

Christ in Prophecy

Prophecy 49: Reagan on Matthew 24

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: During the last week of His life here on earth, Jesus delivered to His disciples a comprehensive prophecy concerning end time events that would signal His return. Since it was delivered while He and His disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem, it is often referred to as the Olivet Discourse. For an overview of what Jesus prophesied, stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope and welcome to Christ in Prophecy! We are going to take a look at the fascinating prophecies that Jesus gave to His disciples during the last week of His life concerning the signs of the times that would herald His return to this earth. His speech is contained in three of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. Let's begin by taking a look at the Lord's remarks as they are contained in Matthew chapter 24.

Matthew 24 presented by Todd Hutchinson playing Jesus

Take heed, let no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you are 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: and there will be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in various places. All these things are the beginning of sorrows. And then they deliver you up to be afflicted, and will kill you: and you will be hated among all nations for my name's sake. And many of you will be offended, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and deceive many. And because iniquity will abound, the love of many will wax cold. But he that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached among all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then the end will come. So when you therefore see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, let them that are in in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him that is on the housetop not come down to the house to remove anything. Neither let him that is in the field return to get his clothes. And woe to those who are pregnant in those days and are nursing babies. And pray that your flight is not in winter, or on the Sabbath day. For then there shall be great tribulation, such was not since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days be shortened, no flesh shall be saved: but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. And, Lo, if any man says to you, 'Here is Christ, or there,' do not believe him. For false Christs, and false prophets, will arise showing great signs and wonders; insomuch, if possible, to deceive even the elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if anyone says to you, "Look he is in the desert," do not go forth. Or "Look he is in the secret chambers," do not believe them. For even as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For where ever

the carcass is, the eagle shall be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven will be shaken. And you will see the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and then they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels forth with a sound of a great trumpet, and they will gather from the four winds, the elect sake, from one end of heaven to the other. So, learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and brings forth leaves, you say the summer is nigh, and it is. So likewise, when you see all these things come to pass, know that the end is near, even at the door. Verily I say to you, that this generation shall not pass, until all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: That excellent presentation of Matthew 24 was done by one of our staff members, Todd Hutchinson, who is our Director of Donor Relations. Now, before I take a look at what Jesus had to say in His Olivet Discourse, I want to emphasize that He was a prophet. I'm emphasizing this because most people do not think of Jesus as being a prophet, but He was. In fact, one of the earliest Messianic prophecies in the Bible refers to the Messiah as a "Prophet." It's found in Deuteronomy 18 where Moses told the Children of Israel: The LORD said to me, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." The Jews were well acquainted with this prophecy, and thus, when John the Baptist appeared on the scene, the multitudes asked him, "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Now John was a prophet; but he was not the Prophet, for he was not the Messiah.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, many who witnessed the miracle proclaimed, "This is the Prophet who has come into the world." And the Apostle Peter, in his second gospel sermon, which he presented to the Sanhedrin Council after his arrest, proclaimed that Jesus was the Prophet who was a fulfillment of Moses' prophecy.

Jesus prophesied about many things. His most frequent prophecies were about His death, burial, and resurrection. For example, in Matthew 20 He said: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." But, Jesus also prophesied about other things, for example, when He left the Galilee for the last time, He put a curse on the three towns where He had focused His ministry: Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida. He said-- "Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.'" All three of these cities were subsequently destroyed and disappeared into the dust bin of history. So complete was their destruction that by 1800 they were being cited by Bible skeptics as proof positive that the Bible was full of myths and legends. The first to be re-discovered by archaeologists was Capernaum in 1838. Today you can go visit the ruins of all three cities.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: As I pointed out at the beginning of this program, one of the most famous and detailed prophecies of Jesus is the one He delivered during the last week of His life as He sat with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Again, it is referred to as "The Olivet Discourse." Jesus began the prophecy with a startling statement about the Jewish Temple. And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things," the Temple buildings, "truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." That prophecy was fulfilled 40 years later in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the city. After this prophecy, Jesus began to give His disciples a series of signs that would mark the season of His return in the end times.

The first sign He mentioned was that of cults, and this is the only sign He mentioned more than once. In verse 5 He said, "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many." He repeats it in verse 11, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. And He repeats it again in verse 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." There have always been cultic groups within Christianity that have taught a false Jesus or a false gospel, or both. Jesus warned that their leaders would be like wolves in sheep's clothing. In the early Church there were Gnostics and Judaizers. But the explosion of cults did not begin until the middle of the 19th Century with the founding of the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

First, the Mormons, founded in 1838. The Mormons proclaim a false Jesus who is the brother of Lucifer and is one of thousands of minor gods who were created by the super god, Adam, an exalted man. They also teach salvation by good works. The Jesus of the Jehovah's Witnesses is also a created being who is identified as Michael the Archangel. In the most recent edition of the cult catalogue published by Watchman Fellowship, literally hundreds of cults are listed, constituting over 300 pages.

Perhaps the weirdest is one started in California by a man named John Allegro. It is called The Sacred Mushroom of the Cross. Its members believe that Jesus was an hallucination produced by eating mushrooms, which is what they do when they assemble for worship. Along with the cults has come an explosion of False Christs, people like Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Herbert W. Armstrong.

Returning to Matthew 24, Jesus gave us some signs of world politics to watch for. He said: "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." The violence within and between nations began to increase exponentially during the 20th Century. In that Century alone, more than 100 million people died in wars, more than in all the Centuries combined before then. And the potential for violence in the future is awesome when you consider the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the fact that one nuclear submarine can deliver more fire power than all the bombs dropped in World War II.

In Luke's account of this same discourse, he mentions an ominous statement that Jesus made: "Men will faint from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Folks, that sounds to me like a reference to the development of nuclear weapons, and we have been in the nuclear age ever since July 16, 1945.

Returning to Matthew 24, Jesus next referred to natural disasters: "He said, 'And in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.'" Luke records this portion of Jesus' discourse in more detail: "And there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves."

In these passages, Jesus warned that the end times would be characterized by famines, earthquakes, plagues, signs in the heavens, tsunamis, and floods. These signs of nature are the signs people tend to respect the least. They are usually greeted with a shrug of the shoulders and the comment, "What else is new? There have always been famines, and floods, and hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, plagues, and strange signs in the heavens." The answer to this skepticism can be found in Matthew 24:8. "All these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." In other words, the signs will be like birth pains. They will increase in frequency and intensity as we approach the time of the Lord's return. There will be more earthquakes, more intense ones. And the same will be true of all types of natural disasters. And that is exactly what has been happening.

For example, here in the United States, between October 1991 and November 2004, a period of 13 years, we had: 9 of the 10 greatest natural disasters as ranked by insurance costs, 5 of the costliest hurricanes in US history, 3 of the 4 largest tornado swarms in US history, and folks, all that was before Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005.

The next sign mentioned by Jesus was persecution of believers. Jesus warned: "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name." We live in such a world today. Christians have been targeted all over the world for harassment by Humanists and for murder by Muslims, and Hindus. Over 200,000 per year are currently experiencing martyrdom. Western Europe, once a bastion of Christianity, is now in a Post-Christian era, and Christians are subjected daily to harassment, persecution and ridicule. Even in the United States, we have reached the point where Christians are the only group that can be criticized and ridiculed with impunity.

The next sign Jesus pointed to was apostasy in the church. He said, "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another." In the mid-19th Century, England was the home base of Christianity, sending out missionaries all over the world and translating the Bible into many languages. But as the Anglican Church began to teach that the Bible was Man's search for God rather than God's revelation to Man, people lost interest. Today only 7% of Britains attend church! The same trend can be seen here in the United States. In the 40 years between 1960 and 2000, during that time The United Church of Christ lost 64% of its members, The American Baptist 57%, The Disciples of Christ 56%, The Episcopal Church lost 50%, The Presbyterian Church lost 41%, and The United Methodist Church lost 33%.

Twenty years ago who would ever have believed that we would rapidly reach a time when churches would be ordaining homosexuals and advocating same-sex marriage? The epitome of the current apostasy is pretty well summed up in a book by former Episcopal Bishop John Spong in which he: Denied the virgin birth. Denied the miracles of Jesus. Denied the resurrection. Denied the Second Coming. And argued that Paul and Timothy were homosexual lovers.

Next, Jesus prophesied the breakdown of society. Here's how He put it: "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold." Jesus emphasizes this sign in

verse 37, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like in the days of Noah." Jesus is saying that society will be as evil as it was in the time of Noah. And if you take a look at Genesis 6, you will find that Noah's society was characterized by two things, immorality and violence. And in fulfillment, lawlessness is increasing exponentially worldwide, both with respect to crime and terrorist activity. And immorality is increasing just as rapidly. One of the key elements is Hollywood. Through the immoral and violent and blasphemous movies and TV programs produced by Hollywood, our nation has become the moral polluter of planet earth.

The seventh sign Jesus mentioned in His Olivet Discourse was a positive one, the only positive one He gave. It was the preaching of the gospel worldwide. Here's how Jesus put it: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." This prophecy is being fulfilled in our lifetime through the use of modern technology. Computer technology is being used to speed up translation of the Bible into thousands of languages. Today the complete Bible is available in 438 translations. The New Testament almost 1,200. Languages in process, almost 1,200-- almost 2,000 in fact! Incidentally, these figures are a little bit misleading because they give you the impression that there are many people in the world who do not have the Bible in their own language. The fact of the matter is that 90% or more of all the earth's people have the Bible in their own languages. The nearly 2,000 translations being worked on are for tribal groups of 100,000 people or less.

Consider the Jesus Movie. It has been translated into 1,500 languages and has been viewed by a total of more than 7.5 billion people, resulting in 490 million conversions. Currently, 2,500 teams are showing the film worldwide. The result of all these efforts is an explosion of conversions worldwide: in 1800-100 per day were coming to Christ. 1900 it increased to 1,000 per day. 1950- 4,000 per day. 1980- 20,000 per day. 1990- 86,000 per day. 1995-100,000 per day. And currently 175,000 per day are coming to Christ!

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: Let's pause for a summary. Jesus gave us seven signs to watch for that will mark the season of His return: First, the explosion of False Christs and their cults. Second, increasing wars and revolutions. Third, increasing natural disasters. Fourth, increasing persecution of Christians. Fifth, increasing apostasy in the Church. Sixth, increasing societal instability. And seventh, increasing proclamation of the Gospel.

As to the timing of His return, Jesus gave us only a clue. It is found in verses 32 thru 34 where he said, "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 things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

Now folks, the fig tree is used in both the Old and New Testaments as a symbol of Israel. The day before Jesus gave this parable to His disciples, we are told in Matthew 21 that He put a curse on a fig tree, and the fig tree withered. That was a symbolic prophecy. It meant that because the Jews had rejected Him as Messiah, God would pour out His wrath on them, and they would cease from being a nation. The next day in this prophecy, in Matthew 24, He reminds them of that fig tree and tells them that one day when the fig tree blossoms again, the generation that witnesses it will also witness His return. That prophecy about the re-blossoming

of the fig tree was fulfilled on May 14, 1948 when the nation of Israel was re-established after 1,878 years.

The message of Matthew 24 is clear, the signs of the times point to the soon return of Jesus. He is at the very gates of Heaven waiting for His Father's command to return. You and I are living on borrowed time. And the crucial question is: "Are you ready?" Will Jesus return as your Blessed Hope or your Holy Terror? It will be one of the two because there are only two ways that God deals with sin: grace or wrath. Here's how John the Baptist explained it in one of his sermons, he said "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Every one of us is under either the grace of God or His wrath.

I have placed my faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and because of that, I have been delivered from the terror of wrath into the hope of grace. And because of that, I can look forward to the return of Jesus with great hope and expectation, which is the reason my heart cries out, "Maranatha! Maranatha! Maranatha!" Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Part 5

Dr. Reagan: My associate evangelist, Nathan Jones, is producing a series of short and snappy videos that sum up the answers to frequently asked questions about Bible prophecy. One of those videos focuses on the question, "How do we know Jesus is coming soon?" In the process of answering that question he provides a very quick overview of the signs of the times that Jesus mentions in Matthew 24. Let's conclude with that video.

The Inbox #4: How do we Know that Jesus is Coming Back Soon?

That Jesus Christ is returning is a given. Three times in Revelation 22 Jesus promised that He will return. Jesus said over and over, "Surely I am coming quickly." He even added that we could trust this promise stating, "These words are faithful and true". Jesus' return is a promise made by God, a promise found so prolifically in the Bible that you can read about Jesus' Second coming in nearly 500 prophecies of the Old Testament and one out of 25 verses in the New Testament. That Jesus fulfilled all 300 First Coming prophecies 100% means you and I can be assured that all the Second Coming promises will be fulfilled as well.

But returning soon? It's been nearly 2,000 years! From a human perspective that's a very long time. Though, from God's eternal perspective, not so much. For Him, it's only been like 2 days.

Jesus didn't make His promise to return soon without providing clues in the form of signs that would show us when His second advent will be getting nearer. When Jesus' own Apostles asked this very same question "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Jesus provided 10 signs we are to look out for. He said these signs would increase in frequency and intensity, like birth pains, the closer He got.

Here are 10 signs Jesus gave that tell us we're getting closer to His return:

1) False Messiahs

Jesus warned, "Watch out that you are not deceived, for many will come in My name claiming, 'I am He' and the time is near, but do not follow them."

We live in a time like no other as false messiahs and prophets such as Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, Jim Jones, Sun Myung Moon and many others claim to speak for God, and even that they are Jesus Himself. These fakes will lead up to the greatest of all false messiahs – the Antichrist and his False Prophet.

Other signs include:

2) Wars

"When you hear of wars and revolutions do not be frightened, these things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

3) Earthquakes

"There will be great earthquakes."

4) Famine

5) Plagues,

6) Fearful Events,

7) Signs in the Sky

"Famines and pestilence in various places, and fearful events, and great signs from heaven."

8) The Persecution of Christians

"But before all this they will lay hands on you and persecute you, all men will hate you because of me."

9) Jerusalem Under Siege

"And when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that the desolation is near; Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

10) The Return of Christ

"There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, on the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea, men will faint from terror apprehensive at what is coming on the world."

Just before Jesus breaks from the Heavens, the sky will be alight with even more celestial signs, the nations will cringe in terror, the seas will toss violently, and all His enemies will live in terror of His return.

Now, can we know the exact day and hour of Jesus' return? No, for Jesus stated point blank...
"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, but My Father only."

But, from these 10 signs, and many others Jesus provided throughout the Gospels, and that these signs are happening more frequently and with increasing intensity, we can know that we are now living in the season of His return.

Jesus is coming back, and we don't have much longer to wait.

Are you ready for His return? Have you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Closing

Dr. Reagan: Well, that's our program for this week. I hope it has been a blessing to you, and I hope, the Lord willing, that you will be back with us next week. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries, saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our Redemption is drawing near."

End of Program