

## INTRODUCTION

This is the third and final message in the miniseries from Mark 13 entitled "Jesus' Extended Forecast." Jesus wasn't predicting the weather; He was predicting the future. In this chapter, He gives us some important details about His second coming.

The early church lived in anticipation of the return of the Lord. They had a word they used to greet each other and say farewell that reflected this anticipation. The word was *maran atha*, which was Aramaic for "Lord, Come!" When Paul signed off his second letter to the Corinthians, his last word was *maranatha*! We've found this word in other early church writings. So when the believers gathered they didn't always say, "Shalom." They would greet and part by saying, "Maranatha, Brother or Maranatha, Sister." "The Lord is coming!"

I heard about a Baptist preacher who was talking about this to his congregation on a Sunday morning. And he said, "Let's try that. Tonight when you come back to the evening worship, let's greet each other with the word 'Maranatha.' Don't say, 'Hi' or 'Good evening,' instead let's greet each other by saying, 'Maranatha, brother' or 'Maranatha, sister.'"

That evening a couple of older ladies were walking toward the pastor in the parking lot. They were trying to remember the special greeting of the evening, but were struggling to remember the word. One of them remembered just in time. So she walked up to the pastor and smiled and said, "Marijuana, brother!"

That wasn't it. So instead, we say, "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!"

In Matthew 13, Jesus reaches the climax of His prophecy when He predicts His return, and then He begins to talk about the conditions present when He returns. So to get a running start let's begin reading where we finished in the last message in Mark 13:26.

"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."

Mark 13:28-37. "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door." "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 'Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

We're living in a time of great political and economic uncertainty. What's going to happen in the stock market? What's going to happen with the price of oil? Who will be elected the next President? When will the next terrorist attack occur? The American public is afraid. In fact, I read these words in a magazine editorial recently: "It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country. Not in the lifetime of most Americans has there been so much grave and deep apprehension; never has the future seemed more unpredictable as at this time. The domestic economic situation is in chaos. Our dollar is weak throughout the world. The political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. It is a solemn moment of our troubles. No man can see the end." So when do you think those words were written? They appeared in October of 1857 in *Harper's Weekly Magazine*.

This was 160 years ago before our nation was divided by a bloody civil war. The writer of the editorial mentioned twice that no one could see the future. Well, we can stand from the perspective of history and look back and agree that was a terrible time in our history, but our nation survived and has grown strong. Our problems today pale in comparison to a time when Americans were getting ready to go to war against fellow Americans. But the feeling of uncertainty is the same. What's going to happen in the future? Jesus has the advantage of seeing what's happening now and He knows how it's all going to turn out in the end. And in spite of the trouble we face, Jesus said, "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus not only KNOWS the future; He HOLDS our future. Let's notice four things Jesus says about the future.

### **1. THE LESSON OF THE FIG TREE: The rebirth of Israel**

Jesus said, "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its leaves come out, you know that summer is near." (Mark 13:28) I've just returned from my latest trip to Israel. Israel is a land where miracles in the Bible took place. But it is also a place of modern miracles. The fact that a nation of Israel exists today is a fulfillment of Jesus prediction about the fig tree budding.

About two weeks ago I stood at the very place where Jesus said He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. I looked up and there beside my head was a biblical fig tree—and it was just beginning to bud and sprout. I called it to the attention of the group and told them I would be speaking about the budding fig tree when we returned.

In the Old Testament, Israel is symbolized by a fig tree. The fig tree was cut off at the root, but we have lived in a period of time, when the leaves started growing again. When the nation of Israel was destroyed in 70 A.D., the Jewish people were scattered to all the nations of the earth. But in the early 1900s a few brave Jews started returning to the Holy Land. They had to live in fenced communal camps called kibbutzim for protection. But more and more Jewish people started being drawn to the back to the land. It was as if their DNA contained a homesickness gene for the Promised Land. In 1947 the Jews waged a war of Independence against the British and the Jordanians. Then on May 14, 1948, they gained their independence for the first time in 2,000 years. The fig tree has literally sprouted its leaves. Jesus said that was an important sign. He

didn't give a day or month; He was talking about a season of time. Many scholars believe we are living in the season where the fig tree has budded again—Israel is a nation again.

This desire for the Israelites to regain their homeland didn't just start in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was a sense that this would happen even in the 1800s. Charles Spurgeon was a renowned Baptist Pastor in London. Long before the Jews started resettling Israel he predicted that this was going to happen. In a message he preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle Church on June 3, 1855 he said, "The hour is approaching, when the tribes shall go up to their own country; when Judea, so long a howling wilderness, shall once more blossom like the rose; when, if the temple itself be not restored, yet on Zion's hill shall be raised some Christian building, where the chants of solemn praise shall be heard. I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the Children of Israel."

There are many Old Testament prophecies that speak of Israel returning to resettle their homeland. Some people say these Old Testament scriptures refer to Israel's return from Babylonian exile in 500 B.C. They did return and resettle Israel for a few more centuries, but then The nation was uprooted again. There is a powerful promise concerning Israel that can only apply to modern Israel. It's found in Amos 9:15 where God promised, "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God."

All of us who visit Israel today have a strong sense that the nation of Israel is here to stay. Although they are hated and many Islamic republics are committed to wiping Israel from the face of the earth, the Jewish people have a tough sense of determination. God said it and I believe it; they will never again be uprooted from their land.

## **2. THE PRESERVATION OF A GENERATION: The Jewish people**

Jesus said, "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." (Mark 13:30) So what "generation" was Jesus talking about? Some say He was referring to the generation of people alive when He spoke these words 2,000 years ago. And indeed, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed before that generation died off. But Jesus said, "Until ALL these things have happened." Jesus made more predictions in Mark 13 beside the destruction of Jerusalem.

Others say Jesus was referring to the generation that was alive when Israel became a nation in 1948. That was the position of Hal Lindsey who wrote a book entitled *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970. He correctly understood the reestablishment of Israel in 1948 was the budding of the fig tree, but he took the word "generation" to mean 40 years. In the Bible, genealogical lists often divide generations into forty-year increments. So Hal Lindsey assumed "generation" to be forty years. He added 40 years to 1948, so he predicted Jesus would return to earth before 1988. As you know that didn't happen—but Hal Lindsey made millions of dollars.

These errors are based on the misinterpretation of the word "generation." The word Jesus used for "generation" is the word *genea*. Jesus wasn't talking about a time period; He was talking

about a people group. Two thousand years ago, He predicted the Jews would be scattered to all nations and Israel would be destroyed. Yet He said the Jews would maintain their ethnic identity. There were all kinds of people surrounding Israel today, but can you find a Philistine? Or a Moabite, or a Jebusite, or an Edomite? No, but you can find plenty of Israelites. The miracle of the Jewish people is they did not pass away while Jerusalem was enduring 1,900 years of Gentile control.

The survival of the Jewish people is a miracle that ranks right up there with the parting of the Red Sea. Throughout the centuries, the devil has tried to destroy the Jews. Pharaoh was the first to try by killing the male Hebrew babies. The Romans tried to rid the world of the Jews. Even Adolph Hitler conspired to kill millions of Jews. Why do you think the Muslim world hates America so much? Because we are one of the few friends Israel has. What you see transpiring in the Middle East is all because the fig tree has budded and the Gentiles are no longer controlling Jerusalem.

When Israel regained their independence, thousands of Jewish people gathered outside the home of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. The mood was festive. A Jewish journalist, Michael Oren, described the scene: "The Jews of Palestine...were dancing because they were about to realize what was one of the most remarkable and inspiring achievements in human history: A people which had been exiled from its homeland two thousand years before, which had endured countless pogroms, expulsions, and persecutions, but which had refused to relinquish its identity—which had, on the contrary, substantially strengthened that identity; a people which only a few years before had been the victim of mankind's largest single act of mass murder, killing a third of the world's Jews, that people was returning home as sovereign citizens in their own independent state." (Michael Oren, "Ben-Gurion and the Return to Jewish Power" Shalem Press, 2006, p. 406)

But God promised this would happen centuries earlier. During the 1600 years of Muslim control of the territory of Israel, it became a barren wasteland. The Ottoman Turks were shepherds, not farmers. The land suffered, but today, Israel has plowed, planted, and irrigated the land. It is one of the most fertile areas of the world. When you drive through Israel you see thousands of green fields and hundreds of thousands of fruit trees. God promised through Isaiah, "In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit." (Isaiah 27:6) Israel produces over forty kinds of fruits and exports them to every continent. That is a prophecy that has literally come true since 1948.

### **3. THE FUTILITY OF SETTING DATES: Only the Father knows**

Jesus said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:32) Throughout the centuries there have been hundreds of predictions of the date that Jesus would return—and they were all wrong. And anytime you read where someone has set a date for the Second Coming, you can know immediately they are a false prophet.

Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe has a good word about date-setters: "The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar, but to build character. Jesus warned us not to set dates

for His coming. Date setters are usually upsetters." As I've said before when it comes to the Second Coming of Christ, I'm not on the Scheduling Committee; I'm on the Welcoming Committee!

Many of you remember a few years ago when Harold Camping, an 89-year-old engineer with no theological training, predicted that Jesus would return on May 21, 2011. He had developed some convoluted way of dating the Old Testament that caused him to believe that May 21, 2011 was exactly 7,000 years after Noah entered the Ark. His radio ministry received millions of dollars in donations leading up to this date and he purchased over 2,000 billboards announcing that May 21, 2011 would be the judgment day. Of course, the day passed and nothing happened. In California, there was a billboard warning about this date. A few days after the date passed someone placed a billboard next to it that said, "That was awkward." And a biblical reminder that Jesus said, "No one knows the day or the hour ..." (Matthew 24:36)

Last year, there were four lunar eclipses, or blood moons, and many prophecy junkies proposed theories they were signs in the sky that Jesus was going to return. Pastor John Hagee in San Antonio wrote a book entitled *Four Blood Moons: Something is about to Change*. The last lunar eclipse was in September, and nothing has changed except perhaps John Hagee's net worth.

If there's one thing we should know about the timing of Christ's return, it will be at a time when we least expect it. That fourth blood moon was a time many were expecting Him to return. Harold's Camping's dates were times when many people were expecting Him to return. Jesus said, "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (Matthew 24:44) How many of you expect Jesus to return in the next hour? Hmm, that means it would be a good time for Him to return, nobody expects Him!

#### **4. THE NEED TO STAY ALERT: Build your life on God's eternal Word**

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away...Be on guard! Be alert!" (Mark 13:31,33) There are three times in Mark 13 where Jesus repeats this admonition, "Be on guard." It means to keep your eyes and ears open to what's happening in the world. It's a picture of a soldier on guard duty. He has to keep his eyes peeled. We should be praying for God to open the eyes of our hearts so we may discern what is happening in the world.

One thing that is certain is that everything we see around us will one day be gone. This building, this city, this planet and the stars in the sky will vanish. But there is one thing we handle that will never vanish, and that is the precious Word of God.

Isaiah made the same observation when he proclaimed, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

Don't trust what you hear or see on television. For sure, don't trust what you read on Facebook or the Twitverse. Just this past week, someone created a Facebook page stating Dewayne Johnson, the Rock, had passed away. Thousands of people posted condolences and tributes to the Rock on Facebook and Twitter. But it was all a hoax! Some people believe anything they read on

the Internet. Really? Really? Dwayne Johnson will die someday, but my hope is built on the real Rock, Jesus Christ, who has conquered death and hell and one day will return in great glory.

## CONCLUSION

So what's the take-away truth? Watching for the Lord's return doesn't mean looking up to the sky; it means looking around to show God's love to those who need Him. In the first chapter of Acts we read that after spending 40 days with His disciples after the Resurrection, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and ascended into heaven. The disciples were watching Jesus slowly rise into the sky when two angels appeared and spoke to them. The Bible says, "They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'" (Acts 1:10-11)

The disciples might have stayed there all day and even built a shrine to worship, but the angels called their attention back to their task. The last thing Jesus said to them before He left was, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) So they returned to Jerusalem, and ten days later the Holy Spirit filled them and they started preaching about Jesus.

One day Jesus will return. You and I may die and meet Jesus before He returns. So what should we be doing until Jesus returns? We should be watching and working. I love an old hymn we used to sing that answers that question. Elizabeth Miles wrote the words in 1837. The verse asks a question: "O land of rest, for thee I sigh! When will the moment come, When I shall lay my armor by, And dwell in peace at home?" And the chorus answers the question: "We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work till Jesus comes, And we'll be gathered home!"

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#### Take-Away Truth:

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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*David O. Dykes, Pastor  
Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas*