

The Nature of Prophecy

We should note at the outset that the prophetic books are among the most difficult parts of the Bible to interpret or read with understanding. The reasons for this are related to misunderstandings as to their function and form. But before we discuss these two matters, some preliminary comments are in order.

The Meaning of Prophecy

The primary difficulty for most modern readers of the Prophets stems from an inaccurate prior understanding of the word “prophecy.” For most people this word means what appears as the first definition in most dictionaries: “foretelling or prediction of what is to come.” It often happens, therefore, that many Christians refer to the prophetic books only for predictions about the coming of Jesus and/or certain features of the new-covenant age—as though prediction of events far distant from their own day was the main concern of the prophets. In fact, using the prophets in this way is highly selective. Consider in this connection the following statistics: Less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5 percent specifically describes the new-covenant age. Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come in our time.

The prophets did indeed announce the future. But it was usually the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and other nations surrounding them that they announced rather than our future. One of the keys to understanding the prophets, therefore, is that for us to see their prophecies fulfilled, we must look back on times that for them were still future but for us are past.

The Prophets as Spokespersons

To see the prophets as primarily predictors of future events is to miss their primary function, which was to speak for God to their own contemporaries. It is the “spoken” nature of their prophecies that causes many of our difficulties in understanding.

For example, of the hundreds of prophets in ancient Israel in Old Testament times, only sixteen were chosen to speak oracles (messages from God) that would be collected and written up into books. We know that other prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, played a very influential role in delivering God’s Word to his people and to nations other than Israel as well. But we know more about these prophets than we do of their actual words. What they did was described in far greater length than what they said—and what they said was placed very specifically and clearly in the context of their times by the writers of the Old Testament narratives in which they appear. Of a few prophets, such as Gad (1 Sam 22; 2 Sam 24; et al.), Nathan (2 Sam 7; 12; 1 Kgs 1; et al.), or Huldah (2 Kgs 22), “we have a combination of prophecy and biography—a situation paralleled in the case of Jonah and, to a lesser extent, Daniel. But generally in the narrative books of the Old Testament we hear about prophets and very little from prophets. In the prophetic books, however, we hear from God via the prophets and very little about the prophets themselves. This single difference accounts for most of the problems people have in making sense of the prophetic books in the Old Testament.

The Problem of history

Another matter complicates our understanding of the prophets—the problem of historical distance. Indeed, by the very nature of things, we modern readers will find it much harder to understand in our own time the Word of God as it was spoken by the prophets than did the Israelites who heard those same words in person.... Rather, as people far removed from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel, we simply have great trouble putting the words spoken by the prophets in their proper context. It is often hard for us to see what they are referring to and why.

The Function of Prophecy in Israel

They are God’s mediators, or spokespersons, for the covenant. Through them God reminds people in the generations after Moses that if his law is kept, blessing will result; but if not, punishment will ensue.

Therefore, one must always bear in mind that the prophets did not invent the blessings or curses they announced. They may have worded these blessings and curses in novel, captivating ways, as they were inspired to do so. But they reproduced God’s Word, not their own. Through them God announced his intention to enforce the covenant, for benefit or for harm—depending on the faithfulness of Israel—but always on the basis of and in accordance with the categories of blessing and cursing already contained in Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4; and Deuteronomy 28–32. If you will take the trouble to learn those chapters from the Pentateuch, you will be rewarded with a much better understanding of why the prophets said the things that they did.”

Leviticus 26 1 “You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the LORD your God. **2** You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. **3** “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, **4** then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit....**15** if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, **16** then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. **17** I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. **18** And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins.

Deuteronomy 4:1 “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. **2** You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. **3** Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor. **4** But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today. **5** See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. **6** Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ **7** For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? **8** And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Briefly, what one finds is this. The Law contains certain categories of corporate blessings for covenant faithfulness: life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety. Most of the specific blessings mentioned will fall under one of these six general groupings. As regards curses, the Law describes corporate punishments, which we happen to find convenient (and memorizable) to group under ten headings that begin with the letter “d”: death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace. Most of the curses will fit under one of these categories.

“The Specific Context

Each prophetic oracle was delivered in a specific historical setting. God spoke through his prophets to people in a given time and place and under given circumstances. A knowledge of the date, audience, and situation, therefore, when they are known, contributes substantially to your ability to comprehend an oracle. In order to help you with this task, we offer the following example.

Read Hosea 5:8–10, a brief, self-contained oracle grouped with several other oracles in the chapter. A good commentary will identify for you the fact that this oracle is in the form of a war oracle, one of a type (form) that announces the judgment of God as carried out through battle. The usual elements of such a form are these: the call to alarm, the description of attack, and the prediction of defeat. In the same way that it is helpful to recognize the form, it is also helpful to recognize the specific content.

Hosea 5:8-10

⁸“Sound the trumpet in Gibeah,
the horn in Ramah.
Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven^[a];
lead on, Benjamin.
⁹ Ephraim will be laid waste
on the day of reckoning.
Among the tribes of Israel
I proclaim what is certain.
¹⁰ Judah’s leaders are like those
who move boundary stones.
I will pour out my wrath on them
like a flood of water

“The date is 734 B.C. The audience is the northern Israelites (called here “Ephraim”) to whom Hosea preached. Specifically the message was to certain cities on the road from the Judean capital, Jerusalem, to the center of Israelite false worship, Bethel. The situation is war. Judah counterattacked Israel after Israel and Syria had invaded Judah (see 2 Kgs 16:5). The invasion had been beaten back with the help of the superpower Assyria (2 Kgs 16:7–9). God through Hosea sounds the alarm metaphorically in cities located in the territory of Benjamin (Hos 5:8), which is part of the northern kingdom. Destruction is sure (v. 9), because Judah will capture the territory it invades (“moving the boundary stones” as it were). But Judah, too, will get its due. God’s wrath will fall on them both for this act of war and for their idolatry (cf. 2 Kgs 16:2–4). Judah and Israel were under obligation to the divine covenant, which forbade such internecine war. So God would punish this violation of his covenant.”

Knowing these few facts makes a great deal of difference in one’s ability to appreciate the oracle in Hosea 5:8–10. Refer to the commentaries or handbooks as you read the prophetic books, and, as always, try to be aware of the date, audience, and situation of the oracles you read.

Acts: The Question of Historical Precedent

In one sense a separate chapter on the Acts of the Apostles is redundant, for almost everything that was said in the last chapter applies here as well. However, for a very practical, hermeneutical reason, Acts requires a chapter of its own. The reason is simple: most Christians do not read Acts in the same way they read Judges or 2 Samuel, even if they are not fully aware of it.

When we read the Old Testament narratives, we tend to do the things mentioned in the last chapter—moralize, allegorize, personalize, and so on. Seldom do we think of these narratives as serving as patterns for Christian behavior or church life. Even in the case of those few we do treat this way—for example, putting out a fleece to find God’s will—we never do exactly what they did. That is, we never put out an actual fleece for God to make wet or dry. Rather we “fleece God” by setting up a set, or sets, of circumstances. “If someone from California calls us this week, then we’ll let that be God’s way of telling us that the move to California “is the one he wants us to make.” And never once in using this “pattern” do we consider that Gideon’s action was really not a good one inasmuch as it showed his lack of trust in God’s word that had already been given to him.

Thus we seldom think of the Old Testament histories as setting biblical precedents for our own lives. On the other hand, this has been a normal way for Christians to read Acts. It not only tells us the history of the early church, but it also serves as the normative model for the church of all times. And this is precisely our hermeneutical difficulty.

Acts as History

The question of Luke’s intent is at once the most important and the most difficult. It is the most important because it is crucial to our hermeneutics. If it can be demonstrated that Luke’s intent in Acts was to lay down a pattern for the church at all times, then that pattern surely becomes normative, that is, it is what God requires of all Christians under any conditions. But if his intent is something else, then we need to ask the hermeneutical questions in a different way. To find Luke’s intent, however, can be difficult, partly because we do not know who Theophilus was or why Luke would have written to him, and partly because Luke seems to have so many different interests.

Luke’s Purpose

We must be careful that we do not move too glibly from this over view of what Luke did to an easy or dogmatic expression of what his inspired purpose in all of this was. But a few observations are in order, partly based also on what Luke did not do.

First. The key to understanding Acts seems to be in Luke’s interest in this movement of the gospel, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, from its Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented beginnings to its becoming a worldwide, Gentile-predominant phenomenon. On the basis of structure and content alone, any statement of purpose that does not include the Gentile mission and the Holy Spirit’s role in that mission will surely have missed the point of the book.

. This interest in “movement” is further substantiated by what Luke does not tell us. First, he has no interest in the “lives,” that is, biographies, of the apostles. James (the son of Zebedee) is the only one whose end we know (12:2). Once the movement to the Gentiles gets underway, Peter drops from sight except in chapter 15, where

he certifies the Gentile mission. Apart from John, the other apostles are not even mentioned, and Luke's interest in Paul is almost completely in terms of the Gentile mission.

Second, he has little or no interest in church organization or polity. The Seven in chapter 6 are not called deacons, and in any case they soon leave Jerusalem. Luke never tells us why or how it happened that the church in Jerusalem passed from the leadership of Peter and the apostles to James, the brother of Jesus (12:17; 15:13; 21:18); nor does he ever explain how any local church was organized in terms of polity or leadership, except to say that elders were appointed (14:23).

Titus 1:4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. **5** This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

Third, there is no word about other geographical expansion except in the one direct line from Jerusalem to Rome. There is no mention of Crete (Titus 1:5), Illyricum (Rom 15:19—modern Croatia and Yugoslavia), or Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia (1 Pet 1:1), not to mention the church's expansion eastward toward Mesopotamia or southward toward Egypt.

All of this together says that church history per se was simply not Luke's reason for writing.

Fourth, Luke's interest also does not seem to be in standardizing things, bringing everything into uniformity. When he records individual conversions there are usually two elements included: gift of the Spirit and water baptism. But these can be in reverse order, with or without the laying on of hands, with or without the mention of tongues, and scarcely ever with a specific mention of repentance, even after what Peter says in 2:38–39. Similarly, Luke neither says nor implies that the Gentile churches experienced a communal life similar to that in Jerusalem in 2:42–47 and 4:32–35. Such diversity probably means that no specific example is being set forth as the model Christian experience or church life.

Fifth, Nonetheless, we believe that much of Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model. But the model is not so much in the specifics as in the overall picture. By the very way God has moved him to structure and narrate this history it seems probable that we are to view this triumphant, joyful, forward-moving expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world, empowered by the Holy Spirit and resulting in changed lives and local communities, as God's intent for the continuing church. And precisely because this is God's intent for the church, nothing can hinder it, neither Sanhedrin nor synagogue, dissension nor narrow-mindedness, prison nor plot. Luke, therefore, probably intended that the ongoing church should be "like them," but in the larger sense, not by modeling itself on any specific example.

Proverbs

"Three Old Testament books are commonly known as "wisdom books": Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. In addition, as we noted in chapter 11, a number of the psalms are often classified in the wisdom category.

The Nature of Wisdom

What exactly is wisdom? A brief definition runs as follows: "Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life." You achieve this goal by applying God's truth to your life, so that your choices will indeed be godly. This sounds reasonable enough, and not the sort of thing that should confuse Christians. The problem arises when the Old Testament wisdom material is misunderstood, and thus misapplied. In such cases people will often make choices

that are not always godly. This chapter intends to help you refine your understanding and application of wisdom. We begin with some common abuses.

Abuse of Wisdom Literature

Traditionally, the wisdom books have been misused in three ways.

1. People often read these books only in bits and pieces and thus fail to see that they have an overall message. Snatches of wisdom teaching taken out of context can sound profound and seem practical, which often results in misapplication. Take, for example, the phrase in Ecclesiastes that there is “a time to be born and a time to die” (3:2). This is part of a lyrical poem set in the context of the transitory/elusive nature of human life; it is about how the ebb and flow of human life and activity are set by God and thus outside of human control—since all die when their “time” comes, no matter how bad or good their life is. Some Christians have thought that the verse intended to teach that God protectively picks out our life span for us; in context, this is definitely not what Ecclesiastes 3:2 is saying.

2. People sometimes misunderstand wisdom terms and categories as well as wisdom styles and literary modes, and this can also lead to misuse. For example, consider Proverbs 14:7, “Stay away from the foolish, for you will not find knowledge on their lips.” Does this mean that Christians should choose not to associate with those who have mental disabilities or are uneducated or mentally ill? Of course not! In Proverbs, “fool” basically means “infidel”—it refers to the person who lives life according to selfish, indulgent whims and who acknowledges no higher authority than oneself. And the “staying away” is inextricably linked with the purpose (“for you will not find”). In other words, the proverb teaches that if you are seeking knowledge, you should not look for it in the “fool”—the one who lives life apart from God (Ps 14:1; 53:1).

3. Especially in a wisdom discourse like Job, people often fail to follow the line of argument. Accordingly, they cite as biblical truth what was intended as an incorrect understanding of life. Consider Job 15:20: “All their days the wicked suffer torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for them.” Would you take this to be an inspired teaching that evil people cannot really be happy? Job did not! He energetically refuted it. This verse is part of a speech by Job’s self-appointed “comforter” Eliphaz, who is trying to convince Job that the reason he is suffering so much is that he has been evil. Later in the book God vindicates the words of Job and condemns the words of Eliphaz (42:7–8). But unless you follow the whole discourse of Job, you cannot know this.

Wisdom, therefore, as the Bible defines it (Hebrew *hokmah*) has nothing to do with IQ. It is not a matter of cleverness and quickness or skill in expression or age, even though personal experience is a valuable teacher if interpreted in light of revealed truth. It is a matter of orientation to God, out of which comes the ability to please him. This is why James 1:5 says that God gives wisdom to those who ask for it. This is a promise not that we can become smarter by prayer, but that God will help us to become more godly in our choices, if we ask. James defines the kind of wisdom God gives (Jas 3:13–18), in contrast to the worldly wisdom by which a person seeks to know how to get ahead of others.

Wisdom in Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is the primary locus of “prudential wisdom”—that is, memorable aphorisms (maxims) people can use to help themselves make responsible choices in life.... As a generalization, one can say that Proverbs teaches “old-fashioned basic values.” A good parent does not want his or her child to grow up unhappy, disappointed, lonely, socially rejected, in trouble with the law, immoral, inept, or broke. It is neither selfish nor unrealistic for a parent to wish a child a reasonable level of success in life—including social acceptance, moral uprightness, and freedom from want.

Proverbs provides a collection of pithy advisory statements designed to do just that. There is no guarantee, of course, that a life will always go well for a young person. What Proverbs does say is that, all things being equal, there are basic attitudes and patterns of behavior that will help a person grow into responsible adulthood.

1. Proverbs Are Not Legal Guarantees from God Proverbs state a wise way to approach certain selected practical goals but do so in terms that cannot be treated like a divine warranty of success. The particular blessings, rewards, and opportunities mentioned in Proverbs are likely to follow if one will choose the wise courses of action outlined in the poetic, figurative language of the book. But nowhere does Proverbs teach automatic success. Remember that inspired Scripture also includes both Ecclesiastes and Job, which remind us that there is very little that is automatic about the good or bad events that may take place in our lives. Consider these examples:

Prov. 22.6 Do not be one who shakes hands in pledge,
or puts up security for debts;
if you lack the means to pay,
your very bed will be snatched from under you.

2. Proverbs Must Be Read as a Collection Each inspired proverb must be balanced with others and understood in comparison with the rest of Scripture... An individual proverb, if misunderstood, may lead you to attitudes or behavior far more inappropriate than would be the case if you read Proverbs as a whole. Moreover, you must guard against letting their intensely practical concern with material things and this world make you forget the balancing value of other Scriptures that warn against materialism and worldliness. Do not engage in the kind of wisdom Job's friends did, equating worldly success with righteousness in God's eyes. This is an unbalanced reading of selected proverbs. Do not try to find in Proverbs justification for living a selfish life or for practices that do not comport with what the Scriptures teach otherwise. And remember that the proverbs are often grouped in various ways, so that one jumps from topic to topic in reading through them."

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ARTICLE III CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Section A. Introduction

Waukesha Bible Church acknowledges the Lord Jesus as the Head of the Church, the Bible as the Word of God and the infallible guide for the church, and the Holy Spirit as its teacher. Under these guiding principles, this church shall be self-governing, not under the direction or jurisdiction of any other ecclesiastical body or federation.

This church shall be led by an Elder Council which will provide spiritual leadership and direction for the church as well as oversee all ministry of the church. The Church Membership shall have and provide input to church matters as described within this Constitution.

Section B. Elder Council

The Membership of Waukesha Bible Church grants governing authority over spiritual and material matters to the Elder Council, subject to the provisions in this Constitution. While retaining oversight responsibility, the Council may delegate authority and/or responsibility for any purpose.

1. Members of the Elder Council

There shall be a minimum of twelve Council Elders, including the Senior Pastor, who will collectively form the Elder Council of this Church. This minimum shall not be maintained by compromising any of the following Elder qualifications.

2. Qualifications of Elders

Elders must be born again men who demonstrate the qualities found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. They are to be wise and godly men in their home and in the church. They must through their character and competence as tested men, have gained the confidence of those with whom they deal, both inside and outside the Body. They must have been members of this church for at least two years and have served in a Ministry Area within this church prior to becoming an Elder. Also, see Article II, Section A-2.

3. Responsibilities of the Elder Council

The Elder Council shall be responsible for the spiritual growth and care of the congregation. They shall also be responsible for oversight and coordination of Ministry Areas.

a. Shepherding Functions

- 1) Involvement in the spiritual care of the congregation.
- 2) Involvement in teaching and discipleship.
- 3) Visitation and pastoral care in conjunction with the pastoral staff.

b. Oversight Functions

- 1) Seek out areas that need assistance and encourage the formation of new ministries.
- 2) Maintain contact and communication with the leadership in each Ministry Area.
- 3) Set, review, and administer policies which deal with spiritual matters.
- 4) Approve policies and review Handbooks that are maintained within Ministry Areas.
- 5) Long range planning.
- 6) Coordinate financial planning.
- 7) Ensure that administration of plans and policies are in accordance with church and ministry needs, directions, and priorities.
- 8) Prepare an Annual Report which is to include progress reports from each ministry.
- 9) Maintain a Handbook of policies and procedures relevant to the Elder Council.
- 10) Oversee the ordination process and recommend candidates for ordination to the Church Membership.

4. Selection Process and Term of Office

When Elders are to be selected, the Elder Council shall inform the Membership that recommendations for candidates will be welcomed. The Council shall review the candidates to determine their qualifications. Those Elder-

Candidates approved by at least 75% of all the Elders on the Council shall be presented as Elder-Candidates to the Membership at least one month prior to a Congregational Meeting. During that period, any member who knows any reason why a candidate does not meet the Scriptural qualifications for an Elder should present their objection to the Elder Council. At the Congregational Meeting, the Membership shall vote to affirm the candidates as Elders.

The term for Elders shall be three years. The term shall begin and end at the appropriate annual congregational meeting. Unexpired terms may be filled or Elders may be added at any time during the year. A man may serve an unlimited number of terms but must go through the selection process and be affirmed by the Membership for each three year term. The Senior Pastor is a permanent member of the Council.

5. Leadership of the Elder Council

The Elder Council shall elect a Chairman, Vice-chairman, and Clerk from within the Council each year at the first Council meeting following the Annual Congregational Meeting. The Senior Pastor may not hold any of these positions. The Chairman of the Elder Council shall lead Council and Congregational Meetings, and in his absence, the Vice-Chairman or Clerk shall preside in that order. The Clerk or his designee shall record Council and Congregational Meetings, maintain the Membership Roll, and be the custodian of the church records. Terms for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Clerk shall be one year. To qualify for the position of Chairman, an Elder must have served on the Council for at least one full year. An Elder may not serve as Chairman for more than four consecutive years, nor may an Elder serve as Vice-Chairman for more than four consecutive years.

6. Meetings of the Elder Council

The Council shall meet on a regular basis, with the intention to meet not less than once per month. A quorum of nine Elders, or 51% of all the Elders on the Council, whichever is greater, is required to transact business. Elders will strive to achieve unanimity in decision making, but may decide an issue with a minimum of a 75% affirmative vote of the Elders present, except where otherwise noted in this Constitution. A Council Elder is expected to be in regular attendance at Council meetings.

7. Discipline of Elders

Elders are to be above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2). While this requirement does not mean sinless perfection, it does mean being free of character marring behavior and attitudes that would damage his testimony and credibility as a spiritual leader. An accusation of such a sin against an Elder is to be handled according, and to the extent of 1 Timothy 5:19-22, on the basis of two or more witnesses, and in light of the total teaching of Scripture regarding church discipline. If the accusation is found to be true, and the Elder is without genuine repentance, then per Scripture he is to be rebuked before the congregation. The goal in all cases is to be restoration. However, the Council and the Membership will determine if, or when, the man may continue to serve as an Elder in this Church.

Section C. Non-Council Elders

Non-Council Elders are to meet the same qualifications as Council Elders and are to be selected in like manner. They shall serve three-year terms with no limits to consecutive terms. Assistant Pastors automatically become Non-Council Elders after serving one year in full-time ministry at this church. There shall be an unlimited number of Non-Council Elders.

Non-Council Elders will not have a vote on the Elder Council but will assist and advise the Elder Council in shepherding, oversight responsibility, church organization and issues. Non-Council Elders can be assigned special projects by the Elder Council.

Non-Council Elders, except for Assistant Pastors and Program Staff, can become Council Elders with the vote of the Elder Council. Non-Council Elders must be willing to attend at least 50% of Elder Council meetings. If unable or unwilling to attend a minimum of 50% of Council meetings the Non-Council Elder will not be considered for renewal of his three year term. Assistant Pastors need not meet the 50% attendance requirement as they attend Elder Council meetings at the discretion of the Senior Pastor or the Elder Council.