

PaRDeS

Bijbelstudies

Drs. Charles van den Berg

END TIME PERCEPTION IN GREEK AND HEBREW THOUGHT COMPARED.

From the time that the Jews began to return to (new) Israel, there grew among the Christians a new awareness of and interest towards the original context in which the Scriptures came into being: Israel and Judaism!

Since then, ever more Christians have become aware of and impressed by the great importance of the Jewish way of thinking to properly understand the Scriptures. The fathers of the Church, laying the foundations of the Christian theology in the period between 200 and 500 C. A, oriented themselves - often driven by some sort of anti-Jewish attitude- on the Greek philosophy of men as Plato, Aristotle and

Pythagoras, detaching the Bible and its thoughts from the context, in which they belong: Israel and his history. It should not surprise us, that as result from a few truths of the Word of God a distorted representation are originated within the Christian Theology. Also the 'replacement theology' - stating that the Church has displaced Israel- influenced the Christian thinking in many area's and has left deep trails, not in the least in the thinking about the 'last days'.

Many among us try to acquire and familiarize themselves with the 'Hebrew Thinking', to understand the Word of God better and more in depth. But how does apply such to our thinking about time and especially about the time of the Last Days? To what extent originate our 'Last Days theories' (Eschatology) and speculations thereabout from Hebrew thinking or from Greek thinking?

Hebrew thinking, but Greek writing

There are those that say that there is nothing wrong with 'Greek Thinking', after all, the New Testament was written in the Greek language. On the other hand, there are believers who definitely recognize the Jewish character and Hebrew thinking in the New Testament writings, subsequently concluding that the Greek New Testament as we know it, must therefore be a translation of an original Hebrew document. This because many 'Hebraisms' (words and expressions that are, being original Hebrew, being adopted and included in the Greek vocabulary) appears in the Greek New Testament. However, such an original Hebrew document has never been found. Besides, there is a much more acceptable explanation for the Hebraisms in the New

Testaments. Let us first -as a comparison- consider what by example a Dutchman does when he writes in Dutch language. You know, he thinks Greek, but he writes in Dutch. May be you are surprised, but let me explain!

The 'thinking' in the West- and therefore also in the Netherlands- finds its roots in the Greek philosophy, that is dominant in almost all western countries. We are tuned to the intellect, we analyze, and discuss in a manner as did the ancient Greeks. From this came our mathematics and later our emphasis on scientific and intellectual approach to reality; and therefore should the Word of God obey the 1 plus 1 is 2 logic before we believe it. The concept of 'thinking with your heart' is utterly strange to some of us, demonstrating the fact how focused we are towards 'intellect'. It is a way of thinking that originated from the Greek-Hellenistic culture, of which our culture is a child, of (with tongue in cheek) rather a step child. We think in Greek, although we write and speak Dutch language.

Likewise, the New Testament writers thought Hebrew - for they were children of their Jewish culture- but they wrote in Koine Greek. Because these New Testament writers thought Hebrew but wrote Greek, just like we think Greek but write Dutch, we were better to call the Koine Greek, as found in the New Testament, with the term "Judeo Koine Greek". This would serve to distinguish it from the Koine Greek, as it was used in the non-Jewish culture, where those Hebraisms are not found.

The Hebrew thoughts, transcribed in the Greek language caused the Hebraisms in the New Testament. To conclude from this that the New Testament as we know it, is a translation from an original Hebrew manuscript, goes too far too fast, because there is a more plausible

argument. But above this, there never was found a Hebrew original, and it is unlikely that God would leave us only a copy of a (possibly mutilated) translation, that would have no more value than any other translation among all translations, including all problems inherent to those.

Hebrew and Greek thinking when reading and interpreting the Bible.

One of the most important differences found between the Jew and the Christian in studying and interpreting the Bible, is that Jews primarily study and contemplate on the Word of God with the intent to find their directions and signs that they can apply to their own concrete life. For this purpose a lot of discussion occurs, not necessarily to convince one another that one is 'right' on a certain item, but to look at such an item from different sides and viewpoints, improving the process of learning.

The Christian thinker, however, characterized by the Greek analytical and abstract thinking, first wants to be able to explain everything, and shall then fix his findings in Christian doctrine. The most important findings are documented in a great number of 'creeds' - something unknown in the Jewishness-, and only after this it is time for the ethics of the real life.

The Christian makes himself recognizable through his creed, has his formula, and measures the other believer to his own conviction. The Jew makes his 'different believing' known to the other Jew, by his specific behavior in his (religious) life.

In the Hebrew thinking, God's Name is a reference to his BEING, and the Jew will try to understand the properties of His Being (essence). In the Greek-Christian thinking one is more likely to be occupied with formulating his Name, and whether this Name should be written and pronounced as is pronounced as is pronounced as Yahweh, Jehovah or whatever is possible within the rules of Hebrew grammar.

How do these two different manners of viewing and thinking about the Word of God manifest themselves, in connection with the subject like 'time' and then, especially connected with what is generally known as 'End of time' (Eschatology)?

To bring this in the proper perspective, we need first look at two Hebrew words for 'eternity'. The first is '**OLAM**'. 'Olam' is 'that which is hidden'; if something is 'olam', then it cannot be observed by us. Not in the Past, not in the Present, not in the Future. 'Olam' belongs to the other world, beyond the threshold, the invisible world, the world that is the source of all, and at the same time withdraws from visibility. You possess this world in faith, in trust and certainty/conviction of the existence thereof. The quote "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible (Heb 11:1) is clearly an expression of Hebrew thinking and the Jewish experience of God's reality.

The second Hebrew word is '**AD**', indicating the 'unlimited time-space' where "God at the end is the Same as at the beginning". At the end, all what is returned to the origin. Thus, the times run cyclic.

In the Greek language we encounter the word '**AION**', that also means 'time-space', and in its multiple refers to an endless series of time-spaces, where one space serially follows the other.

In Greek thinking we travel through the time linearly from the beginning of time till the end, and we do not picture 'eternity' as a return to the origin, from where past, presence and future came forth, but as an endless continuation of the time-space.

There is still another aspect of the way in which the Jew views 'time': in Jewish view the past lying in front of him, the future behind him.

I understand when for most people this sounds very strange and awkward. How can I clarify this?

Maybe it is best to state that the Jews have a 'spatial mental picture of time'. For everybody it will be clear, that being in a room, you can see what is in front of you, and that you cannot see what is behind your back in the room.

In analogy, what happened in the past is known, and therefore you can see it, just like the things lying in front of you. Whatever is in the future is still unknown, and therefore you cannot see it, just like the things that are behind you.

For the Jew lies the future that you cannot see behind him, and that what is known to him from the past lies before him.

In the Greek awareness of time, one travels through the time in which one is encapsulated, while in the Jewish thinking, time is observed as a separate entity, as if it were an area of space that lies before or behind you

These differences in the time experience have far reaching consequences for the way one looks at the things that God promised in advance to accomplish in the future.

A Jew looks in expectation in front of him, until that what God promised appears for his eyes. And that's what appears in front of his eyes, he evaluates and tests afterwards against that what God said about this in His promise, to see if that was what God really promised.

This way of looking to time, as if it were some spatial object lying in the space in front of you, is also clearly exemplified in the Hebrew words 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow'. The word for yesterday' (past time) is **TE-MOL**. It is derived from the root **MOEL**, that means 'up front' or 'at the frontside'.

The Hebrew word for tomorrow (future) is the word **MACHÉR**, derived from the root **ACHÈR**, that means 'behind' or 'at the back', thus 'that what is behind you and you cannot see'

While the Hebrew thinker observes the time, and everything that happens therein, as if it were a spatial object (theater), the Greek thinker travels through the time from the begin to the end.

The Hebrew thinkers trusts and expects that what God has promised will appear before him, at a given moment. And you would understand that in this manner of viewing, continuous attention and a state of alert is required.

On the other hand, the Greek thinker likes to compute through the time from the past into the future, and is inclined to find certainty by means of predicting the announced events, in a manner of "When that has been, then such and such an event will follow after this". Most of all he likes to organize everything that God did in the past and all what God has promised for the future that he will do, and present this

in a series of dates, months and years, on an simple and straight timeline.

Revisiting and studying Hebrew concepts and values from Biblical, Jewish tradition, has caused many 'end time' theories, born from the Greek thinking, to pose statements like "in such and such Sabbath year, that and that will happen' or 'in such and such Jubilee (year) such and such will occur". The Jew, however, he will in the first place think of what God requires of him to do in such a Sabbath year ('give rest to the land') or Jubilee ('let the slaves go free').

This does not mean that there is no place in Hebrew thinking for counting years and days, but that is primarily meant to know in what year to give the rest to the land, or when to release the slaves.

In respect to the realization of God's promises, the Jew lives 'expecting', 'yearning' for this coming out from the unknown future, that lies behind him, to a fully realized fact, that appears in front of him. Then it is the time to evaluate and judge whatever lies there before him.

The Messiah would come from Bethlehem, the Messiah would come from Juda, and would be a son of David. The Messiah would bring peace and the Messiah would restore the kingdom. That was the 'signs of the time', the signs of the time that God indicated.

That mistake can be made in this approach, that we have learned in time (and is clear from history as we know). The great example here of is Yeshua/Jesus: from the Scriptures was justly understood that the Messiah would bring 'Peace", and ultimately He will. But the misunderstanding was that one did not notice that the Messiah had to go through great pain and suffering and first had to die, (before the

peace could come). Therefore, they did not recognize the signs (in the story) of Jonah.

Most Jews that now, today recognize and accept Yeshua as their Messiah, do this on the basis of Matthew 1, the birth-register from which it is evident that Jesus stems from the family-line Abraham - David, and on grounds of Isai 53, where Messiah Yeshua is presented in his 'Suffering period'.

As the Hebrew thinks about time, likewise he does such about time-periods. Forty years, even if this period is past at an actual calendar time, is thought of and experienced as a period of tribulation and affliction; and thousands years, even if they are passed in reality, is in the first place thought of and experienced as that which knows no end.

The Greek thinking believer shall be pleased to derive all kinds of time-periods from the measurements (dimensions) of the Tabernacle . While in Entrance to the tabernacle, measuring 5 by 20 ell, makes the Jew think of the fact that God in grace (5) makes the impossible ($5*20=100$) reality. And the contents of the 'Holy of Holiest' contain no hidden numbers at all, from which the Greek thinker can calculate the time of the events that are foretold in the prophecies. On the other hand the Jewish thinker knows the 'holy of holiest' refers to God's world, and if the contents are said to be $20*20*20$ el (=8000 cubic ell), then this indicates Gods unending world (1000) made accessible to us by the Messiah (8).

The Greek thinker likes to depict the entire holy history from Creation until the New Heaven and Earth, as a long sequence of years, usually from 0 till 6000, after which a 1000 year period of the Messianic

Kingdom commences; then after 7000 years we all will enter the new eternal world of God.

But God in his Word handles time indications quite differently, nowhere He speaks about the such or such year after Creation.

The birthday of somebody is indicated by the age of his father at that moment. His death is marked with the number of years that he has lived.

An important event is fixed in time as happening in a certain year of the reign of a certain king. If a new period commences for God's people, God begins to count the years anew from that moment. Sem fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood (Gen 11:10). When God led his people out of Egypt, He said: "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you." (Exodus 12:2)

The first Sabbath year and the first Jubilee are computed from the moment that the people entered the God promised land (Lev. 25); hence, these Sabbath years and jubilee years are not counted from the beginning of Creation. Also the coming of Messiah is not indicated to occur as in a certain year after Creation, but 'between the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Yerushalayim until an anointed prince comes. It will remain built for sixty-two weeks [of years], (Dan. 9:25). Even so, when the (Babylonian) Exile is ended, God begins to count again anew. The 'old' is gone, God forgets and gives new chance and opportunity. Finished, don't mention it again. Start all over again, with a new beginning. Start counting again, I shall remind the 'old' no more.

If Yeshua/Jesus had said that the Father keeps the 'the day and the hour' to know only for Himself, and even the angels, and the returning Messiah himself does therefor not know, why then would we try to figure out and calculate all kinds of things related to and around His Return? This is a typical demonstration of Greek Thinking.

Yeshua-Jesus calls us to be on the alert, with full attention, anticipating the coming before you, of the unknown future (like a passenger in waiting for the train to come into the station), and then review and evaluate that what is in front of you, looking for the signs that are promised to be revealed.

Just like the signs that were given to recognize the coming of the Messiah (from Bethlehem, offspring from the line of David, etc., etc.), He has given us signs from which we can judge the time of His return! The people shall be as in the time of Noah, there shall be rumors of war, the trampling down of Yerushalayim by the heathens will be completed, and at last the sun will darkened, the moon shall be red as blood, and the stars will withdraw their glow.

Thus, there will be a complete darkening of the universe, as there was between the sixth and the ninth hours of the day when Yeshua-Jesus hung from the cross. If we want to view this 'end of time' in a manner reflecting the Hebrew way of thinking we must be awake and on the alert until we see these things happen, appear in front of us, and not (try) to predict the future event, that in Hebrew though still lies behind us.

Concluding, the article is not meant to pose the correctness of one eschatology against another, nor an invitation to discuss and argue about the difference between the several theories. This article is meant to contemplate on our thoughts, whether they are Hebrew or Greek and to what extent, when we address this subject of the 'End of time'.

If reading this article guides you to examine your thoughts, then this article has achieved the goal, for which it was written!

For all clarity: we considered 'Jewish Biblical Hebrew Thinking', but after thousands of year of diaspora, during which the Jews lived and breathed among the gentiles, you should not be surprised to encounter modern Jews adapted to the Greek Thinking.

Drs. Charles. van den Berg **PaRDeS BIJBELSTUDIES**

(Before: Logos Bijbelstudies)

2018 All rights reserved

It is permitted to share this article, provided free, unchanged and with mention of the copyright source.

You can subscribe to receive free Bible studies by sending a request to this email address: pardesbijbelstudies@outlook.com

