

THE DISPENSATIONAL HOUSE OF CARDS

**Scripture is understood through legitimate, scriptural meditation. (Psalm 1:2)
But today, end-time prophecy has been interpreted through
an intellectual approach, called Dispensationalism.**

Theologians use the term “dispensation” to express a specific era or Age. Dispensationalism teaches that history is divided into different Ages; during each Age God conducts business in a different way. For example, the world passed from one dispensation to the next as God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden. Another dispensation passed away the moment God established the new covenant (New Testament).

Dispensational models were developed for good reason; they help teachers and students in attempts to outline and comprehend the context of scriptures throughout history. Dispensational colleges include Dallas Theological Seminary and Moody Bible Institute. Leaders reported to support Dispensationalism include Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson. Dispensational authors of prophecy include Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and Jerry Jenkins.

Because dispensational thought interprets scriptures using blocks of time, this method of interpretation surged to the forefront when contemporary end-time theories were developed. The block of time interpreted was Daniel’s final seven-years. Renowned prophecy experts, whom are overwhelmingly dispensational interpreters, have already made pronouncements that have proven incorrect. Today these prophecy experts continue to make critical assumptions that although difficult to disprove, will likely not stand the test of time.

Dispensational authors have falsely foretold the time of Jesus’ return. The following scriptures fueled wrong interpretation. Jesus said, *“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.* (Matthew 24:32-34)

Because the *fig tree* is a symbol for Israel, the world's preeminent prophecy experts identified 1948, when the United Nations established modern Israel, as the start of this last *generation*. A generation was interpreted as forty years, so the conclusion was that by 1988 end-time events would unfold. This dogma was featured in a bestseller book titled *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*. (1) This book spent twenty weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. However, the 1980s was not the end-times countdown decade.

Nonetheless, *Time* magazine proclaimed its author, Hal Lindsey, “the Jeremiah of our generation” for his argument that the end was rapidly approaching. Jeremiah wrote a portion of the Old Testament; as an authentic prophet, he wrote without error. Yet Lindsey accepted this comparison; a follow-up book boasted, “He has been called the ‘Jeremiah for this generation’ by *Time* magazine.” (2) Lindsey sold 35 million books in over 50 countries as dispensationalists defined end-time prophecy beliefs worldwide.

Other dispensational authors followed. Dr Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins wrote the popular *Left Behind* series, selling over 60 million copies. (3) *Time* magazine directly referred to LaHaye as a being a prophet in an article titled, *Meet the Prophet*. (4) Time Warner owns *Time* magazine. This corporation distributes porn videos through its cable television business, Time Warner Cable. The result is that Christians have permitted executives with ties to the pornography industry to establish our prophets.

Confusion

According to most dispensationalists, a pre-tribulation rapture must occur at the very beginning of the final seven years. Dispensational interpretation places “bookends” around the seven-year end-time period—with landmark events starting and ending these seven years.

In the dispensational, “pre-tribulation” rapture, God removes all believers from earth at the very start of the end-times, with none left behind. The logic is—since a new dispensation began when God’s focus moved from Israel to the church, then as Israel turns to once again walk with God—that future event also must trigger a new dispensational period. The logic follows that God must remove (rapture) the church at the very start of that seven-year period. This framework places the rapture at the seam, as it were, on the timeline where the seven years begin. This framework also makes the rapture of the church—a 100 percent rapture.

Were a rapture presented later in the seven years, or if multiple raptures occurred, it would not fit into the dispensational framework. It would fragment events into portions of time, instead of major dispensations. However, dispensationalists exude confusion because they cannot agree on the alleged seven dispensations.

SEVEN DISPENSATIONS: CONTRADICTIONARY INTERPRETATIONS

	Interpretation #1	Interpretation #2
#1	Innocence in Paradise	Man under innocence
#2	Conscience after the Fall	Man under conscience
#3	The law—Old Testament	Man in authority over earth
#4	Grace in the Church Age	Man under promise
#5	Antichrist	Man under law
#6	Millennial Kingdom	Man under grace
#7	Perfection in Eternity	Man under reign of Christ on earth

In like manner, end-time rapture interpretation is fraught with disagreement. Experts argue whether there is a pre-tribulation rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, a pre-wrath rapture, or a post-tribulation rapture.

Discovering the Rapture

Dispensationalists place the pre-tribulation rapture at Revelation 4:1. This is based on a belief that the New Testament Church is taken to heaven (raptured) at the same moment that John, the writer of Revelation, is taken up to heaven to witness end-time events. Yet this verse does not describe millions of people being pulled from the earth into heaven. *After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.* (Revelation 4:1)

Forcing events into a dispensational framework produces a contrived interpretation of Revelation 4:1. According to dispensationalists, all the following events must occur at this verse.

- The seven-year end-time period begins (Daniel 9:26-27)
- All believers (the “New Testament Church”) are raptured to heaven
- Later believers are excluded from the “New Testament Church”
- End-time believers are reclassified as “Tribulation Saints”
- The Holy Spirit is removed from earth, releasing the Antichrist

In contrast, the following verse sounds like millions of people arriving in heaven. *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.* (Revelation 7:9)

John did not say, “I turned my head and then saw a great multitude over there.” John says, *I looked and there before me was a great multitude.* As John was watching, the raptured church appeared before him!

Biased Word Studies

Biased word studies provide the “proof” behind the dispensational pre-tribulation rapture belief. The following chart outlines the logic that supports the occurrence of this rapture. The chart depicts the hammering of square theological pegs into round scriptural holes.

“PROOF” OF A PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

A word or scripture not clearly having a specific meaning is given a very specific meaning or interpretation	→	Then that specific meaning is used to prove a 100 percent pre-tribulation rapture of all believers at Revelation 4:1
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The use of “word interpretation” results in a contrived argument. Emphasizing a specific word and repeating its interpretation time and again—can produce an interpretation that proves whatever the theologian wants to prove. The pre-tribulation rapture belief is based upon the interpretation of specific words, such as *after this*, *church*, and *wrath*.

After This

Perhaps the most significant transition to new material in Revelation occurs following the seven letters to the seven churches. The first verse of the next chapter (Revelation 4:1) turns the reader—stating *after this ... after this* twice (Greek: meta taunta). This transition breaks the first three chapters of Revelation—from events that follow. How does this transition play out in actual end-time events? From dispensationalist interpretation, *after this* translates “after these things” or “after the things of the church” or “after the church dispensation.” However, scripture makes no direct reference to there even being a “church dispensation.”

Defeating

The Antichrist (*horn*) makes war against the saints and defeats them. *As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them.* (Daniel 7:21) It is pointed out that these “defeated” saints could not possibly belong to the New Testament Church, because Antichrist is *defeating them*—and Jesus told us *the gates of Hades will not overcome the church.* (Matthew 16:18) Dispensationalists conclude that it would be impossible for the saints of Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 to be a part of the church, because Antichrist, being of Hades, cannot triumph over the church.

The flaw is that the very next verse is ignored—these saints are not defeated. Note the word above is *defeating* (not defeated) and the qualifier below is that they were in the process of being defeated ... until! *until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.* (Daniel 7:22) Daniel described a military defeat of saints, which will be transformed into victory once Christ returns and rewards their faithfulness.

Seven Lamps

Hal Lindsey saw *seven lamps* before God’s throne in the following verse as being the seven churches of Revelation. *Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.* (Revelation 4:5) Lindsey further interpreted that these lamps were representative of the New Testament Church—and that was proof the entirety of the New Testament Church had been raptured into heaven by this point. Once again, a very specific interpretation is made—this time concerning *seven lamps*—and that interpretation is used to “prove” a Revelation 4:1 rapture.

The one who now holds it back

According to the pre-tribulation rapture, Revelation 4:1 is where transformation occurs. A force that has held back the Antichrist for the past two thousand years is lifted, and he will be revealed to the world. Paul wrote about the ongoing restraint of Antichrist: *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed...* (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

The conclusion is that as God’s people are raptured, the Antichrist is no longer held back, and the end-times begin. Dispensationalists identified

the *one who now holds* the Antichrist *back* today—as being the Holy Spirit, present on earth only through the indwelling of the worldwide church. The logic is that after all believers are raptured, the Holy Spirit is removed from earth, and therefore Antichrist is no longer restrained.

However, no one knows for certain that the force that *now holds* Antichrist *back* is the Holy Spirit, present only through the indwelling of the church? It could be an angel, as angels carry out countless end-times functions. Genesis describes the Holy Spirit inhabiting the earth prior to the first man. *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* (Genesis 1:2) To accept the dispensational interpretation, a person almost has to accept that the Holy Spirit “forgot” how to dwell upon the earth, other than through indwelling believers.

Church

The first three chapters of Revelation contain letters to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. After Revelation 4:1 the word “church,” only appears once again. That mention is to describe the church in heaven. (Revelation 22:16) The pre-tribulation position is the reason the word “church” is not again used, is that God raptured the entire New Testament Church to heaven at Revelation 4:1. Yet terms like *saints* (Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4, 11:18, 13:7-10, 14:12, 15:3, 16:6, and 16:6) and *redeemed* (Revelation 5:9 and 14:3-4) that characterize church members throughout the New Testament continue to be used.

Wrath

The pre-tribulation rapture creates a distinction between groups of believers. Those belonging to the New Testament Church will not experience God’s *wrath* in eternity, or while living on earth. Because Dispensationalists have determined the final seven years are a time of God’s *wrath*, God must rapture the New Testament Church at the start of the end-times.

If the pre-tribulation rapture is accurate—then protection from God’s *wrath* applies to more than eternal wrath, but also to wrath poured out upon an ungodly world. Moreover, this complete protection from all aspects of God’s *wrath* applies to the New Testament Church, but not to people categorized as Tribulation Saints, or to end-time Israeli believers.

WRATH: THE DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

Pre-Tribulation Rapture at Revelation 4:1	Problem
<p>Based upon a belief that all New Testament Christians must be gone (removed, raptured) from earth at the very start of the end-times seven-year period—and that Revelation 4:1 starts that seven-year period.</p> <p>Interpreters cite the following scriptures: <i>For God did <u>not appoint us to suffer wrath</u> but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.</i> (1 Thessalonians 5:9) <i>Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be <u>saved from God's wrath</u> through him!</i> (Romans 5:9) <i>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming <u>wrath</u>.</i> (1 Thessalonians 1:10)</p>	<p>There is a distinction between being delivered from eternal wrath (hell) and avoiding God's end-time wrath brought upon the earth.</p> <p>It is true that God does not intend for believers to <i>suffer wrath but to receive salvation</i>. Yet scripture does not state that God's people will be delivered not only from <u>eternal wrath</u>, but also from <u>momentary wrath</u> during the end-times.</p>

When the entire world realizes that events foretold in Revelation are occurring, they call out that *the great day of God's wrath has come*. (Revelation 6:17) However, these people have no authority to declare when the *day of God's wrath* occurs. This quote simply describes how people are reacting to the situation. Dispensationalists manipulate other isolated verses to construct arguments that all Christians must be removed from earth the entire seven years. (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21-22)

Notes:

1. Lindsey, H. *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*. Bantam rack-size ed. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1982.
2. Lindsey, H. *Planet Earth - 2000 A.D.* Palos Verdes: Western Front, Ltd., 1994: Hardcover, inside flap.
3. LaHaye, T. *Tim LaHaye Ministries*. <http://timlahaye.com>. Sep 1 2004.
4. Cloud, J. *Meet The Prophet*. Time magazine. Jul 1 2002.