

Failed Apocalyptic Prophet Theory (Part 2)

“Ever since Jesus pronounced this message of imminent judgment and salvation... the church at large has argued, sometimes vociferously, that Jesus must not have been speaking these words literally but figuratively. In this later Christian view, Jesus’ proclamation must not have referred to an actual judgment of the earth and the appearance of an actual Kingdom, but possibly of judgment that people faced at the time of death, or of the kingdom that came in the community of Jesus’ disciples who formed the church, a place of love, healing, and hope. It’s no wonder that a figurative construal of Jesus’ words became so popular so soon and achieved such dominance for so long. If Jesus were to be taken literally—that is, if he really meant that the Son of Man was to arrive in the lifetime of his disciples—he was obviously wrong.” —Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, p. 244

Problem of the Parousia Delay

- “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” (Matthew 10:23)
- “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:27-28)
- “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34)

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24)			
Introduction/Setting (24:1-2)	Disciples’ questions (24:3)	“Birth pains” signs (24:4-14)	Final signs (24:15-35)
Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple.	When will these things place? What will be the sign of the end and of the Son of Man’s coming?	False christs Apostasy Wars and rumors Natural disasters Tribulation Global evangelism	Abomination of desolation Great tribulation The Son of Man’s coming

Olivet Discourse: Interpretive Options			
Approach	Proponents	Summary	Literalness
Thoroughgoing eschatology	Albert Schweitzer, Bart Ehrman	Jesus was expecting the literal end of the world within a generation.	Timing: literal Events: literal
Dispensation-alism	Hal Lindsey, John Hagee	Jesus was referring to a future generation, not his contemporaries.	Timing: figurative Events: literal
Full Preterism	N.T. Wright, Scot McKnight	Jesus was predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, not the end of the world.	Timing: literal Events: figurative
Partial Preterism	R.C. Sproul, G.E. Ladd, Kyle Dillon	Jesus was predicting the destruction of Jerusalem as a symbolic foreshadowing of the end of the world.	Timing: literal Events: typological (multiple fulfillments)

Which Generation?

- “Far, however, from accepting this decision of our Lord as final, the commentators have violently resisted that which seems the natural and common-sense meaning of His words. They have insisted that because the events predicted did not come to pass in that generation, therefore the word *generation* (*genea*) cannot possibly mean, what it is usually understood to mean, the people of that particular age or period, the contemporaries of our Lord. To affirm that these things did not come to pass is to beg the question, and something more. But we submit that it is the business of grammarians not to be apprehensive of possible consequences, but to settle the true meaning of words. Our Lord’s predictions may be safely left to take care of themselves; it is for us to try to understand them.” —J. Stuart Russell

Apocalyptic Language and Multiple Levels of Fulfillment

- “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:17-21)
- “Another method is to apply the principle of primary and secondary fulfillment of biblical prophecies.... Advocates of this method see an early primary fulfillment of prophecy (a partial fulfillment), followed at a later time by a secondary fulfillment (the complete or ultimate fulfillment).” —R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*
- “From the totality of [Jesus’] teaching one thing is clear: Jesus spoke both of the fall of Jerusalem and of his own eschatological Parousia.... In Jesus’ own view the historical and the eschatological are mingled, and ... the final eschatological event is seen through the ‘transparency’ of the immediate historical. The present author has applied this thesis to the Old Testament prophets and found this foreshortened view of the future to be one of the essential elements in the prophetic perspective. In Amos, the Day of the Lord is both an historical (Amos 5:18-20) and an eschatological event (Amos 7:4; 8:8-9; 9:5). Isaiah describes the historical day of visitation on Babylon as though it was the eschatological Day of the Lord (Isa. 13). Zephaniah describes the Day of the Lord (Zeph. 1:7, 14) as an historical disaster at the hands of an unnamed foe (Zeph. 1:10-12, 16-17; 2:5-15); but he also describes it in terms of a worldwide catastrophe in which all creatures are swept off the face of the earth (Zeph. 1:2-3). This way of viewing the future expresses the view that ‘in the crises of history the eschatological is foreshadowed. The divine judgments in history are, so to speak, rehearsals of the last judgment and the successive incarnations of antichrist are foreshadowings of the last supreme concentration of the rebelliousness of the devil before the End.’” —G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*