

Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 12

Date of Daniel, History of Traditions School, Oral Tradition and Writing

C. There are Alleged Late Linguistic Features for Daniel

1. Greek Loan Words

We are looking at the arguments for the late date of Daniel. We've looked at the assumption that predictive prophecy doesn't happen. We've looked at the historical errors and now C., "There are alleged late linguistic features." This argument centers over the use of several Greek loan words found in Daniel 3:5 for musical instruments, as well as the use of Aramaic that is said to be of a late type of Aramaic. As you are aware, Daniel 2:4 through the end of chapter 7 was written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. The Aramaic of that section is said to be a late form of Aramaic. Again, I don't think either of those arguments is convincing. There's an abundant evidence of contacts between the Greeks and the ancient Near East long prior to the time of Alexander the Great. In other words, the assumption is that if you have Greek loan words it would have to be after the time of the development of the Greek empire under Alexander and the spread of the Greek language in connection with his conquest. The argument can really be turned around. It is surprising there are not more Greek words than there are if the book were actually written in the second century B.C. There are only three, and these are technical kinds of words for musical instruments, so it doesn't appear to be something fairly significant.

2. Late Aramaic

Those who study the Aramaic question will find this gets rather technical and complex. An article stated that 90 percent of the vocabulary in the Aramaic vocabulary of Daniel is attested from documents of the 5th century BC or earlier. If you look at page 16 of your citations, there's some material there at the bottom of the page and over onto page 17 from Joyce Baldwin's, *Daniel* commentary in the Tyndale series. You'll notice she is speaking about the Aramaic argument and says, "The Aramaic of Daniel is shown to be Imperial Aramaic, or 'in itself, practically undatable with any conviction within c. 600 to 330 B.C.' It is therefore irrelevant to make distinctions between 'Eastern' and 'Western'

Aramaic, which developed later. The only indication of a place of origin arises out of the word order, which betrays Akkadian influence, and proves ‘that the Aramaic of Daniel belongs to the early tradition of Imperial Aramaic as opposed to later local, Palestinian derivatives of imperial Aramaic.’” If you look at your bibliography on page 8, you’ll notice there is an essay by K. A. Kitchen, “The Aramaic of Daniel,” and then there are three articles by Edwin Yamauchi, “The Archaeological Background of Daniel,” “Daniel and Contacts between the Aegean and the Near East Before Alexander,” and “The Greek words in Daniel in Light of Greek Influence in the Near East.” Those articles are particularly useful on this question of what kind of Aramaic we have, as well as these Greek loan words. I think that both Baldwin’s and Yamauchi’s conclusions that these are not strong arguments are very well argued. I won’t take the time to read further from Baldwin in your citations.

3. Argument from Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls)

But let’s go to the handout. We read there that evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls attests to the existence of Daniel in copies in Qumran in 150 to 100 B.C., at the latest, or perhaps even earlier. There is a strong argument for dating them both prior to 165 B.C. There is not sufficient time to copy the composition and it having achieved canonical status with the Qumran community if the late date for its composition is accepted. In other words, if we’re going to say it was written in about 165, well by 150, at the latest, it’s already recognized in the Qumran community as a canonical part of Scripture. It seems like that is very improbable if it had only been recently written.

4. Conclusion

Conclusion. There are no compelling reasons for dating Daniel late. There are adequate answers for each of the historical and linguistic arguments for the late date. The underlying question is whether or not one is prepared to accept the possibility of general predictive prophecy. If one is convinced that Daniel could not have spoken so clearly about the future, especially the time of the Antiochus Epiphanes, then one must seek to

date it subsequent to this time. For those who accept the possibility of genuine predictions, this material, along with many other predictive sections of Scripture, are used as evidence that there is a God who controls all of history, who has spoken to his people about future events through his servants the prophets.

Student Question

Student Question: Why did Daniel write in both Hebrew and Aramaic?

I don't think that anybody has ever clearly answered that. Some try to argue that the part in Hebrew is directed more to the Jewish people, and the other section to the world at large. Aramaic was more universally understood. But I'm not exactly sure you can explain that. I can't give you more than that. I don't think anyone ever has given a good sound explanation for that.

C. The History of Traditions School

1. Oral Tradition -- H.S. Nyberg

Section C., as far as our general topic is concerned, "Were of the Prophets writers" is "The history of traditions school." That is something that has developed in the last half century. One of the early promoters of the view was a man named H.S. Nyberg, from Uppsala in Sweden. He wrote a book *Studies of Hosea*. According to Nyberg, the normal manner of transmission of various types of information in the Ancient Near East was oral rather than written. So this history of traditions attempted to argue that the means and manner of transmission of these bodies of material that he found in the Old Testament recorded by the prophets was an oral means of transmission rather than written. He said that stories, songs, legends and myths were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, rather than as written literature. He claimed that this is true of the Old Testament so that pre-exilic Palestine writing was limited to practical matters such as contracts, monuments, official lists, letters—those things that were more technical things. But transmission of history, epic tales, folk legends, etc. were done orally.

Nyberg then proposes that if that's the case, then the conclusion is that the written

Old Testament comes along much later. It was the creation the Jewish community between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the Maccabean period (c. 165 B.C.). So in that period when Israel went to Babylon until second century B.C. was the period when all this oral material was put into the written form. What is in written form prior that time must be considered very slight. Transmission was almost entirely oral.

Thirdly, the prophetic preaching was also transmitted orally and was only written down after the Babylonian captivity. The prophets were not writers. See that's the question we started this discussion with: were the prophets writers? He said, no they were preachers. The concepts that they're proclaimed were best done orally until after the exile. There's a quotation there from Nyberg, found in an article by Eissfeldt in *The Old Testament in Modern Study*, it's in your bibliography where Nyberg says, "The written Old Testament is a creation of the Jewish community after the Exile; what preceded it was certainly only in small measure in fixed written form. Only with the greatest reserve can we reckon with writers among the prophets. We must reckon with circles, sometimes centers, of tradition that preserved and handed down the material. It is self-evident that such a process of transmission could not continue without some change in the material handed on, but we have, not textual corruptions, but an active transformation. For the rest, Old Testament scholarship would do well to consider earnestly what possibility it can ever have of regaining the *ippissima verba*, the very words of Old Testament personalities. We have nothing but the tradition of their sayings, and it is in the highest degree unlikely that any but the oral form of transmission ever existed for them." It pulls your thinking out of the categories of written literature into the categories of an oral transferal of tradition down through the circles of disciples from generation to generation in which process the material is transformed. You can't really get back to the very words of the prophets because of the nature in which this material was handed down.

2. Harris Birkeland

Number 2, Harris Birkeland was a student of Nyberg and he took his views and applied them to individual prophetic books. He said the prophetic books were most likely

the literary representation of an already petrified oral tradition. The prophet was surrounded by a circle, small at first, but then ever growing which continued his work after his death. It's among these circles of disciples that the living transmission of prophetic utterance found their home. Birkeland conjectured that the prophets were kept alive or combined into ever growing larger "tradition complexes," combinations of prophetic renouncements and tradition complexes. Besides the words of prophets other information about them was fused together. Thus through the generations the prophetic sayings were handed down and in process were constantly remolded. What was finally retained depended on what proved itself to be relevant and active in the life of the people, so that in the process there was a choice made, which Birkeland compared to the survival of the fittest in natural life. What proved itself significant and relevant was preserved. The whole transmission process took place in the so called "tradition circles." Because of the means of transmission one can no longer say what originally belonged to the prophet and what should be ascribed to the tradition. So he says in most cases we must give up the attempt "to get back to the prophets and the great Genius himself." Where are the very words of the prophet? Well this whole idea about the method of transmission tells us you can't really know exactly. In consequence we must banish from our study of the prophetic books such ideas as "notes," "larger literary pieces," expressions which have been shaped according to literary patterns. We must rather substitute for these such expressions as are suitable for the oral process of transmission, such as "tradition," "complex," "circles," etc. Further, we must fully recognize the fact that "questions about the *ippissima verba* of the prophets can only be solved, if at all, not on literary-critical but on traditio-historical grounds." In other words, you move out of literary kinds of concerns into concerns of oral tradition.

3. Eduard Nielsen, Oral Tradition and the Modern Problem Old Testament

Introduction

The third important thing here in this approach is Eduard Nielsen, his volume *Oral Tradition and The Modern Problem Old Testament Introduction*, which was published in

English and he goes along the same lines as Nyberg and Birkeland. I want to give A. “A synopsis of this thesis.” Pull your attention to some of the material that he brings out in his book, not so much for the argument that he’s making, although that is certainly important, but just for the evidence he gives of the role that memorization of enormous amounts of material that was handed down orally played in ancient near eastern culture. Some of this is interesting.

1. Memorization in Babylon

On your handout, “The first chapter of this book deals with the use of oral tradition in the Ancient Near East. Nielsen shows that the modern contempt for learning by heart is not characteristic of the ancient Semites. I think that contempt is still significant for the 21st century America. We don’t like memorizing things. He calls attention to some Babylonian texts that indicated that memorization of old texts that form the basis of oral tradition was not strange in Babylon. Look at your citation on page 17, Section A, “The modern contempt for learning texts by heart is the necessary basis for oral tradition... The ancient Mesopotamian culture seems to have been enthusiastic about writing; but we have some contexts that stress the importance attached to learning by heart. From the often quoted conclusion of that Irra myth we cite: ‘The scribe who learns this text by heart escapes the enemy is honored. In the congregation of the learned where my name is constantly spoken I will open his ears.’ In Ashurbanipal’s prayer to Shamash, notable because it concludes with a curse and a benediction, somewhat similar to ancient oriental royal inscription, in which we read in the benediction: ‘Whosoever shall learn this text by heart and glorify the judge of the gods, Shamash may he make his precious, may the words of his mouth please the people.’” This is a reference to learning these texts committing them to memory.

2. Memorization of the Koran

Back to the handout. In Arabia, the Koran especially in the early time of existence was transmitted orally. Anyone who desired to be admitted to the mosque of Al Azhar in

Cairo must be able to recite the whole Koran without hesitation. That mosque is still a very important mosque in Cairo. Look at paragraph B. on page 18 of your citation, “Turning to West-Semitic culture we will remark that it is quite apparent that the written word is not highly valued. It is not considered an independent mode of expression. Even if the Quran has given rise to a ‘theology of Scripture’ which may well be comparable with that of Judaism and Protestantism, the written copies of the Koran play an astonishingly unobtrusive role in Islam. The Koran has constantly—as in the first days of its existence—has been handed down orally; everyone wants to be admitted to the mosque Al Azhar (in Cairo) must be able to recite the whole Koran without hesitation, and their holy writ is learned by heart by one of the initiated reciting it and the younger disciples repeating it, until they know it by heart.” Now that is a different world than we live. To commit to memory the whole book of the Koran by hearing it orally, cite it, and then committing it to your memory so you can then recite it as a group of initiates to the mosque.

3. Johanan ben Zakkai and the Mishnah Memorization

Back to your outline. In Judaism, Johanan ben Zakkai, a prisoner in the camp of Vespasian, could recite the entire Mishnah from memory and thereby know exactly what time of a day it was, because he knew exactly how long it would take to recite each part of the Mishnah. Go to paragraph C., at the bottom of page 18 of your citations. The story tells of Johanan ben Zakkai in the camp of Vespasian. After he had been received in an audience by Vespasian for the first time ‘they seized him and locked him up with seven locks, and asked him what time it was at night. And he told them. And what time it was during the day, and he told them, and how did our master Johanan ben Zakkai know? From the recitation of the Mishnah. In other words Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, not only knew his Mishnah by heart, but he knew just how long it took to recite each paragraph, and how much time he needed to get through it all.’” So somebody asked him what time it was and he’d know because of his recitation of the Mishnah. Now that’s probably a little over exaggerated, but you see what Nielsen here is establishing, is that in the ancient

Near East, people committed enormous amounts of material to their memories.

4. Plato and Oral Memory

Paragraph D at the top of page 19, which is from Nielsen again, “As an explicit reaction against the spread of the art of writing we may cite the following words of Plato (from the *Phadreaus*). They are remarkable as the reaction which does not originate with the common people, the ignorant crude masses—as an illiterate people are not characterized by contempt, but by respect for the written word. These words represent rather an attitude Plato had in common with the intellectual aristocracy of his day.” And here Plato quotes Socrates. Plato was a pupil of Socrates. “Socrates: I heard, then, that at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of that ancient gods of the country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis and the name of the god himself was Theuth. He it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, and also draughts and dice, and, most important of all, letters. Now the king of all Egypt at that time was Thamus, who lived in the great city of the upper region, which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon. To him came Theuth to show his inventions, saying they ought to be imparted to the other Egyptians. But Thamus asks what use there was in each, and as Theuth enumerated their uses, expressed praise or blame, according as he approved or disapproved. The story goes that Thamus said many things to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts, which would take too long to repeat; but when they came to letters, ‘This invention, O king,’ said Theuth, ‘will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is in the elixir of memory and wisdom that I have discovered.’ But Thamus replied, ‘Most ingenious Theuth, one has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory

within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom but not true wisdom,” Why? ““for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise but only appear wise.””

5. Modern Reflections

I find that quite interesting and if that point is made by Socrates many, many centuries ago, and then you come up to our technological age where we not only have the printed word but now there’s all this information that we are drowned in and we look at all this stuff all the time and 90% of it we forget right away because we haven’t internalized it. It’s just kind of floating out there. We may have lost a lot by turning away from committing things to memory—particularly in the realm of Scripture and the words of Scripture and things of that sort. So, I find this fascinating, not so much because it really supports the argument that Nielsen is trying to make with it, but just because of the issues and questions that it raises.

Back to page 16 of the handout. Thousands of Brahmans still learned their books by heart, and it is 153,826 words long. Hindus transmitted their Vedas from generation to generation orally. The same was true in ancient Greece.

6. Israel and Memory and Writing

Back on page 19 of the citation there’s a paragraph on that. We won’t take time to look at that. But Nielsen cites all these examples and then what he says is that in Israel, religious texts were transmitted in the same fashion. And only after the exile did they find great fixation. And he agrees with Nyberg that the introduction of writing was due to a crisis of confidence, and that crisis of confidence was caused by going into exile. They were going to lose stuff so they needed to write it down.

He attempts to establish this contention in a two-fold manner, one negatively by establishing this subordinate role of writing in Israel and then second positively by

establishing the significance of oral transmission. I wanted to take time to go through his arguments of that discussion, but according to him, prior to the exile of Israel writing was primarily only for practical purposes such as contracts, governments, monuments, official register's lists, letters, and not used for purely literary purposes. The tradition of history, epic tales, folk legends, even laws were to him handed down orally. In his conclusion, he says, "Writers should not be reckoned among the prophets and poets except with the greatest caution." That's the traditions-history approach.

B. Assessment of Nielsen's Thesis

1. OT Oral Tradition Examples: Exod. 10 :1-2

B. "Assessment of Nielsen's thesis." It's certainly true that oral tradition existed in ancient Israel, but we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. There's a Dutch scholar, W.H. Gispen that wrote a monograph on oral tradition in the Old Testament. In that monograph, he discusses twenty-eight different texts in the Old Testament that speak of oral tradition. Outstanding among them are Exodus 10:1, 2, Deuteronomy 6:20-25, Judges 6:13, Psalm 44:1-3 and Psalm 78. Let's look at a couple of these. Exodus 10:1 and 2, that's in the context of the plagues and you read there, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Go to pharaoh for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials, so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them.'" Then in verse two, "That you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, that you may know I am the Lord." Part of the Lord's purpose here was that the parents would tell these things to their children orally and their children would pass it on down to their children, and that story of what God did would be transmitted through the generations.

2. Deuteronomy 6:20-25

Deuteronomy 6:20-25, "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?' Tell him:" and here's this story of what God has done for his people, "'We were slaves of

Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders, great and terrible, upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and gave us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us that will be our righteousness.’ So, tell that to your children when they ask, what do these things mean.”

3. Psalms 44 & 78

Let’s go to Psalm 44:1-3, “We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in the days long ago. With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.”

Then Psalm 78, let’s start at verse 1, “O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old. What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done” and so on. Verse 6, “So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.”

4. Summary

So, there are clear references to an oral tradition functioning in the Old Testament period, but what we should notice is, one, this oral transmission is found in a *sitz im Leben* in the family circle. What is its situation in life? It’s the fathers telling the children, the children telling their children. The persons who passed on their tradition were fathers

to their children. There is no evidence of professional bards or troubadours such as existed in other lines and places. Two, it has its purpose in the words of Psalm 78:6 that the generation to come might know the works of God. Three, the tradition passed on consisted at least from what we can tell from references in summarizations of the basic facts of redemptive history. A brief resume, you might say, of what God had done for his people. Four, which I think quite important, that tradition was never isolated from the written fixation.

In Exodus 17:14, for example, we're back to the Mosaic here—this is where Israel is attacked by the Amalekites on the way from Egypt to Sinai. Then Lord says to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Sure, that could be told with children but it was also written down so that the tradition was not isolated from a written fixation. This was also the case outside of Israel for the most part, even in those countries Nielsen mentioned, Egypt and Babylon, and also with the Koran. You see the examples that Nielsen uses really don't establish his point. Because those legends learned in ancient Mesopotamian were texts that were memorized; the Koran was a text that was memorized and passed on. So, yes there was an oral tradition but the oral tradition doesn't operate outside or apart from a written fixation of the text even in his examples. The oral recitation follows the written original.

5. Written or Oral Law Codes

Five, I don't think it can be denied Israel had written laws at an early time. He tries to argue that even the laws were passed down orally. There are numerous law codes in written form that have been uncovered in the Middle East that long predate the time of Moses. For example, the Hammurabi code, and the Lipit-Ishtar code. They are all in an earlier time than Moses and all in written form on clay tablets.

6. Written History -- Numbers 33:2

And finally, there's also explicit mention of written history. Numbers 33:2 speaks

of the record Moses kept of the journey from place to place. Numbers 21:14 speaks of the Book of the Wars of the Lord, called a book or a scroll. It must have been a written source. Yet Nielsen maintains it existed only in oral form as a poetic composition until the time of the fall of Samaria. In 1 Kings 11:41 the book where the history of Solomon is mentioned. First Kings 14:19 and 29 mentions the book that chronicles the kings of Judah.

7. Writing Prophets Texts: 1 & 2 Chronicles

Further, there is mention of the writings of prophets. Our concern here is primarily who the prophets were. Were the prophets writers? Look at 1 Chronicles 29:29, “As for the events of King David’s reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer, together with details of his reign and power, and the circumstances that surrounded him and Israel and the kingdoms of all the other lands.” It sounds pretty comprehensive. It says these were written by these prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. Then in 2 Chronicles 12:15, “As for the events of Rehoboam’s reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the records of Shemiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer that deal with genealogies?” And then there are three more references there to Iddo the seer. Interestingly enough, 2 Chronicles 32:32 refers to Isaiah. Let’s look at that one, “The other events of Hezekiah’s reign and his acts of devotion are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the books of the kings of Judah and Israel.”

So it seems to me that even though it’s an interesting idea and even though Nielsen appeals to a lot of these examples of enormous amounts of material committed to memory that was transmitted in oral form, it doesn’t make the case that that oral tradition existed apart from a written fixation. So I don’t think he established his point.

8. Ps. 77 – Example of Oral Tradition

I might just insert here that there are some places the evidence of an oral tradition in ancient Israel supplements the written material of the Old Testament. And what I mean

by that is if you look at Psalm 77, it talks about the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Go to verse 15, “With your mighty arm, you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” In that reference to the Red Sea; it mentions here “thunder and lightning.” If you go back through the text in Exodus 14, there’s no reference to thunder and lightning or storm events. Where did that come from? It may have come out of the oral tradition from the Psalmists being aware that is using it in his description of what happened at that time.

9. Joshua 24 as an Example of Oral Tradition

In Joshua 24:2 there is a covenant renewal ceremony at the end of Joshua’s life that he held at Shechem. And Joshua says in 24:2, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.’” Where’s Joshua get that? There’s no reference to Terah and Nahor worshiping other gods in Genesis. There may well have been oral information that came down through the generations.

10. 2 Tim. 3:8 as an Example of Oral Tradition

In 2 Timothy 3:8, you have a reference to the magicians of the time of the exodus in Egypt, Jannes and Jambres. Where do those names come from? There is no reference in the book of Exodus to the names of the magicians. It may have come down through oral tradition. There are a lot of examples of that kind of information in the later points of the Old Testament that were in the New Testament included that’s not in earlier written material of the canonical books of the Old Testament. So I don’t think we need to be defensive about a role that oral tradition may have played in ancient Israel. It may have

been a very prominent thing. But the point is that it didn't function in the way Nielsen is trying to say that it did—that it was the means of transmission of these great bodies of prophetic material down through centuries of time until ultimately it came to a written fixation.

11. Conclusion

So, in conclusion: One, even though oral tradition existed in ancient Israel it did not play the role that Nielsen ascribes to it. And two, I don't think there's any convincing evidence that writing was not used for literary purposes prior to the exile. That's contrary to all we know about ancient areas of the world, as well as the Old Testament. Recent extra-biblical archaeological findings at Ebla, for example, established the use of writing for, "literary purposes" in the time prior to Abraham. You're going way back to about 2300 B.C. in Ebla, and according to what is said about those texts, even though the texts themselves haven't been published, there's a lot of epic kind of story material there. And three, the sources referred to by the chronicler indicate the prophets did write. The chronicler specifically names a number of prophets who wrote. Now Isaiah was the only one mentioned who was one of the writers of the canonical prophets. The other's material wasn't preserved, but they were prophets who wrote. There is no reason to conclude that the prophets were not writers. One should not overlook the detailed description of the writing process of the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 36.

IX. Some Hermeneutical Principles for the Interpretation of Prophetic Writings

That brings us to Roman numeral IX, "Some hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of prophetic writings," and A., "Some general characteristics of predictive prophecy." I want to look at those general characteristics first, and then under B. "Some guidelines for interpretation."

1. The Purpose of Predictive Prophecy

So first some general characteristics of predictive prophecy. 1. "The purpose of

predictive prophecy.” We’ve already referred to two aspects, you might say, of biblical prophecy that sometimes have been labeled with the terms “forth-telling” and “foretelling.” By forth-telling I mean exhortation, reproof, correction, and instruction. By foretelling I mean prediction of things to come to pass in the future, some in the more immediate future and some in the distant future. I think that quite commonly the forth-telling aspect of a prophetic message is neglected in favor of the foretelling aspect in a way that often obscures the fundamental purpose of the prophetic message.

We’re going to talk here about the purpose of predictive prophecy. What is it? I think its purpose is not to cater to the appetite of people who are curious about the future and predictive prophecy should not be used in that way today. The predictive element in prophecy—which is what most people think of when you talk about prophets—should never be separated or isolated from its paraneitic function, that is, from its instructional nature. The prophetic message is meant to exhort, to reprove, to reflect, to encourage, and to call to repentance.

Look at your citations page 20. There are I think 3 different writers here. First is from William Dyrness and notice what he said, “It is no coincidence that the publication of Hal Lindsey’s first book on prophecy [the *Late Great Planet Earth*, an enormously popular book 25 years ago] coincided with the greatest revival of astrology in three hundred years. (It is interesting to note how often his book appears in bookstores alongside astrology manuals.) Man can escape as easily into prophecy as into astrology. In either case he is a pawn and thus relieved of moral responsibility. That this was no part of Lindsey’s purposes from the final pages of the book.... But, we must be careful that our longing for Christ’s return is not motivated by our desire to escape responsibility.”

And then Ross in the next paragraph, “If the prophecies are indeed being motivated by a basic ethical concern, as I am convinced a detailed study will demonstrate, then it is our response that is the most crucial issue. If we should become experts in prophetic interpretation, if we have all knowledge of things future, yes, even if we know the day and hour of Jesus’ coming, but if our lives are not transformed by the expectation of what God will do, then we’ve turned prophetic study into a parlor game

and our knowledge becomes a curse rather than a blessing.”

Then lastly Dwight Wilson now puts here something that has often been, I think, a weak feature about premillennial eschatological thought. I would identify myself as premillennial, but there has been a lot of abuses of prophetic interpretation for premillennialists. He says, “The premillenarian’s history, is strewn with a mass of erroneous speculations which have undermined their credibility. Sometimes false indentifications have been made dogmatically, at other times only as probabilities or possibilities, but the result has always been the same—the increased skepticism toward premillennialism. The persons confronted with a premillenarian’s presentation need to be conscious of the composite past of prophetic interpretation, which has included in the following phenomena. The current crisis is usually identified as a sign of the end, whether it was the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Palestine War, the Suez Crisis, the June War, and the Yom Kippur War. The revival of the Roman Empire has been identified variously as Mussolini’s empire, the League of Nations, the United Nations, the European defense community, the Common Market, and NATO. Speculation on the Antichrist included Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, and Henry Kissinger.” There’s a history of that kind of identification with the fulfillment of certain prophetic sections in the Old Testament of the current events that have proven themselves erroneous time after time. Some people get caught up in that kind of thing, kind of lost and fascinated by it.

2. Functions of Predictive Prophecy in Scripture

Let’s turn to the Bible itself as far as the function of the predictive prophecy, what is its purpose? Look at 1 John 3:3. After speaking about the second coming of Christ in verse 2, “We know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.” In other words, the second coming of Christ is not something just for speculation. It will affect the way you live now.

Look at 1 Peter 4:7 as well, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded, self-controlled so that you may pray because Christ is going to return.” That’s to affect the way you live now, “Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks he shall speak as he is speaking the very words of God. If one serves you should do it with strength.” Why? “Because the end of all things is near, it’s coming.”

Look at 2 Peter 3:11. In verse 10 he spoke about the heavens disappearing, destroyed by fire, earth and everything in it lay bare. “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You all ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God.” Look at verse 14, “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him.” 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, “Now dear brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you for you know very well that the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” And he goes on in verse 6 about our response, “So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert, self-controlled.” Down to verse 8, “Let us be self-controlled putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” Verse 11, “Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

3. Purpose of Predictive Prophecy

We look at a text like that where the predictive element in prophecy is given to God’s people to show them that his program of redemption is moving forward according to his divine purpose, plan and schedule. History of all peoples and nations are subject to this sovereign ordering of the historical process as it moves forward through his purposes. That fact is intended to affect the manner of life of those who hear that message. The prophets spoke to induce holy living and obedience to God among God’s people, in their time, as well as in the time of those who live long after the time in which they preached.

We should not lose sight of that because that to me is the most important part of the reason for the initial delivery of the message. Yes, God does have a purpose and a plan, there are these things that are going to happen in times in the future to us. But that should shape the way in which we live now. So that forth-telling aspect of the prophetic message shouldn't be swallowed up by interest in the foretelling aspect of the prophetic message. Okay, we'll have to stop there.

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