

# Living in a Collapsing World

by Gary DeMar

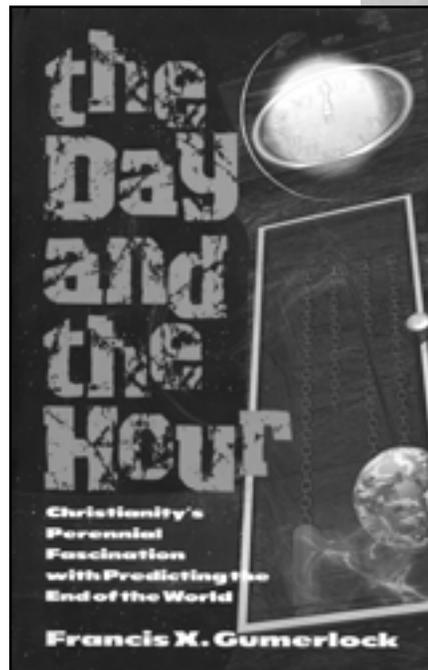
MY ARTICLE ON earthquakes and the end times shook up quite a few readers. So many had been taught as “gospel truth” that there are specific signs that point to an imminent end. When I came along and challenged such a view, they were shocked. Some were incredulous, but most were dumbstruck. Where the future looked inevitably bleak, and they were hoping to escape in a soon-coming rapture, the logic of my position forced them to take a different look at the future. Many didn’t like what they saw. They realized, maybe for the first time in their life, that to a certain extent they are responsible for much of what happens in the world.

Even so, it seems to so many Christians that current events are lining up with biblical prophetic texts. There’s nothing new in this claim. Prophecy “experts” have been making similar assertions for centuries. Francis X. Gumerlock traces the history of this phenomenon in *The Day and the Hour: Christianity’s Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World*. As his book demonstrates, predictions have been made before with similar results—a 100% failure rate by everyone who claimed that their generation was the “terminal generation.”

## REASONS WHY THIS COULD BE THE TERMINAL GENERATION

Prophecy writers see wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes and conclude that these are signs of the end. As I’ve pointed out in *Last Days Madness*, the period between the final days of Jesus’ earthly ministry and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 more than accounts for these signs.

Tim LaHaye, for example, claims that the twentieth century, beginning with World War I, has seen more people killed in wars “than in all the wars of history put together.”<sup>1</sup> Citing no source for his conclusion, LaHaye is apparently unaware of a study that estimates that nearly “three billion people have been killed in more than 14,000 wars since 3600 B.C.”<sup>2</sup> We see events in Iraq as a bloody mess, but tens of thousands more died in the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century than have died in Iraq in this latest war. The horror of watching people beheaded on television does not compare to open-air beheadings of about 800 per month.



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JOSEPHUS, AUTHOR  
OF WARS OF THE JEWS

### EARTHQUAKES AND PLAGUES

Pointing to another sign, LaHaye writes that “an increase in earthquakes, even multiple and enormous earthquakes was predicted by both our Lord in Matthew 24:7, and also by the apostle John in the book of Revelation, for the time of the end.”<sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:7 says nothing about “an increase of . . . enormous earthquakes.” It simply and directly states that “in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.” Luke adds the word “great” (Luke 21:11) and mentions one that took place in Acts 16:26. Notice that these are signs that those in Jesus’ day would see (24:6).

What about the earthquakes recorded in Revelation (11:3, 19; 16:18)? Josephus describes an earthquake in Judea prior to Jerusalem’s destruction as being so severe “that the constitution of the universe was confounded for the destruction of men.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to write that this earthquake was “no common” calamity, indicating that God Himself had brought it about for a special purpose.<sup>5</sup> One commentator writes: “Perhaps no period in the world’s history has ever been so marked by these convulsions as that which intervenes between the Crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem.”<sup>6</sup> The Roman writer Seneca, before his death in A.D. 65, stated that frequent earthquakes had been a characteristic of the ancient world: “How often have cities in Asia, how often in Achaia, been laid low by a single shock of earthquake! How many towns in Syria, how many in Macedonia, have been swallowed up! How often has this kind of devastation laid Cyprus in ruins! How often has Paphos collapsed! Not infrequently are tidings brought to us of the utter destruction of entire cities.”<sup>7</sup> LaHaye admits that the entire city of Laodicea “had been destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 62. . . .”<sup>8</sup>



SENECA



THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH  
BY PIETER THE ELDER BREUGHEL (1515-1569)

The greatest study of earthquakes was conducted by Count F. Montessus de Ballore. Concluding his examination of ancient and modern historical records in 1922, he cataloged 171,434 earthquakes! “The manuscript is stored in the library of the Geographical Society in Paris, where it occupies 26 meters (over 84 feet) of bookshelves.”<sup>9</sup> The earthquakes we read about today are not unique nor is there a greater frequency when compared to other centuries. More sensitive detection devices and immediate news reporting often give the impression that we are experiencing more frequent seismic upheavals.

The Black Plague of the fourteenth century has no modern-day rival. The estimated death toll in Europe was about twenty-five million out of a population of about eighty million. “Worldwide, the scholarly estimates . . . remain little more than medieval guesses: perhaps 75 million dead out of a total population of perhaps 500 million.”<sup>10</sup> Today’s plagues, if you can call them that, including the AIDS epidemic, do not rival the Black Death, which has been described as the “most lethal disaster of re-

corded history.”<sup>11</sup> The Black Death hit everyone. And like today, there were prophecy writers who claimed that the end was near in their day.<sup>12</sup>

### A MIX OF END-TIME SIGNS

An increase in “travel and knowledge” and people “running to and fro on the earth” (Dan. 12:4)<sup>13</sup> are said to be signs that point to our generation. Such a description could fit almost any generation. Certainly the Romans in the first century “ran to and fro on the earth” conquering peoples and kingdoms as they went. No one can doubt that knowledge also increased during that time, first by the Greeks then multiplied by the Romans.

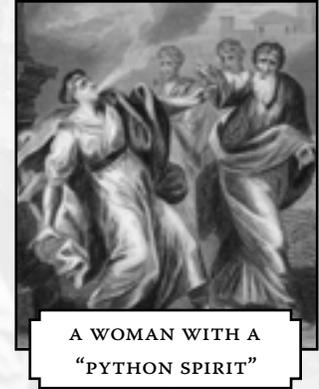
LaHaye mentions “capital and labor conflicts” (James 5:1-6). There have always been capital and labor conflicts. James obviously has a first-century audience in mind: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries which are coming upon you” (5:1). James describes first-century working conditions: mowing fields and harvesting (5:4).<sup>14</sup>

Moral breakdown, lawlessness, a rise in occultism and cults, and apostasy are supposedly four unique “terminal generation” signs. Timothy had to deal with moral breakdown in his day (2 Tim. 3:1-7). So did the Christians in Corinth (1 Cor. 5:1-8). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that the “mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thess. 2:7), that is, already present in their day.

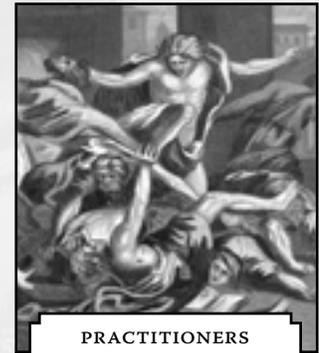
Occultism was a sign leading up to Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70. Again, the New Testament has a great deal to say about this topic. Philip encountered Simon, “who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great” (Acts 8:9). Those who saw him perform believed that he was “the Great Power of God” (8:10), because “he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts” (8:11). Paul faced “a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus” (13:6). Then there was the demon-possessed slave-girl who was being used by her masters to make money for them by “fortune-telling” (16:16).

Even apostasy was operating in the first century. There were “false apostles” and “deceitful workers” who “disguise themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13); “servants” of “Satan” (11:14–15); those who “distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7); “false brethren” who were desirous to bring Christians “into bondage” to the law (2:4); “those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to” sound teaching (Rom. 16:17–18); “evil workers” (Phil. 3:2); teachers of “strange doctrines” (1 Tim. 1:3–4); “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (4:1); “false prophets” and “false teachers” (2 Peter 2:1); “deceivers” and “antichrists” (2 John 7; 1 John 2:18); and a “synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie” (3:9). Contrary to LaHaye, the Bible places the signs squarely in the first century.

None of these signs is unique to our time as any objective study of Scripture and history will show. For nearly two millennia prophecy writers have followed an approach similar to that of modern-day prophecy writers. As each generation passes, skeptics of the Bible point to their continu-



A WOMAN WITH A  
“PYTHON SPIRIT”



PRACTITIONERS  
OF THE OCCULT



THE ARREST OF PAUL

al failed predictions as evidence that the Bible is not true. What makes this generation different? What do today's prophecy writers know that prophecy speculators from the past didn't know?

### THE "SUPER SIGN" OF CHRIST'S RETURN



A WOMAN KILLS AND  
COOKS HER OWN CHILD

LaHaye claims that the interpretive key to understanding when the above signs became prophetically significant is to identify the "super sign." LaHaye believes that this "super sign . . . is such a significant sign it shall be dealt with separately."<sup>15</sup> The "super sign" is related to Israel in the twentieth century. Depending on which editions of LaHaye's books one reads, the key dates for this are either the November 2, 1917 signing of the Balfour Declaration<sup>16</sup> and World War I or world recognition for Israel in 1948 by the United Nations.

Where is this "super sign" found in the Bible? Not in the New Testament. There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that says anything about Israel becoming a nation again. Nothing prophetic in the New Testament depends on Israel becoming a nation again. If Israel becoming a nation again is such "a significant sign," then why doesn't the New Testament specifically mention it?

A super sign requires a super text to support it. Many prophecy writers have turned to Matthew 24:32-33 to find that support: "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these signs, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (Matt. 24:32-33). The fig tree putting forth leaves supposedly is Israel becoming a nation again in 1948. This interpretation was made popular by prophecy writer Hal Lindsey:

The most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel. Even the figure of speech "fig tree" has been a historic symbol of national Israel. When the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the "fig tree" put forth its first leaves.

Jesus said that this would indicate that He was "at the door," ready to return. Then He said, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matthew 24:34, NASB).<sup>17</sup>

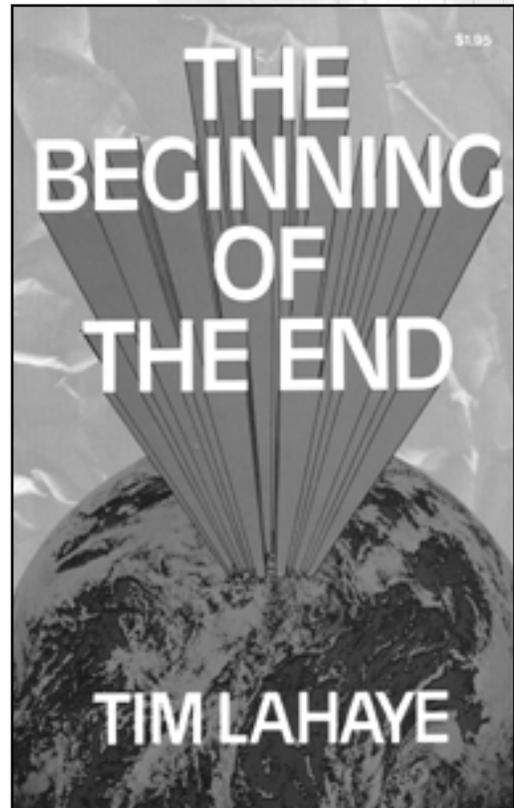
Not everyone agrees with Lindsey on this point. For example, John Walvoord concludes that the fig tree representing Israel "is not so used in the Bible.... Accordingly, while this interpretation is held by many, there is no clear scriptural warrant. A better interpretation is that Christ was using a natural illustration."<sup>18</sup> Even the editors of *LaHaye's Prophecy Study Bible* agree with Walvoord that "the fig tree is not symbolic of the nation of Israel." LaHaye, however, contradicts Walvoord and his own editors when he

writes, “when a fig tree is used symbolically in Scripture, it usually refers to the nation Israel. If that is a valid assumption (and we believe it is), then when Israel officially became a nation in 1948, that was the ‘sign’ of Matthew 24:1-8, the beginning ‘birth pangs’—it meant that the ‘end of the age’ is ‘near.’”<sup>19</sup> So who’s right?

LaHaye has not always held the position that 1948 is the key date for the fulfillment of “this generation” of Matthew 24:34. In the first edition of his *The Beginning of the End*, which was published in 1972, LaHaye wrote, “Carefully putting all this together, we now recognize this strategic generation. It is the generation that ‘sees’ the four-part sign of verse 7 [in Matt. 24], or the people who saw the First World War. We must be careful here not to become dogmatic, but it would seem that these people are witnesses to the events, not necessarily participants in them. That would suggest they were at least old enough to understand the events of 1914-1918, not necessarily old enough to go to war.”<sup>20</sup>

A number of things changed in the 1991 revised edition. The “strategic generation” has been modified significantly. It’s no longer “the people who saw the First World War” but a later generation. “Carefully putting all this together, we now recognize this strategic generation. It is the generation that ‘sees’ the events of 1948. We must be careful here not to become dogmatic, but it would seem that these people are witnesses to the events, not necessarily participants in them.” This change gives LaHaye another fifty years before this new generation passes away.<sup>21</sup> Skeptics will point to this pivotal change in LaHaye’s prophetic philosophy as a way of discrediting the Bible.

If there is no New Testament text that points to Israel becoming a nation again, then where does LaHaye discover his biblical support? He attempts to find it in Ezekiel 37. When Ezekiel was given his revelation from God, the Jews had been overrun by the Babylonians. He would follow his countrymen into captivity in the second deportation to Babylon in 597 B.C. This means that Ezekiel 37 is describing the Jews’ return to their homeland after 70 years of captivity (Jer. 25:11-12; Dan. 9:2). God promised to bring His people back “into the land of Israel” (37:12, 14), and He did. Of course, the ultimate fulfillment of this promise and other pledges in Ezekiel 37 take place in the New Testament era where Jesus, the descendant of David (37:24; cf. Matt. 21:9; 22:42; Luke 1:32, 69; Acts 2:32-36; Rev.5:5; 22:16), is proclaimed the Shepherd of Israel (Ezek. 37:24; cf. Matt. 2:6; 26:31; John 10:11, 14, 16; Heb. 13:20). With all of this biblical evidence in view, it is not surprising, therefore, that the New Testament is silent about the prophetic significance of Israel becoming a nation again.



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# Notes

1. Tim LaHaye, “Twelve Reasons Why This Could be The Terminal Generation,” *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 430.
2. Richard Abanes, *End-Time Visions: The Road to Armageddon?* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998), 277. See Carl Olof Jonsson and Wolfgang Herbst, *The “Sign” of the Last Days—When?* (Atlanta, GA: Commentary Press, 1987), 147.
3. LaHaye, “Twelve Reasons Why This Could be The Terminal Generation,” 438-439.
4. Quoted in Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, According to the Authorized Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References*, 3 vols. (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1832), 3:108.
5. Quoted in Alexander Keith, *Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion Derived from the Literal Fulfillment of Prophecy; Particularly as Illustrated by the History of the Jews, and by the Discoveries of Recent Travellers* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), 60.
6. Edward Hayes Plumptre, “The Gospel According to St. Matthew,” *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, ed. Charles John Ellicott, 8 vols. (London: Cassell and Company, 1897), 6:146.
7. *Seneca Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 2 (London: 1920), 437. Quoted in Jonsson and Herbst, *The “Sign” of the Last Days—When?*, 75.
8. Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 27.
9. Jonsson and Herbst, *The “Sign” of the Last Days—When?*, 78.
10. Otto Friedrich, *The End of the World: A History* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1982), 115.
11. Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (London: 1979), xiii. Quoted in Jonsson and Herbst, *The “Sign” of the Last Days—When?*, 101.
12. Friedrich, *End of the World*, 115–16.
13. LaHaye, “Twelve Reasons Why This Could be The Terminal Generation,” 430.
14. Of course, even though James has specific people from his day in mind, the principle of paying people for their labor is timeless (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18), but it certainly is not a key indicator that we are the “terminal generation.”
15. LaHaye, “Twelve Reasons Why This Could be The Terminal Generation,” 430.
16. LaHaye calls it the “Balfore Treaty.” (LaHaye, “Twelve Reasons Why This Could be The Terminal Generation,” 432).
17. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 53–54.
18. John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago, IL: Moody, [1974] 1980), 191–92.
19. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times? Current Events Foretold in Scripture... And What They Mean* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 57.
20. Tim LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), 165, 168. Emphasis added.
21. Tim LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), 1993. Emphasis added. For a side-by-side analysis of LaHaye’s change, see Abanes, *End-Time Visions*, 295.