

Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy

1. Much of the Old Testament is composed of prophecy. It was meant for us. Ro 15:3-4
2. Several basic principles will help us to understand and profit from OT prophecy.
 - a. The better we understand it, the more we're able to profit. (Acts 8:29-31)
 - b. There is one meaning, defined by the intent of the divine author, with many possible implications and applications.
 - i. Meaning is determined by the author, not the reader.
 - ii. The one meaning may be rich, with multiple layers that are not immediately obvious.
(1) Isaiah 13:9-11 (about Babylon, see v. 1) cmp. Mark 13:24
 - c. Scripture interprets Scripture.
 - i. The Scriptures don't contradict themselves.
 - ii. The Scriptures are to be read considering the whole testimony of Scripture.
 - iii. Clearer passages interpret less clear ones.
 - d. The NT interprets the OT.
 - i. The NT often provides divine commentary on the OT.
(1) Isa. 40:1-4 cmp. Luke 3:4-6 (quoted by John the Baptist)
 - ii. The NT gives us a model for interpreting the OT.
 - e. The Old Testament bears witness of Jesus. (John 5:39, Luke 24:27)
 - f. God is in control of history. (Isa 46:10, Eph. 1:11)
 - i. Because God is sovereign over history, he knows his own plans and he will bring it about. This is the bedrock of real prophecy!
 - ii. God acts with consistency in history and with purposeful revelatory works. Therefore, earlier historical events are ordained by God to foreshadow later works of God.
 - g. There is an essential continuity between the OT people of God and the NT people of God. Rom. 11:16-24 *This essential continuity means that the warnings and the promises of the OT can be applied to us with appropriate understanding of our new place in the flow of redemptive history.*
3. Several specific principles will help us understand the text.
 - a. Much OT prophecy is in the form of poetry. Therefore, it aims at painting a picture rather than always giving specific details. Isa. 11:6-9 vs. Isa. 35:8-1 – lions or no lions?
 - b. OT prophecy often uses cosmic imagery. Isa. 13:9-11 cmp. Acts 2:14-21
 - i. Cosmic imagery implies a relationship between earthly authorities and struggles and unseen, heavenly authorities and struggles.
 - ii. Cosmic imagery foreshadows a more direct confrontation between unseen authorities.
 - c. The historical context of OT prophecy is important:
 - i. Much of OT prophecy is spoken to the context of impending exile.
 - ii. Much of OT prophecy is spoken to the context of returning from exile.
 - d. We should expect revelation to be progressive.
 - i. Prophets could be expected to use familiar language to describe unfamiliar ideas.
(1) Gal. 4:3-4 teaches that the OT people of God were like children.
(2) Even the greatest OT prophet (John the Baptist) was less in his understanding than the least in the kingdom of God.
 - ii. We should expect greater light on earlier revelation now that we have the whole of Scripture. Even the prophets didn't fully comprehend what they prophesied, even though they certainly understood it on a basic level. 1 Pet. 1:10-11