

Matthew 24: Is Double Fulfillment Possible?

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Some teach that Matthew 24 was to be fulfilled twice. This view recognizes a first-century fulfillment, but suggests a second one with worldwide implications is unfulfilled. Even though Jesus said nothing to indicate the Olivet Prophecy would be fulfilled twice, that is apparently what Dr. Oral Roberts believes. Immediately after the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001, he stood up before the students and faculty of Oral Roberts University and suggested the disaster was an indication that Matthew 24 was about to be fulfilled. However, Roberts *must* believe in a first-century fulfillment, at least to some degree, simply because it's undeniable. History records that the destruction of the Jewish temple mentioned by Jesus in the first two verses took place in AD 70. So Roberts' futuristic scenario requires a second fulfillment; a new temple and its subsequent destruction. This might sound plausible initially; however, on closer examination, a verse-by-verse double-fulfillment proposal is exposed as absurd. Keith A. Mathison of R. C. Sproul's Ligonier Ministries says the double-fulfillment theory cannot be "ruled out."¹ Actually, it can easily be ruled out. We might wonder whether those who promote the double-fulfillment theory ever took the time to test it by reading over the text even once.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14, NIV throughout)

Is the "great commission" to be fulfilled twice? Since "the end" was to come immediately after, it must have already occurred following the first fulfillment. Does the end come twice? If it does, the first one wasn't the end, was it? Some might suggest this "end" may refer to the end of the Jewish age, and in a greater fulfillment, the end of the Church age. However, nothing in Matthew 24 supports that interpretation. The modern second fulfillment is usually presented as a worldwide catastrophe, but notice verse 20:

Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

What relevance would that have to anyone today? Outside of modern-day Israel, relatively few people in the world keep the Sabbath. And what if they do? In the time of Jesus, the gates of Jerusalem were shut on the Sabbath preventing escape (Neh. 13; 19,22; Jer. 17:21,24). However, that is not a problem for anyone in the world today. Most Christians probably live out their *entire lives* without *ever* praying that their "flight" will not take place on the Sabbath. Mark's account of the Olivet Discourse adds this:

You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues... (Mark 13:9a)

This is referring to councils of Pharisees and Sadducees. Obviously, it was meant for those living in the first century. It's unlikely that any Christians today are concerned about being "flogged in the synagogues."

For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now — and never to be equaled again. (Matt. 24:21)

Since this time of trouble was "never to be equaled again," how could it occur twice? Some will protest that this kind of language is hyperbole, common in the Old Testament (OT); it wasn't intended to be taken literally. This is true. But then, the same people should be able to accept that the rest of Matthew 24 is replete with the same OT-style hyperbole. They should not require a second fulfillment just because some events didn't occur just the way Jesus described them.

¹ *When Shall These Things Be?* (Phillipsburg, NY: P&R Publishing, 2004), 180.

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (v. 31)

This is referring to the “last trumpet” of 1 Cor. 15:51-52; the Resurrection of the Dead and the moment when the living Christians would be “changed.” Are the “elect” to be gathered twice? If all of Matthew 24 was to be fulfilled twice, then clearly, the Resurrection must have occurred during the first fulfillment within the lifetimes of Christ’s listeners. But if all the dead in Hades were resurrected in the first century, how could they be resurrected again at another time in the future? It’s doubtful anyone believes any of this. Yet Oral Roberts, Keith Mathison and countless others present double fulfillment as a viable option.

The double-fulfillment concept is an untenable fabrication created in desperation, probably deemed necessary because its adherents expect literal fulfillments of the highly figurative, cosmic predictions in Matthew 24 and other places which, of course, have never occurred (and never will). In some cases we find types and anti-types in Scripture. For instance, Israelite worship under the Old Covenant was a type or “a shadow of the things that were to come” under the New Covenant (Col. 2:16-17). However, the New Covenant does not create more shadows for greater fulfillments later. Here is an example of biblical typology:

OT type: Babylon

An oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw (Isa. 13:1); ...*The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.* (v.10)

New Testament (NT) anti-type: Jerusalem

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37); Immediately after the distress of those days “*the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light...*” (Matt. 24:29)

In Matthew 24, Jesus referred back to Isaiah to demonstrate that sinful Jerusalem had become the anti-type of OT Babylon. Jerusalem’s destruction would be the anti-type of Babylon’s destruction. (Most expositors completely miss this parallel and then fail to recognize that in Revelation, “Babylon the Great” is symbolic of Jerusalem.)

It’s all fulfilled. There is no *third* fulfillment. Matthew 24 is not a type of something in the future; it’s an anti-type of something in the past. The NT does not create new types that require future anti-types. Types and anti-types might be considered double fulfillments by some, but if a double-fulfillment rule should be applied without exception to all biblical predictions, we should expect two Messiahs, two crucifixions, two Judgments, two Kingdoms, etc. It gets ridiculous.

Evidently, many influential Bible teachers spend little time testing the double-fulfillment model before teaching it to trusting Christians. They continually predict events that were actually fulfilled long ago. Herod’s temple was destroyed in AD 70, so they must predict a “rebuilt” one. Many prophecies require a Roman Empire, but since it no longer exists, and hasn’t for over 1,500 years, they predict a “revived” one. However, if they would give up their literal-fulfillment requirements (stars falling from heaven, etc.) and fully accept the first and only fulfillments of NT prophecies, there would be no need for a flimsy double-fulfillment theory, and Christians could be spared a lot of useless speculation.

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