

## THE LITERAL FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY

Prophecy is prediction; something spoken by God, which is intended to fulfill at a time future from when it was given.

To test and distinguish the careful reader from the careless, God has hidden the meaning of many elements of prophecy in figures or symbols. And some words connected with these are given in plain language, and should be understood just as they read. That makes reading prophecy like reading something written in two languages mixed together. It is difficult to understand in that form, so before a prophecy can be understood, the symbolic language needs to be translated into its literal meaning by a careful comparison of scripture with scripture. All needs to be interpreted into its plain meaning.

William Miller's Rules 6 through 12 help us to distinguish the figurative language from the plain language, and shows how to handle the figurative elements.

Once a prophecy is understood in its plain meaning, the fulfillment can be searched for. Although often containing figurative language or symbols, prophecy fulfills literally.

### DEFINITION OF LITERAL:

Webster's 1828 Dictionary

- 1) **according to the letter**; primitive; real; **not figurative** or metaphorical; as the literal meaning of a phrase.
- 2) following the letter or exact words; not free; as a literal translation.

### FULFILLED LITERALLY

Prophecy fulfills "according to the letter"; it fulfills literally, as opposed to figuratively. William Miller saw that prophecy fulfills literally.

"He [Miller] saw that the prophecies, so far as they had been fulfilled, had been **fulfilled literally**; that all the various figures, metaphors, parables, similitudes, etc., were either explained in their immediate connection, or the terms in which they were expressed were defined in other scriptures, and when thus explained, were to be **literally understood**." *The Great Controversy*, GC 320.2

Rule 13 defines how we are to look for a literal fulfillment of prophecy; watching for literal events, as the "letter" of prophecy describes.

WILLIAM MILLER'S RULE NO. 13:

To know whether we have the true **historical event for the fulfilment of a prophecy**. If you find every word of the prophecy (after the figures are understood) is **literally fulfilled**, then you may know that your history is the true event. But if one word lacks a fulfilment, then you must look for another event, or wait its future development. For God takes care that history and prophecy doth agree, so that the true believing children of God may never be ashamed. Psalm 22:5; Isaiah 45:17-19; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 17:17; Acts 3:18.

For they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me. Isaiah 49:23

The Adventist pioneers recognized that prophecy delineates (puts in line) events expressed in figurative language, and that prophecy fulfills with literal historical events.

"**Historical events, showing the direct fulfillment of prophecy**, were set before the people, and the **prophecy was seen to be a figurative delineation of events** leading down to the close of this earth's history." *Selected Messages*, book 2, 2SM 102.1

Here are some quotes explaining that prophecy fulfills literally, with literal events.

"The prophecies of Moses were **literally fulfilled**. The chosen nation was scattered among heathen nations." *The Review and Herald*, RH April 25, 1907, par. 10

"Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, ...thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulcher of thy fathers.' Verses 18-22.

"This prophecy of doom was soon **literally fulfilled**. 'It came to pass, after he had eaten bread...'" *Prophets and Kings*, PK 106.2-3.

"Three centuries had passed. During the reformation wrought by Josiah, the king found himself in Bethel, where stood this ancient altar. The prophecy uttered so many years before in the presence of Jeroboam, was now to be **literally fulfilled**." *Prophets and Kings*, PK 402.2

"The promise, 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it,' was **literally fulfilled**. Verse 9. 'The elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the

son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. ...' Ezra 6:14, 15." *Prophets and Kings*, PK 596.1

"In the Sermon on the Mount Christ plainly declared His mission. 'Think not,' He said, 'that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil' (Matthew 5:17). He came to **carry out literally every specification** concerning which the prophets had borne testimony. He who existed with the Father before the creation of the world, Himself gave the prophecies recorded by holy men—the prophecies that He came afterward to fulfill...." *That I May Know Him*, TMK 292.3

"The scenes of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ were a living reality to them. They saw that the prophecies had been **literally fulfilled**." *The Desire of Ages*, DA 667.1

As events foretold have been and will be fulfilled, we can expect to find them written in the pages of history, either in sacred history of Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, or in the pages of secular history.

#### FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY IN SECULAR HISTORY

"All that prophecy has foretold as coming to pass, until the present time, has been **traced on the pages of history**, and we may be assured that all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its order." *Education*, Ed 178.3

"**In the history of nations** the student of God's word may behold the **literal fulfillment** of divine prophecy." *Conflict and Courage*, CC 250.4

Referring to Revelation 11, "This prophecy has received a most exact and striking fulfillment in the **history of France**." *The Great Controversy*, GC 269.4

#### FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY IN SACRED HISTORY

"There is a study of history that is not to be condemned. Sacred history was one of the studies in the schools of the prophets. In the record of His dealings with the nations were traced the footsteps of Jehovah. So today we are to consider the dealings of God with the nations of the earth. **We are to see in history the fulfillment of prophecy**, to study the workings of Providence in the great reformatory movements, and to

understand the progress of events in the marshaling of the nations for the final conflict of the great controversy." *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, CT 379.3

## A PURPOSE FOR LITERAL FULFILLMENT

One important reason that prophecy points to literal, real, or tangible events is to help us find our location in time; to be able to know where we are in relation to the end of time. Therefore, if a prophecy does not fulfill with a real event, it fails to fulfill one of its main purposes, to show us our position in history.

"Every child of God should be intelligent in the Scriptures, and able, **by tracing the fulfillment of prophecy, to show our position in this world's history.**" *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, CSW 23.1

"By a thorough investigation of the prophecies we understand **where we are in this world's history**; and we know for a certainty that the second coming of Christ is near." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 4T 592.1

"The history which the great I AM has marked out in His word, uniting link after link in the prophetic chain, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, **tells us where we are today in the procession of the ages**, and what may be expected in the time to come. All that prophecy has foretold as coming to pass, until the present time, **has been traced on the pages of history**, and we may be assured that all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its order." *Education*, Ed 178.3

## FULFILLED TO THE LETTER

Another definition of the word LITERAL is "following the letter or exact words". When referring to prophecy, it can be said that it fulfills exactly according to what is stated by God. In the Spirit of Prophecy, Ellen White uses the phrases "every particular" or "every specification", and "to the letter" to say the same thing.

"But they would not believe the message, and they laughed at Noah. They would not turn from their wickedness to obey the commands of God, and as the result the word of God was **fulfilled to the letter.**" *Manuscript 40*, 13LtMs, Ms 40, 1898, par. 1

Speaking of the fall of Babylon, "Thus was the prophecy of Isaiah and Jeremiah **fulfilled to the letter.**" *The Signs of the Times*, ST December 29, 1890, par. 3

"All the predictions given by Christ concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were **fulfilled to the letter.**" *The Great Controversy*, GC 29.2

"Forty years after Christ uttered His prediction respecting Jerusalem and the temple, His words were **fulfilled to the letter.**" *The Signs of the Times*, ST December 19, 1900, par. 15

"...as we stand this side of the cross, we see clearly how the predictions of prophets were **fulfilled to the letter.**" *The Signs of the Times*, ST July 9, 1896, par. 3

In the next two quotes, notice how Ellen White uses interchangeably "literally fulfilled" with "fulfilled to the very letter".

"Study the 9th chapter of Ezekiel. These words will be **literally fulfilled...**" *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, 1MR 260.2

"...the time will soon come when the prophecy of Ezekiel 9 will be fulfilled; that prophecy should be carefully studied, for it will be **fulfilled to the very letter.**" *1888 Materials*, 1888 1303.1

Prophecies are constructed of specifications; precise requirements which must be fulfilled in the same manner as described. As we saw at the beginning of this study, some of the specifications of prophecy are given in symbols, which point to real events that fulfill in the line of history.

Here are quotes related to fulfillment of prophecy, which speak of the specifications.

"As each related his dream, Joseph made known its import: In three days the butler was to be reinstated in his position, and give the cup into Pharaoh's hand as before, but the chief baker would be put to death by the king's command. In both cases **the event occurred as foretold.**

"...The chief butler saw the dream **fulfilled in every particular;**" *Patriarchs and Prophets*, PP 219.1-2

"For forty days Christ remained on the earth, preparing the disciples for the work before them and explaining that which heretofore they had been unable to comprehend. He spoke of the prophecies concerning His advent, His rejection by the Jews, and His death,

showing that **every specification** of these prophecies had been fulfilled." *The Acts of the Apostles*, AA 26.2

"Taking 457 B.C., the time when the decree was completed, as the date of the commandment, **every specification** of the prophecy concerning the seventy weeks was seen to have been fulfilled." *The Great Controversy*, GC 326.3

"In the proclamation of the messages, **every specification** of prophecy has been fulfilled. Those who were privileged to act a part in proclaiming these messages have gained an experience which is of the highest value to them..." *Selected Messages*, book 2, 2SM 387.3

In Rule 13, William Miller expressed how important it is for every word or specification of prophecy to fulfill as given. He says, "But if one word lacks a fulfillment, then you must look for another event, or wait its future development."

## **CONCLUSION**

We can see in this study that even though prophecy is given to us in both figurative language and plain language, we should expect it to be fulfilled through literal events which can be found in the record of sacred or secular history. The purpose of being able to find literal events as the fulfillment is to help us understand where we are in time; to locate us in the line of history. As we search for the fulfillment of prophecy, we can expect that it will fulfill according to the letter; fulfilling every specification as it is given.

"We are to show that the specifications of prophecy have been fulfilled in the history of the world." *The Signs of the Times*, ST October 14, 1889, par. 7

We can benefit greatly from a study of how the prophecies have been fulfilled and will continue to fulfill literally throughout the history of this earth.

"A careful study of the working out of God's purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come, will help us to estimate at their true value things seen and things unseen, and to learn what is the true aim of life. Thus, viewing the things of time in the light of eternity, we may, like Daniel and his fellows, live for that which is true and noble and enduring. And learning in this life the principles of the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, that blessed kingdom which is to endure for ever and ever, we may be

prepared at His coming to enter with Him into its possession." *Prophets and Kings*, PK 548.2

May our study of history and prophecy be blessed and profitable, as we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding.