Bite Size Bible Study

Prophecy Part 5 #263 By Lee Logue

Unfulfilled Prophecy

An unfulfilled prophecy is a prediction that has not yet come true or did not happen as originally stated. These can be viewed as future events still waiting to happen, or conditional warnings that were averted.

Many faith traditions hold that end-time prophecies remain uncompleted and look forward to events like global peace or a final restoration.

Some prophecies change or do not occur because the underlying message served as a warning to prompt repentance or behavioral change rather than a fixed timeline, and when the repentance or behavior does change the prophecy is not acted upon.

Some prophecies provide for a dual fulfillment where a single text can have both an immediate historical application and an ultimate future fulfillment.

Unfulfilled Prophecy provides for hope, expectation, and humility. Some prophecies point toward realities that are not yet complete such as final judgment, resurrection, the return of Christ, the renewal of creation, or the full reign of God. These all provide us hope and expectation of a Godly future.

Careful reading of these prophecies should inspire confidence in God's promises – without overconfidence about timelines or exact interpretations. They should lead us to spiritual maturity, endurance, worship, comfort, and hope, not into speculation or fear.

In Revelation 21:1-5 NIV we read about what will happen at some time in the future. Its purpose is to give us hope in a better world than we are living in today.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Like many prophecies, Revelation 21:1 refers to a prophecy that Isaiah also recorded in Isaiah 65:17-25 hundreds of years before John wrote this prophecy.

New Heavens and a New Earth

"See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.
I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.
"Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the sinner who reaches a hundred
will be considered accursed.
They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.
They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.
Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the Lord.

Again, in verse 4 of Revelation 21 (*He will wipe every tear from their eyes*) we are reminded that again Isaiah also prophesied that this would happen. Again, we can see Unfulfilled Prophecy.

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.
On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears
from all faces;
he will remove his people's disgrace

from all the earth.
The Lord has spoken.
In that day they will say,
"Surely this is our God;
we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the Lord, we trusted in him;
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."
The hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain;
but Moab will be trampled in their land
as straw is trampled down in the manure.

Isaiah 25:6-10 NIV

Reading the Unfulfilled Prophecies requires pulling together elements of many other prophecies. They may not all be of the same type but may carry the same prediction of future events. Perhaps more than any other book in the Bible, Revelation is full of predictive warnings and promises, housed in dense apocalyptic imagery. For this reason alone it requires us to hold gently the understanding we have of these scriptures, and definitely not try to set timelines for their fulfillment.

We have seen that Old and New Testament prophecies often have multiple layers of fulfillment. They may provide meaning to a particular audience during or after the prophet's lifetime and receive even greater fulfillment even later. Just like the first people to hear Isaiah's prophecies about Jesus could not have imagined exactly what he would be like when he came, so we cannot know exactly what this "new creation" will be like. However, we can trust God's promises. Even if we don't know exactly when or how he will fulfill them. Our trust in Him should remain stronger than our understanding of any prophecy. It is He that creates and sets timelines for His creation.

Most prophecy is surrounded by rich symbolic imagery, but much of the rest of the Bible give us many insights, while still leaving room for mystery, wonder, and awe.

Using what you have learned, open and read several different study notes and commentaries. As you do, consider the different viewpoints. Where do they agree? Where do they diverge?

Reflection and Application

- What hope does this passage clearly offer?
- What details may be symbolic, literal, or both?
- What parts should we recognize that we may not know fully what it means?
- How should future hope shape our present faithfulness?
- What can believers do to avoid fear-based readings of prophecy?
- What surprises or challenges you about prophecy and its interpretations?

You may like to create a "certainty" chart:

- what the text clearly says,
- what Christians debate,
- and what we should admit current uncertainty.

Reading prophecy with hope and expectation, but with humility, patience, and openness, keeps us from dogmatic interpretations that may cause us or others to miss the important message in these sometimes difficult scriptures.