

MISTAKE 6

DO'S AND DON'TS AND EXTREMES TO AVOID IN STUDYING LAST DAYS BIBLE PROPHECY

There are a number of common mistakes that Christians make when studying last days Bible prophecy as well as some extremes that we need to avoid. They include the following:

1. WE NEED TO CORRECTLY FRAME THE ISSUES

Any question regarding last days Bible prophecy must be properly stated or “framed.” It is important that we understand the precise issues as well as why people hold to the various positions which they embrace.

Therefore, whether we agree with them or not, we should take the time to know why each position believes what they believe. Consequently, we must examine the *best* arguments which are put forward for each side.

This being the case it will not do to find the weakest arguments for one particular point of view and then attempt to refute them. On the contrary we should attempt to find the most persuasive arguments which each side offers and then interact with them.

The fact that some people have offered poor or simplistic arguments in the past should not be an issue. We don't want to seek out the worst arguments each side proposes. Instead we want to find the best. Only then can we come to a proper conclusion on the matter.

Therefore, we should not cite only selective verses or passages which promote *our* particular position while deliberately ignoring other passages which may contradict what we believe. Full disclosure is absolutely essential.

2. WE SHOULD NOT PREDETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF OUR STUDY

In looking at this question, as to what the Bible teaches about the end times, our goal should be to discover the *truth* of the matter. Thus, the outcome should not be pre-determined before we examine all of the evidence. If the evidence leads us to a different position than what we have previously held, then we must change our position. In other words, we should not try to change the evidence! While this may not be easy to do it is something that must be done if we are going to be intellectually honest.

3. WE MUST PUT THESE ISSUES INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE

Once we understand these issues, we must then put them into proper perspective. There are two extremes in which we must avoid. The first sees the study of prophecy as of little or no importance. Basically, people who hold this view assume it is irrelevant to everyday life. There are more important matters which deserve our attention. Thus, this subject receives little or no consideration.

The other extreme sees this subject matter as primary. The study of the last days is placed alongside the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the nature of the Bible and the doctrine of salvation as an essential point of Christian teaching. Neither of these extreme approaches is correct. The answer lies somewhere in the middle.

4. WE MUST NOT MAKE OUR VIEWS AS A TEST OF FELLOWSHIP

This cannot be stressed too strongly. After our study of this subject, or perhaps even before we have made a serious study of the topic, we may have a view which we sincerely and deeply hold. There is nothing wrong with this.

However, what is wrong is to make our particular view the basis on which we associate with other Christians. While it is probably important that we go to a particular church that holds similar views as we do on these subjects, it is certainly not essential. The study of last days Bible prophecy is an important matter but there are a number of other issues which are of greater importance. This should never be forgotten.

5. WE MUST REALIZE THAT THERE ARE NO QUICK, EASY ANSWERS TO SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS

There are some end-time issues which may be difficult for us to form a conclusion. For example, to discover the exact identity of the woman known as “Babylon the Great” in the Book of Revelation is not an easy quest.

Thus, as far as coming to conclusions, we must understand that in a number of cases there may be no simple answers to our questions neither is there any quick solution. If there were, then all Christians would be in agreement on these end times topics. The fact that godly men and women, who are learned in the subject matter, may disagree on particular issues should make this clear.

To the point, any conclusion that is arrived at must be able to account for *all* of the objections brought against it. The theory must be able to give reasonable answers to specific questions.

6. WE MUST NOT THINK WE HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS

While this point can be applied to any biblical subject under discussion it seems especially appropriate here. Too many people claim to have all the answers with respect to the questions concerning the last days. This includes people on every side of this issue!

Obviously, everyone cannot be correct, somebody has to be wrong. Human nature is such that *we* think *we* have the correct answer while the other person has the wrong answer. While that may indeed be the case, it is also possible that the other person has the correct answer and we are the ones which are wrong! We always have to allow for this possibility.

Even if we believe we have the correct answer, it is still our Christian duty to graciously and lovingly treat others who disagree with our conclusions. We should not assume that we are more intelligent or more spiritual than those who hold differing perspectives.

Unfortunately, there is way too much name-calling going on from people on all sides of this issue. This should not be our approach in tackling this question. We need to discuss the issues surrounding these coming events with a large dose of Christian charity. This is what pleases the Lord.

7. SCRIPTURE ALONE MUST BE OUR GUIDE

This last point is crucial. At the end of the day, what solves these questions is not what certain people may have taught in the history of the church or what we think current events may be telling us. While we may look at what others in the past have said about these matters, as well as what is presently going on in the world, the ultimate authority is the Scripture and the Scripture alone.

Every conclusion we arrive at, concerning these last days issues, must ultimately come from the Bible and only from the Bible. The teaching of God's Word on this subject is the only thing which really matters.

These “do's and don'ts” should be kept in mind as we go about examining this particular issue, the study of last days Bible prophecy.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTREMES THAT WE SHOULD AVOID IN PROPHETIC STUDY?

This question follows the previous one. While the subject of Bible prophecy is found in a large part of Scripture, there are two extremes that we should avoid when conducting a study of the subject. They can be summed up as follows:

EXTREME ONE: OVEREMPHASIZE THE SUBJECT OF BIBLE PROPHECY

While the subject of prophecy is certainly important, it must always be studied in the context of the overall teachings of the Bible. In other words, merely studying Bible prophecy, especially predictive prophecy, by itself, misses the main message of Scripture.

Unhappily, many Christians spend their time examining the passages concerning future events while neglecting the main teachings of Scripture. The Person and work of Jesus Christ becomes secondary to their attempt to discover what the Bible says about the future.

THE BIBLE WARNS OF ENDLESS DEBATES AND SPECULATION

Unhappily, many Christians spend way too much time engaging in endless debates as well as speculation about the specific details of coming events, many of which New Testament Christians will not be around to observe! Paul wrote about certain issues in his day that caused endless speculation:

Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God (1 Timothy 1:4 NET).

He also said:

But reject foolish and ignorant controversies, because you know they breed infighting (2 Timothy 2:23 NET).

The same advice holds true today for those engaging in endless questions and speculation about certain aspects of the future which we cannot know anything about. We should avoid doing this!

PEOPLE ADD MORE DETAILS THAN THE SCRIPTURE PROVIDES

There is also the tendency to go beyond what the Scripture clearly says in order to find more details than the text of the Bible provides. This always results in guesswork as well as unnecessary speculation. We should never try to add more details than the Bible itself gives. Paul wrote:

I have applied these things to myself and Apollos because of you, brothers and sisters, so that through us you may learn "not to go beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of the one against the other (1 Corinthians 4:6 NET).

This cannot be emphasized enough! We must not go beyond that which was written.

EXTREME TWO PEOPLE NEGLECT THE STUDY OF BIBLE PROPHECY

As a reaction to this first extreme, there are those who neglect the subject entirely. Indeed, many Christians, when hearing about the various views that Bible believers hold, and all the never-ending debates that are taking place, decide to give up and ignore entirely the subject of Bible prophecy. This is tragic.

THE KEY IS TO FIND A BALANCE

As we have emphasized, Bible prophecy is an important subject to study. But it should always be examined in the light of the totality of Scripture. However, to many, a balanced understanding seems unattainable, so some Christians abandon careful study of the end times entirely.

This is unfortunate. We should give attention to this most-important of subjects but always in context of the overall teaching of Scripture.