There are numerous predictive prophecies in the Old Testament, estimated to comprise nearly 30% of the Old Testament.¹ These are found not only in the Prophets, but also in the Pentateuch, the historical books, and the hymnic/wisdom literature. In this study we focus specifically upon the principles for interpreting Old Testament classical predictive prophecies (found especially in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets).² In the next study we will give attention to the principles for interpreting the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

**General Observations**

In studying the predictive prophecies of the Old Testament, several general and preliminary observations which arise from the biblical self-testimony are foundational. First, the Bible specifically claims that God is able to predict the near and distant future (Deut 18:22; Isa


²This material represents a summary, revision, and (in several places) expansion, of my chapter entitled “Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Biblical Research Institute Studies 1; ed. George W. Reid; Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006), 183–204.
46:10; Jer 28:9), and the interpreter must not be influenced by modern critical presuppositions which reject the concept of future prediction of the eschaton and divine foreknowledge. I was once enamored with such critical presuppositions, as one of my college professors systematically took us in his class through the OT prophecies about the Messiah and explained to us that these passages really didn’t refer to the Messiah. I was robbed of the assurance that the Bible does predict the future, and this led me down a path of several years of uncertainty and doubt regarding Bible prophecy. But I’ve come back as a brand plucked from the burning, and I now believe more firmly than ever before that God can and does predict the future about the Messiah and the many other topics contained in biblical prophecy.

A second principle is that predictive prophecy was not given simply to satisfy curiosity about future events. Too often we encounter those who want to come up with some sensational fulfillment of Bible prophecy found in current political events. Every new wave of tension in the world sparks some brilliant but misguided mind to think that he or she can satisfy our curiosity about the future. But God says “no” to such misdirected uses of biblical prophecy. Prophecy in Scripture was given for moral purposes such as the establishment of faith in God (Isa 45:21; 46:9–11; cf. John 14:29) and motivation to holy living (Gen 17:7; Exod 19:4–6; cf. 2 Pet 3:11). Although God does indeed give us the broad outline of final events in Scripture, our main focus in studying prophecy should not be to nail down all the minutiae in a “Final Events” chart, but to understand how the prophecy can morally impact our lives. The moral purposes of prophecy have been summarized in a classic work by Louis Were.3

Third, the same basic steps of careful analysis followed in interpreting any biblical passage must be taken in interpreting a predictive prophecy, including attention to the historical setting, literary structure and other literary features, grammatical and syntactical elements, meanings of words within the immediate context, and theological message.\(^4\)

Fourth, it is of utmost importance to recognize that within the Old Testament there are two different genres or types of predictive prophecy: apocalyptic (the visions of Daniel) and non-apocalyptic (often called “classical” or “general” prophecy which includes all the other predictive prophecies of the Old Testament). The prophecies of Daniel are specifically marked off as different from other Old Testament prophecies in that only this book is sealed, to be opened for study at the time of the end, and further, in the arrangement of the Hebrew Bible Daniel is placed among the wisdom books in a separate section of the canon from the other Prophets. Classical and apocalyptic prophecy each involve specific hermeneutical rules of interpretation, which arise out of an examination of the biblical evidence.\(^5\) The major differences between classical and apocalyptic prophecy may be summarized in chart 1, below:

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\(^4\) For elaboration and illustration of these basic steps of biblical interpretation, see Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; Commentary Reference Series 12; Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 58–104. See also George W. Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Biblical Research Institute Studies 1; Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006).

## Chart 1

### Two Genres of Predictive Prophecy in the Old Testament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General (Classical) Prophecy (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Minor Prophets)</th>
<th>Apocalyptic Prophecy (Daniel)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Primary focus</strong>: local/national, contemporary</td>
<td>1. <strong>Primary focus</strong>: universal, sweep of history, with emphasis on the end time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Eschatology</strong>: within history (national, geo-political, ethnic)</td>
<td>2. <strong>Eschatology</strong>: comes from outside of history (final, universal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Some contrasts</strong></td>
<td>3. <strong>Striking contrasts</strong> (dualism): ♦ Temporal (this age/age to come) ♦ Spatial (earthly/heavenly) ♦ Ethical (righteous/wicked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Limited symbolism with true-to-life imagery</strong></td>
<td>4. <strong>Profuse, composite symbolism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Basis</strong>: “word of the Lord” (plus some visions)</td>
<td>5. <strong>Basis</strong>: visions/dreams, angel interpreter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Conditionality</strong>: (two possible scenarios are delineated to the prophet’s own generation, the way of blessing or curse, dependent on the covenant response of the people), although an ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promises to God’s people is certain</td>
<td>6. <strong>Determinism</strong>: (the actual course of human events, as shaped by the divine hand in history and recognized by divine foreknowledge of human choices, is set forth, and sealed up, to be revealed to the end-time generation), with an ultimate positive outcome for God’s people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Prophetic “telescoping;”</strong> the prophet frequently jumps from the local, contemporary crisis to the eschatological Day of the Lord (e.g., Joel 2–3), or from one peak of the predictive fulfillment to another, without reference to the valley in between them</td>
<td>7. <strong>Visions give the full sweep of history from the time of the prophet to the end of time, with no gap between the local setting and the final end, or between the different stages of the prophetic fulfillment</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a fifth general observation, there are several different predictive forms in the Old Testament. The most common form is the spoken oracle (introduced by “The word of the Lord came unto me . . .” or similar phraseology), which may be recorded in prose or poetry, and may utilize highly figurative language as well as straightforward literal declarations. Predictions may also be symbolically acted out, as in the lives of Jeremiah (13:1; 19:1; 27:2; 28:10; 43:9; 51:63) and Ezekiel (2:8–3:3; 4:1–17; 5:1–17; 12:1–11, 17–20; 21:6–7 [Heb 11–12], 18–24 [Heb 23–29]; 24:1–24), although these sign-actions are usually accompanied by a verbal divine interpretation of their meaning. Typology is also a species of predictive prophecy, since the divinely-ordained Old Testament type (a person, event, or institution) points forward to its antitypical eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the Gospel realities brought about by Him. While the type itself is usually “mute” concerning its predictive nature, at the same time, as with the sign-actions, there is regularly some verbal indicator accompanying the type (or at least appearing somewhere in the Old Testament in advance of the New Testament fulfillment) which announces its predictive character.6

As a sixth observation, one must always be cautious with regard to specific unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament, especially where the New Testament does not deal directly with these passages. Jesus’ counsel regarding prophecy is pertinent: it is given so that when it comes to pass, we may believe (John 14:29). Before it comes to pass, we may not understand every

detail of the Old Testament predictions, even though the basic outline of events and issues is clear.

As a final general observation, there are three major categories of classical predictive prophecies in the Old Testament: (1) messianic prophecies; (2) oracles against the foreign nations; (3) and covenant-centered kingdom promises/prophecies given to Israel as a geopolitical entity, including end-time prophecies involving the final world-wide showdown between Israel and her enemies. The remainder of this presentation will look at each of these categories in turn.

**Messianic Prophecies**

Scores of specific predictive prophecies concerning the Messiah may be found throughout the various parts of the Old Testament. As will become apparent in the discussion that follows, a basic principle with regard to the interpretation of the Messianic prophecies is this: predictions of the *fact* that the Messiah would assuredly come and perform His saving work, which do not depend upon human choice, are *unconditional* in the classical prophecies, while descriptions of the *results* of His work among His covenant people and the rest of the world that depend upon human choice are *conditional* (and are dealt with later in this presentation). We can only sample a few of the OT Messianic prophecies here.

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**Genesis 3:15—the first promise of the Messiah.** This passage contains the first Messianic promise of Scripture.\(^8\) The entire third chapter of Genesis is arranged in a chiastic structure, and exactly in the center, at the apex of the chiasm, vv. 14–15, is found what theologians call the Protoevangelium—the First Gospel Promise.

The last part of Gen 3:15 goes to the heart of this promise and shows that it is centered in a Person. God tells the serpent: “*He* shall crush your head, and you shall crush *His* heel.” In this verse the conflict narrows from many descendants (a collective “seed”) in the second line of the verse to a masculine singular pronoun in the last part of the verse—“*He*”—fighting against the serpent. Throughout Scripture whenever the pronouns related to the Hebrew term *zera‘* “seed,” “offspring” are singular, it is always a single individual, not a collective of many descendants, that is in view.\(^9\) Thus here God promises victory centered in a single Person: “*He*”—the ultimate representative Seed of the woman, later to be revealed as the Messiah—“shall bruise/crush your head,” Satan, “and you shall bruise/crush *His* heel.”

According to the poignant portrait underlying Gen 3:15, the Promised Seed will bare His heel and step voluntarily on a venomous viper. Here is a powerful prophetic picture of Christ voluntarily giving up His life to slay “that ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan” (Rev 12:9). Here is implied the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on behalf of the fallen human race. Genesis 3:15 also predicts the windup of the cosmic conflict and the end of evil and the serpent

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\(^8\)For full discussion of this passage, see Afolarin O. Ojewole, “The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study” (Ph. D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2002).

at the close of earth’s history. The heel of the Representative, Messianic Seed will be bruised/crushed, but it is only a wound to the heel. Later biblical revelation makes clear that though Christ dies, on the third day He comes back to life. But the serpent, Satan, is crushed in the head, a mortal wound with no hope of recovery. The great conflict will not go on forever. Paul in Rom 16:20 alludes to this text: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Satan’s head is mortally wounded by the Messiah at Calvary, and will receive the final crushing at the end of time.

The first Gospel promise provides a terse, programmatic statement regarding the coming Messiah and His mission in the setting of the last days. All other Messianic prophecies flower forth from this foundational one, progressively unveiling further details of the Messianic hope already set forth germinally in the Protoevangelium.

It is important to notice that in this passage, as with most other messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, there is no clear separation between events of the first and second and even third (post-millennial) advents of the Messiah, between His suffering and His glory and final eradication of evil. The events of the “last days” are merged together in what has been called “prophetic telescoping,” as several mighty mountains with great valleys between them, when seen from a distance often appear as a single mountain. It remains for the New Testament fulfillment to make clear the distinction between the Messiah’s kingdom of grace and kingdom of glory.

**Deuteronomy 18:15, 18—the Messiah as Prophet.** In his farewell discourse to Israel on the borders of the Promised Land, Moses, under inspiration, predicted to his people: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him
you shall hear.” A few sentences later Moses repeats the same promise as given to him by God Himself: “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” The last chapter of Deuteronomy (and the Torah), written well after Moses’ death, and likely toward the end of the Old Testament era (perhaps by Ezra),\(^9\) makes clear that “since that time there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses” (Deut 34:10). No prophet like Moses arose in Old Testament times, and thus this prophecy undoubtedly points forward beyond the Old Testament to the coming of the Messianic Prophet, as was commonly recognized in Jesus’ day (John 1:21) and confirmed by the apostle Peter as referring to Jesus (Acts 3:22).

**Psalm 2—the Messiah as King.** In Ps 2, written by David (Acts 4:25), there is striking evidence that the Old Testament anointed Davidic king is to be regarded as a prophetic-predictive type pointing forward to the future Messiah. Psalm 2 moves from the local level of the earthly “anointed one” (Heb. *meshiach*, v. 2) installed in Jerusalem as the Davidic king and Yahweh’s “son” (vv. 6–7), to the cosmic level of the divine Son, the Messiah. The final verse (v. 12) indicates this movement: “Kiss the Son, lest He [the Son\(^{11}\)] be angry, and you perish in the way, when His [the Son’s] wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him [the Son].” The word for “son” is the Aramaic *bar*, used elsewhere in Scripture for royal

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\(^9\)See the hint to this effect in Ezra 7:10, where Ezra the scribe is said to have “made” or “done” the Torah; cf. further support for this conclusion by John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 478–479; idem, “The Canonical Approach to the Old Testament: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy,” *JETS* 30 (1987): 315.

\(^{11}\)The most natural antecedent to the pronoun is the nearest noun, the Son, rather than Yahweh in the previous verse.
sons; but in this passage, like the reference to “Messiah” in Dan 9:26, there is no article “the,” and thus the noun should be taken in an absolute, unqualified sense of a divine title, “Son” (with caps in English): “Kiss [the ultimate] Son!” To confirm this interpretation of “Son,” the phrase “take refuge in,” used some two dozen times elsewhere in the Psalms, is always reserved for the deity, and therefore use of this phrase for the “Son” of vs. 12, indicates that this Son is none other than the divine Son of God. In light of the final verse of the psalm, the entire psalm is to be taken as not only describing the inauguration and rule and victory of the Old Testament Davidic king, but typologically pointing forward to the royal mission of the Messiah.

The internal typological indicators in Ps 2 set the tone for the remainder of the Davidic psalter: in other Davidic psalms such as Pss 16, 22, and 69, the language moves beyond what is applicable to Old Testament David and points beyond him to the new David, the Messiah. Further evidence that the Old Testament Davidic messiach or “anointed one” is a type of the eschatological King Messiah is found in the Prophets, where the coming Messiah is described as a new David who will reign over Israel forever (Ezek 37:24–25; cf. 34:23; Jer 23:5; Isa 9:5,6; 11:1–5; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11; Zech 8:3). The New Testament writers recognize the fulfillment of Ps 2 in Jesus’ death (Acts 4:25–26), His resurrection (Acts 13:33), His inauguration as High Priest after His ascension (Heb 1:5; 5:5), and in His destruction of the wicked at His second coming (Rev 2:26–28; 19:15; cf. 12:5).

Psalm 110—the Messiah as Priest. Many of the messianic psalms are indirectly messianic, pointing out that the earthly experience of David is typologically prophetic of the new David, the Messiah; but Ps 110 is directly messianic. In this psalm composed by David, “the Lord [the Father] spoke unto my [David’s] Lord [the Messiah]” (v. 1). Not only is David’s Lord
(the Messiah) described as King (v. 1–2), but He is also portrayed in His role as Priest: “The Lord [the Father] has sworn and will not relent, ‘You [the Messiah] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (v. 4). This psalm is cited frequently in the New Testament: note in particular how it is utilized by Jesus Himself as His unanswerable, final argument in support of His messiahship (Matt 22:41–46; cf. Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44), quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon to show that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 2:34–35), and faithfully interpreted by the author of Hebrews as pointing to Jesus the messianic Priest-King (Heb 5:5–11; 7:11–27).

**Isaiah 53—The Messiah as Suffering Servant.** In Isa 42–53 there is a frequent alternation between references to the corporate servant (national Israel) and the individual Servant (the Messiah), using the same expressions for both, thus indicating that the Messianic Servant will represent and recapitulate the experience of Old Testament Israel. At the same time it is clear from the context that the individual Servant presented in these chapters is not synonymous with corporate Israel, because the Messianic Servant is said to bring salvation to the people of Israel as well as to the Gentiles (Isa 49:5–6). Isaiah 42–53 contains four “Servant Songs” that predict the coming of the Messiah and delineate various phases of His work: (1) Isa 42:1–9 (His call); (2) Isa 49:1–13 (His commission); (3) Isa 50:4–11 (His commitment); and (4) Isa 52:13–53:12 (His career). While the Messiah’s suffering is alluded to throughout the first three Servant Songs, this theme forms the very heart of the final Song. Isaiah 53, perhaps the most poignant portrait of the Messiah in all of the Old Testament, makes clear that the Servant’s suffering and death are not due to His own sins, but that He takes upon Himself the guilt,

\[\text{\footnotesize ––––––––––––––––––}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 12For a careful study of each of these Servant Songs, see especially F. Duane Lindsey, The Servant Songs: A Study in Isaiah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985).}\]
covenant curses, and punishment "of us all," as Sin Bearer providing a substitutionary atonement (see esp. vv. 4–6, 8, 10–12). This fourth Servant Song also depicts the Messiah’s resurrection, high-priestly intercessory ministry, and royal exaltation (52:13; 53:11–12). Isaiah 53 (along with the other Servant Songs of Isa 42–53) is often cited in the New Testament as fulfilled in Christ (e.g., Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; 1 Pet 2:20–25; for citations or allusions to the other Servant Songs, see, e.g., Matt 12:18–21; 26:67; and Luke 2:32). Beyond exact quotations, Isa 53 forms the conceptual backdrop to much of the New Testament teaching on Christ’s atoning work.

The Messianic thrust of the entire Old Testament. We could examine numerous other specific Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, but beyond these individual passages, there are biblical indications that the entire Old Testament is Messianic in its outlook. Jesus hints at this in His Resurrection Sunday dialogue with the disciples on the way to Emmaus: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:26). In the next verse Luke makes the point more explicit: “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). This statement is not just hyperbole.

A close examination of the literary macrostructure of the Pentateuch, and of the Old Testament as a whole, reveals that the entire Old Testament is indeed centered upon the appearance and work of the Messiah in the last days. For example, the large narrative blocks of the Pentateuch are each climaxed by a lengthy poetic passage that recaps what has gone before.

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and explicitly links this past history with a prediction of the coming of the Messiah in “the last
days” (Gen 49 [esp. vv. 1, 10–12, 22–26]; Exod 15 [esp. vv. 16–17; Num 23–24 [esp. 23: 22 and
24:8, 14, 17]; and Deut 32–33 [esp. 33:8–10, 13–17; cf. 31:28–29]). Again, at the precise
chiastic center and climax of the Levitical laws and of the entire Pentateuch, one finds Lev 16,
pointing to the antitypical work of Christ as High Priest on the eschatological Day of Atonement.

As an indication of the Messianic thrust of the entire Old Testament, the prophet
(probably Ezra) who under inspiration arranged the Hebrew order of the canon into three major
sections—Torah (Pentateuch), Prophets, and Writings—placed at the introduction and
conclusion of each of these sections a prophetic passage that points toward the coming of the
Messiah in the last days. So, at the beginning and end of the Torah are Gen 3:15 and Deut 33
respectively (noted above); at the beginning of the Prophets is Joshua (who is presented as a type
of the Messiah);¹⁴ at the end of the Prophets is Mal 3 (English divides this into two chapters, 3–4,
which predicts the coming of the messianic “Messenger of the Covenant” at the time of the
“great and terrible day of the Lord); at the beginning of the Writings is Psalm 1–2 (the two-part
introduction to the Psalter, which, as noted above, predicts the coming of the Messianic King);
and at the end of the Writings is 2 Chr 36 (which predicts the coming of Cyrus, who is presented
as a type of the Messiah). This pattern of eschatological Messianic passages placed at the
“stitching” or “seams” of the Hebrew canon makes apparent the overarching Messianic casting of
the entire Old Testament. Jesus well summarized the message of the Old Testament Scriptures:

¹⁴See Richard M. Davidson, In the Footsteps of Joshua (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and
“You search the [Old Testament] Scriptures . . . and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39)!

Prophecies (Oracles) about Foreign Nations

The Bible has much to say about other nations besides Israel, including many promises/predictions regarding their future status. In order to understand these prophecies and interpret them properly, we need to grasp the larger biblical picture of Yahweh’s relationship with the foreign nations. According to the Old Testament, Yahweh, “Creator/Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19, 22) is Sovereign over the whole world. He is King over all nations (Ps 96:10). He has “made” them (Ps 86:9), assigning and controlling their territories and boundaries (Deut 32:8; cf. 2:5, 9, 19; Isa 10:13; 2 Kgs 10:32), directing their migration (Amos 9:7), raising them up and putting them down (Isa 40:22–23; Jer 1:10). The nations of the world are all part of one family (Gen 10), and God desires their welfare and salvation. Abraham and his descendants (and ultimately the Messianic Seed, as we have seen above) are called to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:2–3; 22:18; 26:4). At Sinai Israel is constituted as “an holy priesthood” to mediate God’s blessings to the other nations of the world (Exod 19:5–6). Throughout her history, Israel is given a mission to reach out to the Gentiles (to be discussed in the next section below), and those among the other nations who accept the worship of Yahweh are welcomed into the covenant community (e.g., Josh 2; 6:22–25; Isa 56:3–8; Ezek 47:21–23). A special work of the Messianic Servant is to be a “light to the Gentiles” ( Isa 42:6; 49:6), bringing Yahweh’s “salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6; cf. 42:1; 51:4–5; 60:1–3). These foreign nations are sometimes used by God as His agents of judgment—what He calls “the rod of My anger”—against His special covenant people of Israel (Isa 10:5; Jer 51:7, 20; cf. Hab

At the same time, as Ruler over the whole world, Yahweh holds all nations accountable for their actions. The entire earth is regarded by God as under an “everlasting covenant” (Isa 24:5), an international law or code of human standards (Amos 1–2), in which all nations have ethical duties of civility and humaneness. Yahweh in His universal sovereignty is the Guarantor of justice and decency among the nations in their treatment of each other. Those nations who violate the universal norms of proper behavior receive divine sanctions for their crimes. Numerous oracles concerning foreign nations address their crimes and the divine sanctions against them (Num 24:17–24; Isa 13–24; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Amos 1–2; Hab 2:4–20; Zeph 2), and even whole books of the Bible have their focus upon the sins and punishment of foreign nations (Assyria in the books of Jonah and Nahum, and Edom in the book of Obadiah). Especially singled out are the crimes of violence (e.g., Jonah 3:8; Nah 3:1), brute power (Amos 1–2), arrogance (e.g., Isa 10:12; Jer 49:16; Ezek 28:1–10), reproach against Yahweh (Isa 37:17, 23; Jer 50:29–32), subjugation and abuse of Israel (Exod 3:6, 7; 6:5; 12:12), overstepping the bounds of divinely-permitted acts of judgment against Israel (Isa 10:12–19; Jer 51:11, 24), and gloating over Israel’s misfortunes (Ezek 25:3, 6, 7). Although the non-Israelite nations are the “mission field” to which Israel is called to bring the message of salvation, nonetheless these nations, especially as they exercise a hostile attitude toward Israel and Israel’s God, are considered as wicked and enemies (Exod 15:9; Pss 9:5 [Heb 6]; 59:5 [6]; 106:41–42).

Some have argued that two contradictory and even irreconcilable attitudes toward the foreign nations are represented in the biblical predictions regarding them: on the one hand a
universalism and conditional prophecies, revealing God’s compassion and willingness to forgive and accept foreign nations if they repent (as portrayed in the book of Jonah); on the other hand a nationalism and divine sovereignty, expressing a fierce divine hatred toward foreign powers with no opportunity extended for repentance and forgiveness (as in Nahum). While these two perspectives may have been regarded as irreconcilable by some individuals in Israel (see the prophet Jonah’s own personal struggles over this issue), the inspired prophetic utterances are not contradictory when viewed in the setting of the larger context.

God’s dealings with the Amorites in Canaan are instructive in coming to grips with the interplay of conditionality and divine sovereignty in prophecies against foreign nations. God predicted to Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a land not theirs and afflicted 400 years, before they would be given possession of Canaan; the reason given for the delay is that “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen 15:16). The Amorites were given an extended period of probation, during which time Abraham himself witnessed to them and other true worshipers of the Most High God lent their influence for the truth (e.g., Gen 14:18–24). But when the Amorites had filled up their cup of iniquity, and become totally given over to evil (cherem, Deut 7:26; 13:18; Josh 6:17–18; 7:1, 11–13, 15), their probation was closed, and God dispossessed them and gave their land to the people of Israel (Exod 12:41; 13:5; 23:23; Lev 18:24–28; Deut 7:1–5, 16–26; Josh 3:10; 6:17–19).

The situation is similar with regard to the other nations outside of Canaan. On the one hand, during the time of their probation, before they had filled up the cup of their iniquity, God reached out to warn them of impending judgment, to call them to repentance. As pointed out above, He also offered blessing and salvation for foreign nations who responded to His message.
A time was even envisioned when Israel’s notable enemies, Egypt and Assyria, would be regarded by God as “My people” and “the work of My hands” (Isa 19:25). The predictions concerning the nations during the probationary phase of their national history, should be seen in the light of the general principle of conditionality stated in Jer 18:7–10:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

Jonah’s prediction, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4), is a clear example of a conditional prophecy, although the principle of Jer 18 is not explicitly stated. Indeed this is the way the people of Nineveh regarded it; they repented of their evil, and God relented from His purpose of destroying the city (Jonah 3:5–10).

On the other hand, when nations had filled up their cup of iniquity, no longer responding to the divine entreaties to repent, the threatened judgment surely came to pass. With regard to Nineveh, the prophet Nahum wrote about a century later than the time of Jonah, at a time when Nineveh and the nation of Assyria had returned to—and yes, had totally given themselves over to—their evil ways of brutality, arrogance, and idolatry. The nation’s cup of iniquity was full. There was nothing left for Nahum to do but denounce their heinous sins and announce the Sovereign Lord’s irrevocable sentence of their national doom.

It is not always possible to determine whether the divine oracles against the foreign nations come at a time when probation still lingers for a given nation and thus the threat of judgment is conditional, or whether that nation has passed the bounds of divine forbearance and their fate has already been sealed. In Amos 1–2, the oracles against each nation begin with the
phrase “For three transgressions of [nation x] and for four, I will not turn away its punishment” (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1). The use of the formula $3 + 4 = 7$ probably denote completeness or fullness of transgression, and the statement that the Lord will not turn away seems to indicate that these judgments are certain, i.e., unconditional.

However, these certain divine judgments may not involve total or permanent or immediate destruction of the nation that is punished. While Amos 1–2 predicts destruction and/or captivity for the political powers surrounding Israel and Judah (Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab), Jeremiah indicates that, at least in the case of Ammon and Moab, God would eventually “bring back the captives” of these people (Jer 48:47; 49:6). To other nations, such as Edom and Egypt, the prophet predicts that the nation in question will become a relatively insignificant power in world politics in the future (Jer 49:15; Ezek 29:14–16).

Regarding Tyre, the language of the prediction indicates a sequential destruction, involving at least two powers (Ezek 26:1–14; note the shift alternation between “he” [referring to Nebuchadnezzar, vv. 7–11], and “they,” vv. 4–5, 12–13). The historical events strikingly fulfilled this prophecy, as Nebuchadnezzar (ca. 570 B.C.) took the mainland of Tyre following a lengthy siege, but it was the troops of Alexander the Great [the “they”] more than 200 years later, that literally fulfilled another part of the prophecy: “I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock . . . They will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water” (vv. 4, 12). Alexander’s forces scraped into the sea the remains of the previously-destroyed mainland city destroyed and built a causeway one-half mile out to the off-shore island city of New Tyre, to complete the conquest begun by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel predicted not only total, but permanent destruction of the city of Tyre: “I will make you like the
top of a rock: you shall be a place for spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken” (v. 14). The deserted site of ancient Tyre is still used by fishermen for drying their nets.

Complete and permanent destruction is also predicted for Babylon (Isa 13:20–22; Jer 50:3, 13, 39–40; 51:29, 37), and the site of ancient Babylon, like that of Tyre, remains uninhabited to this day. However, even should buildings, or even cities, be erected on these sites, this would not necessarily diminish the accuracy of the prediction, since the ancient cities with their culture and civilization are gone forever, whatever modern architecture may appear on the ancient sites.

Remarkable is the fact that Cyrus, ruler of the Medo-Persian empire that conquered Babylon, was mentioned by name a century and a half before his time, as Isaiah foretells the role he would play in liberating God’s people (Isa 44:28; 45:1). The predictions of Babylon’s fall also includes unique details regarding the method of conquering the city: “Who says to the deep, ‘Be dry!’ and ‘I will dry up your rivers’ (Isa 44:27). “I will dry up her sea [the Euphrates River] and make her springs dry” (Jer 51:36). This was fulfilled in 539 B.C. as Medo-Persian troops diverted the waters of the Euphrates which flowed through the city, in order to gain entrance to the city through the river bed (see the historical accounts of Herodotus 1.190, 191, and Xenophon, Cyropaedia vii. 5).

Several passages in the Old Testament refer to the final judgment of all the nations of the world, in connection with the eschatological deliverance of Israel (Isa 24–27; Ezek 38–39; Joel 3 [Heb 4]; Zech 9–14). These apocalyptic-like passages will be discussed in connection with God’s original plan and purpose for Israel, to which we now turn attention.
Kingdom Promises/Prophecies Concerning Israel

Some have insisted that the covenant promises made to Israel are not actually predictive prophecies, but only expressions of the two alternative ways available to Israel (depicted foundationally in Lev 16 and Deut 27–28): the way of covenant loyalty leading to prosperity (the covenant blessings), and the way of covenant disloyalty leading to disaster (the covenant curses). While this may be true in the technical sense, at the same time God does predict the detailed outcome if Israel would whole-heartedly participate in His mission to use them as agents of salvation for the whole world. Since specific predictions are involved in the eschatological kingdom promises concerning Israel, it is appropriate to include these covenant promises as part of our discussion of Old Testament eschatological prophecy. While the following outline sets forth the basic contours of God’s eschatological plan for Israel, one cannot be completely certain of the precise sequence of divinely intended events, because, as noted above in our chart contrasting with apocalyptic prophecy, classical prophecy does not give a detailed and unbroken sweep of history. Rather, its “prophetic telescoping” often jumps from the local immediate crisis (such as the locust plague in Joel 2) to the eschatological Day of the Lord (Joel 3 [Hebrew, 4]), without filling in all the historical details in between.

The divine mission for Israel. On the borders of Canaan, Moses received, and transmitted to his successor Joshua, a detailed divine blueprint of God’s mission for Israel as a nation. Upon entering Canaan, the Angel of the Lord would go before them and send the hornets to drive out the inhabitants of the land (Deut 7:17–20; cf. Exod 23:23, 28). Israel was to dispossess these nations that were totally given over to evil (Deut 9:1–3; cf. Gen 15:16) but the individuals who were still responsive to God’s mighty acts were spared and united to His people
(Josh 2; 6:22–25). As Israel remained loyally obedient to God in the Promised Land, the covenant blessings would be showered upon them (Deut 28:1–14; cf. Lev 26:1–13). They would be such healthy (Deut 7:15; cf. Exod 15:26), happy (28:2–8), holy (28:9), wise (4:6, 7), morally enlightened (4:8) and prosperous (28:6, 7; cf. Lev 26:4, 5, 10) people that they would become the head and not the tail (Deut 28:13), above all the nations of the earth “in praise, fame, honor” (Deut 26:19). All the people of other nations would see that they were called by the name of the Lord (28:10).

During the United Monarchy this divine plan for Israel came into sharper spiritual focus. King David’s first appointment of praise to God in the sanctuary called for a declaration of God’s glory among all peoples (1 Chr 16:24 = Ps 96:3). Other inspired psalms envisioned God’s praise and way and saving power being proclaimed to, or reaching, all the nations, even to the ends of the earth (Pss 48:10; 57:9; 66:4; 67; 72:10–11; 117:1–2; 119:46; 126:2–3; 145:11–12, 21), and other nations gathering to Jerusalem to worship the Lord (Pss 86:9; 102:22). What the Levitical choirs intoned was echoed in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kgs 8:41–43), and seemed on the verge of fulfillment in the career of David’s son, as “the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind” (1 Kgs 10:24), and the wealth of the world poured into his expanding empire (vss. 14–29).

The Old Testament prophets (most notably the gospel prophet Isaiah) intensified the vision of God’s sweeping program for a repentant and faithful Israel after the Babylonian exile. It is a glorious plan! As the people of Israel is gathered back to the Promised Land, God pardons and cleanses them from their sins and gives them a new heart, puts His Spirit within them, and causes them to walk in His statutes (Ezek 36:24–28; cf. Isa 40:1–2; Jer 31:31–34). The ruined
cities are rebuilt, and land of Israel is renewed like Eden (Isa 44:24–28; Ezek 36:33–35), causing the other nations to know that Yahweh has done this for them (Ezek 36:22, 36). As Israel loyally serves God and receives the concomitant covenantal blessings, all the nations see her righteousness and glory and call her blessed (Isa 62:1–2; 61:9; Mal 3:12); Jerusalem becomes a praise and glory before all nations (Jer 33:9). From exalted Zion goes forth the Law (Isa 2:2–3 = Mic 4:1–2); God’s people become His witnesses (Isa 43:10; 44:8), a light to the nations (42:1, 6; 49:6; 51:4), giving a universal offer of salvation (45:22) and warning of judgment (Jonah; various oracles against the nations).

The response: nations come to the light (Isa 60:3)! They are gathered, they flow, yes, they run to Jerusalem (Isa 66:18–20; cf. 2:2; 45:20; 49:6–22; 55:5; 56:8) to seek the Lord (Zech 8:20–23) and join themselves to Him (Isa 56:7–8; Zech 2:11). Nation after nation, admitting the falsity of their ancestral religion (Jer 16:19), “come over to” Israel, acknowledging that the Lord is the only true God (Isa 45:14). The nations go up to the house of the Lord—which is called “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:7)—to seek instruction in His ways and to serve Him “shoulder to shoulder” (Isa 2:3 = Mic 4:2; Zeph 3:9). The gates of Jerusalem are open continually to receive the wealth of other nations contributed to bring about the conversion of still other nations (Isa 60:1–11; cf. 45:14; Hag 2:7). Eventually “all nations” are gathered to Jerusalem and call it “the throne of the Lord” (Jer 3:17). Those aliens from other nations who “join themselves to the Lord,” i.e., give their allegiance to Yahweh and hold fast to His covenant with Israel, are considered to be fully part of the covenant community of Israel (Isa 56:1–8; Ezek 47:22–23).
Thus Israel, in cooperation with the powers of heaven, prepares the way for the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah comes, and as the Representative Israelite (Isa 42–53) recapitulates the history of Israel in His own life (Matt 1–5), bringing salvation. He is generally accepted as the Messiah by the people of Israel. While He is still betrayed by some of His supposed friends (Zech 13:6), and delivered to die for the sins of the world (see, e.g., Isa 53), the majority of Israel, including its leadership, accept Him, and after His resurrection (immediately, or eventually after a break in time returning to heaven? the timing is not clear) He takes the throne of David and reigns over a re-united kingdom of Israel forever (Ezek 37:24–25; Isa 9:6, 7). The temple and city of Jerusalem that were rebuilt, also remain forever (Jer 17:21–25; Ezek 37:26). As nations accept the Lord and His Messiah, Israel extends its borders (Amos 9:12), until its dominion embraces the world (Isa 27:6; Zech 9:10). Thus the “Promised Land” for Israel is expanded beyond the borders of Canaan to include the entire earth.

Several Old Testament passages describe the divinely predicted eschatological windup of this earth’s history in the final showdown between Israel and her enemies (Isa 24–27; Ezek 38–39; Joel 3 [Heb 4]; Zech 9–14). These passages have been classified by some as apocalyptic.

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15 See Ellen White, *Great Controversy*, 19: “Had Israel as a nation preserved her allegiance to Heaven, Jerusalem would have stood forever, the elect of God.”

16 See Ellen White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 290: “As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom should embrace the world.” Cf. idem, *Desire of Ages*, 576: “If Jerusalem had known what it was her privilege to know, and had heeded the light which Heaven had sent her, she might have stood forth in the pride of prosperity, the queen of kingdoms, free in the strength of her God-given power. There would have been no armed soldiers standing at her gates, no Roman banners waving from her walls. The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. He saw that she might through Him have been healed of her grievous malady, liberated from bondage, and established as the mighty metropolis of the earth. From her walls the dove of peace would have gone forth to all nations. She would have been the world’s diadem of glory.”
prophecies on a par with Daniel, since they describe God’s final, universal intervention from outside of history. However, inasmuch as these apocalyptic-like prophecies deal primarily with the deliverance of Israel as a national, geo-political entity, I find it better to consider these as the climax of the kingdom promises/prophecies made to Israel, and not fully apocalyptic in nature.

According to the universalistic, end-time scenario predicted by these passages, remnants of opposition against Israel and Israel’s God from the other nations of the world launch a final attack against Jerusalem. During the siege of Jerusalem, the reprobate Israelites are slain by their enemies (Zech 13:8; 14:2). Then God calls the rebellious nations into judgment, and they are eliminated by the Lord in the final eschatological battle (Zech 14; Ezek 38–39; Joel 3 [Hebrew 4]). God raises the righteous dead and puts the finishing touches of immortality upon the living (Isa 25:8; 26:19). The wicked are also raised, judged, and (and after a period of time [the millennium?], Isa 24:22) punished, ending in everlasting destruction (Isa 26:20–23). God then re-creates new heavens and earth, and he re-creates “Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isa 65:17–18). The world becomes Eden restored, and the Lord’s universal and eternal kingdom is ushered in (Zech 14; Isa 24–27; 35; 51:3). “‘And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says the Lord” (Isa 66:23). Sin and sinners are totally vanquished, and evil will never arise again (Isa 66:24; cf. Obad 16; Nah 1:9).

The eschatological fulfillment of the divine promise/plan for Old Testament Israel.

One of the most pressing questions of this study concerns the fulfillment (or non-fulfillment) of the numerous Old Testament classical prophecies predicting the glorious eschatological, geo-political future of Israel. From our vantage point more than two millennia after the Old
Testament era, it becomes apparent that many prophecies concerning the future of Israel as a geopolitical entity have not come about as predicted in the Old Testament. Have these prophecies concerning Israel failed? Will they never be fulfilled? Or are they still part of the divine plan for the future? If they will yet be fulfilled, what is the nature of this eschatological fulfillment?

Very different answers have been given to these questions. Dispensationalists (or futurists) maintain that the Bible presents two distinct salvation programs for humanity, one for the ethnic, national (geo-political) entity of Israel, and one for the Gentiles (the church). The divine predictions to the patriarchs concerning the geo-political aspects of Israel’s history, as well as the spiritual blessings, are seen to be unconditional, based upon irrevocable divine promises (Gen 12:1–7; 17:8; 26:3–5; cf. 2 Sam 7:12–17; Ps 89:34–37; etc.). While Old Testament Israel experienced the covenant curses of destruction and exile (as described in Lev 26:14–39 and Deut 28:15–68), at the same time, in fulfillment of these same passages, according to dispensationalists Israel will never be totally cast off and destroyed, but in the last days will be gathered together as a geo-political entity and restored to their land again (Lev 26:40–45; Deut 30:1–10). We are now living in the dispensation of the church, which constitutes a chronological gap in the overarching plan of God for Israel, brought about by Israel’s initial rejection of Christ. Although some (progressive) dispensationalists allow for partial, spiritual fulfillment by the church of Old Testament covenant promises to Israel, all agree that the complete and literal fulfillment will take place through a revived geo-political state of Israel. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 is viewed as pivotal in the completion of God’s divine plan for Israel as a geo-political entity, and the consummation of that plan is regarded as imminent, occurring literally as predicted in the Old Testament kingdom prophecies.
Christian covenant theologians, on the other hand, tend to be supercessionists, arguing that the promises/predictions made regarding Israel as a nation were conditional upon their faithfulness to the covenant. Since, according to this view, the Jewish nation proved disloyal to the covenant in their rejection of the Messiah, Old Testament Israel received the curses of Deut 28 instead of the blessings, and has been permanently replaced by the church, to whom belongs the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant promises of a spiritual nature. The passages depicting a glorious, literal, geo-political future for Israel, promised upon condition of covenant faithfulness, no longer apply, but are superceded by a spiritual and universal fulfillment to spiritual Israel, the church.

While both of these views contain vital elements of truth, dispensationalism and supercessionism also distort crucial aspects of the biblical evidence. Covenant theologians are correct in recognizing that many of the prophecies made by the Old Testament classical prophets are couched within the framework of covenant relationship, in which God’s people are always free to remain faithful to the covenant, and reap the covenant blessings, or persist in unfaithfulness and receive the covenant curses. Thus, as we have already noted, the classical prophets present two different options: God’s plan for blessing Israel if they heed the prophetic call to remain faithful to His covenant, but also the certainty of punitive judgment and the reception of the covenant curses if Israel persists in covenant unfaithfulness. Within classical prophecy there are repeated calls to repentance, so that God can pour out His blessings, and warnings of judgment, if Israel does not repent. In this respect, the kingdom prophecies of the classical prophets may be seen as conditional in nature.
At the same time, as noted above, dispensationalists have pointed to forceful Old Testament divine promises made to the patriarchs and to David that appear to be unconditional, even (and especially) concerning the geo-political aspects of Israel’s future. How can both of these positions, affirming conditionality and unconditionality, be reconciled?

I submit that the answer is found in understanding several crucial features of biblical covenants. First, on the most basic level, all the divine covenants of Scripture are part of one unconditional promise of God to work out salvation for the human race, stated first in Gen 3:15, and elaborated in each succeeding development of this one unified covenant (see, e.g., the promises of Gen 12, later incorporated into the Abrahamic covenant of Gen 15 and 17). Thus, as we have noted in the first section of this paper, the coming of the Messiah to fulfill God’s redemptive covenant promise, is unconditional, totally independent of human choice. However, the actualization of the divine promise in the lives of humans is conditional upon the response of each individual in accepting the Messiah’s gift of salvation.

A second feature of Old Testament covenants, particularly the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, parallels ancient Near Eastern royal covenants of grant, where a king grants land or position to one of his subjects and his descendants in perpetuity in recognition of the servant’s loyalty. So God promised to Abraham and his descendants a grant of land in perpetuity, i.e., unconditionally, based upon the covenant loyalty of Abraham (Gen 17:8; Gen 26:3–5; etc.). To
David God gave the additional irrevocable promise, under oath, of a never-ending kingdom (2 Sam 7:12–16; Ps 89:34–37). These geo-political features of the covenant clearly go beyond spiritual blessings.

A third feature of biblical covenants also parallels the ancient Near Eastern covenants of grant, where only those of the grantee’s descendants who remain loyal to the crown actually share in the perpetual grant. Generation after generation of descendants might forfeit their right to the royal grant, but eventually that which was granted will be restored to loyal descendants. So in Scripture God bequeaths in perpetuity the land of promise to Abraham and his line of descendants, and the royal throne and kingdom of Israel to David and his sons. Though generations have passed in which the divine grant, with its geo-political features, has been forfeited, yet in the future all that was promised under the divine grant will be restored to Abraham’s descendants who are loyal to the “everlasting covenant” made to him (Gen 17:7, 13, 19).

This brings us to the last, and I believe most crucial feature, of the Old Testament covenants. Who comprised the covenant people who were to receive the kingdom promises made to Abraham? Was Israel comprised only of the direct, ethnic, descendants of Abraham traced through his son Isaac and Isaac’s son Jacob? The answer to this question is a resounding “no”! Throughout the Old Testament, as we have seen above, God’s plan was for Israel to reach out to those peoples and nations around them, inviting them to become part of God’s covenant people. Old Testament Israel was composed of direct physical descendants of Jacob plus a multitude of others from various nations who accepted Israel’s God Yahweh, and chose to become part of the covenant community (for example, the multitude of the Egyptians at the time
of the Exodus [Exod 12:38], Zipporah the Midian/Cushite [Exod 2:16, 21; Num 12:1], Rahab the Canaanite and her family [Josh 2:1; 5:22–25], Ruth the Moabite [Ruth 1:16, 17], Uriah the Hittite [2 Sam 11], and the many Persians who joined Israel [Esth 9:27]). They were all called “Israel”; none were to be considered second-class citizens in the geo-political reality of the Israelite nation (Isa 56:1–8; Ezek 47:22–23). There were not two plans for two different groups of God-fearing people in the Old Testament; all were called to join the one people of God, “biblical Israel.” And within the nation of Israel, there was always the “spiritual” remnant of those who not only took the name of “Israelite” but also gave evidence of true covenant loyalty to the God of Israel (e.g., Isa 10:22–23; Jer 23:3; Joel 2:32; Mic 2:12; Zeph 3:3).19

Now, in light of these aspects of Old Testament covenants, further to be informed by New Testament data, let us see how the kingdom promises made to Israel find a three-stage eschatological fulfillment—in connection with Jesus’ first advent, in connection with Christian Israel (the church) throughout the New Testament era, and at the end of time. We noted above how already in Old Testament times the kingdom promises began to be fulfilled in the time of Solomon, and again upon Israel’s return from the Babylonian exile. These promises were to climax in the first advent of the Messiah in “the last days” (Heb 1:2). When the Messiah, Israel’s ultimate King and Representative Israelite, came to earth, He brought about a basic fulfillment, in principle, of all these kingdom promises in Himself (Matt 12:28; 2 Cor 1:20). Through His life,

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death and resurrection He inaugurated the “rule” or “reign” of God on earth (which He called “the kingdom of God”).

At Christ’s first advent, the people of Israel in general (the Jews, whom we may call “Jewish Israel”\(^{20}\)) “heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37), and although many misunderstood His mission to be that of a political deliverer of Israel from Roman occupation, they widely hailed Him as the Messiah (Matt 21:1–11). On the day of His resurrection the disciples traveling on the way to Emmaus could state that Jesus “was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19). On the day of Pentecost ten days after His ascension, thousands of Jews were converted in a single day (Acts 2:41), and the steadily growing New Testament covenant community, in continuity with the one in the Old Testament, was comprised primarily of Jews—a multitude of them—to whom were added another multitude of Gentiles who responded to the preaching of the followers of the Way (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4, 12; 18:10; 19:23, 26; 21:20).

Thus the New Testament does not present a picture of two separate programs of salvation for two separate peoples of God. Rather, there is one single olive tree, representing the true people of God, comprised of Jews, the natural branches, and ingrafted Gentiles (Rom 9–11; esp. 11:17, 24), as in Old Testament times. We may call this group “Christian Israel.” Furthermore, as in Old Testament times, within the professed people of God called Christian Israel, there is a “spiritual remnant” who are loyal to His covenant and to the Messiah of the covenant (Rom

\(^{20}\)For the helpful terminology describing the various “phases” of Israel—“biblical [Old Testament] Israel,” “Jewish Israel,” “Christian Israel,” and “eschatological Israel”—I am indebted to Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Mystery of Israel* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2004), 109–113, although I do not use all of these terms in precisely the same way as he does.
Paul makes clear that God has not rejected “His people” Israel, whom He elected, and to whom “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:1–2, 28–29). As in the Old Testament, “at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (11:5). Many of the olive branches of the one true olive tree that were broken off at the time of Jesus’ First Advent (Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah) will be grafted in again before His Second Advent (with Jews in the last days accepting Jesus as the Messiah), and in this way “all” of true Israel (both Jews and Gentiles) will be saved (Rom 11:26).

Along with the many elements of continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament covenant communities which we have pointed out, there is one major element of discontinuity. It was God’s intention that all the Old Testament kingdom prophecies also be fulfilled in their geo-political features by theocratic Israel as they accepted the Messiah and extended the Messianic kingdom spiritually and geo-politically throughout the world. Unfortunately, although the people of Israel in general were favorable to Jesus, the religio-political leaders, in legal session of the Sanhedrin, rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and by this action divorced the nation from the geo-political theocracy (Matt 23:32–39; 26:3–5, 14–16, 57–68; Mark 14:1–2, 10–11, 53–65; Luke 22:2–6, 66–71; John 11:47–57; note that Matt 21:43–46 is addressed to the “chief priests and elders” [v. 23, 45], and carefully distinguishes these from “the multitudes” of the general Jewish populace who supported Jesus [v. 46]; again, the disciples on the way to Emmaus made clear the distinction between general populace and the religio-political leaders: Jesus was highly esteemed “before all the people,” but by contrast, “the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified” [Acts 24:19, 20]).
With the divorce of national Israel from the theocracy, brought about by the legal decision of its leaders, the geo-political features of the covenant promises could not be literally fulfilled in the flow of earth’s history before Christ’s second advent. Throughout the period of the Christian era, the spiritual blessings of the covenant have been enjoyed by God’s covenant people, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, and proclaimed to the world. The universal church, or Christian Israel, as the body of Christ, receives the fulfillment of all the kingdom promises (Gal 3:29), but it is only a spiritual fulfillment, and the geo-political language takes on a spiritual, universal, and/or heavenly meaning. So, for example, Mt. Zion is used spiritually of the universal church (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6), which now is the “royal priesthood and holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9; cf. Exod 19:6), or refers to the heavenly city of Jerusalem, to which the earthly believers are spiritually gathered (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22–24).

But the literal geo-political features of the covenant promises are not permanently annulled, in contrast to the claims of many covenant theologians. At the end of time, “eschatological Israel,” comprised of all the faithful people of God throughout all ages, including both Jews and Gentiles, will be resurrected or translated, to experience the ultimate, universal, glorious, literal fulfillment of the Old Testament geo-political covenant promises! In heaven during the millennium they will reign with Christ in the New Jerusalem, and after the millennium will finally receive their eternal inheritance in the Earth Made New (Rev 20–22). While the

Note Ellen White’s perceptive statement: “That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church on earth today. He has ‘let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen,’ even to His covenant-keeping people, who faithfully ‘render Him the fruits in their seasons.’ Never has the Lord been without true representatives on this earth who have made His interests their own. These witnesses for God are numbered among the spiritual Israel, and to them will be fulfilled all the covenant promises made by Jehovah to His ancient people” (Prophets and Kings, 713–714; emphasis mine).
cultural-specific aspects of the Old Testament geo-political covenant promises will be universalized, a final literal fulfillment is nonetheless certain.

The book of Revelation confirms this final, universal-literal fulfillment of the Old Testament end-time prophecies as it portrays the post-millennial battle against the forces of evil in the language of Eze 38–39. “Gog and Magog”—now referring to all of the enemies of God throughout the ages—are repulsed in their attack against God’s holy city and His people, and consumed in the lake of fire (Rev 20:8–9). Likewise, the New Jerusalem, eternal home of the saints in the earth made new, is largely depicted in the language of Ezek 40–48, and the experience Isa 25:8 is fulfilled as “God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Rev 21:4). The seed of Abraham will inherit the Promised Land, which already in the Old Testament was expanded to include the entire earth. The meek finally “inherit the earth” (Ps 37:11; cf. Matt 5:5)!

In contrast to the claims of dispensationalism, the book of Revelation makes clear that this end-time fulfillment of the covenant promises made to Old Testament Israel is not experienced by the Jewish people as a separate group, but by all the people of God, including both Jews and Gentiles—“eschatological Israel.” This becomes especially apparent as all the promises made to the churches in Rev 1–3 return in Rev 20–22 as consummated realities in the New Jerusalem. So, for example, the divine promise to the church at Ephesus, “I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7)—an allusion to Ezekiel’s vision of the eschatological temple in Ezek 47—is fulfilled in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1,2). Again, Revelation’s descriptions of the redeemed saints utilize imagery from both Israel and the church, showing them to be one united people of God: all sing “the Song of Moses . . . and the song of
the Lamb” (Rev 15:3); all enter into the same city, whose gates have the “names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel” (Rev 21:12), while its foundations contain “the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14).

To summarize, the OT kingdom prophecies of classical prophecy have one eschatological (last-day) fulfillment with three stages: (1) inaugurated eschatology: the basic fulfillment of the OT eschatological hopes climaxing in the earthly life and work of Jesus, the Representative Israelite, at His first advent; (2) appropriated eschatology: the derived spiritual aspects of fulfillment by Christian Israel (made up of both Jews and Gentiles), the body of Christ in the time between Christ’s first and second coming, but lacking the geo-political aspects of fulfillment; and (3) consummated eschatology: the aspect of final universal fulfillment by the eschatological Israel (all the redeemed, including both Jews and Gentiles), in connection with ushering in the age to come at the second advent of Christ and beyond, which includes not only the spiritual but also the geo-political dimensions of fulfillment.22

We might describe these three stages of one fulfillment in language borrowed from World War II. Jesus’ First Advent, climaxing in His death and resurrection, may be compared with D-Day, when the decisive battle was fought, and Satan was cast from heaven. After D-Day everyone knew that the war was soon going to be over and who would win, but there were still many mop-up operations that had to take place before V-E Day. We are now in the time of those

mop-up operations. We are still awaiting V-E Day, the time of Jesus’ Second Coming and beyond, when the War is over.23

The mode of fulfillment in each of these aspects of fulfillment is differentiated according to the physical and/or spiritual presence of Christ the King with regard to His kingdom. First, in Christ’s earthly ministry, when as the Representative Israelite He was physically present, the fulfillment was literal and local, centered in Him. So, for example, the “gathering” prophecies (Deut 30, Ezek 36–37, etc.) received an initial fulfillment as He literally gathered the twelve disciples to Himself (Matt 5:1; John 10:14–16; 11:52; Matt 12:30, Matt 23:37).

Second, during the time of the Church, Christian Israel, when Christ is universally but only spiritually present (that is, through His Spirit), and when the geo-political aspects of the Old Testament promises are delayed by the suspension of the Old Testament theocracy, the fulfillment is spiritual and universal. During this period, for example, the Old Testament “gathering prophecies” are fulfilled as Christian Israel is spiritually (not physically) and universally gathered by faith to Christ (Matt 18:20; Heb 12:22; Rev 14:6–12).

Finally, at time of the second advent of Christ, when He physically returns and literally reunites the people of God to Himself, reunites the King with His kingdom, the fulfillment is gloriously literal and universal. So, with regard to the Old Testament “gathering prophecies,” at the second advent, and again after the millennium and for eternity, Christ literally and gloriously gathers all His people to Himself (Matt 24:31; 2 Thess 2:1; Luke 13:28–29; Rev 21–22). In the

book of Revelation, the various Old Testament depictions of the end-time scenario meet and find
glorious literal, universal, fulfillment centered in Christ the Conquering King and His people, the
eschatological Israel. See chart 2, below, for a synthesis of the eschatological substructure of
classical prophecy:

**Chart 2**

**Eschatological Substructure of Classical Prophecy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Kingdom Language</th>
<th>OT Kingdom Prophecies</th>
<th>Christ’s First Advent</th>
<th>Time of Christian Church</th>
<th>Christ’s Second Advent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Eschatological Language</td>
<td>Theocratic Kingdom (Direct Rule by God or His Earthly Vicegerent)</td>
<td>Kingdom of Grace (Matt 12:28; Heb 4:16)</td>
<td>Tension Between “Already” and “Not Yet” (Matt 16:19)</td>
<td>Kingdom of Glory (Matt 25:31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment Mode</td>
<td>Verbal Predictions of End Time</td>
<td>Inaugurated Eschatology</td>
<td>Appropriated Eschatology</td>
<td>Consummated Eschatology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples (1)</td>
<td>National, Ethnic</td>
<td>Literal, Local Fulfillment</td>
<td>Spiritual, Universal, Partial Fulfillment</td>
<td>Glorious, Final Literal Fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gathering Prophecies (Deut 30; Ezek 36-37, etc.)</td>
<td>Christ Gathers the New Israel to Himself (Matt 5:1; 12:30; 23:37; John 11:52)</td>
<td>Church Spiritually gathered by faith to Christ (Matt 18:20; Heb 12:22; Rev 14:6-12)</td>
<td>Christ’s literal gathering of His People to Himself (Matt 24:31; 2 Thess 2:1; Luke 13:28-29; Rev 21-22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practical Steps for Interpretation

As a practical guide for the interpretation of predictive classical prophecy in Old Testament Scripture, the following suggested steps may be helpful:

1. Determine the historical setting that calls forth the prophecy: who wrote the prophecy, when, and under what circumstances. Recognize instances where the book may jump from an immediate local crisis is described in the book or specific passage to the eschatological “Day of the Lord” at the end of time (for example, Joel’s description of the local locust plague, then jumping to the eschatological “Day of the Lord”).

2. Analyze the literary structure of the book and the immediate passage under consideration, determining where this passage comes and what part does it plays in the overall structure of the chapter or book (for example, Gen 3:15 coming at the chiastic center of Gen 3).

3. Look closely at the natural grammatical flow of the passage—words, phrases, clauses, sentences—to understand what specifically is predicted (for example, the movement in Gen 3:15 from a collective “seed” [Eve’s spiritual descendents] to a singular “Seed” [the Messiah], which movement also occurs in Gen 22:17–18, as recognized by Paul in Gal 3:6, 16).

4. Note any obvious symbols or figurative language are employed, and determine the meaning of each symbol or figure, in light of the immediate context and use of this language elsewhere in Scripture (for example, the many sign-actions of Ezekiel).

5. Determine what type of prophetic prediction is involved: Messianic, oracle against a foreign nation, or a kingdom promise to theocratic Israel. If Messianic prophecy, note which aspects of these prophecies are not dependent upon human choice and are therefore unconditional, and which are describing effects of the Messiah’s advent that are conditional upon
Israel’s response. Note also whether the prediction is directly Messianic (as in Psalm 110), or indirectly (typologically) Messianic (as in Ps 2). If typologically Messianic, look for indicators within the passage that the language goes beyond what is applicable to the OT person, event, or institution, and points forward to the Messiah. Use a concordance or marginal notes to trace connections between the OT prophecy and the life of Christ recorded in the Gospel accounts.

6. If a kingdom prophecy regarding the future of Israel, analyze the specific promises or prophecies that are given, and check marginal notes to discover where similar or related prophecies are given elsewhere in the OT. Visualize the original divine plan for the geo-political entity of theocratic Israel as they remained faithful to God, as well as the covenant curses that are threatened in case of continued covenant unfaithfulness, which would disrupt the divine plan.

7. In understanding the NT fulfillment of these kingdom promises, remember that Jesus as the Representative Israelite brought about the basic, initial (inaugurated), literal fulfillment of the kingdom prophecies in Himself. (For example, the “gathering” prophecies received an initial fulfillment, in principle, as He gathered the twelve disciples to Himself.)

8. Recognize that these same covenant promises/prophecies find spiritual fulfillment in the church, the body of Christ. (For example, the church is spiritually gathered by faith to Christ.)

9. Note that these kingdom prophecies find their consummated, universal and literal fulfillment at the Second Advent and beyond. (For example, Christ universally and literally gathers all His people to Himself at the Second Advent and again after the millennium.)

10. With regard to geo-political terminology or imagery for Israel found in the kingdom prophecies, recognize that this language (Jerusalem, Mt. Zion, Israel, etc.) is universalized in the
New Testament as it refers to Christian Israel, to heavenly realities, or the New Jerusalem after the millennium.

11. Kingdom prophecies describing Israel’s enemies likewise are to be interpreted in the New Testament with reference to Christ (as in steps 7–9 above): literal, local enemies of Christ at His First Advent (e.g., John 13:18; Acts 1:20); spiritual, universal, enemies of the church during the Christian era (Rev 14:20; 16:14–16), and the literal, universal enemies at the Second Advent and beyond (Rev 20:8, 9).

12. Old Testament kingdom prophecies referring specifically to the final eschatological battle between Israel and her enemies (Ezek 38–39; Zech 12–14; Joel 3; Isa 24–27), also must be interpreted in harmony with the Christ-centered principles highlighted above. The consummated fulfillment is literal (e.g., the enemies of God literally march against Jerusalem, and Mt. Olives divides in two [Zech 12:1–9; 14:4; cf. Rev 20:9]), but the references to Israel and her enemies is universalized: Israel refers to the true people of God in all ages; Gog and Magog refer to all of their enemies (Ezek 38–39; cf. Rev 20:8).