

Why You Need This Jewish Perspective to Correctly Understand End-Times Prophecy

Why have so many respected Bible teachers fallen into a trap of predicting dates for the Lord's return only to be shown later to have been in error? This has happened repeatedly in the past century, and it never serves the cause of Christ or the reputation of His church. One reason it is so tempting to set dates is that we lean toward a linear reading of Scripture. We simplify prophecy to fit a certain system or to match a timetable or an expected sequence of events that makes sense to us. But what would happen if we set aside the focus on naming names and setting dates and instead sought to gain a deeper understanding of the patterns God has already revealed to us?

I discovered how patterns help explain history when I was reading a pictorial history of the Roman Colosseum. The ancient arena stands in ruins, of course, but the book described its magnificence and glory in ancient times. On one page an overlaying transparency allowed me to see the Colosseum in its glory. The arena came alive with brilliant color restoring its ancient beauty.

I realized we often read the Bible as ancient history, drained of all life and color. Many concentrate on the ruins of antiquity as if the writings are locked into a past epoch that is interesting but not connected to our life and faith. We marvel at how God moved among the ancient Near Eastern tribes, but we fail to read the accounts of God's work through the overlay of God's patterns. We miss what these patterns reveal about God's character and plans for our lives and our world.

The difference between reading the Bible with a linear,

Western mindset and how the first-century Jewish teachers and leaders read—including Jesus and Paul—radically affects how we view prophecy. The Western mind sees prophecy as a written record of predictions and descriptions of how the predictions will unfold. Rather than backing up a few steps so we can see the bigger picture, we focus on separate events and try to line them up. The result is that we reduce prophecy to an event being foretold rather than seeking to understand the bigger pattern of what God is doing.

The Jewish mind understood prophecy differently. They were not bound by a Western tradition of seeking to impose order and structure on the narrative of Scripture. Instead, they saw prophecy as repeating patterns, with each event adding a new layer to the overall picture. As they studied God's patterns, they discovered richer and more profound meanings in the words of the prophets.

Two concepts revolutionized how I read the Bible and can be especially helpful in reorienting our study of prophecy: learning to identify and read God's patterns and applying the principle of "first natural, then spiritual." {eoa}

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