Fulfilled Prophecies

Has Every Knee Already Bowed Before Jesus Christ?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Philippians 2:10-11 is frequently used to argue that Christ's victory and the fulfillment of biblical prophecy must still be future. The argument sounds convincing at first. If every knee must bow and every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, why do billions of people still reject Him? Why do unbelievers continue to exist? Why hasn't the entire world visibly acknowledged His authority?

† Many Christians believe these verses describe a future event

when every human being who has ever lived will physically kneel before Jesus and verbally confess His lordship. Some connect this event to a future resurrection, final judgment, or second coming. They argue that because everyone hasn't visibly bowed before Christ, the prophecy cannot have been fulfilled.
† However, this interpretation overlooks Paul's actual subject, the Old Testament passage he's quoting, and the distinction between possessing universal authority and receiving voluntary acknowledgment from every individual.
† Paul wasn't introducing a new prophecy about the end of the physical world. He was explaining the exaltation of Jesus Christ following His humiliation, obedience, and death. The central question isn't whether every person has physically knelt before Jesus. The question is whether God has already established Jesus as Lord over heaven, earth, and everything beneath the earth.
† Scripture answers that question repeatedly. Jesus received all authority following His resurrection. The apostles proclaimed Him Lord. The Father placed everything under His feet. His kingdom was already established, and believers were already being transferred into it (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36; Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 1:13).
† To understand Philippians 2:10-11 correctly, we must begin with Paul's context rather than assuming the passage describes an event that must still happen in our future.

Philippians 2:8-11
Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
† Notice Paul's explanation. Because Jesus humbled Himself

and became obedient to death, God highly exalted Him. The exaltation was God's response to Christ's completed sacrifice, not something postponed until the end of human history (Hebrews 10:12; Acts 2:32-36).
† Paul connects every knee bowing and every tongue confessing directly to the authority God bestowed upon His Son. The language describes the universal scope of Christ's lordship, not necessarily a future gathering where every person physically kneels at the same moment (Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 2:10).
† The expression every knee will bow communicates universal submission to divine authority. That authority doesn't depend upon whether every individual willingly acknowledges it. A king doesn't stop being king because some of his subjects refuse to recognize him (Psalm 2:1-6; Daniel 7:13-14).
† The three realms, heaven, earth, and under the earth, emphasize that no realm exists outside Christ's supremacy. Paul wasn't describing three separate locations where people must assemble for a future ceremony. He was declaring the comprehensive reach of the authority given to Jesus (Ephesians 1:20-22; 1 Peter 3:22).
† The important distinction is between the establishment of Christ's authority and the acknowledgment of that authority. Scripture teaches that His authority was already established, even while people continued to resist Him (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:8).

Isaiah 45:22-23
Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.
I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.
† Paul wasn't inventing the language of every knee bowing. He was drawing directly from Isaiah's declaration of God's universal sovereignty. Isaiah wasn't describing the end of the physical universe. He was declaring that the Lord alone is God and that

His authority extends over all nations (Isaiah 45:18-22).
† Notice that Isaiah connects the declaration with salvation. God calls the ends of the earth to turn to Him because He alone possesses divine authority. The emphasis is upon God's supremacy over every competing claim to worship and allegiance (Isaiah 45:20-25).
† When Paul applies Isaiah's language to Jesus, he's identifying Christ with the divine authority proclaimed in Isaiah. The authority belonging to the Lord is now openly declared through the exalted Son (John 5:22-23; Philippians 2:9-11).
† Isaiah's words are not proof that every human being must become a believer. The passage establishes that every creature stands under God's authority, whether that authority is willingly acknowledged or resisted (Psalm 2:10-12; Romans 14:11).
† That's why the continued existence of unbelief doesn't prove that Christ hasn't received universal authority. God's sovereignty was real in Isaiah's day even though countless nations worshiped idols. Christ's sovereignty is equally real despite continuing human rebellion (Daniel 4:34-35; Matthew 28:18).

Matthew 28:18
And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
† Jesus didn't say that all authority would eventually be given to Him thousands of years later. He declared that it had already been given. His statement followed His resurrection and preceded His ascension (Matthew 28:1-18; Acts 1:9).
† The word all leaves no authority outside His rightful supremacy. Jesus didn't receive partial authority while waiting for a future generation to complete His enthronement (Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 2:10).
† If every knee bowing in Philippians requires universal authority, Jesus had already received the authority necessary for that declaration to be true. The existence of unbelievers doesn't overturn His own statement (John 17:2; 1 Peter 3:22).
† This is a serious problem for the argument that Philippians 2

remains unfulfilled simply because people still reject Jesus. That argument confuses voluntary obedience with established lordship (Psalm 110:1-2; Hebrews 2:8).

Acts 2:36
Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified.
† Peter proclaimed this on Pentecost, decades before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. He didn't tell Israel that Jesus would someday become Lord. He announced that God had already made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-35).
† The same generation that crucified Jesus was being confronted with the authority of the One they had rejected. Their refusal to acknowledge Him didn't prevent His exaltation (Acts 2:22-24; Acts 4:10-12).
† Peter's proclamation establishes the historical foundation for Paul's statement in Philippians. Jesus was already Lord, and the apostles were announcing that reality throughout the first-century world (Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 12:3).
† Jerusalem's judgment in AD 70 publicly vindicated Christ's prophetic warnings and demonstrated His authority over the covenant nation that rejected Him. However, His exaltation didn't begin in AD 70. It had already occurred following His resurrection and ascension (Matthew 24:30-34; Acts 2:32-36).

Ephesians 1:20-22
which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,
† Paul explicitly identifies when Christ received His exalted position. God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand. His authority wasn't awaiting the end of the physical

universe (Acts 2:32-35; Hebrews 1:3).
† Notice the language. Christ was already seated far above every rule, authority, power, and dominion. Paul didn't describe a throne that Jesus would occupy only after every unbeliever physically bowed before Him (Colossians 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22).
† Paul also says God put all things under Christ's feet. This is the same universal authority expressed in Philippians 2. The difference is that Ephesians directly identifies the exaltation as an accomplished reality (Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 2:8).
† If all things were already placed under His feet, then universal subjection cannot require every individual to demonstrate willing obedience before Christ possesses that authority (Psalm 110:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:25).
† Christ's reign was established in the first century. The transition from the Old Covenant order reached its completion in AD 70, but the authority of the exalted Christ was already being proclaimed before that judgment (Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 24:34).

Hebrews 2:8
YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.
† This passage is especially important because it addresses the exact objection raised against Philippians 2. The writer says everything was placed in subjection, yet acknowledges that this universal subjection wasn't visibly apparent (Psalm 8:4-6; Hebrews 2:9).
† Notice the distinction. God had subjected all things, but the original audience didn't yet see that subjection fully manifested. The absence of visible evidence didn't cancel the reality of Christ's authority (Ephesians 1:20-22; Matthew 28:18).
† That's precisely what many futurist interpretations overlook. They insist that if Christ's authority cannot be observed through universal human obedience, it hasn't been established. Hebrews explicitly distinguishes established authority from its

visible manifestation (Hebrews 2:8-9).
† The first-century believers were living during the final transition from the Old Covenant age. They awaited the completion of the judgment Christ had promised within their generation, not the establishment of an authority He hadn't yet received (Hebrews 10:37; Matthew 24:34).
† We must also recognize that Hebrews doesn't say every human being must physically kneel before Christ at one future moment. That requirement is being imposed upon the passage rather than drawn from its actual wording (Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 2:8).

Colossians 1:13
For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,
† Paul didn't say believers would eventually be transferred into Christ's kingdom after a future worldwide confession. He said God had already transferred them into the kingdom of His Son (Colossians 1:12-14).
† A kingdom requires a king. Christ wasn't waiting for every unbeliever to acknowledge Him before His kingdom could exist. His people were already living under His authority (John 18:36; Romans 14:17).
† The kingdom was spiritual in nature, not an earthly political government awaiting universal public recognition. Jesus Himself explained that His kingdom wasn't of this realm (John 18:36; Luke 17:20-21).
† That's why Philippians 2 shouldn't be transformed into a prediction of a future worldwide political or religious event. Paul's emphasis was Christ's exalted lordship, not the establishment of a future earthly empire (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 2:10).

1 Peter 3:22
who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.
† Peter confirms that heavenly authorities and powers had

already been subjected to Jesus. This directly supports Paul's reference to those in heaven bowing before Christ (Philippians 2:10; Ephesians 1:20-21).
† Peter wasn't waiting for some distant event before acknowledging Christ's authority over the spiritual realm. He described that authority as already established (Hebrews 1:3-4; Colossians 2:10).
† If heavenly authorities were already subjected to Christ, then the language of every knee bowing cannot automatically mean that the entire declaration remains unfulfilled until every human being physically kneels (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:8).
† The heavenly realm already recognized Christ's supremacy, while His authority was being proclaimed throughout the earthly realm. The apostles consistently taught one exalted Lord over all creation (Acts 10:36; Ephesians 1:20-22).

Romans 14:11
For it is written, AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.
† Paul quotes Isaiah's declaration again, this time while discussing accountability before God. The context concerns believers judging one another and the responsibility each person has before the Lord (Romans 14:10-12).
† This passage reminds us that universal lordship also carries universal accountability. Everyone is answerable to God, whether they willingly acknowledge His authority during earthly life or not (Romans 2:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
† However, accountability doesn't establish the timing of a future physical ceremony. Paul's purpose is to remind his readers that God is the ultimate judge and that they must stop assuming His authority over their fellow servants (Romans 14:4; Romans 14:10-12).
† Romans 14 and Philippians 2 use Isaiah's language in different contexts, but both affirm divine supremacy. Neither passage explicitly teaches that Christ must return to earth thousands of years later to receive an authority already given to

Him (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36).
† The acknowledgment of Christ's lordship can be willing or compelled by the reality of His judgment. It doesn't follow that everyone receives salvation or that everyone must participate in a single future worldwide gathering (Matthew 7:21-23; Philippians 2:9-11).

Revelation 1:5
and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood--
† John identifies Jesus as the ruler of the kings of the earth. He doesn't say Jesus will become their ruler after every earthly king voluntarily acknowledges Him (Psalm 2:6-12; Matthew 28:18).
† This statement was written to first-century churches living under Roman authority. The existence of Caesar and other earthly rulers didn't mean Christ lacked sovereignty over them (Revelation 1:4-6; Revelation 17:14).
† Revelation opens by declaring Christ's existing authority and then announces events that were near for its original audience. Those approaching judgments would reveal the authority of the One already enthroned (Revelation 1:1-3; Revelation 22:6-10).
† The judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70 demonstrated that rejecting Christ couldn't overturn His authority. The same Jesus whom Jerusalem rejected had warned that its judgment would occur within that generation (Matthew 23:37-39; Matthew 24:30-34).
† Christ's kingdom didn't depend upon Rome's approval, Jerusalem's acceptance, or the voluntary submission of every human being. His authority came from the Father (Daniel 7:13-14; John 17:2).

Historical References
† Isaiah wrote centuries before Christ that every knee would bow to the Lord. This established the Old Testament foundation for Paul's language. The declaration concerned God's exclusive sovereignty, and Paul applied that divine authority to the exalted

Jesus (Isaiah 45:22-23; Philippians 2:9-11).
† Clement of Rome, writing near the end of the first century, emphasized Christ's exalted position and the authority established through Him. His First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 36 and 59, reflects the early Christian conviction that Jesus was already exalted and honored.
† Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early second century, repeatedly identified Jesus Christ as Lord and emphasized obedience to Him. His Letter to the Ephesians, particularly chapters 7 and 18, demonstrates that early Christians proclaimed Christ's existing divine dignity rather than waiting for a future event to make Him Lord.
† Polycarp of Smyrna, in his Letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, described Jesus as the One whom God raised from the dead and to whom everything in heaven and earth was subjected. His testimony closely parallels the apostolic teaching concerning Christ's exaltation (Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:20-22).
† Josephus, in The Jewish War, Books 5-7, recorded Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. Although Josephus didn't interpret Philippians 2 as a fulfilled prophecy, his historical account documents the judgment that Jesus had announced against Jerusalem's generation (Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34).
† These historical references help distinguish two related truths. Christ's exaltation followed His resurrection, while Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 demonstrated the fulfillment of His first-century judgment warnings. We shouldn't confuse the historical establishment of His authority with the later manifestation of that authority in judgment (Acts 2:36; Matthew 24:30-34).

How It Applies To Us Today
† We don't need to wait for every person on earth to kneel before Jesus before acknowledging that He is Lord. God has already exalted Him, and Scripture declares that all authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11).
† The continued existence of unbelief doesn't mean Christ's kingdom has failed. People rejected God's authority throughout

biblical history, yet their rebellion never removed His sovereignty (Psalm 2:1-6; Daniel 4:34-35).
† We should distinguish between Christ's established authority and humanity's response to that authority. Believers willingly confess Jesus as Lord because they've received Him through faith. Others may reject Him, but their rejection doesn't change who He is (Romans 10:9-10; Colossians 2:10).
† Our responsibility isn't to predict a future worldwide ceremony where every human being physically kneels. It's to live faithfully under the authority of the King who already reigns (Colossians 3:17; Ephesians 1:20-23).
† We also shouldn't turn Philippians 2 into a teaching that everyone will eventually be saved. Universal authority doesn't mean universal salvation. Jesus distinguished between those who belong to Him and those who reject Him (John 3:16-18; Matthew 7:21-23).
† Paul's original purpose was practical. He instructed believers to demonstrate humility, love, and concern for others, using Christ's humiliation and exaltation as their supreme example (Philippians 2:3-8).
† That's why this passage should lead us toward humility and obedience rather than speculation about events that Scripture doesn't explicitly describe (Philippians 2:12-16).
† Jesus Christ is Lord today. His kingdom is established, His authority is complete, and His people belong to Him. We aren't waiting for Him to become King. We're living under the authority of the King who already reigns (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).

Q & A Appendix
Q: Doesn't Philippians 2:10-11 clearly say every knee will bow and every tongue will confess?
A: Yes, but the passage doesn't explicitly say that every human being must physically kneel at one future event. Paul uses Isaiah's declaration of universal divine sovereignty to explain the authority bestowed upon Christ through His exaltation

(Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:9-11).

Q: If every knee has bowed, why do billions of people still reject Jesus?
A: Because Christ's authority doesn't depend upon universal voluntary obedience. Jesus declared that all authority had already been given to Him, even while people continued rejecting Him. Hebrews also distinguishes established subjection from what was visibly apparent (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:8).

Q: Does Philippians 2:10-11 predict a future second coming?
A: The passage doesn't mention a second coming. Its immediate context concerns Christ's humility, obedience, death, and exaltation. His coming in judgment must be established from passages that actually discuss that event and its timing (Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 24:30-34).

Q: Does every tongue confessing mean everyone will eventually be saved?
A: No. Recognizing Christ's authority isn't the same as receiving salvation through faith. Scripture distinguishes those who believe from those who reject the Son (John 3:16-18; Matthew 7:21-23).

Q: What does under the earth mean?
A: It's part of the threefold description of Christ's universal supremacy. Heaven, earth, and under the earth express the comprehensive reach of His authority. The phrase doesn't require a future physical gathering of all the dead on earth (Philippians 2:10; Ephesians 1:20-22).

Q: Didn't Jesus receive His authority at His resurrection rather than in AD 70?
A: Yes. His exaltation followed His resurrection and ascension. AD 70 marked the fulfillment of His judgment upon Jerusalem and the completion of the Old Covenant age, not the beginning

of His lordship (Acts 2:32-36; Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 24:34).

Q: Doesn't Romans 14:11 prove every person must eventually bow before Christ?
A: Romans 14 emphasizes accountability before God. It doesn't specify that every person must physically kneel at a single future event. Paul's purpose was to remind believers that everyone is accountable to the Lord (Romans 14:10-12).

Q: If Jesus is already Lord, why does Scripture speak of His enemies being placed under His feet?
A: Christ's enthronement and the subjection of His enemies are related but distinguishable. He was already reigning while His enemies were being brought under His authority. The first-century covenant judgment reached its fulfillment in AD 70 (Psalm 110:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Matthew 24:34).

Q: Is Philippians 2:10-11 an eschatological passage?
A: It uses language associated with divine sovereignty and universal acknowledgment, which can carry judgment implications. However, its immediate purpose isn't to establish the timing of a future end-time event. Paul is declaring the exaltation and universal lordship of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:8-11).

Q: What is the greatest mistake people make when interpreting these verses?
A: They assume Christ cannot possess universal authority until every individual visibly acknowledges Him. Scripture teaches the opposite. Jesus already received all authority, and God already placed everything under His feet (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-22).

Q: What should believers understand from Philippians 2:10-11 today?
A: Jesus doesn't need another coronation, another kingdom, or another coming to become Lord. God has already exalted Him

above every name. Our responsibility is to acknowledge His authority, follow His teaching, and live faithfully in His established kingdom (Acts 2:36; Colossians 1:13; Philippians 2:12-16).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Philippians 2:8-11; Isaiah 45:22-23; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36; Ephesians 1:20-22; Hebrews 2:8; Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 3:22; Romans 14:11; Revelation 1:5.

† Isaiah, Book of Isaiah, chapter 45; Clement of Rome, First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 36 and 59; Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, chapters 7 and 18; Polycarp of Smyrna, Letter to the Philippians, chapter 2; Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-7.

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