

Christ in Prophecy

Prophecy 30: How Not to Interpret Bible Prophecy

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: Did you know that we are living in the midst of the Millennium? Well I didn't know that either, and I don't believe it. On the opposite extreme did you know that there are some who believe that we are living in the midst of the Trumpet Judgements? I don't believe that either. In a moment we are going to take a look at two books that make these claims and we are going to use those books to make some observations about how not to interpret Bible prophecy. Stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our Blessed Hope and Welcome to Christ in Prophecy. I got a very special program in store for you here because I am going to be talking to you about an extremely important topic and that is: How to interpret Bible prophecy. And as I was thinking it over I decided that probably the best way to go at this, at least an unusual way was to talk about how not to interpret Bible prophecy. And I thought I would do that by talking with you about two books that are classic examples of how not to interpret Bible prophecy. One of the books is from the 20th Century and the other is from this century, in fact just recently published. One of the books the one from the 20th Century claims that we are living in the Millennium right now. And the other book just recently published claims that we are living in the midst of the Trumpet Judgments. You could not find two viewpoints further apart. One is saying that we are in the Tribulation, the other saying we are in the Millennium.

I think what I'll do is start with the book that has to do with--the book that was published in the 20th Century that claims that we are living in the Millennium now. That particular book was this one entitled "The Millennium" by Loraine Boettner. And Loraine Boettner was considered to be one of the foremost theologians of the 20th Century. And before I get into his book let me just make one point about him and that is that he was an Amillennialist. Now for those of you who may not be real familiar with Bible prophecy let me just explain. The Amillennial viewpoint is a view that says that the Millennium began when the Church was established and that it has continued to this day. And that we are in the Millennium right now. And people who know the Bibles say, well, now wait a minute, wait a minute because the Bible says that when the Millennium is established the earth will be an earth of peace, righteousness, and justice. Where is it? The answer of those who believe in this is that we are in the Millennium because the Church is in the world and the Church is restraining evil. And I would say yes, that's true the Holy Spirit works through the Church to restrain evil. But the Bible says the earth is going to be flooded with peace, righteousness, and justice as the waters cover the sea, and it says there will no longer be any war. Surely that's not going on today. In order to take a position that we are in the Millennium you've got to spiritualize Scripture. You've got to say it doesn't mean what it

says. Same is true of the Tribulation. Those people who believe in Amillennialism will argue that we are simultaneously in the Millennium and in the Tribulation because the Church is in the world we are in the Millennium but because the Church is persecuted we are in the Tribulation.

And yet the Bible says the Tribulation is going to last seven years. And they say, Oh, well but seven is just a symbolic figure that means it's going to last a complete period of time. The Millennium the Bible says is going to last a 1,000 years. They say, well, but a 1,000 years doesn't really mean a 1,000 years it just means an indefinite period of time.

I hope you are beginning to get the picture that this is one of the worst abuses of Bible prophecy, it is what we call spiritualization, it's always people who say, the Bible doesn't mean what it says, let me tell you what it says and then they spiritualize that particular Scripture. For example Amillennialists say that when Jesus comes back He will never put His feet on this earth. He will just appear in the heavens, we will go up to meet Him, we'll be taken to Heaven and we will live in a sort of ethereal spiritual world in Heaven forever. Whereas the Bible says we are going to get new bodies and we are going to live forever on a new earth. And they say, well the new earth is just code language for Heaven, it doesn't mean what it says.

Now with that background let me just say that I grew up in an Amillennial church. I grew up in a church that taught Amillennialism that's all I was taught. And the sermon that we heard over, and over and over like a broken record was one that said, there is not one verse in the Bible that even implies that Jesus will ever put His feet on this earth again. I heard that over and over.

And then one days I was flipping through the Bible, and as I was flipping through it opened to Zechariah chapter 14 and I began to read the first 9 verses. Folks, I was only 12 years old at the time. Do you know what those 9 verses say? In Zechariah 14 they say that in the end times when Jerusalem is surrounded by the enemy forces which we know from other verses will be the army of the Antichrist. It says that just as the city is about to fall the Lord will come from Heaven to the Mount of Olives, and it says the moment His feet touch the mountain it will split open in a great earthquake; He will speak a supernatural word all the armies will be destroyed and verse 9 says He will become king over all the earth. Now folks, I was only 12 years old when I read that but I could understand it, it was simple to understand. And I thought, how can that be? It says He's coming back to the Mount of Olives and my preachers say He will never put His feet on this earth again.

So I got up my courage. I went to my pastor scared to death and I said, Pastor you know you preach that Jesus will never put His feet on the earth again. He said, "That's right." I said, "Well, sir, read this." And I gave him Zechariah 14. And He sat there and he read it, and he read it and he read it. I thought he was never going to say anything. Finally he looked up and he put his finger in my face and he said, Let me tell you something son, I don't know what this means, but I'll guarantee you one thing it doesn't mean what it says. Well of course it didn't mean what it said because it disagreed with what he was preaching.

But my name is Reagan, that means I'm Irish, and it means I'm stubborn, and so I just didn't accept that. So every time a preacher came to town and he'd say, "Not one verse in the Bible that implies Jesus will ever put His feet on the earth again." I would get up and I'd say, "What about Zechariah 14?" And they'd always give me the same answer, "Doesn't mean what it says." Finally one day a preacher came who was a seminary graduate which was unusual in our denomination in those days, and I was about 19 at that time. I went up to him afterwards and I said, "You say that the Lord's never going to put His feet on this earth again." "That's right son."

I said, "What about Zechariah 14?" Well he knew it, he was a seminary graduate, he didn't have to read it. He leaned toward me and said, "Son that is apocalyptic." Scared me to death. I didn't know what apocalyptic was, I didn't know if it was a disease or what it was, but it sure sounded pretty serious to me. So, when I got up to preach in my 20's I would get up and just parrot what I heard, There is not one verse in the Bible that even implies Jesus will ever put His feet on the earth again. And when some little old lady in tennis shoes would come up and say, What about Zechariah 14? I would say, Apocalyptic. She would run for the door and I'd smile and neither one of us know what I was talking about.

Then one day I did something I'd never done before I sat down and read the book of Zechariah. You can read it in 15 minutes it is a short book. And I discovered something astounding. I discovered that the book of Zechariah is literally filled with prophecies about the First Coming of Jesus. The book of Zechariah says that the Messiah will come on a donkey. Jesus did. It says He will be held as a king. The crowds did that. It says that He will be betrayed. He'll be betrayed by a friend. He'll be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. The 30 pieces of silver will be used to buy a potter's field. It says that He will be lifted up and that He will be pierced. All of those prophecies are in the book of Zechariah, and guess what? Every one of them meant exactly what they said. That's when I realized that Bible prophecy means what it says. If all the First Coming prophecies meant what they said, then the Second Coming prophecies mean what they say. And that we need to stop spiritualizing them and playing God by saying that they mean something other than what they say. You see people love to spiritualize prophecy because when they spiritualize prophecy they can make the Bible mean what they want it to mean, rather than what God meant for it to mean. And so from that point on I decided I was going to interpret the whole Bible from beginning to end, not only just Bible prophecy but all of it to mean what it says, and just interpret it for its plain sense meaning.

Now, back to this book by Loraine Boettner called, The Millennium. Loraine Boettner I was interested to see how he would deal with Zechariah 14. So that is one of the first things I turned to in his book. This book came out in 1957 and I was studying it in about 1970. I turned over to see what he would say and I was just astonished at how he interpreted Zechariah 14. It is a classic example of spiritualization. Now once again the prophecy says that in the end times Jerusalem will be surrounded by enemy armies, which we know from other verses will be the army of the Antichrist. That just as Jerusalem is about to fall Jesus will come to the Mount of Olives, when His foot touches the mountain it splits open in a great earthquake. Then He speaks a supernatural word, all the armies are defeated, and verse 9 He will become king over all the earth. Loraine Boettner was an Amillennialist he didn't believe Jesus was ever coming back to this earth, so here is how he interpreted that particular passage. He said, the city of Jerusalem stands for the human heart. The armies around Jerusalem are symbolic of the evil forces in the world that are attacking the heart. He said, when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior He comes and He stands upon your heart, symbolically, and your heart splits in contrition and repentance, that's the earthquake, and then Jesus becomes king over your heart. Well that is a very interesting interpretation the only problem is that is not what the Bible says. I hope you're beginning to get the idea now what I mean about spiritualization and how people take what the Bible says and they just say, No, it does not mean that at all, it means something entirely different.

Well I'll tell you what I want to shift gears now and I want us to come to a book that just been published here in the 21st Century. And it is a book that claims that we are living in the middle of the Trumpet Judgments and it does so by the spiritualization of Scripture.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy. We are in the process of discussing how to interpret Bible prophecy. And for those of you who may of just tuned in just let me say that I have been talking about a book that was published back in the 20th Century that claimed that we are living in the Millennium. And then I am getting ready to shift to a new book that claims that we are living in the midst of the Trumpet Judgments. Both books are based upon one of the worse abuses of Bible prophecy and that is what I call spiritualization saying that Bible really doesn't mean what it says, that you must spiritualize it, that it is all symbolic language.

Well, we are going to take a look at that now as we look at this new book. And the new book is this one it is called, "Final Warning" and it was published by a good friend of mine by the name of Carl Gallups. Those of you who are regular viewers of this program are very familiar with Carl because we've had him on this program a number of times. He's a wonderful man of God. He is a pastor of a church in Florida. And he is a great writer. In fact how I got acquainted with Carl is that he published a book called, The Magic Man in the Sky, and this was the best book I have ever read in my life presenting a defense of the existence of God. And in addition to that it also is a book that really tears evolution apart as a modern day fantasy. And I loved the book so I invited Carl to come and be with us. And we did a wonderful series of programs about that book.

Carl then wrote a second book, and the second book was called, The Rabbi Who Found Messiah, in fact I wrote the introduction to this particular book. And this is about a world famous Rabbi by the name of Yitzhak Kaduri who lived in Israel and who was the head of the Kabbalist Movement which is an occultic movement within the Jewish religion. And this man was world renown, he was 105 years old when he died. And the man announced about a year before he was going to die, of course he didn't know when he was going to die but he announced that he was going to--that the Messiah had appeared to him and that the Messiah had revealed his name. And he said, I put his name on a piece of paper in a sealed envelope and I want that opened a year after my death. A year after his death it was opened and it was written in Kabbalistic code. They immediately put it on their website but two or three days later they took it off the website and began to try to cover up the whole thing because it said the Messiah is Yeshua, or Jesus. They were stunned. His son immediately said, "Well my father was suffering from dementia." Which he was not. And they've done everything in the world to cover it up since then. However some Messianic Jews had copied that off the website, they published it in a magazine in Israel and once again the Orthodox Jews said it was a bunch of nonsense. But Carl who was a detective for 20 years before he went into the ministry used those detective instincts of his to put together a tremendous book, it is kind of an investigative book about that. And that book is being used in Israel today to lead many people to the Lord Jesus Christ, for which I praise God. Carl has a zeal for lost souls and so he is very excited that God is using the book in that way.

I wish I could recommend his newest book called, "The Final Warning" but I can't. And the reason is because he uses spiritualization to interpret God's prophetic Word. Let me give you an example, a very quick example of what I'm talking about. In the book of Revelation it says in chapter 11 when the Tribulation begins, that seven year period of unparalleled horror that lies ahead of us. It says when it begins there is going to be two witnesses of God who will appear in Jerusalem for 3 ½ years and they will be preaching the Gospel and they will be calling the world to repentance. And it says the whole world will hate these guys with a passion, but it says God will supernaturally protect them. Then it says that in the middle of the Tribulation when the Antichrist comes to Jerusalem to declare himself God the very first thing he does is kill those two witnesses. God raises His hand off of them. And he kills them and it says that their bodies lie in the streets of Jerusalem for 3 ½ days, and then suddenly they are resurrected. The whole world sees it, the whole world is amazed and then they are raptured up into heaven and the whole world is even more amazed.

Now, Carl in interpreting this passage begins by saying well you know this sounds like two men, it even talks about their bodies lying in the streets. But he says this really is not two men at all these are just symbols. Well folks, that is very interesting because they have been interpreted as two men ever since the beginning of the Church. You go back to the Church Fathers and they all agree that they were Elijah and Enoch. In modern day times most people say they are Elijah and Moses. We don't know for sure their identity, but they've always been interpreted for what the Bible says as two men. Yet Carl begins to spiritualize and he says, well no, these are not two men, not at all. These are simply symbols of two groups of people. One is a symbol of Messianic Jews, the other is a symbol of the Church. Now right there you've got a problem because Messianic Jews are part of the Church, they are not something separate and apart from the Church. You don't really have two separate groups there, the Church includes Messianic Jews. But nonetheless he says one is Messianic Jews, the other is the Church. Do you know why he does this? Because he wants to put the Rapture in the middle of the Tribulation. And so he says, when those two men are taken up to heaven what really is taken is not these two witnesses, what's really taken is all Messianic Jews and the Church. In other words all believers are taken at that time, and that is when the Rapture occurs in the middle of the Tribulation. Now that is classic spiritualization.

Now, let's get back to his fundamental thesis in the book. His fundamental thesis is that we are living in the midst of the Tribulation judgments. For those of you who may not be all that familiar with the book of Revelation let me just say it says that in the end times there is going to be a seven year period of unparalleled horror here upon the earth. Where God pours out His wrath on those who have been shaking their fist at Him and cursing Him. And also the purpose is not only to punish them but the purpose also is to bring people to repentance so that they might be saved. That is the marvelous thing about our God, He is a God of loving-kindness even when He pours out His wrath His fundamental purpose is not to punish but to bring people to repentance. Now it says most people will double up their fists and they will curse God and they will not repent. Some will, there will be a great harvest of souls during the Tribulation.

Ok, with that background--one other thing it says that there is going to be a series of judgments during that seven years there will be Seal Judgments followed by Trumpet Judgments, followed by Bowl Judgments. And these will be three series of judgments and within each one of those there are going to be seven judgments. So in all there is going to be 21 judgments poured out upon the earth during this period of time.

Now, Carl's thesis is that we are living right now in the midst of the Trumpet Judgements. He says the Seals Judgments are not judgments at all they are just a prophecy of what is to come. And the Trumpet Judgements are a fulfillment of that prophecy. First of all there is no reason in the context of the book of Revelation to say that. The Seal Judgments are presented like judgments just like all the others are. And the very common sense approach to this is that they are judgments. But he says no, we are living in the midst of the Trumpet Judgments which are a fulfillment of what is prophesied in the Seal Judgements.

Now, folks he says he began to recognize this in 1986 when the Chernobyl disaster occurred because Chernobyl in the Ukrainian language means wormwood, and he said that immediately reminded me of the third Trumpet Judgment. The third Trumpet Judgment reads as follows, it says, the Third Angel sounded and a great star fell from heaven burning like a torch and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood and a third of the waters became wormwood. And many men died from the waters because they were made bitter. Now that's the third Trumpet Judgment. And he says, has to be a fulfillment today because of the mention of wormwood.

Well first of all Chernobyl in the Ukrainian language does not mean wormwood, it means mugwort. Mugwort and wormwood are two medicinal herbs that are very, very bitter they are in the same family. The Ukrainian word for wormwood is polyn, P-O-L-Y-N, now polyn in Chernobyl are used sometimes simultaneously or interchangeably that's for sure, but Chernobyl means mugwort, not wormwood.

Now even if it meant wormwood that would not mean the prophecy was fulfilled because the prophecy says a star is going to come from heaven burning like a torch. And he says, well it just means something like a star. Incidentally when star is mentioned in the Bible that is a word that is used for a great number of heavenly bodies. It can be an asteroid. It can be a comet. It can be a star. But it is some sort of heavenly body comes down. And he says, oh, no, no. John just thought that was it. He said, when the Chernobyl blew up and the debris came back down that is what John saw when he thought something was falling from heaven like a star. Well that is a very convenient interpretation, but that's not what the Bible says. And he says furthermore, that one-third of the fresh waters of the world are going to be polluted. And he says, well, you know one-third of the waters that is just hyperbole that just refers to a great expanse of territory. No, it says one-third of the freshwaters of the world are going to be polluted. So there is not fulfillment at Chernobyl of this particular prophecy.

Then Carl says, well since I discovered that the third Trumpet Judgment had been fulfilled then the first two must have been fulfilled some place. So he goes looking for them. Folks, let me tell you something when these prophecies are fulfilled nobody will have to go looking for them, nobody. They are going to be so overwhelming, so unprecedented that the entire world will be focused upon them. But no he goes looking. He says, well let's look at the first prophecy it says that there will be hail fire mixed with blood thrown to the earth and a third of the earth will be burned up and the trees of the earth will be burned up and the green grass will be burned up. A scorched earth is going to result one-third of the world from this. He says, well that's either got to be the Russian scorched earth policy that was used against the Nazi's when they invaded Russia in World War II or it's got to be World War I. We are trying to decide which one of those it is? He says well it is World War I. Well folks World War I did not result in one-third of the earth being scorched. And he says, well that doesn't really mean one-third of the earth, it just means one-third of the battle field which was in Europe. Folks that is spiritualizing what God says here.

Then he goes to the second Trumpet Judgment and it says the Second Trumpet angel sounded and something like a great mountain, something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown in the sea and a third of the sea became blood. And he says, well he thinks this was fulfilled with the atomic bomb blast on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He says, well you know if you were out on the ocean and you were looking in the direction of Japan and you couldn't see the Island, and suddenly the atomic bomb went off and you saw it going up in the air you would think that was a mountain on fire. And so that is the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Well folks that's not what the prophecy says it say something from Heaven is going to come down and cause this. And it says also that it is going to result in one-third of the sea, the first Trumpet Judgment affected freshwater, this effects one-third of the sea. The atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not fulfill that, he says, well that just refers to a large expanse of territory. Again the spiritualization of the prophecy.

Then we come to the fourth prophecy and the fourth prophecy says that one-third of the sun and one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars are going to be smitten so that one-third of their light will be darkened on the face of the earth. And amazingly he says, well let's look at an article that was in the New York Times back a number of years ago. In this article is says that between 1950 and 1990 that forty years that the amount of sunlight reaching the earth was diminished by one-third he calls this global dimming. Well folks that is no fulfillment of this prophecy. First of all this says one-third of the light will be cut out not 8-10% and that is what the New York Times article said, 8-10%. This says one-third of the light. Furthermore this says in addition to that that it is going to be something sudden, this is something that is going-- everybody will be aware of. That dimming that took place between 1950 and 1990 which was due to pollution and which has been reversed now. That dimming hardly anybody ever recognized or knew about until the New York Times announced it so this is no fulfillment.

Then we come to the fifth angel, the Fifth Trumpet is the one that he really focuses in on and the one that he spiritualizes the most. Let me explain it to you this is a long one so I will just give you a summary it says that when the Fifth Trumpet is sounded an angel will come down to earth and this angel will open the abyss, the bottomless pit. We are told in other verses in the Bible that's where demons who revolted against God because they didn't keep their proper place here on this earth that is where they are imprisoned. He is going to open that says smoke comes out, a horde of demons come out shaped like locust with tails like scorpions and it says that they are going to torment all of mankind for five months and people will not be able to die. And it says that the person in charge of this will be a demon and named Abaddon or Apollyon which means the destroyer.

Now, in approaching this particular Scripture Carl says, well you know that word for bottomless pit or abyss really just is a word that refers to a pit to a hole in the ground like a well. And he says, where do you have the most wells in the world? In the Middle East where you have all those water wells. He said, this is about the Gulf War in 1990-91, this is the Gulf War. Iraq invaded Kuwait; Saddam Hussein tormented the poor people of Kuwait for five months. And then we invaded and drove them out and they burned their oil fields as they retreated, the smoke. And guess what Saddam Hussein's nickname was Destroyer.

Folks, come on, this is not about the Gulf War this is a demonic invasion that is going to occur during the Tribulation that is going to affect everybody on planet Earth and not just the poor people of Kuwait. And it says that that king named the Destroyer is one of the demons who

comes out of the pit. Now I admit Saddam Hussein was an evil man, but He was not a demon from the pit of Hell.

So, what have we learned from these two books? I think that we have to learn number one that you don't play around with God's Word by saying it doesn't mean what it says. You accept it for its plain sense meaning. Folks, my rule of interpretation for the Bible from beginning to end, whether it is prophecy or not, if the plain sense makes sense don't look for any other sense or you will end up with nonsense. Just take it for its plain sense meaning. Reminds me of one of my heroes in the faith Henry Morris who was the founder of the Institute for Creation Research. He wrote a book about Revelation one of the best commentaries I've ever read called, "Revelation Revealed." And in the beginning he said, I'm writing this book because people tell me they cannot understand the book of Revelation. He said, I've got news for you, the book of Revelation is easy to understand. It is hard to believe. If you'll believe it you'll understand it.

Let me give you an example of what I am talking about there. One time I went to a seminary library in Fort Worth, Texas, a library that had literary hundreds of commentaries on the Bible. I went through those commentaries and looked at Revelation chapter 7 where it says that God is going to anoint a 144,000 Jews in the Tribulation to serve Him. And I wanted to see what those commentaries said. Did you know that 85% of them said those 144,000 Jews were the Church? Folks, it says they're Jews, it even names the tribes where they come from. What would God have to do to convince us He is talking about 144,000 Jews? This is classic spiritualization. There are two parts of the Bible that have been most impacted by this spiritualization, one is the beginning of the Bible, the other is the end of the Bible. One is Genesis, the other is Revelation. If you start out spiritualizing the Bible you are probably going to end up spiritualizing it. I want to appeal to you to stop the spiritualization.

Well that is our program for this week. Until next week the Lord willing this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries, saying, Look up, be watchful for our redemption is drawing near.

End of Program