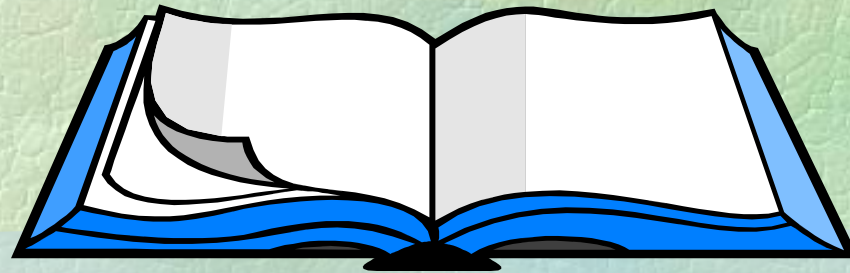


How To Read The Bible



For All Its Worth!

Goals For This Class

- To give a basic approach to understanding the biblical text
- To examine historical methods of interpretation
- To consider other methods of interpretation
- To promote unity of shared understanding
- To relate elders' views on interpretation

Not Goals For This Class

- To ensure everybody believes what I do
- To ensure everybody believes the same thing
- To debate controversial passages of scripture
- To negate or endorse any particular interpretative approach
- To confuse, frustrate, or agitate truthseekers

Understanding Prophecy



Introduction to Prophecy

- More books on prophecy than any other subject
- 4 Major Prophets
- 12 Minor Prophets
- Written in Israel ~ 760 and 460 BC
- Minor prophets shorter than major prophets

The Nature of Prophecy

- Most difficult books to understand
- Misunderstanding of function and form
- The meaning of prophecy
- The prophets as spokespersons
- The problem of history

The Meaning of Prophecy

- Definition: “foretelling or prediction of what is to come”
- <2% of O.T. prophecy is messianic
- <5% of O.T. prophecy concerns N.T.
- <1% of O.T. prophecy concerns other events yet to come
- Prophets did announce the future - usually the future of Israel, Judah, and other nations

The Prophets as Spokespersons

- Primary prophetic function - to speak for God to their own contemporaries
- Hundreds of prophets - but only 16 spoke oracles from God
- O.T. tells us about prophets, not from them
- Prophets tell us from God, not about them
- Why are they difficult to read in one sitting?

The Problem of History

- Hard to understand their time in our time
- Clear becomes opaque
- Removed from religious, cultural, and historical life of that day
- Difficulty putting prophets words in context
- Hard to see what they refer to and why

The Function of Prophecy

- The prophets were covenant enforcement mediators
- The prophets' message was not their own, but God's
- The prophets' message was unoriginal

Covenant Enforcement Mediators

- The Law was a covenant between God and his people
- Law contained not only rules, but blessings and curses
- God enforces his law through prophets
- Moses was mediator of the covenant
- Prophets are mediators/spokespersons for the covenant

Blessings in the Law

- Life
 - Health
 - Prosperity
 - Agricultural abundance
 - Respect
 - Safety
-
- Lev 26:1-13; Deut 4:32-40, 28:1-14

Curses in the Law

- Death
- Disease
- Drought
- Dearth
- Danger
- Destruction
- Defeat
- Deportation
- Destitution
- Disgrace
- Lev 26:14-39; Deut 4:15-28, 28:15-32:42

Examples of Prophetic Mediation

- Blessings - Amos 9:11-15
- Curses - Hosea 8:14; 9:3
- Blessings/Curses always corporate
- Mostly curses from 8th -6th century BC
- Mostly blessings after 587 BC
- Look for a pattern:
 - identification of Israel's sin or God's love
 - prediction of subsequent blessing or curse

The Prophets' Message Was God's

- God raised up the prophets (Ex 3, Jer 1)
- Prophet taking the role was false (Jer 14:14)
- Prophets responded to a divine call (Jer 27)
- Prophets held a kind of societal office
- Installed kings (I Kings 19:16)
- Declared war (II Kings 3:18-19)
- They do not act or speak independently

Prophets' Message Is Unoriginal

- Presented essential content of the covenant
- Message may be rephrased or restructured
- Example:
 - “There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery.” Hosea 4:2 (NIV)

Exegesis of the Prophets

- Need for outside help
- Historical context
- Isolation of individual oracles
- Forms of prophetic utterance
- The prophets as poets

Historical Context of Prophets

- Amos ~ 760 BC
- Malachi ~ 460 BC
- Characterized by three things:
 - unprecedented political, military, economic, and social upheaval
 - enormous level of religious unfaithfulness
 - shifts in populations and natural boundaries
- Israel falls to Assyria 722 BC
- Judah falls to Babylon 587 BC

Specific Context of Prophets

“⁸Blow the ram’s horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah! Cry aloud at Beth Aven, ‘Look behind you, O Benjamin.’

⁹Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

¹⁰The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out my wrath on them like water.”

Hosea 5:8-10 (NKJV)

Specific Context of Prophets

- A war oracle - God's judgement by war
- Features call to alarm, attack, defeat
- Date is 734 BC
- Audience is Israel
- Specifically cities on road from Jerusalem to Bethel
- Situation is war

Specific Context of Prophets

- Judah had counterattacked Israel after Israel and Syria invaded Judah (II Kings 16:5)
- Invasion beaten back with the help of Assyria (II Kings 16:7-9)
- Alarm is to cities in Benjamin (v8) because Judah will capture the territory (v9)
- But Judah will get its due too (II Kings 16:2-4)
- All this because the covenant forbade war!

Isolation of Individual Oracles

- Think oracles!
- Text presented in run-on fashion
- In some books prophecy is dated (Haggai)
- Amos 5 - One oracle or many?
 - Several changes of subject
 - How are components to be understood?
 - Are they independent of each other?
 - Should they be grouped together? How??

Oracles of Amos 5

- Short lament announcing punishment (v1-3)
- Invitation to blessing and warning of punishment (v4-17)
- Warning of punishment (v18-27)

Forms of Prophetic Utterance

- The lawsuit (Isaiah 3:13-26)
- The woe (Hab 2:6-8)
- The promise (Amos 9:11-15)

Poetry in Prophecy

- Synonymous parallelism (Isaiah 44:22)
- Antithetical parallelism (Hosea 7:14)
- Synthetic parallelism (Obadiah 21)

Hermeneutics in the Prophets

- Avoid the prophet as foreteller of future
- Prophecy and second meanings
- Balance orthodoxy and orthopraxy

Questions or Comments?



Next Week:

The Psalms