

UNDERSTAND PROPHECY AND THE END OF THE AGE

December 12, 2015 [Todd Bennett](#) Off [Articles](#),

We are currently living in a time when many sense that we are at the end of the age. As such, people are looking to prophecies for clues, signs and indicators to help them better understand the times. Sadly, most lack a solid understanding of history and are unable to place particular prophecies into their proper historical context. I was raised in an evangelical Christian setting that tended to apply a future fulfillment to most prophecies. As a result, I would have been classified as a “futurist.”

As I began to study the Scriptures and look at their historical context, I realized that many prophecies were given at specific times and in specific contexts and had actually already been fulfilled. Those who believe that prophecies were fulfilled in the past are often classified as “preterists.” I discuss this issue in my book [The Final Shofar](#) and it is extremely important that people looking for answers in the Scriptural texts understand this distinction.

Now the problem with labels is that they tend to pigeon hole people into different categories. While some people are strictly futurists and others are strictly preterists, I happen to believe that there is room in the middle. Clearly, there are prophecies that were fulfilled in the past, but there are also certain prophecies that remain unfulfilled.

Therefore when reading the Scriptures, and particularly prophecies, we should always be aware of the time in history that they were written, the context in which they were given, as well as the person speaking the word and to whom it was spoken. Finally, we need to consider any translation issues concerning the passage.

I recently heard a Christian commentator quote a prophetic passage regarding the Day of the LORD. He proceeded to state with certainty that because the prophecy mentioned the Day of the LORD, then it was clearly referring to the second coming of Jesus. This is a mistake that many people make.

First of all, the Day of the LORD is better known as the Day of YHWH – YHWH being the English equivalent of the Hebrew Name of Elohim. Second, while the return of the Messiah, named Yahushua, may indeed coincide with the Day of YHWH, the Day of YHWH is not a one time future event. Rather, it typically describes a time when prophecy is fulfilled and that often involves judgment.

There have been many Day of YHWH occurrences in the past. For example, some believe that events described in Amos 5 may be one of the earliest references to the Day of YHWH. We know from Amos 1 that the prophecy was given at a time when Yisrael was divided into two kingdoms after the death of King Solomon. Those two kingdoms were referred to as the House of Yisrael (the Northern Kingdom) and the House of Judah (the Southern Kingdom). The prophecy begins by stating: *“concerning Yisrael in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Yisrael, two years before the earthquake.”* Amos 1:1.

The text in Amos 5 that later describes the Day of YHWH specifically addresses the Northern Kingdom. *“Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O House of Yisrael.”* Amos 5:1. So the Day of YHWH spoken of by Amos involved the judgment that would befall the House of Yisrael by the Assyrians – it was specifically given to the Northern Kingdom.

Other prophets would prophesy concerning the destruction that would befall the House of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. That judgment and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians was also considered to be a Day of YHWH event (see Lamentations 2:21). The subsequent fall of Babylon by the Persians was described as the Day of YHWH by Isaiah in what certainly sounds like the end of the world (see Isaiah 13).

From all of these examples we see that it is important to understand the historical context of the prophecies and recognize that they were accomplished in the past. While we can learn about a future Day of YHWH from these passages, they clearly had a previous fulfillment.

Another good example of contextual and translation analysis can be found in the book of Zephaniah, which has no less than five specific references to the Day of YHWH. Let us read the first three verses of Zephaniah, in the New International Version (NIV), which set the stage for the rest of the text.

“1 The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah: 2 ‘I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,’ declares the LORD. 3 ‘I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea – and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble. When I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth,’ declares the LORD.” Zephaniah 1:1-3.

Now according to this text, it initially appears that we are reading about a final judgment when all living things are destroyed from the entire earth. If we look at the context of the prophecy we know that it was given during the reign of King Josiah – King of Judah. From this portion of the text we know that his father was Amon and from the Book of Kings we learn *“Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother’s name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath.”* 2 Kings 22:1. As a result, we can discern that he reigned from around 640 BCE to 609/608 BCE (see 2 Chronicles 34; 2 Chronicles 35:1-25).

Therefore, when this prophecy was given, the House of Yisrael had already seen their Day of YHWH event that had been prophesied by Amos. That judgment culminated around 722 BCE when Samaria, the capital of the House of Yisrael, fell to the Assyrians. So the context of the Zephaniah prophecy was after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, and it was given prior to the fall of the Southern Kingdom, the House of Judah, when Jerusalem was subsequently destroyed by the Babylonians.

Despite that context, the text still seems to be talking about a judgment upon the entire world, until we examine the translation. If we look at the word translated as “world” in the Hebrew we see that it is “adamah” which can mean “ground or land.” Later, the Hebrew word “eretz” is used which also refers to “land.” The prophecy is clearly talking about the “land” of Judah and the surrounding region. When you read further this becomes evident. It is a very specific prophecy to the royal family of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Judah and neighboring peoples. So Zephaniah is not talking about a future event, or the end of the world, but rather the Day of the YHWH, which was a past judgment rendered upon the Land of Judah.

The point of all this is that we must carefully examine the texts when we look to the future. Many people have misplaced expectations concerning the return of the Messiah because they have inherited poor eschatological teachings. They are expecting certain events to occur that have already happened long ago. As such, many may be found unprepared and caught off guard when the Day of YHWH actually arrives “as a thief in the night.”

Peter described a future Day of YHWH as follows: *“But the day of YHWH will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”* 2 Peter 3:10.

Apparently, many will be unprepared because they will be sleeping. The Messiah described His future return when He spoke the parable of the Ten Virgins (see Matthew 25). They all slumbered and slept and when they were awakened by a midnight cry only half of them were prepared for the wedding. Now is the time to get ready and stay alert. Many are sleeping and slumbering because they erroneously believe that certain events must occur before we begin a seven year countdown or three and one half year countdown, but their expectations may be misplaced.

My book [The Final Shofar](#) attempts to place the Scriptures and prophecy into proper historical context and I encourage you to get a copy. My prayer is that we all be found ready for the Bridegroom when the call is sounded.