

Prophecy In Perspective, II

Introduction: A number of people have asked about end time events. To even begin to understand time events, one needs to first understand prophecy and how it works.

Review: What did we learn about prophecy last session?

1. Biblical prophecy includes both fore-telling and forth-telling (preaching and predictions).
2. The purposes of prophecy include validating a message as one genuinely from God (fulfilled prophecy builds our faith!) and to give impetus to repentance or obedience.
3. We should be humble in our interpretation of prophecy in light of the fact that the only prophecy the ecumenical creeds agree on is that **1)** Jesus is coming again, **2)** the dead will bodily resurrect at His coming and **3)** the resurrected dead will be judged.

PPT>> The **Baptist Faith and Message** of 2000 says only this concerning Last Things (X):

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its right end. In keeping with His promise, Jesus Christ will return to earth in person. He will be seen in all His greatness by all people on the earth. The dead will be raised. Christ will judge all men with honesty. The unworthy will be sent to Hell, the place of never-ending punishment. The worthy, in their resurrected and glorified bodies, will receive their reward. They will live forever in Heaven with the Lord.

It is worth noting that no position is taken on the millennium, Israel, the rapture, seven years of tribulation, the anti-Christ, a one world government or the mark of the beast. This calls for humility in our own convictions about these subjects. They are not on par with the doctrine of the Trinity!

4. Realize that many of the prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled. Look for the time indicators: 3 days, soon, 40 days, this generation, some of you standing here will not taste death until, etc.
5. We must read prophecy as literature. We must read it literarily, understanding although prophecy has a literal meaning, it is sometimes clothed in such figurative language as metaphor, simile, symbolism and hyperbole.

Today: The best way to learn how to interpret prophecy is by examining Old Testament prophecy that everybody agrees has already been fulfilled and see how it was written. They used prophetic shop talk. Let's examine how they worded things and see if there is a pattern, then apply it as a test case to Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (Mt 24).

PPT>> The Coming(s) of The Lord

When modern Christians read in the Bible about the “coming” of the Lord, they often assume it is a reference to the Second Coming. However, the Bible is full of references to a coming of the Lord that have nothing to do with the Second Coming. Instead, they refer to localized judgment comings wherein God sent judgment upon a particular city or nation. God did not appear in person in these comings; instead, He came in judgment usually via an invading army.

Examples:

PPT>> Exodus 9:3—The hand of the LORD will come with a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks.

These words are from God to Pharaoh via Moses. This judgment coming concerned Egypt and was fulfilled in the time of Moses in part through the ten plagues.

PPT>> Isaiah 19:1—The oracle concerning Egypt. "Behold, the LORD ... is about to come to Egypt; The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them."

As is obvious from the quoted text, this coming was against the nation of Egypt and was fulfilled in their military defeat by the Assyrians in 670 B.C.

PPT>> Isaiah 26:21—... the LORD is about to come out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; And the earth will reveal her bloodshed, And will no longer cover her slain.

This prediction of the LORD's coming was made after a series of specific prophecies concerning the destruction of Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram, Israel, Cush, Egypt, Babylon, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre. Judgment on each of these nations subsequently fell in war, defeated by various invading armies.

PPT>> Isaiah 31:4—The LORD of hosts comes down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill.

In this coming, the LORD protected Jerusalem from Assyrian aggression and ultimately destroyed Assyria's capital city, Nineveh, in 612 B.C.

Truth: As demonstrated above, there are numerous non-bodily judgment "comings" of the Lord recorded throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The Lord did not appear personally (i.e. in bodily form) in any of these historical comings. Instead, His coming was by way of sending judgment upon specific, sinful groups. This idea of the "coming" of the Lord was much used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and usually resulted in the destruction of a particular city or nation. When you read in the New Testament about Jesus' coming, do not automatically

assume it refers to His Second Coming. It may refer to a lesser, judgment coming (such as the judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70).

In Luke 21:5-7, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple. What sign did the disciples ask Jesus about?

PPT>> ESV **Luke 21:5-7** And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

They wanted to know **1)** when it would happen and **2)** what sign indicator there would be just before it happened.

Matthew 24 is Matthew's parallel account to Luke 21. How did Matthew phrase their question a little differently (24:1-3)?

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 24:1-3** Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." As he sat 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 close of the age?"

Whereas Luke records them asking for the sign of the destruction of the temple, Matthew records them asking for the sign of Jesus' coming. This is because the two are the same.

Application: It is quite possible that in Matthew 24:3 the disciples were not asking Jesus about His Second Coming. Instead, they were asking about Jesus coming *in judgment* to destroy the temple. The disciples were well schooled in Old Testament prophetic language and what they asked him made perfect sense in first century Judaism. Matthew's Gospel was written to Jews who would have understood the various judgment comings of Jehovah. Luke's Gospel was written to Gentiles with no Hebrew background, so Luke changed the question to make it clear to Gentile readers what the disciples were asking.

Perspective: Consider that when this question was asked, the disciples did not even believe in the Second Coming. They never thought he was leaving in the first place. There is no way they could have been asking him about what we know as the Second Coming:

1) When the Old Testament prophets wrote about the coming of the Messiah, there was no hint in their predictions that He would be coming twice. The idea that the Messiah would come, leave and then return again later, was thus also a foreign concept to the early first century Hebrew mind-set. The doctrine of the Second Appearing of the Christ was a secret, not revealed until after Jesus came the first time.

2) Despite such passages as Isaiah 53, Jesus' disciples were slow to hear Jesus' predictions of His death. Thus, they **slept** while Jesus prayed in Gethsemane (Mk 14:37). They **scattered** when He was arrested (Mt 26:31). They **covered** behind a locked door during the three days His body was in the tomb (Jn 20:19). They were **skeptical** at news of His resurrection (Mk 16:11). They **did not remember** His promise to rise from the dead until they themselves were convinced of Jesus' resurrection (Jn 2:22).

Timing: So too Jesus said:

ESV **Matthew 16:28** Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Everyone to whom Jesus spoke is dead now. Whatever Jesus was talking about, it was not the Second Coming, yet he described in a coming in his kingdom.

Orthodoxy: *Does the Bible predict the Second Coming?* Of course, it does! Matthew 24, however, may not be one of those passages that deal with the Second Coming.

Other Types of Coming: In addition to the there are other types of coming as well. For instance, in John 14:23, Jesus promised that He and the Father would "**come**" (in a good way) to whoever obeys His teachings.

ESV **John 14:23** ... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Also, Jesus warned several of the churches in Revelation to straighten up lest He "**come**" and discipline them (Re 2:5, 16, 3:3). The implication was that if they did repent, it would not be necessary for Him to come and discipline them.

PPT>> ESV **Revelation 2:5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. [Ephesus]

PPT>> ESV **Revelation 2:16** Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. [Pergamum]

PPT>> ESV **Revelation 3:3** Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. [Sardis]

Summary: A reference to the coming of Jesus could refer to Jesus coming in judgment, to an existential coming, to church discipline or to the Second Coming.

PPT>> **Cosmic Chaos:**

**Melted Mountains, Murky Moons, Shaded Suns, Stumbling Stars, Cleft Canyons,
Shriveled Seas, Scrolled Skies**

Symbolic Language: Examining long fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the destruction of various ancient cities and nations can help us understand the sometime symbolic language used in prophecy.

1. Micah: The Old Testament prophet Micah lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah just before the fall of apostate Israel to Assyria. One of his prophecies was against apostate Israel's capital city of Samaria. Look how he words its coming destruction:

PPT>> ESV **Micah 1:3-6** ... the LORD is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place ... I will make Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards, and I will pour down her stones into the valley and uncover her foundations.

Fulfillment: Everyone agrees this prophecy concerned the destruction of Samara and was fulfilled in **722 B.C.** Yet no mountains melted and no valleys were split open. Neither did Jehovah God literally come down so that people could see him (in a theophany). Micah used figurative, symbolic language—prophetic shop talk.

2. Nahum: God sent two prophets to Nineveh (Assyria's capital city). The first was Jonah. The second was Nahum, who followed about 100 years later. Nahum's book was a sequel to Jonah's. Nahum lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He predicted the coming destruction of Nineveh.

PPT>> ESV **Nahum 1:1** An oracle concerning Nineveh ...

PPT>> ESV **Nahum 1:3-6** ... the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers ... The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

PPT>> ESV **Nahum 2:10** Desolate! Desolation and ruin! Hearts melt and knees tremble; anguish is in all loins; all faces grow pale!

PPT>> ESV **Nahum 3:3** Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end- they stumble over the bodies!

PPT>> ESV **Nahum 3:7** And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?

PPT>> ESV **Nahum 3:15** ... the fire devour you; the sword will cut you off. It will devour you like the locust.

Fulfillment: All agree Nahum's prophecy has already come true. The city of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians in **612 B.C.** It was literally destroyed. Yet the sea did not literally dry up. The mountains did not actually quake. Not a single hill melted. The earth did not heave. Nahum used symbolic language to convey a literal truth.

3. Isaiah: Isaiah lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah both before and after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Assyria eventually destroyed Israel and its capital city of Samaria. God later raised up the Babylonians to destroy both the Assyrians and Judah as well. Isaiah predicted the eventual destruction of Babylon by the Medes.

PPT>> ESV **Isaiah 13:1, 9-10, 13.** The oracle concerning Babylon ... Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light fire ... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

PPT>> ESV **Isaiah 13:17-19** Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them ... And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

Fulfillment: Babylon was literally destroyed, but the heavens did not cease to shine, the sun and moon never went dark, the heavens did not tremble and the earth was not shaken out of its place. That was prophetic symbolism.

The day of the Lord: The phrase, the day of the Lord, is another prophetic phrase that referred to judgment. There were many mini day of the Lord's foreshadowing the ultimate Day of the Lord (the Second Coming).

Have you heard of the ancient, abandoned rock city of Petra? That was ancient Edom. Isaiah also predicted the destruction of the Edomites. Here is how he put it:

PPT>> ESV **Isaiah 34:4-5** All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom, upon the people I have devoted to destruction.

Fulfillment: Edom was literally destroyed, but the heavens did not rot nor the skies roll up nor all the stars all. Isaiah used symbolic language.

4. Ezekiel: Ezekiel lived during the Babylonian Captivity in Babylon. He predicted that Egypt would be defeated by Babylon (just as Assyria and Judah had been). Here is how he said it:

PPT>> ESV **Ezekiel 30:25-26** ... I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries.

The “I” refers to Jehovah God; God put His own sword in the hands of the king of Babylon and through the Babylonians God scattered the Egyptians. God often comes in judgment via a foreign army.

PPT>> ESV **Ezekiel 32:2, 7-8** ... raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt ... When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD.

Fulfillment: It is a fact of history that the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prediction, yet the sun, moon and stars did not go dark. Ezekiel used symbolic language to predict the literal destruction of Egypt.

King David: After King David was delivered from his enemy, Saul, here is how David described it:

PPT>> ESV **Psalms 18:1** TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, WHO ADDRESSED THE WORDS OF THIS SONG TO THE LORD ON THE DAY WHEN THE LORD RESCUED HIM FROM THE HAND OF ALL HIS ENEMIES, AND FROM THE HAND OF SAUL.

PPT>> ESV **Psalms 18:6-17** In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry ... He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.

Fulfillment: David was literally rescued from Saul. David used symbolic language to describe Saul’s defeat: the earth reeled and rocked, the mountains trembled and quaked.

Application: Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, Priest and King. Jesus the Prophet made prophecies. One thing Jesus predicted was the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. He predicted it around A.D. 33 and it came true in A.D. 70.

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 24:1-2** Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

After predicting the literal destruction of the temple, look at the symbolic imagery He went on use:

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 24:29** ... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Jesus used the same exact type of prophetic symbolism used by the Old Testament prophets. (like Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Ezekiel and David) to predict the destruction of the temple. Unaware of this, some Christians read Jesus' words and think they have not been fulfilled since in A.D. 70 the sun and moon did not go out and no stars fell from heaven. However, letting Scripture interpret Scripture, Jesus was using standard, common, well-know prophetic symbolism in predicting the literal destruction of the temple.

PPT>> Coming on the Clouds

PPT>> ESV **Joel 2:1-2a** ... Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

Cloudy Insight: The imagery of dark, ominous storm clouds was used by the prophets to represent coming judgment from God. Just like there were many "comings" of Jehovah in the Old Testament, so too there were many (mini) days of the Lord (judgment days). These judgment days were associated with dark storm clouds. They are cloudy days.

PPT>> ESV **Isaiah 19:1** An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

Fulfillment: This predicted judgment on Egypt came in the form of the Babylonian army. No Egyptian soldier looked up and actually saw Jehovah God riding a cloud like a cowboy on a bucking bronco. This is symbolic wording intended to show God's hand in the coming judgment, judgment that was coming like the approach of a terrible storm.

When Jesus was on trial before Caiaphas the High Priest, listen to what he said:

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 26:63-64** ... the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell

you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

In what sense did Caiaphas the high priest “see” Jesus sitting at the Father’s right hand and coming on the clouds (Mt 26:64)? Obviously, Caiaphas never literally saw Jesus sitting in heaven. However, the high priest was well aware this was Old Testament Messianic imagery:

ESV **Psalms 110:1** The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

ESV **Daniel 7:13** I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

According to Daniel 7:13, the Son of Man was to come with the clouds up to heaven (not down to earth), to the Ancient of Days and be presented before God the Father. Jesus’ words to Caiaphas were not about the Second Coming, but rather about Jesus’ ascension into Heaven, proof His work and ministry as the Christ was accepted by the Father.

Obviously, Caiaphas could not see into heaven where Jesus would be sitting at the Father’s right hand. However, Caiaphas could see the Roman armies first surround and then destroy the temple, all in fulfillment of Jesus’ teachings and as sign that He really was the Christ and had indeed ascended into heaven.

I believe the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction about the destruction of the temple was proof to the unbelieving Jews that Jesus had indeed come on the clouds up to the Father in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy and was seated at the Father’s right hand. The destruction of the temple was in divine judgment from God for having rejected Jesus as the Christ.

Thus, Caiaphas did not literally see Jesus with his eyes, but he did mentally perceive that Jesus really was the Messiah. This same sense of perceiving God without actually seeing Him is found here:

ESV **Matthew 5:8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Application: So too Jesus said:

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 24:30** ... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

People think this refers to the Second Coming, but I would argue it refers to the A.D. 70 judgment coming. No one literally saw Jesus in A.D. 70, but they did perceive/recognize His divine hand behind the Roman destruction of the temple. Just as Jehovah came with the clouds against Egypt, so too Jesus came with the clouds against Jerusalem.

Earlier Jesus said:

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 16:28** ... there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

PPT>> Time Frame Indicators

If a prophet gives you a time frame for the fulfillment of a prophecy, take it seriously.

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 16:28** ... there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

PPT>> ESV **James 5:9** ... behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

If you await the arrival of relative from far away and suddenly someone shouted, "They are at the door!" that would mean they have arrived, they are here, their entrance is imminent.

PPT>> ESV **1 Peter 4:7** The end of all things is at hand ...

If you keep a glass of water on your night stand, it is at hand. That means it is not far away. It is very close. It is not off in the kitchen somewhere.

PPT>> ESV **Revelation 1:1** The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

Rhetorical: How could taking 2,000 years to arrive possibly be construed as soon?

ESV **Revelation 22:7** "And behold, I am coming soon."

PPT>> ESV **Revelation 22:10** ... Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

Application: In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Jesus when the temple would be destroyed. Jesus gave a clear time frame indicator:

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 24:34** ... this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

So What?

Summary: The best way to learn how to interpret prophecy is by examining Old Testament prophecy that everybody agrees has already been fulfilled and see how it was written. We have learned:

1. The prophets had their own shop talk, specialized wording they frequently used, such as: the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord, clouds associated with judgment, etc.

2. The prophets often used literary symbolism to describe the literal destruction of a city or country (cosmic chaos).

Applications:

1. When you read in the New Testament about Jesus' coming, realize it may not refer to the Second Coming.
2. Not everything in New Testament prophecy is to be taken literally; it must be read as literature and prophetic literature sometimes employs metaphor, simile, symbolism and hyperbole.
3. The fulfilled predictions made by Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem help prove He really was who He claimed to be (God in the flesh). Conversely, the false christs were predicting the over-throw of the Romans.
4. There is life in acting on the teachings of Jesus. The Christians living in Jerusalem read Jesus' prophecies of Matthew 24, applied it to their lives, and fled the city before it was destroyed. Here is what Jesus told them to look out for:

ESV **Luke 21:20-22** ... when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

So too we must act on the teachings of Jesus, we must live by them:

PPT>> ESV **Matthew 7:24** Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

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