

Keith Mathison and the Biblical Time Statements – Part 5

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HAVING LOOKED AT MATHISON’S claim of “telescoping” prophecies in our previous article, we now turn our attention to his claim of double, or multiple, fulfillments: “If Old Testament prophecy provides us with any kind of standard for understanding New Testament prophecy, then the possibility of double fulfillment or prophetic telescoping cannot be automatically ruled out either.” (*When Shall These Things Be?* 180)

Mathison falls back on the nature of Old Testament prophetic fulfillment to supposedly find support for allowing “near” to not mean near. Of course, one of the first problems with Mathison’s argument is that it admits, right off the bat, that there was an imminent fulfillment of the prophecy. He is saying that the prophecies—those he claims had double fulfillment—had a fulfillment in the days of the audience to whom the prophecies were given, but they also looked far beyond that fulfillment to some future time unknown to them. This is supposed to prove that time statements are elastic and plastic—“silly putty” that can be stretched and manipulated into essentially meaning nothing. But this is a self-defeating argument.

If, as just indicated, there truly was a fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies that was imminent to the original audience, then that means that the language of imminence was objective, valid, and true. But to then say that the language that was indeed fulfilled imminently, was fulfilled again centuries, or perhaps millennia, later, turns language on its head. This has Mathison arguing that “at hand” truly meant at hand, but it also meant not at hand!

But the “multiple fulfillments” argument is full of implications that Mathison himself would never accept. Which prophecies had double or *multiple* fulfillments, and how does the Bible student discern them? Is there a solid hermeneutical rule that can be applied to Old Testament texts that tells us that prophecy X was to have double or multiple fulfillments, but prophecy Y wasn’t?

Just how far does Mathison carry his claim of “double or multiple fulfillment”? (Mind you, Mathison is not talking about type and anti-type, but actual “multiple fulfillments.”)

Would Mathison affirm that there were to be—perhaps are still to be—multiple fulfillments of the prophecy of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14)? If not, why not? What are his criteria for denying that possibility?

What about the Great Tribulation? Mathison is on record saying that the Great Tribulation occurred in the first century and was connected with the Jewish judgment:

“There is no end time tribulation. Jesus’ prophecy about tribulation in Matthew 24 was fulfilled between AD 30 and AD 70.” (Keith Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the House of God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ; P & R Publishing, 1995, 144).

But wait! If prophecy has multiple fulfillments, how can Mathison reject the dispensational claim that while the Jewish War was horrific, perhaps even in some way fulfilling the prophecy of the Tribulation, the “real” fulfillment lies in our future? I mean, if the hermeneutic of multiple fulfillments of prophecy is valid, we need to know how Mathison determines which prophecies were to be fulfilled multiple times, and which prophecies were not.

And what about the death of Christ on the Cross? Will there be multiple fulfillments of that substitutionary (horrific) death by our Lord and more resurrections of the Lord?

And what of the establishment of the kingdom? Will the kingdom be established over and over and over again?

What about the last days’ sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)? Joel does not speak of two or more such events, and Peter was emphatic that Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled on that auspicious Pentecost 2000 years ago. But perhaps there are multiple fulfillments? How can we determine that?

And just how many times are we to expect the coming of the Lord, in multiple fulfillments of His prophecies to come? Of course, this is where Mathison’s hermeneutic quickly gets really sticky. Like many postmillennialists, Mathison has traditionally agreed that Christ came in AD 70, on the clouds, with the angels, the sound of the trumpet, etc., to gather the elect. So, we have a coming of the Lord in AD 70—but then, in the postmillennial paradigm, we have yet another coming of the Lord at the end of the current Christian age. (It is to be noted that Mathison now claims that all “coming of the Son of Man” passages referred to Christ’s ascension, and not to His Second Coming—Mathison, *Age to Age*, 2009, 269, 365. It takes little effort to debunk that theory.)

Now, it is common for postmillennialists and some amillennialists to claim that AD 70 was a type or foreshadowing of the “real” coming of the Lord. Kim Riddlebarger says:

In the context of predictive prophecy and prophetic perspective, the intent would be that the destruction of the temple and the tribulation brought by the Roman army is a type of greater wrath experienced immediately before the return of Christ, perhaps connected with the loosing of Satan (Revelation 20:7f) and this on a global, not a local scale. This means that Jerusalem and the temple are, perhaps, a type of the apostate church in the last days.” (Kim Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003, 262, n. 34)

Kenneth Gentry, Jr., likewise posits AD 70 as typological:

Theologically, a redemptive-historical link does in fact connect AD 70 with the second advent. This could easily confuse the disciples. That is, the AD 70 episode is an anticipatory foreshadowing of the larger event, the second advent. (Kenneth Gentry, *Revelation Made Easy*, Powder Springs, Ga.; American Vision, 2009, 47)

I have not been able to find whether Mathison posits AD 70 as a type and shadow of the real end / Parousia, but given his “multiple fulfillment” construct, it would certainly appear that he would accept that claim.

The problem(s) with Mathison’s “multiple fulfillment” claim should be more than apparent. It is arbitrary. Furthermore, what is revealing is that neither Mathison, Gentry, nor anyone else that I have read actually attempts to prove that AD 70 was a type or shadow of a yet future coming of the Lord, and they do not offer textual proof that there are multiple comings of the Lord. All they do is assert, but assertion is not proof.

For a thorough critique and refutation of the “multiple fulfillment” hermeneutic, get a copy of my book *AD 70: A Type of the “Real” End?* It is available from my websites, Amazon, Kindle, and other retailers.

Summary and Conclusion

We have examined Mathison’s arguments as he has attempted to convince his readers that time statements indicating the imminency of the end of the age, the coming of the Lord, and the judgment are not to be taken seriously as objective time indicators.

- We have addressed Mathison’s claims that certain Old Testament prophecies with imminent time statements (Isa 13:22 and Hab 2-3) were not fulfilled until perhaps 200 years later. (2020 Fall issue)
- We have shared with the reader how Mathison’s own writings exhibit a confused and self-contradictory view of time statements. On the one hand he has always affirmed the objective nature of the imminence of the kingdom and of the events of AD 70. But now, in his efforts to counter the truth of Covenant Eschatology, he seemingly rejects his own writings on this topic. This seems like “*argumentum ad desperatum*” (my non-Latin “Latin” term that I coined years ago to describe “arguments from desperation”)! (2020 Winter issue)
- We have exposed how Mathison’s appeal to Haggai is misguided and violates history and Scripture. (2021 Spring issue)
- We have shown how his appeal to Daniel is actually a misrepresentation of the emphatic words of Daniel 10:4, 14, and have falsified his claims that the ancient prophets spoke as if events were near

when in fact they were far off (telescoping). His claim of “telescoping” prophecies is untenable at all levels. (2021 Summer issue)

- We have refuted Mathison’s claim that prophecies are to be fulfilled multiple times. (This issue)

I believe we have effectively shown that Mathison’s Objection is overruled! ✚