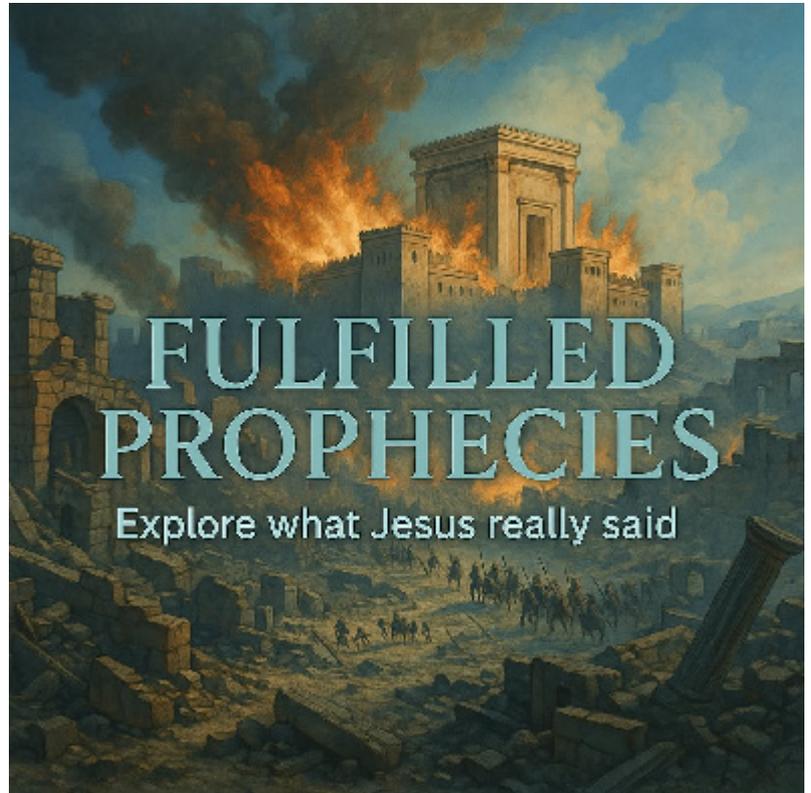


Fulfilled Prophecies

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

[FACEBOOK LINK](#)

[Literal or Figurative -
Literal or Figurative?
Understanding
Prophetic Language in
Scripture etc Language
in Scripture 051525](#)



By Dan Maines

Literal or Figurative? Understanding What God Meant

When we read scripture, we are often faced with a question: Is this literal, figurative, or possibly both? The goal is not to force every passage into one mold, but to understand how God intended the words to be understood.

Scripture shows us both literal and symbolic truths:

When Jesus fed the 5,000 (John 6:1-15), He gave literal bread to fill their stomachs. But later in the same chapter, He said, "**I am the bread of life**" (John 6:35). That is clearly figurative. He

was not a loaf of bread, but the sustainer of eternal life.

Jesus explained, **"It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh provides no benefit; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life"** (John 6:63). He was pointing to a deeper, spiritual truth.

When He said, **"you must eat the flesh of the Son of Man"** (John 6:53), He was not speaking literally. Even when He called His flesh **"true food"** (John 6:55), He clarified that His teaching was spiritual in nature, not carnal.

Many of Jesus' words were rich with metaphor:

He called Himself **the shepherd** (John 10:11), **the gate** (John 10:9), and **the light of the world** (John 8:12). These are figures of speech meant to communicate truth through imagery.

Jesus said, **"If your right eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away"** (Matthew 5:29). Was He commanding self-mutilation? No. He was using hyperbole to stress the seriousness of sin and the need for repentance.

In Revelation, John saw a **beast rising out of the sea** (Revelation 13:1) and another out of the earth (Revelation 13:11). These are symbolic visions, not literal animals. Revelation 1:1 already warns us that the book was **signified** or communicated by symbols.

Symbolic language is not a downgrade:

Figurative language often communicates deep spiritual realities better than literal words. When Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life"** (John 11:25), He used profound symbolic language to reveal truth beyond human comprehension.

Jesus also said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life"** (John 14:6). These are not just poetic phrases, they are spiritual realities stated in the strongest terms.

Context is everything:

We must be careful not to force literal or symbolic interpretations where they don't belong. A passage must be understood in its own setting.

Paul wrote, **"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth"** (2 Timothy 2:15).

Never read just a single verse. Always read at least the paragraph to grasp the full context. Meaning is found in the flow of the text, not isolated statements.

How to approach figurative passages:

Read the surrounding context carefully.

Ask, does the literal interpretation make sense in context?

If not, does a figurative meaning fit better with the rest of scripture?

Paraphrase it in your own words and compare it with other verses.

Literal Days in Genesis vs. Figurative 1,000 Years in Revelation

The **days** in Genesis 1 are described as literal:

Divided into evening and morning (Genesis 1:5)

Distinguished from **years** (Genesis 1:14)

Connected to the literal Sabbath day in Exodus 20:11

The **1,000 years** in Revelation 20:1-7 are part of a highly symbolic context:

A dragon, a pit, a chain, thrones, and a beast with a mark

Revelation 1:1 already says the book was **signified** (symbolized)

The number **1,000** appears over twenty times in Revelation, never once as a literal quantity

The **1,000 years** represent completeness, not a calendar timeline. It is symbolic of a full, God-ordained period of rule and reign, not a literal millennium.

Conclusion:

God's Word uses both literal and figurative language to communicate His truth.

Rejecting a figurative meaning where it was intended is just as wrong as forcing one where it doesn't belong.

Discernment comes from careful study, patient reflection, and reverence for the full context of scripture.

As Psalm 119:160 says, "**The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments is everlasting.**" Let us rightly divide that Word.

[Share on Facebook](#)

Links

Facebook Link

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/posts/1733548107533323/>

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.