

Zephaniah 2:4 and Gaza Prophecies: Events Occurred in Real Time¹

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This article appeared in the 2024 Fall issue of *Fulfilled!* Magazine

*For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon will become a desolation;
the inhabitants of Ashdod will be driven out at noon, and Ekron will be uprooted. (Zephaniah 2:4)*

THOSE WHO REMEMBER THE show 24, starring Keifer Sutherland, cannot forget its classic opening sequence. With the counting of a digital clock, Jack Bauer informs the viewer that “events occur in real time.”² In like manner, the purveyors of pop-prophecy have their own clock, and the establishment of Israel as a nation (May 14, 1948) set that clock ticking.³ Since then, they continue to assure their viewers that prophetic events are occurring in real time, and the final episode of their apocalyptic thriller is soon to air.

With the recent escalation of violence in Gaza, forcing 85% of its population to flee,⁴ Zephaniah 2:4 is the screenplay for the show’s latest installment. As Maarten De Zeeuw says, “Zephaniah 2:4-5 proves to be popular whenever there are problems in and around the Gaza Strip.”⁵ True to form, a pop-prophecy article titled “Gaza Abandoned = Zephaniah 2:4 Fulfilled?” follows script. The writer starts off by saying that he is merely “chewing on the prospect that we have just witnessed the literal fulfillment of Zephaniah 2:4.”⁶ By the end of the article, however, prophetic speculation reaches full-scale escalation. With confidence, he claims that biblical prophecy ensues with every shift of today’s real-time news:

“Gaza City is a bombed out shell of its former self and the entire population has been ordered to evacuate (all 1.1 million Gazans north of the Wadi Gaza). We happen to be alive at the specific point in history when the words of the Prophets pertaining to the Day of the LORD, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming of Christ are being fulfilled in real time, literally. Tick-tock.”⁷

While we can almost hear Jack Bauer’s voice in the “real time” reference as the clock ticks, the pop-prophecy approach to Zephaniah 2:4 is more like the movie *Ground Hog Day* than an episode of 24. The truth is, the Old Testament Gaza prophecies have already been fulfilled, in real time, *in the past*.

Along with Zephaniah, three other Old Testament prophets speak of coming judgments upon Gaza. A brief look at each prophecy, in conjunction with the real-time events surrounding it, makes it clear that there’s nothing to see here, at least not in terms of seeing these prophecies fulfilled in today’s times. There’s actually much to see in terms of their fulfillment in Biblical times.

Gaza in Amos

Following the Gaza prophecies in chronological order, the first comes to us by way of the prophet Amos. He opens his oracle against the nations with a focus on Damascus (Amos 1:3-5) and then immediately takes aim at Gaza (Amos 1:6-7). “*For three transgressions of Gaza and for four*” (Amos 1:6), says Amos, the Lord will “*send fire upon the wall of Gaza*” and “*consume her citadels*” (Amos 1:7).

For a pop-prophecy “instructor” like Wayne J. Edwards, this “fire” points to “nuclear weapons” in “an apocalyptic war.”⁸ However, the fire of which Amos spoke blazed strong and burned out long ago. Prophesying in 760 BC, Amos’s oracle (Amos 1:6-7) would have been fulfilled in the campaigns of Sargon II in 722-705 BC. In 720 BC, Sargon subdued and conquered Gaza—exiling its king, Hanun, to Assyria.⁹ Amos’s prophecy was fulfilled in real time, in the times of the past.

Gaza in Zephaniah and Jeremiah

Gaza makes its next appearance, by way of prophetic oracle, in the writings of Zephaniah (640 - 609 BC)¹⁰ and Jeremiah (627-587 BC).¹¹ Being contemporaries in the same timeframe in biblical history, these two prophets overlap historically. This being the case, Zephaniah’s Gaza prophecy was Jeremiah’s Gaza prophecy and vice versa.¹²

With that said, Gaza is listed among the nations that will stagger from the cup of the Lord’s hand and go mad because of the sword being sent upon them in Jeremiah 25:15-19. Then, in Jeremiah 47:2, the prophet focuses on Gaza with real-time, chronological precision:

“The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh conquered Gaza” (Jer 47:2).

Jeremiah’s real-time reference to the headlines of his day pinpoints exactly when these events were underway. By this time, Gaza was under Babylonian control. But things were about to change. After bouncing back from a resounding Egyptian defeat by Babylon in 605 BC (the famous Battle of Carchemish), Pharaoh Neco¹³ was able to take Gaza in 601 BC—forcing the Babylonians to withdraw back to their homeland.¹⁴

Without a historical judgment upon Gaza, in real time and in their own time, Jeremiah 47:2 would have been meaningless in the original audience’s time. If Gaza’s demise (in the time of Zephaniah and Jeremiah) awaited the current Israel-Hamas crisis, Jeremiah’s time marker makes zero sense. The bottom line? We can’t ignore real-time fulfillment for the sake of the prophecy puppets’ hopes and dreams of modern-time fulfillment.

Gaza in Zechariah

Lastly, Gaza’s final showing in the prophetic lineup comes by way of Zechariah (520 BC). Zechariah 9:5 states that “*Gaza will writhe in great pain*” and “*the king will perish from Gaza.*” A little over 200 years

later, “Alexander the Great destroyed the city again in 332 BC, after a lengthy battle.”¹⁵ In short, all of the Gaza prophecies that the prophecy purveyors appeal to have been fulfilled in the pages of history’s past. Taken in context, the Gaza prophecies have nothing to do with our modern context. And this is precisely why the prophecy pundits ignore the prophecies’ historical context.

Gaza in Pop-Prophecy

Banking on the fact that the gullible Christian public is unfamiliar with the facts, the prophecy pundits routinely and conveniently ignore these facts. For example, Craig Crawford says:

“Through the prophet Zephaniah, God warned Gaza would one day be ‘forsaken’ (yes, that same Gaza you have recently been watching on the world news) . . . With today’s news and headlines, it may be a good time to start taking the Bible seriously.”¹⁶

But interpreting the Bible via today’s headlines is no way to do hermeneutics, and fear of Armageddon is no reason to study it. For all too many, however, this is all they know. It’s all they’ve been taught. And it’s all for one reason—to sell sensationalism.

Narcissism runs rampant in Evangelicalism. It’s all about us and our ticket on the rapture bus. Historical circumstance and audience relevance go out the door, in hopes that we’ll soon take flight and soar. According to pop-prophecy, any turmoil on the Gaza strip means that we’ll soon be taking the ultimate trip. This is what it’s all about for them, and this is all it’s ever been about.

Chris Lehmann puts it this way: “. . . for many in the American evangelical world, the news out of Gaza is a crucial foretaste of redemption—the prelude to the final battle for earthly power, to be followed by Armageddon and the Rapture.”¹⁷ As *Rolling Stone* reports, what should be viewed as “a humanitarian crisis” becomes “an occasion for celebration”¹⁸ for those of the pop-prophecy persuasion.

This being the case, even efforts for peace in the region are viewed as just another episode in the prophecy show’s final season. According to Lee Fang, “. . . several prominent evangelical preachers are already warning their audiences that anyone trying to broker a cease-fire or peace agreement in the Gaza war could well be the Antichrist, just like in the *Left Behind* novels.”¹⁹

The problem here is that the theology behind those *Left Behind* novels is indeed “novel”—having little to no resemblance to the biblical model. Nonetheless, the prophecy pundits keep their audience going by getting the apocalyptic juices flowing. In the wake of the Israel-Hamas war and the situation in Gaza, Greg Laurie goes into full-throttle Jack Bauer mode: “Fasten your seat belt . . . you’re seeing Bible prophecy fulfilled in your lifetime, in real-time before your very eyes.”²⁰

What Laurie and his ilk are doing to the word of God is truly lamentable. There is tremendous apologetic value in coupling biblical prediction with historical fulfillment. It demonstrates divine inspiration. But sadly, for the pop-prophecy pundits, the Gaza prophecies are nothing more than ever-

changing plot rewrites in their apocalyptic narrative. Passages like Jeremiah 25:17–20, 47:2; Zephaniah 2:4; and Zechariah 9:5 become late-season installments leading up to the season finale—the Rapture episode. And this has the binge-watching viewers on the edge of their seats.

But these prophecies were already fulfilled, in real time, in their own time. And it's time to change the channel on the pop-prophecy show, in real time, in our own time. Only then can we start fulfilling our role in this world, in real time, instead of waiting for the end time.

This article was written in real time. ✝

1. Many thanks to Johannes Hildebrandt for his original question on my previous Zephaniah article, and to Michael Karris for his excellent answer -which prompted this article (https://www.facebook.com/groups/PreteristDoctrine/posts/7633935466676535/?comment_id=25314677521509057&reply_comment_id=25315840894726053¬if_id=1715207626724950¬if_t=group_comment_mention). The final form of this article would not be what it is without a little help from my friends. Thanks to Eric Ogea and Brett Prieto for their feedback on the early draft. A tip of the hat to Brian Godawa for his content suggestions. Last but certainly not least, thanks to Jan Logsdon for her editorial magic.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/osHU6YSGqns>
3. For example, Greg Laurie writes: “But here’s where students of Bible prophecy should pay attention. The Bible tells us in the end times that Israel would be scattered and regathered. This has happened, and this really was the sign that set the prophetic clock ticking. On the heels of the Holocaust, who would have ever thought that these Jewish people who lost six million lives to the Nazis would somehow regather in their homeland, but it happened, against all odds. And on May 14, 1948, Israel became a nation.” Greg Laurie (October 13, 2023). *War in Israel: A Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy?* <https://harvest.org/resources/gregs-blog/post/war-in-israel-a-fulfillment-of-bible-prophecy/>.
4. <https://www.hi.org/en/news/bombings-in-populated-areas--a-new-extreme-reached-in-gaza>
5. <https://medium.com/@maartendezeeuw/zephaniah-2-4-5-proves-to-be-popular-when-ever-there-are-problems-in-and-around-the-gaza-strip-7b3decd56253>
6. <https://theblogginghounds.com/2023/12/08/gaza-abandoned-zephaniah-24-fulfilled/>
7. <https://theblogginghounds.com/2023/12/08/gaza-abandoned-zephaniah-24-fulfilled/>
8. <https://theheritagechurch.org/sermon/the-prophetic-significance-of-the-israel-gaza-war/>
9. Abraham Malamat. "The Historical Setting of Two Biblical Prophecies on the Nations." *Israel Exploration Journal* 1.3 (1950), p. 150.
10. <https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-minor-prophets/zephaniah>

11. <https://web-japan.bibleodyssey.org/articles/the-prophet-jeremiah/>,
<https://www.captivefaith.org/prisoners-of-the-bible-era/jeremiah/#:~:text=The%20prophet%20Jeremiah%20was%20a,that%20could%20have%20killed%20him>. The book has its beginnings in the preaching of Jeremiah to the people of Israel during the period from 627 B.C.E. to shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E” (Terence E. Fretheim): <https://enterthebible.org/courses/jeremiah/lessons/background-of-jeremiah#:~:text=The%20initial%20writing%20takes%20place,much%20of%20which%20is%20poetry>.
12. Regarding the judgments on the other territories mentioned in Zephaniah 2:4-7, see <https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zeph/zeph-2/zephaniah-24-7>
13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necho_II
14. Eric Peels. "‘Before Pharaoh seized Gaza.’ A Reappraisal of the Date, Function, and Purpose of the Superscription of Jeremiah 47." *Vetus Testamentum* 63.2 (2013): 308; See also: Holtz, Shalom E. "A Different Kind of Horror in Jeremiah’s Prophecy to the Philistines (Jeremiah 47)." *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 10.3-4 (2022): 286-292.
<https://repository.yu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/063c7e3c-299b-4b56-952c-4eaaf20f2aab/content>
15. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Gaza-in-the-Bible.html>
16. Crawford, Craig. *Bible Prophecy: Israel Gaza & Jerusalem: God's Ticking Time Bomb* (pp. 12, 16). Kindle Edition.
17. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/american-evangelicals-israel-gaza/>
18. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/political-commentary/gaza-war-evangelical-leaders-cheer-end-world-1234884151/>
19. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/american-evangelicals-israel-gaza/>
20. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/greg-laurie-talks-potential-fulfillment-of-bible-prophecy-israel.html>