

“Nuke Iran!” - John Hagee and Evangelical Zionists

By Nollie Malabuyo, from *Doctrine Unites!* October 26, 2007

Warning: I wrote this post to provoke readers to reassess well-entrenched, preconceived ideas about Israel, the Church, and the Second Coming. Be a patient reader, ponder the Scriptures, and those ideas will be shaken!

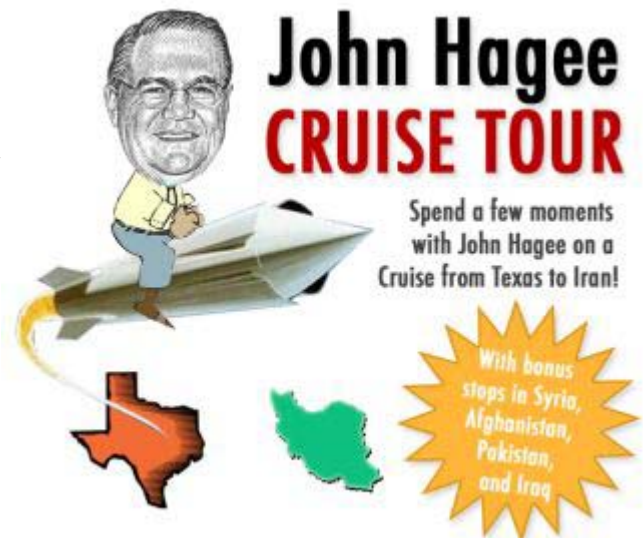
“We want you to recognize that Iran is a clear and present danger to the United States of America and Israel. And... that it's time for our country to consider a military preemptive strike against Iran if they will not yield to diplomacy.” – John Hagee, Christians United for Israel, July 17, 2007, Washington, D.C. (from Bill Moyers Journal, October 5, 2007).

According to a 2006 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, American Protestants strongly support Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is because 53 percent believe Jews when they say, “This land is mine, God gave this land to me (theme from 1960 movie “Exodus,” written by Pat Boone). And 47 percent believe that “the state of Israel is a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy about the second coming of Jesus.”

These evangelicals believe in a historically-recent and flawed theological view of the last things called *dispensationalism*. This is a view that was born out of the “secret rapture” hallucinations of a Scottish girl in 1830. John Darby of the Plymouth Brethren adopted and embellished her hallucinations into the full-blown system we know today as *dispensational premillennialism*, popularized still more by the *Scofield Reference Bible*, Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series.

However, in the first 1,800 years of the history of the church, not a single Christian scholar ever came up with this secret rapture view. As well, for about 1,500 years (4th-19th century), the premillennial view was almost, if not totally, non-existent in the doctrines of the church. The view that was widely taught was this: the Second Coming is a single event when all history is consummated: Christ appears, all the dead (believers and unbelievers) are resurrected and judged, and eternity in the new heaven and new earth begins. This is what is known as *amillennialism*, which regards the thousand years of Revelation 20:1-6 as symbolic of a very long, but complete, period of time – the “last days” or “last hour” between the two comings of Christ (Acts 2:16-17; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:2; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18).

What does dispensationalism teach? All the teachings of dispensationalism rest on an overly literalistic understanding of Biblical prophecy. Dispensationalism regards what they think as unfulfilled prophecies given to Israel in the Old Testament as having a literal fulfillment in a future millennium. Two major errors issue from this erroneous literalistic understanding:



Not wanting to get left behind, the Tim LaHaye Drill Team practice their rapture skills every morning before breakfast.

The first error is the Christian “parenthesis.” When Christ came, God’s Plan A was that Christ would offer his kingdom to the Jews, but the Jews instead rejected and killed him. This was totally unexpected by the prophets (and by necessary consequence, by God too!). So God implemented his Plan B to save Israel: he will establish the church, and the church in turn would evangelize the Jews.

The second error is the eternal distinction between Israel and the church. According to dispensationalism, there was never – and there will never be – a time when Israel was part of the universal church. The church is God’s heavenly people, while national Israel is God’s earthly people – two entirely different plans.

Who are God’s Chosen People Today?

“The biblical mandates for supporting Israel began with Genesis 12:3: ‘I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you.’ Secondly, David said in Psalms 122:6, ‘Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall prosper that love you.’” – Hagee, July 17, 2007.

“The land of Israel was given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their seed in an eternal covenant... And that land belongs to the Jewish people today, tomorrow and forever because it is their covenant by the word of God.” – Hagee, September 18, 2005.

For sure, if we were Jews in the Old Testament times, we would understand these texts as referring only to national Israel. This is dispensationalism’s incomplete understanding of the Old Testament – as if the New Testament does not exist. But when Christ came, the apostles, who were all descendants of Abraham, understood the Old Testament not literalistically, but as types and shadows of Christ and his atoning sacrifice (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 8:5; 9:23-24; 10:1). Why did they interpret the Old Testament as such? Because Jesus showed them so! *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself,”* and *“everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”* (Luke 24:27, 44).

Using Jesus’ own principle of interpretation, how then did the New Testament writers read the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel?

First, Christ is the true Israel of God.

In explaining God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18, the apostle Paul says that “in [Abraham’s] offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” And who is Abraham’s “offspring”? Paul says in Galatians 3:16 that since the text uses the singular, “offspring,” it is referring to Christ. Christ is the Israel of God, Abraham’s Offspring.

Thus, Matthew interprets all of the life of Jesus, from birth to death, as the ultimate fulfillment of the history of Israel as a nation.

Old Testament	Matthew
Pharaoh sought to kill the baby who was to become mediator of the old covenant.	Herod sought to kill the baby who was to become mediator of the new covenant.
Israel crossed the sea, called a “baptism” by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:1-2.	Jesus went into the river to be baptized (3:13).
The cloud, the Spirit of God, hovered over the Israelites in their journey (Exod. 40:38).	The Spirit hovered over Jesus at his baptism (3:16).
Israel was tempted in the wilderness for 40 years (Num. 32:13).	Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days (4:1).
Moses read the old covenant to Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:2-3).	Jesus explained life in the new covenant on a mountain (5:1).
Isaiah ascribes God’s chosen “Servant” in whom he delights to Israel (42:1; 44:1).	Matthew ascribes Isaiah’s “Servant” to Jesus (12:18; cf. 3:17).
Isaiah’s “Servant” “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (53:4).	Jesus “took our illnesses and bore our diseases” (8:17).

Second, the Church is the true Israel of God.

Paul shows in his epistles that from the beginning, God already intended to include in his covenant not only Abraham's blood descendants, but also Abraham's *faith* descendants. Those who are in Christ, namely believers from "all the nations," are the true children of Abraham (Gal. 3:7-9, 29; Rom. 9:6-8). It is not only those who have the external, physical sign of circumcision, but those who have the inward circumcision of the heart by the Spirit of Christ who belong to Israel (Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3).

Therefore, since Jesus is the true Israel of God, all those who are united to him by faith are also counted as the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).



"Abraham Sacrificing Isaac" by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, 1729

If God's blessings are given only to Abraham and all people like him who have faith in Christ, what then of those who do not have this same faith? One of the ways in which Jesus pictures Judgment Day is the Son of Man meting out blessings and curses to everyone based on their treatment of God's people. On that last day, he will say to the sheep, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom... [because] as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." But to the goats, he will say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire... [because] as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matt. 25:31-46). Why is this a basis for judgment? Because love for the brethren is one of the marks of a true believer (1 John 3:14).

The fruit of faith in a true believer is not lobbying the White House to support Israel and bomb Iran, but loving the brethren – the Israel of God – whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Thus, blessings and curses are pronounced by God on people based on how they treated believers, not on how they handled national Israel.

Third, Canaan, the Promised Land, was only a type of the New Heaven and New Earth.

God not only promised innumerable children and many nations to Abraham; he also promised land to him and his descendants (Gen. 17:8). And all that God promised to the Israelites in terms of real estate were given to them, as Joshua 21:43-45 says,

"Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers... Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."

Hebrews chapter 11 points out that Abraham knew that Canaan was not the final Promised Land where he would settle. Why? Because "he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (vv. 9-10). Abraham knew that God's promised land extended far beyond what he could see. Our Old Testament heroes of the faith "all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (v. 13).

How then could dispensationalists say that the land of Canaan belongs to Israel forever, when even Abraham, the first Israelite, did not acknowledge the land as his permanent dwelling place? All the heroes of our faith "did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us" (vv. 13-16, 39-40). Could that "something better" be the land of Canaan in the millennium? Absolutely not! "They desire[d] a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (v. 16). In the same way, all of us in Christ throughout the ages are not to get

excited about a millennial, earthly Jerusalem, but are to wait for an eternal “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet. 3:13).

Fourth, the temporal, earthly kingdom of David was only a type of the eternal, heavenly kingdom of Christ.

At his trial, Jesus was asked by Pilate if he was the King of the Jews. Jesus replied, as always, in spiritual terms not understood by unbelievers, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Why then, do dispensationalists insist on teaching that Jesus will reign from an earthly throne in Jerusalem – a view that Jesus himself denied?

The apostles also interpreted the temporal kingdom of David as such – a type of Christ’s heavenly kingdom. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter saw God’s promise to David “that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,” and that this Son would sit at God’s right hand in his heavenly reign, as fulfilled by Christ himself (2 Sam. 7:16; Acts 2:30, 34). During the Jerusalem council, James interpreted Amos’ prophecy of the restoration of David’s kingdom as being fulfilled by “all the Gentiles who are called by my name” (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 2:15-18). David’s eternal throne is not the millennial kingdom of Israel, but the heavenly, universal Kingdom of Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles.



Were Peter and James “spiritualizing” Amos’ prophecy by not interpreting it “literalistically”? Not at all. They were looking at Old Testament prophecies as types and shadows of Christ’s person and work in the New Testament. They were interpreting Scripture with Scripture, not Scripture with newspapers, TV, and prophecy conferences.

Bizarre Results

When Scripture is interpreted by Scripture, when the Old Testament is interpreted by the New, and when unclear texts are interpreted by the clear, the result is a single, cohesive Biblical story of man’s redemption through Christ, revealed progressively by God from Genesis to Revelation. Note the simplicity and unspectacularity of amillennialism:

<i>Next prophetic event</i>	Second coming of Christ after a brief period of apostasy and revelation of Antichrist; resurrection of believers and unbelievers; Judgment Day; new heaven and new earth
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In contrast, literalistic interpretive principles used by dispensationalists result in innovative and bizarre teachings requiring complex timelines and charts:

<i>Next prophetic event</i>	Secret rapture and resurrection of believers during the second coming of Christ
Events during the 7-year tribulation period	144,000 Jews giving the world a second chance; Moses and Elijah witnessing in Jerusalem; revelation of the Antichrist; World War III in the plains of Megiddo
Events during the millennium	Third coming of Christ; resurrection of OT saints; a millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem; a rebuilt Jerusalem temple with animal sacrifices
Events after the millennium	World War IV (Gog and Magog, the Mother of All Wars); resurrection of unbelievers; new heaven and new earth

We will look only at the teaching about the rebuilt Temple with animal sacrifices for now, and the rest in later posts.

Will the Jerusalem Temple be Rebuilt?

Literalistically interpreting Ezekiel's vision of the temple in chapters 40-48, dispensationalists believe that there will be a rebuilt Jerusalem temple with a high priest and animal sacrifices during the millennium (chapters 44-46). The Lord will dwell with Israel forever in this rebuilt temple (43:7), from where a river will be flowing (47:1-12). How then did the New Testament writers interpret Ezekiel's vision of a new temple?

First, Christ is the True Temple of God

Jesus himself taught his disciples that he is God's temple, but only after his resurrection that they "believed the Scripture," probably referring to Ezekiel's prophecy about the restoration of the Jerusalem temple (John 2:18-22). The disciples must have felt half-witted when they realized that Jesus was not talking about the Jewish temple when he told the Jews, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" So should dispensationalists feel when they ignore interpretations of Old Testament prophecies by Jesus and his apostles, and instead interpret all such prophecies literalistically.

John clearly taught that Christ is the true temple. Jesus "dwelt" [*skenoo*, "tabernacled"] among us" (1:14). He interprets Ezekiel's prophecy that God's "*tabernacle shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*" (Ezek. 37:27) as being fulfilled by Christ in the future heavenly temple (Rev. 21:22, cf. 21:3). As well, Ezekiel's river of life is a foretaste of Jesus as the "living water" (John 4:14; Rev. 7:17) and "the river of the water of life" in the eternal city (Rev. 22:1).

Second, the Church is the True Temple of God

Ezekiel's temple is fulfilled not only by Christ, but also by those who are united to Christ - his Church. On several occasions, Paul describes the church as a temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22).

Micah says that in "*the latter days... many nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord... For out of Zion shall go forth the law'*" (Mic. 4:1-2). Was Micah talking about present-day Jerusalem? Absolutely not! says the *Hebrews* writer, as he says that already, believers "*have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*" (Heb. 12:22). Is earthly Jerusalem, today or during the millennium, ever going to be in the new heavens as the heavenly city?

As well, Ezekiel's temple has 12 gates with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Ezek. 48:31-34). But John expanded Ezekiel's *earthly temple* to a *heavenly city* which not only has 12 *Jewish tribal gates*, but also 12 *foundations with the names of the 12 apostles to all nations* (Rev. 21:12-14). Thus, John is picturing the new temple as the heavenly city, the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2), where Old and New Testament believers - Jews and Gentiles - dwell with God forever.

The Insanity of the Millennial Red Heifer Sacrifice

Many evangelicals believe that there will be a rebuilt Jerusalem temple with a High Priest and animal sacrifices during the millennium. To hasten Christ's coming, some of them are even helping orthodox Jews in trying to raise red heifers, because they believe that the birth of a perfect one in Israel is the signal for starting the temple rebuilding project.

This is not just *insane*, but *heretical*. The writer of the book of *Hebrews* warned the Jewish Christians in the first century against the very same ideas which evangelicals today are longing to see: looking back to the Old Testament types and shadows, and not looking to Christ as the fulfillment of all Scriptures. Christ's sacrifice was "once for all" - *complete, perfect, and sufficient* as a substitutionary atonement for *all the sins of all God's people*.



Holy cow!

Why go back to Old Testament sacrifices? Dispensationalists would say that the animal sacrifices in the millennial temple are only memorial services of Christ's atoning work. But in what way did Jesus say his disciples are to remember him? Through animal sacrifices? God forbid! It is by partaking of the Lord's Supper, just as he commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me." Until when should believers partake of the bread and wine? "Until he comes," Paul says (1 Cor. 11:24-26). Why then do dispensationalists teach that we are to offer the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a red heifer *after* Jesus comes again and is reigning as King during the millennium? Nowhere in Scripture do we find believers, in the age to come after the Second Coming, commanded to sacrifice animals to remember Christ's death. This is so because animal sacrifices are obsolete after Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 8:13; 9:11-14). On the contrary, there is a consummate "memorial" service, a "marriage covenant feast" of the Lamb, to be celebrated in the new heaven (Rev. 19:6-8).

The apostle Paul vehemently wrote against "Judaizers" in the Galatian churches who wanted to go back to being slaves under the Mosaic ceremonial laws, such as circumcision and Jewish festivals: "*How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world [works-righteousness], whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years!*" (Gal. 4:9-10).

Why call dispensationalist teaching insane and heretical? This is exactly what Paul calls those Galatians who wanted to go back to the Old Testament ceremonial laws: "mindless" (*anoetos*, Gal. 3:1, 3); and their teachings a "false gospel" which is accursed (*anathema*, Gal. 1:8, 9), and "heresies," "sects," or "dissensions" (*haeresis*, 5:20).

Thus, in teaching that animal sacrifices will be offered in the millennial temple, dispensationalists are in violation of two of the most basic Christian doctrines: (1) the Old Testament animal sacrifices are but types and shadows of Christ's sacrifice; and (2) Christ's sacrifice is perfect and sufficient for all the sins of all God's people.

So, should Christians send their money to the Red Heifer Program and petition President Bush to nuke Iran to hasten the secret rapture? Yes, if we interpret Scripture with Hagee's wild speculations. No, not at all, if we interpret Scripture with Scripture.

For further reading:

- "The Israel of God" by Dr. R. Scott Clark
- "The Wittenberg Door" by the faculty of Knox Theological Seminary
- "A Present or Future Millennium?" by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger
- "The Not-So-Secret Rapture" by Dr. W. Fred Rice
- "On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend" by Timothy P. Weber