

Pastor Stef's Book Review – August 2018

Would you buy a bucket of food to prepare for the end times? If so, Jim Bakker will sell it to you. Yes, THAT Jim Bakker. He's back! After going to prison for scamming Christians out of millions of dollars for his "ministry", he is back scamming Christians out of millions of dollars for his "ministry." I don't know which is more astonishing, the fact that he has been able to pull this off again, or the fact that people are being fooled by him again. It baffles me. I admit to a weird fascination for the likes of Jim Bakker and Peter Popoff. Why are so many Christians taken in by these guys!?

John Wigger's *PTL: The Rise and Fall of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's Evangelical Empire* (2017) is the fourth book I've read on the Bakker world. (Wigger's book also came in second behind Metaxa's book on Luther for the *Christianity Today's* 2017 biography of the year). *The Rise and Fall* traces Jim and Tammy's life in great detail. (Some may find it painstaking if they simply want a quick overview). From the Bakker's troubled marriage, Jim's affair with Jessica Hahn and the numerous allegations of his homosexual liaisons and Tammy's drug addictions, rehab and, of course, make-up. We also read about how they built their television ministry and founded PTL (*Praise the Lord*) and then moved on to build a Christian theme park (with waterslides), and their overselling of accommodations in the Heritage USA hotel. Add to this Bakker and his entourage's extravagant spending habits and self-awarded bonuses and, finally, the hostile takeover of PTL by Jerry Falwell (in many ways equally shady), it really makes for a great read. It has all the drama you could ask for, in a story you want to read about but not live. Billy Graham's life is quite boring compared to Jim Bakker's, but there is something to be said for boring in regards to which life you'd rather live.

That doesn't mean we can't learn from Bakker's story. The Bible never spares us the details of its characters. It is full of good *good* guys (very few), bad *good* guys, good *bad* guys and bad *bad* guys. (I'm not sure which camp to put Bakker in. He's either a bad good guy and, therefore, a very deluded man, or a *bad bad* guy and, therefore, a fraud and charlatan). John Wigger's book reminds us of the often corrupt world of "Christian" power, fame and money. Just because we are Christians we shouldn't be naive as to how much those things still corrupt us. And this is reflected in the general hollowness of many of our churches baptized in "Christian" entertainment, celebrity and tabloids. Bakker's story teaches us about the pride and self-deception of many of our church leaders (as we are also seeing in how the current *#MeToo* movement is affecting the evangelical church). But Bakker's story also teaches us about the shallowness and gullibility of the masses in our pews (as upwards of 75% of American evangelicals voted for, and still support, Donald Trump. Many, including Jim Bakker, see him as a "fulfilment of prophecy" and "God's man for the hour").

Whether Bakker and his followers will learn anything appears less and less likely. So, if you want to spend \$2500 for a *New Bulk Sampler Bundle* of End Times food, with 23,375 servings, I will not help you by giving the 1-888 number, but it is easy enough to find on the internet. If you do buy it though, please don't tell me or invite me over for supper to eat it. Even if the end does come, I'd rather starve than eat Jim's food.