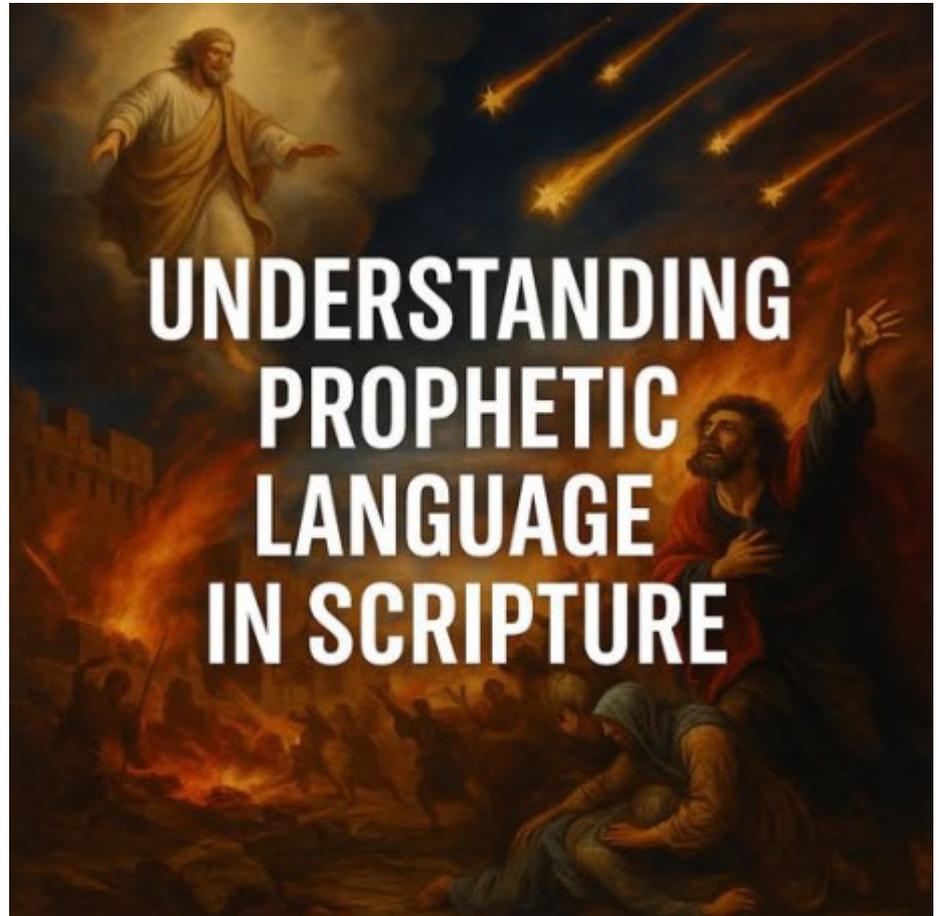


Fulfilled Prophecies

[Home](#) > [L](#) > [Share on Facebook](#)

[FACEBOOK LINK](#)

[Literal or Figurative - Literal or Figurative? Understanding Prophetic Language in Scripture](#)



By Dan Maines

Literal or Figurative? Understanding Prophetic Language in Scripture

When people read Bible prophecy, especially books like Daniel, Matthew 24, and Revelation, they often expect literal fulfillments. They ask questions like, "When did the stars fall from heaven?" or "When did the whole world mourn as Jesus returned?" These objections miss the core truth about how prophecy works. The reason none of these can be taken literally is because the language of prophecy was never meant to be. Jesus, Daniel, and John all used symbolic, covenantal language

drawn from the Old Testament to describe real historical judgments, not cosmic destruction.

Let me show you why, using Scripture itself.

Symbolic Language in the Old Testament

Isaiah 13:10 speaks of the sun and moon being darkened and the stars ceasing to give light. Was this a prophecy about the end of the world? No. It was about the judgment and fall of Babylon. This is symbolic language of national upheaval and divine judgment.

Ezekiel 32:7-8 uses the same type of language to describe the fall of Egypt: "And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars, I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you."

Did the literal sky fall when Egypt fell? No. This was poetic, covenantal language to describe God's judgment.

Jesus Spoke in the Same Prophetic Language

In Matthew 24:29, Jesus said, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

He was not predicting the collapse of the physical universe. He was using the language of the prophets to describe the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The entire context of Matthew 24 is rooted in the disciples' question in verse 3 about the destruction of the temple. Jesus was answering them, not forecasting global catastrophe thousands of years later.

Matthew 24:34 proves this interpretation: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

The generation that heard Jesus would see the signs He described. If you take that literally, then you cannot take the cosmic imagery literally, or you have a contradiction.

Revelation: A Book of Symbols

Revelation 1:1 begins with this: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place..."

And Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written in it, for the time is near."

If these things were near, then they were for the first-century audience, not future generations. Revelation is filled with symbols. It speaks of beasts, dragons, stars falling, a woman clothed with the sun, and a new Jerusalem. Taking this literally would result in absurdity. These images are apocalyptic language meant to convey theological truths and covenantal transitions.

Jesus Did Return in Judgment

Revelation 1:7 says, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him."

The Greek word for "earth" is *ge*, meaning land. This is a reference to Israel. And those who pierced Him? That is the Jewish leadership, not people living 2,000 years later. Jesus came on the clouds, just as God had in judgment throughout

the Old Testament (see Isaiah 19:1).

The Twelve Thrones

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus told His disciples, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

This is not about literal furniture in a physical kingdom. It is about authority in the New Covenant. The apostles judged Israel through their message. When Israel rejected it, they were judged in 70 AD. This fulfilled Jesus' words.

Coming from East and West to Sit with the Patriarchs

Matthew 8:11 says, "I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and will recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

This is a spiritual reality, not a physical banquet. Gentiles were being brought into the kingdom by faith, joining the faithful remnant of Israel in Christ. This was happening in the first century.

The Point of All This

Literal expectations for symbolic prophecy lead to confusion. People are still waiting for sky signs, beasts, thrones, and disasters, when Jesus already fulfilled these prophecies in the first century. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was the end of the Old Covenant world. That is what the stars falling, the sun going dark, and the heavens shaking was all about. It was not about the end of the physical earth but the end of the covenantal world of Israel.

Conclusion

We cannot read apocalyptic prophecy the same way we read the Gospels or the letters of Paul. The genre itself is symbolic, and the audience and context determine the meaning. Jesus, Daniel, and John were all faithful to the pattern of Old Testament prophets who used poetic, powerful images to describe real historical events. Once we understand this, the fulfilled view makes perfect sense, and the glory of the New Covenant shines even brighter.

Let those with eyes to see, see. Let those with ears to hear, hear.

Share on Facebook

Links

Facebook Link

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/posts/1780605589494241/>

Fulfilled Prophecies <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/>

Dan Maines

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/user/100001027365819/>

You may share this article freely without permission as long as you include credit to Dan Maines and/or a link to the Fulfilled Prophecies Group.