

The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible REALLY Says about the End Times . . . and Why It Matters Today. By Hank Hanegraaff. Nashville: Nelson, 2007. 300 pages. Reviewed by Thomas Ice.

Over the last fifteen years, whenever I have heard Hank Hanegraaff—host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio program—field questions on eschatology (the study of “last things”), it has been clear that he has a presuppositional bias against the futurist perspective. Hanegraaff has told his audience for years that he was studying the field of eschatology and would announce his views in a book one day. That book has now been released. Entitled *The Apocalypse Code*,¹ it serves to confirm the harsh rhetoric and tone that Hanegraaff has employed on the radio against dispensationalism, treating it—and this is no exaggeration—as if it were a cult. Although Hanegraaff has always insisted on his openness to different eschatological views, and contrary to his claims that he has not personally adopted a specific view of eschatology, it is evident to anyone with a background in eschatological studies that he had all along rejected dispensationalism and embraced his own version of a preterist/idealist scheme. He has never admitted this bias, and even after the release of the book he still refuses to classify his own conclusions, despite his penchant of assigning labels to virtually everyone else.

Humble Hank

“Humble” Hank Hanegraaff ridiculed Hal Lindsey’s 1997 book *Apocalypse Code*² on the grounds that Lindsey was arrogant enough to claim to understand the book of Revelation. “Until the present generation,” smirked Hanegraaff, “the encrypted message of the Apocalypse had remained unrealized,” but now Lindsey had finally cracked the code.³ However, Hanegraaff himself has now apparently cracked the “code.” He meekly downplays the significance of his new book: “I think it will create a major paradigm shift in our understanding of the end times that is long overdue.”⁴ Needless to say, he believes this “major paradigm shift” will depart from dispensational futurism and toward his preterism/idealism scheme.

Hanegraaff contends that his book is “to underscore that above all else I am deeply committed to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation rather than to any particular *model* of eschatology.”⁵ If that is his goal, then he has fallen far short of the mark! Hanegraaff’s proposed interpretive approaches, if implemented, would send the church back to the Dark Ages hermeneutically. He may indeed wish to produce only a method of interpretation, but the problem is that the moment anyone actually *applies* a method, it necessarily results in a specific

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

² Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1997).

³ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, xv–xvi.

⁴ Hank Hanegraaff, www.gaither.com/viewArticle.jsp?articleId=281474976960023.

⁵ Hanegraaff, *Apocalypse Code*, 2.

model, with specific conclusions. Furthermore, we may doubt the soundness of his methodology from the title of the book itself: Since Revelation is not written in code, there is no need to break a code that does not exist. Hanegraaff fails to see this.

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

Hanegraaff bursts with pride as he informs his readers that the *principle* of his methodology is "called Exegetical Eschatology or e²,"⁶ as though no one before him has produced an eschatology from careful exegesis. Interestingly, for someone who claims such a deep commitment "to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation,"⁷ it is surprising that Hanegraaff's "method" is stated in terms of principles, rather than as an actual method (such as the historical-grammatical). Principles are the bases of a method; "principle" and "method" are not equivalent terms.

"I have organized the principles that are foundational to e² around the acronym LIGHTS,"⁸ writes Hanegraaff. The letters of the acronym LIGHTS stand for the following principles: L refers to the literal principle, I represents the illumination principle, G stands for the grammatical principle, H for the historical principle, T means the typology principle, and S is for the principle of scriptural synergy.⁹ Only three of Hanegraaff's six principles could even arguably be classified as interpretive methods; the other three are best classified as theological beliefs.

Illumination is a ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer that enables him to see or understand God's word. An unbeliever is blinded to the truth of God (1 Corinthians 2:14), but a believer is in such a state that he is able to see and understand God's truth (1 Corinthians 2:9–3:2). This theological truism is not an interpretive method. Similarly, typology is not a method for exegeting Scripture. Instead, as Paul argues, some Old Testament events were types, patterns, illustrations, or examples to help us live the Christian life (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). Finally, Hanegraaff defines his principle of scriptural synergy as a belief "that the whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its individual passages. . . . that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture."¹⁰ Traditionally this has been called the analogy of faith—namely, the idea that Scripture interprets Scripture. But this also is a theological outcome, and not a method. The analogy of faith

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 (*italics in the original*).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3–10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

presupposes that one already properly understands the meaning of all of the other passages that are supposed to shed light on the one in dispute. Such is not necessarily the case.

Tim LaHaye: Racist and Blasphemer?

Hanegraaff's new book anoints Tim LaHaye as the head of the cult of dispensationalism, replacing the former whipping boy, Hal Lindsey. LaHaye is thus the prime target in Hanegraaff's un-Christian attack on dispensational Bible prophecy teachers. Oddly enough, Hanegraaff is known for frequently quoting the famous maxim, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."¹¹ So where in his book is the liberty and the charity that he so often advocates? They are absent. In fact, his new book competes with the writings of Gary North for the distinction of most invectives per paragraph, and it makes Gary DeMar appear to be a fairly nice guy. It is one thing to disagree with another Christian, but for Hanegraaff to call his fellow brother in Christ a racist¹² and a blasphemer¹³ because he advocates a different view of Bible prophecy goes well beyond the pale.

"Furthermore," says Hanegraaff, "there is the very real problem of *racial discrimination*."¹⁴ Watch how Hanegraaff plays the race card: He takes LaHaye's commonly held view that Israel has a future in God's plan, adds a touch of his famous misrepresentation of an opponent's view, and presto! LaHaye has become a racist. It seems to me that the same "logic," when applied to God, would also make Him a racist for choosing Israel "out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 6:6–8). Hanegraaff believes that those who think in such terms actually hold to salvation by race instead of by grace. While it is true that LaHaye believes that God has chosen Israel, like all dispensationalists he also believes that Israel will be saved in the future by the same gracious gospel that is available to all mankind—Jew or Gentile.

Anti-Israel and Pro-Palestinian

Hanegraaff's blend of preterism and idealism produces an eschatology that is viciously anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian. His brand of replacement theology teaches that national Israel has no future at all, since she is replaced by the church. He says, "Just as Joshua is a type of Jesus who leads the true children of Israel into the eternal land of promise, so King David is a type of the 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' who forever rules and reigns from the New Jerusalem in faithfulness and in truth (Revelation 19:16; cf. 19:11). In each case, the lesser is fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater."¹⁵

¹¹ Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 395.

¹² Hanegraaff, *Apocalypse Code*, xx–xxiii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 189, 225.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xx (italics in the original).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

As is typical in replacement theology, Hanegraaff renders much of the Old Testament obsolete by what is thought to have occurred in New Testament theology. He says that the “relationship between the Testaments is in essence typological.”¹⁶ Future prophetic promises that relate to Israel are reinterpreted as myths or merely types and shadows of something else, but never in accordance with what they actually say. Through hermeneutical concepts such as his so-called “typology principle,” Hanegraaff interprets future promises to Israel allegorically as fulfilled through the church. Such deconstruction of God’s Word turns the future promises made to Israel into dishonest fabrications; they are no longer seen as true historical records of God’s veracity.¹⁷ Thus, the reader is not surprised to learn that Hanegraaff does not believe that the seventy weeks of years (490 years) in Daniel refer to literal years that actually elapse in history. Instead, he says, “The seventy sevens of Daniel encompass ten Jubilee eras and represent the extended exile of the Jews that would end in the fullness of time—the quintessential Jubilee—when the people of God would experience ultimate redemption and restoration, not in the harlot city, but in the holy Christ.”¹⁸ Hanegraaff regularly calls Jerusalem “the harlot city.”

Conclusion

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

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁷ Hanegraaff realizes that his typological principle would come across as allegorical interpretation, so he attempts to deny it. See *ibid.*, 171–72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.