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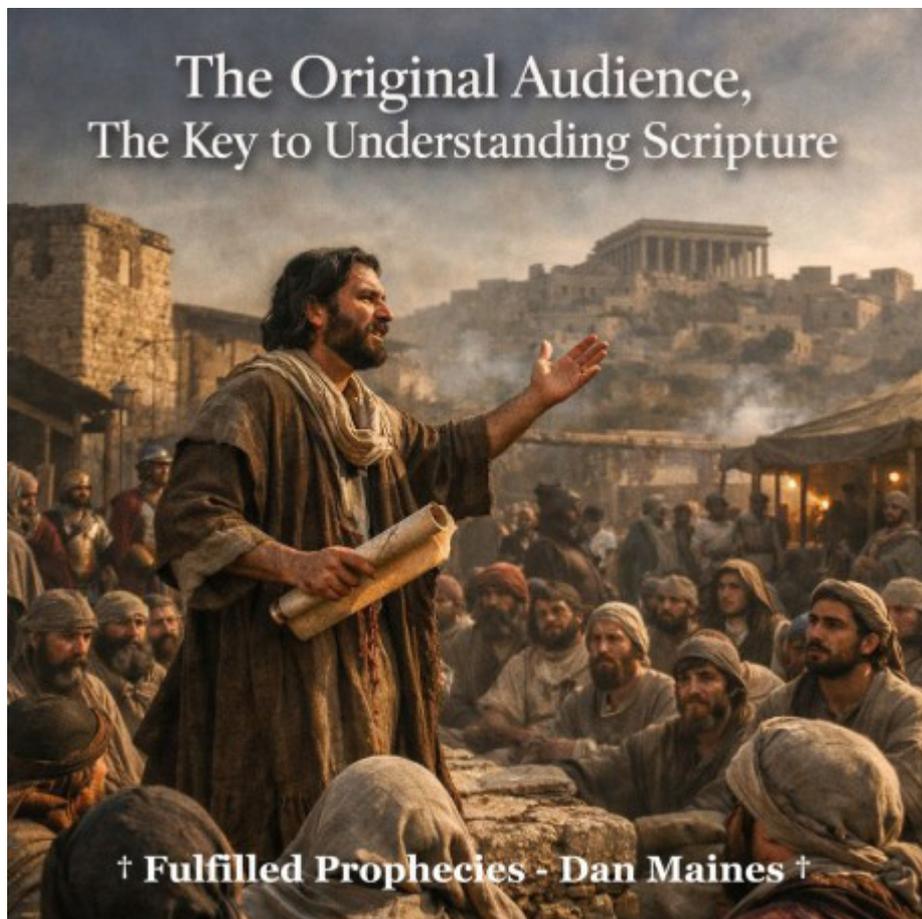
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Audience - The Original Audience, The Key to Understanding Scripture



By Dan Maines

The Original Audience, The Key to Understanding Scripture

Introduction

† Brothers and sisters in Christ, as a Preterist and student of fulfilled prophecy, I want to take a moment to highlight a foundational principle that must guide our interpretation of the Word of God: Audience Relevance. Without this lens, we risk distorting the truth and applying promises or judgments where they were never intended.

† Scripture was delivered into real covenantal situations, not

abstract theological debates centuries removed from the writers.

† Ignoring audience relevance leads directly to futurism, speculation, and broken timelines.

† Let me walk you through this critical truth using Scripture and reason, step by step:

† The Bible interprets itself best when read in its historical and covenantal setting.

† This approach does not diminish Scripture, it protects it.

The Original Audience Matters

† Always ask yourself: "What did it mean to the first century disciples?" This is not just a helpful question, it is essential. It does not matter what we think a verse means today unless we first understand what it meant then.

† Meaning is anchored in authorial intent, not modern application.

† The apostles never expected their words to bypass their original hearers.

Matthew 24:34

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus was not speaking ambiguously. He addressed that generation, not ours. Audience relevance tells us Jesus was speaking directly to His listeners.

† The disciples asked questions rooted in their covenant world, and Jesus answered them plainly.

† Redefining generation removes the credibility of Christ's words.

Hebrews 1:1-2

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...

† Notice who us is. The author of Hebrews is saying they were in the last days. Not us. The original recipients were experiencing the climax of the ages.

† The contrast is between Old Covenant revelation and New Covenant fulfillment.

† The phrase last days is covenantal, not cosmic.

Scripture Was Not Written To Us

† One of the biggest missteps in modern Christianity is treating the Bible like a direct letter to the 21st century. Let's be clear: the Bible is for us, but it was not written to us.

† Confusing application with interpretation creates doctrinal error.

† The authority of Scripture depends on honoring its original recipients.

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

† Paul confirms it was written for our benefit, but not to us.

† Instruction flows forward, not backward.

† Hope is grounded in fulfilled promises, not postponed ones.

Revelation 1:4

John to the seven churches that are in Asia Minor.

† When John wrote Revelation, he was writing to seven literal churches in Asia Minor. They were real churches dealing with

real persecution. He was not cryptically writing to a distant generation 2,000 years later.

† Revelation opens by naming its audience, which must govern interpretation.

† Ignoring this leads to speculative end time systems.

We're Reading Someone Else's Mail

† When you open the New Testament, you're reading correspondence between apostles and early Christian communities. The issues, questions, and warnings were specific to their circumstances.

† Epistles are situational documents, not generic prophecy charts.

† Understanding the mail requires knowing the sender and the recipient.

1 Corinthians 1:2

To the church of God which is in Corinth...

† Paul is not writing to a church in modern America. He's writing to Corinth, and everything he says must first be understood in that historical context.

† Corinth's problems shaped Paul's instruction.

† Removing context produces false doctrine.

Philippians 1:1

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi...

† Again, an audience in a specific city, at a specific time, under specific pressures.

† Philippi was a Roman colony with unique political realities.

† Paul's encouragement addresses those lived conditions.

"Here's What This Scripture Means To Me", A Dangerous Statement

† In modern Christianity, people often say, "Here's what this Scripture means to me." But the only biblical truth at that point is: It does not matter what it means to you, unless you understand what it meant to them.

† Personal meaning cannot override divine intent.

† Scripture is not subjective.

2 Peter 1:20-21

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture becomes a matter of someone's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will...

† Meaning is not personal. It is rooted in what God meant, and what it meant to the people to whom it was written.

† Prophecy unfolds according to God's timetable, not ours.

† The Spirit guided the message and its fulfillment.

Time Statements Were Not Elastic

† Scripture is full of time indicators: "the time is near", "this generation", "about to", "at hand". These phrases were meant for the original audience.

† Language has meaning, especially time language.

† Stretching time statements empties them of truth.

Revelation 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ... to show His bond servants the things which must soon take place.

† If that didn't mean soon for them, then the text is meaningless.

† Soon is defined by the writer, not modern theology.

† God doesn't mislead His servants.

James 5:8-9

You too be patient, strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain... behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

† That urgency was for them, not for us 2,000 years later.

† James wrote to suffering believers awaiting covenant vindication.

† Near means near.

Why This Matters

† We must rightly divide the Word of truth, and that begins by respecting who it was written to and why. The truth is, there is not one book in the Bible that was written to someone living today.

† Fulfillment confirms Scripture, it does not diminish it.

† God kept His word exactly as promised.

† That may be a shocking statement, but it is honest. The Bible was written to others, but for us. It reveals God's character, redemptive plan, and the fulfillment of His promises.

† The faithfulness of God is proven in history.

† Fulfilled prophecy strengthens trust.

† So next time you hear, "Here's what this verse means to me", remember: What matters is what it meant to them. That is where Bible truth is found. Only after understanding that can we apply it faithfully to our own lives today.

† Application follows interpretation.

† Truth precedes relevance.

† Amen.

Historical References

† Josephus records the first century judgment on Jerusalem as an event that fell upon that generation, confirming the historical setting assumed by Jesus and the apostles.

† Eusebius explicitly states that the calamities foretold by Christ came upon the Jews of that time, not a distant future people.

† Clement of Alexandria understood the apostolic age as the transition point between the old covenant order and the realized new covenant in Christ.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Interpretation must always come before application, otherwise Scripture is reshaped by personal experience instead of divine intent.

† Because God fulfilled His word exactly as spoken, our faith today rests on certainty, not speculation.

† Living in fulfillment frees believers from fear driven theology and anchors us in completed redemption.

Q And A Appendix

Q Why does audience relevance matter so much

A Because it preserves the truth of Scripture and prevents distortion

Q Can Scripture still apply to us today

A Yes, but application must come after understanding original meaning

Q Why does audience relevance protect Scripture from error

A Because it anchors meaning to what God actually said to real people in real covenant circumstances

Q Does audience relevance deny inspiration

A No, it affirms inspiration by respecting how and when God

chose to speak

Q Why do futurist interpretations struggle with time statements

A Because they detach words like near, soon, and this generation from their original audience

Q Can fulfilled prophecy still build faith today

A Yes, fulfillment proves God keeps His word exactly as spoken

Q Is this approach new or modern

A No, early Christians understood prophecy through fulfillment, not delay

Q Why do people resist this way of reading Scripture

A Because tradition often feels safer than letting the text speak for itself

Q If prophecy was fulfilled, why do believers still die

A Because fulfillment addressed covenant death and separation, not biological mortality

Q Does fulfillment mean nothing is future

A No, it means redemption is complete and our future is lived out within what Christ already accomplished

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

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Source Index

† Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 1:1-2; Romans 15:4; Revelation 1:1, 4; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 2 Peter 1:20-21; James 5:8-9

† Josephus, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria

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