

For centuries there have been innumerable theories as to when and how the world might end. ... Here are some highlights gleaned from some of the most famous mistaken predictions:

In 960 Bernard of Thuringia... (a German theologian)... calculated 992 as the most likely year for the world's end. As the time approached... panic was widespread.

German astrologer (Johann Stoffler) predicted an overwhelming flood on February 20, 1524. ... Believers started constructing arks. One man is said to have been trampled to death by a mob attempting to board his specially built vessel. ... When nothing happened... the calculations were revised and a new date given—1588. ... Obviously... that year also passed without any unusual rainfall.

Solomon Eccles was jailed in London's Bridewell Prison in 1665 for striding through Smithfield Market... carrying a pan of blazing sulfur on his head, and proclaiming doom and destruction. Although the end of the world did not follow... the Great Fire of London did... in 1666.

One of the most famous predicted failures was by William Miller. ... Miller seemed an unlikely striker of panic. He tended a farm in Vermont... fought in the War of 1812... and served as a justice of the peace. His religious life... however... had not been so steady.

Early in life... Miller followed Deism... the rationalistic faith of many American intellectuals (and several founding fathers). He converted to Christianity in 1816... then began assiduous study of the Scriptures. He

found the prophecies of Daniel especially compelling and used a few key numbers from the text to calculate the date for Christ's return - 1843.

Miller arrived at this conclusion not long after his conversion... but he didn't tell anyone about it until 1831. Soon invitations to speak began to pour in... and Miller became a local phenomenon. He gained wider audience in 1838 by publishing Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ... About the Year 1843 and partnering with pastor Joshua V. Himes... who would serve as his publicist. An estimated 50,000 people took the message to heart quit their jobs... gave away their belongings... and prepared to meet their maker. ... Hundreds of thousands more... took a more casual belief... as they more calmly turned an eye to the skies.

As the title of Miller's book indicates... he had not pinpointed a date for the apocalypse. Pressed for more specificity... he could only offer the span March 21, 1843 to March 21, 1844 - the beginning and end of the Hebrew year. Unfortunately... March 1844 saw no lions lying down with lambs.

Miller announced that he must have erred... but one of his followers dipped back into the Scriptures to adjust the calculations. After the "tarrying time" cited in Habakkuk 2:3 and Leviticus 25:9 was factored in... October 22, 1844... got the nod. Once again... nothing happened.

Interestingly... Miller's followers stayed together... and the Millerites focused on proper food and diet. William Miller invented the graham cracker... as an attempt to create the perfect food. (It was an amazing health food for the time)... The Millerites eventually morphed into Seventh Day Adventists... under its future leaders like Mary Baker Eddy.

After studying both the Bible and the mystical messages of the Great Pyramid... in 1874 Charles Taze Russell... founder of the sect that became Jehovah's Witnesses... concluded that the Second Coming had already taken place. He declared that people had 40 years... or until 1914... to enter his faith or be destroyed. Later he modified the date to "very soon after 1914."

Herbert W. Armstrong... publisher of the magazine "The Plain Truth," declared that January 7, 1972... was undoubtedly the date to watch. The utter failure of his prediction did not diminish his zeal.

These famous failures at predicting Christ's return...(and many others)... have... (in the minds of numerous Believers)... **dulled** their interest in studying Bible passages that deal with the end times. *"Who wants to associate themselves with the "end-of-the-world crazies?!" ... My pastor... when I was in college... had no interest at all in matters of the end times. He said that he had enough to do... with Bible passages that are very clear... without entering the arguments over less certain Bible passages.*

However... there are tremendous blessings... and encouragements... that I believe (those who forsake end-time matters) are missing. (As long as we don't set dates.) ... Revelation is the only book of the Bible that comes with a promise of blessing... for those who study it. ... I will try to show you some of these blessings and encouragements today... as we open a vital passage for end-time understanding. Jesus gave an essential piece of the puzzle as He concluded His scathing rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees... less than a week before they would hand Him over to the Romans to be crucified.

As Jesus and His disciples walked away from the temple and the Jewish leaders... the conversation about end-times continued. It carried over into Matthew 24 (which is next week's passage)... and it is known as the Olivet Discourse. It is **all about** the end-times.

So today and next week we will be dealing with this controversial... yet blessing-filled topic of end-times. But don't worry – I will not set any day or year... as a prediction of Christ's return.

From the start of Matthew 23... we have seen (in last week's and the week before's messages) Jesus pronounce THUNDEROUSLY harsh judgments against Israel's leaders. No where can we find Jesus use more scathing language... as He denounced the rejectors of God's prophesied Kingdom... and the prophesied Messiah.

As Jesus concludes His seven pronounced woes against Jerusalem and it's leaders... we see an unrelenting judgment on these obstinate people. But He finishes it with a very tempered **compassion**. ... While his judgment is sure... this was not what Jesus desired. He would much rather that they would repent of their sin and come to Him. Without any hesitation... Jesus would have gladly gathered them and protected them like a hen does her chicks. But that was not what they wanted. ... He is very much in the spirit of Ezekiel... when he wrote...

Ezekiel 33:11 (ESV)

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Notice this same kind of compassion that Jesus expressed... at the very end of His conversation with the religious leaders.

Matthew 23:37

These final public words of Jesus to his contemporaries strike a note of unspeakable sadness at their unwillingness to respond to his motherly concern.

The image of the mother bird gathering and covering her brood is a familiar one. Moses used it in his farewell sermon (Deut 32:11). It is a picture of love... tender care... and a willingness to die to protect others. Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God's wings... and when a Jewish person converted a Gentile... he or she brought that Gentile "under the wings of God's presence."

Jesus died for the sins of the world... including the nation of Israel...

John 1:11 (ESV)

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

Here is J Vernon McGee on this matter...

Jerusalem rejected Him in His so-called triumphal entry, and He has rejected Jerusalem, but now He weeps over this city. Yes, He denounced them, but He does love them. And knowing the judgment which must come, He weeps.

The statement was made in Dwight L. Moody's day that he was the only man living who should preach on hell because he did it with such compassion. And certainly our Lord pronounced these woes with a heart that was breaking. You remember that some of the people thought he was Jeremiah because, although Jeremiah gave the strongest denunciation in the Old Testament, he wept over it. I am of

the opinion that we today should not make denunciations unless we are personally moved by them.

Jesus was deeply moved for His people and for His city... in spite of the shameful manner in which its leaders had treated Him... and in spite of the horrible sufferings that He knew still lie ahead. ... Christians today must ponder their Lord's compassion for the Jewish people... who... *although in a day or so...* they would oversee His torture and death... they were a lost people... And they were about to experience their own horrific judgment. An arrogant attitude toward those who are lost... is always despicable... whether or not they treat us badly.

In His mind's eye the Lord could see the coming siege. He could see the hills around the city black with crosses and on every cross a Jew. And it broke His heart.

The siege of Jerusalem (which Jesus looked into the future – some 40 years and saw)... was one of the most HORRORIFIC that you'll find anywhere in history. The Romans first systematically subdued Galilee in a series of fierce battles... at times massacring all the inhabitants of a city... especially if it had put up a particularly stubborn defense. Meanwhile in Jerusalem... instead of preparing for the coming siege by uniting under a common leader... various factions savagely fought one another... in great panic.

The state of anarchy was known to the Roman general Vespasian. He simply bided his time... allowing the Jews to weaken themselves... with all this internal strife.

Inside the walls of Jerusalem... there were terrible shortages of food. Ruffian Jews were merciless against their fellow Jews... in their hunt for food. They seized people they suspected of concealing food and tortured them... demanding they disclose secrets they often did not have... regarding hidden food stashes. Natural affection and generous sentiment vanished before the plague of hunger. People ate filth and some even became cannibals and devoured their own children. A measure of wheat was worth its weight in gold.

Weeks later the Roman General Titus came and took charge of the campaign. Then the Romans finally broke down the walls of Jerusalem and entered the already devastated and emaciated city.

When the siege was all over... the number of those who had been slain... or who had died of famine... has been estimated at 1,300,000. The tallest and strongest-looking of the captives... were selected to grace Titus's triumphal return to Rome. But a vast number... including the old and the sick... were put to death. Thousands were dispatched to the mines in various parts of the empire... or distributed among the provinces for the amusement of the populace in the arenas.

Thus Jerusalem fell. ... Foreseeing this very event in all its horror... Jesus lamented with great compassion for them.

Matthew 23:38

"Your house" probably means both the temple and the city... both of which would be destroyed in a.d. 70 by the invading Roman armies. In the Old Testament... the temple was called God's house. ... Perhaps it is called

“*your house*” here to declare that God’s presence has **exited** it. It is the fulfillment of 2 Chronicles 7:20.

2 Chronicles 7:20 (ESV)

then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you, and this house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

Next Jesus said something... which I believe is a key that unlocks so many end-times prophecies. Look what He says in verse 39...

Matthew 23:39

Not only were the religious rulers in shock... but His apostles must have been in total shock, also. ...This seemed to them a strange turn of events. They expected Him to establish the Kingdom... with Jerusalem as the capital. ... But now He says that their house is to be left desolate... and that they will not see Him again until they say: "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" ... You see... although He is on His way to the Cross at this time... He gives them the assurance that He will return -- and that will be His **TRUE** triumphal entry!

Obviously... the Kingdom is going to be postponed. He tells His disciples that He will not establish the kingdom on earth at this time... but that He will come **again** to establish it. That means that the Kingdom they were expecting is postponed... doesn't it? ...The apostles were surprised and disappointed at the idea of a postponement... so as Jesus and His men leave the Temple... they come to Him with three questions... which we will see next week in the Olivet Discourse.

"*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" ... This is a quotation from Psalm 118:26... (that great messianic psalm that was quoted by the crowds several days earlier... when Jesus entered Jerusalem.) The crowds had used those words on Palm Sunday... declaring Him to be the promised Messiah. It is a Messianic greeting that everyone recognized. When the Jewish people pronounce Jesus as the Messiah – (like they did on the first Palm Sunday)... THAT is when Jesus will return... but not until the Jewish nation and its leaders recognize that the One they rejected... truly is their promised Messiah. ... This will (one day) happen... Folks! It will mean the Jewish acceptance of the Messiahship of Jesus. Scripture is clear about it... and this is a key verse that declares it.

Here are a few other verses that also speak of their future confession... which will bring Christ's return...

Jeremiah 3:11-18

In verses 14-18... Jeremiah describes some of the blessings that will come with Christ's 2nd coming (His return.) ... Once He fully establishes His Messianic Kingdom... it will be a time of tremendous blessing and restoration for the Jewish people. ... BUT... those blessings are conditioned by verse 13. ... They must acknowledge... or confess one specific rebellious act – which caused them to be scattered among the world's nations.

Another passage is found in Zechariah. ... Zechariah chapters 12-14 are a single prophetic theme. Chapter 13 is about a national cleansing from their sin. Chapter 14 tells about the 2nd Coming and the establishment of the full Kingdom. Guess what chapter twelve speaks of... ... it is what the

cleansing of Israel... and the 2nd coming are CONDITIONED on. Look with me at Zechariah 12:10...

Zechariah 12:10

Isn't that amazing...!? Before Israel will receive her cleansing of sin... and before Messiah will return to establish His kingdom... Israel must first look on Him Who they have pierced... and mourn for Him... as one mourns over the loss of their first-born child. ... How do grieving parents typically mourn...? *“Oh if I could only have him back... If I could only hold them in my arms once again... I sure wish that I had **another** chance to be with him...”*

Israel will one day plead for Christ's return. And that will happen before He **does** come back.

One more... and this one will astound you! ... (Prophecy is so accurately fulfilled – and that ought to encourage you... that we worship the right God!)

Hosea 5:15

God said that He is going back to His place. Where is God's place...? – It's Heaven... isn't it. ... God is going to return to Heaven. ... (In order to return to some place... you must first leave.) ... Now... the question is... Do you ever know of a time... when God left Heaven...? ... Where did He go...? He came to earth as God incarnate – Jesus! ... Then (just as Hosea prophesied) ...because a specific offense was committed against Him... (and what was that...? They rejected His Messiahship)... He left... and He will not return until they acknowledge their offense.

Just as the Jewish leadership led the nation to reject the Messiahship of Jesus (which we have been seeing since Matthew chapter 12...) Jewish leadership must one day lead the nation to accept His Messiahship. They must confess their national sin... and then plead for the Messiah to return.

This truth is what motivates Satan to wage his war against the Jews down through the centuries. Satan is well aware of this. Anti-Semitism has been fierce throughout history... but Boy! Will it ever increase during the Tribulation. You see... Satan knows that once Jesus returns... His freedom ends. ... Knowing that Jesus doesn't come back until the Jewish leaders beg Him to return... Satan is doing (and will do)... all that he can to utterly destroy the Jews. Satan knows that his time is short... and any form of Anti-Semitism that we see today is part of the satanic strategy to avoid the second-coming of Christ.

Revelation 12 shows that Satan's attacks against the Jews will greatly intensify during the second half of the Tribulation. The first five verses summarize the whole life of Messiah... from just before His birth... all the way to His ascension. Israel is pictured as a woman who gives birth to the Messiah... while Satan (pictured as a great red dragon) waits to destroy the Messiah. But the Messiah survives the murderous attempts of the dragon. The child... who will one day rule the nations with a rod of iron... ascended to Heaven.

Revelation 12:1-5

After this summary about Christ's first-coming... John's revelation moves forward to the middle of the tribulation... with verse six. The woman who gave birth to the Messiah... (and who's that? – Israel... the Jews)... will

flee to the wilderness to find special protection from God. She will have this protection for 3 ½ years... until she will no longer need it... (because the Tribulation is finally over.) This happens during the 2nd half of the tribulation.

Revelation 12:6

During the second half of the Tribulation God will supernaturally bring the Jews... who will be ESPECIALLY persecuted... to a safe place in the wilderness... and He is going to supernaturally protect and provide them with all their needs. Satan will not be able to get to them. God's hand will be upon them.

The next several verses describe the special intense persecution that causes the Jews to flee to this wilderness place for protection.

Revelation 12:7-17

Is Revelation the only place in the Bible... where we find prophecy about this particular fleeing into the wilderness... and God's supernatural protection of them...? ... No.

We do not need to go any further than our passage of study next week... Matthew 24. I want you to see (when we come to it)... that this passage is about this event we just read about in Revelation 12.

Matthew 24:15

Once you see the Anti-Christ break his covenant with Israel... and walk into their Temple and demand to be worshipped as God... then this is what you are to do... The instant you realize what just happened – do not delay...
Go!

Matthew 24:16-27

These are instructions for the Jews who will be saved because of the two special witnesses that Revelation 11 describes. A lot of Jews will place their faith in Jesus because of these powerful prophets. There will also be 144,000 Jewish evangelists (144,000 Billy Grahams)... according to Revelation chapter 7. So there is going to be **masses** of Jewish people coming to the Lord through the Tribulation. And Matthew 24 is a passage they will key-in on. This is for them!

I don't know about you... but I am tremendously encouraged by a God who does not give up on such an obstinate people who turn their back on Him! God is so sovereign! He has it all worked out for bringing His people back to Himself. This is grace! Tremendous grace! Our God is full of mercy and grace. (Seeing how He shows it to the Jews... do you think that He has this same kind of mercy for you...? Oh! You bet He does!)

Look with me at Hosea 5:15... again...

Hosea 5:15 (ESV)

I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

Earlier... I did not continue reading. But Hosea goes on (in the very next verses) to prophesy that the Jewish nation **will** one day... very suddenly acknowledge their guilt and return to Him. (There is going to be a swift national regeneration of Israel.)

Hosea 6:1-3 (ESV)

"Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;

his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”

What could possibly cause such a sudden and total turn-around? The Jewish leadership will come to the realization of their national sin and repent from it.

There are Scriptures that suggest that one of the final stages of the Armageddon campaign is when the Anti-Christ and his armies surround the Jews - at their place of protection... and Satan will threaten to crush them. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum uses Jeremiah 49:13-14 to show this. (He may be right!)

If this is true... then it is not hard to believe that the leaders of Israel will finally recognize **why** the Tribulation has fallen on them. They will realize that they need Messiah Jesus' help... and they cry out to Him. Remember they will also have their study of Scripture and seeing how it correlates with world events... They will also have the two witnesses and the 144,000 evangelists. But they will call on the Lord – AND then Jesus will return!

Jesus **will** come back as the reigning Lord... and every knee **will** bow (Phil 2:9-11). The question is... when Jesus returns... will you see Him coming as your consuming Judge or your welcomed King?

There is nothing in His unchanging character that rejoices when a person is punished. Instead, there is rejoicing in heaven over each sinner who repents and enters the kingdom of heaven (Luke 15:7). It is comforting and reassuring to know that Jesus opens His arms and welcomes us into his family. He has waited patiently for His Own people (the Jews) to return to Him. He has not given up on them. Neither has He given up on you.

No one knows us like Jesus. He knows our hearts as surely as He knew the hearts of the Jewish leaders who rejected His Messiahship. He knows those who truly belong to him—from the inside out.

As we fully comprehend that He knows our most private thoughts... we realize that we... too... stand in need of repentance.

We seek our own way... we want to do those things that further our own personal agendas... and we want people to look at us and remark about how wonderful we are. ... Therefore... like the Pharisees... we deserve Christ's terse analysis of our sinful condition and the punishment that He pronounced on them.

Whether we are terrified by the judgment imposed on those who reject the work and person of Jesus Christ... or overwhelmed by His love and patient urging... turn to Him. ... Give your life completely over to Him... and ask Him to make you His Own.