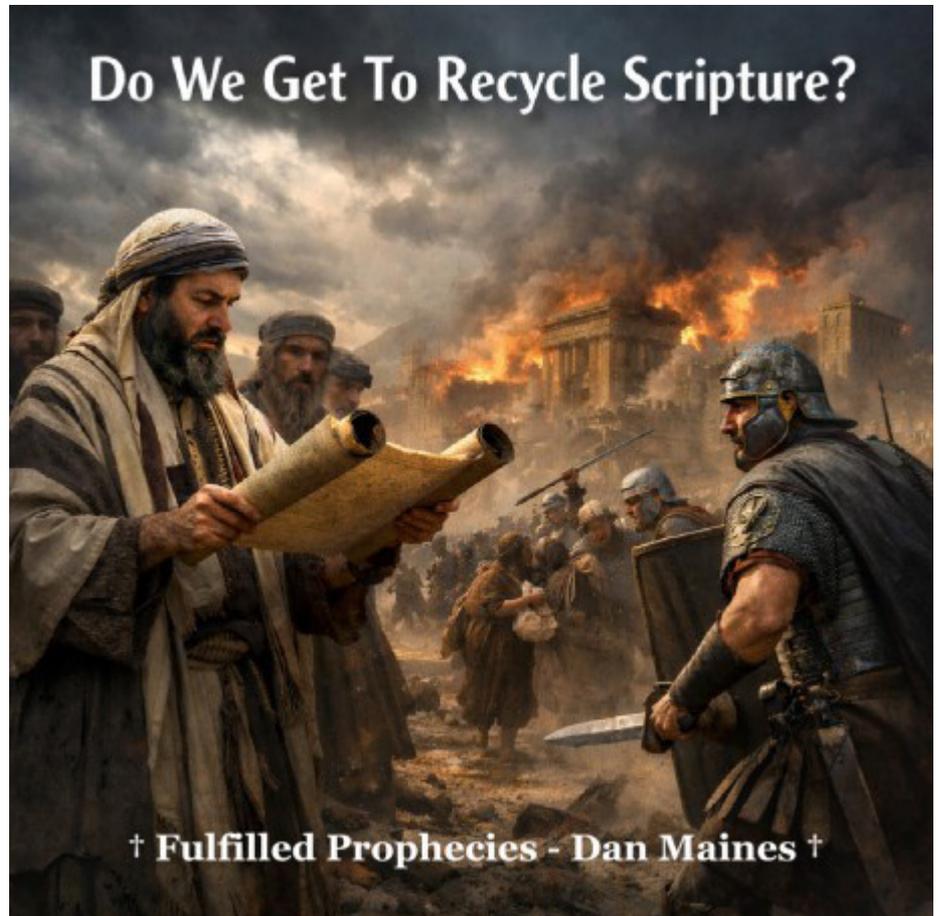


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[Hermeneutics - Do We Get To Recycle Scripture?](#)



By Dan Maines

Do We Get To Recycle Scripture?

Introduction

† Many people approach the Bible as if prophecy is something that must keep repeating itself generation after generation. If a prophecy sounds dramatic or frightening, many assume it must apply to their own time. But that approach ignores the most basic rule of interpretation, audience relevance. When God spoke to people in scripture, He spoke to real people who were

alive at that time.

† If the Bible clearly records a prophecy and then history confirms its fulfillment, we don't have the right to recycle that prophecy and assign it to another future generation. When we do that, we turn fulfilled prophecy into endless speculation. Scripture wasn't written to be recycled. It was written to be fulfilled.

† The apostles and prophets consistently taught that the events they were describing were near in their own generation. History recorded by writers like Josephus, Tacitus, and Eusebius confirms that these things actually happened. When scripture and history agree, the responsible thing to do is accept the fulfillment rather than invent a future repetition.

† The question we must ask is simple. When Jesus spoke about events happening soon, near, and within that generation, did He mean what He said? Or are we supposed to reinterpret those words to mean thousands of years later?

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

† Paul plainly told the Corinthians that they were living at the end of the ages. He didn't say the end of the ages would come thousands of years later. He said it had come upon them. This shows that the transition between the Old Covenant age and the New Covenant age was happening during the lifetime of the first century church (1 Corinthians 10:11).

† The phrase ends of the ages refers to the conclusion of the Old Covenant system centered on the temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. That system was still standing when Paul wrote

these words, but it was about to pass away in the coming judgment upon Jerusalem (Hebrews 8:13).

† This is why the New Testament repeatedly speaks of the time being short and the end being near. The writers weren't mistaken. They were describing events that would climax in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (James 5:8; 1 Peter 4:7).

Revelation 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,

† The book of Revelation opens by declaring that the events in the vision would shortly come to pass. Shortly cannot honestly mean thousands of years later. It meant what it said to the original audience.

† The servants who were being shown these things were the believers living at that time. They were the ones who needed to understand the events that were about to unfold.

† The language of imminence is repeated throughout Revelation, confirming that the prophecy concerned events near to the time when John wrote the book (Revelation 22:6, 10).

Matthew 24:34

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

† Jesus couldn't have been clearer. He told His disciples that their generation would not pass away until all the things He had just described were fulfilled. The audience He was speaking to

was standing right in front of Him.

† Many people attempt to redefine the word generation so they can push the prophecy thousands of years into the future. But throughout the Gospels the word generation always refers to the people living at that time (Matthew 23:36; Luke 11:50-51).

† When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in AD 70, that event fulfilled the warnings Jesus gave in the Olivet Discourse. The disciples asked when these things would happen, what would be the sign of His coming, and the end of the age. Jesus answered their question directly, and history confirms that it happened within that generation (Matthew 24:3).

Matthew 16:27-28

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

† Jesus told the men standing there that some of them would still be alive when His coming took place. That statement cannot be stretched thousands of years into the future.

† This proves that the coming Jesus was referring to was something that would happen within the lifetime of His disciples.

† This statement agrees perfectly with His words in the Olivet Discourse that their generation would not pass away until those events were fulfilled (Matthew 24:34).

Luke 21:20-22

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.

† Jesus gave a very specific warning. When the disciples saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they were to flee to the mountains. This instruction only makes sense for people living in the first century.

† The Roman armies under General Titus surrounded Jerusalem in AD 70 exactly as Jesus described. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded the siege, the famine, and the destruction of the temple in great detail.

† Jesus also said that during this war all things which are written would be fulfilled. That means the prophecies concerning judgment upon Old Covenant Jerusalem reached their climax in that generation (Daniel 9:26-27).

Colossians 1:23

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

† Many modern teachers claim the end cannot come until the gospel is preached throughout the entire planet. But Paul said that in his own lifetime the gospel had already been proclaimed in all creation under heaven.

† The word world in the New Testament often referred to the Roman Empire, the known world of that time. Luke uses this same language when he described the decree from Caesar

Augustus that all the world should be registered (Luke 2:1).

† The apostles understood that their mission had spread throughout the Roman world before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Romans 10:18

But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? On the contrary:

"THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH,
AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

† Paul again confirms that the gospel message had already spread throughout the world of that time.

† This fulfills the statement Jesus made that the gospel would be preached in the whole world before the end of the age came (Matthew 24:14).

† The end of the age therefore refers to the end of the Old Covenant age, not the destruction of the physical planet.

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† When the book of Hebrews was written, the Old Covenant system was still standing but it was about to disappear.

† The temple, priesthood, and sacrifices were about to vanish when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70.

† This confirms that the transition between the Old Covenant age and the New Covenant age was happening in the first century.

Ecclesiastes 1:4

A generation goes and a generation comes,
But the earth remains forever.

† Scripture clearly states that the earth remains forever. This contradicts the modern idea that the physical planet will be destroyed at the end of time.

† When the Bible speaks about heaven and earth passing away, it often refers to the removal of a covenantal system rather than the destruction of the physical universe (Isaiah 51:15-16).

† Understanding the symbolic language of scripture prevents us from creating imaginary future disasters that the Bible never intended to describe.

Revelation 11:8

And their dead bodies will lie on the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

† Revelation identifies the great city symbolically as Sodom and Egypt, the place where the Lord was crucified. That location can only be Jerusalem.

† The prophets had long used the name Sodom to describe the corruption of Jerusalem because of its rebellion against God (Isaiah 1:9-10).

† When Revelation later describes the fall of Babylon, it is describing the judgment of Old Covenant Jerusalem for rejecting Christ and persecuting the prophets and apostles (Revelation 18:24).

Luke 13:33

Nevertheless I must go on My journey today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside Jerusalem.

† Jesus clearly said that prophets are killed in Jerusalem.

† Revelation later says Babylon was guilty of the blood of prophets and saints (Revelation 18:24).

† That connection makes it clear that the judgment described in Revelation concerns Jerusalem.

Revelation 22:6

And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

† The book of Revelation closes the same way it begins, by declaring that the events would shortly take place.

† Shortly come to pass cannot honestly be stretched into thousands of years.

† The consistent time statements throughout the New Testament confirm that the prophetic events were approaching in the first century.

Historical References

† Josephus recorded the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in AD 70 in Wars of the Jews.

† Tacitus described the devastation of Judea and the destruction of Jerusalem during the Jewish War.

† Eusebius recorded that the Christians in Jerusalem fled to the mountains before the destruction of the city, remembering the warning of Jesus.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Understanding fulfilled prophecy frees believers from the constant fear that the world is about to end.

† Christ's kingdom isn't waiting to begin. It was established when the Old Covenant age came to its end.

† Fulfilled prophecy strengthens our confidence in scripture because God fulfilled His promises exactly when He said He would.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Didn't Jesus say the gospel must be preached to the whole world before the end?

A: Yes, and the apostles said that had already happened in their lifetime (Colossians 1:23; Romans 10:18).

Q: What does Jesus mean when He says this generation will not pass away?

A: The word generation refers to the people living at that time. Jesus was speaking about the generation of His disciples (Matthew 24:34; Matthew 23:36).

Q: Does the Bible teach that the earth will be destroyed?

A: No. Scripture repeatedly says the earth remains forever (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Psalm 104:5).

Q: If the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the first century, why do people still believe it is future?

A: Because many teachers ignore the audience Jesus was speaking to. The disciples asked when these things would happen, and Jesus answered them directly. He said their generation would not pass away until all these things were fulfilled (Matthew 24:3, 34). When interpreters ignore audience relevance, prophecy gets pushed into future centuries where it was never intended to go.

Q: What about the phrase heaven and earth will pass away?

A: That phrase is covenant language used throughout the Old Testament. It often refers to the passing of a covenantal order, not the destruction of the physical universe. The Old Covenant system centered on the temple was about to pass away in the first century (Hebrews 8:13; Isaiah 51:15-16).

Q: If the end of the age happened in AD 70, what age ended?

A: The Old Covenant age ended. That age was centered on the temple, sacrifices, and the Levitical priesthood. When the temple was destroyed in AD 70, that system came to its final end exactly as Jesus warned (Matthew 24:1-3; Hebrews 9:8-10).

Q: Why do many churches keep teaching that the end of the world is near?

A: Many traditions reinterpret the time statements of scripture. Words like soon, near, quickly, and generation are often

redefined to mean thousands of years. But the original readers understood those words in their normal meaning, referring to events that were approaching in their lifetime (Revelation 1:1; James 5:8).

Q: If prophecy was fulfilled, why does the Bible still matter today?

A: Fulfilled prophecy proves the reliability of scripture. God said certain things would happen within that generation, and they did. Instead of waiting for repeated fulfillments, we can see the faithfulness of God in keeping His word exactly as promised (Luke 21:22; Matthew 24:34).

Q: What about 2 Peter 3 where people say the world will be burned up?

A: Peter was warning about the coming judgment that was approaching in his own generation. He said the last days mockers were already present and questioning the promise of His coming (2 Peter 3:3-4). Peter also said the day of the Lord would come like a thief, the same language Jesus used when speaking about the judgment on Jerusalem (Matthew 24:42-43). The passing of the heavens and earth refers to the removal of the Old Covenant system, just as the prophets used the same language when describing covenant judgments in the Old Testament (Isaiah 34:4; Hebrews 12:26-28).

Q: What about the Mark of the Beast, isn't that something in our future?

A: The mark of the beast belonged to the first century Roman world. The beast represents the Roman Caesar, and the mark refers to allegiance to the imperial system that controlled buying and selling. During the reign of Nero and the Roman persecutions, citizens often had to show loyalty to Caesar in order to participate in commerce. Revelation itself says these

events concerned things that were about to take place soon (Revelation 1:1; Revelation 13:16-18). The mark was part of the first century conflict between the Roman Empire and the early church.

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

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Source Index

† 1 Corinthians 10:11; Revelation 1:1; Matthew 24:3, 34; Matthew 16:27-28; Luke 21:20-22; Colossians 1:23; Romans 10:18; Hebrews 8:13; Ecclesiastes 1:4; Revelation 11:8; Luke 13:33; Revelation 22:6

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews Book 6; Tacitus, Histories 5.13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5

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