathered here with Bibles . . . and many of the things that attended Woodstock won’t be going on here.”²² Evangelical Christianity, and along with dispensationalism and fundamentalism, effectively proved that it could counter the counterculture of the late Cold War with an alternative that intertwined the evangelical message of salvation and God’s love with warnings of the coming Apocalypse foretold by Jesus and the Prophets of the Bible. For the first time, this message began to spread in new ways beyond the pulpit, revival tent, youth group, and Hal Lindsey paperbacks as it took on new media in the form of cinema and music.

According to Matthew Avery Sutton, “The apocalyptic message conveyed by evangelical writers and preachers found another innovative expression through a new medium.”²³ While acknowledging the importance of dispensationalism’s crossover into film in his 1992 seminal text about the role of Biblical prophecy in American culture, Paul S. Boyer categorically dismissed film and music to focus his research on the literature of the period. Boyer’s dismissal provides an opportunity for additional scholarly research. Yet, Boyer does weigh in on the importance of films like *A Thief in the Night* in the prologue, concluding that the films played a vital role in evangelical churches and youth groups.²⁴ While Sutton is one of the few scholars to

²² Billy Graham, Dallas, TX, 1972, accessed from WFAA Newsfilm Collection, “Billy Graham at the Cotton Ball, June 1972,” *YouTube* video, 0:28 to 1:08, May 19, 2020, <https://youtu.be/tLozcX2lsng?si=YgPg2FU0U5XOCwIN>.

²³ Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 349.

²⁴ Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 7.

expand on Boyer's work, an analysis of Thompson and the impact of rapture-themed films is only briefly touched upon. Sutton does provide a starting point for this dissertation's research. No other scholarship exists, as far as this researcher is aware, that thoroughly analyzes the dispensational teachings incorporated into Thompson's *A Thief in the Night* film series.

A Thief in the Night

"*A Thief in the Night* not only marked a significant achievement in evangelical film production, it also introduced new audiences to the emerging genre of Christian rock music."²⁵ Larry Norman's "I Wish We'd all Been Ready" became the soundtrack of the looming Armageddon and tied the emerging influence of Christian rock 'n' roll with the nascent Christian film industry. If Norman is to be considered the father of Christian rock, then Donald W. Thompson and Russell Doughten should be regarded as the fathers of the Christian rapture film genre. Prior to the popularity of Thompson (director and producer) and Doughten's (co-producer and actor) series *A Thief in the Night*, Billy Graham's World Wide Pictures production studio pioneered Christian cinema, producing numerous films that circulated among churches and youth outreaches. Numerous full-featured films were also distributed, including the first Christian western *Mr. Texas* in 1951 and then a biopic in 1975, *The Hiding Place*—the story of Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom. While Graham's films primarily dealt with stories of conversion to Christianity, Thompson and Doughten's work sought to educate Christians and non-believers—and also nominal believers—about the coming apocalypse. Professor Sutton concludes:

The 1970s innovative evangelicals spread the classic apocalyptic message through multiple platforms . . . [resonating] with a new generation of young Christians who straddled the divide between the increasingly mainstream and button-downed evangelicalism of their parents and the youth revolution underway at the time. For these

²⁵ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 349.

baby boomers, faith in the imminent return of Christ inspired hope in a world that seemed more than ever to be careening toward Armageddon.”²⁶

As this section will demonstrate, Thompson and Doughten’s dispensationalist film series would effectively translate the prophetic works of Hal Lindsey and others by establishing a new medium that could inform audiences of the future events that were to shortly come to pass.

In his critically acclaimed publication *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, which earned him an Emmy nomination for his work on the PBS documentary adaptation, Randall H. Balmer—Mandel Family Professor of History at Dartmouth College and Episcopalian priest—gained firsthand knowledge of Thompson’s landmark film through a series of interviews. Balmer’s interviews with Thompson and Doughten provide context as to why cinema became their answer for communicating the gospel and dispensationalist teachings. Balmer’s analysis of Thompson provides a deeper understanding into the religious beliefs of the film maker.

Apart from his personality, Thompson also strikes me as exemplary in his literalistic approach to the Bible, and specifically, the seriousness with which he takes the various biblical prophecies concerning the end of time. He illustrates, moreover, the extent to which dispensational premillennialism, with its insistence on the imminent return of Christ, pervades the evangelical subculture in America and lends a sense of urgency to evangelical proselytization efforts.²⁷

Like Thompson, Doughten embraced dispensationalism and emphasized the critical role that the “altar call” played when using their film as a form of evangelism. In an interview, Doughten “estimated” that more than “four million” had been saved through their rapture-themed film in what he referred to as “a tremendous harvest of souls.”²⁸ The filmmaker explained that “when

²⁶ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 350.

²⁷ Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57.

²⁸ Ibid.

the movie is over, a pastor, youth leader, or camp director will ask the audience to bow their heads in prayer [and ask] if they are ready for Christ's second coming. 'If Jesus should return tonight, or if you were killed on the way home this evening, would you be ready to meet God?'"²⁹ Although its budget was low (\$60,000) and required the use of many first-time actors, the film's desire to effectively communicating the gospel and end-time events took priority over polished talent and cutting-edge cinematography. In the end, the directors strived to craft an entertaining story that would hook its audience, which became easier for the film's sequels due to their larger budgets and upgrade in talent.

Prior to forming Mark IV Pictures, producer Thompson and co-producer Doughten both worked in the entertainment industry. Thompson was raised in New York and was drawn to the entertainment industry as a child, "especially radio and motion pictures."³⁰ Having worked in radio and television throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, Thompson partnered with Doughten to make feature length films that brought to the big screen what was written in bestseller books like Hal Lindsey's *LGPE*. In contrast, Doughten emerged from a more academic background having studied drama at Yale University, worked in Christian entertainment, and produced films for the Children's Gospel Hour and Salvation Army.

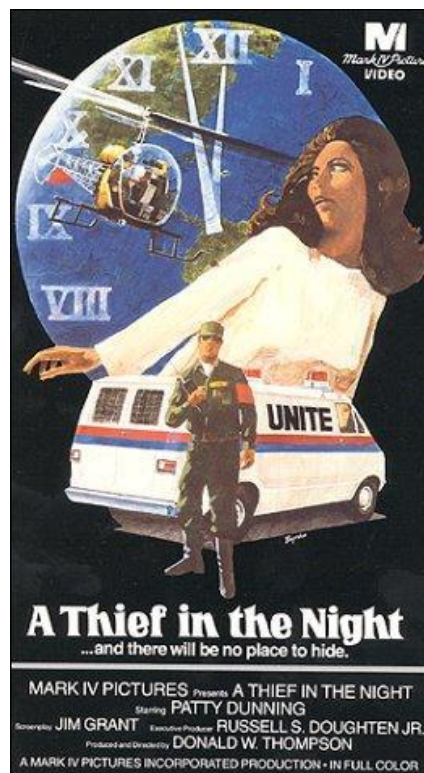


Figure 8. "Original movie poster," Mark IV Pictures, *A Thief in the Night*, 1973.

²⁹ Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 62-63.

³⁰ Balmer, *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, 686.

In the late 1950s, Doughten served as an associate producer on the cult classic horror film *The Blob*, which starred Steve McQueen in his first feature-length role.³¹ Throughout the early 1960s, he worked as an English and drama high school teacher in California before returning to Iowa to produce films with Heartland Productions, later forming another Iowa-based production studio with Thompson.³² With Mark IV founded, Thompson and Doughten's first film together, *A Thief in the Night*, became an unprecedented hit throughout the United States—and later internationally—among evangelical circles while spilling over into some small town theaters. The film's plot, evangelistic message, and dispensationalist teachings made it an effective medium to reach new eyes and ears for Christ.

A Thief in the Night opens with Mark 13:35-37 (NLT): “Keep a sharp lookout! For you do not know when I will come, at evening, at midnight, early dawn, or late daybreak. Don't let me find you sleeping.”³³ The scripture fades to a ticking clock and a radio announcement about millions of people disappearing from the earth. The story's panicked protagonist, Patty Myers—played by actress Patty Dunning, a native of Des Moines, Iowa—realizes that her husband, Jim, is one of the missing people. The radio announces that the United Nations has called an emergency session, the reporter then stating that experts are claiming that this event is either caused by an outside “alien force” or is, perhaps, “actually the Rapture spoken of in some areas of theology.”³⁴ Matthew 24:36 is then read by the broadcaster, establishing the premise of the

³¹ Brian Albright, *Regional Horror Films, 1958-1990: A State-By-State Guide with Interviews* (McFarland & Company, 2012), 286.

³² “Obituary: Russell Doughten,” *Des Moines Register*, August 22, 2013.

³³ In most cases, the film draws scripture using the New Living Translation.

³⁴ *A Thief in the Night*, directed by Donald W. Thompson (Mark IV Pictures Incorporated, 1973), 0:01:02 to 0:01:29. https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B06WLMX_DBL.

film. Patty recalls—in a flashback sequence that would be the first of many—a youth pastor quoting the same passage during a youth group meeting.

But of that day and hour knoweth no man. No, not the angels in heaven. Buy my father only. The world will be at ease. Banquets and parties and weddings. Just as it was in Noah's time before the sudden coming of the flood. People wouldn't believe what was going to happen until the flood actually arrived and took them all away. So shall my coming be. Two men will be working together in the fields. One will be taken, the other left. Two women will be going about their household tasks. One will be taken, and the other left. So be prepared for you know not what day your Lord is coming.³⁵

The youth pastor teaches a few dozen eager youths that the end times are near and that the only way to avoid the horrors to come is to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The youth group then sings Larry Norman's rapture song with verses like "children died, the days grew cold" and "there's no time to change your mind, the Son has come and you've been left behind" setting the tone for the film.³⁶ Norman's apocalyptic melody echoes throughout the film during several emotionally-charged moments, its lyrics serving more as a narrator than soundtrack for the film. The message presented by the youth pastor mirror's Lindsey's commentary regarding how to convert the youth of the 1970s to Christ. In *LGPE*, Lindsey stated:

Young people want a simple, personal, and relevant answer to life that isn't based upon self-centered materialism, but upon real life, selfless love. When they are shown that this idealistic view of life cannot be achieved by various shades of welfarism, socialism, or drugs, but only through a personal relationship with Christ that this is not tied to joining an institutional church, then many respond and receive Jesus Christ . . . Many youth are going to be on the front age of a movement toward first century-type Christianity, with an emphasis upon people and their needs rather than buildings and unwieldy organizations.³⁷

³⁵ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:01:55 to 0:02:38.

³⁶ The song is performed by The Fishmarket Combo with music credit attributed to Larry Norman.

³⁷ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 183.

The youth group experience is contrasted with that of Patty's family church. Representing everything wrong with the American church in the 1970s, Patty's Sunday morning church service exemplifies the many churches that fundamentalists criticized for having grown cold, worldly, and having favored buildings over people. During the first act of the film, Patty struggles with her own church as her pastor, Reverend Matthew Turner—a dynamic character whose story of redemption becomes an important subplot throughout all four films—rejects dispensationalism and



Figure 9. "Reverend Matthew Turner preaching a modernist version of the Gospel," Mark IV Pictures, *A Thief in the Night*, 1973.

fundamentalist teachings—such as the Bible's inherent truth and Creationism—and, instead, advocates for a modernist view of Christianity. The reverend claims, "To insist that the Bible is anything more than the poetic expression of those greater principles by which man lives with man is to box oneself in with a wealth of opinion and counter opinion which really doesn't matter."³⁸ The film portrays Patty as a nominal, once-a-week churchgoing Christian who has not had a born-again experience and struggles with dispensationalist teachings.

After spending a day at the lake, Patty and her friends, along with Jim and Jerry—two older boys they recently met at the state fair—and Jenny's new Christian friend (unnamed), discuss the end of days. Jenny's friend from the youth center has studied prophecy and challenges the group to consider Jesus and warns that the days ahead are going to get worse. Jenny recently accepted Jesus, but her friends struggle with the warnings about damnation.

³⁸ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:20:52 to 0:21:07.

Christian Friend: One of these days, it could be any minute now, Christ's just gonna come back for his own. After that, it's gonna be pretty awful here on earth.

Jim: Like what?

Christian Friend: Well, for example, the Bible says that right now, the spirit of God is holding back the full force of evil in the world. But after the believers go, the spirit will too. That means a whole new ballgame. Only this time with no rules. Evil will just take over. And the evil one, the Bible calls him the Antichrist, or the Beast, will rule supreme. See, we just don't know what it would be like.

Diane: You really believe all that?

Christian Friend: Yes, I do.

Jerry: Lot's of luck.

Christian Friend: I'll say one thing. Anybody that's left here is gonna need it.

Patty: The Beast you talk about, was he the one who goes around marking people? My grandmother told me about a lot of terrible things that are suppose to happen.

Christian Friend: The Mark of the Beast is talked about, Patty. It's probably some kind of identification mark based on the number 666. It says in the Bible that people won't be able to buy or sell anything without it. Kind of a super evil credit card. Only it will be on your hand or forehead.

The scene depicts the six youths discussing prophecy in a way that modeled how a believer might share with their friends after watching the film. The topics mentioned in their conversation foreshadow important plot points throughout the film and its sequels.

Following a near death experience, Jim, a nonbeliever and Patty's boyfriend, is hospitalized after being bitten by an Indian cobra. His friend Jerry is a paramedic and arrives first on the scene. Despite his best efforts, neither his best friend nor the doctors can cure Jim. At the hospital, Jim's friends gather and worry about his recovery after learning that Jim is unable to receive a necessary serum due to an allergy. Jim's only hope of survival is blood from a stranger who has also been bitten by cobras on several occasions. Symbolic of Christ's blood poured out for the sins of the world, the doctor explains to Patty that only this one man's blood can save her friend's life. As a result of the blood transfusion, Jim recovers slowly. The experience awakens

Jim spiritually, confessing that while in a fever dream waiting for the blood transfusion, he felt a deep peace as a result of the prayers of Jenny and her pastor, Clarence Balmer.

At Jenny's church, Jim encounters a sermon about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Labeled in the film's credits as the "Good Pastor," Pastor Balmer's warm mood and inviting sermon contrasts the cold and academic approach of Patty's minister. The viewers learn that not only Jenny's youth pastor, but also the senior pastor preaches on prophecy and urges a born-again experience before the Rapture. At this point in the film, another contrast is established between Patty's church and Jenny's dispensationalist church. Pastor Balmer proceeds to warn about another coming: the Antichrist.

I want to talk to you about some of the signs of the end times. And one in particular, namely, the sign of the Antichrist. When the time is right, then the Bible tells us that a very great and strong and powerful leader will appear. Now who will that leader be? Do we have any indication in the scriptures as to who this person will be? Yes, the Bible has an answer for that . . . The Bible further teaches that this individual will be instrumental in bringing about a season of peace in the world. Although his ultimate end will be a revenge against God. He will be a very evil person. Now some think that if Christ were to come back in 30 years, that this individual could be living at this particular moment. And actually if Christ comes back before 30 years, then it's altogether possible that this man is active in government even this very day . . . Well, from our studies over the past few weeks, we can conclude that we're living now in the end times. The days in which we live are seeing many prophecies being fulfilled. That we have never seen fulfilled before. And surely this serves to remind all of us that the time is short at best. And if we would be followers of Jesus Christ, we must join his band now.³⁹

Jenny's church is an example of what dispensationalists believe to be the true church. Otherwise, a church that is not preaching the fundamentals and dispensationalist views reflected in Pastor Balmer's ministry is possibly an apostate church. In *LGPE*, Lindsey explained:

It is imperative for us to have a clear understanding of who and what "the church" is before we can understand its apostasy. ("Apostasy" means an abandonment or desertion of principles or faith.) The apostate church is, always has been, and will be, the visible, physical gathering of people who call themselves Christians. These churches may be of

³⁹ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:30:30 to 0:32:38.

any denomination . . . However, no matter what sacred or holy name is applied to the visible church, this is no guarantee it teaches and preaches the truth of God.⁴⁰

After Jim's recovery and his exposure to dispensationalism, Jim and Patty marry. Time passes, revealing that Patty and Jim had a happy marriage prior to the Rapture. Prior to the event, Patty maintained the belief that her good works and commitment to church were enough to consider herself in right relationship with God. Visiting the young couple, Pastor Balmer challenges Jim and his wife with the gospel. The dialogue between Patty, Jim, and Pastor Balmer provides another example for how viewers can share the gospel and truth about the end times with individuals who consider themselves Christians but have not accepted the gospel or the teachings of dispensationalism. As a result of his near-death experience and listening to Pastor Balmer's sermons, Jim accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior while his wife, Patty, continues to listen to what her pastor, Reverend Turner, teaches instead.

The dialogue between Pastor Balmer and the newlyweds echoes what Lindsey wrote about the state of ministry during the end times. "With increasing frequency, the leadership of the denominations will be captured by those who completely reject the historical truths of the Bible and deny doctrines which according to Christ Himself are crucial to believe in order to be a Christian."⁴¹ Lindsey continued, quoting the Apostle Paul's warning concerning ministers in the last days: "holding a form of godliness [literally religion], although they have denied its power . . . they are always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."⁴² As the film enters its second act, numerous townsfolk around Des Moines go about their day—Jenny's

⁴⁰ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Christian friend mowing the grass, Jim shaving, Patty's younger sister visiting a neighbor—as the camera repeatedly pans to the clouds and a clear blue sky. Interestingly, the pastor of First Church of the Open Bible updates the church sign with the words “THE END IS NEA—” before being raptured. The next series of frames include a lawnmower idling in a front yard, a little girl's doll lying in the street, unmanned cars, and a kitchen mixer spinning wildly as the radio reports:

Never before has an emergency like this one been contemplated. Airports have stopped all flights. In New York alone, three large jets reportedly have crashed . . . In California, meanwhile, traffic on all major freeways has come to virtually a stand still. Due to pile ups where drivers disappeared. Leaving their vehicles to the mercy of passengers.⁴³

Over the radio, breaking news is announced concerning decisions made by the United Nations.

This is just in from Central News Agency. The UN has established a special emergency committee and will be making an unprecedented worldwide radio and telecast at noon today. And the purpose of this broadcast will be to assess the worldwide situation and establish methods and procedures in handling possible problems and danger facing the world as we know it today.⁴⁴

During a worldwide telecast from the newly established United Television Network (UTN), a representative of the United Nations Imperium of Total Emergency (UNITE) addresses the current global emergency, stating many of the details believed and feared by dispensationalists. The address given by UNITE checks the box of many beliefs about a one world government and the rise of the Antichrist.

⁴³ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:41:37 to 0:42:00.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 0:42:02 to 0:42:27.

As I speak to you this day, my words are being translated into every major tongue and dialect in the world. This morning, the United Nations met in emergency session and formed the organization you see represented by this symbol . . . The Imperium is designed to exercise total power for as long as the emergency exists. And as yet, no final judgment has been made as to the exact nature of the emergency. But UNITE is anxious that until such judgment has been made, all feelings of panic and fear be held in check. The Imperium is made up of leaders from ten major world powers, consisting of six committees. From within those countries of six members each. You can be sure that the Imperium are taking absolute control over all government during this emergency will truly represent your feelings and needs. It is because of this potential threat to our entire planet that this one world government . . . has been formed. And each member of the world council wishes to assure those of his fellow citizens that as soon as the emergency is passed, we will return to self-rule for all nations.⁴⁵



Figure 10. “UNITE representative addressing the world by television following the Rapture,” Mark IV Pictures, *A Thief in the Night*, 1973.

Several prophecies espoused by Lindsey and other dispensationalists are represented in the film. In *LGPE*, Lindsey taught that the United Nations served as the most likely organization for the Antichrist’s one world government. In his chapter titled “The Ultimate Trip,” Lindsey created likely scenarios reflecting how he thought the world might respond to the Rapture. Lindsey theorized “Project Disappearance” and composed how ordinary people, the media, and world governments would respond to such a massive event. “One guys claims, ‘There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver.’” And then another concludes that “we’ve got an invasion from outer space!”⁴⁶ A minister arrogantly addresses his congregation after the event: “I believe God’s

⁴⁵ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:42:41 to 0:44:20.

⁴⁶ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 136.

judgment has come upon them for their continued dissension and quarreling . . . Now that [they] are removed, we can progress toward our . . . goal of uniting all mankind.”⁴⁷ But what mirrors most Lindsey’s work in Thompson’s film is the response of the United Nation: “As an official spokesman for the United Nations I wish to inform all peace-loving people of the world that we are making every human effort to assist those nations who leaders have disappeared.”⁴⁸ The UN spokesman then condemns the nations for causing the incident and eludes to a one world government.

The fictionalized *Laramie Daily Sentinel* headlines the worldwide governmental shift and new ordinances established by UNITE. The headline reads “Imperium Initiates I.D. Sign,” while sub headlines read of horrific events, such as families being murdered. At the local UNITE government office, Patty learns that the new government identification signs are tattooed on



Figure 11. “Businesses across the world require the Mark of the Beast (666) for commerce,” Mark IV Pictures, *A Thief in the Night*, 1973.

either a citizen’s hand or forehead. The marks are computer coded and allude to the dispensationalist belief that the Mark of the Beast will be represented in the future by the numbers 666. One elderly gentleman points to his forehead and eagerly announces, “Put her right there, I’m not afraid to be a good citizen.”⁴⁹ His head is then wiped clean as an electronic device is applied for the inking.

⁴⁷ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 136.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:46:01 to 0:46:03.

Unable to buy food, medicine, or clothing without the mark, Patty feels the pressure intensify when UNITE declares those like her to be enemies of the state and are now subject to arrest. Patty regrets not accepting Jesus Christ as her Savior and not believing what others said about the Tribulation. Filled with regret and anxious about her future, Patty becomes increasingly paranoid as soldiers for UNITE begin to pursue her for not taking the Mark of the Beast.

In one of the more enduring moments of the film, Patty visits her pastor, Reverend Turner, who is also left behind. Patty and the reverend have both acknowledged that the prophecies were true. The film shifts from its focus on reaching unbelievers with the gospel and end-times prophecy to a condemnation of non-dispensationalist ministers. Reverend Tuner acknowledges that he led Patty and his congregation astray, lamenting:

Another one. Oh God! How many? How many have I misled? How many are still here because of me. It was all there. I read it. I studied it. I preached it . . . I can't eat. I can't sleep. All I can think about are . . . all I can see are those faces who were out there every Sunday . . . How many?⁵⁰

A harsh condemnation toward ministers who had abandoned the fundamentals of the gospel, the scene ends with UNITE taking away both the minister and Patty for having failed to register for the mark. After escaping jail, several days of cat-and-mouse between Patty and UNITE result in a final confrontation between Patty, UNITE, and her friends Diane and Jerry at the Red Rock Dam. As Patty reaches the top of the dam, Norman's lyrics narrate: "There's no time to change your mind. How could you have been so blind? The Father spoke. The demons dined. The Son

⁵⁰ *A Thief in the Night*, 0:50:49 to 0:51:39.

has come, and you have been left behind.”⁵¹ Betrayed by her friends and realizing that the only future left for her was one without God’s spirit, Patty jumps in desperation to her death.

The film’s exciting climax left its viewers momentarily shocked over the outcome of Patty’s story only to realize that the events were only a dream. Upon waking, Patty’s bedroom radio announces the end of the world just as it had in her nightmare. Her nightmare was itself a premonition of everything that is to come. Screaming in horror, the film ends with the ticking of a clock and Jesus’ prophetic words: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man. No not the angels which are in Heaven. Neither the Son but the Father. Take heed, watch and pray for ye know not when the TIME is.”⁵² The film’s twist ending communicated clearly to its audience that what looks like a nightmarish future will one day be reality for those alive during the Tribulation. While the Tribulation period and numerous other eschatological topics are not discussed in the first film in the series, its sequels expanded not only the horrific hardships for those left behind, but also its dispensationalist message concerning the order in which everything would occur following the Rapture.

While criticized by some Christian viewers as trying to scare people into heaven, co-producer Doughten believed that “anybody who seriously reads the prophetic books or Revelation or Thessalonians or even Matthew 24 will be scared. There’s some pretty heavy stuff in those prophecies . . . If you take seriously what’s being said there, it’s frightening.”⁵³ When pressed more about the decision to show the brutality of life during the Great Tribulation, Doughten defended the decision, stating, “We’re just trying to illustrate what’s there. If it

⁵¹ *A Thief in the Night*, 1:04:14 to 1:05:07.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:08:00 to 1:08:00.

⁵³ Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 62.

frightens you, then maybe it's your problem, because from our point of view that's what the Lord is telling you."⁵⁴ At the end of the interview with Balmer, Doughten summarized his intentions for the films.

If we can convince you that the tribulation period is going to be filled with strong confrontation between God and the forces of evil, and this is going to affect mankind to the point that one-third of the population will be destroyed as the various vials predicted in Revelation are poured out, well, that's pretty frightening.⁵⁵

For the creators of the series, the decision was intentional to make an effective film to bring people to Christ and to warn about the wrath to come following the Rapture. Thompson and Doughten's usage of film as an evangelistic tool is not unprecedented. Balmer provides key insight into Thompson and Doughten's use of cinema as a new technology to reach the lost for Christ.

Indeed, especially in the realm of communication, evangelicals historically have been pioneers in the use of media. In the eighteenth century, George Whitefield triggered the Great Awakening with his itinerant preaching, his oratorical skills, and his persuasive rhetoric . . . During the Second Great Awakening early in the nineteenth century, Charles Grandison Finney employed "new measures," including the use of newspapers, to publicize his revivals . . . In the twentieth century, Charles E. Fuller and other evangelists used the radio to communicate the gospel . . . None of this suggests a fear of technology or innovation, although it is certainly true that evangelicals were slow in catching on to the evangelistic possibilities of motion pictures, due . . . to lingering doubts about Hollywood morality . . . Thompson may not have eradicated those suspicions, but his films provide an illustration of evangelicals' willingness to use new media for evangelistic ends.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 62.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 65.

To ensure that the film accurately portrayed end-time events throughout the sequels, Thompson incorporated end-times prophecy teacher Stanley A. Ellisen’s scholarship into the script. A seasoned pastor, church planter, and professor at Western Seminary where he taught Biblical Literature, Ellisen published *Biography of a Great Planet* in 1975, two years before the second film, *A Distant Thunder*, went into production. Thompson and Doughten’s major draw to Ellisen’s work is found in the author’s four main reasons for writing the book. The author sought to (1) explain the “why” of prophecy as much as the “what” or “who;” (2) possibly the most important reason the film creators chose Ellisen was the author’s effort in putting “the prophetic program of God in chronological order; (3) popularize the message and terminology of Bible prophecy in a way that was easy for people to understand; (4) and lastly, “to emphasize the positive rather than the negative” to “make the subject [prophecy] appetizing and to relieve any malice or rancor.”⁵⁷ As already mentioned, Ellisen’s second motive for writing about Biblical prophecy was what Thompson and Doughten needed to craft a cohesive narrative for the sequels. Based on Ellisen’s work alongside Salem Kirban—also a prophecy expert remembered for his “One Hour Nearer The Lord’s Return” wrist watches—the filmmakers introduced an end-times timeline into their follow up film to not only give cohesion

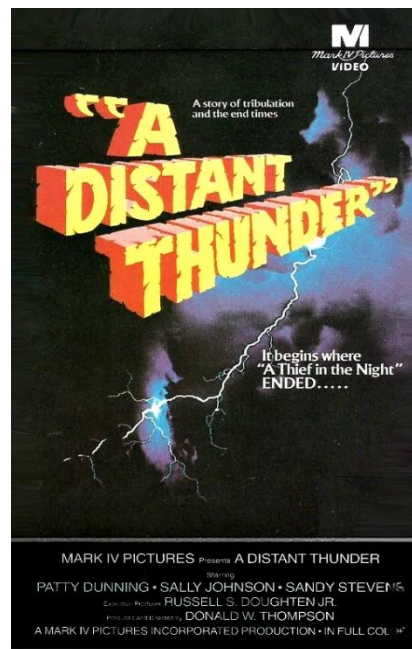


Figure 12. “Original movie poster,” Mark IV Pictures, *A Distant Thunder*, 1978.

⁵⁷ Stanley A. Ellisen, *Biography of a Great Planet* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975), 7-8.

to the events in the film, but also to better instruct their viewers of the events along the road to Armageddon.⁵⁸

A Distant Thunder begins nearly four years after *A Thief in the Night* with Patty—featuring the return of the original actress Patty Dunning—waking from another nightmare about the Rapture only to find that the end of times has actually begun. Patty and several new friends are imprisoned in a UNITE facility awaiting their execution for not taking the Mark of the Beast. While her new friends—Wenda and her younger sister, Sandy—are Christians, Patty struggles with believing in a God that would allow the Tribulation to happen. At this point in the film, Patty still has not invited Jesus Christ to be her Lord and Savior and is not a born-again believer. Her husband, Jim, and friend, Jenny, are gone, both having become born-again believers prior to the Rapture. In a series of flashbacks that explains Patty’s experience under the three and one-half years of the Antichrist’s reign, the film presents the gospel message and introduces a new evangelistic tool in the form of a pamphlet titled “Tribulation Map.” The timeline included

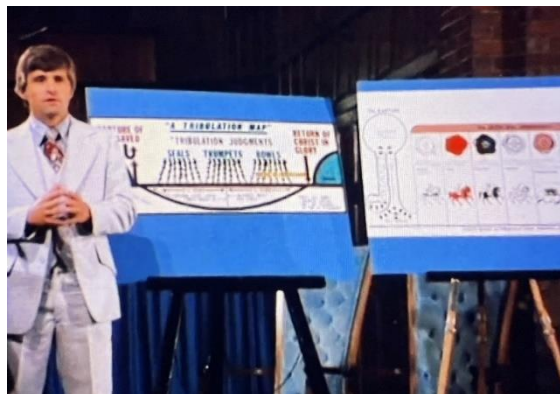


Figure 13. “Evangelists warns church goes pre-tribulation that those not raptured will face the Great Tribulation and horrors of the Seven Seals,” Mark IV Pictures, *A Distant Thunder*, 1978.

in the pamphlet is also reinforced in a flashback when a traveling evangelist visited Patty’s church—to the disapproval of her pastor, Reverend Turner—and explains the chronological order of events during the Tribulation and the Seven Seals that will be unleashed on the earth during the first three and a half years of the period. In another flashback, Patty recalls Jenny

⁵⁸ For more on Salem Kirban, see his bestselling novel of the end times *666* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970). Kirban is also discussed at length in Paul S. Boyer’s *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).

sharing a short passage from Kirban's *Biography of a Great Planet*, which described how people in the last days will be prior to the Rapture. "Others will gather around them a great number of teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive . . . And a whole list of other things."⁵⁹ Filled with regret, Patty remembers all of the times that she rejected the gospel.

While in the facility, Patty meets a Christian Jew—one of 144,000 to convert to Christianity and preach the gospel throughout the world. In *LGPE*, Lindsey described the prophecy:

After the Christians are gone, God is going to reveal Himself in a special way to 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose on this earth—the earth will never know a period of evangelism like this period. The Jewish people are going to make up for lost time. They are going to have the greatest number of converts in all history . . . However, the Antichrist is going to unleash a total persecution of these people . . . He will be the absolute dictator of the whole world! This is the Future Fuehrer.⁶⁰

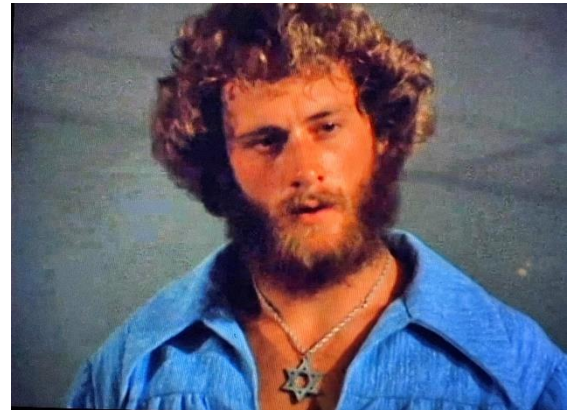


Figure 14. "A Christian Jew wears the Star of David, signifying that he is one of the 144,000 Jews to convert to Christianity during the Tribulation," Mark IV Pictures, *A Distant Thunder*, 1978.

Prior to their internment, a Christian Jew appears while Patty, Wenda, and Sandy are riding horses in the countryside. Wenda is drawn to the man by a supernatural force and immediately embraces Christ's salvation. The power of the 144,000 is portrayed as an irresistible force for those willing to believe the gospel message. Patty looks back to that experience and regrets not feeling the call to salvation like her friend.

⁵⁹ *A Distant Thunder*, directed by Donald W. Thompson (Mark IV Pictures Incorporated, 1978), 0:11:29 to 0:11:42, https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/0HSTSL6VA_C0I34RSZ9M40RBTLR.

⁶⁰ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 111.

Another flashback illustrates an afternoon that Patty spent hiding out in the countryside with her friends Jerry, Diane, Wenda, and Sandy. Jerry reads a recent newspaper headline: “Hey look here guys, it says ‘Men Prophecy in Jerusalem.’ I thought I heard on TV a guy say that all the Christians were gone.” Patty then asks for the newspaper and reads part of the article:

Seemingly with supernatural powers, two witnesses are busy preaching ‘Repent, Jesus is coming’ . . . The character of their ministry is described as similar to as that of Moses and Elijah . . . These two men have actually had spectacular conversions of many thousands of Jewish young men in a brief period of time. These Jewish disciples are being trained for worldwide evangelistic effort.⁶¹

The film quickly moves through major events along the dispensational timeline, including the unsealing of God’s wrath on the earth. A red chest piece appears as a television news segment announces the beginning of World War III while broadcasting a nuclear bomb striking Uganda. Referring to Revelation 6, Lindsey wrote that “almost immediately after the Antichrist declares himself to be God, God releases the dreaded second of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. This is a figure of the unleashing of war upon the earth.”⁶² A black chest piece emerges as the film shifts to a post-Rapture Reverend Turner explaining to a small congregation that the third seal’s power to cause famine throughout the world. Following a devastating barn fire, the only horse to survive is that of a pale horse.

The symbolism reminds Patty that the fourth seal (death) had already been poured out upon the world as many were now starving, lacking water, dying violently from war and animal attacks, and experiencing plagues. Patty recognizes that the fifth seal has been broken when news reaches her town that Israeli missionaries are being murdered around the world and that UNITE

⁶¹ *A Distant Thunder*, 0:30:59 to 0:31:18.

⁶² Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 153.

is now preparing to murder Christians who do not wear the Mark of the Beast. Explaining the news to her friends, Patty laments: “They are setting up clinics in churches and schools and hospitals. You guys know what that means? Pretty soon they’re gonna be killing converts.”⁶³ At a



Figure 15. “UNITE’s instrument of execution, a steel guillotine,” Mark IV Pictures, *A Distant Thunder*, 1978.

clinic set up in a local church, the film’s flashbacks begin to catch up to the opening scene of Patty awaiting her execution in a UNITE detention facility. Patty sits with her friends and agonizes over her experiences and battles with whether to get the Mark of the Beast to prevent being publicly executed. Patty finally embraces the gospel, repents, and accepts the consequences of refusing the mark.

Waiting for her name to be called, Patty recalls the times when she rejected opportunities to be born again. After being called, Patty is blindfolded and led to her death outside of the church. Ripping the blindfold from her eyes, she discovers a large, archaic guillotine is set up in the church parking lot. Like *A Thief in the Night*, the film concludes with Patty screaming as she is forced to watch Wenda’s execution. The scene fades to John 3:16 before ending. Only the second in a four-part series, it would take until 1981 for audiences to learn the fate of Patty and those surviving the Great Tribulation.

Image of the Beast, the third film in the series, opens with a description of the Great Tribulation and plea to take the film’s warnings seriously.

⁶³ *A Distant Thunder*, 0:49:09 to 0:49:22.

The book of Revelation reveals a time to come, of great tribulation. At time of such great catastrophe, that no film could portray its reality. It is the belief of many bible scholars, that the facts presented in this film story, could become a reality in your lifetime. After viewing this film, we hope you will take seriously what God says in His word about these prophecies, and turn to Jesus Christ—and avoid the events you are about to experience in this motion picture.⁶⁴

This film is regarded by many critics as the strongest entry in the series. The role of computers in the end times becomes the central plot device employed to give surviving Christians a chance to fight back against the Antichrist. A larger budget and improved acting talent allowed Thompson and Doughten to improve the quality of the film's heavier dialogue-laden scenes that continue to dominate the film series while also adding more action-packed scenes and special effects. The third film stands out against the other films in the series with its complex, and at times campy, plot. The film does not

lose focus, as seen with the opening statement to the audience. The film's goal is for the viewer to understand the horrors to come and escape the Great Tribulation by believing in Jesus.

The film relies heavily on the dispensationalist view that technology and computers will play a major role in the Antichrist assuming power and establishing an authoritarian government. Lindsey referred to renowned historian Arnold Toynbee to support the belief that these advances will provide the means by which the Antichrist will gain total control.

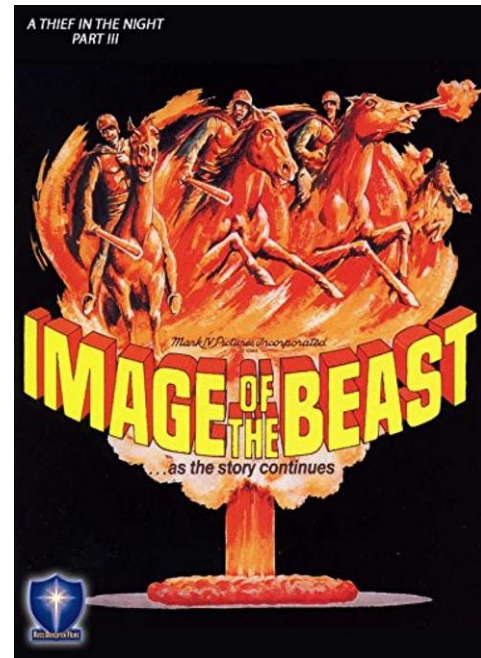


Figure 16. “Original movie poster,” Mark IV Pictures, *Image of the Beast*, 1981.

⁶⁴ *Image of the Beast*, directed by Donald W. Thompson (Mark IV Pictures Incorporated, 1981), 0:00:05 to 0:00:35, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B06W9L4X9J>.

By forcing on mankind more and more lethal weapons, and at the same time making the world more and more interdependent economically, technology has brought mankind to such a degree of distress that we are ripe for the deifying of any new Caesar who might succeed in giving the world unity and peace.⁶⁵

In *Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey wrote extensively about the role that computers would play in the end times. In a section titled “Computers in Prophecy,” he argued:

As scary as it may sound, many of these conditions are already coming to pass. At least one of these conditions would have been impossible before the advent of computers. An international currency has already been introduced. Units called “special drawing rights,” or SDRs, are the currency which member nations of the International Monetary Fund currently exchange. But even closer to the prophecy of a world currency system is the use of “electronic funds transfer,” or EFT. This system eliminates the need for cash by electronically adding or subtracting money from a person’s account as that person earns or spends money. All transactions are conducted using credit cards. Although this system is still far from being widely used, it is being tested in cities such as Arlington, Ohio, where people for a period were assigned credit cards in place of cash. I believe that one day soon, currency will no longer be our medium of exchange. Instead, we will all be assigned computer numbers for life.⁶⁶

At the start of the film, Patty’s fate is decided as she rejects Christ and begs for the mark.

Moments before she is released from the guillotine, a storm erupts and releases the executioner’s blade—killing Patty. Her rejection of salvation in the final moments is one of several plot twists throughout the series. The story then shifts to a new group of survivors being hunted by UNITE. A new protagonist, David Michaels, teams up with Leslie, a Christian, and non-believer, Kathy, and her young son Billy. While Kathy is not a believer, she refuses to receive the Mark of the Beast because of a prophecy book she read that explained the role of computers in the end times. Kathy explains that she was a computer analysis before the world changed and that she believes what is written in the book about the mark, stating, “There’s a chapter in here called, Day of the

⁶⁵ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 103.

⁶⁶ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 111.

Beast. It says that if a person takes the mark, that he is selling his soul to the Devil, and that he'll be tormented forever. Well, I won't take that mark."⁶⁷ In a daring escape, Leslie is shot and left for dead.

While traveling, David, Kathy, and Billy encounter Matthew Turner—the pastor from the previous films who has now turned recluse and lives off grid to avoid UNITE. In one of the most eschatologically heavy moments in the film series, Turner has pieced together the events that are happening around the world. In a conversation with David and Kathy, Turner explains that what is happening in the spirit world is also impacting life on earth.

Turner: Satan has been in heaven accusing the saints, but Christ has also been there telling God that the sins of the saints have been washed away by his blood . . . Michael and the good angels throw Satan and his angels out of Heaven. Satan then comes to earth to vent his wrath and cunning on mankind with new fury. He knows his time will be short.

David: Then you, you think Satan's here now?

Turner: Yes, I believe he is beginning his final, terrible effort to overthrow God . . . [We] will now see three and a half years where the wrath of man mixed with the wrath of Satan is confronted by the terrible wrath and judgment of God. War will continue. Russia will invade Israel. Then a great leader will rise up and save Israel. He will appear to be slain, then Satan will enter him and counterfeit his resurrection. This great leader will then pronounce himself world dictator, destroy the world church . . . He will seize the Temple, set up his image, and begin the most devastating persecution in the history of Israel.⁶⁸

Turner's prophetic interpretations mirror the teachings of most dispensationalists. The descriptions of the Antichrist's role and his persecution of the Jews are rooted in the prophetic interpretations of Lindsey. While much of Lindsey's teachings have been explored in chapter three and throughout this chapter, Thompson's films continue to reference a world church that is united under one religion. This church will be apostate but remain until it is destroyed by the

⁶⁷ *Image of the Beast*, 0:18:14 to 0:18:36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 0:28:10 to 0:29:36.

Antichrist. In *LGPE*, Lindsey wrote that “star-worship, mind-expansion, and witchcraft are preparing the world in every way for the establishment of a great religious system, one which will influence the Antichrist.”⁶⁹ Lindsey expanded on this one world religion, stating that “John is given one of the most important prophecies for us to understand because he is exposing a one-world religious system which will bring all false religions in one unit. Through this system Satan’s Antichrist will take over the world.”⁷⁰ Regarding Turner’s mention of Russia’s immediate invasion of Israel, Lindsey noted that “Russia . . . will rise up against the restored state of Israel.”⁷¹

Integral to the film’s plot, David confesses to Kathy that he has been working for years on a counterfeit Mark of the Beast for Christians to buy food and access the central computer bank established by UNITE. With a background in computers, Kathy is excited at the prospect of David’s mark and agrees to help. At The World Church, the apostate pastor announces Europe’s newly elected president, Brother Christopher, has the full support of America. America’s corporate, financial, and governmental institutions are united under the Antichrist’s global leadership. The apostate pastor at The World Church also announces that an ongoing war between Israel and Russia would soon end, suggesting that Brother Christopher would bring the conflict to a close.

Shortly afterward, a breaking news segment announces that an assassin has killed Brother Christopher just as Israel suffered a major defeat following Egypt’s entry into the Middle Eastern conflict on the side of Russia. Days later, the United Radio Network branch based in Jerusalem

⁶⁹ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 116.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

announces that Brother Christopher has been miraculously healed. Following the Antichrist's ordered execution of the two witnesses (assessed earlier in this chapter for the film *A Distant Thunder*), Turner claims that the next phase of events is to begin: the Seven Trumpet Judgments. According to Revelation 8-11, the seven trumpets result in hail, fire, falling stars, darkness in the heavens, demonic locusts (and their leader Abaddon the Destroyer), fallen angels leading massive armies, and a final trumpet that opens the heavens and readies the bowls of God's wrath to be poured on the earth. Throughout this period, a third of the world's vegetation, marine life, and drinking water will be destroyed as well as a third of the world's population. According to Lindsey, much of the fiery torment unleashed on the earth is likely to result from nuclear strikes across the planet, writing, "Once again, this could be a direct judgment from God, or God could allow the various countries to launch a nuclear exchange of ballistic missiles upon each other."⁷² And even the earthquakes caused during the Tribulation could result in nuclear reactors destroying much of the planet. "According to our author-experts, some of the scary side effects of the new wave of quakes will be great floods—when dams built over faults are destroyed—and nuclear power plant meltdowns at facilities built on or near the Earth's faults."⁷³

Following Brother Christopher's miraculous resurrection, the film's plot quickly illustrates what is happening in Israel regarding the rebuilding of the temple, the new golden calf (a supercomputer), and the Antichrist's new headquarters in Jerusalem. In a lengthy speech to the world, the Antichrist fulfills the following key prophecies taught by dispensationalist: (1) the Antichrist brings a temporary peace to the world, claiming to have ended the devastating Seven Seals of Judgment unleashed in *A Distant Thunder*; (2) ends The World Church, which helped to

⁷² Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 161.

⁷³ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 30.

bring him to power; (3) and mocks God and Jesus Christ while in the rebuilt temple. This scene is a portrayal of what the Prophet Daniel (Daniel 9:27) wrote and what the Apostle Paul described in II Thessalonians 2:3-4 (ESV):

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

In *LGPE*, Lindsey wrote of this prophetic moment, claiming that “by this act, the Roman prince, who is called the “the Lawless One” and “the Antichrist,” breaks his covenant with the Jewish people.”⁷⁴



Figure 17. “Brother Christopher, the Antichrist, sits upon the Ark of the Covenant in the Third Temple of Jerusalem,” Mark IV Pictures, *Image of the Beast*, 1981.

As events intensify in the film, fewer places are left unscathed by devastating natural disasters. David, Kath, and Billy plan to destroy the newly installed supercomputer housed in the temple—a type of resurrected golden calf for the world to worship. As the rivers turn red and monstrous, demonic locusts begin swarming the earth—stinging Kathy and Turner—David and Billy are then betrayed by Jerry and Diane and sent to a UNITE internment camp to await execution. Faced with one of the hardest moral dilemmas possible, David is forced between telling the whereabouts of Kathy to save young Billy, or to allow Billy’s execution. Once Billy accepts Jesus, David chooses to protect Kathy—who is the only one that can bring down the idolatrous supercomputer in the temple of God—instead of saving Billy. In the film’s final scene,

⁷⁴ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 57.

David is led to the guillotine. The camera pans away to a red balloon floating the sky—symbolizing that Billy, like all Christians, are free from the horrors of the Great Tribulation upon death.

Thompson and Doughten’s fourth and final film in the *A Thief in the Night* series—*The Prodigal Planet*—emerged three years after the previous film and is the lengthiest of the films with a two hour and six-minute run time. By 1983, the film series had garnered accolades for its originality and film production by both Christian and secular institutions. “Thompson’s films have won seventeen ‘Christian Oscars’ from the Christian Film Distributors Association, which also named Thompson ‘Director of the Decade’ for the 1970s.”⁷⁵ By the 1980s, the films had become a staple at numerous church events and even several drive-in theaters. Published under “Church Activities” in the “Movies” section of *The Park City Daily News*, recent films “Image of the Beast” and “The Prodigal Planet” were advertised at the Christian Drive-In Theater in Bowling Green, Kentucky.⁷⁶ The films were advertised and shown regularly throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Like the previous films, *The Prodigal Planet* begins where the previous film ended. In *Image of the Beast*, the audience assumed David’s execution. The film opens to Joel 2:3, “A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them

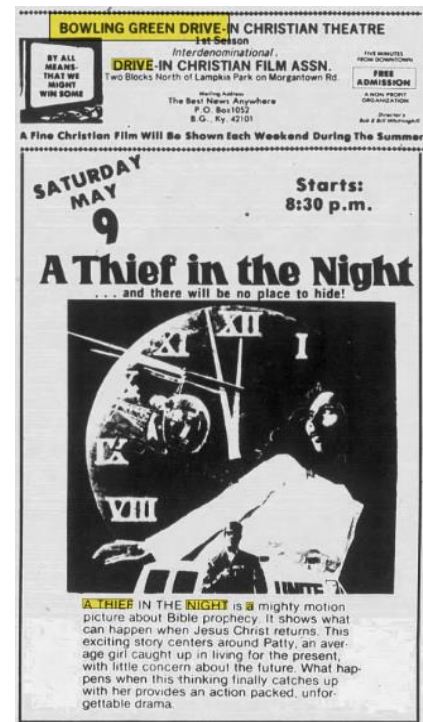


Figure 18. “Bowling Green Drive-In Christian Theatre Newspaper Ad,” *The Park City Daily News*, *A Thief in the Night*, 1983.

⁷⁵ Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 66.

⁷⁶ “Movies,” *The Park City Daily News*, July 8, 1983.

a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.” The film also announces that “this is a story of a few people in that wilderness.”⁷⁷ More so than the other films, *The Prodigal Planet*

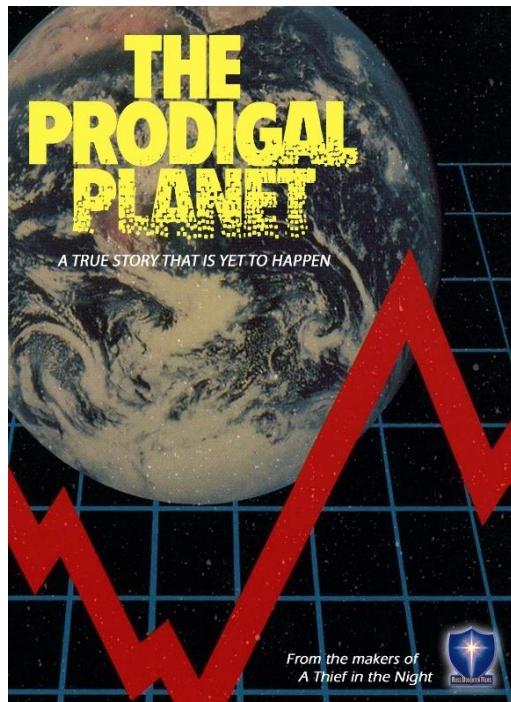


Figure 19. “Original movie poster,” Mark IV Pictures, *The Prodigal Planet*, 1984.

warns its viewer that nuclear warfare and the end of the world is rapidly approaching as tensions increase and the arms race continues to dominate foreign and defense policies around the world. In the film’s opening minutes, David stands before the impersonal, stainless-steel guillotine as UNITE soldiers prepare for his execution. After an alarm sounds, a soldier claims that America is being attacked by a Soviet nuclear warhead. An explosion and its devastating effects are illustrated as the title credits play across the screen.

Cities, including Des Moines, across America are now nuclear wastelands. David’s execution is delayed and a double agent, Connie— posing as UNITE—breaks him out of the detention facility. Connie states that she is a member of the Believers Underground and that radiation is the next threat to face those surviving through the Great Tribulation.

Preparing to launch a second attempt to take down the Antichrist’s supercomputer, David finds Matthew Turner, who is now living underground because of the locust attacks and increased violence among those impacted by the nuclear fallout. Returning to the dispensational timeline, Turner informs the survivors that the worst is still yet to come. The seven seals judgment are over as well as most of the trumpet judgments. Ahead are the bowl judgments,

⁷⁷ *The Prodigal Planet*, directed by Donald W. Thompson (Mark IV Pictures Incorporated, 1983), 0:00:10 to 0:00:20, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B06W9L4X9J>.

which include shortened periods of God's wrath on the earth. These judgments, or plagues, include boils, seas and rivers turning to blood, sun flares, darkness, the Euphrates River drying up, earthquakes, and hail followed by the Battle of Armageddon during the last trumpet call. Turner explains that many of these afflictions will affect "only those with the mark."⁷⁸

It is important to note here that the supercomputer vaguely described in the film series is what empowers the economic monetary system established by the Antichrist. In *Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey explained the role that economics would play in the end times.

The prophet too will have the power to work miracles, and he will use that power to convince the world—and in particular, the Jews—to worship the anti-Christ . . . The anti-Christ will then spread his power throughout the world by devising an ingenious economic program. His 10-nation base of power will be the center of a trade network which will involve every nation on the face of the Earth.⁷⁹

Following the Antichrist's ascension as the "Prince of this World," his war against God unites every nation on the earth by drawing their armies to the Middle East. In a worldwide broadcast from the temple in Jerusalem, Brother Christopher declares:

I am the Prince of this World. In my name and in the power of my glory with advanced missile and nuclear technology, we will blow this self-righteous God from His throne. You can see via satellite we are already moving equipment towards Palestine. Soon, He will not plague us anymore with famine and fire, with pittance and pestilence. We will meet this God of tears and torment in the Valley of Decision. We will settle once and for all who will be king.⁸⁰

David and Connie learn that the supercomputer can be destroyed by a hymn coded, if David can crack the code and write the computer program. After months on the run from UNITE, David

⁷⁸ *The Prodigal Planet*, 0:22:30 to 0:25:50.

⁷⁹ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 110.

⁸⁰ *The Prodigal Planet*, 0:37:27 to 0:38:07.

and his crew reaches Red Rock National Park in Nevada (a reference to the Illinois' Red Rock Dam of the first two films). David discovers the location of a transmitter site that can link directly to the supercomputer in Jerusalem. As the planet becomes increasingly uninhabitable, the war in the Middle East looms over the film's progression toward a climax. United Radio Network announces:

With Russia and the United States nearly destroyed, it appears that China is the thorn in flesh of Brother Christopher. And it appears now that China is going to challenge him for control of the Middle East. Already, many nations are moving their troops over the Himalaya Road built by West Pakistan and the Red Chinese to join forces with the technical might of its European allies. The only other obstacle in the troop move from China to Palestine was the Euphrates River, and it appears now that the mighty riverbed is dry, allowing free movement of troops and tanks toward Israel, the Galilee region near Hypha.⁸¹

As the announcement fades, David quotes Revelation 16:16 (KJV), "And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." *The Prodigal Planet's* description of Chinese military troop movement varies little from Lindsey's *LGPE*. Providing evidence of China's ability to fulfill prophecy by the time of the Battle of Armageddon, Lindsey wrote in a section titled "The Dragon is Awake":

We [dispensationalists] believe that China is the beginning of the formation of the great power called "the kings of the east" by the apostle John. We live at a time in history when it is no longer incredible to think of the Orient with an army of 200 million soldiers. In fact, a recent television documentary on Red China, called "The Voice of the Dragon," quoted the boast of the Chinese themselves that they could field a "people's army" of 200 million militiamen. In their own boast they named the same number as the Biblical prediction. Coincidence?⁸²

⁸¹ *The Prodigal Planet*, 1:48:29 to 1:49:06.

⁸² Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 86.

As the film nears the Battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming, David discovers a group of Underground Christians who have been keeping safe the transmitter deep within the Red Rock caves. The signal emits an electronic variation of “Onward Christian Soldier” as a massive earthquake impacts the entire planet. Dams break and the final devastation of the Great Tribulation plays out across the world, David and the Christian outcasts wait for the end. The Battle of Armageddon, Christ’s return, and the ultimate defeat of the Antichrist—and his supercomputer—are only implied by the prophecies presented throughout the film series. The film’s abrupt ending leaves the final events to the audience’s imagination.

The preachiness of Thompson’s films remained central to the *A Thief in the Night* series, while the end-time events portrayed provided audiences with a basic introduction into the eschatology taught by evangelical authors like Hal Lindsey.⁸³ While dispensationalism inspired the creation of numerous rapture-themed films, works like Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* inspired Hollywood to shift from a Catholic-only spiritual view of the supernatural to also include dispensationalist interpretations of the supernatural and the end times. The most popular Hollywood film featuring the Antichrist is *The Omen*—a film with a story initially inspired by Lindsey’s suggestion that the Antichrist could be a child growing up under the care of dark forces in the 1970s. *The Omen* borrows from the horror, thrills, and supernatural aspects of dispensationalism but abandons the dispensationalist timeline that was key to Christian

⁸³ In the introduction to *Protestants on Screen: Religion, Politics, and Aesthetics in European and American Movies*, Gaston Espinosa frames the collections numerous articles from leading religious historians in the context of premillennial dispensationalism’s popularity from the 1970s onward among many filmmakers. Underlying most assessments for these films is the massive appeal and irresistible narrative provided by Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*. See Gaston Espinosa, etc., eds, *Protestants on Screen: Religion, Politics, and Aesthetics in European and American Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). Of the articles, Timothy Beal’s “The Rise and Fall of Evangelical Protestant Apocalyptic Horror: From *A Thief in the Night* to *Left Behind* and Beyond” provides some of the best assessments regarding dispensationalism’s influence on film since 1970.

filmmakers like Thompson. The result is a Hollywood film series that offers enough “Yes, that could happen” for evangelicals to show interest, while millions of non-dispensationalist moviegoers discovered new fascinations with the doctrines of Armageddon, such as 666, the Antichrist, and the judgments taught in Revelation.

The Omen

In his essay *Reckoning the Number of the Beast: Premillennial Dispensationalism, The Omen, and 1970s America*, Brad Duren provides a historical framework for understanding how apocalyptic interest throughout American history has impacted America culture. “A film built on such religious elements . . . [can] send shockwaves through popular culture, becoming simultaneously representative of its time and transformative in its nature.”⁸⁴ *The Omen* capitalized on the success of *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Exorcist*, which helped to revive the horror genre and generate mass interest in the “cosmic battle of good and evil.”⁸⁵ According to Duren:

What set *The Omen* apart from other religious horror films of the era was its clever, seamless weaving of Premillennial Dispensationalism views into a coherent narrative that captured both the imaginings and anxieties reflected in mid-1970s popular culture . . . [the film] also helped to establish what was once a fringe interpretation of the biblical prophecy as a valid interpretation of the end times.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Brad Duren, "Reckoning the Number of the Beast: Premillennial Dispensationalism, *The Omen*, and 1970s America." in Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Ripper, eds. *Divine Horror: Essays on the Cinematic Battle Between the Sacred and the Diabolical* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), chap. 4. Kindle.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Duran observes, “Lindsey’s work stands as an important link in understanding both the theological and cultural context of *The Omen*.”⁸⁷ As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, it was Robert Munger—an advertiser working for Billy Graham’s World Wide Pictures—who shared his end-time beliefs with producer Harvey Bernhard. Bernhard set the story in motion, crediting Hal Lindsey as the story’s initial source material. Once David Seltzer became involved in the project as the film’s screenwriter, his “superficial understanding” of dispensationalism resulted in an abundance of “interpretative liberties” that resulted more in fiction than Biblical fact.⁸⁸

The series’ sequels—*The Omen II: Damien* and *The Omen III: The Final Conflict*—made substantially less money at the box office but saw the return of Harvey Bernhard as producer and lead of story design. While the first film incorporates prophetic themes such as the rise of the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast, the importance of Israel, the role of the European Common Market, and the end of days, the second film detours to Damien’s upbringing and discovery of the extent of his supernatural powers with little attention to prophecy. In what was designed to be the final film of a trilogy, *The Omen III* explores Damien’s industrial and political rise to power before initiating the end of the world. For this dissertation, the analysis of *The Omen* trilogy will only pertain to the first film in the series since it obtains the greatest influence of dispensationalism. The subsequent sequels departed farther from its original influence, becoming more fictional in its portrayal of the doctrine of Armageddon. For example, in *The Omen III*, the Antichrist is fully aware of his nature and is determined to prevent the reincarnation of Jesus Christ (the Second Coming) as a baby. Damien and his acolytes attempt this by killing babies

⁸⁷ Duren, “Reckoning the Number of the Beast,” chap. 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

born in the U.K. on a specific date (March 24). While entertaining, the sequels reflect very little of what evangelicals embraced in the first film.

The film opens with the darkened silhouette of a child casting a satanic cross (upside-down crucifix) encircled by red, symbolizing the rage and chaos surrounding the future Antichrist. Learning that his first child died stillborn, Robert Thorn (portrayed by Gregory Peck) agonizes over what to tell his



Figure 20. “Original movie poster,” 20th Century Fox, *The Omen*, 1976.

wife who is in recovery. Manipulated into suppressing the origins of another newborn born at the same hospital (lying that its mother died in labor) on the same day (June 6, 1976), a priest suggests that Robert takes the child as his own—and not telling his wife of the unofficial adoption.⁸⁹ The priest reassures Robert that the decision to take this child is morally correct, stating, “On this night, Mr. Thorn, God has given you a son.”⁹⁰ Shortly after obtaining his new son, Damien, Robert is appointed Ambassador to the United Kingdom. The film also reveals that Robert’s political ambitions include becoming President of the United States.

It is relevant to note that the film includes a minimum of prophetic moments that align with mainstream dispensational teachings found in books like Lindsey’s *LGPE*. The value of *The Omen* is what the story represents: a coming-of-age fictionalized account of what

⁸⁹ Because of the prominent theme 666, dates with this series of numbers play a role identifying evil in the world. The film’s cultural impact remains in American and European culture, as evidenced by a general fear that surfaced among some mothers in 2006 whose babies were to be born on June 6, 2006. See Tony Allen-Mills, “Mothers Expect Damien on 6/6/06,” *The Sunday Times*, April 30, 2006, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mothers-expect-damien-on-6606-d8d5wprbcg6>.

⁹⁰ *The Omen*, directed by Richard Donner (20th Century Fox, 1976), 0:04:45 to 0:04:51, <https://www.amazon.com/Omen-Gregory-Peck/dp/B06XFLTC1V>.

dispensationalists believed *could* happen as the Antichrist matures. In the film, Damien's fifth birthday takes a turn as the child's nanny commits suicide in front of hundreds of guests and their children. With a noose around her neck, before jumping she announces: "Damien, I love you. Look at me, Damien. It's all for you."⁹¹ This moment is a turning point in the film, beginning the occurrences of supernatural elements. Once the news spreads of the nanny's suicide, Father Brennan, a local priest, approaches Robert, imploring:

You must accept Christ as your savior . . . You must take communion, drink the blood of Christ, and eat His flesh. For only if He is within you can you defeat the son of the Devil. He's killed once. He'll kill again. He'll kill until everything that's yours is his. Only through Christ can you fight him . . . I was at the hospital, Mr. Thorn, the night your son was born. I witnessed the birth.⁹²

Robert Thorn questions the priest, "What do you know about my son?" In which the priest responds: "Everything. I saw it's mother . . . It's mother was a jackal."⁹³ A major departure from dispensationalist interpretations, the film crafts an origin story of the Antichrist as the son of Satan born through a jackal. The Bible speaks of jackals as cunning and describes them as symbols of desolation. Isaiah 34:13 (ESV) is one such description in the Bible where jackals symbolize destruction. "Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles, and thistles in its fortresses. It shall be the haunt of jackals . . ." Also, the portrayal of Father Brennan as an Anglican priest—as opposed to being Catholic like in most horror films of the period—contrasts the evangelical ministers of films like *A Thief in the Night*. Father Brennan emphasizes rituals and physical elements to combat the Antichrist as well as conversion to Christianity as a form of spiritual and physical protection. The inclusion of physical items to combat evil plays a major

⁹¹ *The Omen*, 0:13:16 to 0:13:24.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 0:16:48 to 0:18:10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 0:18:12 to 0:18:35.

role later in the film when Robert learns of a set of seven ritual knives recently uncovered near Jerusalem.

Arriving to supervise the upbringing of Damien, a member of a Satanist cabal infiltrates the family as the new nanny. Mrs. Baylock is the central figure to not only serve as a protectorate of Damien but to also assist in awakening his supernatural powers. For example, as Damien nears a church, he falls into a ravenous tantrum in response to the religious icons and sacred groups. As the plot develops, animals—except for his loyal rottweiler—sense the evil within Damien, as demonstrated in an intense scene that has an entire zoo react to Damien’s presence. The film’s prophetic messages are scattered throughout the film through Father Brennan, whom the protagonist, Robert, encounters again in a city park. Father Brennan warns:

When the Jews return to Zion, and a comet rips the sky, and the Holy Roman Empire rises, then you and I must die. From the eternal sea, he [Antichrist] rises, creating armies on either shore turning man against his brother till man exists no more. The Book of Revelations predicted it all.⁹⁴

The film offers a watered-down version of the Old Testament Prophets and the Apostle John’s writings, which would be convincing for dispensationalists if not for the obvious mispronunciation of *Revelation* as *Revelations*. While not a major point of criticism by any metric, it is still a glaring mistake that the acute viewer would notice. Father Brennan then describes the Antichrist: “It is by means of a human personality entirely in his possession that Satan will wage his last formidable offense . . . Go to the town of Megiddo in the old city of Jezreel.”⁹⁵ The inclusion of Megiddo is clearly a nod to Armageddon and the end of days. Setting the events for the remainder of the film, Father Brennan is attacked by supernatural forces

⁹⁴ *The Omen*, 0:39:40 to 0:40:08.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 0:40:10 to 0:40:23.

beyond the immediate control of Damien. A violent storm forces Father Brennan to flee to the church, only to be impaled by a falling spear-shaped object from atop the church. The dark cloud over the Thorn family intensifies when his wife, Katherine, announces that she is pregnant but wants an abortion.



Figure 21. “On location in Jerusalem, Thorn, Jennings, and Bugenhagen walk through the historic city of Megiddo, the location for the Battle of Armageddon,” 20th Century Fox, *The Omen*, 1976.

Following Father Brennan’s death, photographer Keith Jennings continues the film’s exposition of Damien’s role in Biblical prophecy. Learning that Damien’s birth records were destroyed in a hospital fire, Jennings and Brennan investigate Father Brennan’s diary for more clues. Referencing the rise of the Roman Empire from earlier in the film, Jennings references what is clearly a dispensationalist teaching, stating that “scholars think that could well mean the formation of the Common Market—The Treaty of Rome.” Robert immediately doubts this interpretation, committing that it is a “bit of a stretch.”⁹⁶ In *LGPE*, Lindsey summarized the role of the Common Market as an instrument of the Antichrist. Reflective of dispensationalist’s mistrust toward European organizations, Lindsey claimed:

If the formation of the European Common Market were an isolated development in the line of Biblical prophecy, then it would have no significance . . . We [dispensationalists]

⁹⁶ *The Omen*, 1:07:54 to 1:08:00.

believe that the Common Market and the trend toward unification of Europe may well be the beginning of the ten-nation confederacy predicted by Daniel and the Book of Revelation . . . [and] according to the prophetic outlook the United States will cease being the leader of the West and will probably become in some way a part of the new European sphere of power.⁹⁷

After discovering that his biological son was murdered at the hospital by the Satanic cabal, Robert learns that Damien's mother was not human but a jackal—implying a twisted-supernatural birth. After his wife's murder in the hospital by Mrs. Baylock, Robert discovers that Megiddo is in some way connected to Damien and that there is currently an archaeological excavation of the area ongoing. Committed to killing Damien, Robert and Jennings seek out Bugenhagen, an archeologist and former exorcist. Found within the ruins of the city, Bugenhagen presents Robert with seven daggers capable of killing the Antichrist. Critical to the originality of the film and subsequent films about the Antichrist, Bugenhagen explains that the real proof that Damien is the Antichrist is made evident by a birthmark bearing “a sequence of sixes.”⁹⁸ Perhaps one of the most fictionalized elements of dispensationalist teachings, the followers of the Antichrist and participants of his economic system are the ones who explicitly wear the mark. While *Image of the Beast* illustrates the Antichrist wearing the mark, it is only after the Mark of the Beast is distributed globally does he take on the mark. In film's like *The Omen*, the mark is almost exclusively worn by the Antichrist and his acolytes—not the general population of non-believers.

After Jennings's supernatural death that resulted in his decapitation, Robert returns to the U.K. to kill Damien. Examining Damien's body for the 666 birthmark, Robert discovers the marking

⁹⁷ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 94-95.

⁹⁸ *The Omen*, 1:32:05 to 1:32:10.

under his hair. Confronted by Mrs. Baylock, Robert kills the Satanic cabalist and takes Damien to a local church. His attempt is disrupted as police enter the church and fatally shoot Robert before Damien can be killed. The film's final scene is of the Thorns' funeral, which is attended by Damien and the President of the United States. The film ends, suggesting that Damien will be raised by the American president—who was a close friend of Robert Thorn. Prior to its credits, Revelation 13:18 fills the screen: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666."⁹⁹



Figure 22. "Robert Thorn discovers that Damien bears the Mark of the Beast, 666," 20th Century Fox, *The Omen*, 1976.

While unplanned at the time of production, Damien's story would continue with two sequels over the next five years. As mentioned in the introduction to *The Omen*, the sequels incorporate limited dispensationalist beliefs concerning the end times and, instead, venture further into science fiction and alternate storylines that do not justify an analysis within the scope of this dissertation. In the next section, a deeper dive into the relationship between music and dispensationalism is assessed, beginning with Larry Norman's influential song "I Wish We'd All Been Ready."

I Wish We'd All Been Ready

Elvis Presley challenged millions of fundamentalists with his black-soul rhythm and blues, suggestive hips, and ability to communicate rock 'n' roll to a generation of American

⁹⁹ *The Omen*, 1:48:49.

youth. While gospel music formed his musical foundation, it was his secular appeal that shot him to stardom. With the recording of his first gospel album with RCA in 1960, *His Hand in Mine* became widely accepted by the older generation, proving that Elvis could close the divide between rock ‘n’ roll and gospel for some religious folk. The title song “His Hand in Mine” echoed the sentiments of Christians who believed that God was knowable. Elvis sang, “You may ask me how I know my Lord is real,” answering with “I can feel His hand in mine and that’s enough for me.”¹⁰⁰ God was not only knowable but also personable. By the late 1960s, America’s counterculture contained a subculture caught up in the nascent Jesus Movement. Challenging norms within fundamentalist Christianity, pioneers like Larry Norman translated a love for the gospel with the popular sounds of rock ‘n’ roll. As noted earlier in this chapter, Norman’s *Upon This Rock* is credited as the first Christian rock album, making its creator the father of Christian rock. Much like Donald W. Thompson pioneering Christian cinema to communicate the doctrine of Armageddon to a wider audience, particularly the youth, Norman’s efforts in bridging Christian music with rock ‘n’ roll enabled Bible prophecy to find another avenue for the diffusion of religious culture into popular culture throughout America. It is important to note that the more a religious doctrine or eschatological belief is absorbed by mainstream culture, the less dogmatic the system remains as creative licenses adjust doctrines for a general audience—as will be demonstrated in *The Omen*.

In *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?*, Gregory Thornbury recounted Paul McCartney’s opinion of Norman, stating that “[he] could be a star if he’d just shup up about

¹⁰⁰ Elvis Presley, “His Hand in Mine,” Track #1 on *His Hand in Mine*, RCA Records, 1960, *YouTube Music*.

religion.”¹⁰¹ Norman’s mission was always to reach the lost with his music and concerts. In essence, his music translated the gospel and prophecy in a way that often “offended Christians and attracted the lost.”¹⁰² While in Los Angeles and Hollywood in the 1960s, Christianity played a central role in Norman’s life. Norman’s activist Christianity was not limited to the gospel or dispensationalists view about the end times. Thornbury described Norman’s religious activism as “[critical of] institutional religion” which was filled with “systemic racism” and often spoke toward topics considered taboo among most Christian churches, which included topics like “STDs and contemporary music, film, and art.”¹⁰³ Yet, it was music that Norman believed to be the most effective medium for “[reaching] people for Christ” despite his “father’s warning about the world of rock.”¹⁰⁴ After wrestling for some time as to whether or not rock ‘n’ roll was of God or the Devil, Norman recalled: “The Bible says to ‘test the spirits’ to see if they are from God so I decided to write another song and see what it was like. I wrote ‘I Wish We’d All Been Ready.’ It seemed quite unlike any song I’d ever written, and different from any song I’d ever heard.”¹⁰⁵ As already noted throughout the chapter, Norman’s rapture song not only contributed to dispensationalist views about the end of days but also became a hit among youth groups and churches as his song played in virtually every evangelical church in America. The song’s lyrics echo the eschatological horrors penned by prophecy teachers like Hal Lindsey and sermonized by ministers like Billy Graham.

¹⁰¹ Gregory Thornbury, *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music? Larry Norman and the Perils of Christian Rock* (New York: Convergent Books, 2018), 2.

¹⁰² Ibid., 93.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Life was filled with guns and war
 And everyone got trampled on the floor
 I wish we'd all been ready

Dispensationalists believe that World War III will dominate the events during Great Tribulation, Lindsey wrote: “As I spoke about the detailed accounts of how the final world war would develop, as recorded in [Daniel 11: 40-45] . . . [The Pentagon’s] computer had predicted the same events and outcome that had been forecast by Daniel.”¹⁰⁶ Lindsey routinely remarked in his books and public engagements that the American military was receiving predictive data from supercomputers that aligned with scripture. While Lindsey’s claims should be taken with a grain of salt at times, assumptions like this were widely held by dispensationalists throughout the late Cold War.

Children died, the days grew cold
 A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold
 I wish we'd all been ready

Norman referenced Revelation 6:6 (ESV): “And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!’” While the language is unfamiliar to most today, the Apostle John is communicating that as a result of war and famine, inflation will destroy the global economy.

There's no time to change your mind
 The Son has come and you've been left behind
 A man and wife asleep in bed
 She hears a noise and turns her head
 He's gone

¹⁰⁶ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 6.

I wish we'd all been ready
 Two men walking up a hill
 One disappears and one's left standing still
 I wish we'd all been ready
 There's no time to change your mind
 The Son has come and you've been left behind

The references to the Rapture in these verses come from Matthew 24 and Luke 17.

There's no time to change your mind
 How could you have been so blind?
 The Father spoke, the demons dined
 The Son has come and you've been left behind
 You've been left behind
 You've been left behind
 You've been left behind
 You've been left behind¹⁰⁷

In his sophomore album *Only Visiting This Planet*, Norman continued incorporating Biblical language with major infusions of political and social commentary while also injecting a dispensational view of where world history was headed throughout the 1970s. For example, on his 1972 album, the song “PeacePollutionRevolution” warned “the world is closely watching as we near the battleline. But if you're truly wise you'll keep your eyes on Palestine . . . But it's all in Revelation, it's part of the design . . . Tribulation.”¹⁰⁸ Norman's eschatological views are in line with Lindsey's. In *Countdown to Armageddon*, the Old Testament Prophets are referenced, especially Ezekiel's prophecies in Chapters 36-38. Lindsey summarized the Prophet, “the Hebrew survivors [descendants] would return to Palestine [and] be miraculously reborn as a nation and prosper.” Norman's reference to Palestine notes the prophetic role that the nation of Israel plays in the end times. Lindsey explained, “The Jews returned to Palestine . . . [and] on

¹⁰⁷ Larry Norman, “I Wish We'd All Been Ready,” Track #9 on *Upon This Rock*. Capitol Records, 1969, *YouTube Music*.

¹⁰⁸ Larry Norman, “PeacePollutionRevolution,” Track #11 on *Only Visiting This Earth*, Solid Rock Records, 1972, *YouTube Music*.

that day, the prophetic countdown began!”¹⁰⁹ Israel’s existence in the Middle East became a hotbed of conflict throughout the Cold War and is believed to be “the focal point of all conflicts, igniting the last war of the world.”¹¹⁰ The role of Israel in the end times is thoroughly examined in chapter three.

By the close of the Cold War in the early 1990s, Johnny Cash’s “Goin’ by the Book” offered an updated view concerning the signs of the time. In his biography of Johnny Cash, Michael Streissguth described Cash’s legacy as someone who was “like Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt [and] came to embody the American spirit.”¹¹¹ Cash’s country music crossed political and religious lines. Like Elvis and Norman, Cash’s upbringing was dominated by gospel music and a fascination with the growing appeal of the radio. A past darkened by drugs and alcohol contrasted his later sobriety and recommitment to Christianity. While Cash would battle drug addiction for most of his life, his influence among evangelicals and embrace of dispensationalist themes in his music became a bridge for dispensationalism to reach a larger, secular audience by the end of the Cold War. Written by Chester Lester, Cash recorded the song and filmed its music video at a time when Bible prophecy spiked interest as a result of America’s entry into the Persian Gulf region in the Middle East.

You can see it in the movies and the paper and the TV news
 Somebody's army is always on the move
 There's going to be a battle, the lines have been drawn
 They have got guns and tanks and planes
 The wells are gone dry and the water is bad and the air is acid rain
 There's war after war and rumors of war from the east
 There's a rumbling in the ground and they are talking about the Beast
 Good mothers cry 'cause the rivers run high
 With the blood of too many sons

¹⁰⁹ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹¹ Michael Streissguth, *Johnny Cash: The Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), xiv.

Some people say peace is on the way
 But the worst is still to come
 Because the prophets wrote about it
 And Jesus spoke about it
 And John got to take a look
 And he told us what he saw
 When it's easy to see
 It's going by the book
 There's armies in the cities and the missiles stand ready for flight
 A pale horse rides like the wind across the night
 And that rumbling in the desert like thunder getting closer
 Are the trumpet's getting ready to blow
 There's going to be a shout that will wake the dead
 We better be ready to go¹¹²

Cash's song connected dispensationalist concerns regarding war in the Middle East and nuclear warfare with concerns of those outside of dispensationalist circles who also feared the start of World War III. The song does not attempt to hide its prophetic imagery, referencing the fourth seal (Pale Horse) and the death that it brings through war, famine, and plague.

While music captured many of the anxieties of the late Cold War, no other band without ties to a religious message voiced as much concern about how the world could come to an end than Georgia-based American rock band R.E.M. Before the end of the Cold War, the Nuclear Freeze Movement was a major voice among anti-atomic lobbyists while new environmental dangers continued to raise the threat level to humanity's survival.¹¹³ The band's fifth studio album *Document* saw its second single rank high on the music charts in late 1987. The song's lyrics captured the political climate of the decade. R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)" referenced earthquakes, hurricanes, buildings falling, and overpopulation— with its most interesting verse residing in the song's political quip. "Tell me

¹¹² Johnny Cash, "Goin' by the Book," Track #6 on *The Mystery of Life*, Mercury Records, 1991, *YouTube Music*.

¹¹³ The Nuclear Freeze Movement is discussed in the following chapter.

with the Rapture and the reverent in the right, right.”¹¹⁴ Most interpretations of this verse refer to the Religious Rights’ belief in the Rapture, implying that politicians like Ronald Reagan—who had been president for six years by the time of the song’s release—believed that the end of the world loomed.

Conclusion

Outside of film and music, Christian novelists, such as Ernest W. Angley, Salem Kirban, and Frank Peretti, promoted apocalyptic themes and fictionalized the end of days decades before Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins’ *Left Behind* novels. Timothy Francis LaHaye, a major promoter of dispensationalism and Christian political activism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, changed the way Christians consumed end-times prophecy throughout the 1990s. His novels emerged in the mid-1990s after the close of the Cold War, because of this, *Left Behind* falls outside the purview of this dissertation but is briefly mentioned due to its relevance to the legacy of dispensationalism in American evangelicalism. Film adaptations prevailed for many of these novels, drawing some of the best talents in Hollywood and garnering box office success. Even the *Left Behind* (2000) film adaptation of LaHaye’s work attracted Hollywood talent, an impressive production budget, and a theatrical release date following the Y2K scare.¹¹⁵

In addition, Hal Lindsey and other dispensationalists established the Soviet Union and global nuclear holocaust as a vital part of Bible prophecy, popular novelists like Tom Clancy’s

¹¹⁴ R.E.M., “It’s the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine),” Track #6 on *Document*, I.R.S., 1987, *YouTube Music*.

¹¹⁵ Often referred to as the Y2K bug or millennium bug, the Y2K scare during the years leading up to the year 2000 caused panic around the world as it was believed by millions that a computing error would result in the collapse of the financial markets, which were heavily dependent on computer systems. While the fear became obsolete the morning after New Year’s Eve, many Americans leading up to the event had feared the breakdown of society and prepared for the worse by prepping their homes for the end of days with food, water, guns, and ammunition.

captured the imagination of millions with all-too-real stories warning of the potential devastating reality of nuclear warfare and the threat of World War III, such as *The Hunt for Red October* (1984) and *The Sum of All Fears* (1991). While literature witnessed a major inclusion of apocalyptic themes, popular novelists were not a focus of this chapter, because the topic of the doctrine of American's influence on literature is extensively covered in Paul S. Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Boyer's work has been referenced extensively throughout this dissertation and initially served as the manuscript that—more than any other work—helped shape the design of this research project.

Just as American culture saw an influx of dispensationalism, its religious ideology would also translate into American politics as the Religious Right and an increasing number of evangelicals embraced dispensationalist views concerning American foreign policy. While Nixon, Ford, and Carter are assessed in the following chapter, the Reagan administration will serve as the focus.

Chapter 5

The Doctrine of Armageddon in American Politics, 1970-1989

“We might be the generation that sees Armageddon.”¹

Ronald Reagan, 1979

Introduction

Ronald Reagan’s somber religious convictions displayed during an interview with Jim Bakker on the *Praise the Lord (PTL)* television program generated conversation among evangelicals but went mostly unnoticed by the national media. Bakker addressed Reagan as the evangelical choice for president while condemning Jimmy Carter—a Democrat and member of the Southern Baptist Convention—for not advocating for issues important to the evangelical community. Responding to Bakker’s concerns about the waning influence of Judeo-Christian



Figure 23. “Ronald Reagan appealing to evangelical voters while sharing his religious views with Jim Bakker,” *PTL*, 1979.

values in America and the lack of effective leadership in the White House, Reagan remarked, “Do you ever get the feeling sometimes that if we don’t do it now, if we let this be another Sodom and Gomorrah, that maybe we might be the generation that sees Armageddon?”² To this, Bakker asserted that he felt the 1980 election could be the most important election to

face America. Reagan’s time as governor of California during the counterculture years of the

¹ Ronald Reagan and Jim Bakker, *PTL*, 1979, accessed from RWW Blog, “We Could See Armageddon,” *YouTube* video, 0:43 to 0:45, January 17, 2017. <https://youtu.be/4UUmKj1oTs>.

² *Ibid.*, 0:33 to 0:45.

1960s and 1970s and his evolving conservatism since the 1940s helped to align his political ambitions with those of most evangelicals. Politically savvy but also sincere in his convictions, Reagan merged the interest of the religious right—many of which were greatly influenced by dispensationalism—with a renewed focus on traditional American values as well as economic and military strength. Yet, this was not unique to Reagan and the 1980s.

Millions of evangelical Americans and numerous national leaders throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century have interpreted world events, particularly those in the Middle East and Europe, through the lens of Bible prophecy. According to renowned historian Paul S. Boyer, “Without close attention to the prophetic scenario embraced by millions of American citizens, the current U.S. political climate cannot be fully understood.”³ At the time of his writing, Boyer was providing an up-to-date application of his Cold War study to the expanding war in Iraq and Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. Relevant to the late Cold War and the focus of this dissertation, the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon on American culture and politics is an important area of study as it reveals how public perception of foreign and defense policies shaped how political leaders presented policies and programs like the Reagan Doctrine and the Strategic Defense Initiative to the American public.

While religious issues were vital to Reagan’s political positions, it was Reagan’s witty fiscal and small government views, as expressed on popular shows like Johnny Carson’s *The Tonight Show*, that produced enormous national chatter surrounding Reagan’s bid for president. Conversing with Carson, Reagan quipped: “Balancing the budget is like protecting your virtue.

³ Paul S. Boyer, “Biblical Prophecy and Foreign Policy,” in Claire H. Badaracco, ed. *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 107.

You have to learn to say no . . . People keep looking at government for the answer, and government [is] the problem.”⁴ Today, Reagan is remembered more for his humor, anecdotes, common sense approach to politics, commitment to the Bible and Judeo-Christian values, supply-side economics, and his lasting impact on the Republican Party, while Reagan’s deeper religious faith and eschatological views have peaked little interest among academics as these aspects are often either glossed over or ridiculed by historians and political pundits outside of conservative



Figure 24. “Ronald Reagan appealing to voters on a late-night talk show,” *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, 1975.

circles. Consequently, Reagan historiography regarding his religious views continues to lack proper scholarly assessment. Reagan was a first-class politician who understood what was important to the evangelical voter, as a result Reagan spoke of the Bible, religious issues, and morality more than any other modern president. Yet, political speeches do not constitute religious conviction. In the historical record found within Reagan’s diaries and recollected conversations between Reagan and his administration, there is evidence of Reagan’s personal convictions concerning the end times, prophecy, and the doctrine of Armageddon.

In his 1994 examination of conservative historiography, Alan Brinkley lamented that, for historians, conservatism does not “fit neatly into [any] patterns of explanations with which most historians are comfortable” and as a result, few other historical studies have suffered more than

⁴ Ronald Reagan and Johnny Carson, *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, 1975, accessed from “Ronald Reagan Interview on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,” *YouTube* video, 0:36 to 0:44, April 2, 2020. <https://youtu.be/CNmmdtdcdeg>.

Reagan's presidency—as this chapter demonstrates.⁵ In an attempt to go beyond the comfortable, safe, and generally accepted field of liberal political history, this chapter adds to the historiography surrounding Reagan's administration in the context of late Cold War dispensationalism and its influence on American politics and foreign policy. A thorough analysis of the greater and lesser Reagan myths is addressed as well in this chapter. While Reagan is the focus, this chapter also assesses to a lesser extent the preceding administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. Historians have traditionally dismissed Reagan's Armageddon references as political rhetoric and not an integral part of Reagan's personal beliefs and decision making. This chapter also attempts to provide an alternative narrative that discusses the extent of dispensationalist views among America's leading political figures throughout the late Cold War. For the scholar, the difficulty lies with separating the political rhetoric from the actual policy influence that resulted from dispensational influence. This chapter in no way claims that dispensationalists were running the government, as some critics of Reagan's administration have erroneously claimed.⁶ Because of this, religious leaders and evangelical organizations are analyzed. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Moral Majority play a prominent role in this chapter, as well as key politicians and political pundits outside of presidential administrations. In addition, Hal Lindsey's writings regarding communism, the Soviet Union, nuclear warfare, and the end times are examined in the context of the late Cold War with special emphasis placed on Reagan's administration.

⁵ Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (1994): 429.

⁶ Of these critics, Grace Halsell's *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (West Port, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986) has been quoted throughout this dissertation.

Nixon, Ford, and Carter's Uneasy Relationship with Evangelicals

In this section, the religious beliefs of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter and their relationship with evangelicals are analyzed within the context of this dissertation's scope. This section seeks to answer to what extent, if any, dispensationalist and fundamentalist views factor into the personal religious beliefs and federal policies of these late Cold War presidents. Before proceeding, Boyer's insight concerning the role between prophecy and American politics offers a needed reminder of the differences between policy and public perception.

The interaction between popular prophetic belief and the tendency of U.S. leaders to cast world issues in apocalyptic terms constitutes a vicious circle. On one hand, the upsurge of grassroots prophetic interest from the 1970s on encouraged the propensity in official circles to portray America's international relations in apocalyptic terms. On the other hand, the apocalyptic pronouncements emanating from Washington reinforced many ordinary Americans' inclination to interpret world events from a perspective of biblical prophecy, thus helping shape the climate of opinion which U.S. foreign policy was formulated and the way those policies were sold to the public.⁷

As Boyer noted, the late Cold War policies were often interpreted prophetically by the American public as well as formulated and championed by congressional members and federal policy makers who deeply embraced strong prophetic beliefs that the world had less miles to travel on the road to Armageddon. Perhaps not a major surprise but still an area of examination worth exploring before moving onto Reagan and his administration, the three preceding administrations are briefly discussed and show that Reagan's relationship with evangelicals and his personal religious views provide a deeper understanding of exactly how impactful dispensationalist became by the end of the late Cold War.

⁷ Boyer, "Biblical Prophecy and Foreign Policy," 119-120.

Born in 1913 and raised as Quaker, Richard Nixon was a regular church attendee most of his life and close friend of Billy Graham. Despite this, Gary Scott Smith of Grove City College—author of some of the best religious studies on the American presidents—argues that Nixon’s religious beliefs are “hard to decipher” due to his “complex” and “perplexing” personality.⁸ Add to this Nixon’s lying to the American people during the Watergate Scandal, misuse of campaign funds, paranoia, and well-known proclivity for foul language and it becomes even harder to grasp Nixon’s religious devotion outside of his public rhetoric. According to Smith’s assessment of Nixon, “many viewed Nixon as a moral traditionalist who could save America from imminent moral breakdown.” Of these many supporters, Smith lists evangelicals, pastors, and the emerging religious right. While Nixon certainly was not a fundamentalist, Smith does conclude that Nixon held to some of the theological concepts of Christian Reconstruction best associated with Rousas Rushdoony and Gary North but also held many ideas of the Bible and Jesus that sat outside of evangelicalism, such as not believing in the inerrancy of the Bible.⁹

While there is no strong evidence of what Nixon believed relating to the millennium and end-time events, Christian Reconstruction—the extent Nixon held to its teachings about eschatology is unknown—promotes a postmillennial view of the Second Coming. For Nixon, religion was a tool to better himself and society. Despite gaining overwhelming support from evangelicals and conservative Catholics, Nixon never fit the mold that later presidents would more comfortably occupy. While vice president, Nixon embraced a concept of good versus evil promoted by the Eisenhower administration to describe the conflict resulting from the Soviet

⁸ Gary Scott Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office: The Religious Lives of American Presidents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 261.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 265-266.

Union's godless influence throughout the world.¹⁰ But by the early 1970s, Nixon "[abandoned] his earlier depictions of the USSR as the embodiment of evil."¹¹ This contrast between presidents regarding the Soviet Union as evil is explored later in this chapter in the context of Reagan's "evil empire" speech.

Gerald Ford is the only American president to take the oath of office without being elected by the American people. Congress appointed Ford to the vice presidency after the resignation of Spiro Agnew. Less than a year later, Nixon resigned because of the fallout from Watergate. Following Nixon's resignation in 1974, Gerald Ford noted in his first message to America that "[the] hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts" and the "long national nightmare" would soon be over.¹² Born the same year as Richard Nixon, Ford grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan (populated by Dutch Calvinists) with strict parents. In his autobiography, Ford confessed that he had never smoked or drank until college, having lived a sheltered life.¹³ A boy scout and college football player for the University of Michigan, Ford's religious beliefs became primetime conversation during his 1976 campaign against Jimmy Carter. Supporters of Ford often quipped, "Jimmy Carter wears his religion on his sleeve but Jerry Ford wears it in his heart."¹⁴ A quiet, inner faith best defined Ford—an Episcopalian—who

¹⁰ In 1955, Congress passed a law mandating "In God We Trust" to be printed on United States currency after President Dwight D. Eisenhower previously declared the phrase the official motto of America. In the same year, Congress also added "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance.

¹¹ Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*, 285.

¹² Gerald Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 40-41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴ Kenneth A. Briggs, "Ford, in Appeal to Evangelicals, Stresses His Religious Beliefs," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1976.

described himself as a born-again Christian and regular attendee of Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill while in Washington, D.C.

Because of their experiences with Richard Nixon, evangelicals were cautious of Ford. Writing for *Christianity Today*, the magazine's journalist interviewed numerous members of Congress to gain insight into Ford's reputation on Capitol Hill. Most Republican supporters agreed to "let [Ford] speak out for himself about his spiritual commitment and relationship rather than others speaking for him. It's wise for a man to give his own testimony."¹⁵ Contrasting their uneasy support of Nixon and his questionable ethics, evangelicals distanced themselves from Ford despite *The New York Times* having no issues associating Ford with evangelicals, publishing "like a growing number of Washington figures, Ford is an evangelical Christian. It is widely assumed that [Ford's religious beliefs] embrace the evangelical Christian Faith."¹⁶ Following Ford's loss to Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election, some evangelicals held reservations about supporting another born-again Christian in the White House after their experiences with Nixon.

Born in 1924, Jimmy Carter served his state of Georgia as both a state senator and governor before being elected to the presidency. A born-again Christian, member of the Southern Baptist Convention, and an evangelical, Carter was passed over by the religious right and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority due to his commitment to upholding *Roe v. Wade*, refusal to speak out against homosexuality, and for not making prayer in public schools a focus of his administration. Yet, many evangelicals outside of fundamentalist circles did show up to vote for Carter in 1976.

¹⁵ Barrie Doyle and James C. Hefley, "Gerald Ford: Prayer and a Quiet Faith," *Christianity Today*, August 30, 1974.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Published recently in the *Des Moines Register*, Randall Balmer—John Phillips Professor in Religion at Dartmouth College—described why many evangelicals ultimately rejected Carter:

Carter's ascent to the White House was abetted by evangelical voters . . . Carter, however, represented a particular strain of evangelicalism known as progressive evangelicalism, which drew from both the teachings of Jesus as well as from evangelical reformers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Evangelicals like . . . William Jennings Bryan sought to reform society . . . Jimmy Carter articulated many of those same principles. One of the many paradoxes surrounding Jimmy Carter, however, is that evangelicals, the very people who helped propel Carter to the presidency in 1976, turned so rabidly against him four years later . . . The version of evangelicalism propagated by Falwell and others was far different from the progressive evangelicalism embodied by Carter. Carter's loss in 1980 signaled the demise of progressive evangelicalism on the national political scene. To paraphrase the words of the gospel, in 1976 Jimmy Carter came unto his own, his fellow evangelicals. Four years later, however, his own received him not.¹⁷

Partially in response to Carter's progressive agenda, the Moral Majority officially formed following the 1978 midterms. If evangelicals needed another reason to depart from Carter, his interview for the November 1976 issue of *Playboy* magazine certainly added ammunition for Carter's critics. Several responses in the interview run contrary to the religious and political views of those that would later form the Moral Majority. When asked about his desire for the further liberalization of some laws, Carter explained:

Liberalization of some of the laws has been good. You can't legislate morality . . . The issue of homosexuality always makes me nervous . . . But to inject it into public discussion on politics and how it conflicts with morality is a new experience for me. I've thought about it a lot, but I don't see how to handle it differently from the way I look on other sexual acts outside marriage.¹⁸

¹⁷ Randall Balmer, "Opinion: Jimmy Carter, Iowa Politics, and the Demise of Progressive Evangelicalism," *Des Moines Register*, March 5, 2023. For more information about Jimmy Carter's religious beliefs, see Randall Balmer's *Jimmy Carter: The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

¹⁸ Jimmy Carter, Interview with *Playboy Magazine* by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/347738>.

Concerning communist leaders in the world, Carter asserted:

I also think we should keep open our opportunities for the East European nations—even those that are completely Communist—to trade with us, understand us, have tourist exchange and give them an option from complete domination by the Soviet Union . . . So I think the best way to minimize totalitarian influence within the governments of Europe is to make sure the democratic forces perform properly.¹⁹

And lastly, the interviewer asked Carter, “Do you feel you’ve reassured people with this interview, people who are uneasy about your religious beliefs, who wonder if you’re going to make a rigid unbending President?” To this, Carter assured:

What Christ taught about most was pride, that one person should never think he was any better than anybody else . . . Don’t consider yourself better than someone else because one guy screws a whole bunch of women while the other guy is loyal to his wife. The guy who’s loyal to his wife ought not to be condescending or proud because of the relative degree of sinfulness . . . I don’t inject these beliefs in my answers to your secular questions. But I don’t think I would ever take on the same frame of mind that Nixon or Johnson did—lying, cheating and distorting the truth.²⁰

Carter’s religious faith and progressive view of morality certainly contrasted with the moral authority fundamentalists thought existed within the purview of the federal government.

An examination of the religious beliefs of the late Cold War presidents reveals that there are no strong connections between dispensationalism and the presidents assessed prior to Ronald Reagan. While Nixon and Ford’s eschatological views are virtually nonexistent, Carter’s openness about his religious views revealed that he aligned closer with a postmillennialist view of the last days. Leo Ribuffo—former Distinguished Professor of History at George Washington University—assessed a Sunday school lesson that Carter gave while campaigning for president

¹⁹ Carter, *Playboy Magazine*.

²⁰ Ibid.

that reflected a postmillennialist view of Revelation.²¹ While Carter’s Sunday school lesson—much like Nixon’s possible adoption while in college of some tenants rooted in Christian Reconstruction—does not provide any definitive answers, although it does demonstrate the gap between these late Cold War presidents and Reagan regarding the role that the Bible and prophecy would play in the concluding years of the Cold War. While George H. W. Bush is not a of this chapter, a brief analysis of his relationship with dispensationalists is included in the conclusion.

Reagan: A Legacy of “Lesser” and “Greater” Myths

Because of the divisive nature of Ronald Reagan’s treatment by historians and political pundits across the last five decades, a more thorough historiography is expanded upon in this section than what is included in chapter one. Covering Reagan’s pre-presidential period, Lou Cannon—former White House correspondent and Reagan biographer—and Frank van der Linden—journalist and historian—are two of the earliest individuals to report on Reagan.²² While this period lacks scholarly assessment, the work of journalist like Cannon and Linden provided a starting point for understanding the dynamic politician that would later become the poster boy of American conservatism and a friend to evangelicals. By Reagan’s election to the presidency, both Cannon and Linden would both publish their own biographical sketches. *The Washington Post’s* White House correspondent and leading political commentor, Lou Cannon published *Reagan* in 1982 arguing that Reagan was an able communicator yet ultimately

²¹ Leo Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter” in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and Secular in Modern American History*, ed. M. L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989), 148.

²² Lou Cannon’s work forms the bedrock for most Reagan historians, providing a critical examination of Reagan’s presidency. Frank van der Linden’s political career as a newspaper reporter from the 1940s through the early 1990s was one of the first to capture the significance of Ronald Reagan’s viability as a presidential candidate in the 1970s. After years in politics, Linden would go on to become a Civil War historian.

unprepared for the presidency. Cannon would later publish *Ronald Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* a few years after Reagan left the White House, which expanded on his critical assessment that Reagan was a great actor who played the role of president—again, describing a man who Cannon viewed as unfit to be president.

According to Cannon, Reagan was a visionary who did not get involved in policy decisions, a notion that would later be challenged by revisionist Reagan scholars in the twenty-first century. Cannon contributed and—perhaps more than any other—popularized the lesser Reagan myth of the *unknowable Reagan* that continues to dominate most academics and non-conservative pundits’ analysis of Reagan.²³ A year before Cannon published his bestselling biography, Linden published—to lesser acclaim—*The Real Reagan*. Linden’s biography contrasted Cannon’s critical assessment by presenting a dispassionate portrayal of Reagan that the journalist had synthesized after dozens of interviews, which included interviews with Ronald and Nancy Reagan, George Bush, Bob Dole, Michael Deaver, Jerry Falwell, and numerous other prominent politically and conservative figures. For Linden, Reagan was up for the job and a friend of evangelical America. While heavily biased toward those of the Republican Party and the recently established Moral Majority, Linden provided a defensible narrative for Reagan’s shift from New Deal liberalism to conservatism.

The greater Reagan myths idolized Reagan and interpreted his triumphs and failures in the White House with an intentionally positive and forgiving tone. Fewer contributed more to the greater Reagan myth than conservative, fundamentalist leaders like Bob Slosser. Slosser, Executive Producer for the Christian Broadcasting Network and one of the early biographers to

²³ Lou Cannon, *Ronald Reagan: The Role of Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 19.

examine Reagan's religious faith, promoted Reagan in his 1984 biography *Reagan Inside Out* as a God-fearing Christian with a deep interest in theology and prophecy—feeling that his own rise in politics was itself a prophetic fulfillment.²⁴ Slosser's assessment of Reagan's Christian faith was based on an interview conducted during Reagan's first term and incorporated additional interviews with associates close to Reagan dating back to Reagan's time as California's governor. Slosser's biography contributed to the greater Reagan myth that Reagan was God's chosen leader for the White House to fight for Judeo-Christian values. While Reagan did fight for issues at the heart of evangelicalism, evangelicals saw little progress made on key issues such as abortion and school prayer.

In the same year that Slosser published his argument as to why evangelicals needed to vote Reagan back into office for another four years, Robert Dallek—former Professor of History at Boston University, UCLA, and Oxford University—published one of the earliest scholarly assessments of Ronald Reagan. In *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism*, Dallek applied a psychobiography approach mixed with political and cultural history to explain the ideologies and motivations of Reagan. Dallek attempted to cast Reagan as a product of Hollywood-engineered entertainment and as someone trained to tell people what they wanted to hear. Dallek's assertions contributed to the lesser Reagan myths, portraying Reagan as “a hero of the consumer culture preaching the Protestant ethic” and described Reagan as unintelligent, claiming Reagan had gone to college “not to gain an academic education [but] for personal advancement.”²⁵ Dallek, as with

²⁴ Slosser's account of a prophetic word during a prayer meeting with Ronald Reagan in 1970 is examined later in this chapter. While Reagan only spoke of prophetic utterances shared with him by others and his own end times prophetic beliefs seldomly, Slosser does provide some insight into how evangelicals interpreted Reagan's religious convictions through the 1980s.

²⁵ Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 14.

many of Reagan's critics, struggled to understand Reagan's psyche and nontraditional approaches to politics and policies. His untraditional approach in writing (psychobiography) one of the first significant pieces of biographic scholarship on Reagan resulted in Dallek's work, as well as Cannon, laying the foundation for how nearly every historian would view Reagan throughout the late twentieth century.

Throughout the late Cold War, the lesser Reagan myths continued to promote the view that Reagan was an incompetent pretender in the White House, a man unfit for office, and described Reagan as "an amiable dunce" by his critics.²⁶ Perhaps one of the most damning accounts of Reagan's first term came in 1986 from David A. Stockman—a member of the House of Representatives who served as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. In his memoir *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed*, Stockman—a Republican and early supporter of Reagan's supply-side economic policies—openly criticized Reagan and other Republicans for increasing the national debt. His memoir was emblematic of numerous disaffected politicians who spoke out critically of Reagan and the Reagan Revolution, often labeling Reagan, and his policies, as economically disastrous for the nation, suggesting that Reagan "had no business trying to make a revolution because it wasn't in his bones."²⁷ Stockman merely echoes the consensus of most historians and many political pundits that Reagan was a man of vision, not policy.

While outside the purview of this dissertation, it is adequate to address how historians have shifted in their views of Reagan and his administration. His policies and rhetoric reflected

²⁶ James M. Perry, "For the Democrats, Pam's Is the Place for the Elite to Meet," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 1981.

²⁷ David A. Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1986), 9.

anxieties rooted in the end times and nuclear Armageddon. Following the close of the Cold War, the lesser Reagan myth prevailed among most scholars, such as Haynes Johnson. In his survey of Reagan's political career, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years*, Johnson asserted that "each decade creates its own myth."²⁸ Writing in 1991, Johnson condemned what he believed to be a false narrative that bore a resemblance to hagiography concerning the successes of the Reagan administration and progress made in American society throughout the 1980s. According to the Pulitzer-winning journalist, Reagan ignored the real problems facing America in the 1980s. For Johnson, Reagan and his administration created unparalleled levels of corruption and abandoned the political policies that put him in office.

Published a year after Johnson's scholarship, Michael Schaller—Professor of History at The University of Arizona—drew upon the rising number of memoirs and expanding academic studies to publish *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s*. Schaller contended that Reagan was a strong leader who restored America's national pride and confidence but "left a complicated, often contradictory, legacy."²⁹ While disagreeing with Reagan's policies, William E. Pemberton's *Exit With Honor: The Life and Presidency of Ronald Reagan* provided a fair account of Reagan's presidency by also drawing upon recent memoirs and the few archival records released in the mid-1990s. Schaller and Pemberton, while not favoring Reagan's policies, acknowledged Reagan's ability to make Americans believe that the best was still yet to come. Like Johnson and Schaller, Pemberton discredited much of Reagan's accomplishments and concluded that "Reagan was a president of consequence [by moving] the

²⁸ Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 11.

²⁹ Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 66.

nation's political center to the right and . . . [ushered] in an age of diminished expectation in people's attitude toward government." Publishing his authorized biography of the president ten years after Reagan left office, Edmund Morris's *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* stands as an anathema of a scholarly work to many historians.

In his long-awaited work, Morris perpetuated the unknowable Reagan by permanently establishing Reagan as unintelligent and an "enigma."³⁰ It would be years before revisionists casted Reagan as intelligent and in control of his administration and heavily involved in policy making. What was commissioned to be an authorized biography, was instead unveiled by Morris to be a partially factual, partially fictional account of Reagan's life. The work included dozens of made-up people, which also included a fictionalized version of Morris. Handpicked by Reagan because of his biographical work on Theodore Roosevelt, Morris received unparalleled access to Reagan—a gift seemingly squandered. For promoters of the lesser Reagan myth, Reagan's presidency was largely symbolic of the wishes of the American people and consequently, Reagan's administration did little to improve the lives of everyday Americans, nor did it fulfill the expectations of his conservative supporters.

It is with the greater Reagan myth that most of this chapter is directed because it reflects the most recent scholarship. Proponents of this view included many leading religious figures, conservative pundits and politicians, and a remnant of scholars willing to break from the general narrative of an incompetent Reagan. As this chapter moves into Reagan's policies and relationship with dispensationalists and their goals, it will reveal that the greater Reagan myth dominated scholarship after the Cold War. Praising Reagan's policies, Dinesh D'Souza—policy

³⁰ Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1999), 83; 641.

adviser for the Reagan administration, conservative commentator, and Christian apologist—contributed to the greater Reagan myths with his 1997 examination of Reagan’s politics. In *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*, D’Souza assessed that Reagan’s policies were essential to ending the Cold War and his economic policies were fundamentally sound. Pro-Reagan and a conservative hardliner, D’Souza’s evaluation praised the Reagan Revolution as the main success, shifting political focus away from Reagan, the individual, to the historical movement in American politics.³¹ By 2001, thousands of new Reagan records became publicly available—dramatically altering how historians assessed Reagan in the twenty-first century. As more papers became available throughout the 2000s, renewed interest in Reagan emerged, especially with the release of additional documents related to Reagan’s personal writings following his death in 2004. Grounded in newly released records, a new approach emerged among Reagan scholars. In what has become known as Reagan revisionism, historians approached Reagan with a new set of lenses with the goal of avoiding the myriad of mistakes of the previous decades.

Revisionists argue that Reagan deserved more acknowledgement for his contributions while president, especially in the area of Cold War policy. Most historians who have published since the early 2000s agree that the Reagan Revolution, a political movement that saw major changes in American politics, was a major turning point in American history. With unprecedented access to Reagan’s writings, radio speeches, and personal letters, renewed interest in Reagan emerged, resulting in a reevaluation that showed Reagan not as the unintelligent

³¹ The Reagan Revolution is rooted in the changing attitudes of Americans throughout the late Cold War period. Distrust in government, especially after Vietnam and Watergate, and its expanding welfare state fueled desires to see the federal government’s power shrink. Reagan spoke to these anxieties and sought to change the image of America globally, reduce government excess through supply-side economic policies, and counter the growth of Soviet influence worldwide.

avatar portrayed by many scholars during the late Cold War—but instead, Reagan was viewed as an intellectual or, at minimum, better than the amiable dunce argued by earlier scholars. For historians, Reagan became increasingly significant in explaining the importance and rise of modern conservatism. For example, in 2008, Gil Troy—Professor of History at McGill University—concluded, “There is now wide agreement on several of the claims made about the Reagan legacy—rehabilitating conservatism, turning the country in a new, rightward direction, restoring faith in the presidency, reviving American self-respect, and contributing critically to the ending of the Cold War.”³² This revisionist approach continued throughout the 2000s and continues until today. Leading works by Reagan revisionists include Gil Troy, Richard Reeves, Robert M. Collins, John Patrick Diggins, and Paul Kengor—several of these scholar’s works play a vital role when examining Reagan’s religious faith.

Gil Troy’s revisionist *America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (2005) argued that Reagan saved the presidency from the doom and gloom of Carter, making the case that Reagan is the greatest president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. His work avoids hagiography, summing up Reagan’s success as “Goldwaterism-with-a-smile” and an alternative to the “cranky conservatism of the 1950s and 1960s.”³³ This aspect of Reagan’s appeal is important as it helped to bring dispensationalists who were still enamored with the Jesus Movement and other new evangelical movements further into the conservative party. Published the same year as Troy, Richard Reeves’s *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (2005) was the first major biographical work published following Reagan’s death in 2004. Reeves—former journalist,

³² Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies, eds, *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 253.

³³ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 336.

presidential biographer, and lecturer at the University of Southern California—argued that Reagan was not a passive president but heavily involved in the day-to-day administration and policymaking. This aspect of Reagan’s active role while president supports primary evidence related to Reagan’s fears of nuclear Armageddon and end-times prophecies discussed later in this chapter. Reeves also concluded that Reagan “said what he actually thought” and seemed to have genuinely believed in the ideas he promoted. According to Reeves, Reagan fell short of the definition of an intellectual but did fit the role of a visionary and leader. Troy and Reeves’s scholarship provided fresh insights due to their incorporation of memoirs and Reagan’s personal writings.

Renowned historian, Robert M. Collins intentionally resisted contributing to the lesser and greater Reagan myths in *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years* (2007). Collins portrayed Reagan as neither the conservative hero nor the demonized political figure portrayed by the political left. In an honest attempt, Collins challenged the Reagan historiography with the notion that Reagan was complex, pragmatic, and, despite not achieving many of his policies, established the rhetoric for the political right to continue fighting for conservative policies into the twenty-first century. Also taking a different approach to Reagan, John Patrick Diggins’ *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (2007) was received well among scholars and the public, making the case that Reagan was less of a conservative and much more liberal in his political ideology. Less partisan and offering a fresh look on Reagan’s political life, Diggins’ analysis of Reagan’s personal papers showed that a revisionist approach to Reagan’s legacy was a viable scholarly endeavor in the late 2000s. Diggins, who served as a Professor of History at San Francisco State University and City University of New York, viewed Reagan through the lens of Western political thought,

concluding that Reagan was an “Emersonian” who believed in the innate goodness of people and promoted an unwavering optimism about America’s future.³⁴ Diggins’ analysis aligns with Gil Troy’s assertion that Reagan was not a fatalist, old school conservative but rather a new kind of conservative who believed that people could make a difference in the world. Their analysis of Reagan provides an important assessment of Reagan’s motivations for ending the Cold War and expanding America’s defense policies. Revisionist historians vary in their approach to Reagan. While more scholars continue to appreciate Reagan’s foreign policy and his contribution to ending the Cold War, historians are still in disagreement on the role of religion in the Reagan administration—a scholarly conversation that the remainder of this chapter attempts to contribute.

Evangelical Connections: Reagan, Communism, the Evil Empire, and the End Times

Ronald Reagan was born into a divided family. His mother served her church and embraced the Social Gospel and postmillennialist views of the Disciples of Christ, while Reagan’s father was an alcoholic and non-religious. Remembering his parents, Reagan wrote: “While my father was a cynic and tended to suspect the worst of people, my mother was the opposite.”³⁵ It was his mother that Reagan would be drawn to and sought to mimic. Reagan became a member of his mother’s church without the pressure of being forced to embrace her faith. After his baptism at the First Christian Church of Dixon in Illinois, Reagan taught Sunday school as a teenager to the younger children in the church. Rooted in his mother’s openness concerning religious dogmas and denominations, Reagan remained tolerant of various Christian

³⁴ John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 37.

³⁵ Mary Beth Brown, *Hand of Providence: The Strong and Quiet Faith of Ronald Reagan* (Nashville, TN: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 24.

beliefs throughout his life and never attached himself strictly to a particular organized religious. From the 1960s through the 1990s, Reagan would become a longtime member of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles under the ministry of famous football player Doon Moomaw. While Reagan primarily attributed his religious foundation to his mother and the Disciples of Christ church that he grew up attending, Reagan never commented on how much of the Disciples doctrines and postmillennial views he personally believed later in life. It is appropriate to conclude that the Disciples' postmillennial emphasis on creating a better and more just society—like that of the Social Gospel that was still popular throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century—impacted Reagan's view of the role of religion in American society.



Figure 25. “Memorial Site,” Ronald Reagan Library.

Throughout the 1920s, Reagan grew up exposed to the teachings of Alexander Campbell—the founder of the Disciples of Christ—and others within the church's leadership. According to Ernest Lee Tuveson, whose scholarship on millennialism is thoroughly assessed in chapter two, the Disciples taught:

We should “no longer consider man formed to be the ignorant, vicious, and degraded being, that, heretofore, he has been compelled to appear, whether covered by the garb of savage or civilized life.” [Tuveson then summarizes the Disciples teaching.] It is society, then, not man that is fallen, and man is man, whether he live in the woods or in Cincinnati.

Mirroring the core teaching of the Disciples and displayed at the Memorial Site at the Ronald Reagan Library, Reagan’s oft quoted worldview is inscribed. “I know in my heart that man is good, that what is right will always eventually triumph and there is purpose and worth to each and every life.” Reagan’s words are undoubtedly as much an ode to his mother as his Disciples’ upbringing. In the context of dispensationalism and mainstream evangelical views regarding the sinfulness of mankind, Reagan’s philosophy concerning human nature does not reflect the prominent teachings of most evangelical ministers of the late Cold War. These words align more with an optimistic postmillennialist view rather than a fatalist premillennialist view of humanity during the Atomic Age. Yet despite that, Reagan—as will be demonstrated later in this chapter—felt deeply convinced that Armageddon could be just around the corner before the millennium. If society and not man was evil, then naturally some governments were potentially an extension of evil in the world. Reagan’s belief in America as a source of good in the world meant that its antithesis, the Soviet Union, summed up everything that was wrong, or evil, with society and government.

“Communism is neither an [economic] or a [political] system,” Reagan wrote in May 1975. “[I]t is a form of insanity—temporary aberration which will one day disappear from the earth because it is contrary to human nature.”³⁶ Reagan believed that evil was rooted in society and atheistic governments—not humanity. Reagan’s crusade against Soviet communism is well

³⁶ “Communism, the Disease,” *Reagan in His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal his Revolutionary Vision for America*, edited by Kiron K. Skinner, etc (New York: Touchstone, 2002), 12.

documented among the thousands of speeches, writings, and reports that reach as far back as Reagan's time in Hollywood. Professor Paul Kengor, one of the foremost authorities on Reagan's presidency, traced the origins of Reagan's crusade against communism to his time in Hollywood as an actor and union leader, claiming that "communism was not the first thing on [Reagan's] mind" in 1937 when he arrived in Hollywood but would become a major focus after World War II.³⁷ Before acquiring a taste for politics as president of the Screen Actors Guild (SGA, 1947-1952), Reagan naively joined the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP). According to biographer Lou Cannon, Reagan understood almost nothing of communism and the Soviet Union prior to joining the organization.³⁸ At the time, HICCASP served as a magnet for Hollywood communist. It was only after Reagan returned from World War II that he began to learn about the dangers of communism within America, especially Hollywood.

By the late 1940s, Billy Graham's crusades in Los Angeles and Southern California would have no doubt reached the ears of Reagan in Hollywood as media outlets branded Graham's ministry as "the greatest religious revival in the history of Southern California" and comparable to



Figure 26. "Billy Graham and Ronald Reagan," Billy Graham Library.

³⁷ Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 11.

³⁸ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 242.

the religious campaigns of Billy Sunday.³⁹ A few years prior, Graham began focusing his messages on the dangers of communism abroad and its potential threat at home. In a fiery message, Graham proclaimed: “There are Communists everywhere. Here, too, for that matter.”⁴⁰ When HICCASP’s council refused to pass a law banning active communists, Reagan left the organization, claiming “HICCASP had become a Communist front organization hiding behind a few well-intentioned Hollywood celebrities to give it credibility.”⁴¹ Reagan remained a member of SGA, serving as its president for several years. As a New Deal liberal, Reagan was willing to support the plight of Hollywood workers and unionizing, his time as president of SGA also solidified his position as an anticommunist even working with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).⁴²

Born in 1911 and having experienced the Great Depression, Reagan both admired and supported Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). During his college years and early career in radio and film, Reagan took to heart the liberal policies and big government rhetoric of FDR. Following his release from active duty in World War II, Reagan supported Harry S. Truman but did not pay much attention to the growing Cold War. By the late 1940s, Reagan recognized that the communist threat at home had its roots in Soviet imperialism abroad. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Reagan witnessed America escalate its wars abroad to stop the spread of communism, which, according to Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis, was justified because it was the only

³⁹ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 254.

⁴⁰ “Communism is Creeping,” *The Charlotte Observer*, November 23, 1947.

⁴¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 112.

⁴² The House Un-American Activities Committee, established in the 1930s under FDR’s presidency, sought to root out Communist and their supporters in diverse sectors of public and private industry throughout America. For one of the most authoritative takes of the impact of the HUAC in Hollywood, see Larry Ceplair, *The Marxist and the Movies: A Biography of Paul Jarrico* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky).

option to stop the Soviet Union from violating human rights globally.⁴³ Following Richard Nixon's visit to Moscow in 1971, a period of *détente* began characterizing American-Soviet relations.⁴⁴ Reagan understood the communist threat at home and actively spoke against its dangers while acting in Hollywood, working as a spokesman for General Electric, and serving as California's governor.

In Hollywood, Reagan was not a conservative like most outspoken anticommunists, yet he was also not welcomed by the political left. Reagan walked "a middle ground" during his politically charged role as informant during the HUAC investigations.⁴⁵ For Reagan, communism was antithetical to America, believing that communism could not be controlled through the democratic process. Reagan's conservative politics would emerge later while working for General Electric, while it was Reagan's experiences in Hollywood that shaped his views toward Soviet communism.⁴⁶ By the time Reagan became president in 1981, Soviet communism had existed for more than six decades. Most Americans had stopped believing that the Cold War could actually end. Policies of *détente* ensured a continuing perpetual Cold War atmosphere between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. *Détente* was also highly criticized by dispensationalists. In *Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey affirmed:

⁴³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, Books, 2007), 122.

⁴⁴ According to Gaddis, America was correct to contain communism early on, then move toward a policy of *détente*, and lastly, transition to Reagan's *roll back* of communism. Had America not taken the steps to contain and ultimately end the Cold War, things would have been a lot worse. See Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, 266.

⁴⁵ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 245.

⁴⁶ While employed as a spokesman for General Electric (GE), Reagan hosted *General Electric Theater*. Reagan's politics shifter farther away from his liberal New Deal beliefs and closer to the rapidly emerging resurgence of conservatism in wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Thomas E. Evans' masterful scholarship in *The Education of Ronald Reagan: The General Electric Years and the Untold Story of his Conversion to Conservatism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) provides the best narrative accounts of Reagan's time at GE and the profound impact Lemuel Boulware, GE's executive throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, had on shaping Reagan's conservatism.

Beginning with President Kennedy, each U.S. administration has grossly misjudged the goals of the Soviet Union and communism in general. Each successive administration has hoped that its own example of fairness and good will toward the world would somehow encourage the communists to abandon their drive toward world domination. We've proclaimed "détente" and pretended that the Soviets were no longer the "bad guys," but rather were just as interested in peace as we were.⁴⁷

Addressing a supporter by letter during his 1980 campaign, Reagan reaffirmed his commitments to ending communism, writing that the "conquered nations . . . of the Soviet Union must regain their freedom"—liking their captivity to those under Nazi occupation.⁴⁸ Once in office, Reagan set out to end nearly two decades of *détente*. National security advisor, Robert C. McFarlane, supported Ronald Reagan's advocacy for an unparalleled buildup of American nuclear arsenal. At the 1980 Republican National Convention, Reagan made no effort to hide the goal of his administration once in office. "We know only too well that war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak. It is then tyrants are tempted."⁴⁹ Reagan committed the U.S. to a foreign policy of *peace through strength*.

For Reagan, freedom could only flourish if America's military was viewed as a formidable force in the world. To reign in the Soviet Union's commercial and political ambitions, America needed to negotiate from a position of military strength. While the military's budget and expansion represented the greatest hurdles for his administration, McFarlane later recalled that Reagan's administration also needed to combat the Soviets through ideological

⁴⁷ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 81.

⁴⁸ "Ronald Reagan to Mr. Palydowycz," June 1980, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, edited by Kiron K. Skinner, etc. (New York: Free Press, 2004): 374-375.

⁴⁹ "Republican National Convention Acceptable Speech, 1980," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/republican-national-convention-acceptance-speech-1980>.

warfare.⁵⁰ Reagan was well versed in anticommunist rhetoric from his days in Hollywood and more than thirty-five years of publicly speaking out against the evils of communism. In many ways, Reagan's stump speeches were the political version of Billy Graham's crusade against the dangers of communism. Graham spoke out from his pulpit against the atheism and immorality of the Soviet Union.⁵¹ A lifelong Democrat, Graham never endorsed political candidates—including Reagan who reached out for his support.⁵² While Reagan increasingly aligned politically with conservatives throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he also sang in tune with Graham's worldview. "Atheism," Reagan explained on national television in Poland, "is as much a part of Communism as is the Gulag."⁵³ A horrific description not unlike the illustrations given in Graham's fiery sermons.

Anticommunist policies and stump speeches rang loudest among conservative politicians throughout the Cold War. Bridging the early and late Cold War periods, Reagan echoed the talking points of prominent figures such as William F. Buckley, Jr. and Senator Barry Goldwater. Years prior to running for his first political office, Reagan spoke out against "communists who were intent on taking over our country and destroying democracy."⁵⁴ In fact, it was as an

⁵⁰ Robert C. McFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell and Davies, 1994), 373-74.

⁵¹ Ronald Reagan and Billy Graham both spoke against the dangers of Soviet communism. Both men were hardliners toward the deplorable conditions of those living under communism. Reagan and Graham met in 1952 and stayed in touch until Reagan's death in 2004. They spoke often about communism and the end times. For more information, see Dinesh D'Souza's *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 213-214.

⁵² While not directly tied to my argument in this chapter, it is interesting to consider that one of the criticisms of Reagan's religious faith is that he almost never went to church while in office. Lou Cannon recalled an interview with Billy Graham who had regrettably advised Reagan to avoid church because it would only turn into a media event and disrupt worship. See Lou Cannon's "Reagan &," *Washington Post*, April 16, 1984. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/04/16/reagan-38/019d9165-a3d8-4f73-8396-d2bd529f2bbc>.

⁵³ "The Pope in Poland," *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 174.

⁵⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*, 14.

anticommunist hardliner that Reagan thrived. And in time, political discourse shifted from Reagan heralding what other conservative thinkers said to conservatives touting Reagan's lines and small government views. Commenting on Reagan's impact in shaping anticommunist rhetoric, founder of the *National Review*, William F. Buckley, Jr.—whom Reagan maintained a lifelong friendship—spoke in 1991 of the former President during a lecture at *Vanderbilt University*. “In the West there were [many] steadfast friends of liberty . . . but [none] dominated. It was Ronald Reagan . . . who suddenly forced the leader of Soviet Communism to look in the mirror . . . [It was Reagan] who had resurrected the moral argument, so successfully neutered by a generation of ambiguity.”⁵⁵ The neutered ambiguity was, in fact, two decades of *détente*. While Reagan praised conservative leaders like Buckley and Goldwater, Reagan's legacy has overshadowed men like these in public memory. For example, in what became known as Reagan's “A Time for Choosing” speech delivered for Goldwater's 1964 presidential run against incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson, Reagan reminded America that it was time for the nation to once again speak up for the “millions of people enslaved in the Soviet colonies in the satellite nations.”⁵⁶ Reagan started his political career in Hollywood warning of the dangers of communism at home and abroad and continued his crusade against Soviet communism for another five decades, building on the foundations of conservative thought and foreign policy.

So far, this section has shown that Reagan's views and attitudes toward communism are well documented in the historical record and aligned closely with what evangelicals and dispensationalists believed concerning the dangers of communism, the Soviet Union, and the

⁵⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Reagan I Knew* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 186-187.

⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, Los Angeles, 1964, accessed from Reagan Library, “Ronald Reagan's A Time for Choosing Speech October 27, 1964,” *YouTube* video, 16:42 to 12:49, April 29, 2016. https://youtu.be/_VBtCMTpveA.

problem of détente. It is also evident that Reagan's anticommunist rhetoric and policy positions generally aligned with conservatives and evangelicals like Billy Graham and Hal Lindsey. But where did Reagan's anticommunist and religious views intersect? One of the clearest examples of Reagan's faith and politics colliding came in 1983 at the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) convention in Orlando, Florida. Reagan's commitment to the Bible and Judeo-Christian values was well known among the evangelicals who helped propel him into the White House.⁵⁷ With thousands in attendance at the Sheraton Twin Towers Hotel's Citrus Crown Ballroom, Reagan spoke of God's providence, the church's role in promoting virtue, the doctrine of sin, and the evils of communism. Reagan's humor and call for godliness was met with enormous applause among an evangelical crowd that for more than a decade had been influenced by dispensationalist views of the end times, communism, and nuclear armament. When Reagan mentioned the word "evil" for the seventh time in his speech, the word took on what would become a new foreign policy branding for U.S.-Soviet relations. Building toward his speech's closure, Reagan warned:

beware the temptation of pride—the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides [U.S. & U.S.S.R] equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.⁵⁸

The NAE attendees praised the speech, and the phrase "evil empire" became a strong rhetorical weapon used in the ideological war against Soviet communism. In his celebrated work on the

⁵⁷ Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 176.

⁵⁸"Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, FL," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-annual-convention-national-association-evangelicals-orlando-fl>.

Cold War, Gaddis admitted that the phrase accurately described the Soviet Union, claiming that the “speech completed a rhetorical offensive designed to expose . . . the central error of *détente*:



Figure 27. “President Reagan speaking at the 1983 National Association of Evangelicals,” Public Domain.

the idea that the Soviet Union had earned geopolitical, ideological, economic, and moral legitimacy as an equal to the United States”⁵⁹ And Boyer even concluded that Reagan “simply [echoed]” what President Dwight D. Eisenhower stated in his first inaugural address concerning the emergence of “good and evil” forces,

casting the Soviet Union as Reagan later would as “the focus of evil in the modern world.”⁶⁰ But what is an evil empire?

Numerous descriptors scatter the historical record concerning Reagan’s views about the evils of communism. In his “Evil Empire” speech, Reagan defined what he believed to be evil about the Soviet Union. “The communists’ subordination of morality to the needs of the state” and “atheism” qualified for Reagan that Soviet communism was evil.⁶¹ In many ways, the Soviet Union was the same evil that Billy Graham spoke of during hundreds of crusades since the 1940s. It was the same evil that Hal Lindsey and other dispensationalists saw as a tool of Satan to usher in the end of days. From a foreign policy perspective, the Soviet Union was evil because it denied freedoms abroad and threatened American security. Five years after his speech at the

⁵⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 224-225.

⁶⁰ Boyer, “Biblical Prophecy and Foreign Policy,” 118.

⁶¹ H. W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015), 408-409.

evangelical conference, the Italian journalist, Arrigo Levi, questioned Reagan about his belief that the Soviet Union was evil. Reagan responded firmly to the journalist, “My views haven’t changed.”⁶² Despite Reagan acknowledging that the Soviet Union had made progress under Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, Reagan contended that the Soviet would persist as an evil empire if communism remained. According to Professor Alan P. Dobson, “Reagan believed that the Soviet Union would indeed expire under the weight of its contradictions, its inhumanity to its own citizens, its corruption, and its economic inefficiency.”⁶³ Like evil in the heart of man, the Soviet Union would also destroy itself from within.

Part of Reagan’s appeal and rhetorical strength stemmed from his humor. But as Cold War tensions tightened just before the 1984 presidential election, Reagan’s humor and relaxed tone regarding the Evil Empire produced a thorn in his side when he jested: “My fellow Americans, I’m pleased to tell you today that I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.”⁶⁴ Reagan regretted the joke once it was leaked to the media. Reagan knew that if a nuclear Armageddon happened, it could only occur as a result of either the U.S. or the Soviet Union launching the first nuclear warhead. Reagan once told Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union’s final General Secretary, that they were the only two men who could start a nuclear war, but more importantly that they were “the only two people, perhaps, in the world that could prevent World War III.”⁶⁵

⁶² “Interview with Arrigo Levi of Canale 5 Television of Italy,” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/interview-arrigo-levi-canale-5-television-italy>.

⁶³ Alan P. Dobson, “The Reagan Administration, Economic Warfare, and Starting to Close Down the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 555.

⁶⁴ “Reagan Said to Joke of Bombing Russia Before Radio Speech,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 1984.

⁶⁵ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 240.

At the second presidential debate in Kansas City, Missouri, Marvin Kalb of NBC News confronted Reagan about “often describe[ing] the Soviet Union as a powerful, evil empire intent on world domination.” Kalb challenged an earlier statement made by Reagan concerning the Soviet’s keeping their “mickey mouse” communist system. Kalb questioned Reagan, “Do you want to contain [the Soviet Union] within their present borders and perhaps try to reestablish détente . . . or do you really want to roll back their empire?”⁶⁶ At the close of Reagan’s first term in office, Reagan reaffirmed his administration’s commitment to winning the Cold War and preventing a nuclear Armageddon. Reagan responded:

I have said on a number of occasions exactly what I believe about the Soviet Union. I retract nothing that I have said. I believe that many of the things they have done are evil in any concept of morality that we have. But I also recognize that as the two great superpowers in the world, we have to live with each other. And I told Mr. Gromyko we don't like their system. They don't like ours. And we're not going to change their system, and they sure better not try to change ours. But between us, we can either destroy the world or we can save it. And I suggested that, certainly, it was to their common interest, along with ours, to avoid a conflict and to attempt to save the world and remove the nuclear weapons. And I think that perhaps we established a little better understanding. I think that in dealing with the Soviet Union one has to be realistic.⁶⁷

Reagan’s pragmatic response and reference to being realistic about the goals and aims of the Soviet Union was also affirmed by his diplomatic relations with the Soviets, often quoting the Russian proverb *doveray, no proveryay*: trust, but verify.

Melvyn P. Leffler, one of the world’s senior scholars of American foreign policy, noted that by the mid-1980s, Soviet ambassadors openly agreed with Reagan about distrusting one another. The Soviet Union distrusted America just as much. Mikhail Gorbachev’s representative,

⁶⁶ Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, Louisville, 1984, accessed from Reagan Foundation, “1984 Presidential Candidate Debate: President Reagan and Walter Mondale,” *YouTube* video, 0:12:27 to 0:12:50, April 27, 2009. <https://youtu.be/EF73k5-Hi9g>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 0:12:53 to 0:13:48.

Eduard Shevardnadze, candidly explained: “We and the Americans were divided by walls built out of the rubble of distrust and stones of ideology.”⁶⁸ Decades of counterintelligence, proxy wars, economic challenges, and ideological clashes had taken its toll on the Soviet Union and the United States, while the political and economic cost of challenging communism in Vietnam nearly ended domestic support for America’s mission to defeat communism abroad. By 1985, Reagan’s rollback agenda (Reagan Doctrine) meant increased support for Afghani insurgents, South American Contras, and anti-communist fighters in Africa. The U.S.-Soviet Cold War remained cold yet continued to burn hot in third-world countries that were, according to Carole K. Fink, “clients” of the two superpowers longing to spread their ideals.⁶⁹

Conflict and wars throughout the world stirred by the ideological warfare waged by the United States and the Soviet Union contributed to the dispensationalist belief that Biblical prophecy foretells of increasing violence and war on earth prior to the Rapture. While this topic is explored in previous chapters, it is helpful to note what Lindsey commented on regarding an increase in conflicts throughout the world. Lindsey interpreted the seven birth pains depicted by Jesus in Matthew 24, describing the second and third birth pains of revolution and war:

Nations would be ripped apart by civil war and revolution . . . Recent histories of Africa, southeast Asia, the Middle East and Latin America will bear this out. [War] has also swept through parts of the world backed by soldiers, arms and money from the major communist powers.⁷⁰

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Boyer’s assessment that “the apocalyptic pronouncements emanating from Washington reinforced many ordinary Americans’ inclination

⁶⁸ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 379.

⁶⁹ Carole K. Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017), 2.

⁷⁰ Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon*, 22-23.

to interpret world events from a perspective of biblical prophecy”⁷¹ While Reagan and his administration certainly did not base foreign and defense policies related to the rollback of communism on the prophetic teachings of dispensationalists, the perception among many dispensationalists throughout the late Cold War was that America, at times, was fighting against Satan’s deception among nations abroad and at home.

Claiming that Reagan had no grand strategy to end the Cold War, James Graham Wilson, of the Office of the Historian at the U.S. Department of State, rejected revisionist historiography and the highly praised work of Gaddis, which supports Reagan’s essential role in developing strategies to rollback communism and end the threat of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Wilson asserted that Reagan’s “peace through strength” and “crusade for freedom” contributed little to nothing to ending the conflict.⁷² For Wilson, Reagan’s foreign policy rhetoric was fraught with contradictions. “[Reagan] spoke about eliminating nuclear weapons ... yet also called for a massive buildup of America’s nuclear arsenal. He publicly questioned the legitimacy of Soviet leaders just as he was making entreaties with them for peace.”⁷³ Wilson rejected Gaddis’ argument that Reagan’s “incongruities” were purposeful and the result of a “master planner.”⁷⁴

If Wilson is right and Gaddis wrong, it is important to note that—despite the muddy scholarship—the Soviet’s took Reagan’s rhetoric seriously, especially in 1983 when Reagan

⁷¹ Boyer, “Biblical Prophecy and Foreign Policy,” 120.

⁷² James Graham Wilson, “How Grand was Reagan’s Strategy, 1976-1984,” *Diplomatic & Statecraft* 18, no. 4 (2007): 774.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 773.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

revealed the Strategic Defense Initiative.⁷⁵ Even Edmund Morris in his highly criticized Reagan biography admitted that the Soviet Union understood that America was decades ahead in technology and capable of nearly any innovation imaginable. The technological divide between America, as well as Western Europe, and the Soviet Union increased during Reagan's administration because of his administration's defense policies. To drive the point home, Morris described the West as "computerized" while "Mother Russia [was] still using the abacus."⁷⁶

Taking into consideration evidence suggesting Reagan's political goals and policies were not significantly influenced by Bible prophecy, the historical record is clear that Reagan personally believed—at least during certain times throughout his administration—that Armageddon was not only a real event that lay ahead in human history but that it was also near. To what degree did this conviction influence Reagan's determination to develop the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) into a real time national defense system?⁷⁷ Robert MacFarlane, one of Reagan's national security advisors and leads on SDI, spoke openly with Lou Cannon about his conversations with President Reagan. According to MacFarlane, "Reagan's interest in

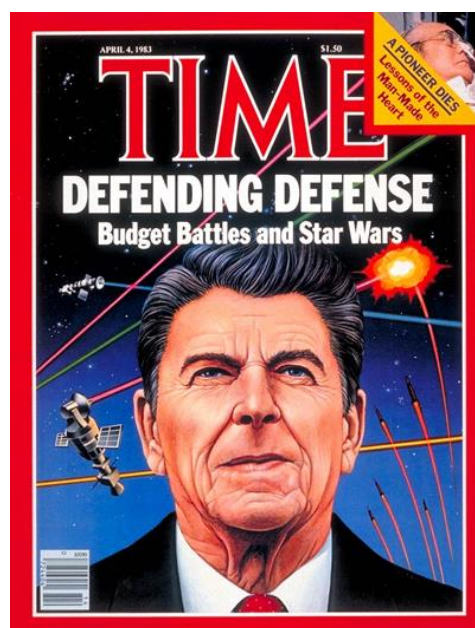


Figure 28. "President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative," *Time Magazine*, April 4, 1983.

⁷⁵ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents, 1962-1986* (New York: Random House, 1995): 528.

⁷⁶ Morris, *Dutch*, 527.

⁷⁷ Nicknamed "Star Wars" by the media, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was a missile defense program that aimed to protect America from a potential nuclear attack. While the program was highly criticized for its impossible implementation, the program effectively stirred the Soviet Union to compete, contributing to the economic collapse of the Soviet Union. For one of the best scholarly accounts of SDI, see Frances FitzGerald *Way Out there in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

antimissile defense was the product of his interest in Armageddon.”⁷⁸ MacFarlane explained that Reagan believed Armageddon would be caused by a nuclear war and that America needed to be protected. Seen as displaced optimism, MacFarlane, as well as others working within the security council, could not reconcile Reagan’s belief in God’s preordained destruction of the world and Reagan’s trust in an improbable antimissile defense system. In a show of criticism, MacFarlane stated: [Reagan] sees himself as a romantic, heroic figure who believes in the power of a hero to overcome even Armageddon. [Reagan] didn’t see himself as God, but he saw himself as a heroic figure on earth.”⁷⁹ MacFarlane’s testimony is reflective of Reagan’s more public admission of a deep belief in Bible prophecy while debating Walter Mondale during the 1984 election.

By the 1984 presidential election, Reagan’s eschatological views that had once only been seriously discussed within the evangelical community (*PTL* segment and interviews with evangelicals like Bob Slosser and Jerry Falwell) suddenly became a national conversation. Both *The New York Times* (*NYT*) and *The Washington Post* (*WaPo*) ran articles detailing statements from religious leaders worried about Reagan’s deeply held views concerning Armageddon. According to the *NYT*, more than eight million Americans adhered to Reagan’s religious views about Armageddon, which included leading pastors such as Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell.⁸⁰ Christians and Jews outside of dispensationalism held various alternative eschatological views and therefore condemned Reagan for reinforcing an interpretation that the Bible foretold a nuclear Armageddon.

⁷⁸ Cannon, *President Reagan*, 249.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ John Herbers, “Religious Leaders Tell of Worry on Armageddon View Ascribed to Reagan,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/21/us/religious-leaders-tell-of-worry-on-armageddon-view-ascribed-to-reagan.html>.

WaPo reported that hundreds of church leaders across America warned that if nuclear Armageddon was certain, as Reagan believed, then “reconciliation with America’s adversaries [was] ultimately futile.”⁸¹ Why strive for peace if the end of humanity is inevitable? The religious leaders stressed that if Reagan’s foreign policy incorporated nuclear Armageddon theology, then the current foreign policy was a danger to national security. Publicly, Reagan denied the accusations that his defense and foreign policy was based on Biblical prophecy. Yet this national incident that caused panic for Reagan’s public relations team also revealed to the American people a more deeply religious and Bible believing Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s deeper theological convictions provide an opportunity to better understand Reagan’s determination to not so much witness Armageddon, but instead— witness the end of the Cold War. While most media outlets in 1984 traced Reagan’s eschatological views back to the 1979 Jim Bakker interview, his views can be traced back even farther in the historical record.⁸²

The historical record indicates that Reagan spoke about Old Testament prophecies and the end of the world to numerous people dating back as early as his time as California’s governor. While Grace Halsell unconvincingly attempted to lump Reagan into the premillennial dispensationalist camp as early as the 1970s, her bias against the emerging religious right and disdain for Reagan’s administration generalized the dispensationalist title given to Reagan as political mudslinging.⁸³ According to Timothy Weber, dispensational premillennialism adherents believe that the Old Testament predicts an Armageddon by fire following the return of

⁸¹ Marjorie Hyer, “Armageddon,” *The Washington Post*, October 24, 1984.

⁸² This refers to the Jim Bakker interview referenced in the introduction to this chapter.

⁸³ Andrew Lang, director of the Washington think tank Christie Institute, quoted in Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (West Port, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986), 40.

Christ and the rapture of believers in the near future. A final battle between good and evil.⁸⁴

While Reagan voiced the belief in Old Testament prophecies, the historical record is hazy about Reagan's exact beliefs and which books, religious teachings, and Bible verses specifically shaped his concerns about Armageddon. When Bob Slosser of the Christian Broadcasting Network interviewed Reagan in 1983, their conversation did reveal a lesser-known side of Reagan's devotion to studying the Bible. But nothing specific is mentioned. While most Americans are familiar with Reagan's devotion and references to the Bible and Judeo-Christian principles in his speeches, Reagan's eschatological views only appear sporadically and are often truncated in the historical record. In conversations with other evangelicals, Reagan spoke about how he believed "biblical prophecies had been fulfilled, mostly pertaining to the Jews and ... the State of Israel" and related the 1967 Six-Day War as fulfillment of a prophecy in the Gospel of Luke concerning Israel regaining control of Jerusalem for the first time since ancient history.⁸⁵ Bob Slosser, a proponent of Reagan, and Grace Halsell, a harsh critic of Reagan and evangelicals, both report that Reagan also read mainstream, dispensationalist writings. But nothing is listed specifically outside of Halsell's unsourced assertion that Reagan read Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

As discussed in chapters three and four, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* was read widely throughout the 1970s with reprints and additional publications in the 1980s that continued to sell millions of copies. Evidenced by what others have claimed, Reagan probably read Hal Lindsey's work, as well as some members of his administration.⁸⁶ This is supported

⁸⁴ For more information on dispensational premillennialism, see Timothy Weber, "Dispensational Premillennialism: The Dispensationalist Era," *Christianity Today*, October 2, 2022.

⁸⁵ Slosser, *Reagan Inside Out*, 16.

⁸⁶ Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 43.

also by Lindsey's claim that Reagan invited him to speak at the Pentagon about geopolitical issues and nuclear war.⁸⁷ In an interview with Christian radio broadcaster and author, George Otis, Reagan expressed his belief in Armageddon and the role that Israel would play in end-time events. Reagan believed that the United States must protect Israel not just because they were Jewish, but because they were the only democracy in the Middle East. The location where Armageddon would unfold.⁸⁸ America would need a friend in the Middle East when Armageddon occurred. In 1980, Reagan claimed that "Israel is the only stable democracy [the U.S.] can rely on in a spot where Armageddon could come."⁸⁹ Concerned about events in the Middle East, a month into his presidency Reagan wrote in his diary that "Sometimes I wonder if we are destined to witness Armageddon."⁹⁰ A few months later, reflecting on Israel's Operation Babylon attack against Iraq's unfinished nuclear reactor prompted Reagan to write again in his diary. "I swear I believe Armageddon is near."⁹¹ Based on Reeve's assessment of Reagan in *The Triumph of Imagination*, Reagan was actively involved in his administration and not passive, meaning that Reagan's convictions about the dangers presented by nuclear armament remained a constant concern and therefore a top national security issue for his administration.⁹² Reading through Reagan's personal journals, Biblical assertions like these seem deeply felt if not also

⁸⁷ Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 46.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 44-45.

⁸⁹ William Safire, "Reagan on Israel," *The New York Times*, March 24, 1980,

⁹⁰ "Friday, May 15, 1981," *The Reagan Diaries*, edited by Douglas Brinkley (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 19.

⁹¹ "Sunday, June 7, 1981," *The Reagan Diaries*, 23-24.

⁹² Reeves, *The Triumph of Imagination*, xiv-xv.

strongly held as religious convictions and influenced at least how Reagan viewed defense and foreign policies.

Armageddon became a peripheral, seldom comment made by Reagan publicly, and it was not until the 1984 campaign that Reagan was forced to publicly address his eschatological beliefs. Even years after being confronted and even ridiculed for what many claimed to be his dispensationalist convictions, Reagan shared with his National Security Council in 1987 his concerns about geopolitical conflicts involving nuclear weapons:

There has to be an answer to all these questions because some day people are going to ask why we didn't do something now about getting rid of nuclear weapons. You know, I've been reading my Bible and the description of Armageddon talks about destruction, I believe, of many cities and we absolutely need to avoid that. We have to do something now.⁹³

During the 1984 presidential debate with Walter Mondale, Reagan confidently affirmed: “No one knows whether Armageddon—those prophecies—mean that Armageddon is a thousand years away or day after tomorrow.”⁹⁴ Reagan repeated his administration’s belief that “a nuclear war cannot be won. And must never be fought.”⁹⁵ When pressed about the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), Reagan suggested that the military and defense buildup was to promote his administration’s ultimate goal of bringing the Soviet Union to the negotiation table “to end mankind from [nuclear] threat.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Planning Group Meeting, 8 September 1987, NSPG 0165, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Meeting File [Review of US Arms Control Positions], The Reagan Files, <https://www.thereaganfiles.com/870908.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Reagan and Mondale, “1984 Presidential Candidate Debate,” 0:36 to 0:44, April 27, 2009.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55:21 to 55:27.

⁹⁶ Reagan and Mondale, “1984 Presidential Candidate Debate,” 57:08 to 57:36.

While dispensationalists and most mainstream evangelicals warned of Armageddon, American popular culture also obsessed over the end of the world and nuclear holocaust—a topic thoroughly explored in the previous chapter. By 1983, the highest viewed television movie in history depicted a nuclear holocaust initiated by NATO and Warsaw Pact nations that lead to a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The influence of *The Day After* was intense enough for ABC to air a political discussion on their highly rated program *Viewpoint*. The discussion included leading figures such as William F. Buckley, Jr., Henry Kissinger, Elie Wiesel, Robert McNamara, and Carl Sagan. The film, televised discussion, and national media conversation surrounding nuclear war revealed that apocalyptic concerns were not relegated to only dispensationalists but also included the general population.⁹⁷

In an attempt to not sensationalize the horrors of a nuclear holocaust, *Viewpoint* posited that the conversation should not focus on the crisis of a nuclear holocaust but instead center around the issue of “what, if anything, can be done [to prevent a nuclear holocaust]?”⁹⁸ In response, McNamara, Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968, argued that more than 40,000 nuclear weapons existed (as of 1983) and that it was in the

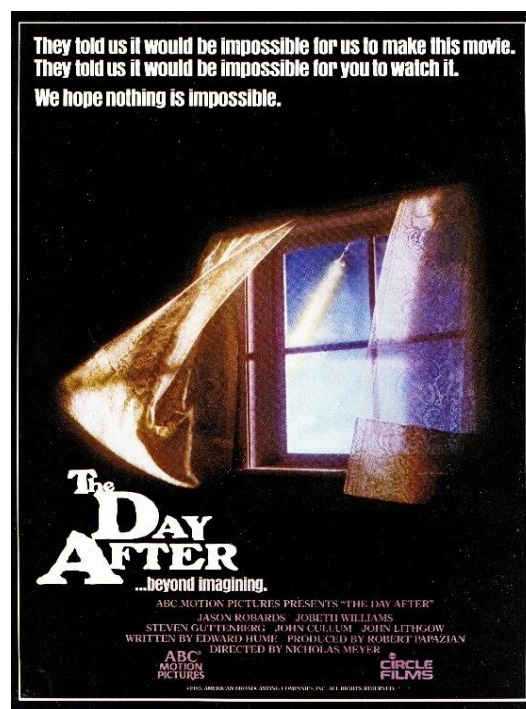


Figure 29. “Original movie poster,” ABC Motion Pictures, *The Day After*, 1983.

⁹⁷ For more information about the impact of the doctrine of Armageddon on American culture in the late Cold War, see chapter four.

⁹⁸ The Museum of Classic Chicago Television, “ABC News Viewpoint The Day After WLS Channel 7,” *YouTube* video, 17:18 to 17:23, December 26, 2019. <https://youtu.be/4RLVRfwhO8E>.

common interest of the U.S. and the Soviet Union to avoid using nuclear weapons, stressing the point that no one wins in a nuclear exchange. Because the world possessed the knowledge of how to make nuclear weapons, the goal to eliminate all nuclear weapons was not a reasonable policy. While the number of nuclear weapons could be reduced, the only defense was to ensure that the cost of a nuclear exchange would be so destructive—"a million times the destructive force of Hiroshima"—that neither nation would dare to use their arsenal.⁹⁹ Although *The Day After* advocated an antiwar message and criticized the buildup of nuclear weapons, Reagan and his administration perceived it as an example of why America needed to continue promoting a policy of nuclear deterrence through strength. In fact, the film was as much a message to Washington, D.C., and Moscow as it was to the American people. The film's disclaimer read:

The catastrophic events you have just witnessed are, in all likelihood, less severe than the destruction that would actually occur in the event of a full nuclear strike against the United States. It is hoped that the images in this film will inspire the nations of this earth, their peoples and leaders, to find the means to avert the fateful day.¹⁰⁰

Reacting to an early showing of the movie prior to its television release, Reagan recorded in his diary that the film was "powerfully done" and had left him "greatly depressed."¹⁰¹ If the film was meant to make an impression on the president, it certainly accomplished its goal. "My own reaction was one of our having to do all we can to have a deterrent [and] to see there is never a nuclear war."¹⁰² Although Reagan believed that God guided human events, Reagan also

⁹⁹ Ibid., 19:25 to 19:39.

¹⁰⁰ *The Day After*, directed by Nicholas Meyer (ABC Motion Pictures, 1983), 1:59:48 to 2:00:05, DVD.

¹⁰¹ "October 10, 1983," *The Reagan Diaries*, 186.

¹⁰² Ibid.

understood that it was through people those events were shaped. As president, Reagan believed that he was in the unique position to mitigate Americans' fear of a nuclear Armageddon.

Conclusion

According to the evidence in the historical record and presented in this chapter, Ronald Reagan held religious convictions in Biblical prophecy that warned of a great battle called Armageddon—a final battle between good and evil. Holding these beliefs, Reagan also acknowledged that the potentiality of a nuclear holocaust and ongoing conflict in the Middle East meant that Armageddon *could* happen within his lifetime—and not that it necessarily *would* happen. As evidenced by those who worked closely with Reagan in the National Security Council, Reagan believed that America's role in the end times—or in the event of a nuclear exchange—was to mitigate its devastation. Reagan also believed that mankind possessed the ability to promote goodness in the world and to ward off destruction—even nuclear holocaust. The connection between Reagan's religious beliefs and the foreign and defense policies that characterized his administration is subjective to Reagan's laments found within the historical record. Yet, it is reasonable to conclude that Reagan was privately driven by his religious convictions and belief in at least some aspects of the doctrine of Armageddon as expressed in the public and private comments examined in this chapter. For example, Reagan's vision of a SDI program was, at least in part, motivated by his fears of nuclear war and Biblical Armageddon.

Reagan's political agenda did not contain an easy list of tasks but rather a complex duty to keep his promise to limit the size of the federal government despite expanding the nation's national budget far greater than his predecessors. Out of necessity, Reagan accepted what his critics viewed as contradictions within his administration. Despite his failure to make major gains regarding the conservative agenda, Reagan successfully maintained his devotion to

preventing the continuation of the Cold War and kept the dissolution of the Soviet Union as his primary focus—his endgame. While Reagan certainly did not end the Cold War singlehanded nor end communism’s control throughout the world, his administration—driven in part by Reagan’s personal devotion to mitigating the horrors of Armageddon—created the conditions that helped to bring about the fall of the Soviet Union.

Reagan’s vice president, George H. W. Bush, trumpeted the accomplishments and renewed marriage of politics and Judeo-Christian values when he successfully ran for president in 1988. According to Gary Scott Smith, “Most scholars have paid scant attention to how Bush’s faith guided him personally or influenced his presidency, especially as he organized, implemented, and justified Operation Desert Storm.”¹⁰³ As expressed in the following chapter, Bush’s relationship with dispensationalists is a matter that requires additional scholarship. Bush’s aggressive behavior in the Middle East sparked renewed interest Bible prophecy in the early 1990s—as assessed in Johnny Cash’s “Goin’ by the Book” song in chapter four. The scope of this dissertation ultimately pauses on January 11, 1989, just a few days before the transfer of executive power from President Reagan to his vice president.

Delivered with great somber, Reagan’s farewell address touched on many of the themes that dominated his time in office.

Nothing is less free than pure communism—and yet we have, the past few years, forged a satisfying new closeness with the Soviet Union . . . The detente of the 1970's was based not on actions but promises. They'd promise to treat their own people and the people of the world better. But the gulag was still the gulag, and the state was still expansionist, and they still waged proxy wars in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Well, this time, so far, it's different . . . We must keep up our guard, but we must also continue to work together to lessen and eliminate tension and mistrust . . . And we'll continue to work to make sure that the Soviet Union that eventually emerges from this process is a less threatening one. What it all boils down to is this: I want the new closeness to continue. And it will, as long

¹⁰³ Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*, 295.

as we make it clear that we will continue to act in a certain way as long as they continue to act in a helpful manner. If and when they don't, at first pull your punches. If they persist, pull the plug. It's still trust but verify. It's still play but cut the cards. It's still watch closely. And don't be afraid to see what you see.¹⁰⁴

Reagan's final words as president reminded Americans of the importance of keeping the distinctions between good and evil at the forefront of foreign policy in the years ahead. Within a few short years, the world would witness the dissolution of the Soviet Union and major changes in geopolitical events around the world with increased emphasize on Africa and the Middle East throughout the 1990s followed by changing faces to evil in 2002 with George W. Bush identifying North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. By 2023, the *National Review* would resurrect the axis of evil and evil empire themes to include China and add again to the list—Russia.

¹⁰⁴ Ronald Reagan, White House Oval Office, 1989, accessed from Reagan Library, "President Ronald Reagan's Farwell Address to the Nation. January 11, 1989," *YouTube* video, 11:34 to 14:29, April 25, 2016. <https://youtu.be/FjECSv8KFN4>.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The Doctrine of Armageddon Since the End of the Cold War

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, a recasting of prophetic interpretations gained worldwide acclaim as evangelicals and millions more outside of the faith discovered an action-adventure alternative to Hal Lindsey and Donald W. Thompson's horrific accounts of life on earth in the last days. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins' *Left Behind* novels and their films captured the excitement of the apocalypse in a way that dispensationalists had not in previous decades. Well-written and packed with dispensationalist eschatology, LaHaye and Jenkins uprooted Lindsey and Thompson so successfully that by the end of the century, Tyndale Publishing had sold more than twenty-three million copies of the *Left Behind* series, which included seven books by 2000.¹ And at the time of LaHaye's death in 2016, more than eighty-five million copies of the twelve novel series had sold worldwide with numerous other books written for younger readers that totaled in the millions.² Writing for *The Washington Post*, Alissa Wilkinson of The King's College provides insight into what made LaHaye's work succeed commercially in ways that other dispensationalist writers failed—having not captured the broader audience with what is essentially the same interpretations of Bible prophecy as Lindsey and Thompson. Wilkson concludes:

This is the genius of the *Left Behind* books: They work on two levels. For the non-Christian reader, the traditional genre trappings, and the mystery of what will happen next keeps the pages turning. But for the Christian reader, being able to read current events into the novel's narratives is thrilling, as is seeing how various elements of the

¹ Corrie Cutrer, "Left Behind Series Puts Tyndale Ahead," *Christianity Today*, November 13, 2000.

² Camila Domonoske, "Tim LaHaye, Evangelical Legend Behind 'Left Behind' Series, Dies at 90," *National Public Radio*, July 25, 2016.

Bible are written as visions in Revelation (dragons, beasts, women giving birth, horsemen, fiery pits, the symbol 666) might actually work out in contemporary America and the geopolitics beyond its borders.³

The transition from non-fiction to fiction as a new medium marked not only a major change for dispensational writings and film but also how it would be perceived by the those outside of evangelicalism. While the *Left Behind* series brought greater awareness to premillennial dispensationalism, it also removed what made Lindsey and Thompson's works so urgent and often terrifying. In *Left Behind*, the more the pages turned, the higher the stakes, the more entertainment overshadowed the eschatological teachings that spurred the plot and climax of each consecutive novel. The books would produce a trilogy of films in 2000, 2002, and 2005. Waning interest in the films resulted in a decade hiatus before the inevitable reboot of *Left Behind* in 2014 with Nicholas Cage playing the lead role of Rayford Steele. According to *Christianity Today*, Nicholas Cage chose to play the leading role in the *Left Behind* reboot partly because of his brother's belief in the end times. "My brother, Marc, is a Christian pastor, and he was very excited about this. He said, you know, Nicky, you've really got to do this. I'd already wanted to make the movie because I thought it was such a great script and an opportunity again to do something challenging, but when I saw how passionate [Marc] was, I thought, well, yeah, I want to make this movie for my brother, too."⁴ Recently, a sequel to 2014 film emerged with Christian and conservative activist actor Kevin Sorbo assuming the director's chair as well as stepping into the lead role.

³ Alissa Wilkinson, "Opinion: The 'Left Behind' Series Was Just the Latest Way America Prepared for the Rapture," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2016.

⁴ Lucinda Borkett-Jones, "Nicholas Cage's Pastor Brother Told Him to do Left Behind Movie," *Christianity Today*, September 30, 2014.

The resurgences of interest in the end times, the Rapture, and Armageddon have been thoroughly explored throughout this dissertation, leading to several conclusions and key insights as to how it has impacted American culture and politics. On *The Hal Lindsey Report*—a weekly prophecy-themed newscast that aired on Trinity Broadcast network (TBN) from 2007 to 2016—Lindsey explained that prior to the publication of his work *The Late Great Planet Earth*:

Bible prophecy was considered mostly academic—a study of a thing known as eschatology. It was discussed in seminaries not coffee shops. When I wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth*, it was my desire to write a book on the Bible’s prophecies that would attract non-Christians and lead them to Christ. I also wanted to intrigue Christians and to help them to understand the wonder of Bible prophecy . . . To do this, I utilized global current events as they existed in 1969.⁵

While Lindsey’s prophetic interpretations helped to make sense of the late Cold War, Lindsey admitted decades later that his emphasis on the Soviet Union was based on what was happening in the world at the time of his writing. In recent years, Lindsey argued that China took the mantle of adversary that the former Soviet Union bore. Offering additional support to several key conclusions and insights expressed in this dissertation, Lindsey contended that the popularity and secularization of Armageddon and end-time events in films like *The Omen* (discussed in chapter four) altered how people view Bible prophecy. “There are new doomsday themed movies coming out every season—desensitizing their audiences to the internal God-given warning bell that the clock is running out.”⁶ This helps to explain why each resurgence of Bible prophecy has less appeal and little lasting impact.

⁵ The Hal Lindsey Report, “August 12, 2011,” 0:57 to 1:38. <https://www.hallindsey.com/videos/hal-lindsey-report-8122011/211>.

⁶ Ibid., 5:33 to 5:47.

As assessed in chapters two and four, Bible prophecy coincided often with war, especially global conflicts. The height of this interest might have climaxed with the 1967 Six-Day War, yet the late Cold War saw tensions build between world powers before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The early 1990s witnessed renewed war in the Middle East with the Persian Gulf Crisis. Y2K generated panic that an economic failure would result in global conflict and the end of society. Then in 2001, terrorist attacks on American soil resulted in long-term conflict in the Middle East that was often interpreted as a means of ushering in Armageddon with President George W. Bush (2001-2009) declaring a new “Axis of Evil” in the world that excluded the former Soviet Union.

Summary Analysis

Chapter two focused on the origins of millennialism and the historical influences of end-times prophecy and premillennial dispensationalism in American history prior to the Cold War. The chapter revealed that the role of the millennium and the doctrines of Armageddon proved to be substantially meaningful throughout American history from its colonial days through the early twentieth century. It took until the 1930s for the foundation to be laid for the upswing of dispensational interest throughout America, culminating in 1970s with the publication of Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Dispensationalism’s impact throughout the Cold War and beyond did not happen in a vacuum but was rather the culmination of several ideological developments rooted in a tradition that reached far beyond John Nelson Darby and Cyrus I. Scofield’s influence in the nineteenth century. Chapter two demonstrated that the eschatological views and ministries of religious leaders like Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, John Willison, Henry Drummond, Lewis Way, William Miller, John N. Darby, William Blackstone, C. I. Scofield, and John Frank Norris whose ministries ranged from the

seventeenth through twentieth centuries advanced the relevancy of premillennial dispensationalism and progressively blurred the lines between religious and popular culture and politics.

Ultimately, the research and conclusions reached in this chapter align closest to Ernest Lee Tuveson's critical work *Redeemer Nation*. Based on the research provided in chapter two, the clearest common thread throughout American history relating to the doctrine of Armageddon is that of the millennium and its strategic role in interpreting present history (of those living through the times) and future history (of what laid ahead for humanity). Despite postmillennialism's dominant influence throughout much of America's early history, the twentieth century destroyed for many the utopian idealism of a manmade Kingdom of Heaven on earth that could warrant Christ's Second Coming. As chapter two concluded, the Millerites' blight on premillennial prophecy in the 1840s and the Watch Tower Society's misdirected vision that World War One was the beginning of the end severely damaged both religious and popular view of prophecy and the validity that the world was, indeed, on the road to Armageddon.

Despite a marred history, dispensationalism witnessed greater growth alongside fundamentalism in the decades following World War One. By the 1930s, dispensationalism and fundamentalism had become so intertwined among evangelicals that the two ideologies became virtually indistinguishable. By the start of the Cold War, numerous denominations across America preached a dispensationalist message that emphasized the decline of morality and worsening of society followed by the immediate rapture of the true Christian church. The final analysis of the role of Armageddon as America entered the Atomic Age is that, as chapter two demonstrated, the union of dispensationalism with American culture and politics was well established by 1945.

Chapter three explored the second half of the twentieth century by focusing on the origins of the Cold War and its relationship with Bible prophecy. Religious figures such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Hal Lindsey were thoroughly assessed based on their roles in popularizing dispensationalism and a layman approach to Bible prophecy. A world left broken in the wake of World War II and the rise of competing political and ideological warfare between the United States and the Soviet Union rewrote how millions would come to interpret Bible prophecy. But the birth of the nation of Israel—the first signpost along the road to Armageddon in 1948 proved to be the key to unlocking Bible prophecy. As a result, Bible prophecy became a staple of evangelical rhetoric and helped to propel the ministries of religious figures like Graham, Falwell, and others. Chapter three provided several key insights and assessments of the doctrine of Armageddon's influence and the critical role that Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* played in elevating dispensationalism into the spotlight. Foremost, the most important insight is the confirmation that Lindsey's work was, indeed, a turning point in the history of Bible prophecy. Lindsey's impact provided support for both cultural and political analyses of the role that the doctrine of Armageddon played in American history from the 1970s through the end of the Cold War—only to be replaced by the introduction of Tim LaHaye's novelization of the end times. Chapters four and five are supported by Lindsey's prophetic interpretations, revealing that Lindsey's talent for applying current events to Bible prophecy—along with the ability to pivot when current events shifted in different directions—reached deeper into American culture and politics than most historians have given him credit.

In chapter four, Hollywood and the nascent Christian studios along with secular and religious music and the emerging sounds of Christian rock 'n' roll were analyzed in relation to the growing impact of dispensationalism in American culture. The chapter determined that

dispensationalists' views reflected a common fear that Americans believed nuclear warfare was unavoidable and that the "signs of the time" indicated the end of days were just around the corner. Fear of the Great Tribulation and Armageddon affected Americans beyond the church pew as the message of the apocalypse entered American culture. Among those most influential, Larry Norman, Donald W. Thompson, and Russell Doughten contributed more than anyone from the era in incorporating dispensationalism into the mediums of music and film throughout the late Cold War. Alongside these critical figures, Billy Graham, Hal Lindsey, and Johnny Cash played supportive roles in promoting their work. The research undeniably points toward Thompson and Doughten's *A Thief in the Night* film series as the most important work of dispensationalist eschatology outside of Hal Lindsey's writings. Produced throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Thompson's films complemented Lindsey's interpretations, applying the same interpretations that both horrified and excited those enthralled by end-times prophecy. Influencing more than culture, dispensationalist views and concerns entered American politics most evidently during the administration of Ronald Reagan.

Evaluating late Cold War politics, chapter five drew several conclusions concerning the presidencies of Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan. While there was no conclusive data to determine the eschatological views—if any—of Nixon and Ford, the historical record does support that Jimmy Carter held a postmillennial view that reflected his progressive evangelicalism. Therefore, prior to Ronald Reagan, there is no substantial tie between dispensationalism and the presidents of the late Cold War. Confounding Reagan's political career, the lesser and great myths of Reagan's supporters and detractors dominate the discussion surrounding the role dispensationalists played in his presidency. Several conclusions were gleaned from a close look at the historical record regarding the degree to which Reagan

internalized Bible prophecy and certain dispensationalist teachings. On numerous occasions, both private and public, Reagan alluded to his belief that Armageddon was down the road for humanity. Events in the Middle East and the ongoing struggle between American freedom and Soviet atheism played a vital role in his administration's defense and foreign policy—as evidenced by the Evil Empire speech and the Strategic Defense Initiative. Chapter five concluded with Reagan's farewell address, stopping short of George H. W. Bush's presidency. Because of this, additional research beyond the scope of this dissertation would benefit from a thorough assessment of Bush's relationship with eschatology in the context of his Methodism and association with influential evangelicals like Jerry Falwell.

Historiographical Contribution and Areas for Further Study

While the goal of any dissertation is to provide the most thorough and comprehensive assessment of an area of study, the reality is that topics and sources quickly get set aside throughout the writing and revision process to ensure that both clarity and narrative is maintained. The truth of the matter, there are more than another sixty pages on the “cutting room floor” that reflect alternate routes that the narrative of this dissertation could have taken. Early in the process, an examination of more than a dozen Christian denominations found itself shelved, because it distracted from the essential questions the second chapter sought to answer. Chapter three lost much of its analysis of Lindsey's teachings outside of *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *Countdown to Armageddon* due to the repetitiveness of his works. Even chapter four saw the exclusion of a dozen pages concerning *The Omen*'s two sequels due to both films' lack of depth and progressively irrelevancy to dispensationalist teachings. Numerous end-times books that were read and deemed to be important to this dissertation were cut due to much of the research becoming a repeat of Paul S. Boyer's work in the late 1980s. And chapter five witnessed the

axing of several topics relating to congressional leaders in Washington D.C. throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the pain associated with not including everything originally planned, the dissertation and its focus is no worse for wear.

Because of this, there are numerous areas of study that are worth pursuing for researchers wanting to build on the work of scholars like Paul S. Boyer and Matthew Avery Sutton—as well as this dissertation. Throughout the research, a common theme emerged among Protestant Americans going back as far as the founding generation. Numerous American presidents have garnered the title of Antichrist at some point during their presidency. While anti-New Dealers brandished FDR as the Antichrist throughout the 1930s and 1940s, he was not the only president to bear the mark. In addition, there is a lot of evidence in the historical record concerning religious sects who emerged, merged, and disappeared while proclaiming the day of the Rapture was near. The role of dispensationalism abroad is also not addressed in this dissertation. Dispensationalism was not contained within America but was received around the world alongside the message of the gospel with American and European missionaries. The missionary efforts of dispensationalists are an area that is prime for research, especially in how the concepts of the Rapture, Great Tribulation, and Armageddon might be interpreted in other cultural contexts outside of Western Civilization.

The goal of this dissertation is to add to the historiography—the long-standing conversation among historians—to better understand the relations between Bible prophecy, particularly the doctrine of Armageddon, and American culture and politics. The research presented in this study demonstrates that religious studies are integral to understanding American history. From its foundation, millennialism has remained a strain of intellectual discourse among the religious, particularly those of Protestant faith. The millennial beliefs most reflective of those

expressed by J. N. Darby, and later by figures like Billy Graham and Hal Lindsey, emerged as one of the most politically significant religious doctrines to shape American attitudes toward global conflicts and economies. Throughout the Cold War, millions of Americans interpreted global events through the lens of premillennial dispensationalism with guides like the *Scofield Reference Bible* and *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Persisting through present day, dispensationalism is a powerful religious and intellectual belief system that remains on the forefront of many Christians anticipating the return of Christ and the coming end of days.

Outside of the handful of scholars revealed in this study, few, if any, words are given to a prominent religious and intellectual worldview that millions of American have increasingly held to since the nineteenth-century. In addition, historians seeking to understand the relationship between American culture and politics in the twenty-first century are obligated to not only consider but to incorporate the impact of Biblical prophecy in American history. One area this belief system deserves further research is the relationship between Christian Zionism and foreign policy. These issues were established among many Christian activists in the early twentieth century and cemented in American foreign policy with President Truman's acknowledgment of Israel as a nation in 1948.

And finally, it should be noted that dispensationalism is still a vibrant eschatology believed by millions globally whose eyes are locked toward the sky and ears attuned to current events that each day sound more and more like the final signpost along the road to Armageddon. The events that took place on October 7, 2023, in Israel are a reminder of the age-old conflict surrounding the persecution of the Jews that millions of Christians believe will determine the start of the doomsday clock that counts down to Armageddon.

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