

Eschaton, Eschaton, Read All About It

Revelation 22:17 & 20-21

Critics call it 'Newspaper Eschatology.'

(I should define 'eschatology.' It is the branch of theology that is interested in last things. For our purposes today, it is the study of unfulfilled Bible prophecy).

Newspaper Eschatology is a derogatory label to belittle Christians who believe that you can see trends and events in our world that corroborate the remaining 500 or so end times prophecies in the Bible.

I'll give you an example. Prominent in the news of late has been the air strike ordered by President Trump against Syria as a warning that the United States will not tolerate Syrian president Assad's use of chemical weapons against his own people.

Long before the air strike, students of prophecy were pointing to Syria because of some things two of God's Old Testament prophets said about the future of its capital city, Damascus:

Jer 49:24 Damascus has grown feeble; She turns to flee, And fear has seized her. Anguish and sorrows have taken her like a woman in labor.

Jer 49:25 Why is the city of praise not deserted, the city of My joy?

Jer 49:26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, And all the men of war shall be cut off in that day," says the LORD of hosts.

Isa 17:1 The burden against Damascus. "Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, And it will be a ruinous heap.

Damascus has the reputation of being the oldest continuously occupied city in the world. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah are predicting it's total destruction.

The current chaos in Syria is exactly what you'd expect from reading the Bible.

"Wait a minute," the critics object. "Damascus has been conquered in the past. Those prophecies by Isaiah and Jeremiah *have already been fulfilled*," they argue.

I'll grant them that Damascus has previously been conquered. It was conquered by the Assyrians in 732BC; then by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar; and then by Alexander the Great.

In the 7th century, Damascus was the victim of a Muslim siege led by General Khalid ibn al-Walid. Later the Turco-Mongol armies of Timur conquered it around the turn of the 15th century.

We counter their argument by stating that Damascus has never been totally ruined, and left uninhabited, as Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted. But even apart from that, there's something more at play here than whether or not it's ever been conquered.

What the critics won't tell you is that scholars whose field is eschatology understand that a single Bible prophecy often represents two similar events separated by time.

Called *dual fulfillment*, or *dual prophecy*, it is the observation that some prophecies in the Bible have both a *near-fulfillment* and a *far-fulfillment*.

An example is that of David's son reigning on David's throne. The prophecy God made to David (Second Samuel 7:12-16) had elements of fulfillment in the near future, in the person of David's son, Solomon.

However several important elements of the prophecy were not fulfilled by Solomon. The prophecy was therefore also looking past Solomon to a far-fulfillment of it when Jesus, the greater Son of David, *will* sit on David's throne in Jerusalem to rule over the world in the Kingdom of God.

The critics of our approach to prophecy are themselves being disingenuous in their criticism. Even if the Isaiah and Jeremiah prophecies had a near-fulfillment, they also could have a far-fulfillment; and they know this.

We might, therefore, really be witnessing the far-fulfillment of ancient prophecy - the final destruction of Damascus.

Damascus is just one small part of the larger stage that is being set. There is a famous prophecy in the Book of Ezekiel that lists a coalition of nations who will attack Israel in the last days. Those nations are currently aligning with each other, just as the Bible predicted. They are Russia, Iran, Turkey, Libya, and the Sudan.

Further, Ezekiel mentions that the main attack will come from the north, meaning the armies must advance through Syria.

But let's cut to the chase. The critics ignore what might be called the mother of all the end times prophecies - that Israel would become a nation again in the last days, and become the central focus of world events.

What are the chances that a nation that had ceased to exist as a country would suddenly reappear back on the world stage and be resurrected after more than 2000 years?

Nothing like that has ever happened. This is why the fulfillment of all these prophecies is so incredibly amazing.

Here are just a few of the hundreds of biblical predictions which have been fulfilled as Israel became an independent nation after centuries.

#1 Jesus predicted Israel's destruction:

Mat 24:1 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple.

Mat 24:2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

This was fulfilled just as Jesus predicted. In 70AD, the Roman legions led by Titus sacked and burned Jerusalem.

It is one of the oddities of history that the Temple project was not completed until 64AD - just in time to be destroyed six years later as a result of Jewish rebellion.

Critics point to the Wailing Wall as evidence Jesus prophesied falsely when He said "not one stone shall be left here upon another." Well, that wall was not a part of the Temple structure. It was a retaining wall.

One scholar wrote: "Strictly speaking, the Temple proper is not a matter of archaeological consideration since only one stone from it and parts of another can be positively identified."

Jesus' words were spot-on.

#2 The land would be laid waste, and the Jews scattered throughout the world, and persecuted:

Lev 26:32 I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it.

Lev 26:33 I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

In 1867, Mark Twain wrote about the land at the time saying, "Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes... the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies... Palestine is desolate and unlovely... It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land."

Meanwhile the scattering of the Jews to nearly every nation on earth is called the *diaspora*.

The history of the *diaspora* is very definitely one where the sword followed them everywhere they settled, as they were cruelly persecuted.

#3 Jerusalem's Temple Mount would be destroyed & plowed under:

Mic 3:12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest.

Sixty or so years after the destruction of the Temple, Rome was planning to build a temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount. In 131AD the governor of Judea, Tineius Rufus, performed the foundation ceremony, which involved ploughing over the Temple, just as Micah foresaw. It led to what historians call the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

#4 The Hebrew language would be resurrected:

Zep 3:9 "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord.

Hebrew was spoken by the Jewish people from the second millennium BC until the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC. From the 6th century BC until close to the Middle Ages, many Jews spoke Aramaic, and many ancient Jewish texts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, were written in Aramaic.

In the late 1800's, an Orthodox Jew who took the name Eliezer Ben-Yehuda almost singlehandedly, despite great opposition from his own people, resurrected the Hebrew tongue.

Hebrew is now spoken by the majority of Israel's citizens. Linguists are astonished by its revival. As with so many other things Israel, it is unprecedented.

#5 Israel would be reborn in a day:

Isa 66:8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children.

Israel, a country that had not existed as a separate nation for nearly 2000 years, was declared a new sovereign state by an act of the United Nations on May 14, 1948. The nation was literally born in a single day just as God predicted it would be.

#6 A worldwide return of Jews to Israel:

Eze 20:34 I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out.

Isa 43:5 Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west;

Isa 43:6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth...

The Jews had been scattered to virtually every country in the world. But over the years, many felt compelled to return to their ancestral homeland (especially as they experienced persecution). So it started slowly, but bit by bit they began to come from the east, the west, the north and the south returning to Israel. During the past century, millions of Jews returned, from the Middle East; from the west (Europe and the United States); from the north (in Russia); from the south (Ethiopia); and from the ends of the earth, just as it had all been predicted.

No other people has ever gone into exile and survived for thousands of years to come back to re-establish a national homeland. The return of the Jews from exile to the land of Israel was nothing short of a miracle.

#7 The Jews Would return to Jerusalem:

Zec 8:7 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east And from the land of the west;
Zec 8:8 I will bring them back, And they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people And I will be their God, In truth and righteousness.'

Although Israel became a nation in 1948, the Jews did not have control over Jerusalem until 1967 when they recaptured the city during the Six Day War.

#8 Israel would bloom and the fill the world with fruit:

Amo 9:13 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And all the hills shall flow with it.

Amo 9:14 I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.

Israel was a desolate wasteland full of malarial swamps and deserts right up until the beginning of the last century. When the Jews began to return to the area in large numbers, they began to transform the land. Israel has now advanced in their farming and irrigation techniques taking this once barren land and turning it back into extremely productive farmland.

Israel produces 95% of its own food requirements. They export tons of food. They are recognized as a world leader in ag research and development. If you use drip irrigation, you have Israel to thank, because they invented it.

#9 Trees will grow again in the wasteland:

Isa 41:19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, The myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine And the box tree together,
Isa 41:20 That they may see and know, And consider and understand together, That the hand of the LORD has done this, And the Holy One of Israel has created it.

During the past century, more than 200 million trees have been planted in Israel. The replanted forests are flourishing.

One tree that isn't flourishing is the one planted in 2013 by then President Obama as a gift to Israel. The Times of Israel, and Israeli news website Ynet, reported that on the president's departure, the magnolia tree was unceremoniously dug up by the agricultural ministry and taken away to be tested for pests.

According to the Times of Israel, "Plants cannot be brought in from abroad without undergoing a check by the ministry."

There are also predictions that this reborn, last days Israel will be a problem for all the nations of the world. She is called "a cup of trembling." I'd say that is an apt description of modern Israel's political situation.

The rebirth of Israel as a nation is one of the most incredible supernatural displays of God's power, **ever**. Nothing like it has happened before, that a nation would be resurrected after being out of existence for so long. It is a modern prophetic miracle that is still unfolding.

In February of 1979, Pam and I sat in a nearly empty movie theater in San Bernardino and watched *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. It was based on the future prophecies of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It laid down the daily news right next to prophecy to show that what God had predicted in the Bible was coming true before our very eyes.

It was compelling, and it was only a few days later that Pam had rededicated her life to the Lord, and I had prayed to receive Jesus as my Savior.

The study of prophecy from a literal, futurist position, has never been so relevant. Everywhere I go, people are referring to things like the mark of the beast and Armageddon.

Here are a few recent headlines in major newspapers:

- We're Doomed; Why is Hollywood Obsessed with the Apocalypse.
- Strange Obsession with the the End of the World.
- Be Honest: The Apocalypse Seems Kind of Exciting, in a Way.
- Zombies, Power Outages, Global Pandemics: Why TV Is Embracing the Apocalypse.

An article I read stated, "In the last [few] years, on screens big and small, we've seen driverless cars careening into crowds, airplanes falling from the sky, the Hollywood Hills aflame, true believers being sucked into the heavens. The Rapture is upon us, more so than ever, through movies both faith-based, secular, and somewhere in between."

I find it amazing that just when nonbelievers are the most interested in eschatology, many churches are discouraging its emphasis. You know those critics I mentioned, who coined the label, Newspaper Eschatology? ***They are Christians.***

People are interested, fascinated, and more than a little scared. That's because they think of the Apocalypse as the complete and final destruction of the world.

We know that the Apocalypse is the saving of the world as Jesus Christ is unveiled, and returns to rule it.

We can give people the hope that Jesus is coming. And by "coming," I mean **first** that He's coming to resurrect and rapture the church.

The Bible ends on a high note:

Rev 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Rev 22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

When is Jesus coming? "Quickly." It doesn't mean *soon*; it means *suddenly*.

- *Soon* indicates it could be a while.
- *Suddenly* means it could happen at any moment.

John understood this to refer to the rapture, because he adds, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" He knew that Jesus' coming is preceded by at least a seven year Tribulation. No way John was talking about Jesus' Second Coming, knowing the many events that must occur prior to His return to rule the earth.

The only thing that makes sense is that John was praying Jesus would come "suddenly," to resurrect and rapture the church, so that the Great Tribulation could begin.

The imminent, pretribulation, premillennial return of Jesus was important to John. It affected how he lived. He wrote in 1John 3:2-3,

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The hope we will be raptured imminently inspires us to keep ourselves "pure," contributing to the Lord transforming us more-and-more into His image.

Do you have a theme for this year? Instead of resolutions, people are choosing a word, or a phrase, to be their theme each year.

My theme, every year until I'm in Heaven, is going to be, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" **It covers everything.**

Rev 22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
Amen.

You present the Gospel in a context of "grace." It is because you love them with the love of Jesus Christ that you explain to nonbelievers what is happening and what is going to happen.

Prophecy is a great proof of the love of God because it shows that He gives men ample warning to repent and be saved.

Prior to the air strike against Syria, the United States warned Syria's forces.

Prior to the Great Tribulation, and all during it, God issues warnings. When we studied through the Revelation, we called the series, *The Grace of Wrath*, because we see in the wrath of God His final, powerful efforts to reach sinners to save them.

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

"The Spirit... [says], Come." The Holy Spirit's ministry is to reveal and glorify Jesus.

Specifically, He is said to "convict... of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment to come" (John 16:8).

Jesus' death on the Cross exerts a power on the human heart that makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to free your will to see yourself as a sinner. All have sinned, and all need salvation.

Once you become aware you're a sinner, you understand that you fall far short of God's righteous standards. You acknowledge that you cannot, by any amount of good works, save yourself. You must be declared righteous by God - which you are when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. On the Cross, He took your sin upon Himself, and exchanged it with His righteousness. That exchange clothes you for Heaven.

The Holy Spirit performs this operation on your heart in a context of revealing to you that there is judgment coming.

You can either stand before God accepted in Jesus; or you stand on your own, in your own insufficient righteousness, destined for Hell for having rejected God's offer of salvation.

By the way, scholars point out that this is the only prayer by the Holy Spirit that is recorded in God's Word. To me it says a lot that His 'only' prayer is for Jesus to come suddenly.

The Holy Spirit is pre-trib in His eschatology.

“... The bride [says], Come.” The church on earth is the bride of Jesus Christ. The church collectively ought to long for His coming just as a bride awaiting the coming of her bridegroom to marry her.

“... Him who hears [says], Come.” The individual in the church on earth - you and I - ought to, in our personal lives, live in the expectancy of the imminent, pretribulation, premillennial return of Jesus.

“... Let him who thirsts come.” This refers to nonbelievers - who are parched for a drink of the free living water offered to all by Jesus.

But you must come and take; you must receive Him by faith.

We're going to take a few minutes here at the end to reflect upon what the Lord has been teaching us.

If you're a believer... Ask yourself, "Is my hope in the Lord's sudden return? Am I therefore becoming more pure as I expect Him?"

Not a believer? Call upon the Lord to save you, and He will. He's not willing you perish, but that you receive eternal life.