

“Should I Worry About the End Times?” Study Guide

Lesson 2: How to Interpret Prophecy

Outline

1. Look for Explanations
 - a. Many prophecies will tell you what some of the symbols used represent.
 - b. John 2:19-21; Genesis 41:28-32; Daniel 2:36; 2:45b; 7:16
2. Look for Simple Interpretations (Genesis 37:5-8; 37:9-10)
3. Look for Interpreted Symbols
 - a. Many prophecies will explain their symbols.
 - b. Revelation 1:12-16, 20
4. Look for Common Symbols
 - a. Many prophecies reuse common symbols.
 - b. Example: Stars often represent prominent people, such as kings, so the falling or darkening of stars often represents the fall or humiliation of a king.
 - c. Judges 5:19-20; Isaiah 14:4, 12; Joel 2:10-11; 3:12-15; Obadiah 4; Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:13
5. Look for Parallels
 - a. Many prophecies will come in pairs or have an obvious parallel elsewhere in Scripture.
 - b. Warning: Not everything that sounds the same is the same.
6. Look for Time Words
 - a. Many prophecies contain time words that will fix the events relative to others or otherwise limit them.
 - b. Genesis 41:28-32; Joel 2:28 & 3:1; Daniel 2:44
 - c. Warning: Time words might be literal, relative, figurative, or symbolic.
7. Don't Build On Guesses
 - a. Speculation isn't always bad, but it is never certain.
 - b. Deuteronomy 29:29; Ecclesiastes 3:11
8. Read the Right Newspaper
 - a. Prophecy meant something to its original audience.
 - b. Every word of Scripture was written for you.
 - c. Not a single word of Scripture was written to you.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we find it difficult to accept that we may not get know everything God has planned? What happens when we try to get information out of a prophecy that is not actually there?
2. Why is it important to remember that prophecy must have meant something for the people to whom it was originally written?
3. Why do we tend to think that prophecy must be coming to pass in our own time?