

Deceptive “Prophecies”

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

“¹ Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, ² That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. ³ Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;”

Have you ever been troubled or deceived by prophetic teaching? This passage can give you comfort.

The Dangers of Deceptive “Prophecies” 2:2-3

In the last message from this text, we learned that false prophecies can leave you distraught (“shaken in mind,” “troubled”), vs.2. False prophecies can also leave you deceived, vs.3.

Examples of False Prophecies

We have many examples of fearful people who were fooled by deceptive prophecies. Here are a few.

Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses

William Miller began to study Biblical prophecy in earnest in 1816. “Along the way, however, he encountered many portions of Scripture that were particularly difficult to interpret. His difficulties were compounded by his refusal to use scholarly resources (such as Bible commentaries), lack of formal training and limited linguistic skills.”ⁱ Miller wrote, “I was thus brought, in 1818, . . . to the solemn conclusion that in about twenty-five years from that time all the affairs of our present state would be wound up; that all its pride and power, pomp and vanity, wickedness and oppression, would come to an end; and that, in the place of the kingdoms of this world, the peaceful and long-desired kingdom of the Messiah would be established under the whole heaven. . .”ⁱⁱ Miller’s beliefs drew from a strange phenomenon on May 19, 1780: the sky above the northeastern American colonies was covered in darkness beginning a high noon. (Scientists later determined that this was caused by forest fires on the unsettled western frontier.) Then on November 13, 1833, the world witnessed the Leonid meteor shower. That year, “hundreds of thousands of meteors per hour” were seen.ⁱⁱⁱ Miller concluded that these two events together were a

fulfillment of Matthew 24:29 (see below). In what later became known as “The Great Disappointment” Miller prophesied, “I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for his coming. And I am fully convinced that some time between March 21st, 1843 and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish method of computation of time, Christ will come and bring all his saints with him; and that then he will reward every man as his work shall be.”^{iv} When the Lord did not return on these dates, Miller’s followers ultimately divided into two main groups: the Seventh Day Adventists and the “Russelites” (followers of Charles Taze Russell) or “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Miller’s followers numbered about 500,000. Today, the Seventh Day Adventist Church numbers about 19 million. Jehovah’s Witnesses number about 8 million.

Unitarians

These false prophetic teachings have deceived many, including truly brilliant people. “Joseph Priestley, schoolmaster, scientist, and Presbyterian minister. . . Discoverer of oxygen, ammonia, carbon monoxide, and other gases, Priestley was convinced that ‘everything looks like the approach of that dismal catastrophe,’ the end of the world. On the basis of revelation and prophecy, he had discerned evidence of the coming end in the rebellion of England’s American colonies, and would so again in the French Revolution, which presented ‘a near view of the millennium.’ Taken together, the two revolutions looked like the inauguration of the state of universal happiness and peace ‘distinctly foretold in many prophecies delivered more than two thousand years ago.’ Priestley helped found the Unitarian society in 1791 [in Great Britain] . . .”^v Hoodwinked by deceptive “prophecies” this brilliant man helped to usher the ancient heresy of Unitarianism into Great Britain. During World War I, there were about 50,000 Unitarians in that country.

Misuse of Matthew 24:32-34

Authors such as Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye and William T. James have subscribed to a faulty interpretation of the springing forth of the fig tree in Matthew 24:32. To them it now represents^{vi} the rebirth of modern day Israel on May 14, 1948.^{vii} As recently as this past Tuesday, October 31, 2017 prophetic teacher, Jack Van Impe taught the same thing.^{viii} He insists that Hosea 9:10, and Joel 1:7 prove his interpretation to be true. Then, since “this generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled,” all these prophetic teachers had to do was calculate the length of a Biblical “generation” from that point. Using this interpretation of Israel as the blossoming fig tree, Edgar

Whisenant, a NASA engineer, authored “88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988.” Whisenant wrote, “Israel is the blooming fig tree, (Jer. 24:4-8) and the last generation will end 40 wicked Gentile years later on 14 May 1988.”^{ix} Since Christ did not return as promised in 1988, false teachers have predicted 1998 and then 2008. More recently, Michael Evans has used Psalm 90:10 to estimate that a “Biblical generation” is actually seventy to eighty years, so the Lord will come back between 2018 and 2028.^x It would not be an overstatement to say that millions of fearful people have been fooled by this deceptive approach to prophecy.

Our Defense against Deceptive “Prophecies”

In the last message on this text, we learned of our assurance and defense against this deception.

- **Our assurance is based on our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, 1:11-2:1.** As we have learned, this passage emphasizes “our God,” “our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “our gathering to Him.”
- **Our assurance is based on understanding what the Bible actually says about the Revelation (Second Coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2:3**

When Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonian believers, he wrote, “**Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;***” It would be impossible to counter all of the errors of deceptive “prophecies” in a single message. But here are two examples.

The 1000 Year Millennium

There are those who teach that the 1000 year millennium described in Revelation 20 is merely symbolic. The duration of Christ’s 1000 year reign is clearly expressed 6 times in the timetable in Revelation 20:1-7. Yet there are those who say that these references to “one thousand years” simply do not mean 1000 years, but something else. They do not agree as to what the “something else” means.

Matthew 24-25

This extended teaching by Jesus Christ is referred to as “the Olivet Discourse.” Jesus had taught that the temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed. So, Matthew 24:3 records that His disciples asked him two questions: “**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?" In these two chapters, Jesus answered these two questions. Scholars disagree as to when the first answer ends and the second begins. But certain verses stand out as referring to the end time (rather than the fall of Jerusalem). **"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be"** (Matthew 24:21). This is clearly referring to the great tribulation in the end time – a time of trouble unlike any other time in world history. If we begin with that verse, and continue reading, we find references in Matthew 24:23-34 to

- False messiahs and false prophets, including "secret visions," 23-26
- An unmistakable description of the Second Coming of Christ, 27
- A series of events described in verses 29-31

"²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: ³⁰ And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

At this point in the text, Matthew records a parable that Jesus taught to help His disciples apply this teaching: **"³² Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh: ³³ So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors. ³⁴ Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."**

Jesus compared the season in which mankind would see "all these things" (verse 23-34) with a season in which the branches of trees spring forth. Each new Spring is a reminder of the coming Day of the Lord.

This parable places the emphasis on the springing forth of the tree, not on its specific identification as a fig tree. This is even more evident in Luke 21, where the same events are described. There we find the same parable in Luke 21:29-32: **"²⁹ And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; ³⁰ When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.**

³¹ So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom

of God is nigh at hand. ³² Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.”

Though Hosea 9:10 and Joel 1:7 use the illustration of a fig tree, these are not “Biblical types” of Israel. In fact, there would be more evidence to insist that Israel is like an olive tree (Hosea 14:5-6, Romans 11:17, 24). But those who insist that the parable of the fig tree refers to the establishment of Israel in 1948 are teaching prophecy deceptively. To further insist that Christ must return within one generation of that date deepens the deception. Remember this when the deceptive prophets start insisting that Christ must return between 2018 and 2028.

Applications

What does 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 mean to us? How should we apply it?

- **Take hold of the assurance that is based on your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.** This assurance was described by Peter in 1 Peter 3:18: **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:”** God gives you assurance through Gospel grace. The Righteous Christ suffered for unrighteous sinners **“that He might bring us to God.”** He was put to death for your sins, but He rose again by the power of the Holy Spirit
- **Put aside your fears about the future by remembering your personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- **Remember that there are those who will seek to shake you up with sneaky “prophetic” teaching.** They will seek to deceive you and make you distraught.
- **Slowly and carefully read and re-read, study and re-study each prophetic passage.** Remember to take each passage as a whole unit. Watch out for those who skip over phrases in a mad dash to “prove” their deceptive “prophecies.”

A Brief Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

Doctrine: Based on the Coming of *our* Lord Jesus Christ

- {Including} *our* gathering to Him

>> {Appeal} We beseech you

- Do not be quickly shaken in your minds
- Do not be troubled

- >> {Deceitful Attack} by spirit [prophetic revelation], teaching, or false letter stating that the Day of the Lord had already come
- >> {Doctrinal defense} That Day shall not come unless first
 - Comes the apostasy “the falling away”
 - Comes the man of sin (“lawlessness”)
 - (These two are amplified in verses 4-11 and applied in verse 12)

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ⁱⁱ Richard Abanes, *End-Time Visions, the Road to Armageddon?*, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998, p. 214.

ⁱⁱ Paul A. Gordon, *William Mller [sic] Preparing to Preach*, accessed at

<http://www.adventistheritage.org/article/50/resources/pioneer-stories/william-mller-preparing-to-preach>

ⁱⁱⁱ Eleanor Imster, *Leonid Meteor Shower 1833*, EarthSky, accessed at <http://earthsky.org/todays-image/leonid-meteor-shower-1833>

^{iv} Seventh Day Adventists, accessed at <http://bibleprobe.com/SDA.htm>

^v Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses, Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1999. p. 105 citing Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, and M.H. Abrams, *English Romanticism* in Northrop Frye, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered* (New York, 1963), 36

^{vi} LaHaye originally held that the blossoming fig tree represented the beginning of World War I. See Abanes, p.294

^{vii} Abanes, p. 294

^{viii} Jack Van Impe, broadcast of *Jack Van Impe Presents: Earthquakes That Will End the World, October 31, 2017* accessed on November 2, 2017 at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=iyJ1LR7Q9dE> beginning at 6:00.

^{ix} Edgar C. Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988*, accessed at

<http://charlescoty.com/user/88%20Reasons%20Why%20the%20Rapture%20Will%20Be%20in%201988.pdf>

^x Abanes, p.98, citing Michael D. Evans, *Seven Years of Shaking: A Vision* (Euless, TX: Mike Evans Ministry, 1994), 158.