

Pick a Pack of Proper Preppers

By Steve Schmutzer

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I leaned back in my chair and watched as my friend carefully lifted out his new stock Remington 700 .308 from its case. He laid the rifle on his lap and fondly caressed its barrel.

"I can take out a bad guy from a quarter mile away with this sucker," he said. "If I put a Leupold scope on it, it's a guaranteed kill."

I was confused. "How do you know they're a 'bad guy' if they're that far away?"

"I'll know," he murmured.

I was unconvinced.

"Doesn't the right to use a gun for self-defense end at the door?" I asked. I wasn't an expert on these issues, but I'd already checked out my state's laws on *that* one.

He curled his lip and looked at me with feigned disgust. "I'm not talking *now*. When the SHTF in the tribulation, you won't want to wait till they're on your doorstep firing at you. That's too late."

I took a sip of coffee as I thought about my next words.

"I don't plan to be around then," I replied matter-of-factly.

My friend said nothing. He shook his head and continued his public display of affection with his newest acquisition. He knew better than to argue with me.

My friend's a good guy. I've known him a long time and he seems to be a solid Christian. He's active in his church and he's passionate about prayer. He also has a heart for ministry, and he's trying to organize a street outreach team to college students. I can't fault him there since that group needs all the help they can get these days.

Somewhere along the line however, my friend jumped on the bandwagon of the Reformed movement. I don't know how or why that happened – but I've watched his journey with mounting concern.

A few years ago, he used to devour prophecy-themed books by Arthur W. Pink, J. Dwight Pentecost, and John F. Walvoord. Those were the good old days, and he and I used to have a lot of great discussions. He's since given most of those books to me as he started reading a bunch of authors I was less familiar with.

He talks constantly about "the importance of the church," and he's frustrated with any discussion that holds it's different than Israel. He throws out Romans 10:12 and Galatians 3:28 as his primary defenses for seeing "no difference between Jew and Gentile," and he believes this settles the matter. He claims he doesn't subscribe to replacement theology, but his newer notions seem to suggest otherwise.

I'm not sure where in his journey my friend became obsessed with The Gospel Coalition, but he's all about it now. He's convinced himself that every passage of Scripture somehow divulges the person and work of Jesus Christ – and I do mean *every!* He goes to elaborate lengths to explain the “gospel meaning” within verses that are plainly speaking to unrelated matters.

All said, my friend is not the same person he used to be. He's made choices to believe things he once didn't.

I still remember the day we met for lunch and he told me he'd decided he was a “post-millennialist.” I knew what that was, but I wanted him to explain his position to me.

In short, he believes we are in the Millennial Kingdom now. He does not believe it's a literal 1000 years, but “a very long time” instead. He believes the church will grow in its ministry and effectiveness to eventually transform entire cultures around the world, infusing them with prosperity, goodwill, and “kingdom peace.” He's sure the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will occur only after this all takes place.

He's got one big problem here: the Bible doesn't support any of that.

Actually, my friend has several big problems, and they each begin with his decision to doubt that God says what He means and means what He says. His doctrinal gaffes are the offspring of willfully mishandling the Bible.

He doesn't believe in a literal Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:2-7; Luke 1:32-33; Micah 4:2-4, et al) because he sees no Biblical significance in national Israel and he dismisses God's unconditional and unilateral promises to the Jews. He's convinced himself that there's a better meaning within these Scriptures, and he feels self-righteous for discerning their “spiritual application.”

Because he feels the church will continue to have a greater and more positive impact on the world as time goes on, my friend sidesteps discussions about the rapture. Why remove from the earth the very institution that's – obviously! - making our world a much better place to live?

He's lumped the rapture into being one and the same with the physical Second Coming of Christ. He argues that Christ doesn't come back to earth two more times. I agree with him. I've pointed out all the ways Scripture defines these two events differently, but he's quick to spiritualize those details which call his own persuasions into question.

It's not hard to see that my friend generally discounts the prophetic Scriptures. Though he once had an appetite to study them, he now claims they are the “nonessential” parts of God's Word. He's condescending to folks like me that would challenge him on that, and he feels “we should be focused on the gospel” instead.

I've pondered my friend's belief that the person and work of Jesus Christ is somehow revealed in every verse of the Bible - and the way he disregards the importance and intent of the prophetic Scriptures. Is there a connection?

Besides the fact that certain prominent Christian leaders appear to align with my friend's errant views – and it's always easier to tout one's position if “so and so” supports them too - I've come to an unsettling conclusion. There is *absolutely* a strong connection!

If one believes something *is* there within a particular portion of God's Word when it's really *not*, then it's no big deal to claim something is *not* there when it really *is*! It's the same reckless mishandling of the Bible either way. Neither decision submits one's will to God since both choices engage in an intentional remodeling of His divine truth.

And both choices are guilty of dismissing the greater body of God's Word in favor of an "easy-believe-ism" which justifies one's right to rank the importance of Scripture. It all tends to lead to mindless chant-like slogans like "*It's all about Jesus*" that sound true on the surface but which overlook the proper regard and handling of the entire Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16).

Let me make one thing clear about the gospel message. While I believe the greater picture of the Scriptures point to Jesus and His redemptive plan, the granular approach may not tell that same story every time. The gospel message is not always inherent in each verse or even in some passages of Scripture.

One is therefore required to take in the complete counsel of God's Word, and that includes *all* of the prophetic Scriptures. In Rev. 19:10 it says, "*For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" The bottom line is prophecy is designed to reveal the full person and divinity of our Lord Jesus, and as such, we should not discount it. We miss something important if we do.

My friend's decision to approach God's Word on his own terms precipitates a conundrum for him: his rationale is not required to follow a consistent logic. He can say in one moment that the church is making everything better in this world, while claiming in the next breath that he can "take out bad guys in the tribulation" with his new bolt action boom stick.

Are things going to get better, or are they going to get worse? He's saying two different things.

It's convenient for him to have it both ways - and in that, he's not alone. Plenty of Christians pick and choose their way through the Scriptures like they're at a buffet. This permits them to hold to whatever beliefs best serve their preferred positions, but it's not right, responsible, or even remotely reverent.

And that brings up my earlier conversation with my friend. There are some issues I want to address for those believers like him who are prepping now to go through the tribulation.

There are various passages in the Bible that speak to the matter of "saints" during the tribulation. The larger counsel of the Scriptures make it clear this is a group which comes to saving faith *after* the rapture and not *before* it. The reality check that emerges for these people is not a pretty one, and several points are made evident:

They are not protected from the impact of God's judgments

In Revelation 7:9-17, John sees a vast multitude in heaven, and the text says they are martyred believers from all parts of the globe. The scene is explained to John and he learns this crowd came "*out of the great tribulation.*"

This underscores a plain fact: people will come to genuine saving faith during this terrible time. The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-10) will continue then as it does now.

But John learns something else about this group - these saints will not suffer *“any more.”* Specifically, they will not face any more extreme hunger or thirst, nor will they need to further endure the scorching sun and heat. Their severe physical, emotional, and mental strain on earth has come to an end.

It’s clear that the closing years of these martyrs’ lives on earth will be desperate times. It will be hard for them to acquire their basic needs of food, water, and shelter. They will live their lives on the run, looking over their shoulders, and doing whatever they can do to survive.

The larger Biblical narrative of the tribulation describes God’s judgments as far-reaching. Specific texts like Revelation 7:9-17 clarify that it will be a *very* difficult time for believers too.

They are not victorious over the ambitions of the world religion

My friend believes Christians will eventually overcome the corruption of this world and lead it into a glorious spiritual age. He believes the institution of the church is playing this role even now.

In fact, quite the opposite is true. The world ahead of us is going to descend into depths of chaos, barbarism, and depravity the likes of which history has never seen (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 11:9-10). There’s no sound Biblical indication that Christians will deter these developments, and that’s a much different scenario than my friend anticipates.

Organized religion will indeed play a role, but it’ll part of the problem and not part of the solution. Christians will be viciously targeted by a corrupt world religion during the tribulation (Rev. 17:6), and they are not likely to survive this pogrom as the fifth seal judgment of Revelation 6:9-11 makes very clear.

The tribulation Scriptures repeatedly emphasize the theme of persecuted Christians during the tribulation. They are murdered *“...because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained”* (Rev. 6:9). The post-rapture saints are not “victors” by relevant earthly definitions – “victims” is much closer to the truth.

They are not insulated against the effect of the global economy

I know a few preppers well – and they’re obsessed with being “ready for anything.” They are stocking up now so they can sail through the challenges of refusing the mark of the beast.

Beans, band aids, bullets, and batteries may be their cliché staples, but are they really ready for what’s coming? It’s easy to read Revelation 13:16-17 and oversimplify the situation.

This passage says those who refuse the mark cannot “buy or sell,” but the implications of this are far greater than one’s inability to score a Big Mac or sell a bike.

The real picture is one of complete economic control. It’s an entirely different system one cannot easily avoid and it will *own* those who are part of it. It will affect everything: taxes, mortgage and car payments, utilities, medical services, school loans, credit cards, and myriad other basic transactional elements we take for granted today. It will be a radical and invasive concept through which a comprehensive new economic structure will flow.

Hunkering down with a basement full of goodies might work for a couple weeks, but when bills aren’t being paid, mail isn’t getting picked up, or other folks get desperate and put “two and two together,” it’ll be nearly impossible to go unnoticed. And trust me - when the first bullet flies in either direction, the gig is up!

And that leads to my last – and most sobering – point about believers in the tribulation.

They are not successful against the campaign of the antichrist

Read that again and let it sink in. It’s not my conclusion; it’s the Bible’s.

According to the Scriptures, God gives the antichrist “*authority*” (Rev. 13:5-7). This apocalyptic despot is entitled to his role because God will arrange it. This enables the antichrist to “*wear down*” the saints and “*overcome*” them according to Daniel 7:25. Revelation 13:5-7 adds the antichrist is given power to “*....wage war with the saints and conquer them.*” He’ll be extremely effective!

Satan gets in on the deal too. While God grants authority and power to the antichrist to fulfill His divine sovereign plan, Satan actually gives the antichrist HIS power and “*HIS great authority*” (Revelation 13:2). Satan’s role is a subset of God’s intentions. Satan’s personally invested - but ironically, he’s assisting God’s plan!

The result is the antichrist is unstoppable. Nothing – and nobody - on earth will be able to stand against him. Everyone will know it and everybody will be talking about it (Rev. 13:4).

That’s why masses of Christian martyrs in the Great Tribulation are killed for their faith and for their refusal to bow to the antichrist’s terms (Rev. 20:4). These believers do not gain the right to reign with Christ because they set up a perimeter and fought off intruders while living on rice and pond water. They will reign because they chose a right relationship with their Lord and Savior over everything else.

So let’s just cut to the chase here. The antichrist is a tool in God’s hands, and Satan - duped by his own pride and ambition - plays right into God’s plan. While nothing is out of God’s control, the net effect is the tribulation saints will die in innumerable numbers (Revelation 7:9). Their desperate conditions will be the result of facing unparalleled injustices on earth (Rev. 6:10-11).

Prepping to go through the tribulation may sound appealing to the mercenary types (“Oh man - I can’t wait to waste all the zombies!”), but that’s a passion which finds its inspiration more in *The Walking Dead* than in *The Living Word*. It’s not based in sobriety, and it’s certainly not based in a proper interpretation of the Bible.

I think it goes without saying that one must choose to have this errant view. If one mocks the prophetic Scriptures (2 Peter 3:3-4), shuns solid teaching in favor of right-sounding pabulum (2 Tim. 4:3), extracts meanings from the Bible that are not there, or refuses to act on the divine truth that *is* there, then one naturally puts themselves at risk for doctrinal drift.

Believers today are reminded that they “...*are not destined for wrath*” (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Revelation 3:10), and the Scriptures teach that the Tribulation timeframe is not about the church. God has different intentions for those seven years, and they do not involve His Bride.

Those of us that are part of the church right now are misled if we are prepping to “take out the bad guys from a quarter mile away.” Instead, we should be “prepping” our hearts to hear the voice of the archangel and “...*to meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thess. 4:15-17).