

Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 16

Apologetic Value of Prophecy, Introduction to Obadiah

X. Apologetic Value of Prophecy

Last week I gave you Roman numeral X. I hope you were able to look through that because what I intended by handing that out was to save time in going through that. Let me just run through this and then if you have questions perhaps we can discuss it further. But I'm not going to read through the entirety of that handout but highlight a few things.

A. Does biblical prophecy have apologetic value?

A. is, "Does biblical prophecy have apologetic value? Preliminary considerations." Historically, there are many people who feel there is apologetic value in predictive prophecy, and therefore it is an apologetic tool that can be used effectively to argue for the truthfulness of the Bible, and the existence of God who has spoken through Scripture. Because you can look at the prophecies, given centuries ago, and see fulfillment in much later times, and that provides a good apologetic tool for arguing for the truthfulness of Scripture and God's existence.

1. Aalders: Little Value

So my first statement there is that there's good reason to answer that question affirmatively. Is there apologetic value? I think there is. But there are some evangelicals among us who would answer negatively. Now, when you get outside the evangelical world there are a lot of critical scholars who say there is no value whatsoever. I use for purposes of illustration, a Dutch scholar G.C. Aalders, an Old Testament professor at University of Amsterdam where I did my work. The volume he wrote, you can see it under there in the second paragraph is called *The False Prophet in Israel*. He discusses in that book this issue of apologetic value. He notes some positive factors such as the use of prophecy fulfillment in a positive

way and those positive factors are numbered 1-5 on page 1 of your outline. I won't review all of them, but you get over to page 2 Aalders has some serious objections to appealing to the fulfillment of prophecies as a criterion for demonstrating the truth of Scripture. In his view, when you look at those objections, the objections show that the apologetic value for the argument is not as great as you might initially be inclined to think. Then what follows is a list of his objections. There are three of them.

a. Disputes on Fulfillment

The first one is a "Disputes on fulfillment." He quotes for example Abraham Keunen in his book *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, and it gives a list of unfulfilled prophecies. He says Keunen has turned the apologetic argument around and on the basis of non-fulfilled prophecies and has argued against fulfilled prophecies.

b. Disputes on Dating and Subjective Factors

Secondly, "Disputes on dating and subjective factors in assessing the connections between prophesy and its fulfillment." In other words, you get into disputes with Daniel and the second part of Isaiah. Is Daniel dated in the time that it claims to be or is that some anonymous person writing around 165 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes had already appeared on the scene?

He quotes a man named Davidson who says that if the argument of fulfillment will really have evidential value it must adhere to the following conditions, "First the *known promulgation* must be prior to the event. Secondly, there must be a *clear and palpable fulfillment* of it. Lastly the *nature of the event itself* if, when the prediction of it was given it lay *remote* from human view, and was such as could not be foreseen by any supposable *effort of reason*, or be *deduced* upon principles of *calculation* derived from *probability* or *experience*." Now in that statement all of those italicized words are what Aalders would call

subjective judgments. Things like known promulgation, nature of the event could not be foreseen by effort of reason, could not be seen or produced by deduction. Then Aalders says that with respect to those subjective value judgments, it's clear that people will differ in their conclusions so that a real convincing truth can never be found. But then you see what he does, he turns that around and says that the reverse is also true, so that no convincing proof against the divine origin of prophecy can be made by her non-fulfillment as Keunen attempts. In other words, the whole business can fall because it is subjectively determined. So that's his second objection.

c. Symbolic Language Nullifies Apologetic Value

The third one is "symbolic language nullifies apologetic value." I might say from the outset that Aalders is an amillennialist. He is inclined to take the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament for Christ in a spiritual or figurative kind of sense and apply them to the church. So several lines down in that paragraph under symbolic and apologetic value he says that this creates a particular difficulty for appealing to prophecy and fulfillment as the apologetic tool. Aalders argues that the literal approach of men like Keith does not do justice to the symbolic nature of many prophecies. It is Aalders' view that the prophecies often speak of Jerusalem, Zion, and the temple in order to indicate spiritual realities of the new covenant.

Take the Isaiah 2 passage, "Everyone will come to the mountain of the Lord it will be high and exalted." That's the coming of the Church! Assyria and Babylon typify sinful and destructive directions. He is not talking about a series of Babylons, but the enemies of God's kingdom, in a spiritual sense. He adds that he cannot see how, notice this, "one who adopts a more literal method of interpretation such as Keith, can keep himself free from the chiliast error."

Do you know what the chiliast error is? Chiliast is a thousand! It is premillennial eschatology, where you take these prophecies that speak of the

future thousand-year reign of Christ here on earth in which swords will be beat into plowshares. So you see what he is saying is, if you're doing interpretation taking it literally, you're going to become a premillennialist. That's unthinkable for somebody like Aalders. He says that were the prophecies concerning Babylon to be fulfilled literally down to the details, one cannot propose a different manner of fulfillment for the prophecies with regard to Jerusalem and Israel. One should then also expect the detailed literal fulfillment of these prophecies. It is thus clear, according to Aalders, that appeal to the literal fulfillment of prophecies entangles apologetics in a great difficulty.

But, and here's where all the good points, if one abandons the literal method of interpretation in favor of a spiritual fulfillment then one loses his weapon. Why? The spiritual fulfillment is difficult to explain to those who oppose the Christian faith. In other words, if you're going to use prophecy and fulfillment as an apologetic tool and you're going to interpret it symbolically, it cuts the force of the apologetic argument.

d. Observation: Amillennialists—Presuppositional Apologetics, Premillennialists - Evidentialists

I remember reading this some years ago now, and something dawned on me but I never put it together before. I think this is true, and that is: If you look out at evangelical interpreters, you will find that amillennialist interpreters are normally presuppositionalists in apologetics. Amillennialists tend to interpret more symbolically and figuratively, and they do not normally use prophecy and fulfillment as an evidence for the truthfulness of the Bible. Whereas premillennialists, who tend to interpret more literally, generally are not presuppositionalists in apologetics. They are usually evidentialists, and this is one of the evidences of truthfulness of Scripture. So, you might not think there's any connection between apologetic systems and eschatological systems, but I think there's a pretty tight one when you really reflect it. In general, those who are

amillennialists are also going to be presuppositionalists apologetics and those who are premillennialists, in general, are going to be evidentialists in apologetics. I am sure there are exceptions, but in general it certainly fits with Aalders, and he makes a point of it.

e. Aalders Conclusion

Notice this next statement. Aalders then concludes that it's not the fulfillment of prophecy that brings the conviction of the divine truth of scripture, but the reverse—the conviction of divine truth of scripture leads to belief in the fulfillment of prophecy. And of course there again, the eschatological view is pretty tight with the apologetic view. He argues that the certainty of the revealed truth of God does not rest in any outward evidences, but rather in itself. God does not force men to believe. It is also his will that fulfillment of prophecy should not stand outside of all doubt as something incontrovertible but rather that it should render only such certainty that the believer can find in it support for his faith. In other words, someone who has come to faith and believes, and then looks at prophecies, can find support for his faith, but someone who has not come to faith may now look and find little or no value in them.

He says that for the one who recognizes the Bible as the word of God the fulfillment of prophecies is clear as day and therefore it can serve to confirm his faith. That's certainly legitimate. My favorite question is: does it also have some role for the unbeliever, to bring him the place of being open, to listening to the Bible? So he says that the fulfillment of prophecy is not without value in a secondary sense, but for the one who does not believe in the Scripture, it does not speak so clearly that he is forced to see divine origin of Scripture.

Aalders says it therefore comes down to what he calls the internal principle, which is at the heart of his position—one believes Scripture to be God's word or one does not believe Scripture to be God's word. This belief is the fruit of the

working of the Holy Spirit. The final ground for the certainty of Christian truth is to be sought in the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

So his conclusion is that apologetics is better off not to involve itself with seeking for objective evidence for the truth of Scripture, but rather it should retreat to this subjective standpoint and then demonstrate that the non-Christian world view, in spite of arguments to the contrary, also cannot justify itself with any ground of evidence, and it has its own starting point in the subjective just as much as does the Christian position. So, that's the heart of what his view is on "the apologetic value of prophecy." In his view, you either believe the Bible and the scripture or you don't! And whether you believe or not that the Bible is the word of God, it is the work of the Holy Spirit! It's subjective. But then you turn that around and you tell those who are not believers that their position is also subjective. Now I think that in that you encounter the difference between presuppositional and evidential approaches to apologetics which is another huge subject.

4. Machen's Comments

I have a paragraph there from J. G. Machen from the "Christianity and Culture" publication. Details are found in your bibliography. You notice the underlined statement at the bottom of the page from Machen. He says, "It would be a great mistake to assume that all men are equally well prepared to receive the gospel. It is true that the decisive issue then is the regenerative power of God." It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings people to the knowledge of Christ. He says, "That can overcome all lack of preparation, and the absence of that, makes even the best preparation useless." And here's the underlined statement, "But, as a matter of fact, God usually exerts that power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel... I do not mean that the removal of intellectual objections will make a man a

Christian. No, conversion was never wrought simply by argument. A change of heart is also necessary. And that can be wrought only by the immediate exercise of the power of God.”

But notice the next statement, “But because intellectual labor is insufficient it does not follow, as it so often is assumed, that it is unnecessary. God may, it is true, overcome all intellectual obstacles by an immediate exercise of His regenerative power. Sometimes he does. But he does so very seldom. Usually He exerts His power in connection with certain conditions of the human mind.” The mind looks at, and assesses, whatever claims are being made for the truthfulness of the Bible, and the truthfulness of the Gospel. “Usually he does not bring into the Kingdom, entirely without preparation, those whose minds and fancy are completely dominated by the ideas of which make the acceptance of the gospel logically impossible.”

Francis Schaeffer often would talk about people as pre-evangelists and he means dealing with questions, trying to answer objections to listening to the Scripture, or to the message of the Gospel. I think that’s what Machen is talking about here.

I listed next another essay by Machen that’s in your citations pages 32-33. He says some of the same things in that discussion. Let’s look at a couple of these paragraphs. Machen says, “A man hears some true preacher of the gospel. The preacher speaks on the authority of a book which lies open there on the pulpit. As the words of that book are expounded, the man who listens finds the secrets of his heart are revealed. It is though a cloak had been pulled away. The man suddenly sees himself as God sees him. He suddenly comes to see that he is a sinner under the just wrath and curse of God. Then from the same strange book comes another part of sovereign authority. The preacher, as he expounds the book, seems to be an ambassador of the king, a messenger of the living God. The man who hears needs no further reflection, no further argument. The Holy Spirit has opened the doors of his heart. ‘That book is the word of the living God,’ he says; ‘God has found me

out, I have heard his voice, I am His forever.”

Then Machen comments, “Yes, it is this way sometimes, and not by elaborate argument, that a man becomes convinced that the Bible is the word of God.” But then you notice he repeats what he said in the other quotation, “Yet that does mean that argument is unnecessary...I may be convinced with my whole soul that the Bible is the word of God; but if my neighbor adduces considerations to show that it is really full of error, I cannot be indifferent to those considerations. I can indeed say to him ‘your considerations are wrong, and because they are wrong I can with good conscience hold onto my convictions.’ Or I can say to him, ‘What you say is true enough in itself but it is irrelevant to the question whether the Bible is the word of God.’ But I do not see how in the world I can say to him, ‘Your considerations may be contrary to my conviction that the Bible is the word of God, but I am not interested in them; go on holding to them if you want to do so, but do please agree with me also in holding that the Bible is the word of God.’” It is a very real situation. He says, “No, I cannot possibly say that.” That last attitude is surely quite absurd. Two contradictory things cannot both be true. We cannot go on holding to the Bible as the word of God and at the same time admit the truth of considerations that are contrary to that conviction of ours.

I believe with all of my soul, in other words, in the necessity of Christian apologetics, the necessity of a reasoned defense of the Christian faith, and in particular a reasoned defense of the Christian conviction that the Bible is the word of God.”

And then he says, he was at a student conference where methods of evangelism were being discussed. He says someone got up and said (in the middle of that next paragraph), “You never win a man to Christ until you quit arguing with him.” You’ve probably heard that before. He says, “Well you know my friends, when he said that I was not impressed one little bit. Of course a man never was won to Christ *merely* by argument. That is perfectly clear. There must be the mysterious work of the Spirit of God in the new birth. Without that, all of

those arguments are quite useless. But because arguments are insufficient, it does not follow that they are unnecessary. What the Holy Spirit does in a new birth, is not to make a man a Christian regardless of the evidence, but on the contrary to clear away the mists from his eyes and enable him to attend to the evidence.

So I believe in the reasoned defense of the inspiration of the Bible. Sometimes it is immediately useful in bringing a man to Christ... But its chief use is of a somewhat different kind. Its chief use is in enabling Christian people to answer legitimate questions, not by vigorous opponents of Christianity, but of people who are seeking the truth and are troubled by the hostile voices that are heard on every hand.” So, there are those comments by Machen.

5. Faith & Reason – 1 Peter 3:15 – St. Augustine

My next comment on that handout is that it’s the Holy Spirit’s work to open the heart. It’s our responsibility to present the evidence. It seems to me there is a place for reasoning and defense of the Gospel. 1 Peter 3:15 says that it’s our responsibility to give reasons for the faith that is within us.

There are two other articles referenced in the next paragraph. First, A. J. Neuhaus, “Why We Can Get Along,” in *First Things*. Go to page 33 of your citations. He’s talking in this article about connections between faith and reason. And he says, “In thinking about connections between faith, reason and discourse, St. Augustine is particularly helpful. It is possible to find snippets, especially from his devotional and homiletical writings, that can be used to show that Augustine a fideist, someone who sacrifices reason for faith.” You know, to me it seems like that’s someone who holds Aalders’ position when he says that it’s all internal principle. We either believe or we don't believe. Evidence has nothing to do with it. That’s fideism. It “can be used to suggest that Augustine is a fideist, someone who sacrifices reason to faith. But that would be a grave misunderstanding.” You often see that. He believed in order to know.

“Augustine addressed in great sophistication why it is that faith is reasonable and why it is that reason without faith is incomplete. There is, for instance, the very engaging essay, *The Usefulness of Believing*. The very title reflects Augustine’s assumption that Christian and non-Christian are able to consider together what would be useful for understanding the truth. Augustine makes the case that belief is necessary for understanding. He explains in great detail to his unbelieving interlocutor the reasonable case for believing. It is clear that Augustine and his interlocutor who shared a common *a priori*... that belief is necessary to understanding—in everyday life, in science, in friendship and in matters religious and why belief is necessary as itself rationally explicable. ‘Understand my word in order to believe,’ says Augustine, “but believe God’s word in order to understand.’ As Eptham Gillson writes... ‘[In Augustine] the very possibility of faith depends on reason... because only reason is capable of belief.’

Again, ‘The Augustinian doctrine concerning the relations between reason and faith comprises three steps: preparation for faith by reason, act of Faith, understanding the content of faith.’ But Augustine himself said it best, ‘No one believes anything unless he first thought it to be believable.’ Everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded. Not everyone who thinks believes, since many think in order to not believe; but everyone who believes thinks.’

Augustine was a firm opponent of what would later come to be called fideism. The claim that faith is utterly arbitrary—that it is not supported by and cannot appeal to an *a priori* about what is reasonable—finds no support in Augustine, or for that matter in the mainstream of the Great Tradition of Christian thought.”

6. Historically Amerstadam – presuppositional; Princeton – Evidentialists

So, there’s that little second paragraph out of Neuhaus’ article. And then the next article mentioned on your outline is a fairly lengthy article by Donald

Fuller and Richard Gardiner titled, “Reformed Theology at Princeton and Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Re-appraisal.” It was published at Covenant Theological Seminary in 1995. I think that is extremely helpful to explain the situation of the schools of thought generated at places like Princeton in the early 1900s. There was a period when the school of thought generated at Amsterdam University was presuppositionalists apologetics and the Princeton school of thought was evidentialists, as far as apologetics was concerned.

It’s a rather lengthy article. You’ll notice I have a fair amount excerpted from it starting on page 34 in your citations going over to page 37. I don’t want to take time to go through that, but I encourage you to read it. I think you’ll find it gets rather complex, but I think you’ll find it helpful in sorting out these issues.

Just turn to page 37 and we’ll look at the last 2 paragraphs where Fuller and Gardiner say, “Warfield and the old Princeton theologians believed that reason and faith *cooperated* in order to provide a knowledge of God coordinate with a *true* human knowing, even if knowledge was incomplete. This *coordinate* notion of faith and reason is rooted in Augustinianism,” as Neuhaus was saying, “is deeply at odds with nineteenth century positivism,”—enlightenment kind of thinking—and “means that speaking about God to the un-regenerate really matters.

Warfield’s vision for Christian engagement with secular intellectual perspectives is, therefore, quite different than the retreatist orientation of Kuyper.” It was a retreat to that subjective position, the internal principle. “Warfield writes, ‘Let us, then, cultivate an attitude of courage as over against the investigations of the day. None should be more zealous of them than we. None should be more quick to discern truth in every field, more hospitable to receive it, more loyal to follow it wherever it leads. It is not for Christians to be lukewarm in regard to the investigations and discoveries of the time. But it is for us therefore as Christians to push investigations at the utmost, to be leaders in every science, to stand in the vein of criticism, to be the first to catch in every field the truth of faith in our redeemer. The curse of the church has been her apathy to truth...she has nothing

to fear from truth; but she has everything to fear, and she has already suffered nearly everything, from ignorance. All truth belongs to us as followers of Christ, the Truth; let us at length enter into our own inheritance.” So, those are some comments on this larger question, “Is there apologetic value to prophecy-fulfillment?” Those are some of the positions that have been taken.

B. The Revelatory Claim of the Bible

B. on page 5 is the heading, “The revelatory claim of the Bible.” The Bible presents itself as the Word of God, not simply as a product of human thought or reflection. Much of the Bible concerns itself with human history, and in its prophetic sections the Bible claims to sketch broad lines of future history that are determined by the sovereign will of a God who speaks through it. This unique claim calls for, and is certainly open to, verification and testing. Whether one believes the Bible or not, its historical statements (both predictive and non-predictive) are something that to a great extent can be submitted for verification. The Bible indicates that much of its revealed plan for history has already been realized in the history of Israel and in the appearance of Jesus Christ. It is our contention that in the connection between prophecy and fulfillment, particularly in that between the Old Testament and in Christ, there is to be found an objective prophecy/fulfillment structure that is clearly visible or recognizable. The existence of this prophecy/fulfillment structure points to the existence and veracity of the God who has spoken in biblical revelation.

This prophecy/fulfillment structure is not characterized by what might be termed a religious or pistical quality. It’s not something subjective or internal. Rather, it is something that breaks through religious subjectivism by its very nature, because it stands as a recognizable entity that points to the reality and veracity of the God of biblical revelation apart from the necessity of religious commitment to that God. In other words, you can look at a prophecy and look at

history to see if it was fulfilled, and that's something that can be submitted to verification; that's something outside of oneself.

In the Old Testament and New Testaments we notice the demonstration of the existence of God is based primarily on clearly recognizable signs and the coherence of prophecy and fulfillment. In other words, if you took the Bible itself, how does God make himself known? Think of the Exodus events and go through the plagues where the statement is explicit. "These things are done so that you may know that I am the Yahweh." You can see them. You can see that Moses speaks in advance and then it happens. That's also true in Joshua where the same thing happens with crossing the Jordan River and the taking of Jericho. So, demonstrating the existence of God is based primarily on recognizable signs, and on the coherence of prophecy and fulfillment. While this is true that intellectual recognition of the "existence" of God is not belief in an existential sense only because belief is possible by the work of the Holy Spirit developing a relationship between man and God. It is, nevertheless, a corollary to and prerequisite for genuine faith. Genuine faith is a response to what God has demonstrated in history, in his power and existence. In all of this it is necessary to remember that there is an objective revelation that is there. This objective revelation exists apart from the response of faith that is worked in the individual given by the Holy Spirit when that individual submits himself to the God of the biblical revelation. This distinction might be termed as an internal revelation and an external revelation. In order to avoid misunderstanding, we must make it clear that objective prophecy exists and is recognized by an identifiable character, the external revelation.

Seems to me that's what people like Aalders miss. They talk about that internal principle. Well fine. Yes, there is that internal principle but that's the Holy Spirit regenerating inside us and opening the mind. No one is ever going to come to the knowledge of the truth without it. But that doesn't mean there isn't an external principal or external revelation—something that's actually out there that evidences that God is who he claims to be. That's the way God made himself

known through Scripture, signs and wonders, and prophecy/fulfillment.

C. Prophecy and Fulfillment

So that brings us to C., “Prophecy and fulfillment.” In the Old Testament we are confronted with a unique and surprising form of the divine revelation. This revelation entails components that are adequate to demonstrate in an objective and recognizable way the reality of the God of Israel. They include:

1. God makes his existence and power recognizable among many witnesses in many ways, including signs, wonders, and theophanies. That is something that’s out there. It can and has been seen by multiple witnesses.
2. God makes known a plan for future history through his spokesmen the prophets.
3. This plan for future history is brought into fruition as it had been professed and predicted by the prophets.

Note that in the first component—signs, wonders and theophanies—is the sense perceptible presentation of something in which Yahweh claims to reveal himself. The second two components are intended to confirm the evidence of that claim, that is, prophecy and fulfillment, plan and execution.

Here it can be said that the Old Testament distinguishes itself from all other “religious revelations” by not promoting belief simply on the basis of what certain persons claim to have received by divine revelation. Anybody can go out there and say God’s spoken to me. That’s what Muhammad did. Anybody can do that. But it’s not promoting belief on the basis of what people claimed they received by divine revelation. Rather, belief is founded in revelation that is connected with external signs and the progression of the history according to a previously announced plan. On the outline I gave some biblical examples of that.

Now I want to make a distinction here. Those signs and wonders perform the function of authentication of the existence and power of God to the people who observed them in that time. We’re no longer there. All we can do is read the

reports of what God did at that time and how he revealed himself to his people, at the time of the exodus to the time of the conquest or the first advent of Christ.

In the next paragraph there, I mention the Old Testament gives no mythological or metaphysical arguments for the existence of God. That's not the way God demonstrates his existence.

1. Prophets Self-Authentication

Then the next paragraph. The signs that God gave to authenticate the words of prophets and make his own presence visible to his people served an immediate and direct authenticating purpose in connection with the historical progress of revelation and redemption. With the completion of revelation we should not look for the continuation of such signs. We've talked about that before in connection with Vos's conception of the progress of revelation and redemption. Revelation has that objective side as well as the subjective individual side. Revelation is really the interpretation of redemption and revelation moves along with it. But when the redemption reaches its climax in Christ, then revelation ceases to exist. But that's another issue. We don't look for a continuation of such signs. Signs, therefore do not play the *same direct authenticating purpose* for us today as they did for those to whom the signs were originally given. The connection between prophecy and fulfillment, however, is of such a character that *its value* as an evidence of the existence and veracity of the God of biblical revelation *continues to function in a direct way*, even amongst succeeding generations. In other words, signs and wonders function in the time at which they were given. Now we read reports of it. Prophecy and fulfillment continue to function even for succeeding generations because these generations can look at that prophecy/fulfillment structure. If you can establish that the prophecy was given at a certain point and time and it was not fulfilled until centuries later. There are many examples of these kinds of prophecies—there you have something that I think has apologetic value.

2. Bloom, Gaugh, and Newman: Testable Miracles

J. A. Bloom and H.G. Gaugh and R.C. Newman, who was a New Testament professor here for many years, argue that fulfilled prophecy is an accessible kind of miracle, a testable miracle rather than a reported miracle. You see the distinction there? They argue that since fulfilled prophecy is an accessible kind of miracle, a testable miracle rather than a reported miracle, this character of prophecy serves to bypass the difficulty of the reported miracle such as the observation or interpretation of what happened. Prophecy is different than a private experience of the miracle because its fulfillment is often testable by any interested person, whether that person is sympathetic to the Bible's theistic worldview or not. Israel's God is, then, one who claims belief on the basis of the things that the people have seen and experienced of him. Logically or rationally speaking, it can be said that the Old Testament demonstrates Israel could hardly do anything other than believe because she could know from objective facts that Yahweh is. How could you not come to that conclusion if you were among those who were sent out of Egypt? And that none of his words return to him empty or void. Israel could and did willfully turn their back on things that were clearly idolatry. The Lord gave his people many infallible, the NIV has "convincing," proofs, to use the wording of Acts 1 where he claims the veracity of his existence and power. In our witnessing we should do nothing less, and simply adopt the ways that God himself employed to demonstrate to his people that he exists. That's how he brought about the redemption of his people.

So, it seems to me in that context, given certain qualifications that are mentioned in the conclusion, that prophecy and fulfillment is something that is verifiable and testable, and it is an objective structure that stands outside the individual. It does have a legitimate function in an apologetic sense of pointing to the truth claims of the Bible and of Christ as the redeemer of mankind. I won't

read through the conclusion, you can do that on your own. So that's Roman numeral X.

XI. Obadiah

Page 6 of your class lecture outline we come to the new section of the course, "Survey of prophetic books." As I had told you before, I want to go through the minor prophets of Hosea, Obadiah, Joel, and Amos for the remainder of our course.

1. Introductory Remarks

Point 1 is, "Introductory remarks." So before going to Obadiah, let me just make some general comments. We talked earlier about classification of the prophetic books and in Jewish tradition there is that of the former prophets and later prophets. The former prophets being what we normally today in our tradition are historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuels and Kings.

The later prophets are what we call the prophetic books. They are divided into two groups. You're familiar with that classification I am sure: the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. The terms major and minor have nothing to do with significance or importance, but simply with length. The Major prophets are the larger ones: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The Minor prophets are the 12. I think you should know the names of them, I won't go through the list.

But I do want to say something about the arrangement of the list of the Minor Prophets. You have been reading in Bullock, actually you have been reading in a different order than Bullock has put them in and the reason for that is simply that Bullock's dating some of the prophets was different from the way I would date them. For example, the first one is Obadiah.

2. Order of the Minor Prophets

But you get to that question of why are the Minor Prophets in our Bibles

today in the order which they presently appear? When you look in our English Bible, and that's true in the Hebrew Bible as well, at the Minor Prophets, you have: Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah as the first four, and then Jonah and Micah. But if you go the Septuagint, the first 6 are in this order: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. It's quite a different order. The order we are familiar with is taken from the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint has a different order. If you look at the two lists, there appears to be little discernable criteria for either list as far as the order in which the books occur. I think what is noticeable is that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are last and they are all post-exilic. So it seems like there's a chronological element at least in those last books. Amos is placed after Hosea in order. Hosea, Amos Obadiah. Yet Amos was earlier than Hosea. So you have that question, and I don't think anyone has ever come up with a convincing explanation for the order of the books in either the Septuagint or the Hebrew Bible. But I think we should be aware of that.

3. Dating Minor Prophets

We're going to discuss dating issues with Obadiah and Joel. They are both very difficult to date. But I think you can divide the prophets into three periods if you use the nations that were the prominent power that affected the history of Israel and Judah: the Assyrian period, the neo-Babylonian period and the Persian period. This is the order that you have been following in your reading in Bullock. So the Assyrian period has nine prophets, the Babylonian period—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah and Habakkuk, and the Persian period—Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. So just those general comments looking at the first four of those books: Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah.

A. Obadiah

Let's go to Obadiah. I gave you that handout. You'll notice that A. under Roman numeral II is, "Obadiah's date and author." I think that we had mentioned

that Obadiah is one of the most difficult to date. Differences on date are not based on liberal or conservative viewpoints and they range from about 840 B.C., which makes it the earliest, to shortly around the destruction of Jerusalem around 586 B.C., and then some as late as 450. So you can see that there is a wide range of conclusions.

At the crux of the dating question lies the identification of plundering of Jerusalem that's mentioned in verses 10 and 11. If you turn to Obadiah, which is a one chapter book, you will notice, it is an oracle against the Edomites. Judgment is being pronounced upon the Edomites. In verses 10 and 11, Obadiah says, "Because of the violence against your brother Jacob," (Edomites are descendants of Esau), "you will be covered with shame, you will be destroyed forever on the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem. You were like one of them." So there is a reference here to the Edomites having some sort of association with the plundering of Jerusalem. Strangers carried off wealth, cast lots for Jerusalem. You notice I say there that the crux is on the plundering of Jerusalem by the Edomites in 10 and 11 and possibly on to 14. That becomes an interpretive issue and it does have a bearing on the date. Do verses 12-14 speak of some future similar kind of plundering of Jerusalem or are they a continuation of verses 10 and 11? I will come back to that and we will discuss it in more detail later. But first, what are the positions that have been argued for the identification of the plundering of Jerusalem mentioned in verses 10 and 11? I have listed 3 of them here.

1. A Plundering in the Reign of Jehoram of Judah by a Coalition of Philistines and Arabians

A. is, "A plundering in the reign of Jehoram of Judah by a coalition of Philistines and Arabians." In 2 Chronicles 21:8 you read that in the time of Jehoram, "Edom rebelled against Judah, set up his own king." Verse 10, "To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah." Go down to verse 16. It is the

same time, during the reign of Jehoram, “The Lord aroused against Jehoram the hostility of the Philistines and the Arabs who lived near the Cushites. They attacked Judah, invaded it, and carried off all of the goods they found in the king’s palace along with the sons and wives. Not a son was left.” So there are our records on a pillaging of Jerusalem connected to the rebellion of the Edomites. In 2 Kings 8:20 you have no reference to the rebellion of the Edomites against Jehoram. So, it’s possible that the Edomites cooperated in that invasion and shared in the spoils. That may be what provoked the judgment on Edom in Obadiah. That’s the early view.

2. Babylonian Plundering of Jerusalem in 586 BC

A second view is that in verses 10 and 11 of Obadiah what you have is a reference to the Babylonian plundering of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, some say, is supported by Ezekiel 35:5 but the reference is not conclusive. Ezekiel 35:5 says (this is a prophecy directed to Edom, a prophecy of judgment), “Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over at the time of the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax,” (clearly the time of the Babylon destruction of Jerusalem is in view), “Therefore as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I give you the bloodshed, and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.” So, I think it’s clear that, yes, the Edomites did have some participation in the plundering of Jerusalem in 586, but that doesn’t mean that they hadn’t done it earlier! Because Edom later took a similar position at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem is not to say that they had not done something similar at an earlier time. Objections to the 586 date are that there’s no mention of deportation of the whole population, there’s no mention of the destruction of the city and the temple, neither is there any mention of Nebuchadnezzar from verse 10, “because violence against your brother you will be covered with iniquity.”

Then on top of page 2, the interpretation of 10-11 and 12-14 as having two points of reference, must be considered. There is similar phraseology in Jeremiah 49:1 and its relation to Obadiah 1-6. Some try and use that for dating. There are allusions in language between Jeremiah 49:1-7 and Obadiah 1-6. Question is: Which prophet has priority? Things are divided on which is the original or whether both reflect an earlier source of some unknown prophecy. How do you explain these similarities in language? Is Obadiah reflecting the language of Jeremiah? Or is it the other way around, is Jeremiah reflecting the language of Obadiah? It could be either. So I don't think that that's a way of coming to a conclusion about dating.

3. J. B. Payne verses 10-11 of Obadiah talk about an attack on Israel by Syria in the time of Ahaz

But then a third suggestion comes from J. Barton Payne is that verses 10-11 of Obadiah talk about an attack on Israel by Syria going at the time of Ahaz and that was accompanied by the simultaneous attack by the Edomites. That's 2 Chronicles 28:16-18, where you read, "At that time King Ahaz went to the king of Assyria for help. The Edomites had again come and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners, while the Philistines attacked down in the foothills and then they give to Judah. They captured and occupied [its places]." So that's another possibility, although there is no specific reference to Jerusalem.

Now what follows are just some names. There are some advocates of the date after 586 B.C., after the plundering of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar. R. K. Harrison believes a later date of about 450 B.C.

So that's the question about dating, and as I mentioned this question arises further when you get into looking more closely at verses 10-11 and 12-14 and what you conclude is the relationship between them. I want to hold off on that discussion for a few minutes yet. But we will come back to this. But which plundering of Jerusalem you see referenced in 10-11 it is going to affect your

conclusion on dating.

4. Author of Obadiah

The author is Obadiah, which means, “Servant of the Lord.” He is a prophet about whom we know nothing. All we have is his prophecy and there is not much in the book of Obadiah itself that says anything about this individual. There are several other Obadiah’s mentioned in the Old Testament but no others mentioned that connect to the time of Ahab.

B. The Theme of the Book of Obadiah

B. is, “The theme of the Book.” We’ve already related that a little bit here. It’s a pronouncement of judgment on Edom. I have already mentioned Edomites were descendants of Esau. Go back into Genesis and see the relationship of the Edomites to Esau. Genesis 36:8 tells us that Esau lived in the Seir mountain range of Edom, often used as a synonym for the homeland, directly south of the Dead Sea and to the east with a mountainous country, east of the Rift Valley depression, connecting the Dead Sea and Aqabah gulf of the Red Sea. The principle cities were Bozrah and perhaps Sela, which means “private rock,” some think that is a reference to the city of Petra which is a famous archeological site in the Edomite territory. From Eziongeber, which is at the very tip of the gulf of Aqaba, is a road called the King’s highway, which ran north through Edom. That was the route Moses wanted to lead the Israelites on at the time of the Exodus but if you remember at that time the Edomites refused to let the Israelites go and therefore they had to go around. From that point forth, there were conflicts between the Edomites and the Israelites. I think this is the outworking of what you might call the Jacob/Esau controversy if you remember that whole situation when there was a struggle with the two brothers for the blessing from Isaac and so on.

Look at page 38 of your citations. Keil made some comments on this relationship and we will conclude with this. He said, “Wrong, or violence, is all

the more reprehensible when it is committed against a brother. The fraternal relations in which Edom stood towards Judah is still more sharply defined by the name Jacob, since Esau and Jacob were twin brothers. The consciousness that the Israelites were their brethren, ought to have impelled the Edomites to render helpful support to the oppressed Judeans. Instead of this, they not only reveled with scornful and malignant pleasure in the misfortune of the brother nation, but endeavored to increase it still further by rendering active support to the enemy. This hostile behavior of Edom arose from the envy at the election of Israel, like the hatred of Esau for Jacob, which was transmitted to his descendants, and came out openly around the time of Moses, in the unbrotherly refusal to let the Israelites pass in a peaceful manner through the land. On the other hand, the Israelites are always commanded in the law to preserve a friendly and brotherly attitude toward Edom.” In Deuteronomy 2:4-5 and 23:7 it is enjoined upon them not to abhor the Edomites, because he is their brother. So you have the outworking you might say of that Jacob/Esau controversy that is still ongoing at whatever date this is...840...586 and so on.

All right we will stop here and pick up with C which is, “Some comments on the content” next time.

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