

First Discover the Spine - Part 1

by Derek Prince

Derek Prince explores the spine of biblical prophecy in Matthew 24, emphasizing the importance of recognizing signs of the end times and avoiding deception.

Duration: 28:28

Scripture: Matthew 24:1-2, Matthew 24:4-11, Luke 21:20-24

Topics: "End Times", "Biblical Prophecy"

Description

This sermon by Derek Prince delves into the spine of biblical prophecy, focusing on Matthew chapter 24 as the key piece to understanding prophecy. It explores the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies regarding the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, emphasizing the importance of not being deceived in the end times. Derek Prince warns against deception, ethnic and political wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and the rise of false prophets as signs of the end times, urging believers to have a passionate love for the truth to avoid deception.

Transcript

Derek Prince Ministries, proclaiming the inspired Word of God around the world. Derek Prince is an internationally recognized Bible teacher and author. Through books, audios, videos, and radio broadcasts, Derek seeks to reach the unreached and teach the untaught.

In over 50 years of ministry, Derek has reached over 100 nations in more than 50 languages. And now, Derek Prince. I have a theory that a word spoken in the spirit never dies.

And when I was still a fairly young believer, I think I was still in the British Army in the Middle East, I just heard a statement made by a Jewish believer, and there weren't many in those days. His name was Meyer Perlman, and he was a member of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States. And he said, with regard to interpreting prophecy, it's like putting together the pieces of a human body, or a human skeleton.

And if you want to do it successfully, you have to start with the right piece. And he said, the right piece is the spine. When you get the spine in place, then you can begin to fit the other members into it.

And that has stuck with me now more than 50 years. And tonight, I'm going to try to deal with the spine of biblical prophecy. He said, it is Matthew chapter 24.

And that's where we're going to spend most of our time this evening. Matthew chapter 24. We sometimes tend to overlook the fact that Jesus was a prophet.

The people of his time acknowledged him as prophet, even if they didn't acknowledge him as son of God. He was the greatest of all the great Hebrew prophets. And his greatest prophetic discourse is found in Matthew chapter 24, continued in Matthew chapter 25.

In spite of the chapter division, there's no division in the discourse. But the same first part of the discourse is also found in Mark chapter 13, and in Luke chapter 21. These are three different perspectives of the same discourse.

It might be compared, for instance, if there were three television cameras here tonight, all focused on me. They'd all record what I say and do. But they'd do it from a slightly different perspective.

And to get the full picture, you really need to put together all three chapters. We won't have time to do that effectively, but we'll take a little time, at least in Luke chapter 21. Now chapter 24 begins with a situation in which Jesus makes a very dramatic and startling statement to his disciples.

In fact, it was almost like a blow in the solar plexus, the words that he spoke here at the beginning of Matthew 24. It says in verses 1 and 2, Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. Now you need to know that King Herod had spent 46 years renovating and extending and glorifying that temple.

And it was considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was also the center and focus of the whole national life of the Jewish people. Their national life and their religious life.

It was their great pride and joy. And so when Jesus said what he said, as I say, it was like a blow in the solar plexus. 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.

I don't think any of us are capable of understanding the impact that those words had on the disciples. Well as soon as they had an opportunity, they got alone with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. And they said, now we want to know about this.

So the next verse says, verse 3, Now as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? It seems to me that they had the impression that if the temple was to be destroyed, such a disaster would mark the end of the age. They couldn't conceive that the age would continue after the temple had been destroyed. So I think they thought they were asking one question, but in actual fact they were asking two.

The first was, when will these things be? That is, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. And the second was, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Now Jesus answered both those questions. But the answer to the first question is found in Luke chapter 21.

So we'll turn there for a moment. Luke 21, verses 20 through 24. Luke 21, 20 through 24.

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains. Let those who are in the midst of her depart.

And let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days.

For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

So that's the answer to the question, when will these things happen? In other words, when will the temple be destroyed and Jerusalem be destroyed? And Jesus said this is the sign. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that the desolation of it is near. Now this was historically fulfilled in A.D. 70.

The Roman commander Vespasian laid siege to Jerusalem, surrounded it with his armies. And then he received word from Rome that he had been chosen as the next emperor. So he had to go back to Rome to receive his position.

And he temporarily lifted the siege of Jerusalem and the armies withdrew, but temporarily. Now those Jews in Jerusalem who acknowledged Jesus as a prophet of the Lord, understood the application of these words. And they fled from Jerusalem to a town called Pella on the east side of the Jordan.

And after that Vespasian's successor Titus reformed the siege, gathered the armies together, and continued to besiege Jerusalem until the words of Jesus had been exactly fulfilled. The whole city was destroyed, the whole temple was so completely destroyed that not one single stone was left upon another. And in the course of that war, two million Jews were killed and one million were sold into captivity as slaves throughout the Roman Empire.

In fact there were so many slaves in the markets that the price of slaves fell and no one was buying them. So those words of Jesus were fulfilled. But note that the people who gave heed to what Jesus had said saved their lives.

This is a very important lesson. And then Jesus says about, in verse 23, For there will be great distress in the land. What land is that? The land of Israel.

And wrath upon this people. What people is that? The Jewish people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away captive into all nations.

That was fulfilled as I've said. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The times of the Gentiles are times when Gentile powers rule the land which was given by God eternally to Israel.

And so that second half of that verse covers nearly 2,000 years until Jerusalem is liberated from Gentile domination. Now one of the key dates in this century is 1967, the Six Day War. When for the first time in nearly 2,000 years the Jewish people regained control of that vital area which is called the Old City.

But the prophecy was not yet completely fulfilled because they did not take control. They could have done, but they did not, of the temple area which is still occupied by a Muslim mosque. So it's like we're right on the verge, but we haven't actually stepped right over.

And then Jesus goes on immediately. And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars. And on the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them from fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth.

For the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. That shows that immediately after the liberation of Jerusalem from Gentile dominations Jesus is going to come back in person.

So that 24th verse there spans a period of nearly 2,000 years. But it also indicates that when Jerusalem is liberated finally from Gentile domination, Jesus, the next event in the calendar, will be the return of Jesus. Now we'll go back to Matthew 24 and consider the second question.

Which was, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And I want you to notice they didn't say the signs, they said the sign of your coming. Now Jesus answered that question in Matthew chapter 24. But he didn't answer it immediately.

He led up to his answer. And Jesus begins now this analysis of the closing phase of this age with a word of warning. Verse 4, take heed that no one deceives you.

For many will come in my name saying I am the Christ, the Messiah, and will deceive many. I want to point out to you that the first great warning given to us concerning the period of the end is a warning against deception. And this is repeated twice more in the course of this discourse.

In other words, three times Jesus warns his disciples in connection with the close of the age against being deceived. And in my personal opinion, deception is the greatest single danger that threatens us as Christians. Greater than persecution, greater than war, the danger of deception.

I heard somebody say in effect a little while back, it doesn't matter who it is, well it never happened to me. I want to tell you if you think it never will happen to you, it will happen to you. It's a sure mark if you have that attitude that you're already under deception.

Because Jesus warned his own disciples, his apostles who'd been close to him for three and a half years, heard all his teachings, seen all his miracles. Be careful, don't come under deception. I believe it's much the greatest danger that threatens all of us here in this room this evening.

I want to warn you against deception. And there is only one sure guarantee against deception. And it's given to us in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Receive the love of the truth.

The only thing that will protect you from deception, it's not something negative. It's something positive. It's the love of the truth.

And the Greek word there is agape, which many of you know means the strong form of love. In other words, to avoid being deceived you have to have a passionate love for the truth. It's not enough to have a quiet time every morning or attend a good church or say your prayers.

You have to have a passionate commitment to the truth of the Word of God if you're going to avoid being deceived. Now let's go on with this. Jesus says in verse 5, Many will come in my name saying, I am the Christ, the Messiah.

And will deceive many. Now that's a prophecy made by Jesus. It's been fulfilled.

A Jewish encyclopedia lists approximately 40 false messiahs who've come to the Jewish people since the time of Jesus. And all have deceived some of them. Some of them have deceived almost the whole nation.

Bar Kokhba, the next one, probably did so. Moses of Crete led about 5,000 Jews out into the sea believing that the Lord would come. And they drowned.

So this is a repeated feature of Jewish history. Happened again in the year 1666 when Shabbatai B'n Tzvi told the Jewish people he was the Messiah. He was going to restore them to the land of Israel.

And thousands of them gathered there. And to save his life he converted to Islam. What a bitter disappointment for all those believers.

So I just want to point out to you that Jesus was a true prophet. Everything he said has been fulfilled or will be fulfilled. Then he warns them a second time against wars and commotions or troubles.

Verse 6. Incidentally you'll do one. I see most of you've got your Bibles open. We're going to go systematically through this chapter.

So it helps to have the chapter in front of you. Verse 6. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled.

For all these things must come to pass. But the end is not yet. In other words, the mere fact that there have been wars and troubles all through this age is not by itself an indication that the age is about to close.

We need some further indication. Now if you turn for a moment, if you can do, to Luke 21. There's a rather interesting little example of how Scripture comments on itself.

So in Luke 21 Jesus said, and we'll read from verses 8 following. It's the same discourse. Take heed that you be not deceived.

For many will come in my name saying, I am he and the time has grown near. Therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified.

For these things must come to pass first. But the end will not come immediately. In other words, wars and commotions by themselves are not an indication that the end of an age is near.

Then in verse 10, and if you have a Bible that prints the words of Jesus in red, as most do. You have a few words here in black. Interjected, verse 10.

Then he said to them, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. In other words, I'm pointing out that there's an important pause after the statement, the end is not yet. Now we're going back to Matthew 24.

And now we come to the signs of the end. The signs, not the sign. Matthew 24, verse 7. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

And there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places. Some of your Bibles will not have the word pestilences. Because there's uncertainty about the text.

But Luke has it in the text. So whether it's there or not in Matthew, it's there. So we have these three major attacks on the human race.

Famines, pestilences and earthquakes. And then Jesus says in verse 8, all these are the beginning of sorrows. Sorrows means birth pangs or labor pains.

So when these things happen that are mentioned in verse 7, then you know that the labor pains have begun. And we all know what labor pains lead up to, don't we? Some by experience and some by hearsay. But when there are labor pains, the next major event will be a birth.

And that's exactly what this means here. These are the labor pains, the things that must precede the birth of God's kingdom on earth. Now if you're a husband, happily married.

And your wife is pregnant. And she says, Honey, I'm getting the most terrible pains. Something's happening.

He does not rush to the phone and say to the doctor, Doctor, something terrible is wrong with my wife. Can you come and stop the pains? Why not? Because he wants the baby. And you see, this is a way we can test ourselves.

Do we want to stop the pains or do we want to have the baby? Because if you want to have the baby, you have to have the birth pangs. There's no way for a birth without birth pangs. So if you say, Oh, I can't stand all this.

It's too terrible. I don't know why I'm living in this time. You're not really excited about the baby.

But if you want the baby, you welcome the birth pangs. Even if they're very painful. So you can begin to check yourself at this time.

What is more important to you? The coming of the baby? The coming of God's kingdom on earth? Or not being involved in the birth pangs? But you might as well make the right choice. Because you'll be involved in the birth pangs anyhow. All right, now we're going to verse 7 and verse 8. These are the beginning of birth pangs.

Nation will rise against nation. Kingdom against kingdom. Let's stop that there.

The word nation in Greek is ethnos. From which we get the word ethnic today. And this is precisely what is happening in the world today.

There are two kinds of wars. Ethnic wars. Political wars.

I would say World War I and World War II were both essentially political wars. They were wars fought by world powers to establish their dominion. But before World War I, which began in 1914.

In 1913 there was an ethnic war of which we are told very little. But the Turks in the Middle East massacred 1 million Christian Armenians. Now that was not a political war.

That was an ethnic war. Turks against Armenians. And I think one of the major features of the present time is ethnic wars.

They are breaking out everywhere. In 1993 there were 34 wars fought in the course of that year. And most of them were ethnic wars.

So when ethnic wars become a major emphasis of our time, that's an indication the birth pangs have begun. Then there are the political wars. And then it says there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places.

Now for these figures I'm indebted to Harold Lindsay. Which I'm glad to acknowledge. Let's deal with the three things.

Famine, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. Today in the world, there are about 750 million people who suffer from chronic hunger. They never have enough to eat.

Mainly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. With regard to acute hunger, that is you are at imminent peril of death. There are more than 35 million people on earth today in the condition of acute hunger.

Mostly in the southern parts of Africa. Also some in parts of Eastern Europe and the CIS. And Albania is an example of such a nation.

Then with regard to pestilences, all these are official estimates. We have a new pestilence which is called AIDS. And it's estimated that by the year 2000, which is only five years away, there will be 100 million cases of AIDS worldwide.

The continent of Africa is the worst afflicted. And by the year 2000, some parts of Africa will be heavily depopulated. The population will begin to dwindle rapidly.

Other plagues that are returning and increasing are TB, malaria, and cholera. And some of these are already out of control worldwide. Then with regard to earthquakes, this is the most, I think, the most dramatic and the most clear example.

Talking of quakes which are, which register six or more on the Richter scale. From 1950 to 1959, that's in the 1950s, there were nine. In the 1960s, there were 13.

In the 1970s, there were 51. And in the 1980s, there were 86. And from 1990 through 1993, that's four years, there have been more than 400 such earthquakes worldwide.

I think it's worth repeating that because it's really so clear and objective. In the 1950s, nine. In the 1960s, 13.

In the 1970s, 51. In the 1980s, 86. And in the first four years of the 1990s, more than 100.

Then I already pointed out in 1993, there were 34 distinct wars being fought in the world. So I think we're not just fanatical or alarmist if we say the birth pangs have begun. Now in interpreting Matthew 24, there's a key word and it is the word then.

And it occurs nine times in Matthew 24 and a further nine times in Matthew 25. In other words, 18 times in the total discourse. And that key word then indicates the succession of events following one another systematically recorded.

And that's the nature of this talk of Jesus. It's very systematic. It's very thorough.

It's very basic. So now we're going to verse nine. Bearing in mind now that we have entered the period of birth pangs.

And we have one of the thens. Verse nine. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

I ask people, who is you? Grammatically this is not correct. But you is us. Did you get that? Have you absorbed that fact? Then, at this point, they will deliver you Christians, followers of Jesus, up to tribulation and kill you and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

Verse 10. And then, the next then, many will be offended, will betray one another and will hate one another. Many who? Many Christians, that's right.

Why will they betray one another? To save their own lives. Now this is not something that hasn't yet happened. It's been happening for years in China, the Soviet Union and some Muslim nations.

The fact that we haven't seen very much of it yet in this nation doesn't mean that it isn't already happening in many parts of the world. And I don't doubt that fairly soon it will begin to happen here. People pray for revival and I do.

But I want to tell you, in my opinion, when the church experiences revival, it will discover for the first time how much the world really hates the church. So when you pray for revival, bear that in mind. All right, we're going on.

Verse 11. Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. Every, what we call a cult, is the product of a false prophet.

And we cannot number the cults that have confronted us in recent years. And I have to say this regretfully, but I think I need to say it. Some of those false prophets are not outside the church.

They are inside the church. I've studied the life of Jeremiah a little bit and I'm impressed by the fact that at the close of the history of the people of Judah, apparently there was one true prophet, Jeremiah. And there were countless false prophets.

This was an indication that the nation was on the verge of final judgment and disaster. And the soothing words of the false prophets who promised peace caused most of the people to ignore the true words of Jeremiah who said, disaster is coming.

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