

Our Daily Bread Ministries Discover the Word Series

Jesus the Prophet in Matthew

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1. Prophets in the Old Testament

What comes to mind when you hear the words “prophet” and “prophecy?”

Core Passage: Deuteronomy 18:15-22

Supporting Passages: Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 28:1-6, 15-19; 30:15-20; 34:10; Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Acts 3:19-26

Key Ideas:

1. Prophets and prophetesses¹ were not spiritual meteorologists who forecast history and wrote it down before it happened.
2. From Moses on, prophets were God’s messengers, filled with the Spirit and called to speak for God to Israel about Israel’s covenantal responsibilities.
3. Prophets after Moses were “mini-Moses’s” who called Israel to be faithful to God and the Torah. All these led up to Jesus, the ultimate prophet (John 1:21; Acts 3:19-26).
4. Prophecy is covenantal discourse that promises rewards for obedience and warns of punishment for disobedience. The promises are the means to achieve faithfulness.

Take Away: Understanding biblical prophecy is not about deciphering dates and timetables—it’s about getting our lives in line with God’s plan. “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Matt 3:2; 4:17)

2. Fulfillment of Prophecy in Matthew

You’re in the checkout line at the market and you glance at the magazine rack. You see this headline: PROPHECY FULFILLED! Do you buy the tabloid?

Core Passage: Matthew 2:13-15, quoting Hosea 11:1

¹ See Exod 15:20 (Miriam); Jdg 4:4 (Deborah); 2 Kgs 22:14; 34:22 (Huldah); Neh 6:14 (Noadiah, a false prophetess); Isa 8:3 (Isaiah’s wife); Anna (Luke 2:36 (Anna); Acts 21:9 (4 daughters of Philip); 1 Cor 11:4-5 (married women who prophesy in the church); Rev 2:20 (reference to the so-called prophetess Jezebel)

Supporting Passages: The wider context of Matthew 2-3, especially the Old Testament citations in Matthew 2:5/Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:17-18/Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 3:2/Isa 40:3; as well as Matthew 3:13-17; 5:17-20

Key Ideas:

1. Fulfillment means that what God said will happen, will happen. God keeps his promises to us. E. g. Matt 2:5-6/Mic 5:2
2. Fulfillment means that what God commanded must be obeyed. God expects us to keep our promises to him. E. g. Matt 3:15; 5:17
3. Fulfillment means that what God has foreshadowed will be completed. History isn't chaos; it unfolds God's plan. E. g. Matt 2:15; Hos 11:1. Jesus put his feet into the footprints of Israel.
4. Fulfillment means that Jesus fulfills the history of Israel by obeying and teaching God's law perfectly. He calls us to continue his prophetic mission.

Take Away: Don't waste your time scouring the latest news for fulfilled prophecies. Instead, trust God to do what he has said he will do, and follow Jesus until he comes. "All the promises of God find their 'Yes!' in Jesus." (2 Cor 1:20).

3. The History of Israel Culminates in Jesus

With turmoil raging all over the world, are you tempted to think that history is spinning out of control?

Core Passage: Matt 1:1-17

Supporting Passages: Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:12-29

Key Ideas:

1. History makes sense when you understand how the roles of Abraham and David culminate in their descendant Jesus (Matt 1:1, 17). As David's son Jesus will rule over Israel. As Abraham's son Jesus will extend Israel's blessings to all the nations.
2. From Abraham to David (Matt 1:2-6) was a time of promise and growth.
3. From David to the exile in Babylon (Matt 1:7-11) was a time of decline and judgment.

4. From the exile in Babylon to the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:12-16) was a time of release from exile and renewal of God's promises to Israel.

Take away: God's promise to bless all the nations through Abraham's descendants was being fulfilled behind the scenes during the long, difficult days before Jesus came. Today we are living through similar days until Jesus comes again. Then we will realize again that history is His Story. "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come, and will not delay." (Hebrews 10:37 quoting Habakkuk 2:3-4)

4. Jesus and His Forerunner John the Baptist

When you're at a wedding, what do you typically pay attention to? Let me guess—you typically don't pay much attention to the best man. Here's an exception to that rule!

Core Passage: Matthew 11:2-19

Supporting Passages: Matthew 3:1-17; 4:17; 9:14-17; 14:1-12; Luke 1; John 1

Key Ideas:

1. As Jesus' forerunner, John called Israel to prepare to meet their Messiah-King Jesus by turning from sin to God and receiving baptism.
2. John was Israel's penultimate prophet, the greatest of all the prophets, save One.
3. John's ministry was like a somber funeral dirge; Jesus' ministry was like a joyful wedding dance.
4. As great as he was, John still had times of doubt about Jesus.

Take away: John faithfully accomplished a unique and difficult ministry. He put the spotlight on Jesus, not himself. Are we like John? "He was not the light, but he came to bear witness about the light." (John 1:8) "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

5. Jesus and the Spirit

Does it surprise you that even Jesus depended on the enablement of the Holy Spirit?

Why might that feel like a surprise to us?

Core Passages: Matthew 3:16-17; 12:17-21, alluding to Isaiah 42:1-4

Supporting Passages: Luke 3:21-22; 4:1, 14,16-21, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2; John 1:29-34;

3:34-35; Acts 10:38

Key ideas:

1. John somehow recognized that Jesus had no need for repentance and hesitated to baptize him.
2. As the Servant of Isaiah 42, Jesus insisted on being baptized in order to obey God and identify with John's ministry and the repentant remnant of Israel.
3. At Jesus baptism, the Father declared his approval of Jesus and empowered him with the Spirit for his prophetic/messianic ministry.
4. Jesus' gentle manner with hurting people was as much a mark of the Spirit's work as the spectacular miracles he performed.

Take away: God's prophets, even the ultimate prophet Jesus, were always empowered by God's Spirit. Are we dependent on the Spirit every day?

6. Jesus and Moses: Law and Grace

Can you think of different pairs of people that are so tightly connected that it sounds strange to see or hear about one of them by themselves? (i.e. Abbot and Costello, Mario and Luigi, Woody and Buzz, Calvin and Hobbes). What about Jesus and Moses? We don't tend to connect them closely, but actually they're best friends.

Core Passage: Matthew 5:17-48; 7:28-29

Supporting Passages: Matthew 12:1-7; 15: 1-20; 19:3-9; John 1:17, 45; 5:39-47; 9:28-29;

Acts 28:23; Hebrews

Key Ideas:

1. How do we understand "law and grace" issues today?
2. In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus explains his relationship to Moses in general terms: he did not come to abolish the law and prophets but to fulfill them.
3. In Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus gives us six examples to illustrate how he fulfills individual case laws.
4. Jesus fulfills the law of Moses by explaining God's original purpose for it, a purpose that had been obscured by human traditions.

5. Although many have highlighted the contrast between Jesus' teaching and the Scriptures he cites,² the real contrast is not between Jesus and Moses' law but between Jesus' and the Pharisees' teachings about Moses' law.

6. Jesus' relationship to Moses was the toughest issue his original hearers faced. It is still a major obstacle for Jewish people today.

Take Away: Understanding the unity of Jesus and Moses opens up the Old Testament for Christians. "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

7. Jesus, Israel's Leaders, and Us: Do what they say, not what they do

Are you annoyed with other people's virtue-signaling? Are you prone to humble-bragging yourself?

Core Passage: Matthew 23:1-28

Supporting Passages: Isaiah 1:2-20; 5:8-6:4; 19:13; Matthew 6:1-2; 15:1-20

Key Ideas:

1. The seven woes (curses) of Matthew 23³ are the flip-side of the beatitudes (blessings) of Matthew 5:1-12.

2. Expressions of woe are found throughout the Bible, especially when prophets announce God's coming announcement. A series of seven woes is found in Isaiah 5:8 to 6:4.

3. The root cause of the seven woes is hypocrisy—religious fraud involving outward behavior that masks one's inward relationship to God.⁴

4. The seven woes in Matthew 23 are best understood as a series of three pairs followed by a final woe that exposes the reason for the others.

- Pair 1: The Pharisees' focus on making converts actually lead people to hell, not heaven (Matt 23:13-15).

² Note the word "but" that introduces Jesus' teaching in 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44 in most translations.

³ See Matthew 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29. Compare Jesus' words of woe in Matthew 11:21; 18:7; 26:24.

⁴ Hypocrisy is mentioned 14 times in Matthew: 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51.

- Pair 2: The Pharisees focus on obscure legal details regarding oaths and tithing rather than central matters such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt 23:16-24).
- Pair 3: The Pharisees focus on outward appearances rather than on inward realities (Matt 23:25-28).
- Final woe: The Pharisees rejection of Jesus culminates a heart-breaking pattern of Israel rejecting God's prophets (Matt 23:29-36). This hypocrisy is the root of all the other sins.

Take Away: Virtue signaling is not just an annoying habit of pop culture. It is a mark of hypocrisy, false piety that leads people to hell. Eagerly pointing out virtue-signaling in others can itself be a form of virtue signaling on our part.

8. Jesus, Israel's Last Prophet

In pop culture today, love seems to mean unconditional acceptance, and even constructive criticism is labeled hate speech. Can we be critical of people and still love them?

Core Passage: Matthew 23:29-39

Supporting Passages: 2 Chronicles 36:15-23; Lamentations; Matthew 21:33-46;

Galatians 4:16

Key Ideas:

1. Israel's historical pattern of rejecting God's prophets came to its horrific end with the crucifixion Jesus.
2. This is one of the most sobering passages in the whole Bible.
3. First Jesus sarcastically tells Israel's leaders to kill him and complete Israel's history of rejecting the prophets (23:29-33).
4. Next Jesus prophesies Israel's rejection of future messianic ministers before judgment ultimately comes (23:34-36). The Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE fulfilled this prophecy.
5. Finally, Jesus sorrowfully laments Jerusalem's fate, but leaves open the possibility of repentance (23:37-39). Someday the words "Blessed is he who comes in the name of

the Lord” (Psalm 118:26), uttered at the triumphal entry by the fickle crowd (Matt 21:9), will be said again in genuine repentance.

Take Away: Israel’s refusal to receive Jesus as Messiah broke his heart. Do we care that much for people, especially the Jewish people?

9. Jesus and the Future: The Olivet Discourse

It seems like there are always preachers who tell us Jesus is coming soon. Through the years many of them have set dates that turn out to be wrong. All that aside, do you know how to get ready to meet Jesus whenever he does return?

Core Passage: Matthew 24:1-25:46

Supporting Passages: Isaiah 1:2-20; Matthew 23:13-28; 2 Peter 3

Key Ideas:

1. As Jesus and the disciples leave the Temple, their comment about the Temple’s grandeur (24:1-2) amounts to ignoring “the elephant on the sofa.” Jesus abruptly tells them the Temple will be destroyed.

2. Later, on the Mount of Olives the disciples ask Jesus when the Temple will be destroyed as a signal of his return and the end-times (24:3).

3. Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question comprises what we call the Olivet Discourse, running from 24:4 all the way to 25:46.

4. There has been a great deal of debate about this discourse, largely hinging on the relationship of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE to the future coming of Jesus and final judgment. In my view Jesus speaks of both events, the former as an omen of the latter.

5. Jesus first speaks about the course of the present age, primarily about the church’s difficulties with false teaching, wars, hardships, and apostasy (24:4-14; compare the first five seals in Revelation 6:1-11).

6. Jesus then speaks of the end times as unprecedented tribulation (24:15-28), culminating in his return (24:29-35).

7. After 24:35, Jesus turns from speaking in terms of signs of his coming to speaking about being ready for his coming. Metaphors and parables mark this teaching. The main ingredients of readiness are:

- Constant alertness because the time is unknown (24:36, 42, 44, 50; 25:13)
- Faithful stewardship of all that God has given us (25:14-30)
- Compassionate care for Jesus' little brothers and sisters, most likely needy disciples (25:31-46).

Take Away: Being ready for Jesus' return is not about deciphering signs but about alertness, faithfulness, and compassion.

10. The Church as a Prophetic Community Today

Many say the nuclear family is under fire today. Do you agree that this is also true of Jesus family, the church? If so, how do you see this happening in the world today?

Core Passages: Matthew 5:11-12; 10:1-42; 12:46-50; 23:34-38; 28:18-20

Key Ideas:

1. Jesus speaks of his disciples as prophets in the beatitudes (Matt 5:11-12), in the Mission Discourse (10:41), and in the final woe of Matthew 23 (v. 34).
2. Warnings about future *false* prophets (Matt 7:15; 24:5, 11) seems to assume the ministry of faithful prophets in the future.
3. The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) is a prophetic commission.
 - In Matthew 28:18 (alluding to Dan 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27), the authority of Jesus passes to his community.
 - In Matthew 28:20, teaching new disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded echoes Deuteronomy 18:18-19, where the prophet like Moses will speak to Israel all that God commanded, and those who disobey will be held accountable (compare 1 Chron 22:13). Similar commands are found in the commissioning of Joshua (Deut 32:44-45; 34:9; Josh 1:1, 16-17; 22:2), Jeremiah (Jer 1:7, 17), and Ezekiel (Ezek 2:7; 3:4, 10-11).

4. Jesus' prophetic community is a family in the most profound sense of the word (Matt 12:46-50).

5. Jesus' community will be persecuted, just like Jesus and the prophets before him (Matt 5:10-12).

Take Away: Matthew 28:18-20 may be the end of Matthew, but more importantly it's the beginning for the church. The exit of Jesus marks the entrance of the church. Are we willing to stand together as a family with Israel's last prophet Jesus in completing his mission whatever the cost?