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End Times Berean Watchman Report - Interpreting Prophecy - Part 3

By [Dr. Christian Widener](#) • [Issue #15](#) • [View online](#)

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I hope you're ready for this third installment of lessons for interpreting prophecy that come straight from examples in the New Testament. These have been extracted from the first chapter of my soon to be released book, *No More Delay*.

[Stopping in the Middle of a Sentence](#)

Another example of how prophecy should be understood comes from Luke 4:16-21. In the account, Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and he read a passage from the scroll of Isaiah. They didn't use the chapter and verse references we have now, but he read from what we now call chapter 61.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” – Luke 4:16-21 (NIV)

Jesus just stopped in the middle of a sentence or expression. He didn't even finish the rest of what should have been read from the appointed portion of Scripture for that day. He just cut off in the middle of verse 2, leaving out “and the day of vengeance of our God,” which was a prophecy for his second coming, not the first. This establishes a principle for applying prophecy that

teaches that even if statements are right next to each other, then they don't have to be chronologically close together in time, or indeed even directly connected. This means that the prophecy ends not at the end of a passage or sentence, but wherever the fulfillment happens to end.

Admittedly, this sets up a precedent that can be confusing; but once the principle is recognized, it can be used to calibrate our understanding of how we should view prophecy. If we fail to understand and apply this principle, then it can lead to applying unnecessary constraints on our interpretation of prophecy that will then invariably cause us to get it wrong.

Different Prophecies Can be Combined

The proof text for this idea comes from Matthew 27. The story is the account of Judas betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver; but he then later feels remorse and attempts to return the thirty silver pieces to the chief priests. They don't accept the money, so Judas throws it at their feet and then goes out and hangs himself. After Judas' death, the silver is used to buy the potter's field, as a burial place for foreigners.

Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." – Matt.

This prophecy is only attributed to Jeremiah, and yet it includes a major portion from Zechariah as well. In these passages, the idea of buying a field with silver in obedience to the command of the Lord is the overarching narrative. Here are the passages in question:

“I knew that this was the word of the Lord; so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver.” – Jeremiah 32:8b-9

You, Sovereign Lord, say to me, “Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed.” – Jeremiah 32:25

I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord. – Zechariah 11:12-13

In the above references we have the Lord’s command to buy the field, and we have the price for the land of seventeen shekels. At first glance, seventeen shekels doesn’t sound like thirty pieces of silver, but here’s where a little history and some math come in. For the temple, the half-shekel was the official silver coin for temple usage. In ancient Israel, there were multiple shekel weights and even different standards for measurement that were

sometimes utilized, so it is not possible to be completely certain about the precise weights of shekels or pieces of silver. There are, however, sources we can refer to make a good estimate [1]. In Jeremiah's day, the shekel is believed to have been in the range of 12.9 grams; but by the first century they were using Tyrian shekels that weighed about 14.3 grams. Half-shekels were used for the temple tax, so a standard "piece of silver" would have been half of Jeremiah's shekel [2]. Using those numbers, the seventeen shekels of Jeremiah were equivalent to thirty pieces of silver (i.e., thirty Tyrian half-shekels) in the first century [3]. The Jeremiah passages don't give us the reference to the potter's field, though. That additional information comes from Zechariah. Therefore, we get the primary instruction from Jeremiah, but there are additional details in the account from Zechariah. This example teaches us that revelations from different prophets can be combined into one prophetic narrative—like connecting puzzle pieces together.





Sybille Heinemann. "Kommunikation puzzle," CC BY-SA 4.0

Notes

1. "Shekel," in Encyclopaedia Judaica (Keter Publishing House, 1972), 1347-8.
2. Tyrian shekels in the first century weighed an average of 14.3 grams and a half-shekel was 7.15 grams. This is supported by looking at the weights of real shekels and half-shekels from the first century. For examples, see:
www.forumancientcoins.com/numiswiki/view.asp?key=tyrian%20shekels.
3. Seventeen shekels times 12.9 grams each equals 219 grams. Dividing 219 grams of silver by 7.15 grams per Tyrian half-shekel, and you get 30.6 pieces of silver (30 if you discard the remainder).

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Coming up in Lesson 4

Next week, we'll look at how one prophecy can be imbedded into another, like an apple of gold in a setting of silver (Proverbs 25:11)...

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By Dr. Christian Widener

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