

Fulfill **πληρωω**

Approximately twenty Greek words are translated “fulfill” in the New Testament. The dominant one is number 4137 in the Strong’s system, which appears about 61 times, usually as fulfill, fulfilled, or fulfilling, but also as full, fully, accomplish, complete, ended, expire, perfect, and supply once or twice each. The general idea is the image of loading a basket to its top, which can be applied figuratively in many situations.

Not connected to the result of a specific prediction in the Old Testament

- Matthew 3:15 “Permit is to be so now, for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”
- Matthew 13:48 When it was full, they drew to shore
- Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.”
- Luke 1:20 “You will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”
- Luke 9:31 ...Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to fulfill at Jerusalem.
- John 3:29 “Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled.”
- John 7:8 My time is not yet fulfilled
- John 15:11 “These things I have spoken that My joy may remain in you, that your joy may be fulfilled.”
- John 16:24 “Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be fulfilled.”
- John 17:13 That they may have My joy fulfilled in them
- Acts 2:28 (Psalm 16:11) In Your presence is fullness of joy.
- Acts 7:23 When he had fulfilled forty years...
- Acts 7:30 And when forty years were fulfilled, and angel of the Lord appeared to him
- Acts 9:23 After many days were fulfilled
- Acts 12:25 When they had fulfilled their ministry
- Acts 13:25 As John was fulfilling his course
- Acts 14:26 ...Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God to the work which they had fulfilled
- Acts 19:20 – 21 The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. When these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in the Spirit...to go to Jerusalem.
- Romans 15:19 From Jerusalem round about to Illyricum I have fulfilled the preaching of the gospel of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 10:6 ...being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled
- Philippians 2:2 Fulfill my joy by being likeminded
- Philippians 4:18 I have all and am fulfilled, having received...the things from you
- Colossians 1:25 To fulfill the Word of God (v27, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.)
- Colossians 2:10 You are fulfilled in Him
- Colossians 4:12 That you may stand perfect and fulfilled in all the will of God.
- Colossians 4:17 Take heed of the ministry you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:11 Fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power

- 1 John 1:4 These things we write to you that our joy may be fulfilled.
- 2 John 12 I hope to come to you and speak face to face that our joy may be fulfilled.
- Revelation 3:2 “For I have not found your works fulfilled before God.”
- Revelation 6:11 ...that they should rest a little longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was fulfilled

Connected to specific passages in the Old Testament

- Matthew 1:22 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet
- Matthew 2:15 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet
- Matthew 2:17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet
- Matthew 4:13 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet
- Matthew 8:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet
- Matthew 12:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet
- Matthew 13:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet
- Matthew 21:4 All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet
- Matthew 27:9 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet
- Matthew 27:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet
- Luke 4:21 “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
- John 12:38 That the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled
- John 13:18 That the Scripture may be fulfilled
- John 15:25 That the word might be fulfilled which is written in their Law
- John 19:24 That the Scripture might be fulfilled
- John 19:26 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled
- Acts 1:16 This Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas
- Galatians 5:14 For the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness.”

Connected to unquoted passages in the Old Testament

- Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”
- Matthew 26:54 “How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”
- Matthew 26:56 “But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”
- Mark 14:49 “But the Scriptures must be fulfilled”
- Luke 21:22 “For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.”
- Luke 21:24 “Until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”
- Luke 22:16 “I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”
- Luke 22:44 “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”

- John 17:12 None of them is lost except the son of perdition that the Scripture might be fulfilled
- Acts 3:18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ should suffer, He as thus fulfilled.
- Acts 13:27 Those who dwell in Jerusalem...have fulfilled them in condemning Him
- Romans 8:4 That the righteous requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us
- Romans 13:8 He who loves has fulfilled the Law

Connected to the words of Jesus

- Luke 7:1 When He fulfilled all His sayings in the hearing of the people...
- John 18:9 That the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke
- John 18:32 That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

Connected to unknown passages in the Old Testament

- Matthew 2:23 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets

Observations

- The vast majority of the contexts are connected to the activity of God.
- A few passages appear to be ordinary, but the implication could be included that the seemingly ordinary event was part of a bigger plan orchestrated by God (Matthew 13:48, Acts 7:23, Acts 7:30, Acts 9:23)
- Several passages relate to fulfilling joy, perhaps summarized in Psalm 16:11.
- A generic definition of the word is needed that fits all of the contexts, whether literally or figuratively applied.
- The “fulfillment” of prophecy only sometimes could be read to mean that a specific prediction was accomplished, and always may be understood not to imply that a prediction was satisfied. Most of the cited fulfillments would not be anticipated by a concerned reader of the Old Testament before the time of Jesus. Predictions are not valid unless they were understood before the supposedly predicted event took place. The word, fulfilled, rather paints the picture that the history is being used to illustrate and explain new events. The original prediction applied to a specific historical event in the past (*e.g.*, Isaiah 7:14). The application to Jesus birth was intended to explain the attitude of the people of the time: hopeless and fearful of losing their country. (Yes, the virgin birth is safe; see Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:26 – 35.) In the time of Jesus and the church, the history of Israel is used as an allegory, “filling up” the meaning of the special history of Israel and is taken to a new level as illustrations of New Testament events. This definition eliminates the problems of “double fulfillment” and applications that were not anticipated by the original audience. The literal accomplishment of the prediction happened. The fulfillment uses the scenario of the accomplished prediction to illustrate a new thought, and implies that God built that illustration into the history of Israel for the purpose of teaching the church.
- Commentators have had to work too hard to explain how a “fulfilled” Old Testament Scripture was a satisfied prediction. “Fulfilled” means “illustrated by.” The meaning should be understandable by average people. As an example, consider four passages at the beginning of Matthew: 1:24, 2:5, 2:17, and 3:3. Two of them recount when a clear prediction was being satisfied. Two of them are applications of an illustration that God set up well in

advance. Plenty of predictions were satisfied in the New Testament. The “fulfilled” Scriptures are not among them; those are illustrations.

Many events of the Old Testament are cited in the New Testament.

- Which events did God engineer as examples of spiritual principles?
- Which events were natural events that God used as examples?
- How can we tell the difference?

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

- The point of the statement is in a context stretching back to 12:1, concerning behavior.
- The immediate reference is the behavior of Jesus, who suffered for doing the right thing
- The example of things “written before” is from Psalm 69:9, which is cited at least four times.
 - John 15:25 But this happened that the word might be fulfilled...
 - Matthew 27:34, 48 No specific application given
 - Romans 11:9 – 10 Just as it is written...
 - Acts 1:20 For it is written...
- The original context concerned the life of David.
- God reveals that He engineered this psalm to be fulfilled in Jesus.
- Paul implies that this and other Old Testament events were engineered by God centuries in advance in order to be teaching tools for Christians.
- Which events did God engineer and which did God just use?

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

- The specific references:
 - The cloud that lead and protected the Israelites after the exodus and in the wilderness
 - The dividing of the Red Sea
 - The manna
 - Miraculously supplied water from a rock
 - The golden calf
 - Immorality and (or as a part of) paganism on the Plains of Moab
 - Grumbling at difficulties and Moses
 - The ten spies died shortly after their bad report
- The specific applications:
 - The danger of unbelief
 - The danger of lust
 - The danger of idolatry
 - The danger of immorality
 - The danger of testing Christ
- Paul implies that these events were engineered by God for the purpose of being examples for church
- Which events did God engineer and which did God just use? Prudence dictates limiting the correspondences to the great number revealed by inspired writers, restricting ourselves to

the specifics given in the Word. And, we must include the logical progression for each application so as not to contribute to the confusions of the past.

Specific events labeled as “fulfilled” in Jesus and in the church:

- Matthew 1:22 – 23 In Isaiah 7, Ahaz (representing the people of God) were fearful that the Kingdom would be destroyed by foreign invaders and that an outside king would replace the line of David. The fulfillment found in the virgin birth of Jesus was the same promise that the Kingdom would not pass from David (Herod was an Idumean), that the foreigners would no longer be a threat, and that the apostate Northern Kingdom would be taken away within 65 years. Jesus became the everlasting king of the everlasting kingdom; the kingdom would no longer be threatened; and that apostate Israel would be utterly destroyed.
- Matthew 2:15 In Hosea 11:1, the prophet lists many events in which God lovingly cared for, rescued, and guided His people, only to have them revert to paganism. The specific event of the quotation refers to the release from slavery in Egypt, which is repeatedly used in the New Testament as an image of release from bondage to sin. The rest of Hosea 11 also expands on the refusal to repent by those whom He “healed.” Those who did not know that they had been healed would be taken captive. Christians who do not realize that they have been granted the power to overcome will be taken captive again.
- Matthew 2:17 – 18 Jeremiah 31:15 gave hope to Judah that captive Israel would one day return. Matthew applied this to those who mourned the loss of infants in Bethlehem, that they would be reunited. And, since the story in Matthew 2 concerns the birth of the Messiah, the extended application is that the church would suffer terrible things, but would be reunited.
- Matthew 4:13 Isaiah 9:1 – 2 is the counterpoint of a comparison that starts in 8:11. The specific comparison in 9:1 – 2 is to the tribal territories of Zebulun and Naphtali which were often overrun by adjacent countries. Isaiah uses them as an example that even those who have had the worst history will be rescued. Joseph settling in Galilee illustrates that God rescues even those who have been far from God and have no good history of being faithful.
- Matthew 8:17 Isaiah 53:4 is in a section long held to be Messianic, although the original application was to Judah in Hezekiah’s time (see next paragraph). This character trait of the Messiah that was described by Isaiah was further illustrated by the healings that Jesus performed. Isaiah, in this section, was largely poetic and general. Matthew illustrates spiritual healing with physical healing. Jesus did not just cure people; a debt was paid, He took our sin. The image is that of Jesus taking the illnesses and demons into Himself.
- Matthew 12:17 – 21 The context of Isaiah 42:1 – 4 begins in Isaiah 40:1 and continues at least through chapter 59 if not the end of the book. Many portions of this long prophecy are cited in the New Testament. Many have assumed that this quotation was for the purpose of revealing the satisfaction of a prediction, which arises from the assumption that Isaiah’s purpose was to speak of the Messiah. It was not. His original audience was Judah of Hezekiah’s time. Isaiah announced that Judah would be saved by God (40:1). Reading the whole passage surfaces several comments that show that the original meaning was to comfort and admonish those in Judah around 700 BC (40:27, 41:2, 41:8, 41:25, 42:23 – 43:7, 43:14, *et al*). Fulfillments in the New Testament are numerous, meaning that God built this illustration of division, captivity, rescue, restoration, and help as an historical

illustration of Christ and the church. The specific application for Matthew 12:17 is the character of Jesus which would be nonviolent “until He sends forth justice to victory.”

- Matthew 13:35 Psalm 78 is a recounting of the history of Israel at least up to the time of David if not the Divided Kingdom (v9 and v 67). The author’s point was not about hiding God’s teaching, but revealing it and passing it on (v3 – 4). Matthew used the psalm to explain why Jesus used parables. He was not using Jesus’ teaching style to redefine the psalm. Matthew’s point was that Jesus’ parables were a means of recounting the interactions of God with humans so that that history could be passed along to future generations. The psalmist’s point about parables and dark saying (which were heard and known) was that prophets often used parables and similar illustrations, which the people understood. Jesus “filled up” the illustration God built with the prophets. The prophets could have issued literal warnings, but God chose to use figurative language to set the stage for Jesus’ style of presentation. Both Jesus and the prophets were effective because their illustrations were easily remembered and passed along.
- Matthew 21:5 The quotation is from the middle of a prophecy extending from Zechariah 9:1 – 11:3, from early in the Restoration period, when things were not going well for the Israelites returning from Babylon, along with some from Assyria and Egypt. The prophecy begins with judgments against surrounding countries. The quoted line (9:9) is a description of the joy of Israel because of their deliverance. Zechariah was delivering a message of hope to those who were struggling (Ezra 5), which was accomplished in the re-establishment of Israel over the next century, predominantly during the time of Nehemiah. The people at that time, although taking great risks to return to their ancestral lands, were facing huge opposition from entrenched residents of the region who had moved in after the various deportations. God promised them victory, which was slow in coming due to their frequent lapses in faith. Jesus made a point of riding into Jerusalem on a donkey to “fill up” the illustration of Zechariah. God’s kingdom would be victorious, limited only by the faith of its citizens.
- Matthew 27:9 The citation comes from Zechariah 11:12 – 13, the same passage as the paragraph above. It is unlikely that Matthew forgot which prophet said this in the space of a few pages. Many have offered creative explanation of why this citation is attributed to Jeremiah. The most simplest is that “Jeremiah” was not in the original text, but was inadvertently added by a later copyist (who didn’t know his prophets very well). This is confirmed by the fact that the oldest Syriac versions do not contain the name of a prophet. Zechariah’s point was that God was finished with those who inhabited the land during the Captivity. Apparently, God had established some sort of relationship with them (covenant, 11:10) during that period, but now God was done with them, so they would be slaughtered like a herd of livestock (which is a normal process). Despite the fact that God had cared for these faithless people for centuries, they had no gratitude and offered an insulting amount as compensation for His services. Matthew’s point was that God “filled up” the odd illustration in Zechariah with the price paid to Judas, implying that the leadership of Israel in the time of Jesus was of the same nature as the pagan inhabitants of Palestine when the Israelites began to return from captivity.
- Matthew 27:35 Psalm 22, a song by David concerning his own difficult times, was “filled up” in the crucifixion (*cf.* Matthew 27:43, 46, John 19:24, Hebrews 2:12). The figures of speech used by David concerning his own difficulties. Because Matthew used the term, fulfilled, we are to understand that God intentionally used these images so that they could

be applied to what appeared to be the abandonment of Jesus. The application was that, just as David was persecuted and brought low, he was made king and ruled a mighty and wealthy nation. Despite events of the present for each of them, both had in their hearts the sentiments of v22 – 31. Matthew offers this fulfillment to explain the attitude of Jesus at His death.

- Luke 4:21 Jesus said that Isaiah 61:1 - 2 was fulfilled in His earthly ministry. Isaiah wrote the original as a word of encouragement to the people of his own time (*e.g.*, v4), bringing hope to those who saw the devastation of the Northern Kingdom and the predicted fall of Judah. Jesus filled up this image for spiritual Israel. God engineered the history of Israel to be an illustration of the Kingdom of God, that although the “cities” of the faithless were being destroyed (Judaism of the first century), the faithful would be consoled and receive beauty, joy, praise, and righteousness (v3) as they rebuilt the ruined religion.
- John 12:38 John applied the words of Isaiah 53:1 to Jesus’ ministry. The original application was to the Northern Kingdom, recently taken into captivity by Assyria (52:4) and to Judah, recently devastated yet rescued from the same (52:9). The people did not heed the servants sent to them and considered Hezekiah to be stricken. This piece of history was manufactured by God to illustrate how the people of God would be in captivity to the world (the Hellenistic Jews), be rescued from seeming destruction (Roman occupation), yet be redeemed by one considered stricken, Jesus.
- John 13:18 Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 to describe Judas. The psalm is a cry for help by a faithful person who is betrayed. Historically, the scene is Absalom’s rebellion (2 Samuel 18). The betrayer was Ahithophel, David’s counselor who defected to Absalom. Jesus applies that scene to His own situation.
- John 15:25 Jesus quoted either Psalm 35:19 or 69:4. Psalm 69 may be more likely since it is quoted six times in the New Testament for different portions, whereas this would be the only one for Psalm 35. Either psalm fits the occasion, although Psalm 69 may have more points of contact with Jesus’ point expressed in John 15:18 – 24. Jesus brought the psalm to its ultimate application.
- John 19:24 See Matthew 27:35
- John 19:28 The quotation is uncertain, but probably refers to Psalm 22:15.
- Acts 1:16 The psalm referenced by Peter is uncertain. The more probable source is Psalm 41:9, quoted by Jesus in John 13:18.
- Galatians 5:14 Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18. Certainly the meaning of fulfilled cannot be that of a prediction, since the quote is part of the Law of Moses and was a command to Israel. Rather, the concept of Leviticus 19:18 was the generalization of the Law. Paul’s point is in verse 13, do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. People are inclined to use law codes to their own ends. Paul points out that the Law of Moses was governed by the principle of love (doing what is best for the other person). So, the ultimate application of the law is love.
- James 2:23 James quotes Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” The use of “fulfilled” cannot mean “satisfying a prediction,” since this is an historical example, not a prediction. Rather, the idea is that faith is brought to its fullest application when it results in works.
- Luke 23:46 This passage does not use the word, fulfilled. However, Jesus used a phrase from Psalm 31:5. The idea of fulfillment is obvious.