

Study Aids

For “What’s the Message?” Lessons Interpretive Principles – Part Two

Lesson 67

Comment:

This Study Aid is the second of two parts intended to help you better understand the role and purpose of the prophets, and some basic rules in interpreting prophecy. These points are excerpts from the book, **Prophecy Interpreted** by Dr. John P. Milton.

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1. The Double Emphasis in Prophecy
 - a. Our interpretation of prophecy must be guided by a clear recognition of the two chief points of emphasis in Old Testament prophecy: judgment and redemption.
 - b. The Old Testament covenant always envisions, or sets forth, a goal.
 - c. God promises the fulfillment of that goal.
 - d. God moves forward towards the goal of His covenant with men by judgments, and the primary purpose of preaching judgments was repentance; but often there was no repentance.
 - e. Parallel to and projecting beyond the motif of judgment is that of redemption, and God moves towards the goal of His covenant with men by redemptive acts, or acts of deliverance.

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What is the relevance of Old Testament prophecy for today? How shall we interpret it? How shall we understand it? How shall we use it? How does it relate to the good news of the Gospel? From the negative side, there are at least four ways in which prophecy should not be used.

1. It should never be used with the aim of satisfying human curiosity.
2. It should never be used in the attempt to determine “times and seasons.”
3. It should never be used with reckless disregard of the historically contemporaneous situation, in the attempt to “identify” some man or nations in terms of predictive prophecy.
4. It should never be used without keeping firmly in mind its relation to the fulfillment of the central idea in the covenant goal with Abraham and Israel.

On the other hand, a right interpretation and use of Old Testament prophecy should lead us to:

1. Repentance
2. Faith
3. Peace
4. Faithfulness to duty

The Time Dimensions of Prophecy

There are three points in the time dimension of prophecy. The following is a highly summarized presentation of Dr. Milton's message on this aspect.

1. The Time Dimension of the Past (Israel's early history)

God elected Abraham to be the conduit through which his descendants would learn His holy will. Prophetic preaching must be understood against the background of the covenant with Abraham, a covenant of promise and hope, and the relationship that was expected under that covenant.

2. The Time Dimension of the Present (the prophet's present)

First of all, the prophet speaks to the people of his own time, so it is mandatory for us to know the historical setting and see the parallels for our relevance today. (One of the aims of this course of study has been to give you a better understanding of that historical setting to enable you to see those parallels more clearly.)

3. The Time Dimension of the Future

The prophets look forward to the attainment of the covenant goal; the ultimate glorious victory of the kingdom of God. The Present is always seen in the light of the Past, and the Future in the light of both.

The theme of prophetic preaching is always the ultimate coming of the kingdom of God in all its universal and spiritual implications in the promise of the Messiah, in fulfillment of the covenant of blessing with Abraham. History, and in history, the mighty acts of God move toward this goal.