

## PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING PROPHECY

Before one begins a study of prophetic literature it is helpful to know that there are 3 primary approaches to interpreting this biblical genre. These 3 approaches consist of premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. Premillennialism views all prophecy as having a literal fulfillment unless clearly indicated otherwise by the passage. The emphasis of the premillennial approach is that Christ's second coming will precede a literal 1,000 year reign on earth. Amillennialism contends that prophecy should not be taken literally and that prophecies regarding Christ's future kingdom should be taken figuratively. Lastly, the postmillennial view argues that the millennium is figurative with Christ ruling from heaven and He will return when Christians fulfill certain criteria by first creating a better world order. The major difference between the 3 approaches is that premillennialism is the result of a literal interpretation of scripture, while amillennialism and postmillennialism are the result of an allegorical and spiritualized interpretation of God's word.

- I. Follow the normal hermeneutic of historical-grammatical-rhetorical interpretation. The historical element means that the cultural background and circumstances of the prophets are considered. The grammatical element means (a) that words are taken in their normal sense unless it is evident that a figure of speech or symbol is used, and (b) that words are considered in the light of their immediate and broad context. The rhetorical elements considers the special features of apocalyptic and prophetic genres and considers the place of figurative and symbolic language.
  - A. Consider how the recipients, in their unique historical setting, would have understood the prophecy
    1. Genesis 12:1-3, 7
    2. Genesis 15:7-8, 18-21
    3. Acts 7:2-5
  - B. Avoid the danger of reading into a passage something that is found elsewhere in scripture - 2 Chronicles 7:14
- II. Compare parallel passages, and fit all prophetic passages together in a unified whole. An understanding of the Book of Revelation, for example, is aided by an understanding of the Book of Daniel
  - A. Daniel 7:25; 12:7 and Revelation 12:14
  - B. Daniel 7:21 and Revelation 13:7
  - C. Daniel 7:13 and Revelation 1:7; 14:14
- III. Recognize the principle of "foreshortening" or perspective, in which events separated by many years are seen together
  - A. Isaiah 9:6-8
  - B. Isaiah 61:1-3; Lu. 4:16-21
- IV. Recognize the several themes of both fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy
  - A. Fulfilled scripture
    1. Seed of woman - Genesis 3:15 (Mt. 1:1-16; Lu. 3:23-38)
    2. Bethlehem - Micah 5:2
    3. Birth, person, deity - Isaiah 9:6-7
    4. Death - Psalm 22, Isaiah 53

- 5. Resurrection - Psalm 16:10
  - B. Unfulfilled scripture - why would not these prophecies be fulfilled literally as well?
- V. Follow consistency in interpreting prophecy
- VI. Determine if the predictions are conditional or unconditional.
  - A. Genesis 22:16-18
  - B. John 14:1-3
- VII. Determine if the predictions are fulfilled or unfulfilled.
  - A. Zechariah 12:10
  - B. Ezekiel 37:21-22, 24-25

\*The basis for these notes is largely derived from Dr. Stephen Lewis' class notes