

INTERPRETING PROPHECY

1. Take the words of prophecy in their normal grammatical sense. In other words, don't change the rules for grammar when dealing with prophetic passages. Consider the meanings of the words in their regular sense. When Isaiah says that if a person dies at 100 years, there is no reason not to take that literally. The passage is teaching that during the future kingdom on earth people will live significantly longer than they do now. Even though figurative language is used in prophecy, we should begin with the assumption that words are to be taken in their normal sense unless a figure of speech or a symbol is indicated. The term "a thousand years" is used six times in Revelation 20:1-6. To describe the length of Christ's future kingdom on earth. There is no reason not to understand this as literal. When Isaiah 11:6-9 says that wild beasts will live peacefully together with children this should be taken literally, because there is no indication of figurative language in the passage.
2. Look for figurative language in the passage. If you find figures of speech interpret them according to the appropriate guidelines. The first prophecy in the Bible uses figurative language. When Genesis 3:15 says, "He shall bruise your head," it means the Seed of the woman will defeat Satan. "You shall bruise His heel" refers to the fact that the Redeemer's death (on the cross) is only a temporary crippling.
3. View prophecy as focusing primarily on the Messiah, His judgments, and His kingdom. Revelation 19:10 says, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The purpose of prophecy is to testify of Jesus Christ. Many of the prophecies concerning were fulfilled at His first coming, but many will be fulfilled in the events lead to and surrounding His second coming. History will culminate in the return of Jesus to earth where He will reign for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-6).
4. Compare parallel passages. Revelation 13 and Daniel 9 need to be studied together. The passages regarding the Millennium need to be compared (Isaiah 9:24; Joel 2; Zechariah 14; Revelation 19:1-10).
5. Look for prophecies that are fulfilled and prophecies that remain unfulfilled. The first part of Isaiah 61:1-3 has been fulfilled, but the last part is yet to be fulfilled. The first part of Joel 2 was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, but Joel 2:18-32 is awaiting fulfillment. Many of the prophecies concerning judgment on the nations in Isaiah have been fulfilled, but many have not. Always try to determine what remains to be fulfilled.