



NG Study Guide: “Matt. 24:3-35 Prophecy Update “Motivation not Speculation” [12.31.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Prophecy is evidence of God’s inspiration of the Bible. One-third of the Bible relates to prophecy. And two-thirds of the prophecies have been fulfilled in connection with Jesus’ First Coming. The remaining third shall be fulfilled in connection with the Second Coming. The purpose of prophecy is motivation not speculation. Understanding the times and the prophecies should be a source of hope that produces perseverance, purity, preparation, and proclamation of the gospel.

How do recent events align with Bible prophecy? What might it reveal about the 2nd Coming of Christ? And how should the thought of Christ’s return impact your life?

I. The return of Israel in the Promised Land: Israel is God’s timepiece [Matt. 24:3-35]

Jesus’ Olivet Discourse [Matt. 24-25] is a response to the disciples’ questions about the sign of His Second Coming and the end of this age [3]. Jesus said there would be events that preceded His return, like birth pangs [8]. These include false messiahs [4-5] (e.g. Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones, David Koresh), and wars, rumors of wars, and nation against nation [6-7]. In the 20th Century we had for the first time, World Wars and more than 50 million deaths in WWII alone. This was unheard of in human history. But the key sign would be the return of Israel in the land [32-35]. Israel is described as a fig tree [Jer. 24:10, Is. 43:5-7], and the restoration of Israel in the Promised Land in May, 1948 is critical to prophecy [Ezek. 37]. Jesus’ declared, “I say to you this generation will by no means pass away [34]. Who is “this generation”? The most likely answers are, the Jews, or the generation alive at the return of Israel to the land. In the latter scenario, it is curious that a generation in the Bible is generally up to 80 years. In that case, we would add 80 years to 1948 and have a clue that by 2028 Christ will return. In the case of the Jews, God has been faithful to preserve his people despite unparalleled efforts to destroy them.

II. Conflict in the Mid-East that sets the stage for a 7-yr. peace treaty brokered by the Antichrist, and includes provision for Israel to rebuild the Temple [Dan. 9:27, 2Th. 2:4, Ezek. 42:20] There will be sufficient tension in the region to stir other nations to seek to create peace. The conflict in the region between Israel and the Palestinian Authority [PA] has existed for decades, and there has been international discussion of a two-state solution. Nevertheless, the PA has vowed to destroy Israel and has never recognized Israel's right to exist as a Nation-state.

Trump officially recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and orders embassy move for US [12.8.17 Fox News] President Trump formally recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying it's time to "acknowledge the obvious" as he ordered the State Department to begin moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The move could inflame tensions across the Middle East. "This is nothing more or less than a recognition of reality," Trump said. "It is also the right thing to do. It's something that has to be done."

Palestinians Pushing UN Security Council to Reverse US Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital [12.14.17 Reuters] The Palestinians are pushing the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to demand that the US reverse its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. At an emergency session of the UNSC on Friday convened by eight of the council's 15 members, 14 member states condemned the US move.

Netanyahu: Palestinians must face reality over Jerusalem [12.14.17 Radio New Zealand] Palestinians must "get to grips with" the reality that Jerusalem is Israel's capital in order to move towards peace, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says. Mr. Netanyahu spoke as protests continued in the Muslim and Arab world at US President Donald Trump's announcement that the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital. The prime minister said Jerusalem had been the capital of Israel for 3,000 years and had "never been the capital of any other people". "You can read it in a very fine book - it's called the Bible," he said. "You can read it after the Bible. You can hear it in the history of Jewish communities throughout our diaspora... Where else is the capital of Israel, but in Jerusalem?"

Trump's Jerusalem declaration sparks talk of 3rd Temple [12.14.17 United Temple Movement] While Muslims jeer, Israelis cheer President Trump's Jerusalem declaration, prompting Jewish religious activists to suggest building the Third Temple is closer to reality than ever before. "What he did ... was an enormous step in bringing the Temple," said Asaf Fried, official spokesman for the United Temple Movement, an association of organizations working towards making the Third Temple a reality. He added, "This necessarily had to come from a non-Jew in order to bring them into the process, so they will be able to take their part in the Temple." Fried sees Trump's role similar to the one played by Cyrus, the Persian king who ended the Babylonian exile and helped build the Second Jewish Temple. "There have been amazing advances towards bringing the Temple this year. It was clear that Trump was part of that process, guided by Hashem (God)," Fried declared.

III. Revived Roman Empire: Daniel 2; 7:23-25 describe a world power in Europe from the area previously within the Roman Empire. Ten leaders will grant sovereign authority to a charismatic powerful leader who is later revealed to be the Antichrist. Current pressure to consolidate European power continues despite Britain's exit from the EU:

EU must become a United States of Europe by 2025, says Angela Merkel's planned coalition partner Martin Schulz [12.8.17 The Independent of London]

The leader of Germany's SPD party has said he wants to establish a United States of Europe by 2025. Martin Schulz, a former European Parliament president, said a convention should be set up to create a new constitution for Europe and that any country that did not adopt it should automatically be kicked out of the EU. His comments come as he seeks permission of his SPD party to enter coalition talks with Angela Merkel, who has been unable to form a government without his support following elections in September. "I want a new constitutional treaty to establish the United States of Europe. A Europe that is no threat to its member states, but a beneficial addition," he said. "A convention shall draft this treaty in close cooperation with the civil society and the people. Its results will then be submitted to all member states. Any state that won't ratify this treaty will automatically leave the EU." Mr. Schulz was speaking at the SPD's convention in Berlin, where delegates will vote on whether to start coalition talks.

EU takes step toward joint army [11.13.17 NY Times]

The vast majority of EU states have agreed to create what some have called the nucleus of a joint army. Twenty three out of 28 EU states signed the declaration in Brussels on Monday (13 November), prior to making a legally binding pledge at an EU summit next month. British firms stand to lose EU defense contracts if UK stays out. Britain, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, and Portugal stayed out. But some of them, such as Ireland, indicated they might join in time for the summit. Britain, which is leaving the EU, could also take part under special conditions. EU foreign relations chief Federica Mogherini called the signing ceremony an “emotional moment”. She said that, from the point of view of her native Italy, the decision had “dismantled the ghosts of the past” and showed that “the taboo concerning EU defense could be broken”. She also said she hoped “this could be an inspiration for other areas of [EU] integration”.

IV. The Gog-Magog War: Ezek. 38-39 - Israel surrounded by coalition of

nations led by Russia (Magog, Meshech & Tubal), Iran (Persia), Turkey & Syria (Beth-togarmah), Libya (Put) [Ezek. 38:1-6]:

Russia and Iran’s growing influence in Middle-East region [Newsweek 10.11.17]

Syria has been in a civil war since 2011. Russia and Iran have supported President Bashar al-Assad, and the U.S has backed Kurdish and Arab forces seeking to overthrow Assad’s regime that has used chemical weapons against its own citizens. Both sides have worked effectively to remove Islamic State [IS] from northern Syria. As the Assad regime has survived IS and the civil war, Russian and Iranian regional influence has grown.

Israel vows to destroy Iranian positions within 40 km of Syrian border [1 1.29.17 Al Jarida]

Kuwaiti newspaper *Al Jarida* revealed on Sunday that an Israeli source disclosed a promise from Jerusalem to destroy all Iranian facilities within 40 kilometers (25 miles) of Israel’s Golan Heights. The source, who remains unnamed, said that during Syrian President Bashar Assad’s surprise visit to Russia last week, Assad gave Russian Premier Vladimir Putin a message for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: Damascus will agree to a demilitarized zone of up to 40 kilometers from the border in the Golan Heights as part of a comprehensive agreement between the two countries, but only if Israel does not work to remove Assad’s regime from power.

V. False Teachers and Apostate Christians [Mt. 24:11-12, 2Tim. 3:1-7]

Church of Sweden to stop referring to God as ‘He’ or ‘Lord’ [11.30.17 Sweden’s TT News Agency]

The Church of Sweden is urging its clergy to use gender-neutral language when referring to the supreme deity, refraining from using terms such as “Lord” and “he” in favor of the less specific “God.” The move is one of several taken by the national Evangelical Lutheran church in updating a 31-year-old handbook setting out how services should be conducted in terms of language, liturgy, hymns and other aspects. A former state church, the church has 6.1 million baptized members in a country of 10 million. It is headed by a woman, who told Sweden’s TT news agency that a more inclusive language had been discussed as early as the 1986 conference.

Vi. Other World Events to Watch

A. The gospel shall be proclaimed to all nations: Matt. 24:14 “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” Christ shall return once the gospel message has been proclaimed in the whole world, to all nations. The Greek term *ethnos* is translated “nations” but more accurately refers to people groups rather than Nation-states. For example, Nigeria is one nation but consists of 500+ people groups.

The gospel is now being presented in more than 900 languages and dialects; and an estimated 95% of the world’s population has access to the gospel message [Joshua Project 12.16.17]. There’s an estimated 6,000 unreached people groups (less than 2-5% Christian pop.) and 3,000 unengaged (no missionaries, outreach, church, or gospel in native tongue). The International Missions Board of Southern Baptist Conference [IMB] estimates the mission can be accomplished by 2025.

B. Persecution of Christians [Mt. 24:9-10] [Open Doors USA]

Persecution of Christians globally is monitored by Open Doors. The top 10 places where persecution occurs are: North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Eretria. One in twelve Christians on the planet face high, very high, or extreme persecution including loss of life, torture, loss of liberty, violent attack, destruction of homes and churches. The Christian population in Iraq alone plummeted from over 1.5 million to an estimated 250,000 in about the last decade.

Conclusion: What should we do with this information?

The purpose of biblical prophecy is not to stir speculation, but to motivate preparation to conform your life to Christ. Jesus refused to give “the time” of His Coming, but instead focused on how we should live until His return [Matt.24-25, Ac. 1:6-8]. **In essence, understanding prophecy and the times should be a source of hope that produces perseverance, purity, preparation, and proclamation of the gospel [1Jn. 3:1-3].**

The Bible describes an event called the Rapture [1Th. 4:13-18] where Christ gathers His Church, all believers from Pentecost to the Rapture. We believe the Rapture occurs prior to and possibly near His Second Coming, however it can happen at any time [Mt. 24:32-33, 25:13]. Since Christ’s return is sooner than it’s ever been there should be an urgency to love God supremely, love our neighbors as ourselves, to know Him and make Him known [Matt. 22:37-39, 28:18-20].

Study Guide Qs

1. *Why are Biblical prophecy and current events important to you?*

2. *How is fulfilled prophecy regarding Christ’s First Coming a source of hope to you? How does that help produce perseverance while waiting for His return?*

3. *What are some questions that you have about Bible prophecy?*

4. *What changes would you like to make as you reflect upon Christ’s Second Coming?*

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

Here are some recommended books on the subject of Biblical prophecy for those who want to go deeper in their studies:

1. *Footsteps of the Messiah* by Arnold Fruchtenbaum
2. *Things to Come* by J. Dwight Pentecost
3. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* by John Walvood

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

As you talk with neighbors about their holiday experiences, share your recent Christmas spiritual experiences with them.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. **The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.