

“Wormwood”

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I ADMIT I DERIVE a small amount of guilty pleasure anytime I confront my futurist friends about highly anticipated prophecies that failed to come to fruition. Don't get me wrong, I put on my concerned face with my lowered eyebrows, tilt my head slightly to one side, and speak in my soft “Mister Roger's” voice, empathetically sharing their disappointment. “How does this make you feel?” But on the inside, I'm laughing my head off that acquaintances of mine, that I thought were pretty darn smart, once again end up believing in the Easter Bunny.

I have a close friend I've known for over 30 years now. We attended the same futurist church back in the late 1980s. He stayed, and I moved on. He knows my beliefs and doesn't call me crazy, doesn't call me a heretic. However, Last month he called me to relate an episode of a Sid Roth television program where some “profit,” uh, I mean prophet, predicted that an asteroid named *Apophis*, (wormwood) is going to strike the Earth in 2029. With his new-found inspiration (from science, not Scripture), he informed me that his mind was now made up! He believes that that asteroid will bring the rapture and, though he appreciates my views, he no longer needs me to share the fulfilled view with him.

I told him I was happy for him and we are still friends. That was last month. Just this week I read an updated article on the “prophetic” asteroid. Now those same scientists, astronomers, and researchers (you know-the experts), have retracted their initial prediction. IMAGINE THAT! They now believe the closest it will come is 19,000 miles. But heck, even that's cool too! That would be fun to look at through a telescope. I read about six more articles, all confirming the same thing. I forwarded the link to my friend and asked him (as sincerely as possible) “Hey bro, what are your thoughts on this? Must be disheartening?”

I believe my friend is smart enough to read between the lines because he has yet to reply, though we've spoken and texted several times since. These same experts that gave my friend the ammo to “hope against(?) hope,” are the same experts that have now stripped it away from him. (“Hey, don't steal my hope of glory!”)

I have included the email I sent him before the “wormwood disappointment,” as I hoped this study would inform him on how to do simple word studies, understand figures of speech, and apocalyptic language. Yeah . . . I guess not.

Here is that email:

Dear ‘friend,’

Looking at the use of Wormwood in the Old Testament, gives a vastly different viewpoint worth studying.

Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be

among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood (a curse); (Deut 29:18 KJV)

The Hebrew word for wormwood is *la'anah*: From an unused root supposed to mean **to curse**.

“But her end is bitter as wormwood (a curse), sharp as a two-edged sword.” (Prov 5:4 KJV)

Therefore thus said יהוה of hosts, the Elohim of Yisra'el, “See, I am making this people eat wormwood, (not literally feed them but put a curse on them) and I shall make them drink poisoned water.” (Jer 9:15 The Scripture 2009)

Therefore thus said יהוה of hosts concerning the prophets, ‘See, I am making them eat wormwood, and shall make them drink poisoned water. For defilement has gone out into all the land from the prophets of Yerushalayim.’ (Jer. 23:15 The Scripture 2009) Here God is going to curse the prophets for giving false prophecies. The writer compares affliction to the word “wormwood” and gall to misery.

Remember my affliction and my anguish, The wormwood and the gall. (Lam 3:19 The Scripture 2009) Again, the writer compares affliction to “wormwood” (curse) and gall to “misery.” This theme is present throughout the Old Testament.

O you who are turning right-ruling to wormwood and have cast down righteousness to the earth! (Amos 5:7 The Scripture 2009) This would be correct, as God’s judgments typically resulted in a curse against Israelites for their disobedience.

Now that we have looked at every use of the Hebrew word for “wormwood,” and see that in EVERY instance it meant a divine curse from YHWH, let’s look at the only use in the New Testament. Note that the Jews, familiar with the Old Testament context, would have connected the dots and known exactly what John meant.

. . . and the name of the star (not a real meteor) is called Wormwood (a divine curse). And a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. (Rev 8:11 The Scripture 2009)

We read the Old Testament verses which used many figures of speech still recognized today: “*double-edged sword*,” “*I will feed them*,” “*make them drink*,” “*a root that bears from you*.” None of these phrases were meant to be understood as literal *swords, eating, drinking, or roots*—they were just figures of speech. But in 21st-century America that suddenly goes out the window.

Let’s look at the word “star.”

. . . wild waves of the sea foaming up their own shame, straying stars (Reference to Jewish leaders) for whom blackness of darkness is kept forever. (Jude 1:13)

The writer was not speaking of a celestial light from a distant galaxy. In context, he was referring to Jewish leaders and teachers. Here are two verses that help establish this interpretation:

*“And he had in his right hand **seven stars**: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength.” (Rev. 1:16 KJV)*

*“The **mystery of the seven stars** which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars **are the angels of the seven churches**: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” (Rev. 1:20 KJV)*

Here we see John getting the INTERPRETATION of the figure of speech. Not real stars at all, but messengers/angels/pastors over those seven churches. So yes, for those people to understand an exalted individual, they had to be given a reference point. That was the star. Now they could communicate deeper meanings and comparisons.

The New Testament speaks of stars in the heavens. At Jesus’ birth for example. But whenever you read that they fell from the sky, that is your clue the author has shifted into apocalyptic language and now referencing men in powerful positions. The same with the Sun and Moon. Think of this: The Sun=Herod or Rome, the Moon=High Priest in Jerusalem. Stars=the Sanhedrin, Scribes, Pharisees, teachers of the law. Since Israel was under submission to Rome, there was no sun in Jerusalem. Only a moon. Remember Joseph’s dream also, where the sun, moon, and stars represent authority figures (Gen 37).

Finally, to get a brain-wrap around the wormwood in Revelation 8, follow the actions of the remaining seals and bowls being poured out AND the following results. If the angels were being obedient and following God’s ORDER, then it was sequential. There was order and not chaos. No angel went out of turn. What vision did the 7th (final) angel show John after the 7th bowl was poured out? The kingdom had come down. Read Revelation 21:3-4, where those same benefits spoken of are the same ones we now claim. But how can that be if we are still waiting for a fulfillment of Revelation 8?

The angel, who had already completed his work by chapter 21, was showing John glorious things. Judgment was over. Good stuff now. Remember, these are figures of speech. Hebraic poetic language was designed to let the reader, or listener, know how glorious the New Covenant would be. New Covenant = Grace = New Jerusalem = Kingdom of God = God in Man = eternal life = everlasting covenant. They’re all just adjectives for the same subject: the New Covenant.

Just a thought on relying on some translations and concordances: Here’s the definition of the Greek word “Wormwood”: Rev. 8:11 “the name of a star which fell into the waters and made them bitter”.

Wow, this makes no sense. They couldn’t read the Old Testament verses where it’s understood the writer was using figures of speech, comparisons, and synonyms for things like “make them drink the water of gall”? God wasn’t going to make them drink anything. He compared His wrath to drinking gall. There was no physical drinking of gall that occurred in those chapters, but there were a lot of curses that were invoked. Sometimes even the translators were using their Western Europe or American interpretation bias to understand Hebrew mentality. Get your definition from the Old Testament use of a word. That’s where John Eliezer got it. [End of email]

As you can see, it was a very basic study which should have given my friend some comfort and a gentle introduction into basic biblical Interpretation. But thanks to the dispensational claws of futurism, my friend was raptured back into the cave of despair. Don’t ya love my figures of speech? Until next time! Blessings. ✝