

**BIBLE
PROPHECY**

Insights

**The Olivet
Discourse:
History or Prophecy?**



Observations by the Editor

Our Cover

The Mount of Olives is one of my favorite places on planet earth. From the top of it you can see the magnificent old walled city of Jerusalem. And as you absorb that breath-taking scene, you can sense that you are standing at the center of world history, where the Messiah shed his blood and where He will return to this earth.



Dr. David R. Reagan

Half way down the Mount, at the Dominus Flevit Chapel, you can get a clear view of the Eastern Gate which has been closed in fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Ezekiel 44:1-2). It sits silently, looking to the East, awaiting the return of the King of Glory (Psalm 24:1-10).

The Chapel marks the traditional site where Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. Appropriately, the Chapel is shaped like a tear drop. When Jesus came to Jerusalem, He always stayed with His relatives — Mary, Martha and Lazarus — who lived on the East side of the Mount of Olives, in the village of Bethany. Each morning, Jesus would walk up and over the Mount of Olives, and I imagine that He would always pause about half way down the West side, at the site of the Dominus Flevit Chapel, to admire the Temple and to pray.

At the base of the Mount is the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed in agony before His arrest. The site is occupied by ancient olive trees and by the Church of All Nations. Its windows are made of opaque alabaster that permits very little light to enter, giving the interior a dark and dreary feeling. The altar is located adjacent to an outcropping of bedrock where the agony of Jesus supposedly took place.

The Mount of Olives is covered with tens of thousands of Orthodox Jewish graves. They desire to be buried there because the book of Zechariah says that when the Messiah comes to earth, He will arrive on the Mount of Olives, and when His feet touch the Mount, it will be split asunder by a great earthquake (Zechariah 14:4). The Jews believe that those buried on the Mount will be the first to be resurrected.

Several years ago one of my close friends, Clem Stewart, died in a tragic

drowning accident. He and his wife, Nancy, had been planning to go to Israel with me. His daughter took his place, and she and her mom brought Clem's ashes with them. We held a memorial service for Clem in a garden adjacent to the Dominus Flevit Chapel, and I scattered his ashes there at the base of an olive tree. So, there is at least one Gentile whose remains are on that Mount awaiting the return of Jesus.

Our cover photo shows a spire at the pinnacle of the Mount. It is the Russian Church of the Ascension. It marks one of two traditional sites from which Jesus ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:1-11). The other site located nearby is more authentic but is controlled today by Muslims who have transformed a small and ancient domed church on the site into a mosque.



Dome of the Ascension. The spire of the Russian Church can be seen on the right.

If you will look to the right of the spire of the Church of the Ascension you will see a building with seven arches. It is an Arab hotel known as the Seven Arches Hotel. While it was being constructed, it was discovered that it sits on a major fault line. This is most likely where the Mount will be divided by an earthquake when the Lord returns.

Our cover photograph was supplied by IsraelImages.com. ✚

Prophecy Insights

is published randomly
by Lamb & Lion Ministries

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The Olivet Discourse

Past History or Future Prophecy?



This detailed and authentic drawing of the Olivet Discourse shows Jesus and His disciples on the Mount of Olives looking across the Kidron Valley toward the Temple Mount. This is one of 54 panoramic black and white drawings of the life of Christ that were done by Robert Doares (1911-2005). His drawings and paintings may be purchased at www.robertdoaresart.com.

Dr. David R. Reagan

Matthew 24 is a very important prophetic passage because it contains detailed prophecies of Jesus concerning future events. It consists of a speech delivered by Jesus during the last week of His life (in about 30 AD) as He and His disciples sat on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem and its magnificent Temple. The speech is recorded in three places: Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

The discourse was prompted by one of Jesus' disciples as they were leaving the Temple where Jesus had been teaching. The disciple, obviously overwhelmed by the beauty of the Temple, said, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings" (Mark 13:1). Jesus' immediate response was a startling one: "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another which will not be torn down" (Mark 13:2).

A Series of Questions

This statement must have greatly perplexed the disciples of Jesus, because later, after they had ascended the Mount of Olives and had stopped to rest, they asked Jesus: "Tell us when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

Note carefully the three questions Jesus was asked:

- 1) "When will these things be?" That is, when will Jerusalem and the Temple be destroyed?
- 2) "What will be the sign of Your coming?" That is, what event will signal Jesus' return?
- 3) "What will be the sign of the end of the age?" That is, what event will mark the consummation of history and the launching of a new world order?

Jesus' Answers

Jesus does not address the first question in his discourse as it is recorded in Matthew 24. His response can be found only in Luke's account, in Luke 21:20-24. The answer is that Jerusalem and the Temple will suffer destruction when the disciples "see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20). This occurred 40 years later in 70 AD when the Romans besieged the city and then destroyed it. Jesus referred to this event as "days of vengeance" (Luke 21:22).

The answer to the second question is provided in Matthew 24:4-22. Basically, the point that Jesus makes is that the sign of His coming will be the Great Tribulation, a future period of seven years during which God will pour out His wrath on the nations of the world.

The third question is answered in Matthew 24:30. The sign of the end of the age will be the appearance of Jesus in the heavens, "coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

Signs of the Tribulation

In the process of delivering this discourse, Jesus mentioned many signs that would characterize the period leading up to and including the Tribulation, signs which altogether would point to His soon return (Matthew 24:4-15). These included such things as false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, persecution of believers, and lawlessness. Signs of nature were also emphasized. Jesus said that natural catastrophes such as famines, earthquakes, pestilence and signs in the heavens would increase like birth pangs — in frequency and intensity.

The only positive sign Jesus mentioned was the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations of the earth (Matthew 24:14).

According to Jesus, the climactic sign of the Tribulation would be the erection of what the prophet Daniel had called "the

abomination of desolation,” which would be situated “in the holy place” of the Temple (Daniel 11:31 and Matthew 24:15).

The Theological Issue

So, what about it? Is Matthew 24 history or prophecy?

It is a crucial prophetic question. The passage clearly portrays a period of intense tribulation that will precede the Second Coming of Jesus. Has this terrible period of tribulation already occurred or is it yet to occur? And what about the Second Coming of Jesus? Has it already occurred? Have all the events described in Matthew 24 been fulfilled or do some of them await fulfillment?

The Conflicting Views

The Premillennial viewpoint, both historic and modern, holds this passage to be predictive, yet-to-be-fulfilled sometime in the near future. According to the Premillennial view, the return of Jesus will be immediately preceded by a period of worldwide, unprecedented tribulation that will particularly focus on the Jewish people.

The majority viewpoint of Christendom, both Catholic and Protestant, is the Amillennial view. This view spiritualizes Bible prophecy and concludes that there will be no future Tribulation or Millennium. Amillennialists argue, instead, that we are simultaneously experiencing both the Tribulation and the Millennium right now and have been doing so since the Cross. We are supposedly in the Millennium because the Holy Spirit is restraining evil through the Church. And we are simultaneously in the Tribulation because the Church is experiencing persecution.

Although Postmillennialists argue that the Millennium is still future, they maintain that the tribulation aspects of Matthew 24 were fulfilled in the First Century destruction of Jerusalem. They conclude, therefore, that there will be no future Great Tribulation.

The group with the strangest attitude toward Matthew 24 are those Amillennialists who are also what is called “Full Preterists.” (The word, Preterist, is Latin for “past.”)

There are degrees of Preterism. A moderate Preterist believes all of Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem, except the Second Coming of Jesus. But the “Full Preterist” takes the position that every aspect of Matthew 24, including the Second Coming, happened in 70 AD! They argue that Jesus returned spiritually in the destruction that the Romans inflicted upon Jerusalem. They also argue that the prophecies refer to the end of the Jewish Age and not to the end times.

Matthew 24 thus emerges as a key prophetic passage. Those who spiritualize prophecy (Amillennialists and Postmillennialists) either argue that its tribulation prophecies were fulfilled in



The Russian Orthodox Church of Mary Magdalene, located on the West slope of the Mount of Olives. (Photo by the author.)

70 AD or have been fulfilled in the history of the Church, and they therefore reject the idea that it points to a period of severe tribulation immediately preceding the return of Jesus. Amillennialists who are Full Preterists argue that all of it, including the prophecy about the Lord’s Second Coming, was fulfilled in 70 AD. Those who interpret prophecy more literally (Premillennialists) contend that all aspects of the passage await fulfillment. They therefore feel that it definitely points to a future period of tribulation before the Lord returns.

So, what about our central question? Is Matthew 24 history or prophecy? Is it past or future? Was it fulfilled in 70 AD or is it yet to occur?

I believe Matthew 24 was *pre-fulfilled* in prophetic type in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and is therefore yet to be *fulfilled* in history. And I think I can prove that from the passage itself.

The Proclamation of the Gospel

Let’s begin with verse 14. It states that all the events described in Matthew 24 will take place at a time when the Gospel has been preached to all the world.

This certainly had not taken place by the year 70 AD. In fact, it still has not taken place to this date. Using modern technology like radio, television, movies, satellites, and the Internet, we have been able to proclaim the Gospel to more people than ever before in history, but we still have not reached all the people in the world.

The book of Revelation reveals that this will not be accomplished until late in the Tribulation when God will send forth an angel who will preach the “eternal gospel” to “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Revelation 14:6).

Daniel’s Prophecy

Next, let’s consider verse 15. It says the period of intense persecution of Jews will begin when “the abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel, is seen “standing in the holy place.”

We have no historical record of such an event taking place in 70 AD. Unlike the Greek tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the Temple’s holy place in 168 BC by erecting within it an altar to Zeus, the Roman general Titus took no such action in 70 AD before he destroyed the city and the Temple.

The Intensity of the Tribulation

The third point to note is found in verse 21. It says that the period of Jewish persecution that will follow the desecration of the Temple will be the most intense in all of history, “since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall [be].”

These words were not fulfilled in 70 AD. The persecution which the Jews experienced under Titus was severe, but it pales in comparison to what the Jews suffered during the Nazi Holocaust of World War II.

Josephus says the Romans killed a million Jews in the 70 AD siege of Jerusalem. Historians are convinced that this number is greatly exaggerated. But even if it is true, it is nothing compared to the six million Jews who perished at the hands of the Nazis.

Furthermore, the prophet Zechariah tells us that during the end times a total of two-thirds of the Jewish people will die during a period of unparalleled calamity (Zechariah 13:8-9). In other words, there is a period of Jewish persecution yet to occur that will even exceed the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. According to the book of Revelation, this will occur during the second half of the Tribulation. It is the reason that Jesus referred to that part of the Tribulation as the “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21).

Consider verse 21 again: “for then there will be a great tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.” Did Jesus mean what He said or not? Surely this is not an example of hyperbole — of exaggeration to make a point. Everything in the passage screams that we are to take Jesus’ words literally.

The conclusion is inescapable. The tribulation experienced by the Jews in 70 AD was not the greatest “since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be.”

The Severity of the Tribulation

The fourth piece of evidence is found in verse 22. Jesus says that the period of “great tribulation” (verse 21) that He is talking about will be so severe that all life will cease unless the period is cut short.

You and I live in the only generation in history when these words could be literally fulfilled. There was no possibility in 70 AD that the siege of Jerusalem would lead to the extinction of all life. But that is a very real threat today due to the development and deployment of nuclear weapons.

The best selling book of 1982, *The Fate of the Earth*, proved that if there is ever an all out nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia, *all* life on earth will cease to exist.

The Proximity of the Tribulation

The fifth clue that Matthew 24 is yet to be fulfilled is found in verse 29. It says the Lord will return “immediately after the tribulation of those days.” How can we escape the impact of the word “immediately”? I don’t think we can. It clearly ties the preceding events to the immediate time of Jesus’ return.

As I have already pointed out, some Amillennialists who are also Preterists have tried to deal with this problem in a fanciful



Dominus Flevit Chapel is located on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, near the top. The name means, “The Lord Wept,” and thus the church was designed by its architect, Antonio Barluzzi, to look like a tear drop. It sits on the traditional site where Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). (Photo by the author.)

way by claiming that the Second Coming of Jesus actually occurred in 70 AD! But to argue, as they do, that Jesus returned spiritually, and therefore invisibly, is to deny the promise made in Acts 1:11 that Jesus will return in the same manner in which He ascended to Heaven — bodily and visibly.

The claim that the Second Coming occurred in 70 AD is, of course, ludicrous, but it shows the extent to which some people will go to try to make Scripture conform to a particular pre-conceived doctrine.

The Context of the Tribulation

The final evidence that Matthew 24 was not fulfilled in 70 AD is to be found in verses 32-35, where Jesus says that all the things He has spoken of concerning the Tribulation will be fulfilled during the generation that sees the “fig tree” reblossom. Here is the key to the timing of the prophecy’s fulfillment.

What is the “fig tree”? The fig tree is often used in Scripture as a symbol of the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 24:1-10; Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7; and Luke 13:6-9). So, I think what Jesus is saying here is that all the events prophesied in Matthew 24 will be fulfilled at the time when the nation of Israel is re-established.

But we really don’t have to guess at the symbolic meaning of the fig tree. Think back for a moment to what had happened the day before. Jesus had put a curse on a barren fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19), causing it to wither. It was a prophetic sign that God would set the Jewish nation aside because of their spiritual barrenness — that is, their refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Now, the next day, Jesus calls the fig tree to mind and says, “Watch it. When it reblossoms, all these things will happen.”

The setting aside of Israel occurred in 70 AD. The reblossoming took place on May 14, 1948 when the nation of Israel was re-established.

A Fact to Ponder

Matthew 24 is not history. The terrible events of 70 AD were a classic prefillment in type of the ultimate fulfillment that will occur immediately before the Lord returns.

Matthew 24 is prophecy yet to be fulfilled. It is going to be fulfilled soon, for Israel has been regathered, the nation has been re-established, and the nations of the world are coming together against the Jewish state. The wrath of God is about to fall. We are on the threshold of the Great Tribulation.

As you ponder this reality, are you ready for it? Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior? The Bible says that if you put your faith in Jesus, you need not fear the wrath of God, for “having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Romans 5:9). ✚

The Olivet Discourse: Frequently Asked Questions

Dr. David R. Reagan

There are many issues concerning Jesus' Olivet Discourse that have been hotly debated over the years and which still cause storms of controversy. I thought it would be good to address some of the most frequently asked questions that stimulate argument.

But this certainly does not mean that the discourse has no relevance to the Church. Jesus knew the Church would be established. And He knew that Christians would look to His words for insights and guidance.

To say the Olivet Discourse has no relevance to the Church is equivalent to saying that the Old Testament has no relevance because it was written by and for Jews. Or, that the letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians have no relevance to the Church at large because they were directed to a particular First Century congregation.



A view of the Old City of Jerusalem looking west from the Mount of Olives. The Dome of the Rock and the Eastern Gate are in the distance, across the Kidron Valley. In the foreground are some of the tens of thousands of graves that cover the western slope of the Mount. Orthodox Jews desire to be buried on the Mount of Olives because they believe, based on Zechariah 14, that the Messiah will come to that site when He comes to earth, and they want to be the first to be resurrected. (Photo by the author.)

1. *Does the Olivet Discourse have any application to the Church?*

This may seem to be a strange question, but it is a source of constant argument because some contend that the passage is relevant only to the Jews. They take this position because Jesus addressed His remarks to His Jewish disciples and because the Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish audience. Also, in the midst of the discourse, Jesus says that they should pray that the desecration of the Temple does not occur on a Sabbath, because when it occurs, they will need to flee the city, which they could not do on a Sabbath day.

It certainly is true that when Jesus delivered the discourse He was speaking to His Jewish disciples and not to the Church. The Church, in fact, had not yet been established. That would not occur until the Day of Pentecost, some 50 days after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

The fact of the matter is that all of God's Word is relevant to the Church either directly or indirectly. Even those sections of the Mosaic Law that were specifically given to Israel — like the sacrificial and ceremonial laws — contain spiritual insights that apply to the Church. Take, for example, the biblical principle that there is no forgiveness of sins apart from the shedding of blood (Leviticus 17:11).

Or, consider the Old Testament passage in 1 Samuel 15:22 that says that obedience to the Lord is better than burnt offerings and sacrifices. The sacrificial system is not a part of Christianity today, but the spiritual principle contained in the verse is still relevant — namely, that ritual practices of the Christian faith like baptism and communion are not more important than being obedient to God in our daily lives.

For those who claim that Matthew 24 applies only to Jews, what are they going to do with Mark 13 and Luke 21 where the



The Church of All Nations is located at the base of the Mount of Olives, adjacent to the Garden of Gethsemane. It commemorates the traditional site of Jesus’s agony before His arrest. (Photo by holylandphotos.org.)

Olivet Discourse is also recorded? These were Gospels written to the Gentiles. Also, the Olivet Discourse was probably delivered only a few days before Jesus spoke the words of John 14 to His disciples. Those who deny that Matthew 24 has any relevance to the Church are the same persons who believe that the promise of the Rapture in John 14:1-4 was meant for the Church. Both speeches were delivered by Jesus to Jewish audiences, and both were delivered before the Church was established.

As for Matthew being a book directed primarily at Jews, that is true, but it is also the only one of the four Gospels that specifically mentions the Church, and it does that in two passages (Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 18:17). Furthermore, the book closes with the “Great Commission” which is considered to be the “marching orders” for the Church (Matthew 28:19-20).

2. Do the signs of the times contained in the Olivet Discourse apply to our day and time, or do they apply only to the Tribulation?

The Olivet Discourse is full of what we call “signs of the times” that point to the Lord’s return. Some argue that these signs will be confined to the Tribulation and will be provided for the benefit of those living during the Tribulation. In other words, the signs have no relevance to the Church existing on earth before the Tribulation.

But this cannot be true. We can look around us today and see the precise signs mentioned in the Olivet Discourse. They are already appearing on the world scene.

There is no way these signs can be confined to the short

period of the seven years of the Tribulation. They may intensify during that time, but they don’t just pop-up overnight once the Antichrist signs a treaty with Israel and the Tribulation begins.

Jesus said these signs would be like birth pangs (Matthew 24: 8). It is a fact that all the signs mentioned in the Olivet Discourse began to intensify like birth pangs during the 20th Century, increasing both in frequency and intensity.

Some counter by arguing, “But there are no signs of the Rapture. It is an imminent event that could occur any moment.” That’s correct, but I am not talking about signs of the Rapture. I am talking about signs that point to the beginning of the Tribulation and the Second Coming of Jesus.

3. Concerning the fig tree parable, what is the symbolic meaning of the fig tree?

As I said in the main essay in this issue, I believe the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. (See “The Context of the Tribulation” on page 5). My reasons for this conclusion are twofold:

- 1) The fig tree is used as a symbol of Israel in both the Old and New Testaments (see the references on page 5).
- 2) The day before the Olivet Discourse Jesus had put a curse on a fig tree, causing it to wither. This was a symbolic prophecy that the nation of Israel would cease to exist because of their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. Then, the next day, He reminds His disciples of the fig tree and says, “Watch it. When it blooms again, the generation that sees that will witness My return.”



Orthodox Jews tending to a tomb on the Mount of Olives.
(From the author's collection of photos.)

Over four hundred years ago the Puritans seized on this passage and argued that one day Israel would be re-established and that when that happens, the generation that witnesses it will be the generation that will experience the Lord's return.

Some deny that the fig tree has any relation to Israel whatsoever. They argue that all the parable means is that just as the blooming of the fig tree is a signal that summer is near, so also, the coming together of all the signs Jesus mentioned will be an indication that He is soon to return.

I would agree that the parable carries this meaning, but I still believe that the fig tree was selected because it symbolizes Israel. And by using this common symbol of Israel, Jesus gives us a more precise time for His return. I think this is important because I believe God wants us to know the season of His Son's return (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6). He does not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

I think it is interesting that in Matthew 24 Jesus speaks very clearly and precisely for 28 verses (verses 4-31) about the signs that will lead up to His return, and then, suddenly, at verse 32, He shifts into symbolic language by telling a parable. Why did He suddenly switch to coded words?

I believe it is because the parable contains a prophecy about a very specific event that will clearly reveal the season of His return, and that event is the re-establishment of the nation of Israel. He wanted to limit the understanding of this key event to those who have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6 puts it, there is no reason for the Lord's return to overtake believers like a thief because they are "sons of light and sons of day." In other words, they have the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit to understand passages of Scripture that are unintelligible to unbelievers.

4. What did Jesus mean when He said that the generation that sees the blossoming of the fig tree will witness His return? What generation was He talking about? And how long is a generation?

I believe that Jesus meant exactly what He said — that the generation that sees the re-establishment of the nation of Israel is the one that will witness the Lord's return. This is the most important reason I believe that we are the terminal generation.

People frequently ask me how long is a generation? The answer is that it depends upon context. In Genesis 15:13-16 a

generation is defined as 100 years. In Psalm 90:10 it is 70 years. A generation based on the genealogy presented in the first chapter of Matthew calculates to be about 50 years. Job 42:16 says Job lived 140 years and saw four generations during his lifetime, which would make a generation 35 years. The Bible frequently refers to a generation as being 40 years (Numbers 32:13; Psalm 95:10; and Hebrews 3:8-10). Some passages seem to indicate that a generation was viewed as starting at age 20 (Exodus 30:14; Numbers 1:3; and Numbers 14:29). If that were so, and you add 40 years, then a generation would have been from 20 to 60 years of age.

But the word is also used generically to refer to people living at a particular time, and when it is used this way, it does not refer to any specific number of years. An example can be found in Jeremiah 7:29 where the prophet declares that God has rejected "the generation of His wrath." That is simply a reference to the people living at that time. It would be like making a reference to the "Nixon generation," meaning all the people living during the time that Richard Nixon served as President. In like manner, people refer to the "Hippy Generation," which is a reference to young people living during the 1960's.

I believe the term is used generically in Matthew 24:34. All it is saying is that the people living at the time the nation of Israel is re-established will be the ones who will witness the return of the Lord. It could be a person who was a small child at that time and who will be 80 years old when the Lord returns. No specific amount of time is meant or implied.

5. Can the Rapture be found in the Olivet Discourse? Or, does Jesus speak exclusively about His Second Coming?

Many very fine Premillennial Bible prophecy experts have taken the position that the Rapture is nowhere to be found in the Olivet Discourse. To the contrary, Amillennialists and Postmillennialists argue that the Rapture can be found in Matthew 24:31.

Let's consider the latter position first. Matthew 24:31 reads as follows: "And He [the Son of Man] will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

The most detailed description of the Rapture (Jesus coming for His Church) is contained in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.



Dennis Pollock and the author at the grave of Menachem Begin, the only Israeli Prime Minister buried on the Mount of Olives. He was buried there at his request rather than at the Israeli National Cemetery on Mount Herzl because he was an Orthodox Jew.

Comparing it to Matthew 24:31, we find two similarities — the blowing of a trumpet and the gathering of the elect.

But there are also several differences:

- In 1 Thessalonians 4, believers are gathered in the air when Jesus appears in the sky and are taken to Heaven. In Matthew 24 they are gathered after the arrival of Jesus on earth, and there is no mention of them being taken to Heaven.
- In 1 Thessalonians 4, the Lord Himself gathers the elect, whereas in Matthew 24, they are gathered by angels.
- The gathering in 1 Thessalonians 4 includes the resurrection of the bodies of the dead in Christ. There is no mention of anyone being resurrected in Matthew 24:31.
- In 1 Thessalonians 4, the spirits of the dead in Christ return in the clouds with Jesus. In Matthew 24 Jesus returns alone.

Those who insist that the Rapture is mentioned in Matthew 24:31 are actually contending that the Rapture and the Second Coming are all one event, producing what I call, “the yo-yo Rapture.” I call it this because they are proposing that Jesus will appear for His Church, the living and dead in Christ will be raised up to meet Him in the sky, and then He will immediately return to earth with them. This is not a biblical scenario because Jesus said in John 14:1-4 that when the Rapture occurs, the living and dead in Christ will be taken back to Heaven.

All “gatherings” mentioned in the Bible do not refer to the Rapture. At the Rapture the bodies of the dead in Christ will be resurrected and taken up to meet the Lord in the sky where their spirits will be reunited with their bodies. The living in Christ will follow, and the bodies of both groups will be glorified. They will then be taken to Heaven.

At the Second Coming, two additional gatherings are going to occur. According to Luke 17:22-37, all unbelievers who are alive at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus returns will be gathered and consigned to death, their bodies being given over to the vultures.

But at the Second Coming there will also be a gathering of “the elect” (Matthew 24:31). This could be talking about all believers who are alive at the end of the Tribulation, but it is most likely referring only to Jewish believers because it is quoting Deuteronomy 30:1-5, and that passage is a prophecy that when the Jewish people finally accept their Messiah (which, according to Zechariah 12:10 will happen at the end of the Tribulation), God will gather them back to their homeland and establish them as the prime nation of the world during His Son’s millennial reign.

If the Rapture is not referred to in Matthew 24:31, can it be found anywhere else in the Olivet Discourse? Many, if not most Premillennialists contend that Jesus simply did not mention the Rapture.

But I respectfully disagree with that position. I believe Jesus mentions the Rapture in verses 36-44 of Matthew 24. The first reason I see the Rapture in these verses is because Jesus says, “of that day and hour no one knows . . .” How could He possibly be referring to His Second Coming? Keep in mind that He has just told His disciples exactly when He was going to return —



An Orthodox Jew pauses to pay tribute at a tomb on the Mount of Olives. The proper way to do this is to leave a “stone of remembrance” on the top of the tomb. (From the author’s photos.)

“immediately after the tribulation of those days” (Matthew 24:29).

From both the prophecies of Daniel and the book of Revelation we know the Tribulation will last exactly 7 prophetic years (years of 360 days each). Anyone living at the beginning of the Tribulation (when the Antichrist signs a treaty with Israel) could calculate the exact day of the Lord’s return because we are told that the Tribulation will last precisely 2,520 days (Revelation 11:3 and Revelation 12:6). So, again, when Jesus says no one can know the day of His return, He must be speaking of the Rapture, and not the Second Coming.

Next, Jesus says that when He returns, society will be like it was in the days of Noah, when right up to the last moment people were “eating and drinking” and “marrying and giving in marriage” (Matthew 24:38). In other words, life will be continuing as normal when He returns.

But this could not be talking about the Second Coming because life will be anything but normal at the end of the Tribulation. At that time more than half the population of the world will have been killed, including two-thirds of the Jews, and the whole world, according to what we are told in Revelation 13-19, will be in absolute chaos.

Additionally, if you will take a look at the Olivet Discourse as it is recorded in Luke 21, you will find that Luke adds an observation that Matthew’s account does not contain. In the section where Jesus starts talking about how His return could occur any moment, Luke quotes Him as saying: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36, NKJV).

Those words sure sound to me like a reference to the Rapture of the Church. ✚

Zechariah 14: Fact or Fiction?

Dr. David R. Reagan

When I was about 12 years old, I stumbled across Zechariah 14. It was an amazing discovery.

You see, I grew up in a church where we were told over and over that “there is not one verse in the Bible that even implies that Jesus will ever set His feet on this earth again.”

We were taught that the Church Age would come to a sudden end with the Second Coming of Jesus — not to earth, but in the sky. We would be taken up to meet Him, and He would take us back to Heaven where we would live forever as spirits in a spirit world. No Tribulation. No Rapture. No Millennial Reign. No New Earth. It was the classic Amillennial viewpoint.

Simple Language

So, Zechariah 14 shocked me to the core. It not only implied the Lord is coming back to this earth again, it said so point blank! The passage is written in simple language that any ten year old can understand:

- 1) Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when . . .
- 2) . . . I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.
- 3) Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.
- 4) In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split . . .
- 8) And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea . . .
- 9) And the LORD will be king over all the earth . . .

In summary, this passage says that the Messiah will return to this earth at a time when the Jews are back in the land of Israel and their capital city, Jerusalem, is under siege. Just as the city is about to fall, the Messiah will return to the Mt. of Olives.

When His feet touch the ground, the mount will split in half. We are then told in verse 12 that the Messiah will speak a supernatural word, and the armies surrounding Jerusalem will be destroyed in an instant. Verse 9 declares that on that day “the Lord will become king over all the earth.”

How was I going to square all this with the sermons I had heard that denied Jesus would ever return to this earth to reign over all the world?

A Muddled Interpretation

I decided to take this remarkable passage to my pastor and



“Yeshua Returning to the Mount of Olives,” a painting by a Messianic Jew in Israel (cropped).

ask him to explain it to me. I will never forget his response. He sat there for what seemed to be an eternity, reading the passage over and over. I don’t think he had ever seen it. Finally, he looked up, stuck a finger in my face, and said, “Son, I don’t know what it means, but I’ll guarantee you one thing: it doesn’t mean what it says!”

For years after that, I would show Zechariah 14 to every visiting evangelist who came to town preaching that Jesus would never return to this earth. I always received the same response: “It doesn’t mean what it says.” That response did not satisfy me.

A Sophisticated Interpretation

Finally, I ran across a visiting preacher who was a seminary graduate, and he gave me the answer I could live with. “Nothing in Zechariah means what it says,” he explained, “because the whole book is apocalyptic.”

Now, I didn’t have the slightest idea what “apocalyptic” meant. I didn’t know if it was a disease or a philosophy. But it sounded sophisticated, and, after all, the fellow was a seminary graduate, so he should know.

Another Discovery Experience

When I began to preach, I parroted what I had heard from the pulpit all my life. When I spoke on prophecy, I would always make the point that Jesus will never return to this earth. Occasionally, some person would come up after the sermon and ask, “What about Zechariah 14?” I would snap back at them with one word, “APOCALYPTIC!” They would usually run for the door in fright.

Then one day I sat down and read the whole book of Zechariah. And guess what? My entire argument went down the drain! I discovered that the book contains many prophecies about the First Coming of Jesus, and I discovered that all those pro-

pheries meant what they said.

It suddenly occurred to me that if Zechariah's First Coming prophecies meant what they said, then why wouldn't his Second Coming promises mean what they say? It didn't take a rocket scientist to come to that logical conclusion.

The Plain Sense Rule

That was the day that I stopped playing games with God's Prophetic Word. I started accepting it for its plain sense meaning. I decided that if the plain sense makes sense, I would look for no other sense, lest I end up with nonsense.

A good example of the nonsense approach is found in the book, *The Millennium*, by Loraine Boettner. He spiritualizes all of Zechariah 14.

He argues that the Mt. of Olives is symbolic of the human heart surrounded by evil. When a person accepts Jesus as Savior, Jesus comes into the person's life and stands on his "Mt. of Olives" (his heart). The person's heart breaks in contrition (the cleaving of the mountain), and Jesus then defeats the enemy forces in the person's life and begins to reign in his heart.



Loraine Boettner

I would suggest that this theologian should be given an honorary doctorate in imagination! When people insist on spiritualizing the scriptures like this, then the scriptures end up meaning whatever they want them to mean—and that, of course, is the reason people love to spiritualize.

Zechariah's First Coming Prophecies

Consider for a moment the First Coming prophecies contained in the book of Zechariah:

- 1) The Messiah will be a humble person (Zech. 9:9 - fulfilled in Phil. 2:8).
- 2) He would come as a Servant of God (Zech. 3:8 - fulfilled in Phil. 2:6-7).
- 3) He would be a Shepherd to His people (Zech. 11:4-7 - fulfilled in John 10:11).
- 4) He would come on a donkey to Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9 - fulfilled in John 12:12-15).
- 5) He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12 - fulfilled in Matt. 26:14-15).
- 6) The betrayal money would be used to purchase a potter's field (Zech 11:13 - fulfilled in Matt. 27:3, 5-7).
- 7) The Messiah would be abandoned by His disciples (Zech. 13:7 - fulfilled in Matt. 26:55-56).
- 8) The Messiah would be crucified (Zech. 13:6 - fulfilled in Luke 23:33).
- 9) He would be pierced (Zech. 12:10 - fulfilled in John 19:34).

All of these prophecies were literally fulfilled. They meant what they said. Why would the Second Coming prophecies in Zechariah be any different?

Zechariah's Second Coming Prophecies

Consider the following Second Coming prophecies in Zechariah:

- 1) The Messiah is going to return to Jerusalem (Zech. 1:16, 6:12-13 and 14:4).
- 2) When He returns, the Jewish people will accept Him as their Messiah (Zech. 12:10 and 13:1).
- 3) He will speak a supernatural plague that will kill all His enemies (Zech. 14:12).
- 4) He will regather all believing Jews from all over the world back to Israel (Zech. 8:7-8).
- 5) The Messiah's throne will be in Jerusalem (Zech. 6:13).
- 6) His Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Zech. 1:16).
- 7) Gentile nations will assist with the rebuilding of the Temple (Zech. 6:15 and 14:14).
- 8) The land of Israel will overflow with prosperity (Zech. 1:17).
- 9) Jerusalem will be a city of peace (Zech. 2:4-5, 8:4-5 and 14:11).
- 10) The Messiah will reside in Jerusalem (Zech. 2:10-12 and 8:3).
- 11) Gentile nations will seek the Messiah in Jerusalem (Zech. 2:11 and 8:22).
- 12) Israel will be a blessing to all the world (Zech. 8:13).
- 13) The Jewish people will be highly respected by Gentiles (Zech. 8:23).
- 14) The Messiah's reign will be worldwide and result in peace for all nations (Zech. 9:10 and 14:9).

These are only a few of the Second Coming prophecies in the book of Zechariah. Why are these prophecies dismissed as being meaningless?

Conclusion

I believe God knows how to communicate. I believe He says what He means and means what He says. I don't believe you have to have a doctorate in Hermeneutics to understand the Bible. The essentials, instead, are an honest heart and the filling of God's Spirit.

I ask you: How do you treat Zechariah 14 — as fact or fiction?

Thus says the Lord: "I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain" (Zechariah. 8:3). ✠



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Dr. Reagan's Comprehensive Book About Bible Prophecy

First published in 2005, this book has gone through many printings since that time. It covers every aspect of Bible prophecy.

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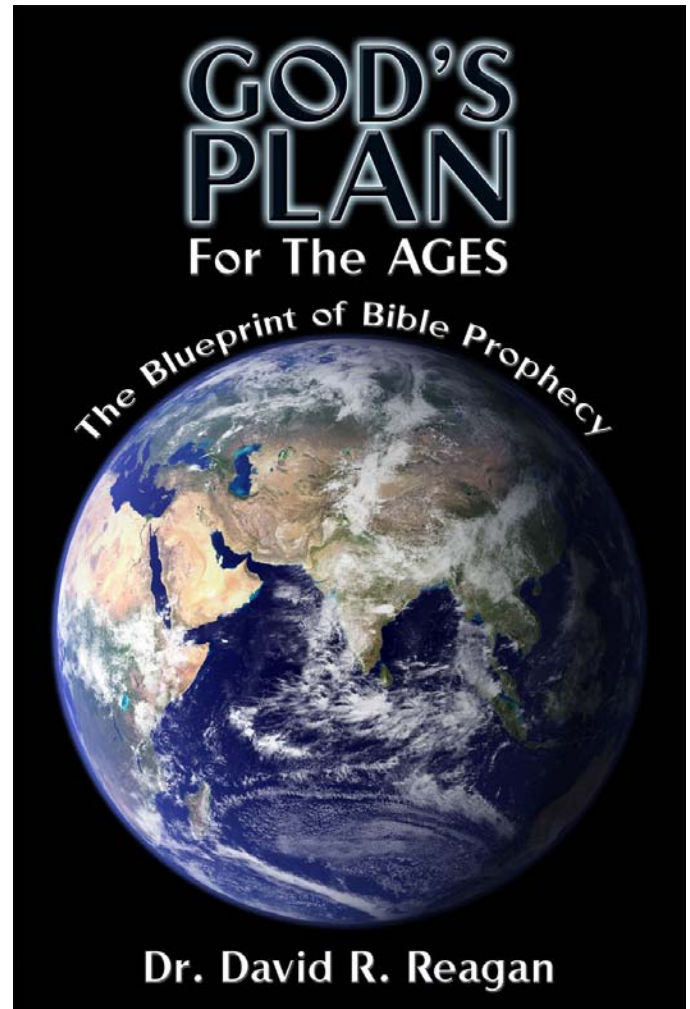
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God's Plan for the Ages by Dr. David Reagan offers a sweeping, panoramic view of prophetic events unlike anything I have ever studied, even after having read more than 11,000 books!

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