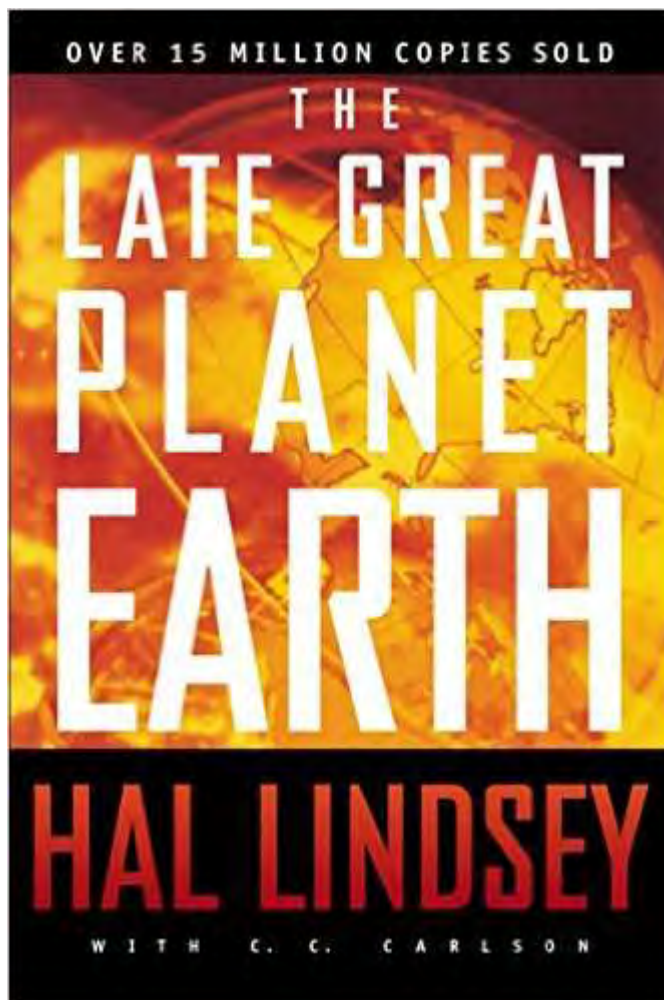


The Late Great 'Late Great Planet Earth'

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We are living in an age when man is clearly on the verge of destroying himself. Never before in history has Doomsday, the End of the World, seemed more imminent and real. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Biblical prophecies concerning the End of the World are being seriously reconsidered today. The fact that Lindsey's "Planet Earth" has sold over 1,600,000 copies, and other works in the same vein are enjoying increased popularity, shows the extent to which people are really concerned that today is "the Latter Days."

Lindsey's view of the future, based on his literal interpretation of Biblical prophecy, gives a detailed scenario of the not-too-distant future which very few secular "futurologists" would take seriously.

However, millions of Christians are taking it quite seriously. The Bible does say, does it not, that Christ will come again during a time of great tribulation to establish His kingdom and bring the Last Judgement to mankind. Whether we take the Bible literally or not, no one can deny that that's what the Bible says, so if we believe that the Bible is inspired by God, we must seriously consider the true meaning of these prophecies.

Lindsey's scenario goes something like this: God is guiding history inexorably towards a final seven-year "countdown" leading to the personal return of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem. An essential step in this process was the founding of the nation of Israel in 1948. Christ will return within the generation of people born during that year.

In the meantime, the nations of the Common Market will unite into a ten-nation confederacy (prophesied by the "ten horned beast" in Revelations), Driven by fear of communism and feeling abandoned by a weakened America, and faced with rising calamities brought on by economic chaos and over-population, people begin to cry out for someone to bring them peace and security.

Finally, a great politico-religious figure emerges out of Rome and takes over the ten-nation confederacy. This is the great Anti-Christ, the "future Furher," as Lindsey calls him. Alert believers will be able to recognize him by his having had a near-fatal wound to his head followed by a miraculous recovery.

The great world dictator will be charismatic, enjoy a meteoric rise to power, and move about with a haughty, self-assured air. Seven nations will make a pact with the Anti-Christ, but three will be subdued by force.

Accompanying the great dictator, and helping to consolidate his reign, will be a great one-world religious system which will be a revival of the 'mystery' religions of ancient Babylon, consisting of magic, astrology, and psychic phenomena. This one world religion is symbolized by the "Harlot" in Revelations, because it is an adulteress in the spiritual sense, claiming to be wedded to Christ, but worshipping a false religious system. A "False Prophet" rises up to proclaim the new religion, and leads people to worship images of the new Furher. This false prophet will somehow gain control of the world's economic system, and cause everyone who does not worship the "beast" to be unable to hold a job or make a living. Christians who oppose the rule of the Roman dictator will be relentlessly oppressed and executed.

Meanwhile, the Israelis will have rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem (much to the chagrin of the Arabs) and restored the practice of offering sacrifices at the temple. They will make a pact with the Roman Dictator for protection against the Arabs. This will be a signal for all who are aware that the final seven-year countdown before Christ's return has begun.

The pact with the Israelis will be the event which will make good the Anti-Christ's promise to bring peace to the world. He will be proclaimed for his great statesmanship, and more of the nations of the world will put their faith in him. After 3 1/2 years of great progress, the Anti-Christ will be worshipped for his great achievements. Riding the crest of public worship, the Roman Dictator will go to the temple in Jerusalem to proclaim himself God Incarnate. This is the signal that the terrible day of Armageddon is about to begin.

Good Christians needn't worry, though, I cause they will have been snatched up to heaven to meet Jesus in the air sometime before the tribulation. In what Lindsay calls "The Ultimate Trip" or more generally "The Secret Rapture," millions of believers will instantly disappear from off the face of the earth, to return later on to reign with Christ.

Meanwhile, back on Planet Earth, the great battle of Armageddon will have begun. "The King of the South," that is, an Arab confederacy under Egypt, attacks Israel. Russia uses the occasion to launch an invasion of the Middle East, sweeping over the Arab countries as well as Israel, double-crossing their former allies. The Roman Dictator will mobilize his forces to crush this breach of the peace. The Russian commander will retrench his forces in Palestine to meet the counterattack of the Roman forces, but the Romans will unleash a nuclear barrage against the Russian army which will totally obliterate them. In the exchange, even the United States, Europe, and Russia will experience "fire" falling upon them.

In the meantime, the "King of the East," namely China, has been mobilizing its 200 million man an army for an attack on the Middle East, using the confusion to move against the Roman forces in a challenge for world control. The Anti-Christ will send out his religious cohort, the False Prophet, to send out a demonically inspired propaganda message to the non-Oriental world to unite in doing battle against the Chinese hordes. The armies of the world will finally be gathered together in Armageddon for the final conflict.

Spreading throughout the world, the fearful battle destroys all the cities of the world the Eastern force alone will wipe out 1/3 of the earth's population, and whole islands and mountains will be blown off the map.

When it seems as if mankind will be wiped out completely, Jesus will come back in the nick of time to save the world from destruction. During all the carnage in Israel, one third of the remaining Jews will have experienced a conversion to Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus will descend to the Mount of Olives on a cloud" (which Lindsey interprets as being the celestial bodies of the previously raptured saints) and where Jesus' foot touches down, a gigantic fault will open up in the earth, and the believing remnant of Jews will run into the great chasm as sort of a natural bomb shelter to protect them from the terrible forces the Lord will unleash upon the Godless armies all around.

After Christ has destroyed all the Godless kingdoms, he will set up His Kingdom on the earth. The believing remnant of Jews will repopulate and evangelize the earth, and be the world's spiritual leaders. Jesus will set up His throne in Jerusalem, and all the peoples of the earth will go there annually to worship him. Peace, plenty, and harmony will reign for 1,000 years-but then some children of the original believers will rebel, but Christ will bring swift judgement before it reaches the fighting stage.

At that point, all believers who remain as mortal will become immortal and Christ will unloose the atoms holding the world together, so that all the elements will be dissolved. Then Jesus will remake the world from scratch, "a new Heaven and a new Earth," eternal and free from any corruption.

Looked at objectively, this scenario is, to put it mildly, hard to swallow. Scientifically, of course, it just doesn't seem reasonable that people can be teleported up into the sky en masse. Other things, like the personal return of Jesus after 2,000 years, coming on the "clouds" (even if they are made up of raptured Christians), the great chasm opening up where Jesus' foot touches, and other supernatural events just don't agree with what we know about natural and physical laws.

"But," a true believer would say, "Is anything impossible for God?" I would say, yes definitely! If God is a personal being, with the attributes of reason, emotion and volition, and is a 'good' God, having the virtues of constancy and integrity, then it would be impossible for God to act contrary to His own nature. As St. Paul said in Romans 1:20, "His invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." Therefore, the more man comes to know about the universe, that is "the things that have been made," the more we come to understand about the nature of God. On the basis of the understanding we've gained since Biblical times, it has become obvious that God must be a God of order, harmony, and law, not an arbitrary magician, zapping things into being with a wave of his hand.

From the Biblical standpoint, Lindsey is on much firmer ground, and marshals some very impressive

evidence concerning the verity of Biblical prophecies. Clearly, there is providential significance behind the history of the Jews, their dispersion and the restoration of the Jewish homeland. Also, it is obvious that the Old Testament prophets were inspired men of God, having true prophetic vision.

However, as Lindsey himself mentions, many Biblical scholars have come to the conclusion that many of the prophecies, especially those in the book of Daniel, came about after the fact. I read a commentary in the "20th Century Bible Commentary" which says that Daniel's prophecy concerning the oppression of the Jews and the "abomination of desolation" in the Temple in fact refers to the time of Israel's oppression under one of the Seleucid kings about 400 years before Christ. I, too, tend to think that many of the "higher critical school" of Bible scholars have gone overboard in knocking on all aspects of the supernatural in the Bible, but I don't think the findings, of reputable scholars should be lightly dismissed. In any case, I don't believe Lindsey has dispelled the critic's contentions beyond a reasonable doubt.

This reviewer is not a Biblical scholar, but I found one discrepancy: Lindsey quoted a passage from Deuteronomy chapter 28 in which he says Moses "predicted" that the Jewish nation would be destroyed twice and they would be dispersed unto all the nations of the world. Looking at all of Chapter 28 in context, however, this whole passage is *a warning*, not a prediction. Moses was telling the Israelites that they would be blessed if they followed God's commandments, but cursed if they didn't. The Jews didn't follow God's commandments, so they were cursed: but Moses never said that their sad fate was predestined, but depended upon how they fulfilled their responsible part in obeying God. This is one area that Fundamentalists tend to ignore -- the crucial importance of man's responsibility in relation to God's will.

A main point of Lindsey's review of Old Testament prophecy is that the events prophesied by the Old Testament prophets happened just as literally predicted. Therefore, the prophecies dealing with the New Testament and the Second Coming of Christ should also be taken exactly and literally. However, there seems to be a profound difference in the style of Biblical prophecies: before and after the Babylonian Exile. Before the Exile, the prophecies seemed to be mostly historical, based on experience and a shrewd understanding of political realities, and depicted the Messiah as physical king and redeemer coming from the line of Judah. After the Exile, however, the prophecies up to the Book of Revelation seem to follow the pattern of the book of Daniel -- highly symbolic, containing much supernatural imagery, and describing the Messiah as coming on the clouds of heaven with great glory.

It seems that after the Exile in Babylon, the Jews' prophetic style was changed through the influence of Zoroastrianism, which emphasized an Angelic hierarchy and a supernatural Last Judgement. Therefore, I don't think that the prophecies following the pattern of Daniel should be treated in exactly the same manner as those written prior to the Babylonian exile.

The most famous and most quoted prophetic book in the Bible is the book of Revelations. Lindsey interprets the symbology in this book as predicting the great Anti-Christ and One-world religion mentioned earlier. However, when I read over the passages which Lindsey uses, I found it difficult to understand upon what basis he makes his interpretation.

For example, Lindsey says that the vision in Chapter 13 of the beast with seven heads and ten horns refers to the Great Roman Dictator. Politically, this prophecy seems way off base, it hardly seems likely that all Europe will come under the aegis of Rome. It also says that the beast will receive a deadly wound and be healed; and that all the earth will marvel at the beast.

It goes on to mention another beast, which Lindsey identifies as a False Prophet, who makes people worship the dragon who gives power to the beast, and worship images of the beast, and furthermore put a mark in everyone's foreheads " that no man might buy or sell, save that he had the mark."

If I were to venture an interpretation of this passage, it seems to me that the Anti-Christ could well be Stalinist Russia. Russia received grievous damage during World War II yet survived; there are ten Soviet satellites, if we include the Ukraine and Mongolia; Russia's armed might is powerful enough to conquer the world, and is seeming to become more and more invincible, even able to cover the great nations. If we were to search for a "False Prophet" in the world today, what modern prophet has had more impact than Karl Marx? And if we're looking for a great world dictator, Stalin is by far the greatest dictator the world has ever known; and although he died, his ghost lives on in Russia and the Communist movement today.

Also, Lindsey's interpretation of the Harlot in Chapter 17 is questionable. He says that she represents a great world religious system which will unite the false religions of the world. He bases this on verse 5, "And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery Babylon, the Great," which Lindsey assumes is the mystery religions of ancient Babylon.

However, if we read further, we get a clearer definition of the Harlot which contradicts Lindsey's contention: verse 18 says "And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." It seems difficult to reconcile the image of a great city with a religious movement.

If we read on into chapter 18, we get several passages which clarify the verse above. "And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise anymore and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, what city is like unto this great city!"

The Harlot obviously refers to something materialistic; an economic system, not a religious system; otherwise, why would the merchants of the world weep?

To venture another interpretation, the Harlot seems to represent the great materialistic system based on greed and corruption which dominates so much of the world today. This seems to be prophesying the doom of a system based on greed and avarice, not on false religion.

Even more questionable than the things Lindsey puts into his interpretation are the things he leaves out. For example, he makes almost no mention of the Woman clothed with the sun in Chapter 12, which "brought forth a man child who is to rule the earth with a rod of iron," or the significance of the Red Dragon which sought to devour the child who she brought forth (Red China?).

It is difficult to see how Lindsey can present such detailed and exact predictions on the basis of the Book of Revelations, especially considering the important parts he left out. However, as one gets deeper into "Planet Earth", one can pick up indications of certain prejudices which may have led to make such an interpretation.

For example, Lindsey recounts as one of the signs of the end that "True Christians" will be persecuted by the denominations which have fallen into "apostasy." He says, "Christians who believe in the final authority of the Bible, salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Christ alone, and deity of Jesus Christ, etc., will be branded as prime hindrances to the brotherhood' of all men and the 'universal Fatherhood of God' teaching, which is so basic to the 'ecumaniacs' who don't believe in the very heart of Jesus' teachings." The "very heart" of Jesus' teachings is of course, the fundamentalist interpretation advocated by Lindsey.

Unfortunately, much of Lindsey's interpretation seems to be motivated by a kind of religious paranoia. It is true that many Christians do not take the Bible literally; but this is because a literal interpretation simply doesn't hold water anymore. A Christian who sincerely seeks to know God, and wants to find deeper understanding of God's truth without shelving his intellect or denying the truths revealed through science, has to look beyond a literal interpretation of the Bible if he is to be true to his heart and mind. However, Lindsey feels the need to reject such people as apostates. Furthermore the greatest threat to the world in Lindsey's eyes, is not communism, poverty, famine (as a matter of fact, he says 'watch for the greatest famines the world has ever known,' as if famines were a spectator sport!) pollution or nuclear war; but religious unity! This is the most tragic error on Lindsey's part, considering that greater religious unity is probably the most basic necessity to really bring about genuine peace to the world.

Of course, Lindsey clearly believes Jesus is going to rapture him up into heaven before the tribulation comes, so he doesn't have to worry about the other poor wretches of the world. As he says, "What a way to live! With optimism, with anticipation, with excitement. We should be living like persons who don't expect to be around much longer." However, I'm afraid Dr. Lindsey will be around just as long as the rest of us, only he will be very sorry he didn't use his time more wisely. Because, if we are to follow Jesus' admonition to feed the hungry and clothe the naked we shouldn't be sitting around waiting to get raptured and watching for famines. I dare say that for every innocent person who dies in one of those famines, another rich Christian will go to Hell for not having tried to prevent it!

This is my final most severe criticism of Lindsey's book. The most valuable thing that a book about the future could do is to adequately prepare a person to face the future, and the future is determined by how we tackle the problems of the present. The Bible clearly reveals that the calamities and holocausts which befell men in the past were not a result of God's predestination, but a result of man's failure to do his responsible part in fulfilling God's plan. As Jesus said, "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven." He also said, "You search the scriptures, thinking that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that testify to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." This indicates that God, the Father and His son are the living reality which we should follow. Therefore, I would suggest that Mr. Lindsey come away from his Bible for a while and pray earnestly to God Himself to reveal to him what His will really is. Otherwise, he may find himself rejected by the Lord to come, the same way that Jesus rejected the Pharisees.