

Back to the Future

Five Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy

1. The first concern of Old Testament prophets was to call the people of their own day back to living as the people of God.

Historical background

- Look at the beginning of the book. When did the prophet write? Who was king?
- Read about the prophet's time period in the historical books.
- If the prophet wrote over the course of multiple kings, try to determine who was king for each passage that you read.

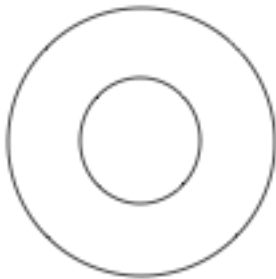
Example: Isaiah 1:1

2. Prophecy is not just a prediction.

Example: Isaiah 1:2-8

3. Prophecy contains telescoping.

Telescoping: events that are separated by long periods of time come together in a single passage, without any indication of their timing.



Perspective of the Prophet



Perspective of History

Example: Isaiah 11:1-9

4. Predictions are either conditional or unconditional.

Conditional: The prediction will come to pass unless the people respond in a certain way.

- Example: Jonah. "In forty days Ninevah will be overthrown."

Unconditional: The prediction will come to pass regardless of how the people respond.

- Example: Isaiah 11:1-9

How can you tell if the prediction is conditional or unconditional?

Unconditional: predictions about God's purposes of grace for his people.

Conditional: everything else.

*Tricky: prophecies addressed to Israel that predict judgment for their enemies.

- ***Unconditional.*** It reveals God's purposes of grace for his people (i.e. protection, vindication).

5. Prophecy is poetry.

Parallelism: a literary device in which two or more lines of poetry complement each other and form a single unit.

Metaphor: a literary device that identifies one object with another.

Imagery: a word picture in which the reader can see, touch, taste, smell, or hear what is being described.

Application: Interpreting Isaiah 9:2-7