Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

2005-014

April 3, 2005 by Steve Brandon

Prophecy Is ...

Matthew 24:1-2

Prophecy is ...
1. Difficult
2. Dangerous
3. Divisive

Chapters 24 and 25 of the gospel of Matthew contain the last of the five discourses that Matthew has recorded Jesus giving. Each of these discourses end with a statement describing Jesus as "finishing" the words or instructions or parables (Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The first discourse was the Sermon on the Mount, which is recorded in Matthew 5-7. The second discourse was given in Matthew 10, when He instructed His disciples before they went out to preach the nearness of the kingdom. The third discourse was the kingdom parables, found in Matthew 13. The fourth discourse was in Matthew 18, which spoke of belief and forgiveness. The fifth discourse is in Matthew 24-25 and is often called "The Olivet Discourse," because Jesus gave these words "as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 24:3). This morning, we are going to consider the first two verses of this discourse and spend the rest of our time on overviewing prophecy.

> Matthew 24:1-2
> And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

As Jesus walked away from the temple, it may have been a symbolic fulfillment of the words that He had just spoken. In chapter 23, verse 38, Jesus said, "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" In other words, Jesus was telling the Jews that their house is alone and will be deserted. As Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, was leaving the temple for the last time, it was as if God Himself was

deserting the temple. It was as is "the glory had departed from Israel" (1 Sam. 4: 21).

Why the disciples pointed out to Jesus the wonderful buildings to Him, I have no idea. Perhaps it relates to the things Jesus just spoke to the religious leaders of the day. Jesus had just condemned them with no uncertain terms (in Matthew 23). Jesus had just communicated that they would be left desolate (Matt. 23:38). Perhaps it was in light of this statement that the disciples felt the need to point out to Jesus the glorious buildings behind them.

Indeed, the temple was a beautiful building. The temple mount and the temple itself was constructed during the reign of Herod, with his blessing at the expense of the Roman government. It took 46 years to build and was "Herod's greatest building achievement." [1] The Talmud said that Herod's temple was the most magnificent building in the world. [2]

The temple was built upon a raised mount, which was built with large, white stones along the foundation. These stones vary in size, an average stone would be about 3 feet high, 10 feet long, and (I'm guessing) 3 feet wide. Each of them weighed several tons. One of the stones in the wall is almost 40 feet long, weighing several hundred tons! How they moved the stones into place still baffles archaeologists and engineers today. These stones were so precisely chiseled that they were set upon one another with no mortar. If you go to Jerusalem, you can still see many of these stones today that formed the base of the temple mount. These stones are very impressive when you see them. You can only imagine what the entire structure would have looked like when it was finally finished.

On the temple mount was the temple itself. It was also a beautiful white stone building, with massive pillars and doors. Much of it was overlaid with silver and gold. It was very ornate and beautiful.

If you go to Jerusalem today, you can't see any of the temple itself. It was completely destroyed when the Romans entered Jerusalem in 70 A. D. There are no remains of the temple at all. In the academic circles today, there are debates with differing views about the exact location of the temple on the temple mount. I have read some of the arguments one way or another. [3] All of the arguments for or against particular sites are based upon theories. There is no archeological proof for any of them.

The point is this: The temple was totally destroyed! There is nothing left of the temple, which is exactly as Jesus said it would be, "Not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Matthew 24:2). This happened exactly as Jesus had told them it would.

Now when the disciples heard Jesus say these things, I believe that several things may have come into their mind. First, they would have had difficulty believing it. The temple itself was a huge building. It was a solid building, which seemingly would stand forever. The wall surrounding the temple mount gives enough evidence of the magnificence of what the structure must have been like. It would have been hard for them to believe that such a building could ever be destroyed.

Second, they would have thought back to the Scripture and realized that the prophet Micah had prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple mount. Perhaps they remembered the verse, "Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest."

Thirdly, they would be curious. Jesus had just made a huge prediction. They would certainly want to know when this would take place, which is exactly the question that the disciples ask in verse 3.

Notice that this question didn't come just as Jesus was walking out of the temple. It was after He and His disciples took the walk out of the temple area, down into the Kidron valley and up again, finally arriving at the Mount of Olives, overlooking all of Jerusalem. This walk was a "Sabbath's day journey" (Acts 1:12), which was about a kilometer. It would have taken some 20-30 minutes for Jesus and the disciples to take this walk. Perhaps it was at this time that the above thoughts were running through their minds.

We read in verse 3, "And as He was sitting 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 is from this question that Jesus then speaks about future events. He fills up two chapters of Matthew to answer this question. Chapters 24 and 25 are prophecy. They are filled with eschatology. In the Greek language, the word, escatoVmeans "last or end." So, "eschatology" means "a study of end times."

Before we proceed past this verse to Jesus' answer, I want to say a few things about prophecy in general, which will help to lay some foundational perspectives of prophecy before we simply jump right into things.

First of all, prophecy is ...
1. Difficult

In these past five weeks, I have done much reading and study in this passage and have found it to be very difficult to understand. It's not difficult in the words that Jesus used. His grammar isn't particularly complex. There is no question as to what Jesus is saying. It's not difficult to get a general understanding of what Jesus is saying. In fact, His practical exhortations to us are very clear. There is no doubt as to what our practical response to His words ought to be.

It is difficult in the particulars. It is difficult to know what exactly Jesus was referring to. The commentaries that I read on this passage are all over the map. Some said that everything concerning which Jesus spoke was fulfilled already in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. In this sense, there is nothing in these passages that await a future fulfillment. It is all done. Those who believe this are called "preterists." Some said that nothing of which Jesus spoke was fulfilled yet. In this sense, everything in these passages await a future fulfillment. Though I have not heard this term applied to them, you might well call them "futurists" in the sense that they believe that the fulfillment of these things is in the future (just as a preterist believes that all things have been fulfilled in the past). All other commentators land somewhere in between these two extremes. Some see more that has been already fulfilled. Some see less that has been fulfilled.

At this point, you need to know that these types of difficulties aren't unique only to Jesus' words here in the Olivet Discourse. They are characteristic of much prophecy that is in the Bible.

For an example of this, I want to examine the story of the virgin birth, as found in Matthew 1. This chapter begins with "the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (Matthew 1: 1), demonstrating Him to be of the line of David. In the last half of the chapter, we have recorded for us the account of "the birth of Jesus Christ" (Matthew 1:18). Every Christmas time, we go over these details of what took place so long ago in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married, but hadn't yet consummated their marriage. The Holy Spirit descended upon Mary and miraculously conceived a boy in her womb. We then come upon a few verses that

many of us are familiar with: Matthew 1:22-23, "Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means 'God with us.'"

If you simply read this verse of Scripture, you might get the sense that Isaiah was writing about the future coming of the Messiah. You might get the sense that Isaiah was putting forth how you can identify the Messiah: He would come from the womb of a virgin. However, should you go back to Isaiah 7:14 (from which this quotation comes), you will find, no mention the coming Messiah. Neither will you find any mention that this is one of the ways to identify the Messiah. Furthermore, there is no mention of a future expectation that this prophecy wasn't fulfilled.

Here is the story. The kings of Aram and Israel were waging war against Judah. When report came to the people, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim" (which is just north of Judah), Isaiah writes, "the hearts of [Judah] shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind" (Isaiah 7:2). It was a terrifying time for Judah! They were under attack.

Then, the word of the LORD came to Isaiah and told him to go to Ahaz, the king of Judah, and say to him, "Take care, and be calm, and have no fear and do not be fainthearted" (Isaiah 7:4) over the impending attack from these two nations. "[Though they are saying] 'Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it.' thus says the Lord GOD, 'it shall not stand nor shall it come to pass'" (Isaiah 7:6-7).

Such a claim was difficult to believe. Aram and Israel were on the doorsteps of the territory of Judah and about to attack. They were powerful nations and fully capable of overtaking Judah. To prove his claim to be true, the LORD spoke to Ahaz saying "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (Isaiah 7:10). The LORD made an offer to Ahaz to name the miracle that would prove the LORD's words to be true or not. The LORD told him to name something so incredible that it would be a clear display to all that the LORD had done it. If the LORD could do that, then certainly, He was able to stop these two countries from defeating Judah in battle, without a fight.

Ahaz refused saying, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" (Isaiah 7:12). So, the LORDwould name His own sign. He said, "The Lord Himself will give you a

sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken" (Isaiah 7: 14-16). In other words, a boy will be born of a virgin. He will be called Immanuel. By the time the boy knows enough to discern the good and the bad (which is only a few years), the kings that are threatening to overtake you will be destroyed.

As Isaiah continues his story, chapter 8 begins with a birth of a child. It was said of this child, "before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria" (Isaiah 8:4). Indeed, this is exactly what took place. In 732 B. C., Tiglath-Pileasar, the king of Assyria destroyed Damascus (which is where Aram was) and he destroyed Samaria (which is where Israel was). In only a few years, the threat of these two kings against Judah was gone. Indeed, the word of the LORD proved to be true. Several times in chapter 8, Isaiah referred to "Immanuel" (God with us) (Isaiah 8:8, 10).

And now, the question: was king Ahaz a preterist or a futurist? In other words, did king Ahaz understand the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 to be fulfilled in the birth of this boy? Or, did king Ahaz understand that this prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 was still yet to be fulfilled? How about you? Do you believe that the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in the times of Ahaz? Or, do you believe that the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus? What would you say? I say, "Yes." I believe that the prophecy was fulfilled in both instances. I believe that Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in the time of Ahaz. I believe that Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

The Lord made a promise that a virgin would bear a son, calling his name Immanuel. The Lord promised that these two kings would be wiped away before this boy was very old. These kings were wiped away, just as the Lord has said. Therefore, I believe that this boy was born, just as Isaiah 7:14 had prophesied. And yet, I also believe that this Scripture was also fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ. This is exactly what Matthew 1:22-23 tell us happened.

So, how do I account for such things? How can it be that Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in the time of Ahaz **and** in the time of Jesus? Does the Bible contradict itself? Or, is this how prophesy often works?

Here is how you explain such things. When the Bible predicts a future event, there are often multiple fulfillments that take place. I have often heard of these events described as a "near fulfillment" and a "far fulfillment." You might also call it an "initial fulfillment" and a "greater fulfillment."

I can give you many instances in the Bible in which this is the case. I can give you many passages of Scripture that appear to be speaking about David or Solomon or Israel as they are read in the Old Testament, and yet, the New Testament makes it clear that these passages were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Let's look at a few...

1. Psalm 22.

In Psalm 22:1, David writes, "My God, my God, why have Your forsaken me?" Later in the same Psalm, David writes, "All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ... 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him'" (Ps. 22:7-8). Later, David writes, "A band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots" (Ps. 22:16-18).

It sounds to us to be a description of the crucifixion. And indeed it is a description of the crucifixion. Everything I just read for you took place in the cross. Everything I just read was fulfilled in the cross. In fact, John 19:36 tells us that the reason why they didn't break the legs of Jesus (as they did to the other two who were crucified with Jesus), is that "the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of Him shall be broken.'" (John 19:36). And yet, David seemingly was only speaking about his own experience.

This is how prophesy works. There is a near fulfillment. There is a far fulfillment. It's not a contradiction. It's the way that the prophecy works. God has chosen to write His word in such a manner.

2. 2 Samuel 7.

In this passage, the LORDprophesies of the Son of David, who will build the temple (2 Sam. 7:13). The LORD said that his throne will be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16). In a very clear sense, this is speaking Solomon. It must be. He built the temple! And yet, there are some things that are said that can only be true in Jesus. His throne is the only throne that will endure forever!

So, when were these prophecies fulfilled? Were they fulfilled in Solomon? Were they fulfilled in Jesus? Or, were they fulfilled in both? I believe that they were fulfilled in both of them.

3. Hosea 11:1

In Hosea 11:1, we read, "When Israel was a youth, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." When Hosea wrote these words, they had a clear reference to the redemption of Israel out of the land of Egypt. And yet, in Matthew 2:15, we read that this verse of prophecy was fulfilled when Marry and Joseph returned from Egypt, where they had fled for safety from Herod's wrath.

4. Isaiah 53.

This passage speaks of the suffering servant (Is. 52:13), saying, "He was despised and forsaken of men. ... Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried, ... He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed ... The LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (verses 3-6). We read these things and instantly think of Jesus. And rightly so.

And yet, if you would look closely at the context of the book of Isaiah, you would discover that the servant is often identified as being the nation of Israel. Consider just one of several verses. Isaiah 49:3 says, "You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory." (See also Is. 41:8; 44:2; 45:2; 49:3). For this reason, many Jews today will refuse to believe that the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is Jesus. They believe it to be Israel, because the servant is so often identified as Israel.

This is how prophecy works. There is often a near reference and a far reference. Distinguishing between the two is often very difficult, which is my point!
Prophecy is difficult!

Prophecy is often like a web of yarn, where two colors (say, white and blue) are intertwined together. When you try to unravel it, you only pull the yarn into more knots. It's very difficult to separate the white from the blue. Furthermore, there are some strands that appear to be white, but as you follow the yarn for a little bit, you quickly discover that it turns blue after a short while. This is prophecy.

So, you ask, "How can we possibly understand?" The thing that ultimately unravels it all is time. With prophecy, all becomes clearer after the fact. Consider

the experience of the disciples. Back in Matthew 24, just after Jesus had predicted the destruction of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In verse 3, the disciples asked Jesus, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" The disciples asked about several events: the destruction of the temple, the full coming of Christ, and the end of the age. In their minds, they understood all of these events to be mixed together, "as a single complex web of events." [4]

When the disciples thought of the coming of the Messiah, they clearly thought that His coming would result in the redemption from the bondage of Rome, and perhaps, the culmination of all things. Perhaps you remember when the two disciples were on the road to Emmaus, describing to this stranger what things took place in Jerusalem. They told him that "we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" from Roman oppression (Luke 24:21). Even after Jesus was raised from the dead, they asked Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

For these disciples to fully understand what Jesus did, and how exactly Jesus fulfilled the Scripture, it took time and reflection and thought and study. Eventually, as time passed, they came to see clearly that there are two comings of Jesus. Jesus came the first time to save, and He will come a second time to judge. But, the disciples never understood this until after the fact.

There are many Scriptures that contain both of these aspects of the Messiah's coming (both His saving work and His judging work) together, even in the same verse. Perhaps you will remember when Jesus stood in his hometown synagogue to preach for the first time. He took the scroll of Isaiah the prophet and read from Isaiah 61. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are downtrodden, To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." At this point, he closed the scroll and gave it back to the attendant. He preached from these verses.

It is significant that Jesus didn't finish the second verse from which He read. For it goes on the speak of the coming judgment. It goes on to speak of the "day of vengeance" (Is. 61:2). In the same verse, you have His saving work and His judging work. Now, we understand clearly how this was to work itself out. For the early disciples of Jesus, it was a bit more difficult. The first time, the Messiah would come as a sacrifice for our sins to redeem us. The second time, more than 2,000 years later, the Messiah would come as a judge to condemn those who have

refused to believe in the hardness of their hearts, and as a king to receive those who have believed.

Though we have no record of it, certainly it is easy to imagine the eschatological debates that could have taken place with the Jews before Christ came. Some may have been in the pre-judgmental coming of the Messiah, who believed that the Messiah would come first, before he judged the world. Others may have believed in the imminent judgment view. I can imagine the prophecy conferences in which each of these groups could have used the Scripture to prove their point. I can imagine the endless debates that my have arisen.

Now, we know that these didn't take place, because nobody saw the two comings of the Messiah. Paul said that it was a mystery, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). But such imaginations help us to understand a bit of the situation today regarding the full understanding of the prophetical passages.

Prophecy is not cut and dried and able to be fully understood. This is equally true of the second coming of Christ as it was with the first. It is difficult to understand all of the details now. However, I am sure that after the fact, all will be made clear. We will understand which verses have been fulfilled completely. We will understand which verses will have a future fulfillment that is yet to come. But, for now, prophecy is difficult.

Prophecy is ...
2. Dangerous

There is something about knowing what the future holds that captures the attention of us all, Christian or non-Christian. Who wouldn't want to know the future. As a child, I remember really being fascinated by fortune cookies, in some sense believing that these fortunes would come true in my life. This fascination with the future keeps the horoscopes in business.

This very curiosity can be very dangerous. I know of a non-Christian man who was very interested in the book of Revelation. On several occasions, this man has told me that he has done some in-depth study of the Bible, and all of it the book of Revelation. The only reason why he is studying Revelation is because he thinks that it will help him get an advantage in this life, if he is smart enough to figure out what will take place in the future. On several occasions, I had the opportunity to

share the gospel with this man. Every time I shared it with him, he rejected it. This man is blind to the gospel, but interested in eschatology. That's dangerous.

I know of many groups that are dedicated to the study of prophecy. Some of them are radio ministries. Some of them are television ministries. Some of them are Sunday School classes. All of their focus and all of their efforts are focused upon eschatology and prophecy. They produce books on eschatology. They write articles on eschatology. They have seminars on eschatology. It's dangerous. Here's why, ...

Look at Matthew 24, and verse 4. When Jesus began His discourse on the events that will take place in the future, the very first thing out of his mouth were these words: "See to it that no one misleads you" (verse 4). I tell you that there is nobody who will mislead you more than those who focus their entire attention upon eschatology. For the most part, these people read their Bibles in one hand and read their newspapers in the other hand. All you need to do is wait a few years and you will soon discover that they were wrong.

I listened this week to a tape from a man who was preaching in the 1980's from Matthew 24. I respect this man greatly, and yet, I believe that some of his teaching was deceiving. He spoke with confidence how "the king of the north" (modern Russia) was going to come against Israel (Ezek. 38:2-3). He told how this king will unite with Persia (Ezek. 38:5), which is modern day Iran and Afghanistan. He said, "Before the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan [which took place in 1979], it was difficult to see how that country fit into the picture, but now we know--Afghanistan is controlled by the Soviet Union." This was before Russia fell. Russia no longer controls Afghanistan. I doubt that this man would say such things today.

It used to be that many prophecy experts were talking about Mikhail Gorbachev being the anti-Christ. The birthmark on his forehead caused some to identify this with the mark of the beast. But once the communism of the Soviet Union fell in 1991, nobody talked about Gorbachev much longer. In recent days, attention has been focused on Sadaam Hussein, thinking him to be the anti-Christ. After all, he controlled ancient Babylon. Doesn't Revelation speak about how Babylon is restored to greatness, only to fall? But, with the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the talk of Sadaam Hussein as the anti-Christ has fallen to a trickle. Attention has now shifted to North Korea or to Afghanistan. The speculation (or

deception) will continue on and on and on and on. More books will be written. More books will be sold. More people will be deceived, as history will demonstrate their predictions to be false.

What disturbs me about these things is that people will continue to follow these "prophecy experts." Though their predictions fail, these prophecy experts will continue to get a hearing.

Perhaps the biggest test case was the Y2K crisis. I don't know of a single "prophecy expert" that didn't predict major catastrophe on January 1, 2000. As we all know, very little happened on that day. They were wrong. They went on the record to say that January 1, 2000 would be a time of global disaster, but they were proved wrong! And yet, what happened to these prophecy experts? They have continued their ministries as if nothing ever happened. But, something dreadfully wrong has happened. They continue along today with their new theories as if nothing is wrong!

Before we leave this point, I want to sound a warning here concerning fictional books on eschatology. Fictional eschatology is big business today. Many have read some of these books have been so captivated, that they have sought for more (which the publishers have willingly provided). They can prove to be very fascinating reading. I know of a non Christian who was so captivated as he began reading some of these books, that he has read a dozen of them. The danger in these books is that they can be very misleading. Without a Biblical understanding of what the Scripture says, it is impossible to discern the assumptions of the author from the truth of the Bible. Great liberties are often taken in such books, and many have shaped their eschatology from fiction, an not from the Bible. Fictional eschatology is dangerous.

Those who are most engrossed in prophetical things will often spend the majority of their Bible study looking only at the verses in the Bible that address the future. In so doing, they can easily miss the clear commands, which always come intertwined in prophetical passages. The message is always, ...

... "be on the alert" (Matt. 24:42).
... "be ready" (Matt. 24:44).
... be doing the Master's will (Matt. 24:46).
... "Be on the alert" (Matt. 25:13).
... Be the "good and faithful slave," who turns his master's money into profit (Matt. 25:21).

... Give drink to the thirsty (Matt. 25:35).
... Give shelter to the stranger (Matt. 25:35).
... Give clothing to the naked (Matt. 25:36).
... Visit the sick (Matt. 25:36).

As a result, it is those who are most interested in studying prophecy, who end up being deceived and deceiving the most. Prophecy is dangerous.

Prophecy is ...
3. Divisive

On this last point, I have only a little to say. I want to begin the point by quoting J. C. Ryle. He wrote, "All portions of Scripture like this ought to be approached with deep humility and earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit. On no point have good people so entirely disagreed as on the interpretation of prophecy; on no point have the prejudices of one group, the dogmatism of a second and the extravagance of a third done so much to rob the church of truths which God intended to be a blessing." [5]

In the history of the Christian churches, there have been many different views of eschatology. There has never been agreement within the church of the one view that is correct. The church has agreed fully in many areas! The church has always agreed on the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the physical resurrection from the dead, and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But there has never been full agreement on eschatology. I believe that much of this has to do with the difficulty of understanding prophecy (i.e. like my first point sought to make clear).

For an Old Testament saint, it was very difficult to understand what the Messiah would be like. It was very difficult for them to understand His comings. In fact, Peter said that the prophets themselves who prophesied, "made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:10-11). God hid the truth from them, but He has revealed it to us (Eph. 3:5).

We stand in the same situation regarding the return of Christ. That Jesus is returning to gather His elect and the judge His enemies is a non-negotiable. Throughout all history, the entire Christian church has believed this. But, **when** this takes place, and the exact sequence of events that take place, has never found full agreement in the church of Jesus Christ.

And yet, there are many who will take their view on eschatology and press it as a standard for orthodoxy. They will say, "You don't believe in the pre-tribulational, pre-millennial return of Christ? Your theology must be way wrong. You must be a heretic in your views!" Brethren, this ought not to be!

I am thinking right now of two men who have exhibited a great ability to disagree on eschatology and yet, be engaged together with one another in ministry. I am thinking of John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul. I respect both of these men greatly. If ever they would come to Rock Valley Bible Church, I would sit down and let them speak. And yet, their views on these things are on divergent ends of the spectrum. R. C. Sproul is a "preterist." He believes that everything from Matthew 24:4 through the end of the chapter has been fulfilled, with the possible exception of verses 29-31. John MacArthur is a "futurist" (as I have sought to use the term). He believes that everything from Matthew 24:4 through the end of the chapter is yet to be fulfilled. And yet, these men have willingly chosen not to make their eschatological views a point of division.

R. C. Sproul has been a frequent speaker at the annual Shepherds Conference which takes place at Grace Community Church, where John MacArthur is pastor. Likewise, John MacArthur has been a frequent speaker at the Annual Ligoneer Conference that R. C. Sproul hosts in Orlando, Florida. They willingly unite together because of their similar views on the gospel. They both are committed to the sovereignty of God in saving the soul. Their eschatology forms no ground for them to divide.

Such an example ought to be held in the fore-front of our minds as we go through these things for the next few months. Let's not make one's views on eschatology a reason to be divisive.

In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity. Today, you might say it this way. "On the majors, agreement; on the minors, tolerance; on all things, love." May this be our heart regarding our views on eschatology.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 3, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

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[1] Peter Connolly, Living the Time of Jesus of Nazareth, p. 34.

[2] The Babylonian Talmud, Bava Bathra 4a.

[3] The Biblical Archaeology Review put forth several theories in its March/April 2000 issue (pp. 52-61). The following link will take you to a typical discussion of these things (http://www.bibleDiscoveries.com/templesite.html).

[4] D. A. Carson, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8, page 495.

[5] J. C. Ryle, Commentary on Matthew, p. 225.