

# THE LAST DAYS AND PROPHECY FULFILLED

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One of the major difficulties when studying New Testament prophecy is the issue of how to understand the terms 'the last days' and 'the last hour.' There are many instances where these and similar terms are used by the New Testament writers to indicate the nearness of the 'coming of Christ' as the Son of Man. We shall consider some of these texts below (somewhat briefly as an introduction to this subject). Most of these texts (when interpreted in their original context, along with noting the original word usage) appear to clearly teach that a coming of Christ was expected to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

In fact, Jesus made it plain to his disciples that the 'royal presence' or *parousia* of the Son of Man would occur in their lifetime (cf. Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 24:34; 26:64). It is also evident that this 'coming' was intimately connected to 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord' and the impending judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple (Luke 19:41-44; 21:5-33).<sup>1</sup>

Yet on the other hand, it is also evident that there are a number of other passages that speak of an ultimate return of Christ, both bodily and visibly (commonly called the Second Advent), which will include the bodily resurrection of all mankind, of both the righteous and the unrighteous, followed by the final judgment day (cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21; 17:30-31; 24:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 50-55; Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 20:11-15). Now in the sense that the early Church understood these things, in particular, bodily resurrection, it is obvious that these events have not occurred as yet, nearly 2000 years later.

However, there have been many Bible teachers who have correctly argued the point that throughout the New Testament (NT) 'the last days' and the 'parousia' or coming of Christ and his kingdom were said to be near, at hand, very soon, right at the door, etc, indicating that Jesus' disciples believed that He would return in judgment within their lifetime (this view is generally termed Partial-preterist).<sup>2</sup>

There have also been those who have then taken this information and used it to 'prove' that Christ must have returned in the 1st century AD so that all NT prophecy could be, and allegedly was, fulfilled – even including the Second Advent, and the

great resurrection and judgment day in this scenario.<sup>3</sup> This particular belief is called Full or Consistent-preterism, sometimes referred to as Hyper-preterism (*preterism* basically means *that which is past*).

Ultimately, I believe this viewpoint falls far short of the truth.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand it recognises the errors and extremes of ultra-literalism, futurism and Dispensationalism, but on the other it fails to acknowledge the correct place of NT prophecy, relegating *all* of it to the past. Yes, I do believe (after many years of study, contemplation and revision) that a *large portion* of NT prophecy has already been fulfilled in the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and later (this is the Partial-preterist position).

There are also very good exegetical reasons for accepting the view that 'the coming of the Son of Man' did actually occur by 70 AD, particularly in light of a correct understanding of Daniel 7 – but I do not accept the view that this is one and the same as the Second Advent of Christ or the final appearance, as we still await the final resurrection and judgment day. I plan to deal with this subject in more detail in later articles.

So how are we to understand these time indicators in the NT? What are 'the last days' of the NT writers?

I used to be among those who are of the position that these 'time' words and phrases are to be understood from God's point of view and not man's, i.e. God views time differently.

The argument usually goes like this: God is outside of Time, for He created it, and therefore, as the scriptures say, 'a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day or a watch in the night' (cf. 2 Peter 3:8-9; Psalm 90:4). So God is not slow in keeping His promises as some understand slowness, hence 'the last days' and 'the last hour;' or that which is 'near' or 'soon' can be understood as meaning a 1000 years from God's viewpoint!

I have to say, I find it hard to believe that I actually accepted and taught that view for many years! It's obvious that God views time differently to us, but when he reveals his word to humans, he speaks in ways we can understand. So what did Peter mean when he quoted Psalm 90:4?

Here's what the text says.

First of all, you must understand that **in the last days** scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ...

...But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, **as some understand slowness**. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...

...Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation,

(2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9, 15a NIV)

The Apostle Peter was writing primarily to Jewish Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, probably in the early to mid-60's AD. The 'coming of the Son of Man,' which Jesus had prophesied would occur in that generation, had not yet arrived, and the holy city of Jerusalem and the temple were still standing. Peter then warns the Jewish believers about the scoffers who would come 'in the last days' who would mock the prophecies of Jesus and scorn his words.

Then he reminds them of Psalm 90 verse 4 to emphasise that God's way of doing things is not the same as man's way, because time itself is of no consequence to God. A thousand years *are like* a day to God, but to humans who aren't around for very long, time can seem to drag by! Peter tells them that the Lord is *not* slow in keeping his promise at all – as some understood it, slowly counting off the decades. God's timing is perfect. And also bear in mind that all these things had particular relevance to the 1<sup>st</sup> century audience, to the generation that had heard the words of Jesus and the apostles firsthand.

Peter also emphasises that the reason behind the seeming delay of the 'coming of Christ' and the Day of the Lord is that of God's patience, to allow as much time as possible for repentance among the Jewish nation because he wants everyone to come to repentance to avoid the impending judgment. Ultimately, the Lord's patience means salvation and deliverance from the coming wrath.

This passage alone doesn't prove that 'the last days' had already begun at that time, but there are others that do make it very clear. These were the last days of the old covenant system represented in the temple religion of the Jewish nation – and the end of that age, and the subsequent establishing of the New Covenant 'kingdom of heaven' was 'near' or 'at hand' (meaning *close enough to reach out and touch it*). The judgment-coming of the Son of Man and his 'royal presence' would achieve this (in accordance with Daniel 7:13-14, 26-27).

## What are the Last Days?

Now let us take a brief look at some of the texts that talk about the last days.

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

### **In the last days**

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths."  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

(Isaiah 2:1-3 NIV; see also Micah 4:1-2)

Even in the Hebrew Scriptures, the term 'the last days' usually referred to the Messianic era and the arrival of God's kingdom. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus the Messiah taught in the Temple at Jerusalem and then subsequently established his spiritual kingdom (the mountain), which spread forth from Jerusalem to the whole world.

Christ is now the true Temple of God, as well as the true King of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly Mount Zion. And likewise, his new covenant people, the Body of Christ assembly; the Christian Church, which is composed of Jew and Gentile, is also represented as the kingdom and the figurative temple of God. The Gospel has gone forth to the whole world. Therefore, even in the OT, 'the last days' referred to the days of the Messiah. This is confirmed in the NT as being fulfilled in Jesus.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, **but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

(Hebrew 1:1-2 NIV)

He was chosen before the creation of the world, **but was revealed in these last times for your sake.**

(1 Peter 1:20 NIV)

On the Day of Pentecost in 33 AD, when Peter gave his speech to those in the temple courts, he quoted from Joel to confirm that these prophecies were being fulfilled through Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

" **In the last days**, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy."

(Acts 2:16-18 NIV)

This again confirms that these events in the 1st century AD were 'the last days.' This is why Paul could say that, even in the 1st century, the end of the ages have already arrived upon the people of God. This was particularly relevant to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish audience in light of the fact that the Jewish Old Covenant age was about to come to an end.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, **on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.**

(1 Corinthians 10:11 NIV; see also Hebrews 8:13; 9:26b)

Paul also spoke to Timothy about the last days.

But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days.** People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

(2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV; see also 1 Timothy 4:1)

In this text, Paul is initially describing the moral condition of the last days of that Jewish era, which is very much in line with what Jesus had predicted in his Olivet Discourse. He is expecting Timothy to have to deal with such people, for he warns him strongly, 'have nothing to do with them.'

Of course, texts like these are not to be limited solely to the last days of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They can also apply in principle to the Christian era beyond 70 AD. That is, this text is not out of place if applied to the Christian apostasy that was to largely arrive in the form of the religion of Christendom and the rise of Papal Rome, as well as through some of the Christian Gnostic sects. Nevertheless, its primary context is the last days of the Jewish age in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Dear children, **this is the last hour;** and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. **This is how we know it is the last hour.**

(1 John 2:18 NIV)

In this text, John is also speaking of the present-yet-coming apostasy of the Christian Church and the antichristian kingdom that would arise. Yet he also stated that many antichrists, that is, counterfeit, replacement christs, were already emerging in the 1st century AD within the early church. He was probably referring primarily to the rise of the Gnostic Christian sects of that early period. Some believe that either Nero Caesar, Titus or Vespasian was the antichrist, as they were all involved with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, but there is some debate as to whether 'the antichrist' mentioned here is identical with 'the man of lawlessness' prophesied by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2.

I think it is evident that the apostles expected a fulfilment of these things in the 1st century, but I think it is equally clear that there was a greater fulfilment yet to come that involved the future of Christianity. I firmly believe, along with a number of the Church Fathers and the Reformers, that the ultimate *antichrist* (or more accurately *the man of lawlessness*) was to come in the form of Papal Rome. A lot depends on how the phrase 'temple of God' is to be understood in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 – i.e. was it the physical temple still standing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century or the figurative temple of the Christian Church?

Now returning to the above text, take note that John said '*this is the last hour*' and '*we know it is the last hour.*' Now there's no way that the term 'the last hour' can be stretched to mean hundreds of years, let alone thousands of years! This has to be understood in the light of 1<sup>st</sup> century events; that is, during the era of transition,

between the fading away of the Old Covenant religion and the official inauguration of the New Covenant kingdom of Christ. All of these things have to be understood in light of the prophecies of the Olivet discourse. The era when all the Hebrew Scriptures would be fulfilled concerning Israel and Jerusalem was *at hand* or *near*.<sup>5</sup>

Here are a few more texts that are declaring the same thing.

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. **You have hoarded wealth in the last days.**

(James 5:1-3 NIV)

James was writing primarily to Jewish Christians in the dispersion, and here, in this chapter, he was warning those within the Jewish community that judgment was coming soon upon the land. He particularly addresses those who had acquired their wealth unjustly and who were selfishly hoarding it all '*in the last days*.' Instead of following their Lord's wise advice to sell their possessions and give to the poor, because the land was about to be destroyed, they had hoarded their wealth instead. And James makes it clear that this had occurred *in the last days*!

Peter also states that Christ was revealed or manifested '*in these last times*' for the sake of that generation of Israel.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed **in these last times** for your sake.

(1 Peter 1:20 NIV)

Peter also confirmed in this same letter that '*the end of all things is near*' meaning that the end of the Old Covenant age, which event Christ figuratively referred to as 'the passing away of the heavens and the earth,' was near (cf. Matthew 24:29, 34-35; also 1 Corinthians 7:31).

**The end of all things is near.** Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

(1 Peter 4:7-8 NIV)

This expression of Christ's coming and kingdom being *near* or *at hand* is stated clearly in a number of places in the NT. One of these passages is James 5:7-9.

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, **because the Lord's coming is near**. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

(James 5:7-9 NIV)

The Greek words *engus* (adverb) and *engizo* (verb) are usually translated *near* or *at hand*. This was the common way of describing something that was close by, something that could almost be touched, hence the expression *at hand*. James was reminding his Jewish Christian brethren that the Lord's coming (parousia) or royal presence was near, so near, in fact, that he could say that the Judge was standing at the door – ready to bring judgment upon Israel.

The same thought is being proclaimed at the beginning and at the end of the vision of Revelation, and this cannot be ignored when it comes to interpreting this book.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must soon take place**. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, **because the time is near**...

...Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, **because the time is near**."

(Revelation 1:1-3; 22:10 NIV)

The apostle John was indicating very clearly that the prophecies contained within the vision of Revelation were about to be fulfilled, shortly after it was given to him. A sound interpretation of Revelation has to fit these criteria. <sup>6</sup>

## Has The Coming of the Son of Man Occurred?

Another commonly, misunderstood text that Full-preterists often use to 'prove' that Jesus' Second Coming must've occurred in the 1st Century is that found in Matthew 10:23.

"I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes." (NIV)

Dispensationalists or futurists usually understand this as referring to a yet future time in which Israel will be evangelised in the midst of a Great Tribulation before Christ returns. This interpretation just stretches the limits of the context beyond all recognition, and this just isn't good exegesis!

Admittedly, this seems to be a difficult text to understand correctly, but if we take careful note of the context in which Jesus said this, and let scripture interpret scripture, then the difficulties disappear.

In Matthew 10, we have the account of Jesus giving instructions to His twelve apostles before He sent them out in His Name to proclaim His message to the towns and villages of Israel. This occurred during His ministry. In verses 17-22, He begins to warn them about the persecution that they would face in the years just ahead of them, and of the awful condition in which the nation of Israel would find itself in the years to come. This is very much in line with the prophecies of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24. (The fulfilment of the persecutions is recorded in the book of Acts,

and the condition of Israel in later years is recorded in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus, and others.)

Yet after saying this, Jesus returns to His instructions for them at that time, and He tells them that they 'will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.' He was telling them that within a short period of time, the spiritual kingdom of God was going to be established in power before they'd even finished taking the message throughout all the cities of Israel!

I used to believe that this meant that Christ's spiritual kingdom arrived on the Day of Pentecost 33 AD at the coming of the Holy Spirit - and that this was when the Son of Man, Jesus, came to them. Now although it is true to say that this Pentecostal event was 'a coming of Christ,' I don't believe it fits the phrase 'the coming of the Son of Man in power.' At another time during his ministry, Jesus prophesied the following to his disciples,

"I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

(Matthew 16:28 NIV)

And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

(Mark 9:1 NIV)

In this instance, Jesus could not have been referring to either the vision of His Transfiguration, which Peter, James and John were to witness about a week later, or His spiritual coming via the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He was evidently telling His disciples that some of them wouldn't experience death before they would see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom with power. Or put another way, some of them would actually see death first before the kingdom of God was to arrive with power. So this event had to be far enough away to allow time for some of the disciples to die, but not that far away that all the disciples would've died!

Jesus clearly wasn't referring to His Second Appearing, the ultimate Day of the Lord, because those original disciples are all long dead! It had to refer to the awesome events of 70 AD.

This should be sufficient to highlight the meaning of what Jesus was saying in Matthew 10:23 - but what OT prophecy was the basis for Jesus' teaching on 'the coming of the Son of Man,' particularly as this event was prophesied to occur within 'this generation' in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD?

Here is an extract from another article of mine on the subject of the coming of the Son of Man in the Olivet discourse of Jesus, and how it relates to the vision of Daniel 7. I think it would be helpful to the reader if I include it here. There may be a little repetition of some things mentioned earlier.



## The Son of Man in Daniel 7

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

(Daniel 7:13-14 NIV)

Earlier in this chapter, in verses 9-10, Daniel was introduced to a heavenly courtroom scene where Yahweh, as the Ancient of Days, was seated on His Chariot-Throne of Judgment, with fire issuing from before Him. It appears as though this scene is ultimately depicting the Judgment of the Great White Throne of Revelation 20, the ultimate Judgment Day for all mankind. Yet in another sense, in accordance with the coming of the Messiah, it is declaring the judgment of God revealed in the momentous events of the 1st century AD. This is confirmed by what follows in verses 13-14.

The vision reveals the coming of a human, a son of man, the Messiah, being surrounded by the clouds of heaven, that is, the glory clouds of God, often called the Shekinah Glory. He is seen to be approaching the Father, the Ancient of Days, and is led into God's Presence in the heavenly court. He is then granted the authority and power and glory of God to rule over *all* nations, resulting in people from *all* nations worshipping Him. This worship is not just confined to Israel, but it engulfs the whole world.

Unlike those kingdoms before Him, His kingdom will never be destroyed nor will it be passed on to another. This is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of the heavens, established by the Messiah as the Son of Man. This event is described as 'the coming of the Son of Man' - and this 'coming' is not in the direction of earth but of heaven. Take a look at the text again and see - this 'coming' is the heavenly coronation of the King of kings before the throne of the Ancient of Days. At this time, His kingdom is fully established and the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, would be vindicated through the events of Jerusalem's judgment. As we shall see, this is '*the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*' (Matthew 24:30).

Now it is very evident from the writings of the New Testament that these things were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah. He received all authority and power after His resurrection, when He ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Jesus Himself, when He was before the Sanhedrin, applied Daniel 7:13 to Himself, and He often spoke of 'the coming of the Son of Man' applying it to Himself. Here are some scriptures that testify to this.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light...**

...While he was still speaking, **a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, **until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.**"

(Matthew 17:1-2, 5-9 NIV)

This event of the Transfiguration of Christ highlights certain aspects of the Son of Man vision in Daniel, particularly in the description of Christ's appearance and the Glory cloud. The voice from the cloud, which was representing God the Father, alluded to at least two messianic texts - Psalm 2:7 and Deuteronomy 18:15. These things were identifying Jesus as the Son of Man.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. **Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**"

(Matthew 16:27-28 NIV)

The first sentence here appears to be referring to the Second Advent of Christ and the final Judgment, yet Jesus goes on to emphasise to his disciples that *some* of them would not experience death before they would see the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom. The parallel passage in Mark 9:1 says that they would see '...the kingdom of God come with power.'

Therefore, Jesus was clearly telling them that some of them, not all of them, would witness the coming of the Son of Man and his kingdom in power and glory in their generation! That is, this 'Coming' was to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD within the lifetime of the apostles. This was a clear allusion to the vision of Daniel – and the fulfilment occurred in 70 AD when the Old Covenant officially ended.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. **"But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."**

(Matthew 26:63-64 NIV)

Again, Jesus was declaring the very same thing to the Jewish leaders of his day, that is, that they would see the fulfilment of Daniel's vision of the coming of the Son of Man – and *He* would be the one to fulfil it! His messianic mission would be vindicated for all to see. Here are a few more texts that are proclaiming the same thing.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** Therefore go and make disciples **of all nations**..."

(Matthew 28:18-19 NIV)

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "**I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.**"

(Acts 7:55-56 NIV)

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead **and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

(Ephesians 1:19-23 NIV)

THIS is what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of His coming as the Son of Man within 'this generation.' His kingdom would be established with great power and glory in accordance with the curses of the covenant of the Law, dealing out vengeance to those who had rejected the covenant and who were filling the land with lawlessness and murder, wickedness and blasphemy. The Great Shepherd was going to begin His rule with 'a rod of iron' (cf. Psalm 2; Revelation 19:14-16).

## OT Israel and the NT Church

I have also come to notice that many of those who hold to the Full-preterist view of NT prophecy often fail to see that prophetic scripture is revealed as succeeding patterns that lead to at least two fulfilled events; firstly, in the soulish, natural realm (that which is historical and is largely quite 'literal' or concrete), and secondly, in the spiritual, allegorical realm (that which is still historical, but is largely figurative and allegorical). Hence, *all* biblical prophecy does not end in the 1st century AD!

This interpretive view can be described in terms of Old Covenant fulfilment & New Covenant fulfilment, or Old Creation fulfilment & New Creation fulfilment. Every prophecy has had an OT fulfilment via ancient Israel, which has been largely a concrete historical fulfilment concerning the physical nation, land, city, and temple of God. Yet since the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the establishing of the New Covenant, these prophecies have had, and are having, a NT fulfilment in Jesus and His Church (or Ecclesia); the true spiritual Israel of God - and this is largely spiritual and allegorical (though, of course, this doesn't rule out a concrete historical fulfilment of prophecy as well).

There has been a 'literal' history of the OT Church (via Israel), as well as a history of the NT Church (via Christendom). Both of these ages or eras have similar patterns

to them. The first Era closed with the First Appearance of Christ, and the second will close with the Second Appearance of Christ.

There can also be a number of historical fulfilments that are leading to an ultimate fulfilment. This is how the Holy Spirit of God uses and interprets Scripture. A major case in point would be the Day of the Lord itself, for there have been a number of these prophesied 'Days of the Lord' within history, yet there is still the ultimate one to come. (For further study of this, see *The Day of the Lord, the Return of the King.*)

Now let us briefly consider a few examples of how OT prophecy is applied in the NT.

### Biblical Prophecy Fulfilled

The greatest and clearest example we have of prophecy being fulfilled, that is, how the Spirit of God uses prophecy, is in the First Advent of Christ and the events associated with it. Every instance where an Old Testament text is used in relation to Christ and the surrounding events recorded in the Gospels, as well as in the writings of the Apostles, **it is taken in a concrete historical sense!** Even where there are figures of speech in the original prophecies, as well as in the spiritual application of their fulfilment, the prophecies were fulfilled in real people and real events and real places. **They were fulfilled historically in concrete events, yet they can also have a spiritual, allegorical application too.** This is primarily the case with most NT prophecies as well.

Some of the OT prophecies are clearly in a Messianic context in the Hebrew Scriptures, and even the Jewish Scribes and Rabbis knew this. For example, they knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah (cf. Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:3-6). Yet there are other prophecies that are not so obvious, and their meaning appears hidden, without any clear indication that they are Messianic. Many of the prophecies in the Psalms are like this.

Here are a few examples from the writings of the prophets.

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

(Jeremiah 31:15)

This prophecy was fulfilled a number of times in relation to the judgments that came upon Jerusalem and Judah from invading armies and evil tyrants, in particular, the Babylonians and the Seleucids, but it had a messianic fulfilment during the era of Jesus when king Herod killed all the male children up to two years old around Bethlehem (cf. Matthew 2:16-18).

Ramah was a town in the territory of Benjamin, in Judea, and Rachel's tomb was believed to be near Ramah and Bethlehem. The mention of Rachel is clearly figurative here. She was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, both of whom represent the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. So Rachel represents the mothers of Israel.

This prophecy was describing great weeping and mourning that would occur in the vicinity of Bethlehem and Ramah because the mothers of Israel had suffered the murderous deaths of their children. This was historically fulfilled at the time of Christ. Yet the immediate context of this prophecy in Jeremiah has more to do with the judgment and restoration of Israel at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, rather than Christ's First Coming.

Be that as it may, Matthew, under inspiration of the Spirit, records this prophecy as having been fulfilled at the time of Jesus' birth. It could also be said that this prophecy had a more complete fulfilment in the Jewish/Roman War of 66-70 AD (cf. Luke 21:20-23; 23:27-31).

Here's another example.

"Out of Egypt I called my son."

(Hosea 11:1)

In the context of this prophecy in Hosea, this is describing the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, because Israel was figuratively called God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22). Nevertheless, again, Matthew applies this prophetically to Jesus when, as a baby, He was called out of Egypt to go back to Israel with His parents (Matthew 2:13-15). Jesus is the true Israel, He Who is 'upright with God' and He is the true Son of God.

As a baby he actually travelled to Egypt with his parents and then was divinely called out of there to return to Israel. This was fulfilled historically, and as some would put it, literally, though the original context in Hosea hides the fact that it was Messianic – largely because it contained a figure of speech, with the use of 'son' as a term for the nation of Israel.

In another sense, throughout the NT, followers of Christ Jesus are also called sons of God (Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 3:26), the spiritual Israel of God (Galatians 3:29; 6:15-16), who have come forth from the figurative Egypt of the world system to inherit the true Promised Land of the spiritual kingdom of God (Romans 4:13-17; Hebrews 11:16; 12:18-24; Ephesians 3:6). So on another level, this prophecy can also refer to all believers; all true Christians who are Disciples of Christ.

One more example will suffice.

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

(Psalm 118:22-23 NIV)

Psalm 118 does not, at first, appear to be a Messianic psalm, yet a closer look will reveal messianic elements as to the establishing of God's kingdom. Yet this prophecy seems to appear out of nowhere in the text, talking about a stone being rejected by builders. This, of course, has reference to a temple.

Yet it is evident from its use by Jesus (Matthew 21:42) and Peter (1 Peter 2:7; Acts 4:11) that this Stone is referring to the Messiah, and the builders are representing the leaders of the house of Israel. Jesus and Peter, as well as Paul

(Romans 9:32-33), link this prophecy to the more obvious messianic prophecies of Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 8:14; 28:16).

Christ is the Stone that the leaders of Israel rejected and cast aside by crucifying Him. Yet this precious, chosen Stone has become the Cornerstone and Capstone of the spiritual building of God (that is, his people) through His resurrection from the dead. The cornerstone and capstone were special stones that either began or completed a building. Christ Jesus is this Messianic Stone that Israel stumbles over, and He is also the true Temple of God. His followers are also spoken of in terms of being a corporate, spiritual temple in Christ.

Although there are a number of figurative elements to this prophecy, it nevertheless was historically fulfilled in Jesus.

The NT only gives us a handful of prophecies that were fulfilled in the First Coming of Christ. There are numerous others that haven't been mentioned, but this shows us a little how we are to interpret the rest of the prophetic scriptures. There are also types and shadows contained in the Law that are fulfilled in Christ, especially in regard to the sacrifices. Even these had an actual historical fulfilment in Christ Jesus, Who is the Passover Lamb Who was sacrificed - even down to the detail that 'not one of His bones was to be broken' (John 19:31-37; Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20). He may have figuratively been the Lamb, but Jesus was actually sacrificed on Passover - fulfilling the messianic criteria.

Jesus had arrived on the world stage in the **fullness** of time, when the time was **fulfilled**, to bring about the **fulfilment** of the ages - to establish God's spiritual kingdom within history during **the last days** of the old covenant age.<sup>7</sup> It is accomplished!

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed study of this topic, see my updated article *The Olivet Discourse and The Second Advent* and the new series entitled *The Day Of The Lord: The Royal Appearing*. (Updated December 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, this is the view I now hold. For further details concerning these various prophetic viewpoints, see my *Introduction To Prophetic Studies* and *A Further Introduction To Prophetic Studies!* in *The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed* section.

<sup>3</sup> The foremost example of this view is that put forward by J. Stuart Russell in his classic book *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*.

<sup>4</sup> Although I still do not consider myself a 'full-preterist' in the modern sense, I have since changed my view on these things in relation to the Second Advent. Overall, I now accept the view of J. Stuart Russell. My present position only enhances the view put forward here about 'the last days' being in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Please see my *A Further Introduction To Prophetic Studies!* and the new series entitled *The Day Of The Lord: The Royal Appearing in The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed* section. (**This note added December 2012**).

<sup>5</sup> In Luke 21:22, in relation to the then-future events of the Jewish war, and the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (which occurred in 70 AD), Jesus stated clearly that those days were to be the "...days of vengeance, **to fulfill all that is written.**"

"Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, and let those in her midst be coming out into the country, and let not those in the country be entering into her, **for days of vengeance are these, to fulfill all that is written.** Yet woe to those who are pregnant, and to those suckling in those days; for there will be great necessity in the land **and indignation on this people.**"

And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden by the nations, until the eras of the nations (*or times of the nations*) may be fulfilled."

(Luke 21:20-24 CV)

It is very evident from the context that Jesus was talking about the events of 'the great affliction or tribulation' of the Jewish/Roman War in the land of Judea and the whole of Palestine, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, heralding the official end of the Old Covenant system. It also began the era of 'the Times of the Nations' during which time the final exile and captivity of the Jews would continue till the end of this age.

Jesus was confirming that Daniel's prophecies were to be fulfilled by 70 AD. He said that those events in the 1st century, within that generation, would fulfil ALL that is written concerning Israel and the coming Messianic kingdom, including the days of vengeance and judgment upon the people and the land and the city and the temple.

In fact, Jesus was alluding to Daniel 12:7.

"It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, **all these things will be completed.**"

The time period of 'time, times and half a time' is understood as three and a half years, which can also be found in Daniel 7 in relation to the Little Horn. It is a well-established historical fact that the Jewish War lasted three and a half years! And by the end of this period, "**all these things will be completed!**" This time period can also be found in Revelation - where it is evidently referring to the same event, although its symbolic significance can be interpreted on a number of levels.

Anyhow, let us repeat this point. Jesus was saying that ALL the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures concerning Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, the land, the covenants, as well as that that prophesied the coming of the Messiah and the establishing of His spiritual kingdom were all fulfilled by 70 AD! The New Testament writings are the inspired record of these fulfilments, much of which was witnessed by thousands in Judea and Palestine - and throughout the Roman world.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, in his excellent book *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating The Book of Revelation*, shows convincingly that the weight of evidence for the writing of Revelation, both externally and internally, actually leans heavily toward the early date of c. 65 AD, during the reign of Emperor Nero, as opposed to the later date of c. 95 AD during the reign of Domitian. The evidence also indicates that the whole New Testament canon was completed before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

I am strongly convinced that the vision of Revelation can be interpreted on three levels of truth. The *primary interpretation* is the Partial-Preterist view that this was largely a prophecy of the Jewish War, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, thereby ending the Old Covenant era of ancient Israel, and firmly establishing Christianity as the New Covenant kingdom.

The *secondary interpretation* is the Historicist view that it is prophesying many key events of this present Church Era until the Second Advent of Christ, and that essentially, Revelation carries on where Daniel left off (with a little overlap). I would say that whereas Daniel was largely prophesying the Times of the Hebrews under the Old Covenant, John in Revelation is largely prophesying the Times of the Nations under the New Covenant (as well as prophesying the end of the Old Covenant system and the 'days of vengeance' upon Israel and Jerusalem).

The *third interpretation* is the Idealist view that views these things as purely spiritual truth that can be applied to any and every generation in this present age, and they are not tied to any specific historical event, but are always recurring throughout history in cycles.

Of course, due to the nature of scriptural truth and spiritual principles, some of the interpretations within these views actually converge in agreement, while other points are very similar. For example, views 1 & 2 agree that the first Beast of Revelation 13 is the ancient Roman Empire, while the second Beast resembling a Lamb is 1) ancient Judaism (Preterist) or 2) Papal Rome (Historicist). View 3 would see the 'Beasts' as representing satanic worldly powers, both politically and religiously, under the domination of the flesh.

For further information, see my *Introduction To Prophetic Studies*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Galatians 4:4; Mark 1:15; 1 Corinthians 10:11 & Hebrews 1:1-2.