
Jesus and the Last Days

By: Ronald L. Dart

Predicting what's going to happen next in the Middle East is a fool's game. Or, maybe it's a prophet's task, but since I'm not a prophet, and I'm trying not to be a fool, it seems necessary to look at what's going on there in the light of the Bible.

Christian people pay close attention to what happens in the Middle East for good reason. The reason grows out of a prophecy Jesus handed down in response to a question by His disciples. Country boys that they were, they were exclaiming over the beauty of the temple when Jesus shocked them into silence when He said, "See you 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," and He walked on.

History Repeats Itself

This actually came to pass a few decades later when the Romans sacked Jerusalem, burned the Temple, killed the Jews in the thousands, and they say that in the years following you could actually walk by that site and not even realize that a building, a wall, or anything else had been there. But there's one curious thing about that. It happened in 70 A.D. to be sure, but it also happened some 650 years before that, when the Babylonians came, sacked Jerusalem, and destroyed the Temple. The Temple, that those boys were admiring in Jerusalem that day, was not Solomon's Temple, it was a second Temple built after their return from Babylon. And that reflection is kind of disturbing.

I know you've heard the old saying that history repeats itself. Well, it does. History repeats itself, because human nature does not change, so men keep on doing the same stupid things over and over again with the same results. And if that were not enough, the divine nature of God doesn't change either. As God said to the prophet Malachi, "I am the LORD, I change not; therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Let Them Show the Former Things

To some degree, this little comparison between human nature and the divine nature accounts for a lot of the repetitive nature of prophecy. If an event happened because of a given condition, and if the condition recurs, it will happen again. While I was pondering this one day, I came upon a Scripture that almost spells it out. God was challenging Israel because of their constant chasing around after one god and then another.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God said this, "Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let the idols bring them forth and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come." Now that's a stunning thing to say. He said, if you're going to understand the future, look at the former things, consider them, and then you can understand the end of it all. "Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods: yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together." Now the things that are to come are reflections of things that have already happened.

Type and Anti-type

The terminology adopted by Bible students for this sort of thing is "type" and "anti-type." The word 'type' comes from the Greek and basically means a model, a shape, or a form. An 'anti-type' means that which the thing was modeled after. So, we have types and anti-types all through the Bible. It is, however, a mistake to assume that you only have type and anti-type—two occurrences. You may have many more.

Prophecy Must Have Roots in History

So, the things to come are reflections of things that have already happened. If you are a prophet, your prophecy has to have roots in history or it is meaningless. This is one of the most helpful things to know when you hear all these would-be prophets in the world today—people who come to your church or to another church and say, "I have a word of prophecy from the Lord." Does the prophecy have roots in history? If not, you can safely brush it aside.

Repent and Amend Your Ways

Now consider Jesus' disciples oohing and aahing over the grand Temple of God and compare it to something Jeremiah said one day. God customarily sent Jeremiah down to the city gates. It was the equivalent in more recent times to the courthouse steps, where business was done. The Lord said, "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. Thus, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place." In other words, repent, you sinners, and do the right thing. "Trust you not in lying words, saying, The Temple of the LORD, The Temple of the LORD, The Temple of the LORD, are these." I can almost see Jeremiah standing there repeating this, sweeping his arm around first to the west, then to the east, then to the south, exclaiming "Look at all the magnificent buildings"—each with a "this is the Temple of the Lord." I can hear Jesus' disciples exclaiming the same words in awe of the Temple and all that it stood for as they showed the buildings of the Temple to Jesus.

Jeremiah said, "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; . . ." We've got to have, not half-baked amends; we've got to have the real thing. ". . . if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; If you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt" (Jeremiah 7:5-6). He is standing on the courthouse steps and he's talking about judicial

proceedings. Let's have judgment, let's have honesty, let's put a stop to this nonsense. Do these things, "Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Are you going to steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, [right here in court], and burn incense unto Baal, [which, in fact, people were doing in the Temple grounds] and walk after other gods whom you know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are safe to do all these abominations?" Then he said something in this prophecy that was echoed all the way down to Jesus when He ran the thieves out of the Temple. He said, "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD." That's the way it is.

Go To Shiloh

Then God says this, "Go you now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. "Go to Shiloh.

Years ago, when my wife and I were visiting Israel, we rented a Volkswagen and we were driving north from Jerusalem to a place called Jacob's Well. As we drove along, I saw a sign along the road pointing to the right to a place called Shiloh. Now I didn't remember the context at the time, but the words of Jeremiah, "Go to Shiloh," were in my ears. I was very familiar with it because we kept coming across it in a class, I taught in college called "Old Testament Survey." So, when I saw that sign—Go to Shiloh—I said, we'd better do it. I slammed on the brakes and took a right turn without thinking. We bounced over a rather poor road for a little while and then came to the end of the road. I stopped. I got out. I looked around and I saw. . . nothing. Absolutely nothing.

And, that seems to be the point. I recalled the history of the place, but it was only when I got back to where we were staying and read the context of Jeremiah's prophecy, that I really understood what he was driving at. He said, "And now, because you have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spoke unto you, rising up early and speaking, but you heard not; and I called you, but you answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house (the Temple), which is called by my name, wherein you trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim."

That happened, you know. Ephraim had long since gone into captivity into Assyria and, because Judah didn't listen, the same thing happened to them. So, there I stood on a bald patch of ground that once was Shiloh and there was nothing there. Off in the distance, there was a small very old mosque and sometimes I wonder if even that was symbolic.

The Third Temple

So now we know the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was not the second shrine of God that had been destroyed. It was the third. Now, I've not been appointed a prophet of God and I'm not stupid enough to appoint myself, but I have a sinking feeling that what has happened three times, will happen again. Why? Because we're still here, and we're still making the same evil mistakes.

Jesus and the End Time

When the disciples had recovered sufficiently to ask some questions, they had a big one. "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 your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). The disciples plainly understood Jesus to be talking about the end of time, not merely another sacking of Jerusalem. I mean, it happened in 70 A.D. They understood all this because they knew what the prophets said. They knew there would be another destruction. They knew that there would be a destruction that would come in the last days. They knew it from the prophets. They wanted to know when it was going to happen.

One important note, all the events prophesied here happened in 70 A.D., except one. It was not the last days, and the disciples were looking for that. What Jesus said in reply to this is called the "Olivet Prophecy" because of where it was given —on Mount Olivet, or the Mount of Olives.

The remainder of Matthew chapter 24 and all of chapter 25 answers the disciples' questions. Part of it may be familiar to you. He said, "Take heed that no man deceives you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall deceive many."

I took the time to look through a number of translations because there is sometimes a misunderstanding of this. People think it means, "People will come in my name admitting that I am the Christ and deceive many." But apparently, He is saying, "Many are going to come saying, 'I am the Christ,' and deceive a lot of people." There will be false christs and you will "hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Wars and Rumors of Wars

When I was growing up during World War II, I recall hearing somebody say that wars and rumors of wars were a sign of the time of the end. I think there were a lot of people in World War II who thought, "Boy, we must be coming right up on the end of the age; the end of the world."

What I didn't hear from any of them was Jesus' statement, "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

So, wars and rumors of wars are not a sign that the end is here. The signs are really going to be coming from that time until this. These things, said Jesus, are only the beginning.

That sounds a little creepy in the present world situation, as you look around and think that maybe what we are seeing today is only the beginning. "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you: and you 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" (Matthew 24:9-10).

That's a little hard to figure. I suppose it happened, and I suppose it will happen again because Jesus said it would. I also suppose it because I know human nature, but it's distressing, nonetheless.

The Jews Are Hated of All Nations

Jesus was talking to His disciples at this point, but it has an eerie echo of the days of Jeremiah. In those days, Judah was hated of all nations. But the words "you'll be hated because of me" have a double meaning. Look at where the Jews sit in the world. They are hated of all nations. It is really staggering to consider when you look at what the Jews have done throughout, the modern world at least. What have they done to be hated as they are? How is it that we have anti-Semitism so rabid in the world, yet it seems the Islamists who are murdering men, women and children, are not hated of all nations? People make excuses for them. People try their dead-level best to keep from condemning them for what they have done. They condemn Israel. They don't condemn the Arabs; they don't condemn Islamists.

You see this double standard everywhere from the United Nations to the Arab press, from Western television to Al Jazeera, and maybe all the way to Reuters. They all blame the Jews, not the people that hate them. Why do they hate them? They give all kinds of reasons for it, going all the way back to the 1948 War and the United Nations' decision that gave them the nation of Israel.

But I think the real reason is that they are a people chosen by God. They are, for better or worse, His covenant people. And, pursuant to His promises, they have survived. They have been punished, but they have survived. They have been destroyed, but they have survived. The whole world is guilty of anti-Semitism. It is there for any objective person to see.

Efforts to stamp out the Jews have gone on throughout history—the most recent being characterized as the Holocaust—and they've survived. . . for now.

Love For God Will Grow Cold

In Matthew 24:11-12, Jesus continued, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will grow cold." He seems to have been talking about people who really did love God, but because they lived in an environment of so much iniquity, even those who loved God grew cold. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." You can't stand firm halfway and be saved, you have to stay with it all the way.

Gospel of the Kingdom

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness or testimony unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

There's an interesting thought that arises out of all this. Is that last statement, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness or testimony unto all nations; and then shall the end come," a prophecy or a commission? Is it a statement of what's going to happen or a statement of what the disciples of Jesus were supposed to make happen? Whatever the case, Jesus appears to be setting this prophecy to conclude at the time of the end.

Abomination of Desolation

In Matthew 24:15-18, Jesus continues, "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso reads, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." The reference to Daniel here is of more than passing interest. The *Holman Bible Dictionary* has an interesting rundown on it. Basically, in the second century B.C., there was a man named Antiochus Epiphanes who was ruling this whole area out of Syria. And he was trying to completely Hellenize and de-Judahize Jerusalem. He went there to set up an altar of Zeus in the Holy Place, which seems to have been what Daniel's prophesy was all about. Antiochus had fancied himself to be a god who greatly resembled Zeus Olympus. Zeus was known as Baal-Shamim, that is, lord of heaven. The Hebrews didn't want to write or pronounce the pagan term, Baal, so they substituted "abomination," and "shaman," as a typical play on words. It was written "desolating one." Thus Zeus, lord of heaven, is loosely referred to as "abominations, one who makes desolate." That's where this whole thing came from in the Book of Daniel.

Later literature picks up this same type of violation of proper worship in Jerusalem, when Caligula, about 40 A.D., tried to erect his own statute in the Temple. Josephus even identified the Abomination of the Desolation in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman, Titus, in 69-70 A.D.

The Abomination of Daniel would have been understood in the terms the *Holman Bible Dictionary* has of the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. That's the way they would have understood it. But for some reason Matthew adds this little phrase "*Let the reader understand,*" as though the obvious meaning was not necessarily the intended meaning, that there was more to it. We'll have to wait to see what that might mean.

War, Women and Children

Jesus goes on in Matthew 24:19-21 to say this, "Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray you that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath Day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." The thought came to mind when I read this recently, one of the truly disturbing things about war is the destruction of innocent life. Normally you would like to think that women and children are spared, but because they are weak, it would be a burden to try to move them or carry them around. Generally speaking, pregnant women, infants, suckling's, were dealt with very harshly. The Germans killed them outright when they were

exporting the Jews in boxcars to Buchenwald, to Dachau, to Auschwitz. The mind boggles at things that were done. It has always been so; it always will be.

Amalek and Hezbollah

What I have seen in more recent months in the Middle East may have served to clarify a passage from the Old Testament that disturbs a lot of people. In 1 Samuel 15:2-3, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." The first thing to know about this passage, is that when Israel first came up against Amalek, the Amalekites had ambushed the rear of the Israelite column, which is where the women, the children, and the animals would have been. Men normally fought from the front; they protected their women and children who were behind. The expectation is that real men would have met them head on and they could have fought.

I think in those days there were rules of engagement that called for sparing women and children, because what the Amalekites did was unusual.

There were people, in those times, who lived by these rules and people who did not. And here is the key: if you were fighting a people who cared nothing for life, you would lose if you fought by humanitarian rules, for they fought from behind women and children.

One of the most stunning examples of that I ever saw was in the Iraqi war when Tommy Frank's boys were fighting their way through Iraq toward Bagdad. They were ready to cross a bridge and, what should they encounter, but men fighting behind a line of women and children that they had arranged across the bridge. They were using human shields. And the more recent war between the Israelis and Hezbollah in Lebanon, coming up against the Amalekites who would have had their women and children up front, the Israelites would have hesitated. (Please note this program was recorded in August 2006). They were told they would have to fight through that, and that included women and children. Now, with the Hezbollah fighters not caring who they kill, and actually fighting from behind women and children, the Israelis encounter a situation not that different from when Saul went after the Amalekites.

When I read this in the words of Jesus later in this prophecy, where He makes it very clear He's talking about the time of his return, I have to realize the prophets are showing us that, as we come down to the last days, there will be yet another holocaust. Only after the return of Jesus Christ will a lasting peace be achieved.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways have you witnessed history repeating itself?
2. Do you agree with Mr. Dart that true prophecy has to have roots in history?
3. Do we have modern idols today?
4. What lessons should Christians make sure that they learn from what happened to Israel and Judah?
5. What are your thoughts to Mr. Dart's statement that it is a little creepy to consider that we may only be at the beginning of the time leading to Jesus' return?
6. Why do you think there is a double standard in our world when it comes to the Jews and the Arabs?
7. What do you think the "Abomination of Desolation" is?
8. Do you agree with Mr. Dart that there will be another holocaust before Jesus' return?
9. Was there anything new that you learned in Mr. Dart's study?
10. What should Christians be doing as we wait for Christ's return?