

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14, Session 16, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14, Session 16, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Vannoy's lecture provides guidelines for interpreting biblical prophecy, emphasizing a careful grammatical, historical, and contextual analysis. He stresses the importance of identifying the passage's referent and determining if it's predictive, already fulfilled, or yet to come. **Vannoy cautions against automatically seeking "double fulfillment," where a prophecy refers to multiple events simultaneously.** He critiques the idea that the same words can hold multiple meanings in the same context, preferring to seek the single, original intent of the author. **He references historical interpreters, like Luther and Calvin, who resisted allegorical interpretations and advocated for understanding the author's intended meaning.** The lecture considers the concept of "authorial intent," but accounts for the Holy Spirit as the superintending author, allowing for the possibility of the human author speaking better than they knew.

2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14, Session 16 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Foundations).



3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14, Session 16, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Robert Vannoy's "Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14," along with direct quotes:

Briefing Document: Robert Vannoy on Interpreting Prophecy

Main Theme: This lecture focuses on providing guidelines for the proper interpretation of biblical prophecy, emphasizing a cautious and textually grounded approach. Vannoy critiques the idea of "double fulfillment" or "double reference" in prophecy, arguing for a primary focus on the authorial intent and a single, coherent meaning of a prophetic statement.

Key Ideas and Guidelines:

1. Grammatical-Historical-Contextual Analysis:

- The foundation of interpretation is a thorough understanding of the text itself.
- "Make a careful grammatical historical contextual analysis of the passage. That's not something that is exclusive to the prophetic discourses nor to the exegetical task. I think that's the basic fundamental task of the interpreter."
- This involves understanding the meaning of words, their grammatical relationships, the historical background of the prophet and audience, and the broader context of the passage within the book and the entire canon of Scripture.

1. Identifying the Referent:

- Determine who or what the prophecy is about.
- "State explicitly to whom or what the passage refers."
- Is the message directed to the immediate audience (didactic), or is it about someone else (potentially predictive)? If predictive, are there any conditions attached? Has the prophecy been fulfilled (in the Old Testament, New Testament, present, or future)?

1. Pay Attention to Fulfillment Citations:

- Recognize and analyze phrases indicating fulfillment in the New Testament.

- "Pay attention to fulfillment citations."
- Phrases like "that it might be fulfilled" often signal a specific fulfillment, but Vannoy cautions that this phrase can also denote a relationship of illustration or similarity rather than a direct predictive fulfillment (citing R. Laird Harris). He points out that sometimes these citations are simply formulas of citation.
- Examples:
- Matthew 1:22 (Isaiah 7:14): Mary's virgin birth fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin conceiving.
- Matthew 8:17 (Isaiah 53:4): Jesus healing people fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy about the Servant bearing infirmities.
- James 2:21-23 (Genesis 15:6): Abraham's faith credited as righteousness, used as an illustration rather than a predictive fulfillment.
- Matthew 2:17-18 (Jeremiah 31:15): Rachel weeping for her children, referring to the exiles of Babylonian captivity.
- Formulas of citation: *plerono* ("fulfilled") and *gegraptai* ("it has been written"). Forms of *lego* ("I say") usually indicate a historical reference, not prophecy and fulfillment.
- "Certainly they will help with pointers and identifying predictive passages, a point of fulfillment but you have to be careful of that."

1. **Avoid the Idea of Double Fulfillment/Reference (Critique):**

- Vannoy strongly argues against the principle of "double reference" or "double sense" as a standard hermeneutical approach.
- "Avoid the idea of double fulfillment or double reference."
- He contends that assuming a prophecy can refer to two or more different events simultaneously with the same words is hermeneutically dangerous, implying that the same words in the same context can have multiple meanings.
- He cites Dwight Pentecost and Eric Sauer as proponents of double reference. Pentecost: "Two events, widely separated by the time of their fulfillment, may be brought together into the scope of one prophecy." Sauer: "They speak of the return from Babylon and simultaneously promise a gathering of Israel at the still future inaugurating a kingdom of peace."

- Vannoy refutes this with the argument that language usually has a single, intended meaning. He references Luther and Calvin's rejection of allegorical interpretation, emphasizing authorial intent. "Only the single, proper, original sense, the sense in which it is written, makes good theologians. The Holy Spirit is the simplest writer and speaker in heaven and on earth. Therefore his words can have no more than a singular and simple sense, which we call the written or literally spoken sense."
- Westminster Confession: Scripture has "one" sense, which can be understood by other clearer passages.
- Vannoy acknowledges the concept of "authorial intent," but notes that with Scripture, there's a human author and the Holy Spirit.
- He states, "I think it's possible that the human author could speak "better than he knew," so to speak. In other words, he could say things that he himself did not believe or comprehend and therefore wasn't his intent; yet it was superintended by the Holy Spirit who was addressing issues that transcended the prophet's whole understanding."

1. **Rejection of Allegory:**

- He discusses John Bright's explanation of the four levels of meaning during the Middle Ages: literal, tropological, allegorical, and analogical.
- "But the tendency was to care far less for the literal meaning than for the spiritual one, for the true meaning of the text is spiritual."
- The reformers rejected allegory because it undermined the authority of scripture.

1. **Typology vs. Double Sense:**

- Vannoy differentiates between legitimate typology (where persons, events, or institutions prefigure future realities) and "typological language" which he equates with spiritualization.
- He uses Deuteronomy 18 (the prophecy of a future prophet like Moses) as an example. He argues that the passage refers to the *office* of the prophet, which itself can be seen as a *type* of Christ, but that doesn't mean the *language* has a double sense. The meaning of the *words* is about the prophetic institution.
- Terry: "Some writers have confused this subject by connecting it with the doctrine of type and antitype."

1. Cautious Conclusion:

- Vannoy is not entirely dismissive of the possibility of double sense in *some* cases, but emphasizes that it should not be the *default* assumption.
- "I'm not saying it is impossible to find double sense. I don't think you should bring rules of interpretation from outside and force them on Scripture to fit some formula of interpretation."
- If Scripture itself demonstrably *forces* an interpreter to recognize multiple senses, that's acceptable, but the burden of proof is high.

Examples Discussed:

- **Isaiah 7:14:** The prophecy of Immanuel (a child born to a virgin). Vannoy acknowledges the difficulties in interpreting this passage fully.
- **Deuteronomy 18:** The prophecy of a prophet like Moses. Is it a reference to the prophetic movement, Christ, or both?
- **Daniel 8:** The vision of the ram and goat, with the "little horn." Vannoy critiques the Scofield Bible's interpretation, which sees a "double reference" in the interpretation of the little horn, applying it simultaneously to Antiochus Epiphanes and the antichrist.
- **Malachi 4:5-6:** The prophecy of Elijah's return before the Day of the Lord. Vannoy plans to discuss this passage in the next session, considering its relationship to John the Baptist and its fulfillment status.

Overall, Vannoy's lecture promotes a rigorous, cautious, and textually driven approach to interpreting biblical prophecy, warning against imposing pre-conceived notions of "double fulfillment" and emphasizing the importance of understanding the author's intended meaning within its historical and literary context.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14, Session 16, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings

Biblical Prophecy Interpretation Guide

I. Key Concepts Review

Based on Robert Vannoy's lecture, the following guidelines are crucial for accurate biblical prophecy interpretation:

1. **Grammatical-Historical-Contextual Analysis:** This foundational principle involves understanding the language, grammar, and historical setting of the passage. Consider the author, original audience, and the broader context of the book and the entire Bible. Identify parallel passages for further insight.
2. **Referent Identification:** Determine to whom or what the prophecy refers. Is it a message for the original audience (didactic) or a prediction about someone/something else (predictive)? If predictive, are there conditions attached? Is it fulfilled, and if so, where does Scripture indicate the fulfillment (Old Testament, New Testament, present time, or future)?
3. **Fulfillment Citations:** Pay close attention to phrases in the New Testament that indicate the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Phrases like "that it might be fulfilled" are often specific pointers, but be cautious. Some citations may only illustrate a similarity in words or ideas rather than direct predictive fulfillment. Consider the 'plerono' and 'gegrapti' citation formulas and forms of 'lego'.
4. **Avoid Double Fulfillment/Reference:** Resist the idea that a single prophecy can refer to two or more different events simultaneously with the same words. This principle, advocated by some, assumes the same words in the same context can have multiple meanings, which is often hermeneutically unsound. Look for the single sense intended by the author (and the Holy Spirit).

II. Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each:

1. Why is a grammatical-historical-contextual analysis essential for interpreting prophecy?

2. What questions should you ask when trying to determine the referent of a prophetic passage?
3. What is the significance of the phrase "that it might be fulfilled" in the New Testament?
4. Explain the difference between a predictive fulfillment and a relationship of illustration when discussing "fulfillment citations."
5. Why does Vannoy advise against the principle of "double reference" in prophecy interpretation?
6. How did Luther and Calvin view allegorical interpretation, and why?
7. Explain what is meant by "authorial intent" in biblical interpretation.
8. What qualification does Vannoy give regarding "authorial intent?"
9. How might a "type and anti-type" approach be confused with a "double-sense" interpretation?
10. According to Terry, what is the hermeneutical consequence of accepting that scripture has more than one meaning?

III. Quiz Answer Key

1. A grammatical-historical-contextual analysis grounds the interpretation in the original meaning of the text, considering the author's intent, audience, and historical setting. Ignoring this can lead to subjective and inaccurate interpretations that are not grounded in the author's intended meaning.
2. You should ask whether the message is directed to the original audience (didactic) or about someone/something else (predictive). If predictive, consider if there are conditions attached, and whether it's fulfilled (OT, NT, present) or unfulfilled (future).
3. The phrase "that it might be fulfilled" often indicates a specific connection between an Old Testament prophecy and its New Testament fulfillment. However, be aware that sometimes it may point to an illustration or similarity rather than strict fulfillment.
4. A predictive fulfillment demonstrates a direct and intended correspondence between the prophecy and the event fulfilling it. A relationship of illustration

involves a similarity of words or ideas from an Old Testament statement not originally intended as a prediction.

5. Vannoy argues against "double reference" because it assumes that the same words in the same context can have multiple meanings, which is often a hermeneutical fallacy. He believes it can lead to subjective interpretations not grounded in the author's original intent.
6. Luther and Calvin strongly opposed allegorical interpretation, viewing it as a distortion of Scripture's plain meaning. They insisted on finding the single, literal sense of the text intended by its author, grounding hermeneutics in authorial intent.
7. "Authorial intent" refers to understanding a text based on what the original author intended to communicate. It emphasizes the importance of discerning the author's purpose and meaning in their historical and literary context.
8. Vannoy acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit as a co-author of Scripture, suggesting that the human author might speak beyond his own understanding. However, this does not open the door to finding multiple meanings without scriptural warrant, as authorial intent is still paramount.
9. A "type and anti-type" approach may be confused with a "double-sense" interpretation when the language used to describe the type is assumed to have a double meaning related to the anti-type. However, the type itself prefigures future events, but does not change the single meaning of language as it applies to the type.
10. Terry argued that if scripture has more than one meaning it has no meaning at all, making hermeneutics indeterminable. This undermines the possibility of scientific or systematic interpretation, leading to subjective and arbitrary readings of the text.

IV. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Vannoy's emphasis on grammatical-historical-contextual analysis as the foundation for interpreting biblical prophecy. Provide examples of how neglecting this approach can lead to misinterpretations.
2. Explain the significance of "fulfillment citations" in the New Testament and how they function as a tool for identifying fulfilled prophecy. Discuss the potential pitfalls of relying solely on these citations for interpretation.
3. Critically evaluate the concept of "double reference" in biblical prophecy interpretation. What are the arguments for and against it, and what are the potential implications for understanding the text?
4. Compare and contrast the views of Luther and Calvin on allegorical interpretation with modern approaches to biblical prophecy. How have their perspectives influenced contemporary hermeneutics?
5. Examine the role of "authorial intent" in biblical interpretation, particularly in the context of prophecy. How do you balance the human author's intent with the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Scripture?

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Grammatical-Historical-Contextual Analysis:** A method of biblical interpretation that emphasizes understanding the original language, historical background, and literary context of a passage.
- **Didactic:** Instructive or teaching; a didactic passage aims to convey a lesson or truth directly to the audience.
- **Predictive:** Prophetic; a predictive passage foretells future events or circumstances.
- **Fulfillment Citation:** A phrase or statement in the New Testament that points to the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (e.g., "that it might be fulfilled").
- **Plerono:** Greek verb often translated as "fulfilled" but can also mean "to complete" or "to bring to fullness."
- **Gegraptai:** Greek perfect passive form of "grapho" (to write), meaning "it has been written."
- **Legō:** Greek verb meaning "to say."
- **Double Fulfillment/Reference:** The idea that a single prophecy can refer to two or more different events simultaneously with the same words.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and practice of interpreting texts, especially religious texts.
- **Allegorical Interpretation:** A method of interpreting Scripture that seeks to find a hidden or symbolic meaning beyond the literal sense.
- **Authorial Intent:** The meaning or purpose that the original author intended to convey in a text.
- **Type and Anti-type:** A theological concept where a person, event, or institution in the Old Testament (the type) foreshadows a corresponding person, event, or institution in the New Testament (the anti-type).

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 14, Session 16, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Prophetic Writings, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided text, formatted in markdown:

1. What is the foundational principle for interpreting biblical prophecy?

The foundational principle is a careful grammatical, historical, and contextual analysis of the passage. This involves understanding the meaning of words, their usage, grammatical constructions, the historical background of the prophet and the people, and the context of the surrounding text, both near and far, even considering parallel passages within the entire canon of Scripture.

2. How do you determine if a prophetic passage is predictive or didactic?

To determine if a passage is predictive or didactic, consider to whom or what the passage refers. Is the message about the immediate audience, teaching them a truth applicable to them (didactic), or is it about someone or something else, potentially future (predictive)? If predictive, consider if any conditions are attached, whether it is fulfilled or unfulfilled, and if so, when the fulfillment occurs (past, present, or future).

3. What are "fulfillment citations," and how can they aid in interpreting prophecy?

"Fulfillment citations" are phrases in the New Testament that indicate the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Common examples include "that it might be fulfilled." These phrases often specifically point to the fulfillment of a prophecy. However, some citations may indicate a relationship of illustration or similarity in words or ideas rather than a strict predictive fulfillment. Citation formulas such as "gegraptai" ("it is written") and "lego" ("I say") can also be useful for identifying predictive passages, but care must be taken to note whether the phrase in question is actually a predictive statement.

4. What is the concept of "double fulfillment" or "double reference" in prophecy, and what is the author's stance on it?

The concept of "double fulfillment" or "double reference" suggests that a single prophecy can refer to two or more distinct events, often separated by time. Some interpreters believe that prophecies may have a near fulfillment in the prophet's time and a distant, often eschatological, fulfillment. The author generally discourages seeking double references as a hermeneutical principle. He argues that it assumes the same words in the same context can have multiple meanings, which he deems hermeneutically dangerous and contrary to how language generally functions.

5. Why do the reformers (like Luther and Calvin) reject allegorical interpretations and the idea of multiple senses of Scripture?

The reformers rejected allegorical interpretations and multiple senses of Scripture because they believed it undermined the authority of Scripture and led to fanciful, uncontrolled interpretations limited only by the interpreter's ingenuity. They insisted on arriving at the plain sense of the text intended by its author, emphasizing that Scripture has a singular, simple sense.

6. What is "authorial intent," and how does it relate to interpreting prophecy?

"Authorial intent" refers to the idea that the legitimate interpretation of a text is what the author intended to convey. However, in the context of Scripture, the author acknowledges that there is a human author and the Holy Spirit, potentially leading the human author to speak "better than he knew." While not advocating for wholesale multiple meanings, this suggests the possibility of meanings transcending the human author's full comprehension, superintended by the Holy Spirit.

7. What are some arguments against the idea of double fulfillment?

Arguments against double fulfillment include:

- If Scripture has more than one meaning, it effectively has no determinate meaning, making objective interpretation impossible.
- The New Testament doesn't explicitly suggest the possibility of dual fulfillment; its interpretations of Old Testament passages tend to focus on a single, definite sense.
- Often, the Old Testament context itself does not support the notion of a double fulfillment; the language used may not be applicable to both the supposed near and far events.

8. How does the concept of "type and antitype" relate to the discussion of double fulfillment?

Some interpreters confuse the subject of double sense by connecting it with the doctrine of type and antitype, with the notion that the *language* regarding the types is capable of a double sense. However, in the case of legitimate types, the *types themselves* (people, institutions, events) prefigure things to come, and this is distinct from the question of whether the language used in a particular passage has a double meaning.