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Isaiah - Introduction to the Prophets (Part 2)



Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah's writings contain prophecies about God's plan for deliverance and salvation, including the coming of a messiah who will fix everything. This messianic age, as described in Isaiah 2, will bring peace to the nations, and it is an important aspect of understanding the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Though some prophecies refer to specific events, many have a dual fulfillment, pointing to both a historical and a future hope. Ultimately, Isaiah's message is one of hope and trust in God's plan for redemption.

Transcript

I'd like to revisit this Introduction to the Prophets. We have not quite finished that, and then we will afterward move to an introduction of the book of Isaiah. I was talking about some of the reasons that the prophets are found to be so difficult to understand.

And one of the features that is very, I think many people struggle with, I think many scholars do, when I read their commentaries, they seem to be struggling with this. I know I struggled with it for many years, and then I felt like it, eventually I figured out what was going on. You can judge for yourself whether I'm right or wrong, but I think you'll find that this explanation does solve a major problem.

And that is that many times in a prophet, they'll be talking about some near-range disaster. Generally, a very typical pattern in the prophets is God will give his complaint about the sins that people are doing. He'll tell what he's planning to do to rectify that, the judgment he's going to bring, the disaster, the horrors that are coming upon them.

But almost always, he'll then come around and say, but after that, I'm going to save you. I'm going to rescue you. And sometimes the rescue is referring to the rescue from the Assyrians, depending on the prophet's time frame and what he's talking about.

It might be deliverance from some other local enemies, the Assyrians or some other enemy. Or in many cases, it's from Babylon. A very common theme is that God will rescue his people from an exile that they will experience in Babylon.

But the thing is, you'll be reading these passages and suddenly you say, wait a minute, this looks like it's talking about Jesus. Right? I mean, it looks like this is like a New Testament thing we're talking about here, and yet this is talking about Assyria, Babylon. What's up with that? Well, I think what's up with that is this.

Remember I said that there is a typological element in the Old Testament, where certain things of the Old Testament are divinely ordained circumstances that God intends to foreshadow something more ultimate. Of course, the ultimate purpose of God was and is Christ, that Jesus would come, that he would undo the works of the devil, that he would rectify the damage done by the fall. He would be a second Adam, the first Adam God has sent to trouble, but someday God would send another who would be as significant, even more significant than the first Adam, a second Adam who would bring justification in life where the first Adam brought condemnation and death.

The coming of Christ is the grand plan of God. Jesus is said in the scripture to be the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world, that is from the very time that God created the world, he already had it planned that he would send Jesus to redeem people who at that time had not yet even fallen, but God knew they would. Therefore, Jesus is God's eternal purpose.

The prophets, all of them, I believe, there may be one exception. If there is, it would be, I think, Obadiah, who principally is just a very short prophet who only is talking about the fall of Edom, but I'm not sure I would even exclude from that book. The prophets all essentially have the Messiah as their ultimate interest.

The Messiah would be the anointed one, that's what the word Messiah means, the one that God would anoint, the one that God would raise up and make to be a deliverer and a king and a savior. In the prophets, there is this recurring vision of an ultimate salvation that the Messiah would bring and what we could call a messianic age, an age that would be inaugurated by the Messiah's coming where it would be an age of peace and security and righteousness and justice and it would be all good. The Messiah would fix everything.

This is the ultimate plan of God. It's not surprising, therefore, that when God inspired the prophets, he revealed to them things about this ultimate plan. But, in the Old Testament, there were events of God's deliverance of his people which served as foreshadowing types of that.

I mentioned the Exodus because in the New Testament, the Exodus is frequently referred to as a type of what Christ would do. I mentioned that on the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke 9, it says that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and the three disciples that were with him and they spoke to Jesus about the Exodus. In the Greek text of Luke, it says they spoke of the Exodus that Jesus was going to accomplish.

Here's Moses and Elijah. Moses was the man God used for the first Exodus and now he's talking to Jesus as sort of a second Moses. You're going to lead a second Exodus, of course, a spiritual one.

The Exodus that would be accomplished by Jesus through his death and resurrection is a deliverance of his people from the slavery of sin which is, of course, typified in the Old Testament by the deliverance of the children of Israel from the slavery in Egypt from pagan oppressors. We had spiritual oppressors. In Matthew chapter 1, the angel told Joseph that the child's name will be named Jesus which means Jehovah is salvation or Yahweh is salvation.

It says because he will save his people from their sins. Moses saved people from the bondage in Egypt. Jesus would save them from the bondage of sin.

And so the Exodus in the Old Testament, a time of God delivering Israel and establishing them, taking them out of slavery, established them in their own land as a new nation, that happened in the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of a time when a new Moses, a new Exodus, a new salvation, a spiritual one would come and it would establish a spiritual people as a spiritual nation. Now, the Babylonian exile was like another Exodus too because in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and carried the remaining Jews except for a very small ragtag remnant of peasants who were left to farm the land. Most of the Jews were carried away into Babylon for 70 years.

But the prophets predicted that that would happen and that God would rescue them from Babylon, that God would restore them after a period of discipline and chastening in Babylon. He'd bring them back and restore the nation. It was like another Exodus.

In fact, one of the prophets said when that happens, they will no longer say, blessed be the Lord God who delivered us out of Egypt, but they will say, blessed be the Lord God who delivered us from all the countries where we were driven, meaning from the Babylonian exile. That is, God's drawing Israel back after their nation was destroyed for 70 years, coming back and building them again from scratch. It's just like the Exodus itself, bringing them out of bondage in a foreign land, come back to the promised land, build their temple, build their nation again, essentially from scratch.

Twice God established the nation of Israel and both times it was by saving them from bondage. So the return from Babylon and the Exodus are two events of the same type, and they are of the same typological significance, too. Both of them are a type of the salvation that is in Christ.

Now, we don't find as much in the New Testament referring to the return of the exiles from Babylon as a type, as we do find references to the Exodus as a type. But we do find the New Testament writers quoting passages in the Old Testament, which in their context are passages that begin talking about the return of the exiles from Babylon. But

the New Testament writers quote from these passages and apply them to the church, which tells us that they are seeing the return of the exiles from Babylon in the very same way that they see the coming of the children of Israel out of Egypt.

God delivered his enslaved people from foreign oppressors, safely brought them on a journey to the promised land, and established them as a nation twice. And that is a picture of what he would do through the Messiah. The Messiah would be the new Moses.

He would be the new Cyrus. Cyrus was the king who allowed the Jews to be delivered from their Babylonian exile, the Persian king. We'll talk about that later in Isaiah.

These men were types of Christ, and the salvation of God's people that they initiated is a type of Christ's salvation. So what happens very often is that there's a morphing of the prophetic vision from some kind of political deliverance or some kind of thing that God does to save his people in Old Testament times, and then suddenly the passages talk about the Messiah. Because the prophets under inspiration cannot help but have their minds carried from this instance in their own time, perhaps, of God delivering his people to the ultimate deliverance that God would someday bring through the Messiah.

And the topics seem to be morphed together. It's almost like both are being talked about at the same time sometimes. We're familiar, for example, with a passage in Zechariah chapter 9, which is quoted in the New Testament as a reference to the triumphal entry of Christ on a donkey.

In Zechariah 9 and verse 9, it says, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you. He is just and having salvation lowly, and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. Now this is quoted in the New Testament as being fulfilled when Jesus on Palm Sunday rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, but the context in Zechariah 9 is different.

The first eight verses are actually describing Alexander the Great and his conquests. The opening verses of Zechariah 9 describe the cities that fall to Alexander the Great in the very order that he conquered them. And although you might not see a clear reference to Alexander the Great there if you just read those verses, if you read the context of this section of Zechariah, this is the time that is being discussed.

But what's more than that, when you come to verse 8, after the first seven verses have described all these cities falling to Alexander the Great, verse 8 says, I will camp around my house because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns. No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for now I have seen with my eyes. Now here's all these cities falling to Alexander, but God's house, the temple in Jerusalem, God encamps around it and delivers it.

What actually happened in history? What happened in history was Alexander did conquer

the towns in the very order that they're named and came to Jerusalem to conquer it too. However, the priest, whose name was Jada at the time, came out to meet Alexander and his armies with a procession of priests in white robes and carrying the scroll, apparently, of the prophet Daniel. In the prophet Daniel there were predictions about Alexander the Great that were clear enough that the priest could show him that God, the God of Israel, had predicted his conquest.

Alexander was sufficiently impressed that he decided not to destroy Jerusalem. Instead, he went into the temple and offered a sacrifice with the priest and then he made the Jews governors of his provinces. While Alexander had entered Israel planning to do the same thing to them that he'd done to everyone else, and he did conquer them but without a fight, God camped around his house and made sure the temple was not destroyed as it had previously been by the Babylonians.

Alexander did not do it. Here we have in the first eight chapters of Zechariah 9, Alexander's conquest and God delivering his house from Alexander, like 323 years before Christ, something like that. And then suddenly we've got Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey in the next verse.

Why? It's fairly commonplace in the prophets. You've got an instance of God saving his people, as in this case, where he didn't allow Alexander to destroy the temple. Suddenly we're on the subject of salvation.

Speaking of that, the Messiah is coming to save us someday. And so we've got this tendency on the part of the prophets, and Isaiah does this, Jeremiah does this a great deal. They'll be talking about something that really occurred previous to the time of Christ.

Generally speaking, or I would say virtually every time, it's a case of God saving his people from something. But the very subject of salvation almost forces the prophet to look to the ultimate salvation that will someday come through the Messiah, and then we have a messianic prophecy, a description of what we could call the messianic age or the kingdom age. And so this morphing of like an Old Testament event into the New Testament message, really, is something that confuses our reader.

But it doesn't have to as much once we see that this is what they do. Now, the most important theme of the Old Testament prophets is the messianic age, the Messiah and the order that he will establish when he comes. Virtually every one of the prophets has passages that are describing this age.

Some of the passages mention the Messiah specifically. Some simply refer to an order of things that God will establish, which, of course, is by the Messiah's coming. Sometimes the Messiah is not mentioned particularly in the passages, and sometimes he is.

But in every case, the passages describe the ultimate order of things that God will establish through the Messiah. I refer to these as kingdom age or messianic age passages. There are a great number of them in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, Ezekiel.

The minor prophets have them. Daniel doesn't have quite the same kind of passages but does mention, of course, the kingdom age and the Messiah, but not so much in whole chapters and large descriptions. But extremely common recurring theme, and the most important of all the themes in the prophets, is, of course, Jesus and the order that he was predicted to establish, the kingdom, the messianic age.

The Jews of Jesus' time and before, they spoke of history divided into two parts, this age and the age to come. This age was the age they're living in. The age to come would be the age that the Messiah would inaugurate.

And so the messianic age, extremely important. It is this age of which it is said in Isaiah 2 that they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. It's that age of which Isaiah 11 says, the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the lion and the kid shall lay down together peaceably.

And those kinds of passages, I mention those two because they're probably familiar to you. After all, you've been reading Isaiah and you come to that, even if you didn't finish, you got to those chapters, certainly. And you find passages of that sort throughout the prophets generally.

They are the high point. They're the golden age. They are really the hope of Israel.

That God would send them a king like David, usually. He would be descended from David and he was very much often likened to David. David was a type of him.

Have you ever noticed how many times in the New Testament, the writers will quote from the Psalms as if Jesus is speaking, but you look at the Psalms, it's just David speaking. David's talking about himself. David's talking about his own situation.

And the New Testament writers will quote that as if it's Jesus speaking. Why? David's a type of Christ. What David said about himself is true of David and of Christ.

And therefore, there are words rightly put into the mouth of Jesus, though originally put in the mouth of David, where he may have had no idea he was talking about anyone other than himself, but the New Testament writers did because Jesus opened their understanding that they might understand the scriptures. Now, it is important for us to get a handle on this messianic age in general before we go through the prophets, because we're going to encounter it again and again and again and again. And what happens going through the prophets, if I don't give this kind of introduction, is every time I come to one of those messianic age passages, I have to repeat many of the same

things to orientate the listener because there is a tension.

That is, there is a tension in the modern body of Christ in terms of how these passages are to be interpreted because all Christians agree that Jesus' coming is the inauguration of the kingdom passage, the kingdom age passage, the messianic age. But what Christians differ about is whether it's his first coming or his second coming. What is agreed upon is that the messianic passages all talk about the same thing.

In other words, once we've become familiar with one of them and identified it, we're pretty much going to apply that identification to all of them because there's this one age that the prophets keep talking about. And it cannot be inaugurated by human effort, and the prophets make it very clear it's God who will establish it. And it is, all Christians agree, it is Jesus, the Messiah.

Who establishes it. But does he establish it at his first coming or his second coming? Now, those who believe that it is at his first coming identify the messianic age with the church age, with that which began at Pentecost. At Pentecost, the kingdom age began, or the messianic promises began to be fulfilled.

And the era that we read about in these passages then is the present age. Now, if this is true, then of course much of the language has to be taken not literally. Because the church age has not been an age of universal peace and universal security and so forth.

However, if one is willing to consider that this is talking about the spiritual experience of the believers, then it would seem to have New Testament support that Jesus did bring about these circumstances for us spiritually when he came. This would have to be discussed point by point and case by case. But the point is, one view is that Jesus' first coming established this era that is so frequently spoken of in the prophets.

By the way, this was the view that was held by the church from the time of the apostles until about the 19th century AD. So essentially, it's the historical viewpoint of the church. In the early 19th century, a new view arose.

And it held that we cannot take these passages symbolically because that's not doing justice to the word of God. That God speaks literally. And therefore, we should take them literally.

And therefore, they say these kingdom passages, since they have not occurred in a literal fashion at the first coming of Christ, it must be that when he comes the second time, they will occur literally. And therefore, they apply these to a future age, usually associated with a thousand-year reign of Christ at his second coming. This view is called premillennialism.

And it identifies the millennium, a 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth after his second coming with the kingdom age prophecies. In doing so, they're able to take the passages

more or less literally. They can say they really will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

There really will be no more war for 1,000 years as Christ reigns because the Messiah will come and establish this circumstance. So these are the views that are out there. Today, it would appear that the premillennial view, the view that this age is a future millennium that will be established at the second coming of Christ, would appear to be the most visible view in the evangelical church.

I say the most visible because it's not always the case that the most visible view is the most widespread. Throughout history, and even at this time, there are whole sectors of the church denominations and such that still hold the historic view, that the church has always held, that Jesus inaugurated this messianic age at his first coming, and that many of these prophecies will need to be understood spiritually rather than literally. However, very large sectors of the body of Christ, especially since the early 1900s, have held the view that these passages talk about a future millennium that will be inaugurated when Jesus comes again, and that these promises have been postponed.

That Jesus would have, in fact, established him at his first coming, except that Israel rejected him. And because of that, they were not fulfilled and were postponed until a later time. The view that holds that position is, I mentioned, called premillennialism, but especially a variety of premillennialism called dispensationalism.

Now, if these words are new to you, just know that millennium means thousand years. Premillennial means a person believes that Jesus' second coming will be before the millennium. So they believe in a premillennial return of Christ before the thousand years.

And so a premillennialist believes that Jesus will come back and establish a millennium, a thousand-year reign. You might say, you mean there's people who don't believe that? Well, there are, like most of Christians throughout history. But there have always been some who did, or at least for a long time there have been some who did.

And so these are two views that exist in tension and have a very different approach to understand these messianic passages that are so prominent in the prophets. Obviously, deciding the issue of is it the first coming of the Messiah or the second coming of the Messiah that inaugurates this period that is described would be very helpful. At the very least helpful in knowing what the prophets are talking about.

Well, we actually have some help in this, and this help, again, comes from the New Testament writers. As I mentioned in our first lecture, the New Testament writers were given by Christ the divine revelation of the meaning of the Old Testament scriptures. And they were good stewards of that revelation.

They used it a lot. They quoted the Old Testament a lot. Many of the times when they

quoted the Old Testament, they were quoting from these passages, these very ones, that are the Kingdom Age passages.

And therefore, as we see how the apostles quoted and interpreted these passages, we will gain an understanding of how they were intended by God when he inspired the prophets to write them. Although the prophets themselves may not have understood it. The rabbis did not understand it.

Now, I am going to take the view throughout my lectures that the church took through most of history. I believe the messianic age was inaugurated by Christ at his first coming. This is a somewhat difficult position to maintain among modern American Christians because of our Western way of thinking.

Remember, the prophets and the apostles and Jesus were not Westerners. They were not Europeans. They did not write or think like Westerners.

For us to know how they did write and how they did think requires that we immerse ourselves in them. I will just tell you in a moment's time my testimony. I was raised, like any Western American, not immersed.

I knew something of the Bible because I was raised in a Christian home. I went to church. I heard sermons based on verses here and there out of the Bible.

But I never heard any teaching of the Bible passages in their context growing up. And I was dispensational. That is, a person who believed that these promises to Israel were postponed because Jews rejected Christ and that it will be at the second coming of Christ that the initiation of this era will begin.

My early teachers were of this opinion also, and they always interpreted these passages that way. It was always the millennium. The study Bible I used, the Scofield study Bible I used in those days, interpreted them that way because it was also dispensational in its orientation.

I didn't actually know there were any other views than that. But my problems came because I'm—if you listen to me enough, you'll probably conclude that I think for myself, for better or for worse. Not necessarily better, but it's inevitable I will be thinking for myself.

And I've always done that, and that's what's gotten me into the trouble I'm in. But I'm not in that much trouble. But in some circles, I imagine I am.

But I don't worry about that. As a youth, I first picked up the views I was taught. What else do you do? The Bible says in Proverbs, he that is first in his own cause seems right until his neighbor comes and examines him.

Well, I never had a neighbor to come and cross-examine my views. I had to cross-examine them. I didn't intend to.

I was not skeptical of what my teachers said. It fit nicely as far as I was concerned until I read the New Testament. Now, of course, I read the New Testament from the beginning.

But one thing I didn't do from the beginning is what I later felt I must do. That is, when I'd read the New Testament and they'd quote a verse from the Old Testament, for the longest time, I just assumed, of course, that's what that verse means. I never even familiarized myself with the same verse in its context in the Old Testament.

So I just assumed that all these verses that Christians quote, that you would see them clearly in the Old Testament. In fact, I couldn't understand why the Jews didn't recognize Jesus because so many verses in the Old Testament clearly are talking about him, clearly as far as I was concerned, because I was assuming the New Testament interpretation of it. But I didn't realize until I actually studied the Old Testament how these verses fell into context that I don't know if I would have seen them the way the apostles did.

I don't know that I would have known that was about the Messiah. I don't know if I would have recognized it that way. In other words, as I read the Old Testament, I began to come across the very verses that I was familiar with because I'd seen them quoted in the New Testament and always applied them.

I'm sorry, but as I ran into them in the Old Testament, they didn't seem to fit the context. It seemed to me like the apostles were taking these out of context, or even Jesus might have been taking them out of context sometimes. That puzzled me until I realized, well, yeah, that's why Jesus had to open their understanding because you wouldn't understand it in the natural.

The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God because they're spiritually discerned. Not to say that Christians who don't see them properly are not spiritual, but you could see how the Jews who didn't have the Holy Spirit but who were reading them wouldn't necessarily understand them correctly. I was on to this.

I began to do my own study to see everywhere that the New Testament writers quoted from the Old Testament to go back and look at the context, and it was perplexing. Some of it really didn't make much sense to me. Sometimes I just thought, well, it's just esoteric, and the Holy Spirit just showed them that it means that.

But then I began to see patterns. I began to realize that they were taking all of the passages of a certain type a certain way, a different way than I was taught to take it. But if you begin to take all the passages of that type the way they took them, then all the quotes they made made sense in that connection.

Basically, over a period of some years, I didn't have anyone guiding me about this. It was

only after I reached my present conclusions that I found out that this is what the church had always taught, even the church fathers taught it. I realized that the New Testament writers were spiritualizing, as we would say.

Now, I was raised a dispensationalist. The word spiritualize is sort of like the word heretic. You don't spiritualize because that's what liberals do, or that's what non-dispensationalists do.

That's what Christians always did before they were dispensationalists, and dispensationalism arose in 1830. So all Christians spiritualized these passages until 1830, even the church fathers. Some of the church fathers were pre-millennialists, but they still spiritualized these passages.

I realized that though I had been taught never to spiritualize because we must take things literally, I realized, well, the apostles apparently were not taught that rule because they spiritualized virtually everything they quoted in the Old Testament. Now, it made me wonder, why then did anyone think you should take it literally? If the apostles consistently take things in a spiritual way, I shouldn't say consistently. There are times they take things literally, but about one-third of the time, I found.

The apostles quoted scripture in its literal sense about a third of the time. Two-thirds of the time, they seemed to spiritualize. I thought, well, why did anyone come up with the idea that you should take it literally? Well, I'll tell you what I would have said and what my dispensational teachers would say and what dispensational writers still say if you read their books.

They say you should take all prophecy literally because Jesus fulfilled literally 300 Old Testament prophecies. Therefore, if 300 prophecies were fulfilled literally, then that must be the way you're supposed to take it. We see the prophecy in the Old Testament this way.

Jesus literally fulfilled it. It must be that God intends for prophecy to be taken literally in general. That's what I always said.

But again, I later studied that and realized that Jesus didn't fulfill 300 scriptures literally. He may very well have fulfilled 300 prophecies, but not literally. I mean, the people who say that are going through the New Testament, counting up the prophecies that are quoted about Jesus as fulfilled.

They say, oh, about 300 there, and they're not really looking carefully. For example, in the book of Matthew, Chapter 2, there are four Old Testament passages that are said to be fulfilled in the events of that particular chapter. Just to give you an example, Matthew, Chapter 2. It begins with the wise man saying, where is he who is born king of the Jews? Herod goes to the chief priests, asks them, the rabbis, where's the Messiah going to be

born? They answer from Micah 5, 2. But you, Bethlehem, verse 6, but you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah.

For out of you shall come one, a ruler who will be shepherd of my people Israel. Okay, well, that's literally true. The Messiah was born literally in Bethlehem, although he was not a literal shepherd.

That's figurative. He was a carpenter, not a shepherd. We have pictures of Jesus carrying lambs on his shoulders, but those are imaginative.

He never tended sheep. He was not a shepherd. So to call him the shepherd is itself to use a poetic word, which we were so accustomed to, we think of it as literal.

No, that's literal. The shepherd came from Bethlehem. David was a shepherd who came from Bethlehem.

The Messiah is a shepherd who came from Bethlehem. Well, true in a sense, but he's only spiritually a shepherd. He's not a literal shepherd.

But he did literally come from Bethlehem. So there is some literal fulfillment here. But we move on further, and it turns out that in verse 15, the parents of Jesus take him into Egypt.

And it says in verse 15, he was there until the death of Herod that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophets, saying, out of Egypt I call my son. Well, that sounds literal because Jesus was God's son. Jesus was in Egypt as a child, and God called him back after Herod died, came back from Egypt, out of Egypt, I've called my son, a literal fulfillment.

Not exactly. If you look at the prophecy that's being quoted, it's Hosea 11.1. Here's how it reads in Hosea 11.1. When Israel was young, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt. First of all, there's not even a prophecy there.

There's not even a prediction. It's talking about something historical. When Israel was young, God loved him and called him out of Egypt.

The exodus, it's a statement about the exodus. The prophecy itself doesn't even appear to predict anything. It's just a reminiscence of what God did, bringing Israel out of Egypt when they were young.

Now, you might say, what about the son? Well, don't you remember? God told Moses, you go tell Pharaoh, Israel is my firstborn. If you don't let Israel go, I will kill your firstborn, son, that is. He's saying, Israel is my son.

You let my son go, or I'll kill your son. Hosea says, when Israel was young, it's personifying the nation of Israel as God's son. I loved him, and I called him out of Egypt.

It goes on to say how I led him in the wilderness and so forth. It's actually a recounting of a historical period of Israel's life. The passage itself does not contain any overt prediction at all.

And yet, when Jesus comes out of Egypt as a baby, Matthew says, and this fulfilled what was written in the prophet, out of Egypt I call my son. Well, how could this be? This is certainly not a literal fulfillment of a prophecy, because there's not even a prophecy there. This is typological.

You see, in this case, Israel is being seen as a type of Christ. And Matthew and the other apostles saw this fairly often. They saw Jesus as the new Israel.

I've said he's the second Adam. He's the new David. He's also the new Israel.

All the important characters in the Old Testament are types of Christ in one way or another, it seems. And Jesus is the new everything. The new Moses.

The new David. The new even Israel. Israel, in the Old Testament, is a type of the Messiah.

This can easily be demonstrated at a time when we have more time to do so. But the New Testament often makes connections. I mean, think of it.

Jesus passed through the waters of baptism like Israel passed through the Red Sea. He went in the wilderness and was tempted for 40 days. Israel was tempted 40 years.

In Jesus' life, a day for a year. So he comes through the waters. He's in the wilderness for 40 days, tested.

He answers all the temptations with quotations from Deuteronomy. All the quotes are from Deuteronomy. Talk about Israel's time in the wilderness.

There's many things in the life of Jesus that are predicted by foreshadowing. Not by verbal predictions like prophecies, but simply by events which themselves predict something. The events themselves foreshadow something.

We find two prophecies now we've come to in Matthew 2. One of them was a literal fulfillment. Bethlehem will be where he'll come from. Well, Jesus did literally come from Bethlehem.

The second one, though, I called my son out of Egypt. Well, Jesus did literally come out of Egypt. But there's no prophecy in the Old Testament that was literally fulfilled.

There's just a historical reminiscence made by Hosea, which serves in the apostolic mind as a type and a foreshadowing of Christ. Therefore, Christ doing it is the counterpart of it, and therefore is a fulfillment of what was, in a sense, secretly anticipated by that

statement. Not exactly what you'd call a literal fulfillment of a prophecy.

But then we go further, down to verse 18. When Herod killed all the babies in Bethlehem under two years old, all the male babies, it says in verse 17 and 18, then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, and the quotation is from Jeremiah chapter 31, excuse me, verse 15. It says, Okay, so when Herod killed a few dozen male infants in Bethlehem, this fulfilled this prophecy? I'll accept it because the apostle says so, and Jesus opened their understanding so they'd understand the scriptures, but I wouldn't have gotten that out of that.

Where is a reference to Herod? Where is a reference to Bethlehem even? There's a prediction, is Rachel in her tomb weeping because her children are no more? Well, the people of Bethlehem weren't Rachel's children. They were of the tribe of Judah. Judah came through Leah, not Rachel.

And was Rachel literally in her grave weeping? Her bones were shedding tears? I don't think so. This is obviously figurative language. This is impressionistic language.

This is giving the impression of a very sorrowful event occurring in the precincts of Bethlehem. She was buried, Rachel was buried, according to Genesis, as Jacob and his family were traveling near Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. So she was buried in the vicinity near Bethlehem, although it's not mentioned in the prophecy.

But the assumption is this tragedy in Bethlehem would evoke sorrow from godly Rachel who was nearby buried. It's like we might say, well, the founding fathers would turn over in their graves if they saw some of the policies the government's making right now. You know? Right? Well, we're not speaking literally.

People don't really turn over in their graves unless they were buried prematurely. Or there's an earthquake. But to say Rachel's weeping in her grave is no more literal than to say that George Washington's turning over in his grave is literal.

This is not literal language. It's poetic. It's figurative.

Now, did this fulfill it? Apparently so. This is the fulfillment according to the Holy Spirit's interpretation. But not an interpretation I would have gotten taking the passage literally.

That's not a literal interpretation. There's another case at the end of Matthew 2. Verse 23, it says, They came and dwelt in the city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. Now, this one's really strange because there's not any statement in the Old Testament that says He shall be called a Nazarene or anything very similar to it at all.

The statement He shall be called a Nazarene is not found in the Old Testament. So in what sense did Jesus fulfill prophecy when He moved to Nazareth and became a

Nazarene? Well, it was written in the prophets that He'll be called a Nazarene. Really? Which ones? Now, there is an answer.

I'm sure if you asked Matthew, he could answer that for you. And scholars have tried to discern what that answer is. And there's a couple of suggestions.

Matthew is not here to tell us exactly how he understood this, but there are a few suggestions. One suggestion, and this is not the one I would favor, is that Nazareth was a town of low reputation. And therefore being called a Nazarene would be sort of a term of scorn.

And although this exact statement is not found in the Old Testament, the Old Testament does have passages where it says that the Messiah would be scorned and derided and so forth. So if in the mind of Matthew's readers, Nazarene meant a scorned person, then one could say the prophets did predict that He would be a scorned person. And Jesus being a Nazarene was scorned, so that fulfills those predictions.

It's a little out there, kind of on the edge. But what are you going to do? You don't have an actual statement like this in the Old Testament. There is what I consider to be a better interpretation, though not so much better that the light would go on and say, oh yeah, that's obviously it.

But I think a slightly better interpretation, and this is held by the majority of commentators, I think, and that is that the etymology of the word Nazareth, in other words, Nazarene means a person from Nazareth. By the way, it's not a Nazarite. The King James Bible, in searching desperately for a cross-reference for this verse, because, you know, in the margins they want to put, if it says this fulfills this scripture, they want to put in the margin what the scripture is that it's fulfilling.

Desperately searching for something relevant, the King James editors put in Numbers chapter 6, which was the law of the Nazarite. Well, Nazarite and Nazarene are not the same thing. And furthermore, Jesus was not a Nazarite, and nowhere was it ever predicted He would be.

It was just their desperate attempt to find something similar. And the word Nazarite is similar to the word Nazareth, at least in English. Nazarite is someone who takes a special kind of vow of separation.

Anyone in Israel could do that. A Nazarene is entirely different. It's like a Washingtonian, someone who lives in the state of Washington.

A Nazarene lives in the city of Nazareth. A New Yorker lives in New York. Nazarene talks about geography and where a person lives.

Now, Jesus was a Nazarene. He was Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, He was a Nazarene.

But there's no mention of Nazareth or Nazarenes in the Old Testament at all. So what do we do with this? Well, what most scholars today believe is that it has to do with the etymology of Nazareth or Nazarene. It comes from the Hebrew word netzer.

The word netzer means branch. Therefore, Nazareth means branch town or town of the branch. Now, there are multiple prophets, among them Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, who refer to the Messiah as the branch.

It's one of the names of the Messiah. He should be called the branch. Now, Nazareth, the word means the town of the branch.

Matthew, using somewhat of a stretched out kind of way of thinking, seems to be thinking, now, isn't that interesting? The man that the prophets said would be the branch, here he comes, and he's a Nazarene. He lives in the town of the branch. It's like, although this was not done, but the word Bethlehem means house of bread.

It's like someone would say, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Just, He's the bread of life. You know, isn't that cool? The bread of life is born in the house of bread.

It's sort of the same thing. Here's the branch. He's raised in the town of the branch.

Now, the Old Testament didn't say he'd be raised in the town of the branch, but did say he'd be called the branch. And so, there's kind of almost a tortured kind of connection here. You almost have to kind of, you know, dislodge the mechanical connection in your mind to these things and say it's kind of a vague sort of a point of interest of similarity that Matthew's using.

He's not literally saying someone in the Old Testament said he'll be called a Nazarene, and look, he was. In fact, he doesn't say prophet. Notice in the other cases, it's the prophet who says what is quoted, but in this case, it's what was said in the prophets, plural.

Notice he's not quoting any particular prophet. He's just saying something that multiple prophets have said, but they didn't say it in those words. So, what I'm saying is here's one single chapter in the New Testament has four Old Testament passages quoted.

One of them is about the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. That's literally fulfilled. One is I have called my son of Egypt.

That's not even a prophecy in the Old Testament. So, it's not a literal fulfillment. It's typological.

It's a typological fulfillment. Israel is a type of Christ. The pattern of Christ's life corresponds in this point to the pattern of Israel's history, and therefore, it's seen as a fulfillment.

Not a literal fulfillment of a prediction, but a typological connection. Then you've got Rachel weeping in her grave. That is certainly not literal.

Then you've got he should be called a Nazarene. That's about as non-literal as anyone could hope to find. Now, what I'm saying is when people say Jesus fulfilled 300 prophecies literally, what they're doing is counting up all the times the New Testament says that it might be fulfilled and then quotes the Old Testament.

Okay, we've got 300 of them, and they say he fulfilled them literally. Hardly. In this one chapter, one out of four could be called literal, and even it has a figurative expression referring to Jesus as a shepherd, which is not a literal vocation for him.

In others, there's symbolic language. There's spiritual language. There's typological language.

There's also literal language. As I said, one thorough study was done of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, and a group of scholars actually who were dispensationalists trained at Dallas Theological Seminary, but they defected from dispensationalism after doing this study. They found that only one in three of the prophecies that Jesus is known to be fulfilled were really literally fulfilled.

The other two-thirds were like these others, not literal. Now, certainly Jesus fulfilled enough prophecies literally to convince us that he's the Messiah, and there's plenty of them that he fulfilled literally, but a lot of the prophecies were not literal, not literal fulfillment. This tells us that while you will find some prophecies that express something in literal language, like the king of Babylon will destroy Jerusalem and take them away for 70 years, that literally happened.

You'll also find a lot of prophecies, though they are talking about real events, that literally happened, they don't describe them in literal terms. They describe them in symbolic terms or spiritualized terms or impressionistic terms or typological terms or some other kinds of terms, poetic terms. So that is why we have so much trouble with the prophets at times.

They're not always speaking in literal terms. And as Western people, now some of you here are Asian people, and maybe it's different where you come from, but those of us from the West, we like things to be a one-to-one correspondence between the thing said and the thing that it means. That's how we write.

That's how our writers write. We want technical writing. We want technical truth.

We don't want all this fluff and touchy-feely impressionistic kind of stuff. We want just the facts. Well, unfortunately, God didn't accommodate the Western mind when he inspired the scripture, probably because there wasn't one yet.

But actually the Greeks were already thinking this way probably in the time of the New Testament, but the Jews weren't Greeks. They were different, and God's not a Greek. And so he spoke in the manner he wished, and it was not always literal.

Now having said that, let's get back to our topic of the Messianic Age prophecies. I told you it's a major theme of the Old Testament. I've given you a chart.

We don't have time to go over all these scriptures, lots and lots of scriptures here. No one could go over these in an hour or two, but you can on your own. But I couldn't discuss them.

I just want to discuss the chart for you, because as I said, these prophecies about the Messianic Age are all about the same Messianic Age. There's only one Messianic Age in God's program, and all the prophets spoke of it, and many of them repeatedly. And so whenever you come to a passage about the Messianic Age, you're actually visiting a certain genre that's commonplace in the prophets, and you're always reading about the same age.

It's the age of the Messiah, though he may in many cases not be mentioned in the passage, it's very recognizable. It's the age of salvation. It's the age of God ending war and sin and corrupt government and so forth.

Now, as I said, premillennialists believe that this age has not yet come. It will be inaugurated at the second coming of Christ, and it will be more or less literally a fulfillment of these prophecies. The church historically has taught, and still a very large segment of the church, and many denominations still teach, what would be called the amillennial approach.

You don't need to know that word, but it'll help you to have a label for the whole system so you know. They believe that this is not describing a future millennium at the second coming of Christ, but it's describing the salvation and the conditions that have prevailed since the first coming of Christ, but taken in a more spiritual way. And the reason that - now, dispensations sometimes tell us that the reason the church fathers spiritualized these passages was because they were anti-Semitic.

They say that if you take these literally, it keeps Israel, the nation of Israel, central to all things. Jerusalem, Zion, the capital, Israel, God's chosen people forever and ever, or at least through the millennium. And on this view, the literal interpretation is very Israel-centered, very Jewish-centered.

And dispensations are very, very Israel-centered. But they say that the early church fathers were anti-Semitic, and therefore they couldn't stomach the literal interpretation of these prophecies that put Israel in such a central place in God's program. And so they, I guess almost deviously, came up with a scheme of spiritualizing these prophecies

rather than taking them literally.

And they stole the promises from Israel and applied them to the church because they said this is not the future millennium, this is the church age. It's us. It's we who are experiencing these things.

That's what the church has always taught from Justin Martyr on. I would say from the Apostle Paul on. Maybe Peter, even before Paul.

Because these men quoted from these passages and applied them. Now the point I want to make is that there may in fact have been some anti-Semites in the early church, just as there have been throughout history. There are some anti-Semites now, but that's a red herring.

The early fathers and Christians ever since then, if they do spiritualize passages, have nothing to do with any dislike they have for Israel. It has to do with the sense that we are compelled to follow the apostolic teaching in the New Testament. And the apostles quoted extensively from these passages, and we are not at liberty to understand them differently than the inspired apostles understood them.

And therefore the church historically has taken these things spiritually because the apostles did. Now this chart I've given you, I came up with this a few years ago to help my students in my school. I guess it's been a decade and a half ago now.

But I consider it to be one of the most helpful pieces of printed literature that I've ever produced. So don't take it lightly. I mean, you should, you know, what do you do? Laminate it.

Frame it. Keep it in your safe at home. Make sure it doesn't get burned up.

This is very valuable. What is it? It's an analysis of the apostolic teaching about the Kingdom Age passages. Now there are many more Kingdom Age or Messianic Age passages than those treated in this chart.

But I've given a really good sampling. If you look at the vertical column on the left, headed by the words Old Testament passage, you'll see there's a list of them. There's Psalm 72.

There's Isaiah 2. There's Isaiah 9. Isaiah 11. Isaiah 35. Jeremiah 30 through 33.

Ezekiel 34 and 37. Joel 2 through chapter 3. Amos 9. Zechariah 14. I just decided to take a sampling.

There's many, many more than this. But I decided to take them from several different prophets, samples. Some of these are the best known.

Some of these are the best known Messianic Age prophecies. There are others. But the point is we really only have to understand one of them to understand them all, at least to identify what's being talked about, because all of them are about the same thing.

But this is a very large sample. And so these are the passages that this chart analyzes. Now if you look across the horizontal column at the top, you see terms like Davidic Kingdom, Gentiles subdued, exiles returned, second exodus or highway to Zion, peace and prosperity, temple worship, salvation and restoration, everlasting duration.

These are all features of the Messianic Age that are mentioned repeatedly in some passages. All the passages mention some of them, though few passages mention all of them. But these are the features of the age that are recurring themes of the Messianic Age.

It's a Davidic Kingdom, that is the king is descended from David, often mentioned, not always, but usually. It's compared with the exiles returning from Babylon or from Egypt. There's a reference to a highway that these people traveled to Zion.

The political conditions and social conditions are prosperous, secure and peaceful. There is reference to worship in the restored temple and salvation and restoration of the land. And it is often said to be everlasting in duration, which makes it hard to make it a thousand year millennium.

But the point is, some people do anyway, because they don't know what else to do with it. Well, what they could do is what the apostles do. And what I do in this is demonstrate what the apostles do.

This is a grid. You can look at all the passages listed in the vertical column and see that they all mention some of these things. Some only mentioned two or three of them or four.

Some mentioned almost all of them. For example, Ezekiel 34 and 37 include all these features. So does Jeremiah chapters 30 through 33.

Psalms 72 includes all of them except one. It leaves out the temple worship and so forth. But all of the passages include some of the features, and they are repetitious in that respect.

They don't have to repeat it every time. Now, the question is, how are they to be understood? If you look at the far right column, the vertical column, it says New Testament references and allusions. To all except two of these passages, there are references in the New Testament.

For example, Isaiah 9 is quoted in Matthew 4. Isaiah 11 is quoted in Romans 15. Isaiah 35 is alluded to and quoted in Hebrews and in Matthew and so forth. You can see that.

Now, the point here is to look up those passages in the New Testament, where they are clearly quoting from these passages in the Old Testament, and see what the New Testament writers apply them to. And you will in every case find that what they apply those passages to when they quote them is now the church age. The system inaugurated by Jesus Christ at his first coming, especially after Pentecost.

Now, there's another column to consider, and that is the bottom horizontal column. It gives New Testament references that are not specifically quoting these passages, but are referring to the features. For example, the Davidic kingdom, the first feature listed.

It's found in almost all these passages. It's also talked about in Acts, in the Sermon of Peter on Pentecost, and the Sermon of Paul at Antioch. Acts chapters 2 and 13 are in here.

They don't quote these passages so much as they talk about the fact that Jesus has come in fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom promises. They basically make the statement without quoting the verses. Take the next column, the Gentiles will be subdued to God.

New Testament has a lot to say about that. That's in this present age. Paul in Romans 15, 16 more or less summarizes that.

The idea of a highway and the exiles coming back are expressions that are found in John and Romans and other places as referring to the present age of the church. The highway motif, which is found in so many of these passages, is quoted directly about John the Baptist preaching. The voice of one crying and one is, prepare a highway for our God.

It's one of those many Isaac highway passages that talk about the age of the Messiah, and it's John the Baptist. The peace, prosperity, and such as those things are found in some New Testament passages too. If you look down each column, at the bottom there are some references in the New Testament that talk about the features in that column, which are features of the Messianic age, but which the New Testament writers apply to the present age.

In other words, whether the New Testament writers are actually quoting from the passages, as they sometimes do, or whether they're only talking about the features that are in these passages, as they sometimes do, they always apply to the present age. There is no exception. There's no exception.

There's no time when a New Testament writer quotes from any of these passages and says, and this is something we're waiting to happen when Jesus comes back. No, they talk as if it's a given, that the prophecies are fulfilled. Jesus has done it.

But of course, in order to do so, it is necessary for them to give a spiritual meaning to the prophecies. If we don't feel comfortable with that, we should find another religion, I guess, because the apostles and founders of this religion did that. In a sense, we might

say that some Christians have founded another religion, because they've actually said that Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies when he came.

Although it's so often affirmed that he did throughout scripture, there are some who say, no, it was postponed. He didn't do it. He didn't fulfill the messianic promises.

Some of them, 300 of them, yes, but they say there's a lot more he hasn't fulfilled. The apostles knew nothing of that. The apostles knew of no prophecies that Jesus had failed to fulfill.

We shall see that as we go through the prophets, and especially when we come to the passages, and there are many where there is a tension between Christian viewpoints on it, where some people say, well, this must be the future, and others say, no, that already happened. When we come to those passages, we'll look at that. We'll see what the New Testament says.

We'll analyze that. I don't come here with an agenda to convince anyone of my particular view. I believe that my view is correct, or else I wouldn't teach it.

But I have nothing to gain by people agreeing with me. So I don't have an agenda here. I just want to open up the scriptures and see what they say, and you can reach your own conclusions, I hope, as I have.

We'll have to take a break now, though, and then when we come back, we'll begin studying Isaiah.