

VANISHED: LEFT BEHIND NEXT GENERATION

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

I went and saw the new “Left Behind” movie called “Vanished: Left Behind – Next Generation” on September 28, 2016 at a local movie theater. The movie was shown at about 500 theaters across America and included a live hook-up discussion before and after the movie. The focus of the movie is said to be “a tailor-made adventure for today's teens, tweens, and other fans of the popular young adult genre.”¹ I thought it was a well done movie and hope it will reach a lot of people, especially young people in their teens, with both the message of the gospel and of end-time Bible prophecy. The movie is to be released to the general public at theaters sometime in the middle of October 2016.

The movie is produced by two men, but the grandson of Tim LaHaye, Randy LaHaye, came up with the idea for the movie and was the driving force behind it. Randy said that Tim LaHaye saw the movie shortly before he died earlier this year. According to Randy, Tim said about the movie, “Finally someone has done a Left Behind movie that captured what made the book so successful.” I have to agree. I watched with Tim LaHaye the first Left Behind movie at his house and he was greatly disappointed, especially because they did not include any kind of gospel presentation or clear conversion scene. *Vanished* includes both and it is geared toward young people, even though adults of all ages should also enjoy the movie as well.

1970S RAPTURE MEDIA

I am 65 years old, but I still remember how important the rapture was in those days during the Jesus Movement generation. Frankly, it was by far and away the best way to approach people evangelistically. It enabled one to talk about current events and then guide the conversation toward God's plan for history and where someone stands in relation to that. I think it still is a great approach to evangelism today, even though the younger folks tend not to agree. I had many friends who accepted Christ during those days because of the urgency of the hour.

Back in the early 70s there was a movie entitled *A Thief in the Night*,² made by the late Russell Doughten who had a master's degree from Yale University in drama. That movie taught the pre-trib rapture and was also a catalyst that saw many people come to Christ through its showing. In those days there was no video or DVDs; therefore, it was shown mainly at churches as a 35 millimeter film on a movie projector that most churches had in those days. It was the go to movie shown to many youth groups and thousands of young people accepted Christ as a result of that movie and the three follow-up movies. I hope that *Vanished* can have a similar impact upon this current generation almost fifty years later.³ It is estimated that Doughten's four films on the end-times have resulted in about five million people coming to Christ as their Saviour.⁴ It is hoped that *Vanished* could play a similar role in our day as *A Thief in the Night* played in the 70s.

Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in their *Left Behind* novel series have likely matched the impact of Hal Lindsey and *The Late, Great Planet Earth*⁵ of the 1970s. Perhaps *Vanished* could play a complimentary role when it comes to visual media. In the 70s young people would bring their unsaved friends to their youth group at church and the film would be shown resulting in many coming to Christ. However, today, with the

advance of technology a Believer can provide a private showing of the movie to their unsaved friends in almost any venue, whether publically or in the privacy of one's home. The DVD of *Vanished* is supposed to be released shortly after the movie hits the theaters in October. If Christian young people and their leaders get excited about the movie they will be able to use social media and all kinds of way of promoting it that a old guy, like myself, would never know about or think about. Also, it will be important to know how to talk their unsaved friends and ask them what they thought of the movie and be able to share the gospel with them after they have seen the movie. The Lord could really use this movie in a big way, which was always what Tim LaHaye had wanted in a movie production of the *Left Behind* series. He communicated that often to me when we talked about the novels.

THE CAST

There are four main characters in *Vanished*. The movie revolves around a fifteen-year old girl named Gabby Harlow who is played by Amber Montana, who was actually fifteen when the movie was made. She is helping her mother take care of her younger sister, Claire who is eleven and played by Keely Wilson, who was also eleven when the movie was made. Gabby and Claire live in Chicago with their mother who is a recent convert to Christianity and she is separated from her husband who lives somewhere in the country not far from Chicago. There are two teenage boys who play a prominent role in the movie. Gabby's longtime friend Josh Jackson played by Mason Dye and a homeless boy simply called "Flynn" played by Dylan Sprayberry. The rapture occurs about ten minutes into the movie. In *Vanished* the focus is not on an airplane but on the streets of Chicago.

The storyline is described as follows from the *Vanished* website:

When a billion people around the world suddenly vanish, headstrong 15-year-old Gabby is thrust into adulthood way too soon. The event forces Gabby, along with her younger sister Claire and the two teen boys vying for Gabby's affection, Josh and Flynn—to try to figure out what has happened and how they fit into this dangerous new world.

Inspired by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' NY Times best selling books, **VANISHED** is filled with a cast from MTV's "Teen Wolf", Nickelodeon's "Haunted Hathaway's" and Lifetime's smash movie, "Flowers in the Attic," making it a tailor-made adventure for today's teens, tweens, and other fans of the popular YA genre.

A fresh and modern "coming-of-age-during-the-apocalypse" story for the post "Twilight" generation, **VANISHED** asks: What would happen if everyone you cared about was suddenly taken away? Girls will relate to Gabby and her struggles to deal with missing parents and big sister responsibilities—while wishing they were in her shoes when she's forced to choose between the all-American hero Josh, and the dark and mysterious Flynn. Guys will be pulled in by the suspense and cool new twist on the "end of the world adventure," just like "The Walking Dead" and "the Hunger Games." **VANISHED** takes its characters—and the audience—far beyond their own fears and desires. It opens them to the questions of purpose and whether their lives and choices matter.

VANISHED's fresh-new-young take on the beloved NY Times best selling book series will not only elate the franchise loving fans, but create a whole new generation of enthusiastic followers.⁶

I am just a layman when it comes to evaluating acting, but I thought all of the actors did a very good job. The movie had the feel of a topflight Hollywood production, which has not always been the case in many previous Christian movies. *Vanished* held my attention throughout and I do not recall any real dead times in the hour and a half presentation. Since *Left Behind* was done about twenty years ago, they had some updates. For example, instead of watching the pastor's teaching on the rapture on a VHS video, the church had a digital video that they gave out to people on a flash drive which did not require them to watch it at the church. Instead, they watched the video clips later on a computer, just like people do today. Cell phones played a prominent role in the film as could be expected by a young person today.

CONCLUSION

Tim LaHaye told me on multiple occasions that his hope for a movie project stemming from the *Left Behind* series would be that it have a worldwide impact and that at least a million people would come to Christ through the movie as it had a global impact. This is why many of us who believe in the rapture, as I surely do, need to go to the theater and see this movie and take a boatload of young people with them in October. Also, they should buy a copy of the DVD and spread that around when it comes out. The reason that *Vanished* should be supported is because Randy LaHaye has said his goal is to make into future movies as much of the novel series as they are able; however, this cannot be done unless the first in the series reaches a certain level of success in order to enable them to continue the series. The showing of *Vanished* would be a great way to introduce folks to the rapture, which can then be followed up by teaching sessions showing them from the Bible where this is taught.

Randy and his co-producer have done a very good job on *Vanished* and I believe they would continue to do a great job in sequels. Tim LaHaye also believed his grandson Randy would do a good job and gave him all the movie rights to the *Left Behind* series. It will be a real blessing if both Tim and Randy LaHaye's vision for the *Left Behind* series continues on even though Tim has now gone to be with the Lord. I pray that will be the case. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Cited from ChristianAnswers.Net,

<http://christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/2016/vanished2016.html>.

² Russell S. Doughten, Jr., *A Thief in the Night* (1972).

³ The three sequels are *Distant Thunder*, *Image of the Beast*, and *The Prodigal Planet*. Anyone can watch all four of these prophecy movies on YouTube.

⁴ See Russ Doughten Films, <http://www.rdfilms.com>.

⁵ Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth: A Penetrating Look at Incredible Prophecies Involving This Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

⁶ Taken from the *Vanished* website: <http://www.thevanishedfilm.com/synopsis>. (emphasis original)