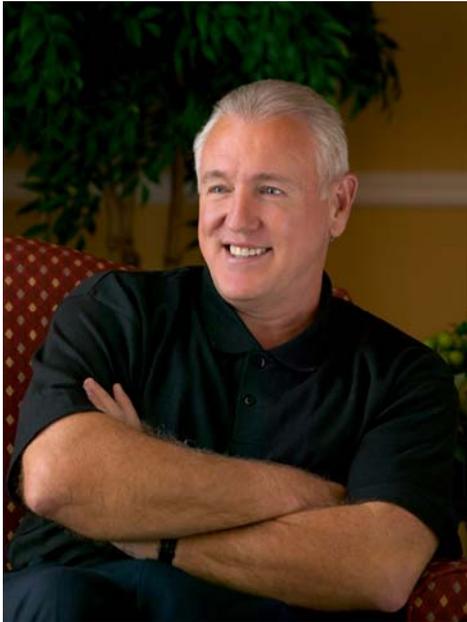


— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —



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

---

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David***

***Dykes in Texas.***” This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes

#

## INTRODUCTION

A little boy came home from his first day in school. His mother met him and asked, "What did you learn today?" He replied, "Not enough, I guess. They want me to come back tomorrow." In this message I hope you will learn the lesson something about the Second Coming by learning the lesson of the fig tree.

As many of you know, the last few weeks have been filled with speculation about the Rapture. An 89-year-old man named Harold Camping owns a string of radio stations across California and other states. Mr. Camping, who has no theological training, has declared that all organized churches are apostate. As a former engineer, he developed his own esoteric dating system of the Old Testament. Based on his dating system, he was convinced that May 21, 2011 was exactly 7,000 years from the day Noah entered the ark, so he concluded this would be the date of the Rapture. His radio stations receive millions of dollars in donations and he spent a fortune buying full page ads in newspapers like *USA Today* and sponsored over 2,000 billboards announcing that the Rapture would happen May 21. He even had the audacity to say, "The Bible guarantees it." Mr. Camping, who had earlier predicted Jesus would return in 1994, was wrong again—and now you can expect him to just extend his date to October 21.

Some people are taking advantage of all this Rapture talk. There is a website that offers to take care of the pets of Christians after the Rapture. For a one-time payment of \$135 you can rest assured this organization of pet-lovers will collect your pet and take care of it. The website guarantees that all the members of this organization are all avowed atheists, agnostics, or blasphemers. If you think it's a joke, many people didn't. Saturday, a week ago, the day of Camping's predicted Rapture, the website had so many hits it shut down. These folks raked in thousands of dollars. I guess P.T. Barnum was right about a sucker being born every minute!

When you read the title of this message you might think I'm speaking in reaction to all the recent hype about the Rapture. But many of you know I plan out my messages over a year in advance, and it just so happened that God brought us to Matthew 24 at a time when a lot of people are thinking about the second coming of Christ. Jesus had more to say about His return in Matthew 24 than in any other chapter in the New Testament.

We're not going to study the entire 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, because we're restricting our study to parables and miracles and today we're going to examine the parable of the fig tree. But in order to understand the context of this parable of the fig tree, it's important to understand what Jesus is addressing. "Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' (Matthew 24:1-3).

There are three specific questions asked and answered by Jesus. First, "When will this happen?" Jesus predicted the destruction of the Jewish Temple and that would occur 40 years later in 70 A.D. The second question was, "What will be the sign of your coming?" We'll address that

#

answer in this message. And the next question was "What will be the sign of the end of the age?" The return of Christ isn't the same thing as the end of the world. With that in mind let's pick up with our parable found in Matthew 24:32-35.

"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 all these things, 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."

Some people are looking at the woeful world conditions and think that we must surely be approaching the end of the world. The world seems to be in chaos. I recently read an article that said, "It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country. Not in the lifetime of most men has there been so much grave and deep apprehension; never has the future seemed so unpredictable as at this time. The domestic economic situation is in chaos. Our dollar is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible. The political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. It is a solemn moment of our troubles. No man can see the end." When do you think that was written? Last week? Last month? That statement appeared in October 1857 in *Harper's Weekly Magazine!*

So there have always been times when world conditions seemed ideal for the return of Christ. Next week we're going to look at the scripture where Jesus points out that no one knows the day or the hour of the return of Christ—only the Father in heaven.

While there is no way to name a specific date, Jesus did give some clues as the general time when we should be looking for his return. Let's examine three signs we can't ignore.

### **1. THE FIG TREE (Israel) HAS SPROUTED LEAVES (since May 15, 1948)**

In Matthew 24 Jesus said, "Learn the lesson of the fig tree." In the parallel account in Luke 21, Jesus said, "Learn the parable of the fig tree." He said when you see the tree start putting forth leaves you know that spring is coming. I think Jesus was saying that while we can't know the exact day He will return, we can generally calculate the season of time when He will return. When I use the word "season" I'm not talking about a particular season like spring or summer, but a general period of time.

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. Then on May 15, 1948, the fig tree sprouted leaves. On that day, the United Nations chartered Israel as a nation.

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

#

they were displaced again. There is a powerful promise concerning Israel that can only apply to modern Israel. It's found in Amos 9:15. 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."

Have you ever wondered why there is so much media attention given to a country the size of New Jersey with a population less than Houston, Texas? Are the producers for CNN, NBC, or Fox News reading their Bibles to ask, "What should be our featured stories today?" It is because God said thousands of years ago during the end times there would be a nation of Israel and they would play a prominent role in world events. The second sign we can't ignore is:

## **2. THIS GENERATION (Jewish People) HAS SURVIVED AND OCCUPIES JERUSALEM (since June 7, 1967)**

In verse 34 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." 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 Matthew 24 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.

Some of you might also recall that Edgar Whisenant, a NASA engineer-turned-prophecy-teacher, wrote a booklet in 1988 entitled, "88 Reasons why the Rapture will happen in 88." It didn't happen, so he followed it up the next year with "89 reasons why the Rapture will happen in 89." Edgar Whisenant believed his theories, but "wise he was not."

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? No, but can you 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.

Many mainstream commentators support this interpretation. Dr. Adam Clarke wrote: "This generation (*genea*) means 'this race.' i.e. the Jews shall not cease from being a distinct people, till all the counsels of God relative to them and the Gentiles be fulfilled." (*Clarke's Commentary of the Bible*)

#

In the parallel passage in Luke 21, Jesus made this clear when He predicted, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) A Gentile is anyone who isn't a Jew and history records that Gentiles were in control of Jerusalem until 1967. Let me give you a thumbnail history of Jerusalem over the last 2,000 years. Buckle your pew belt and put your seat in its upright position because we're going to be moving fast!

From 70 A.D. until about 637, the Romans controlled Jerusalem, the last 300 years of that rule is called the Byzantine period because of the influence of the Greek Orthodox faith based in Constantinople—and of course, they were Gentiles. During this period many beautiful churches were built in Israel.

In 637 A.D. the Persian Muslims attacked Jerusalem and took control. They destroyed every church in Israel except one—The church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem. That's because Persian soldiers saw a mosaic on the wall of the church depicted the magi from the East. The Magi were dressed as Persians, so the church was spared.

Jerusalem was under Muslim control until the Crusaders from Europe came to "liberate" the Holy sites from the pagan Muslims. Beginning in 1099 for about 200 years the Christian Crusaders had a tenuous control of Jerusalem, but like the Persians, they were Gentiles.

In 1244, the Egyptian Muslims called the Mamluks pushed the last of the Crusaders back toward Europe. Then in 1517, the Ottoman Turks took control of Jerusalem for the next 400 years. During this time, the land deteriorated into poverty and waste. In his book *Innocents Abroad*, American writer, Mark Twain described his visit to Jerusalem. He found a sleepy village with only 8,000 residents!

It wasn't until 1917, near the end of WWI, that the Turks lost control of Jerusalem. The movie, "Lawrence of Arabia," was set in this time period. As the British forces were getting ready to advance on Jerusalem, British General Allenby sent three biplanes, called Sopwith Camels flying over the city. From these airplanes they dropped thousands of leaflets that read in Arabic, "Surrender Jerusalem immediately." General Allenby signed his last name only on the leaflets, "Allenby." The Muslims, who had never seen an airplane before thought the name on the leaflets read, "Allah bay" which means "servant of Allah." They must have thought the message was from Allah because they surrendered Jerusalem to the British without a shot being fired!

During the war of Jewish independence in 1947, the British put up token resistance to the Israeli freedom fighters, but when the nation was established in 1948, they deserted Jerusalem. It became part of the West Bank, and under Jordanian control from 1948 until 1967. But on June 7, 1967, during the 6 Day War, Israel gained control of Jerusalem for the first time in almost 1,800 years! Do you know the very first thing the Jews did? The soldiers went immediately to the Western Wall of the Temple, and began to weep and pray. The Jews call it the Western Wall, but we call it the Wailing Wall. Jerusalem was no longer under control of Gentiles. And in 1980 Jerusalem was declared the capital city of Israel. Under President George W. Bush, plans were being made to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but those plans probably won't be carried out by our current administration. Every time I'm in Jerusalem and I see the

#

Israeli flag flying I'm reminded of how the time of the Gentiles controlling Jerusalem has been completed. We are living in a time of fulfilled prophecy!

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. But there is one more sign we can't ignore.

### **3. THE GOSPEL IS BEING PREACHED TO EVERY PEOPLE-GROUP (*ethnos*)**

Last week Mario Zandstra referred to the worldwide spiritual awakening that is happening. Sadly, America isn't seeing much of it, but the Gospel is being preached and received by people groups all around the world. In a few weeks, I'll introduce you to a pastor friend of mine from China who can tell you first-hand about the thousands of Chinese coming to Christ every single day. Jesus predicted this global explosion of the gospel. He said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14)

When Jesus used the word "all nations" He wasn't speaking about countries with borders like we see on a map. He used the word *ethnos*, from which we get our English word "ethnic." It means people groups. This would be a group of people who share the same culture and root language although they may reside in several countries.

Global mission leaders have determined there are about 6,800 different ethnic groups that share a least part of one root language. For instance in Africa, there are thousands of local dialects but many of the Africans understand Swahili.

So what's our plan? Are we going to translate Bibles into those languages and print them and sent them Bibles to read? There's a problem with that approach. It is estimated that half of the world's population is illiterate, and many of those people groups don't even have a written language, it is only a spoken language.

This is where technology can help us fulfill the Great Commission. There are many technological tools being used in terms of cyber-evangelism, but only a tiny percentage of the people in the world have access to the Internet.

There is a mission organization called Faith Comes By Hearing that has developed a tool called "the Proclaimer." It is a small set that has the Bible recorded digitally on a microchip in different languages. The battery can be recharged by solar power or by using a hand crank. They currently have the Bible translated into over 300 languages. All over the world, groups are gathering to hear the Bible in their own heart language. The Proclaimer uses digital audio loud enough for a group of 300 to hear clearly. The goal is to have the Proclaimer programmed with 2,000 languages by 2015, which will reach over 97% of the people groups. And even within those

#

remaining 3% there are bilingual people who can understand one of those languages and translate it. God is using many means and methods to carry the gospel to the people of the world. We are closer today to carrying the gospel to every people-group on the planet than at any time in the history of the world.

## CONCLUSION

Most of us had the experience of being children and riding in the car heading on vacation. We were excited but we didn't really have an understanding of when we would arrive. So we would yell up to our dad or mom driving, "How much longer? Are we there yet?" And they would often reply, "We're ten minutes closer than the last time you asked!" That's a little bit how I feel about the return of Christ. We don't really know when it's going to happen, so we ask our Father. "How much longer?" And He smiles and says, "Closer than when you asked the last time." I'm not a genius but I feel safe in making this prediction about when Jesus will return: Sooner than yesterday. We can't know the exact day, but we can know the season. Pay attention: The fig tree has sprouted leaves; the Israeli flag flies over Jerusalem; and the gospel is going to all people groups.

These are exciting days! So what should we do? Should we log on to a web site and pay a fee for someone to take care of our pet if the Rapture happens? Over the last few months there are reports of people who maxed their credit cards out and stopped saving for college because they thought Camping's prediction was right. If you know Jesus really was coming back tomorrow, is that what you'd do? Go on a spending spree? I have a better idea. If you want to know what to do until Jesus returns, here's my suggestion:

## **BUILD YOUR LIFE ON GOD'S WORD AND SHARE THE GOOD NEWS WITH PEOPLE WHO NEED JESUS!**

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Matthew 24:35) Everything around us is temporary, but Jesus claimed His Word would exist forever. When this old earth has turned to dust and the stars have been plucked from their sockets in the sky, God's Word, the Bible, will still exist.

Most food and drugs have expiration dates. Or sometimes food products will have a "best if used before" date. You should turn to the flyleaf in the back of your Bible and write: "Expiration Date: Never." The Bible has no expiration date, but it does have a "best if used before" date. You should also write in your flyleaf: "Best if used before I die or before Jesus returns." Now each of us has an expiration date. The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." The Bible won't do you any good after you die or after Jesus returns, so you'd better read it, study it and obey it now.

As our world becomes more and more unstable, we need something permanent upon which we can base our lives. God's Word stands forever. There are only two things in this world that are eternal—the souls of men and women and the Word of God. So, if you want your life to matter for eternity, don't sit around waiting for Jesus to return. Instead get busy and invest yourself in

#

the Bible and reaching people for Jesus. So if you've been waiting to talk to a friend or a loved one about the Lord, don't put it off any longer.

In John 9:4 Jesus said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." When I was growing up, the chorus of one of my favorite hymns said, "We'll work 'till Jesus comes; We'll work 'till Jesus comes; We'll work 'till Jesus comes; And we'll be gathered home." (Words by Elizabeth Mills)

#

## OUTLINE

### 1. THE FIG TREE (Israel) HAS SPROUTED LEAVES (since May 15, 1948)

God said, "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." *Amos 9:15*

### 2. THIS GENERATION (Jewish People) HAS SURVIVED AND OCCUPIES JERUSALEM (since June 7, 1967)

"Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." *Luke 21:24*

### 3. THE GOSPEL IS BEING PREACHED TO EVERY PEOPLE-GROUP (*ethnos*)

Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." *Matthew 24:14*

WHAT TO DO UNTIL JESUS RETURNS: Build your life on God's Word and share the Good News with people who need Jesus!

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." *Matthew 24:35*