

RESURRECTION OPC – ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL
Hermeneutics: How to Read the Bible

WEEK 7 | JUNE 5, 2016

Introduction & Acknowledgement

In our first session, we looked at an overall approach to reading Scripture *contextually, grammatically, theologically, and doxologically*. In our last session, we looked at how we use other passages of Scripture – as well as its overall teaching – to aid us in reading every passage of the Bible. Today we take a special look at the interpretation of prophecy and typology. In so doing, we continue to follow the lectures of Dr. Benjamin Shaw.

Typology and Prophecy

“They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things...” (Hebrews 8.5)

Typology

- *Typology* is the study of biblical ‘types’.
 - Berkhof (144-145) defines a *type* as follows:
 - “A type is a fact that teaches a moral truth and predicts some actual realization of that truth.”
 - “The preordained representative relation in which certain persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament bear to corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New.”
 - Shaw summarizes this as follows:
 - “Many elements in the Old Testament were intended to serve a dual purpose. They were to serve for instruction for the people of the Old Testament, and they were point to Christ, either to some aspect of his person or of his work.”
- Examples of types are numerous in the Bible:
 - The Passover Lamb (Ex 12) was a type of Christ (1Cor 5.7).
 - The furniture of the Tabernacle (Ex 25-31) were types of Christ.¹
 - The temple was a type of the church (1Cor 3.16-17; 2Cor 6.16; Eph 219-21).
- A real type always has three characteristics (Berkhof, 145):
 - A type always prefigures something future.
 - There must be a notable, real point of resemblance between the type and the *antitype* (its fulfillment).
 - The type-antitype relationship must be designed by God and supported by Scripture:
 - “Accidental similarity between an Old and New Testament person or event does not constitute the one a type of the other. There must be some Scriptural evidence that it was so designed by God.”
 - Note: This does *not* mean that every OT type must be labeled as such in the NT:
 - Does the NT ever speak of David as a type of Christ? – Yet he is such (Ezk 34.23-24; 37.24-25).
 - On the other hand, Rahab’s scarlet cord (Josh 2) was probably *not* a type of the blood of Christ.
 - For help, use the analogy of Scripture and the analogy of the faith (*see Lesson 6*).
- Shaw points out to us that typology may be *layered* – that is, *a single type can have multiple fulfillments*:
 - For example, take Ezekiel’s prophecy of the dry bones (Ezk 37).
 - One typical fulfillment of this occurred when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian Exile.
 - It is also typically fulfilled in the new birth of individual believers (Eph 2.1-5; 5.14).
 - It will be antotypically fulfilled in the final resurrection on the last day (Jn 5.25-29).
 - All such typological relations and fulfillments are part of “the true and full sense” of Scripture (WCF 1.9).
- Before moving from typology to prophecy, we quote Shaw’s reminders from last week that applies to both:
 - The “true and full sense” is the God-intended sense – “that which God the Author of Scripture in and by the Scriptures gives men to know and understand.”
 - “It is important for the interpreter to pay careful attention to the whole of Scripture. It is usually the case that when a particular passage is one that has a fuller meaning, other passages will make this clear. Many references in the New Testament clarify the full sense of an Old Testament text... It is also the case that passages that have a fuller meaning will be commonly referred to in later Old Testament passages.”

¹ See “Exodus” in *The English Bible: a Concise Summary*, available at: resurrectionopc.org/resources/discipleship/.

Prophecy

- Prophecy is closely related to typology. But whereas typology involves the foreshadowing or interpretation of *theology*, prophecy involves the foreshadowing or interpretation of *history*.
- The Greek word 'prophecy' (*prophēteuō*) is a combination of *pro* (before) + *phēmi* (to say). It carries both a *spatial* and *temporal* sense:
 - Spatial – the prophets spoke God's message 'before' the people (i.e., in public)
 - Temporal – the prophets spoke of things 'beforehand' (i.e., things yet to come)
- Combining these, Berkhof defined prophecy as "the proclamation of that which God revealed," (148).
- Theological polemics in the last 300 years have clouded the interpretation of prophecy:
 - Enlightenment rationalists denied the possibility of truly predictive prophecy, and so claimed that predictive portions of OT prophecies must have been written later than historically believed. This leads critical scholars to postulate the existence of 2-3 'Isaiahs,' etc.
 - Partly in reaction to this, dispensationalist teachers began to insist on a literalistic approach that assigned the fulfillment of Israel prophecies to the distant future and restricted their recipients to ethnic Israelites only. This reaction, however well-intended, implicitly denigrated legitimate biblical typology and led to the postulation that there were two distinct peoples of God (ethnic Israel and the church).
- Biblical prophecy has the following general characteristics:
 - It evaluates history from God's perspective:
 - The books of Joshua – 2 Kings are called the "former prophets" not because they predict things to come (though in some cases they do), but because they are *history written from the prophetic perspective* – "essentially giving God's evaluation of that history," (Shaw).
 - For example, note how the writer comments on the reign of each king – either that he did "what was right" or "what was wrong" "in the eyes of the LORD."
 - It looks to the future from its own vantage point:
 - "If a man looks at a distant mountain range, it may appear to him all one connected range. But as he gets closer, he begins to see that some of the mountains that appeared close together at first are actually quite far apart. So future events in the prophets may be closely tied together, even though in their fulfillment they are centuries apart. Predictions in the writing prophets concerning the Day of the Lord commonly bring together some elements that were fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, and others that now clearly await his return. A similar example is found in Matthew 24. Some of the events predicted there come to pass at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Other events will apparently be fulfilled at the time of Jesus' second coming. Such an arrangement is known as 'prophetic foreshortening.'" (Shaw)
 - It is expressed in the imagery, language, and customs of its time:
 - Isaiah 2 pictures the nations coming to the mountain of the LORD – the essence being that Gentiles are included in the people of God. This is fulfilled not in worship at the Temple Mount, but in believers being incorporated into the church wherever they live.
 - Likewise, Ezekiel 38-39 pictures a great battle with the people of God (the seed of Shem) arrayed against nations descending from Noah's other sons, Ham and Japheth (see Genesis 10). The fact that the enemies are divinely defeated points us to spiritual rather than physical warfare. "In short, the message of Ezekiel 38-39 is essentially the same as the message of Genesis 3.15. The seed of the serpent will attack the seed of the woman, but will be defeated, crushed under the heel of the seed of the woman. What is depicted in Ezekiel 38-39 is the ongoing warfare between the two seeds, a warfare that will continue until the return of Christ," (Shaw).
 - It may involve conditions (see Jonah 3.4).
 - It often involves symbolism and/or hyperbole (Ezekiel 36, Matthew 24.2)
 - It may involve action-symbolism (see Isaiah 20, Ezekiel 4-5).
 - It frequently employs poetic language (see Lesson 8).
- To interpret biblical prophecy, certain considerations must be kept in view:
 - Take the language in its ordinary sense, unless contextual clues indicate otherwise.
 - Pay attention to historical context. (Who was king when the prophet prophesied? What was happening?)
 - Seek the fundamental idea of figurative language (for examples, see Isaiah 11 and Ezekiel 23).
 - Consider the way the NT deals with OT prophecies (see Lesson 9).