

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 6, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting the Prophets, Part 2

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Wilson, Prophets, Session 6, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting the Prophets, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Marv Wilson's Hermeneutical Principles for Understanding the Prophets, Part 2, explores guidelines for interpreting biblical prophecy. He emphasizes that **interpreting scripture is more of an art than a science**. Wilson suggests starting with the Old Testament, then the New Testament, when interpreting the texts. **Wilson cautions against overly deterministic or fatalistic readings of prophecy** and warns against setting dates. Ultimately, **Wilson encourages a person-centered understanding of eschatology** focused on Christ.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Wilson, Prophets, Session 6 – 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 → Prophetic Literature).



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3. Briefing Document: Wilson, Prophets, Session 6, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting the Prophets, Part 2

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Marv Wilson's lecture on interpreting the prophets:

Briefing Document: Hermeneutical Principles for Understanding the Prophets (Dr. Marv Wilson, Session 6)

Overall Theme: This session focuses on developing sound interpretive principles for understanding Old Testament prophecy, moving beyond rigid, event-focused approaches to a more nuanced, person-centered, and ethical reading of the text. Wilson emphasizes that interpreting prophecy is more of an "art" than a strict "science," requiring sensitivity and contextual awareness.

Key Ideas & Principles:

1. Goal-Oriented Scriptures:

- The Hebrew Scriptures are goal-oriented, pointing toward a future of justice, righteousness, peace, and the knowledge of God covering the earth.
- "Indeed, ultimately, we will experience the dream of the Old Testament prophets of the world being covered with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."
- This ultimate vision should call believers to be "people of reconciliation, justice, and hope."

1. The Primacy of the Original Context:

- Interpretation should begin with understanding the Old Testament text in its original context, setting, and testament.
- Avoid imposing later New Testament interpretations onto Old Testament texts prematurely. "You start with the Jewish scriptures, which are a word from the Lord in their own right, and if God has additional things that He wants to shed on that, do so. But here, the original word, in its own context, in its own setting, in its own testament."
- The methodology of the earliest church should serve as a guide.

1. **Prophecy as Poetry:**

- A significant portion of the Old Testament is poetry, using figurative language (metaphors, similes, hyperbole, etc.).
- "The language, therefore, lacks the precision that one might find in a straightforward historical narrative."
- Hebrew writers used beautiful language to make their points memorable, painting "word pictures."
- We should not expect the same kind of precise, literal meaning as we would find in historical prose.

1. **Person-Centered Eschatology:**

- The focus of prophecy is on a *person* (the Messiah), not primarily on a detailed sequence of events.
- Emphasis on *Epiphania* (manifestation/appearance of Christ), *Parousia* (arrival/second coming), and *Apocalypse* (revelation).
- "Eschatology, then, is very much person-centered, not event-centered."
- The "blessed hope" of Christianity is centered on Christ's return.
- Wilson specifically critiques dispensational approaches that often focus too heavily on charting a "sequential series of events in a precise order," leading to debates about the timing of the tribulation, etc.

1. **Prophecy Should Not be a Test for Fellowship:**

- Differences in interpretation of prophetic details should not divide Christians.
- "How we understand the specifics of these things is not all that important. In fact, they often become schismatic."
- Essential Christian beliefs (e.g., the resurrection, the visible return of Christ) should be the foundation for fellowship.
- The focus should be on essential unity, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all things.
- Wilson critiques seminaries that require faculty to adhere to very precise interpretations of specific prophecies (e.g., the 70 weeks of Daniel).

1. **New Testament Reinterpretation:**

- The New Testament writers often reinterpret Old Testament texts in ways that the original writers may not have fully understood or intended.
- Examples:
 - Paul's interpretation of the rock in the wilderness as Christ (1 Corinthians 10).
 - Paul's application of Hosea's prophecies about Israel to the inclusion of Gentiles (Romans 9:24-26).
- The Holy Spirit can reveal interpretations beyond the literal meaning, that do not match modern exegesis
- These re-interpretations are not invalid but reflect the New Testament writers' understanding of the story's climax in Christ.
- "God's use of those writers through the Holy Spirit sometimes transcends and goes beyond what we would call good normative principles of doing biblical exegesis."

1. **Progressive Application of Prophecy**

- Prophecy is often fulfilled progressively, not all at once.
- The prophecy of Joel 2 about the pouring out of the Spirit was applied to Jews in Acts 2, but its fulfillment expanded to include Gentiles later.

1. **Healthy Skepticism of Date Setting and Dogmatism:**

- Wilson cautions against setting dates for Christ's return or being overly dogmatic about prophetic interpretations, particularly those related to long charts.
- "I would have a healthy suspicion about date setting, long charts, a kind of dogmatism, an unwarranted dogmatism, and things that, at the end of the day, may be reduced far more to speculation than sound exegesis."
- He provides examples of failed date predictions (e.g., William Miller, 1888 predictions based on the founding of Israel) as a reason to be wary of those setting dates.
- "We have to be very, very careful about that."
- There should be healthy skepticism of those that are so certain about when the Lord is going to return

- **Conditional Nature of Prophecy:** Many Old Testament prophecies are conditional and dependent on human response (repentance or disobedience).
- God is not bound by static prophecies; He responds to how people live.
- Jeremiah 18:7-10 illustrates that God will relent from disaster if a nation repents and will reconsider blessing if a nation does evil.
- "Prophecy, particularly prophecy that concerns foreign nations...are conditional. They're not written or chiseled in marble. God considers the human response."
- "No word is God's last word" (Heschel).

1. **Prophets did not always Distinguish between First and Second Comings**

- Old Testament prophets often did not clearly distinguish between the first and second comings of Christ. From their perspective, they saw these events as one coming of God to judge and save.
- Examples:
- John the Baptist's pronouncements about Jesus as judge (Matthew 3:12) blend first and second coming language.
- This reminds us that we have to read both Old Testament and New Testament with "postponed eschatology" in mind.

1. **Avoiding Deterministic Readings:**

- Avoid reading prophecy in a deterministic or fatalistic way, as if God's will overrides justice, compassion, and morality.
- Example: The idea of Israel's right to land must be tempered by compassion and justice for those currently living there.
- Wilson critiques those who would deterministically use land promises to justify actions that would be unjust to others.
- "The same thing, some in Israel today believe there may be another temple on the Temple Mount... if you read that deterministically, say you read Ezekiel 40-48, literally, this is the new temple. At what cost?"
- A focus on justice, morality, and compassion must be considered when interpreting predictive prophecy.

- “We must be careful we don’t read the Bible deterministically in such a way as we impose our will on others and create hardship, undue hardship, simply because God has said it...”

Key Takeaway: Dr. Wilson's lecture emphasizes a responsible and nuanced approach to interpreting biblical prophecy, emphasizing context, literary genre, the centrality of Christ, and a commitment to justice and compassion. He cautions against rigid, event-focused approaches that can lead to division, dogmatism, and even injustice.

4. Study Guide: Wilson, Prophets, Session 6, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting the Prophets, Part 2

Prophets: Hermeneutical Principles Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What does Dr. Wilson mean when he says interpreting scripture is "more like a wrestling match than a science?"
2. How does Dr. Wilson suggest we should approach understanding Old Testament prophecy in relation to the New Testament?
3. Why is it important to remember that much of prophecy is poetry?
4. What is the main point Dr. Wilson makes about eschatology, and how does he use the terms *epiphania*, *parousia*, and *apocalypse* to support this point?
5. What is the significance of the 70 weeks of Daniel, and why does Dr. Wilson use it as an example of how prophecy should not be used?
6. Why does Dr. Wilson emphasize that how we interpret prophecy should not become a test for fellowship?
7. How did Paul interpret the story of the Israelites getting water from the rock in the wilderness, and what does this suggest about New Testament interpretations of the Old Testament?
8. How does Dr. Wilson explain the New Testament reinterpretation of Joel's prophecy about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit?
9. What does Dr. Wilson mean when he says many prophecies, especially concerning foreign nations, are conditional?
10. How does the speaker describe the challenge of interpreting the "day of the Lord" and its relationship to the first and second comings of Christ?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Dr. Wilson means that interpreting scripture involves grappling with the text, considering various perspectives, and using sensitivity rather than simply applying a rigid, scientific formula to arrive at an answer. It requires an understanding of context, art, and figurative language.

2. Dr. Wilson suggests that we should start with the Old Testament scriptures in their original context and then consider the New Testament as shedding additional light, rather than starting with the New Testament and imposing it onto the Old Testament. He emphasizes that the original word, in its context, has validity of its own.
3. It's important to remember that much of prophecy is poetry because the Hebrew language uses figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, and hyperbole, and aims for memorable and beautiful expression rather than precise literal language. These poetic elements emphasize word pictures and concepts over literal precision.
4. Dr. Wilson states that eschatology should primarily be person-centered, focusing on the person of Christ, not on a specific sequence of events. He uses *epiphania* (manifestation of Christ), *parousia* (arrival of Christ), and *apocalypse* (revelation of Christ) to show that the emphasis of the New Testament regarding the end times is about the person of Christ.
5. The 70 weeks of Daniel is a specific prophetic passage interpreted differently by many. Dr. Wilson uses it to argue that making such interpretations a requirement for fellowship or teaching positions is going too far and can create unnecessary division.
6. Dr. Wilson emphasizes that how we interpret prophecy shouldn't be a test for fellowship because it can create schisms and division among believers. He argues that the essentials of the Christian faith are simpler and should be the basis of unity, rather than specific interpretations of prophetic events.
7. Paul interpreted the rock that gave water in the wilderness as Christ, seeing it as a foreshadowing of spiritual sustenance and living water. This demonstrates that New Testament writers often reinterpreted Old Testament events and narratives, seeing them as pointing to Christ.
8. Dr. Wilson explains that while Joel's original audience was Jewish, the New Testament broadens the application to include Gentiles. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on "all flesh" in Acts 2 initially applies to Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost but it is ultimately meant to be a progressive and inclusive expansion to all people.
9. Dr. Wilson means that many prophecies are conditional on human response, and can be altered if people turn away from evil and repent. Therefore, they are not

fixed, deterministic predictions, but open to the possibility of change based on human behavior and obedience.

10. The speaker states that Old Testament prophets often viewed the "day of the Lord" as a single event, while the New Testament reveals it to be two phases: Christ's first coming and second coming. Thus, one challenge in interpreting prophecy is recognizing how Old Testament passages are interpreted and applied to two distinct phases of God's plan.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of Dr. Wilson's emphasis on the poetic nature of prophecy. How does understanding the use of figurative language change our reading of prophetic texts, and what are the potential pitfalls if we read such language too literally?
2. Discuss the role of community and fellowship in interpreting biblical prophecy. What are the dangers of making specific interpretations a test of fellowship, and how can we foster unity while still exploring different understandings of eschatology?
3. Examine Dr. Wilson's claim that eschatology should be "person-centered, not event-centered". How does this perspective shift the emphasis in our reading of prophetic literature, and what are its implications for how Christians should live in the present?
4. Explore the concept of "conditional prophecy" as discussed by Dr. Wilson. How does this idea challenge traditional notions of prophecy, and what role does human agency play in fulfilling or altering prophetic pronouncements?
5. Evaluate the tensions between literal and metaphorical readings of prophetic texts, using the concepts of the first and second comings of Christ. What are the interpretive challenges involved in reconciling different time perspectives in the Old and New Testaments, and how can Christians approach such challenges with humility and wisdom?

Glossary of Key Terms

Eschatology: The study of the end times, concerning the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world.

Hermeneutics: The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of biblical texts.

Dispensationalism: A theological system that divides history into distinct periods or "dispensations," often involving specific interpretations of prophecy and the role of Israel.

Epiphania: A Greek word referring to the manifestation or appearance of Christ.

Parousia: A Greek word meaning "presence" or "arrival," often used to refer to the second coming of Christ.

Apocalypse: A Greek word meaning "revelation," often used in reference to the end times unveiling of God's purposes.

Shalom: A Hebrew word meaning peace, wholeness, and well-being.

Messiah: The promised deliverer of the Jewish people, often associated with the coming of a king and a new age. Christians identify Jesus as the Messiah.

Exegesis: The critical interpretation and explanation of a text, especially of scripture.

Nabi/Navi: Hebrew words for prophet.

Berit Olam: Hebrew for eternal covenant.

Mikvehot: Jewish ritual bath.

Pre-Millennialism: The belief that Christ will return before a literal thousand-year reign of peace on earth.

5. FAQs on Wilson, Prophets, Session 6, Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting the Prophets, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Understanding the Prophets

- **How should we approach interpreting the Old Testament prophets?** Interpreting the Old Testament prophets is less like a strict science and more like an art, requiring sensitivity and careful consideration. We should start with the Old Testament in its own context, then consider any further revelation or teachings in the New Testament. It's essential to understand the original meaning of the text in its historical and cultural setting before applying it to contemporary contexts. We must recognize that much of prophecy is poetry, using figures of speech, such as similes, metaphors, and hyperbole, and avoid a overly literal interpretation that ignores the poetic nature of the language.
- **Why is it crucial to remember that a significant portion of prophetic literature is poetic?** A large part of the Old Testament, including prophetic texts, is poetry. The Hebrew culture valued words and used poetic devices like parallelism, assonance, and onomatopoeia to make their message memorable and impactful. The use of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, and hyperbole, requires us to interpret these texts with an understanding of the broad concept being conveyed rather than focusing on a strict, literal precision. Recognizing the poetic nature helps avoid misinterpretations and allows us to appreciate the intended meaning behind the word pictures.
- **What should be the primary focus of our eschatological studies according to the text?** Our focus should be person-centered, not event-centered. The emphasis should be on the person of Jesus Christ, as eschatology is ultimately about His manifestation (epiphania), His arrival (parousia), and His revelation (apocalypse). Rather than getting caught up in precise timelines or speculative scenarios, we should focus on the blessed hope of Christ's return and our relationship with Him. The New Testament emphasizes seeing Christ as He is and striving for purity in light of this hope.

- **How should disagreements on the interpretation of prophecy affect our Christian fellowship?** Interpretations of prophecy should not be used as a test for Christian fellowship. Differences in understanding prophetic details should not lead to division. As Augustine wisely said, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, but in all things charity." We should hold to the basic core beliefs, such as the personal, visible return of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and his atoning death for our sins. Beyond these essentials, there should be freedom of thought, coupled with love and respect for others' diverse viewpoints on prophetic details.
- **How does the New Testament sometimes reinterpret Old Testament texts?** New Testament writers sometimes reinterpreted Old Testament texts in ways that might not have been apparent to the original authors. For example, Paul interprets the water from the rock in the wilderness as Christ. The prophets who wrote those stories probably never thought they were talking about the Christ. Additionally, Paul expands the idea of God's forgiveness and restoration in Hosea, initially written in reference to Israel, to include the Gentiles. These reinterpretations do not necessarily invalidate the original meaning but rather reveal deeper layers of meaning and connections within God's overall plan, even transcending good normative principles of doing biblical exegesis.
- **What is the significance of understanding that prophetic texts can be conditional?** Prophecies, especially those about foreign nations, are often conditional, not necessarily fixed or predetermined. They depend on the human response of a nation or people. God considers repentance, and His response to a people may change if they turn from their evil ways. This is illustrated in Jeremiah 18:7-10, which shows that God can relent or reconsider plans based on a nation's actions. Prophecy is not a static prediction set in stone but includes the possibility for change and is a reminder that "no word is God's last word".
- **How did Old Testament prophets perceive the timing of the Messiah's coming and God's final acts?** Old Testament prophets typically did not distinguish between the first and second comings of Christ. They often saw them as one event, that God would visit history to both judge the wicked and vindicate his own people. To them, these two things seemed to occur at the same time, however, it would come in two phases. The first coming and the Day of the Lord is inaugurated and the second coming and the day of the Lord is consummated. When we read the prophets we need to read through what was once called a "postponed eschatology" lens.

- **Why should we avoid a deterministic or fatalistic approach to prophecy?** We must be careful to not read prophecy deterministically or fatalistically, imposing our will on others. For example, while some may use scriptural land promises to support Israel's claim to all of its historic borders, this interpretation must be tempered with principles of justice, morality, and compassion for all people in those regions. We should avoid using a literalistic reading of the text to justify actions that may create hardship, such as forcing people to move from land they live on. Instead, application of prophecy should always be sensitive and balanced, prioritizing the welfare of all.