



When the Experts Get It Wrong

The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" (Luke 7:18-19)

Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? (John 7:40-41)

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21)

And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. (Luke 24:19-21)

Why did so few of God's people recognize the Messiah at His First Coming? In spite of having all the Scriptures, and unlike His Second Coming, in spite of having been given through the Prophet Daniel the specific time of His arrival (and many were, therefore, actually looking for Him at that time), and in spite of His doing things in their presence which only the Messiah could do, most would reject Him. As indicated in the Scriptures above, it was not just religious leaders or the people in general who were seemingly blind to what took place before their very eyes, but even Christ's disciples and John the Baptist admitted that things were not what they had expected. One of the biggest reasons was erroneous teachings about the Messiah, particularly a very rigid interpretation of prophecy. The events of Christ's First Coming are characterized as contradicting the popular notions of what was generally anticipated would take place

when the Messiah finally came. They so rigidly clung to their own expectations of how prophecy would be fulfilled, they could not recognize when those very prophecies were actually *being* fulfilled. And I believe the same pattern is repeating itself today among a great many of those who are supposed to be anticipating most His Second Coming.

To be sure, the answer to why so many could not understand the fulfillment of Scripture at Christ's First Coming ultimately has more to do with *sin* and the *heart* than *logic* and the *brain*. But there was also an overall problem among God's people back then which I believe we are seeing repeated today: eschatology. This is the fancy seminary term to describe the study and teaching of the End Times.

For quite a while leading up to His First Coming, God's people had been oppressed and ruled by various other nations, and in particular at that time by Rome. One of the things which happened gradually at first and picked up significant momentum was a shift in the way the Scriptures were studied when it came to the anticipated arrival of the Messiah. Whereas there were two main pictures of the Messiah provided in the Old Testament, which Hebrew scholars had long identified as the "Suffering Servant" (also called the "Son of Joseph" revealed in the life and character of Joseph) and the "Conquering King" (also known as the "Son of David" revealed in the life and character of King David), they neglected the "Suffering Servant" and focused almost exclusively on the "Conquering King". In other words, they over-emphasized one part of the prophetic picture to the point it clouded their whole view because they wanted an earthly Conqueror much more than a spiritual Savior.

The "Son of Joseph", the "Suffering Servant" was a picture of the work of the Messiah who would die for sin and bring about the kind of *spiritual* change the Law intended but never actually realized; the "Son of David", the "Conquering King" was a picture of the Messiah who would establish His kingdom and rule the whole earth from Jerusalem. We now have the benefit of seeing Jesus fulfilling *both* of these roles in His two comings, first as the "Suffering Servant" who died for sin that we might be reconciled *spiritually*, and later as the "Conquering King" in His Second Coming when He establishes the Millennial Kingdom and we are reconciled *literally*. They are *both* fulfilled by the one and same Messiah, but through His two separate comings.

As the time of Christ's First Coming approached, combined with the long-time desire to be free of Roman bondage, they did not believe that the answer to their problems could

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be found in a “Suffering Servant”, but only through a “Conquering King”. They so de-emphasized the Scriptures speaking of the “Son of Joseph” that the near universal focus was exclusively placed on the “Son of David”. In other words, they took *a* truth—those parts of God’s prophetic Word which appealed to them the most, and over-emphasized them to the point that it did not simply overshadow everything else, but actually produced a false eschatology—a false set of expectations as to what would take place when the Messiah finally arrived. They could not recognize the unfolding of prophetic events because such did not conform to their rigid pre-interpretation.

This is why, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13), when Peter saw Jesus with Moses and Elijah, he wanted to set up three tabernacles. Peter thought the Millennial Kingdom was literally starting and, as they were taught, immediately acted according to the Feast of Tabernacles which is representative of the Messiah’s Millennial Reign. Peter was conditioned to think of the Messiah only as the “Conquering King” which Scripture associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and not as the “Suffering Servant” who would first fulfill the Passover as the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*”. (Jn. 1:29) Peter mistook what was taking place because of beliefs derived from a life-long emphasis that the Messiah’s coming would only come in the way they narrowly and erroneously interpreted Scripture.

If we understand this in the original historical and cultural context, then we can fully appreciate what was taking place when, after the feeding of the 5,000, “*they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king*” and He withdrew from them. (Jn. 6:15) They weren’t really interested in the work of the First Coming as the “Suffering Servant” but desired to skip past it and go directly to the “Conquering King”. Jesus came to be their King, but only in the correct sequence and therefore thwarted their wish to skip to the end.

This is also the reason why, at the Triumphal Entry which took place at Passover, the people celebrated Jesus’ arrival with the waving of palm branches, a celebration replayed to this day as “Palm Sunday”. (Mt. 21:1-11) This was an act that was only supposed to be performed by everyone when later celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles which represents the Second Coming and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom by the “Son of David”. At Passover, the representation of the First Coming and the work on the cross by the “Son of Joseph”, instead of palm branches they were to wave their hands. Here it was Passover, but they were celebrating it like the Feast of Tabernacles.

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They were misinterpreting the signs of the Messiah's arrival because of their personal desire to see things fulfilled their way.

There are many other instances in the Gospels which testify to just how far askew eschatology—their notion of how the Messiah would fulfill Scripture, had strayed. Their over-emphasis on the “Conquering King” repeatedly obscured the Scriptures identifying the “Suffering Servant”. Again, this was experienced not just by the religious authorities who opposed Him or the people led and taught by them, but by Christ's Apostles and disciples as well, and even by His own family.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” (John 1:45-46)

“However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from.” (John 7:27)

They answered him, “You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.” (John 7:52)

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him. (Mark 6:3)

When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, “He has lost His senses.” (Mark 3:21)

Again, I am not discounting that there were other issues involved, particularly related to sin, but even among those most accepting of Christ as the Messiah there was confusion and doubt because His First Coming did not meet their strongly ingrained preconceived expectations.

One of the most common themes of Christ's teachings throughout the Gospels is to correct the misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture in general, but in regards to His being the Messiah specifically. Even John the Baptist and the Apostles were not able to fully shake off the teachings they had been raised with which predisposed them to interpret the Messiah's coming with such a narrow, altered view that even when those events were actually being fulfilled before their very eyes, they were incapable of processing it. (Look at how many times in the Gospels the apostolic authors say of a

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particular event or teaching that at the time they did not realize its full meaning.) God's Prophetic Word had been so misapplied to conform to human wishes and desires that its literal fulfillment was obscured and, at times, even hidden to them. And I am of the opinion that it is happening once again in the shadow of His Second Coming.

We have growing numbers of "experts" who insist that theirs is the singular and exclusive way in which God's prophetic Word will be fulfilled at Christ's Second Coming. They have become so entrenched in their view with no allowance for even the slightest deviation that they refuse to fellowship with anyone who even slightly disagrees; they label opponents as "heretics" or "apostate" and they speak so rigidly of their viewpoint that they cannot abide any other possibility in spite of the fact that *none* of these things have actually taken place yet. We are being set up for the very same thing which took place at Christ's First Coming where personal desires and feelings are creating a set of "facts" where none, as yet, actually exist, and may not hold true when fulfillment finally comes.

The Bible, and particularly those portions belonging to God's prophetic Word, have been under attack for a long time. It is not surprising that the leading false teachers of the most prominent false movements attacking the Church from within are dismissive of prophecy and End Times events in general. Because they handle Scripture in general so poorly it is natural they process anything prophetic even more so. Most of the false teachers of our time subscribe to one of the many forms of Dominionism, believing Christ will not return until the Church first evangelizes the entire world, or they are dismissive of prophecy altogether.

Brian McLaren of the false Emergent Church Movement actually believes the dispensational view he grew up with is "morally and ethically harmful" and that the pursuit of eschatology is simply a "self-fulfilling prophecy". (Full article found [here](#).) Tony Campolo states that Christians looking for Christ's imminent return are "the real problem for the whole world" and are to blame for most of the wars and evil in this world. Mark Driscoll openly ridicules those who believe there will be an Armageddon or Rapture, while Rick Warren, in *The Purpose Driven Life*, proclaims that those who study Bible prophecy are not fit for the kingdom of God. But as stated previously, it is no surprise that these and other false teachers of our time have extraordinarily bad views when it comes to Christ's Second Coming since they have so extraordinarily distorted and misapplied the basic teachings of His First Coming.

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In fact, Rick Warren took it to a new level which I had never seen before, doing something that not even a cultist or enemy of Christianity would do. In *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren uses the cut-and-paste function of his word processor to present Jesus as saying exactly the opposite of what He originally taught when it comes to the End Times. On pages 285-286 of that book, he takes Matthew 24:3 and pastes it to Acts 1:6 to make it look like Jesus said not to talk about prophecy. In spite of the fact that Jesus answered the question as to the signs of His return in Matthew 24:3 with two whole chapters we identify as the Olivet Discourse, and warned at least four times to be alert and to not let ourselves be deceived, Warren's cut-and-paste antics twist it completely around to mean the exact *opposite*!

As shocking as this might be, that someone would go so far as to cut-and-paste verses together to suit them, or that they demean and diminish God's prophetic Word in general, none of the antics of false teachers such as Warren, Campolo, Driscoll, McLaren or many others like them should in the least bit surprise us. The very fact that they are, by definition, false teachers shapes our expectations of them. We're never that surprised when they mishandle Scripture. But what happens when an even more egregious perversion of God's Word is undertaken by those whom we identify as supposedly being the spiritually *true* leaders of the Church, those who are held to the highest standards when it comes to handling God's Word? What can we expect when the "good guys" act even worse than the known "bad guys"?

*Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the **apostasy** comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (2 Thessalonians 2:3)*

This is going to take an additional, dedicated article at a later date to fully explain in detail, but some of the most well-known and respected scholars, authors and speakers of our time have gone beyond Rick Warren's cut-and-paste of the English translation of Scripture to actually cut-and-paste the original Greek. These scholars, who are members of, or closely affiliated with, "The Pre-Trib Research Center", do not like how every Bible from the 1611 KJV to present translates the underlying Greek word "*apostasia*" as either "apostasy", "rebellion", or "falling away". The debate in eschatology circles over this verse has become so unbearable for them that they decided to cut-and-paste the Greek word "*aphistemi*" in place of "*apostasia*" in the original Greek text. They do this in order to argue that instead of "*the apostasy comes first*", they can claim it actually says, "the departing comes first" and then proceed to explain this means the departing of the

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faithful (as in the Rapture) rather than a spiritual falling away (as in “*apostasy*”). Like Rick Warren, they twist Scripture to mean the exact *opposite* of what it plainly states, but these are not popular false teachers like Warren of whom we actually expect these kinds of shenanigans—these are the “good guys” who we normally embrace as some of our best teachers where the rest of God’s Word is concerned!

Their desire to see prophecy fulfilled strictly in accordance to their way has become so dogmatic and extreme that they reach down and alter the original text by substituting a different word more suitable to them. These are the normally good teachers of our time! These aren’t the leaders of cults! These are the “good guys” who, in every other area of doctrine, we look up to and depend on! They are so intent on fixing the fulfillment of Christ’s imminent return to strictly fit their interpretation and no other that they are willing to not just publicly commit academic fraud, but risk the dangers of altering God’s Word in ways we are commanded *not* to do. (Dt. 4:2, 12:32; Prov. 30:6; 1 Co. 4:6; Rev. 22:18-19)

What is even more disturbing to me is how these leaders, and many of the pastors they have trained and seminaries they have influenced, are now making Pre-Tribulationism an issue to separate over. Whereas in the past they recognized that no one’s salvation is dependent on one’s view of the timing of the Rapture, they are no longer treating it as such and beginning to publicly disassociate with those not in agreement. What began as name calling and ridicule is escalating into actual division and persecution. And if you think this behavior is limited only to elements of those holding to Pre-Tribulationism, there is no shortage of this kind of behavior (and sometimes worse) on the websites and at the conferences and forums for the other major eschatologies, *especially* Pre-Wrath. If you want to witness “Christian-on-Christian” hate crimes, just visit an online “discussion” between brethren of eschatologies which differ on the timing of the Rapture.

Once again, as it was leading up to Christ’s First Coming, eschatology is being taught as an absolute to such a high degree that it is being made into a defining issue of who is, or is not, a true believer. And what happened at His First Coming when those eschatologies did not come true in precisely the dogmatic way their adherents believed they would? The teachers caused even more confusion among God’s people by claiming what was being fulfilled before their very eyes and in their own time could not possibly be right. They would not let go of their presuppositions even when prophecy finally came true.

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Now I have hope in the examples of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, two such leaders of their time who jettisoned their own notions when confronted with the fulfillment of God's prophetic Word in Christ contrary to popular teaching. I earnestly hope that regardless of how many books they've sold, conferences they've spoken at, or pastors and followers they have trained according to their interpretation of End Times events, that they will not just recognize, but spiritually yield to, God's literal fulfillment of His Word and not recapitulate the behavior of their counterparts at the First Coming. But I must also recognize that Nicodemus and Joseph were in a very small minority, and that it is far more likely that many of them will become prideful antagonists at precisely the worst time in history for the Church. How many of them will not just recognize things are not turning out the way they predicted but actually repent and submit? How many of them will instead insist "this" or "that" is not a biblical fulfillment when it is happening because it doesn't conform to their dogmatic presupposition?

Just to show what kind of heretic I am in my own eschatological view, I am confident that everyone will know when the Tribulation ends when all the nations are gathered together against Christ and He returns with His heavenly host. And I'm quite sure we will know when the middle of the Tribulation occurs when the Antichrist takes his place in the newly built temple to be worshiped. That is a sign specifically identified by Jesus, Daniel and Paul. We can make all manner of speculation about the name and identity of the Antichrist, but we will all know for sure who he is when he literally does this particular thing at that particular time in that particular place. But although I cling to the belief that when the mid- and ending-points of the Tribulation take place they will be unmistakably recognized as such, I personally think most everything else on everyone's End Times chart is the stuff of conjecture, *especially* the beginning point of the Tribulation. We might know the sequence—the chronology, but assigning each and every event a date on our End Times chart?

Jesus describes the Last Days as "*birth pangs*" of things like wars, famines and earthquakes which come in ever-increasing and closer preliminary waves leading up to that first seal. (Mt. 24:4-8) My own presupposition is that as these activities increase and become ever more intense, it masks the onset of the Tribulation—we think what happens with the seals at the beginning are just an extension of what was already taking place and merely getting worse.

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I know that some will say that if we weren't supposed to be able to recognize these things in advance, then God would not have provided them in His Word, but I go back to what I pointed out about the Gospels and Christ's First Coming. Many times it states that the Apostles did not recognize at that time that a prophetic fulfillment was taking place—it only became apparent in hindsight. Don't we have to at least entertain the possibility that this will be true with some things pertaining to His Second Coming as well?

But allow me to take my heresy a step further. I not only believe that many of these things will not unfold in the manner or according to the timeline to which many so dogmatically ascribe, but that in the spiritual scheme of things, it does not matter that much, because we have to be *just* as spiritually prepared and faithful to be taken in the Rapture if it does come before the first seal (as Pre-Tribulationism stipulates) as those who will have to experience at least some part of the Tribulation (as Pre-Wrath proposes). Prophecy is not a test of *knowledge*, but a test of *faith* as God's prophetic plan is finally revealed in whatever manner!

"...However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8b)

What kind of faith divides the Body of Christ over the timing of the Rapture? What kind of faith predicts the fulfillment of prophecy to such an extreme degree that it will actually fight against it when it comes into contrary fulfillment of that prediction? What kind of faith places an over-emphasis on God's prophetic Word to the neglect of obedience to the fundamental truths that matter most such as salvation, justification and sanctification? What kind of faith pursues unlocking the mysteries of yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy at the expense of the love of the Body?

"Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matthew 24:12-13)

The Lord has provided many scriptural tools to enable us to recognize the fulfillment of His prophetic Word when it finally takes place, but not at the expense of love and fellowship of the Body of Christ. I may disagree with another's eschatology, but as long as they are born-again, Bible-believing brothers and sisters in Christ I will love them until we die and are mutually resurrected, or we are all taken together in the Rapture, *whenever* that may be.

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I think that there are many, *many* events and signs which together comprise the Last Days, and the Rapture is but one of them. I worry that Satan is working within the walls of the Church like a master stage illusionist to successfully distract us to “look over here” so that we won’t notice something that may be even more important taking place “over there”. I think the proof of this is when the Body begins dividing over something that has no direct bearing on whether one goes to heaven or hell as if it really does. And the most potent indicators are when there is a measurable decrease in biblical faith and love, important spiritual elements identified by Christ Himself when it comes to these Last Days.

No one’s eschatology, no matter how dogmatic or dramatically they over-emphasize it, can substitute for a daily-devoted faithfulness to the fundamental doctrines of a Bible-believing, crucified life in Christ.

In Him,

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