

Prophecy in Perspective

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An Email Newsletter

Our Times - Prophecy in current events

To understand current events and trends in the news today, we must turn to Scripture and spend some time examining some background prophecies which Jesus gave to help us understand our times. We find an important and fairly simple key to understanding the main events and circumstances surrounding the End Times in chapter 24 of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' discourse on the unfolding of the End Times ensued after certain comments were made to Him by His disciples pointing out the buildings of the temple. Likely they were impressed with the elaborate layout of the modern temple and declared their amazement as to its beauty and impressive size. It was becoming a wonder of the ancient world. Jesus, always the Master Teacher and Disciple, never missed an opportunity nor wasted any time in keeping His students focused on things that really mattered. We know today in our own lives how easily we can be drawn off to the bright and sparkly, the latest and the greatest things of the world, and forget the Lord and His high calling. Therefore, He seeks to get our attention and affection back to where they should be. So, here, Jesus proceeded to use the temple itself and His disciples' interest in it as a launching point to teach important facts about the future of Israel, the Church, and the world.

"And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Matthew 24:2)

No doubt, Jesus really had their full attention. No statement could have had more shock value. In fact, it seemed from the appearance of the temple in their time that Jesus' prediction was downright impossible! Remember, no matter how unlikely a prophecy or promise seems, we know that "with God, nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37) This is why a study of Bible prophecy is so important. God is graciously entrusting to us the knowledge of His future plans to confirm His love toward us, His hatred for evil, and sure purpose to judge the wicked. Through prophecy, God is also exalting His Son, Jesus Christ, by confirming His credibility. The Father desires to get the attention of the wayward and the lost and to draw them through faith to His crucified and resurrected Son for salvation.

Albert Barnes, relates the account of Jewish Historian, Josephus, as the fulfillment of these words of Jesus. Josephus was not a Christian, but as a faithful priest, historian, and scholar he recorded the events surrounding the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He may not have been aware of Jesus' prediction, but he was an eye witness to the tragic fulfillment of Christ's prophecy.

After the city was taken, Josephus says that Titus "gave orders" that they should now "demolish the whole city and temple," except three towers, which he reserved standing. But for the rest of the wall, it was laid so completely even with the ground by those who "dug it up from the foundation," that there was nothing left to make those believe who came hither that it had ever been inhabited." Maimonides, a Jewish writer, has also recorded that "Terentius Rufus, an officer in the army of Titus, with a plowshare tore up the foundations of the temple, that the prophecy might be fulfilled, 'Zion shall be plowed as a field,'" [Micah 3:12](#). This was all done by the direction of divine Providence. Titus was desirous of preserving the temple, and frequently sent Josephus to the Jews to induce them to surrender and save the temple and city. But the prediction of the Saviour had gone forth, and, notwithstanding the wish of the Roman general, the temple was to be destroyed. The Jews themselves first set fire to the porticoes of the temple. One of the Roman soldiers, without any command, threw a burning firebrand into the golden window, and soon the temple was in flames. Titus gave orders to extinguish the fire; but, amid the tumult, none of the orders were obeyed. The soldiers pressed to the temple, and neither fear nor entreaties, nor stripes could restrain them. Their hatred of the Jews urged them on to the work of destruction, and thus, says Josephus, the temple was burned against the will of Caesar. - (**Jewish Wars**, b. 6 chapter 4, section 5-7.)



Today, Israel's enemies are working hard to keep the temple from being re-built. In times like these in which we live, it is so comforting to know that no power of evil on the earth can stop the hand of God. No one can thwart His purposes! No matter how much man mocks His Word or how much so-called "Christians" compromise on their view of Scripture and twist the interpretation of God's future plans for Israel, the Church and the world, God will carry out all of His declared purpose! The amazing prophet Daniel declares this truth when he proclaimed:

"And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35)

Next, we come to the disciples' three questions which arise from the statement Jesus just made concerning the destruction of the temple. Notice they immediately associated the obliteration of the Jewish temple with the inauguration of the winding down of history, otherwise known as the *last day*. To understand this we need to know that there was nothing more devastating to the Jew than the idea that the temple might be destroyed. Surely its removal would signal the end, or the beginning of the end of the world as they knew it. Indeed, it was based on how Jesus answered their questions.

The three questions put to Jesus by His disciples actually demonstrate how well He had taught them. These were "educated" questions which demonstrated how they were well acquainted with eschatology, or the study of the End Times. They did not respond to Jesus' prediction with: "Oh, that is impossible!" but with thoughtful questions to the Master Teacher whom they believed, as indicated by the very fact of their asking HIM these questions, that they believed Jesus was truly the Messiah. These questions showed they believed that Jesus was Deity because they assumed He knew the future. As well, they must have had some understanding of the idea that Jesus would depart for a time and that He would come again to the earth to fulfill predicted events of "the End of the Age."

The three questions asked by the disciples of Jesus are questions that any of us might ask of Him today. Notice that Jesus apparently did not consider these questions to be inappropriate, as many today would make them out to be. He answered them just as he was asked, logically and systematically. The three questions were: 1. When will these things be? 2. What shall be the sign of Thy coming? 3. And (what shall be the sign of) the end of the world? (Matthew 24:3) Jesus begins His answer with a general outline of the character and events of the time between the destruction of the temple, and of Jesus' return. (Matthew 24:1-14) In other words, I believe we are to understand from this that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple indicated that the last days were already well under way. Daniel predicted that Israel's seventy week count-down to the coming of the Messiah to set up His Kingdom would suddenly stop with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. (Daniel 9:26-27) There would be one more week of seven years to complete, but the cutting off of the Messiah stopped Israel's prophetic time clock, and the destruction of the Jewish Temple less than 40 years later confirmed that God was holding His purpose for Israel in abeyance. During the intervening time and with increased fury, troubles would mount up as the world went on its own rebellious way, until the last week of the Tribulation when the impact of earth's growing "birth pangs" (Romans 8:22) would erupt with unprecedented ferocity.

Jesus explains how, beginning with the destruction of the temple, which indicated the total rejection by Israel of Jesus as the Messiah, and which occurred in 70 A.D., there would commence a measured time whose unfolding could be tracked by believers. **What should believers look for?**

First, Deceptions: ***"Take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."*** (Matthew 24:4) Notice that Jesus gives them the solemn warning, both to them and to all believers during the intervening Church Age, to "Take Heed...", that is, the apostles and we are to constantly be on our guard against deception. In other words, deception would be both an initial and continual characteristic of the Church era as well as of the coming Tribulation time which will see ever worsening deception after the rapture of the church. (2 Thessalonians 2:29-10)

Today there are many false teachers and false prophets. They have always been busy deceiving the saints in an effort to lead them astray from the truth and to gather a following for themselves. We wonder why they would go to the trouble. Remember there are vast amounts of wealth and power that can be gained through religion and spiritual teachings. This is why New Age and occultic as well as Word of Faith, and liberal so-called "Christian teachers" are growing in popularity because they are offering and marketing the kind of religion that people are looking for: religion that is ***entertaining, self-gratifying, positive thinking, do-good and feel-good, non-judgmental of sin, and theologically and Biblically watered down***. Much of today's preaching does not consist of expounding the Word of God, but is based on the opinions of man. It tickles the ears but fails to transform the heart. Old fashioned preaching was known for being filled with Scripture from beginning to end and focused on the person and cross-work of Jesus Christ. Yet much of today's preaching is "postmodern" and even "post-evangelical." The goal is often to promote and protect the world we have now rather than exhort people to prepare for the world to come. The burden of many teachers, some very popular, is to affirm man in his sin more than God in His righteousness.

Recent examples of these, as I have reported in previous *Prophecy in Perspective* newsletters, have been very busy setting dates for the end of the world, as in the case of Harold Camping; and in denying eternal hell, as in the case of Rob Bell, in his recent book, "Love Wins." Another abominable example of what too often passes for "good Christian reading" is the heretical book, "The Shack." Books like these are like cheap drugs that give a brief high and feeling of euphoria but leave the victim empty, dependent, and only craving more. Many through the centuries have claimed to be God's Christ, or special prophet, such as Muhammad who started the religion of Islam and who was the single author of the Koran. Islam really seems to be a loose adaptation of both Judaism and Christianity, claiming their blessings for Islam and leaving Judaism and Christianity with the curses. Today we are seeing desperate and misinformed leaders such as Rick Warren and others attempting to resolve the un-resolvable differences between Christianity and Islam by making attempts at accommodating the two. This approach amounts to a freakish hybrid religion called **Chrislam**. And, another false prophet, Joseph Smith, who claimed to be God's special prophet and wrote the Book of Mormon has only succeeded in further obscuring the light of the gospel with the shadowy and mystical rituals and false polytheistic doctrines of the Latter Day Saints.

Paul predicted that the infiltration of false prophets would begin immediately after His departure and would continue to occur with increasing intensity as the coming of the Lord draws closer. Against this danger Paul warned:

"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." (Acts 20:28-31)

Second, Jesus predicted there would be **Destructions**: Jesus told His disciples: **"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."** (Matthew 24:6,7) The news out of the Middle East is constantly reminding us that peace will never arrive on the earth until the return of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem. For example, officials of the United States, through such representatives as the Secretary of State, show how ignorant they are as to the volatile results of supporting organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood who are avowed enemies of Israel. According to one recent news report:

Hillary Clinton says that we should make friends with the Muslim Brotherhood. The official statement of purpose of the MB is as follows: "Allah is our objective. The prophet is our leader. The Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope." On July 8, 2011, An Egyptian leader stated: "the whole world belongs to us," that is, believers in Islam. ("The Blaze")

The unfortunate reality is that this kind of spirit will be the primary reason for the increase in wars and rumors of wars especially in the latter days. There is a festering hatred for the Jews and Christians, as well as for the crucified, resurrected and returning Lord Jesus, in the Middle East today. While we in the Church witness these things happening today we need not fear, however, as Jesus said to His disciples, **"for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet..."** (Matthew 24:6) We are called to tell our families, cities and nation, as well as the whole world, that Jesus came to die for sinful man, He has risen from the dead and He is coming back again! Jesus said: **"...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."** (Mark 16:15) Are you seeking God to empower and direct you to do this?

Third, Jesus predicted that there will be **Disasters**: **"and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places...(Matthew 24:7); ...and fearful sights great signs shall there be from heaven."** (Luke 21:11) While there have always been earthquakes and famines as well as pestilences, we are to expect a measurable increase as to the frequency and intensity of these events as the time for the rapture of the Church approaches and the Lord prepares the world for the coming Tribulation period. How sad to know that today many millions suffer from many diseases that can easily be cured if not for the selfishness and neglect of the Godless powers that war and fight for domination. So often, the suffering and death of the innocent is used to gain political and military power. God will judge these forms of neglect and wickedness. Jesus teaches us to be aware how bad things will get as the last days unfold. As Christians we should pray for those who suffer and prayerfully assist Christ honoring ministries in getting help to those in need around the world along with the gospel.

There are increasing numbers of reports of UFO sightings and even encounters. Therefore, the fearful sights and great signs from heaven which Jesus warns about are already being seen in some measure. These are doubtless demonic in origin. Satan and his demonic minions will take any form possible and show any sign possible in order to draw people through deception to himself. In January, Fox News' Megan Kelly reported on videos of a light that descended over the Temple mount in Jerusalem. These videos witness this light descending and remaining over the Temple mount while many people look on with their camera phones recording the scene. Suddenly, the light is seen shooting back up and disappearing into the night sky. We should not be too surprised at events of this sort, and we should expect to see more of them according to our Lord's prediction.

Fourth and finally, the Lord warned His disciples and us that this age would be characterized by wide-spread **defection**, "**All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.**" (Matthew 24:8-12) Notice that Jesus repeats His warning about false prophets that "shall rise, and deceive many." All of this false teaching will have a dulling impact on the affections of people for others besides themselves. Much false teaching will encourage people to seek their own personal happiness. Those, of course, who stay with Biblical truth will be betrayed and ostracized for doing so. Revelation three tells us of the Laodicean church which will be characterized by their lukewarmness. What is lukewarm love at the close of the Church Age will become in the Tribulation period a hard heartedness where, "iniquity shall abound...(and)...the love of many shall wax cold."

Upward Call - How to walk in view of Prophecy *and*

The Church Today - Doctrine and Prophecy Today

The book of Daniel records the helpful insight which especially marks the times we are living in as accelerating in the discovery and growth in technology as well as in the speed of travel. This prophetic insight is found in Daniel 12:4, "**But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.**" Even as far back as the early years of the twentieth century, these words were becoming reality. Those heady days when many reveled in their ability to talk to countries across the Atlantic, the high speed of aircraft, as well as the growing size and speed of the ships which were being built. And the biggest of them all was the *RMS Titanic*!



The RMS Titanic

The Titanic was the state of the art ship of the day. It was immense. It was luxurious. It was built to be unsinkable; and it was fast! The Titanic departed from Southampton, England April 10, 1912. This grand ocean liner carried 2,200 passengers and crew, but had enough lifeboats for only 1,178. Under the direction of the ship's Captain, and likely at the suggestion of an important passenger, who may have wanted to "make a record," the great ship was cruising at nearly maximum speed, 22.3 knots, about 25 mph, when it struck an iceberg on April 14th at 11:40 pm. The lookout had no binoculars, though he had requested them, and so could not see the floating mountain of ice in the distance until it was too late.

Consequently, even though the alarm was given the great ship was unable to turn in time. The waiting iceberg sliced a hole in Titanic's hull 220 to 245 feet long. A torrent of water entered the bottom of the bow portion of the ship at the rate of seven tons per second causing the Titanic to sink in less than three hours. The amazing Titanic which was purported to have been a vessel that "not even God could sink" came to its final resting place 2.3 miles below the surface on the bottom of the North Atlantic ocean 350 miles Southwest of Newfoundland, Canada. On that fateful and tragic night, 1,235 souls were lost to the depths.

There are many lessons to glean from this story of the sinking of the Titanic. One lesson I will draw is how it demonstrates the unnecessary tragedy of presumption and of rushing pridefully ahead of God's clear leading. How easily we in our Christian lives and ministries can move too fast and carelessly ahead, resulting in tragic consequences. There are many "icebergs" out there lingering in the "ocean" of life and ministry waiting to be struck by some speeding and spiritually blind "ship." Because of the rapid increase of knowledge today we are all too ready to move on our own and without the guidance of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. **We can become lulled into thinking we are unsinkable, but we are not!** At a special hearing in 1912 to discover the reason for Titanic's sinking a key finding was stated:

"The loss of the ship was brought about by the excessive speed at which she was navigated."

Yet, Proverbs 16:18 gives us the real cause of the Titanic's sinking: "**Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.**" It is important to remember then, that while we may feel that we can do nothing but succeed if we go fast and hard enough with the right technology, methodology, and a good positive attitude, the results may be the sinking of what we thought was "unsinkable." May we not go pridefully and blindly speeding along in the "deep ocean" of these latter days, striking icebergs, taking on water, losing souls. But may we go on patiently, humbly, and seeing clearly through the Word of God, under the authority and sure direction of the "Captain of...(our) salvation," the Lord Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 2:10)

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(Note: If you would like to interact with Dr. Downing concerning this newsletter, views, etc. you can "blog" with him at prophecyinperspective.com. Also, you can purchase his latest book, "Good News From a Far Country", a study in the book of Daniel [\$15] by contacting him.)