

# *The Prophets: Hermeneutics*

## *An Overview*

- Reminder: The task of exegesis in the Prophets is to determine what God was saying to Israel within the specific historical context of each oracle
- Then, how do we determine what God's word for us is through them?
  - Much of what applies to the Epistles, applies here as well

## *A Caution*

- It was NOT the Prophets' primary concern to predict the distance future
  - The majority of the predictions of the Prophets happen in our past (though their future)
- Ex.) Ezek. 25-39
  - Various oracles concerning the fates of various nations
  - The fulfillment of most of these oracles came within decades of their delivery (the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC)
  - Exceptions exist: Ez. 37:15-28 describes the New Covenant age and the blessings associated with the coming of the Messiah
  - However, most of the vast majority deal with events and nations of their own age
    - Including Gog & Magog (Ez. 38-39)
- Too great a zeal for identifying New Testament events in OT prophetic oracles can yield wrong results
  - Ex.) Isa. 49:23 has been associated by some with the magi who came to visit Jesus (Matt. 2:1-11)
    - This completely ignores:
      - The context: Also references queens; and refers to the restoration of Israel after the Babylonian exile
      - The intent: The language is meant to show how great the respect for Israel will become
      - The style: Poetic images of rulers as foster parents to Israel; and licking the dust of their feet
      - The wording: Magi are wise men/astrologers, not kings
- We must let the text mean what God intends it to say, not what we want it to mean
- Some of the prophecies of the near future were set against the background of the great eschatological future
  - And sometimes they seem to blend
  - The Bible regularly sees God's acts in temporal history in light of His overall plan for all of human history
    - That is, the temporal is be seen in light of the eternal
    - See illustration p. 208
  - Some texts may describe events that belong to the final events of the age (e.g. Joel 3:1-3; Zeph. 3:8-9; Zech. 14:9)
    - But the temporal judgments that are often spoken of in conjunction with these final events must not be pushed into the future as well
  - Eschatological language is normally metaphorical
    - Ex.) Ez. 37:1-14 "Dry Bones Oracle"

- It uses language of the resurrection of the dead
- An event that will take place at the end of the age
- But, utilizes it to describe the return of Israel from exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (v. 12-14)
  - Thus, an event that is past to us, it predicted metaphorically with eschatological language as though it were an end-time event

### ***A Concern***

- At a number of places in the NT, reference is made to OT passages that do not appear to refer to what the NT writers seem to suggest they do
  - That is, the passages seem to have a clear meaning in their OT context and yet are used in connection with different meaning by a NT author
- Ex.) Moses bringing forth water from the rocks (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13)
  - Pretty straight forward in their original context
  - But Paul utilizes the text as an encounter with Christ (1 Cor. 10:4)
    - Paul ascribes to the rock a second meaning
    - *Sensus Plenior*: “Fuller meaning”
  - What Paul was doing was drawing an analogy
    - “*What the rock was to them, Christ is to us- a source of sustenance.*”
    - Paul’s language is highly metaphorical (v. 2-4)
    - He wants the Corinthians to understand that the experience of the Israelites in the desert can be understood in an analogous way to their own experience with Christ, especially at the Lord’s table.
  - As modern readers, we may miss Paul’s analogy
- The Holy Spirit inspired Paul in the *sensus plenior*
  - Thus, what Paul did, we are not authorized to do!
  - *Sensus plenior is a function of inspiration, not illumination!*
  - We are NOT inspired writers of Scripture
    - We are illuminated readers
  - Inspiration: “The original motivation to record the Scripture in a certain way”
  - Illumination: “The insight to understand what the Scripture’s authors wrote”
- Good Study Bibles, commentaries, handbooks, and Bibles with reference columns will all tend to identify OT prophetic passages that have a second, often analogical, meaning in the NT
  - Ex.) Matt. 1:22-23 (Isa. 7:14)
    - Matt. 2:15 (Hos. 11:1) Read p. 210.2-211
    - Matt. 2:17-18 (Jer. 31:15)
    - John 12:15 (Zech. 9:9)
  - These examples reflect a common form of biblical interpretation during the time of the writing of the NT called typology
    - Typology: “A method of interpretation in which one thing is seen as providing an example or type of another.”
      - Ex.) Melchizedek (Gen. 14; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5-7)

### ***A Final Benefit***

- Through the Prophets, God calls Israel to both orthodoxy & orthopraxy
  - Orthodoxy: “Right beliefs”
  - Orthopraxis: “Right practice”
- This is something true of New Testament believers as well (Eph. 2:8-10; Jas. 1:27; 2:18)
- What God wanted for Israel & Judah is generally what he wants for us
  - To be obedient to the covenant we are under