

Prophecy in Perspective

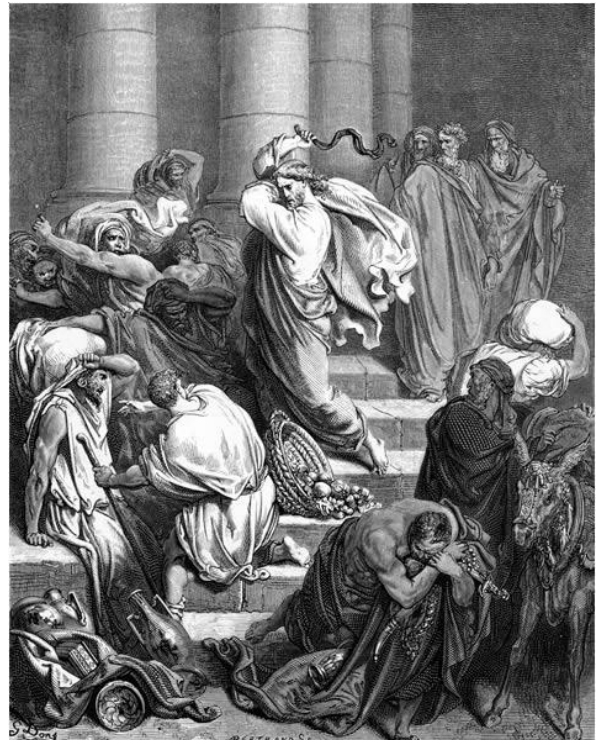
Dr. Scott Gregory Downing
An email newsletter

Our Times - *Prophecy in Current Events*

Jesus Knows the Future, and Wants Us to Know it Too!

The Lord Jesus Christ said a great deal about the future. In Matthew 24, Jesus relates many prophetic details about Israel's coming days. Today, Israel is central in the news and in world affairs. As Satan desired Israel's destruction in the past, so he does today. The devil is leading almost the entire Middle East against Israel today. The powers of Islam are rallying to wipe Israel off the map. Islam is a Gentile religion. Israel is living under the influence and even control of the Gentiles just as Jesus stated they would (Luke 21:24). In Matthew 23:37, Jesus stated that Israel had the opportunity to receive their Messiah when He came the first time. He *"would have gathered"* them, but they *"would not."* Then Jesus said that because of their national rejection of Him as the Messiah, the house of Israel, represented in the standing temple, would be greatly diminished.

Jesus had great zeal for the temple. Defending the integrity of the temple, he cleansed it of the thieves and moneychangers that settled in the temple to make money and to cheat people. The Lord desires us to have a similar zeal for the purity of the Christian life and for His church. Yet, as fewer and fewer would take this kind of a stand for God during Jesus' earthly ministry, so there are fewer who will take a stand for Christ today. Because of their unbelief, Jesus warned that the temple and the Jews would be removed from the land. This removal, thought to be caused by Israel's rejection of their Messiah, was actually for their preservation as a people. God would one day, as we see today, bring them back and the temple would be rebuilt. Similarly, for their protection from the Antichrist, the Lord predicted that believers of the church age will be removed from the earth when He returns to take the church to heaven (1 John 14:3). Jesus' important prophecies in Matthew 24 and 25 foretell how God's future activity toward His chosen people of Israel would come in the complete destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews. Jesus stated to the Jews who had refused to hear His message: *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"* (Matthew 23:38). When Jesus said these words, He was in the temple. He



"The Buyers and the Sellers Driven Out of the Temple"

by Gustave Dore

John 2:15

promised they would not see Him again, that is, in the temple, *"till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord"* (Matthew 23:39). The practical impact of knowing the future is plain to see as we examine Jesus' next words:

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. 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 24:1-2).

The disciples seemed a little oblivious of Jesus' declarations while He was in the temple. They were so taken by the grandeur of the magnificent temple buildings that Herod had built for the Jews. There was no other building to match its size, complexity, or beauty certainly in that part of the world, nor, perhaps in all the world! Today, people are impressed with buildings. They gaze at buildings and assesses property and wealth and possessions, but often overlook the God who truly owns them. The disciples were distracted from their Lord and their mission to walk with Him by the amazing construction of the temple. But Jesus instantly brought the disciples back to the often ignored reality that God is busy unfolding His plan. God was going to destroy this great temple! It was to be completely dismantled and removed from its foundation! The destruction of the temple was Jesus' prophecy to unbelieving and distracted Israel. Yet, He had much more to say. Jesus will go on in Matthew 24 and 25 to give His disciples, both then now, God's plans for the future of Israel and for the world, especially for the latter days of world history leading up to Jesus' return.

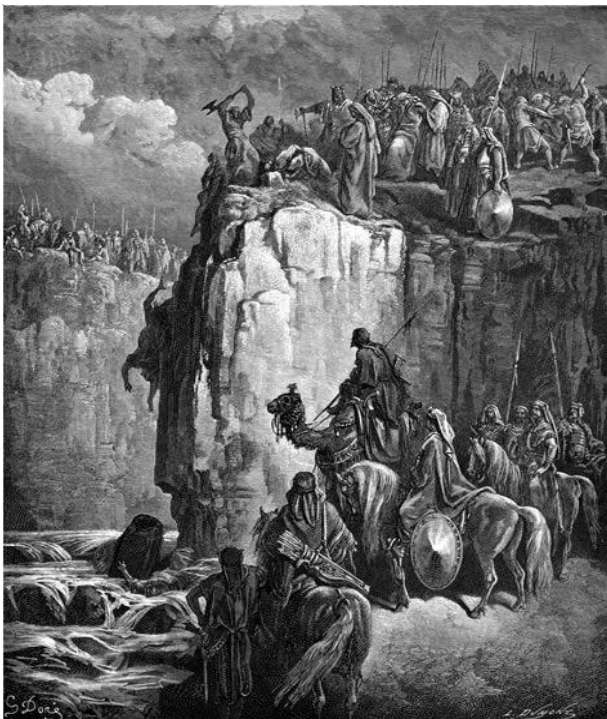
And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24:3).

Man likes to make up his own future. This is often true even in the church. Today, the leaders and proponents of the Neo-Liberal, Emerging, and Seeker-Sensitive Church movements avoid prophecy, because they have plans of their own. They are often distracted with buildings and the expansion of personal ministries. Could it be that the predictions of end times Bible prophecy are not on their schedule? Yet, here in Matthew 24, as well as many other places in the gospels, we see Jesus detailing the prophetic future. His disciples asked Him: ***"Tell us, when shall these things be?"*** That is, when is the time of the destruction of the temple and the events surrounding it's demolition? Then, they asked: ***"What shall be the sign of thy coming?"*** They definitely anticipated that there would be another coming of Jesus and some type of

intervening period of time between His first and second coming. Then they asked further about the details of the ***"end of the world."*** Plainly, Jesus wanted His disciples to have answers to their questions. He did not chide them for being overly curious about the future as some Christian leaders in America would have us believe. Jesus responded to these questions with great detail. And in future editions of *Prophecy in Perspective*, we will investigate the important prophecies of Matthew 24 and 25 in detail.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5).

The religious landscape has been littered with various false Christs and their cult religions throughout history. These false Christs are definitely increasing today both in number and satanically energized power. The growing rejection of God and the Bible by American and European leaders adds to the rise of oppressive religious movements like radical Islam. Nations like the U.S., Russia, and the European Union are currently being taken over by cult-like teachings of



"Elijah's Slaughter of the Prophets of Baal"
by Gustave Doré
I Kings 18:38-40

atheistic humanism and Socialism. They are also vulnerable to the ravenous rise of radical Islam. People by the millions are drawn away, persecuted, and killed by many mere men who claim to be God's one true prophet, messiah, or representative leader. We need to pray for God to send Elijah-type prophets in our day who will do battle against the false prophets of Baal and their supporters (1 Kings 18:22-23). While there is only one true and final Prophet, Priest, and King: The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; God still calls up true prophets and witnesses for our days to proclaim His truth without fear of man (Matthew 10:28). There is great victory in standing for God's truth in the face of much opposition. This victory is elusive for most Christians today because they are not witnessing for Christ as they should. In the article shown below, Dr. Ed Hindson describes only some of the many hundreds of false Christs and cults they have started through deception:

While schismatic cults exist in every religion from Lubavitcher Jews to Muslim extremists, they all have certain characteristics in common.

Every religious cult has a sacred book translation, set of writings, key to interpretation, and perhaps visions, dreams or voices to validate its beliefs. Muslims believe the Koran is God's final revelation to man through the Prophet Muhammad. Mormons look at The Book of Mormon as equally inspired as the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses recognize only their New World Translation of the Bible. Seventh-day Adventists recognize Ellen G. White as an inspired prophet of God. Christian Science reveres Mary Baker Eddy's Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures as divinely inspired.

While some cultic religions have gone so far as to produce and sanction their own sacred books, others have not. Instead, they claim allegiance to the Bible, but insist that their interpretation is the only spiritually valid understanding of Scripture. The Way International founder Victor Paul Wierwille claims, "God spoke to me audibly, just like I'm talking to you now. He said he would teach me the word as it had not been known since the first century." By contrast, The Way magazine condemns the so-called Christian church as being built essentially upon manmade doctrine and tradition. Thus, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart conclude, "The Way International believes Victor Paul Wierwille has the only true interpretation of the Scriptures and is the only one who can lead fellow Bible students out of the confusion in which traditional Christianity has engulfed them."

The Children of God (COG), also known as the Family of Love, recognize David Berg as "prophet and King" and his "Mo letters" as God's truth. Berg himself has said, "My letters mean exactly what they say, literally, and they don't need explaining away, spiritualizing or reinterpreting by any one." One of Berg's early prophecies concerned an impending earthquake in California in the early seventies that never came to pass, yet he was revered by COG members as "God's prophet and King." Later revelations of sexual relations with his own daughters and other cult members only caused Berg to use his letters to defend his practices.

The Church of Bible Understanding, originally known as the Forever Family, is an example of a Bible-based cult. Founded in 1971 in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and headed by Stewart Traill, this religious group uses orthodox Christian terminology loaded with very unorthodox meanings. Cult observers Una McManus and John Cooper state that Traill's "understanding" of the Bible and its concealed meanings ("figures") are accepted as authoritative for cult members. They note that the group has "declared war on the powers of this world, including government, police, schools, parents, and churches."

The Church of Armageddon, also known as the Love Family, looks to the vision of its members, including founder Paul Erdmann (also known as "Love Israel"), as its divine authority. Members renounce all worldly traditions of matrimony and are considered to be married to one another.

In each of these examples, the words, visions or writings of a human leader are made equal to the Bible. In some cases they are looked upon as being of even greater authority than Scripture itself. Whenever someone claims to have a new revelation from God, he or she is making the same claim Muhammad made for the Koran and Joseph Smith made for The Book of Mormon.

Presumptuous Leadership: Not every cult leader is dangerous, but every one is presumptuous. Cult leaders think they alone have God's ultimate message for mankind. Therefore, in their minds, it becomes an absolute necessity that they deliver God's message at all costs and eliminate whatever opposition they face in doing so. Branch Davidian cult leader David Koresh's demand that his 58-minute "message to the world" be aired on radio in Waco, Texas, is typical of such a mind-set.

Early descriptions of David Koresh's and Jim Jones' backgrounds show striking similarities: broken homes, parental neglect, desire for power and control, excessive sexual appetites and the constant demand for loyalty and allegiance from their followers. Jim Jones and David Koresh may be extreme examples of dictatorial cult leaders, but they are not that far removed from the excessive behaviors of Sun Myung Moon, who dictates the marriages to total strangers of thousands of his followers, or David Berg, who authorized incest within the Children of God. Like this statement from the egotistical Reverend Ike, who said, "You can't lose with the stuff I use," the blasphemous and extravagant claims of deluded cult leaders are incredible. Here are just a few:

Judge Rutherford (Jehovah's Witnesses): "Jesus Christ has returned to earth A.D. 1914 to establish the Theocratic Millennial Kingdom" (The Kingdom, 1933). The world is still awaiting this revelation.

Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science): "Death is an illusion" (Science and Health, 584:9). She succumbed to that illusion on December 3, 1910.

Father Divine (Peace Mission): "I am God Almighty ... the Holy Spirit personified ... the Prince of Peace" (New Day, July 16, 1949). "God" (George Baker, alias Father Divine) died in 1965.

Elijah Muhammad (Black Muslims): "Wallace Farad [Muslim version of Father Divine] is God himself! He is the one we have been looking for the last 2,000 years" (New York Herald Tribune, April 3, 1963). Wallace Farad (alias Allah) disappeared in 1934 and was never seen again.

Elizabeth Clare Prophet (Church Universal and Triumphant): "I am that I am" (Teachings on the Path of Enlightenment). She claims to be the channel of the "Great White Brotherhood" of "Ascended Masters." She and her followers are awaiting the end of the world in Montana.

Meher Baba (Sufism Reoriented): "I Parvardigar (Baba died on January 31, 1969) am Jesus Christ personified."

Sun Myung Moon (Unification Church): "Jesus Christ will return by being born in the flesh in Korea as Lord of the Second Advent and True Parent of the world family" (Divine Principle, pp. 501ff.). Moon considers himself to be the Messiah incarnate.

David Berg (Children of God): "Forget not thy King.... Forsake not His ways, for He hath the key, even the Key of David! Therefore, thou shalt kiss the mouth of David. For thou art enamored of my words and thou art in love with me, thy Savior! " (The Kingdom: A Prophecy, August 20, 1971, Lo. No. 94). Berg is revered as King, Father and David by his followers.

John Robert Stevens (The Walk): "We are going to turn and become the savior of the Church" (Living Word, July 6, 1975). Steven's followers denounce all churches but their own as the "harlot of Babylon."

Herbert W. Armstrong (World Wide Church of God): "We grow spiritually more and more like God, until at the time of the resurrection we shall then be born of God—we shall then be God" (The U.S. and British Commonwealth, p. 9).

David Koresh (Branch Davidians): "I am the Lamb of God" (People, March 15, 1993, p. 41). He died April 19, 1993.

This one criteria separates cults from denominations. Various Christian denominations may differ on their methods of ordination, their mode of baptism or their form of church government, but they generally don't consign each other to hell because of those differences. Cults, on the other hand, are always convinced they are the only ones going to heaven. All others are lost, damned, heretical or have the mark of the beast! (See this important article in its entirety: "False Christs, False Prophets, Great Deception," by Ed Hindson; <https://www.raptureready.com/terry/james46.html>)

Conclusion



Unfortunately, thousands who are led into cults have not been warned about them by their preachers when they were attending churches. The cults and false religions like Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc, find fertile ground in the doctrinally bland and unscriptural teachings of the Emerging and Seeker-Sensitive movements. There are some who do teach against cults. Yet, professing Christians often do not want to hear about them because they are deceived into believing that adherents to these religions will also be saved *if they are sincere*.

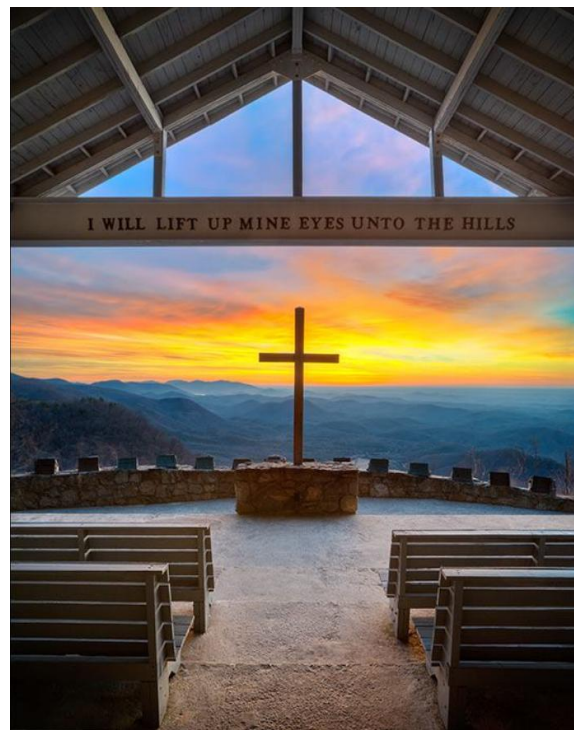
As a result, church members often do their best to stop their preachers from exposing cults and false religions. Often the best workers for the cults and false religions are the ones in the churches.

Within the Emerging Church movement there are growing numbers of Christian leaders who want to emphasize points of agreement between Christianity and Islam. This is sometimes aptly known as Chrislam. It is sad to say, but a definite possibility, that there are a surprising number in Christian leadership in America that are not even saved! It is not our place to separate the wheat from the tares (Matthew 13:28-29), however, but to recognize without fear, that we are living in the last days and so there are many false Christs, just as Jesus predicted. We see how President Obama is criticized for not naming Islamic terrorism for what it is: Islamic. Yet, Christians by the tens of thousands are drawn into following false leadership that will not even name the false trends, religions and movements of our days as they are warned about in Bible prophecy! Staying away from Bible prophecy and the growing realities of false cults and religions is like wearing a blindfold in the Christian life. This is why Jesus called the false leaders of His day: "blind guides" (Matthew 23:16).

We will continue examining the details of the end times according to Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 in the weeks ahead. The Lord wants us to be warned and encouraged through the study of Jesus Christ in both His first and second comings. He is faithful and will give great victory to any and all who will study and obey His Word. He will give confidence and direction for you today as you receive the light of Bible prophecy to help you understand the times to be a faithful witness and win the lost through your prayers and preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are you a faithful witness for the one true Christ? Are you watching for His coming?

So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

(2 Peter 1:19, NASB)



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