

How Prophetic is Biblical Prophecy? An Evaluation of Sandy's View of Prophecy as Described in *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*

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My remembrance of Dr. Bill Arp: I am thankful for Dr. Arp and his influence on my life. I am particularly thankful that he arranged for my wife to be mentored by his wife during our visits to Baptist Bible Seminary. That was especially helpful as we were newly married and trying to navigate PhD studies and marriage. I really appreciate what he taught me about illumination having less to do with identifying the meaning of the text but instead welcoming how to apply the text. His emphasis on the importance of singularity of meaning and authorial intent impacted my studies of the Scripture and is addressed in my evaluation of *Plowshares and Pruninghooks* by D. Brent Sandy.

Recent attempts by advocates of the open view of God to reconsider God's ability to accurately predict the future led to a reevaluation of the nature of prophetic language. D. Brent Sandy offers an alternative to what he considers to be two extremes in the arena of prophetic interpretation. On one hand, he writes to counter the liberal assertion that minimizes the divine inspiration of prophecy, while disagreeing with any approach that reads all prophecy in what Vanhoozer calls a literalistic way. Sandy's mediating position focuses on the performative nature of language and argues that most prophecies in the Bible are metaphorical and should not be interpreted at face value. He bases his arguments on speech act theory, examples of allegedly unfulfilled prophecies in the

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Bible and genre analysis that overemphasize the apocalyptic nature of many prophecies. This article will describe and evaluate Sandy's arguments as expressed in his book *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*.² The purpose of this article is to evaluate Sandy's arguments on prophetic communication, literal versus figurative communication, his use of speech act theory, his view of implicitly conditional prophecy, his arguments on fulfillment of prophecy, his arguments regarding apocalyptic literature, and his hermeneutical method for prophetic interpretation. This study will demonstrate that Sandy's view is a departure from traditional dispensationalism and his arguments are not convincing enough to change the hermeneutic for interpreting prophecy.

Description of Sandy's View

This section will endeavor to describe the view of D. Brent Sandy, a professor of Biblical Studies at Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana. He wrote *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* in order to "understand prophecy and apocalyptic biblically [emphasis his]."³ He is writing in response to concerns about individuals who see the fulfillment of prophecy in recent and anticipated events such as the Y2K bug and events in the Middle East.⁴ Although he was trained in dispensational

² D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 2002). Sandy has written some additional works on this topic, but this article will primarily focus on *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*. For some of his other works on the topic, please consult D. Brent Sandy, "What Does God Want Us to Know About the Future? The Function and Focus of Biblical Prophecy," in *Eastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Myerstown, PA: 1999); and D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995).

³ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

thought and has been associated with dispensational denominations and institutions, the goal of his book is not to defend premillennial dispensationalism.⁵ His main goal, as he describes it, is to go beyond the theological jargon and debates in order to investigate prophecy objectively and biblically.

The Goal of Prophetic Communication According to Sandy

Sandy begins by attempting a linguistic analysis of prophecy. He writes, “For another perspective on the power of prophecy, we need to slow down and think more philosophically. Language originates in humankind’s fundamental need to communicate. It is a way to express what humans experience and need to voice. In rudimentary form, words are symbols for things we want to talk about.”⁶ According to Sandy, this symbolic nature of language creates a dilemma for God on how to communicate to humans in different languages and cultures. This challenge is compounded by God’s desire to communicate heavenly concepts in ways that human beings can understand. Since language is imperfect, the description of concepts such as the Trinity and the agenda of eternity are challenging for God in Sandy’s view. According to Sandy, God solves this problem through “the creative use of

⁵ Proof that Sandy achieved this goal was the favorable review he received in James Bibza, “Review of *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* by D. Brent Sandy,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 33 (Spring 2004): 391-93. In this review, Bibza wrote, “Although Sandy indicates that he has been schooled in dispensationalism, and he claims not to be theologically motivated, it is clear that some schools of interpretation will have a much easier time agreeing with Sandy’s analysis. If Sandy is correct, all eschatological approaches will have to rethink how they have interpreted various passages. However, those, such as amillennialists, who already acknowledge that figurative language abounds in the eschatological writings, will concur with much that Sandy says. It is very difficult to see how a dispensational approach would agree with much of the main thrust of Sandy’s book.”

⁶ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 25.

language.”⁷ Sandy expresses concerns that a literal interpretation of some symbols of prophecy such as “streets of gold” will lead to a lowered view of the heavenly state. He writes, “Will we walk streets of gold? We can be sure heavenly existence is something like what they describe, but if we think it is exactly what they describe we will have lowered the spirit world of God and heaven to the physical world we have experienced.”⁸ This may also explain why he considers the 144,000 people in the book of Revelation to represent martyred saints.⁹

Sandy also questions traditional dispensational teaching about rewards when he writes,

The concept of rewards—an important form of motivation in Jewish and Greco-Roman society—runs through the whole of Scripture (from Gen 15:1 to Rev 22:12). Though rewards for Christians were generally spiritual rather than tangible, in some instances the reward offered was a crown: of righteousness, of life, of glory (2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; cf. Is 61:3. But even there the genitive case (“of”) may designate apposition, suggesting that these rewards also were spiritual: not actual crowns but a crowning with spiritual blessings of righteousness, life and glory. Whatever the intent of crowns, the opportunity to receive rewards and, conversely, the fear of not receiving them were effective means of encouragement for holy and faithful living.¹⁰

Sandy justifies his view by arguing, “Prophetic language freely uses a variety of images to refer to the same thing.”¹¹ After attempting to justify his conclusions exegetically, he states,

This proposal for understanding the rewards for overcomers may seem helpful, but it is deficient. The approach has been cerebral almost to the exclusion of the emotional. If we think that by

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁹ Ibid., 249.

¹⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹¹ Ibid., 29.

objectifying and exegeting every aspect of prophecy we can grasp the intent, we will have ignored one of the most important features of prophecy. The variety of expressions of future rewards allow us to *preexperience* [emphasis his] a small part of being in God's presence will be like. As an old hymn puts it, "O that will be glory for me!"¹²

The discussion has demonstrated that Sandy focuses primarily on the symbolic nature of language. He believes that God chooses to communicate in a language that is consistent with human experience so that humans can best understand him. His functional view of language argues that the ends are what are most important in prophetic language and not the means. In other words, God primarily speaks in prophecy to generate a response from humans and the details of the prophecy are not critical, and often should not be taken literally. Images like crowns of righteousness exist merely to motivate individuals to service by advocating spiritual rewards clothed in physical language. As opposed to dragging down the spiritual conceptions of heaven by emphasizing a literal fulfillment of physical promises, one should use the physical language to pre-experience what being in God's presence might be like (although one cannot truly understand because he or she has not experienced God's presence). Thus far, Sandy's approach has emphasized the reader's experiential response to prophecy as being the main goal of prophecy. For Sandy, prophecy is primarily a tool to communicate concepts that are beyond the normal comprehension of human beings.

Literal versus Figurative Communication

This section will endeavor to describe how Sandy views literal interpretation of prophecy. He writes, "Literal may be used to designate the opposite of figurative. In a very different sense, it may designate the opposite of historical (or actual)."¹³

¹² Ibid., 31.

¹³ Ibid., 39.

He claims that the debates over literal interpretation date back to the Enlightenment:

Since the Enlightenment and the resulting tendency of some scholars to challenge the literalness of the Bible in a historical sense, many Christians have defended the literal meaning of Scripture. The intent is not to deny that Scripture may be figurative but to affirm that *where it intends to be* [emphasis original], it is historically true. Parables, for example, are not intended to be historically true. Unfortunately, the uses of the word literal becomes confusing, in the minds of both those who make pronouncements and those who hear the pronouncements. For the purposes of this book, it is not a matter of literal opposite the historical sense but literal opposite the figurative sense and the degrees away from the surface meaning. However, because literal continues to be a misleading term, substitute terms will be preferred.¹⁴

As opposed to viewing prophecy as being primarily literal or figurative, Sandy argues for degrees of literalness. He believes that any prophecy may be interpreted in a strictly literal sense, or to such a degree that the figurative meaning is predominant, but not all literal meaning is lost. He concludes, “Only when we reach the point of denying that anything will happen as a result of those words have we moved completely away from literal meaning. At that point to be nonliteral would mean to be nonhistorical (non actual). In other words, the literal or figurative interpretation is not a simple black-or-white issue.”¹⁵ He also supports individuals like Vanhoozer who argue for a literal interpretation of Scripture, but against a literalistic interpretation of Scripture.¹⁶

In a related matter, Sandy claims that one must make a distinction as to whether the prophecy should be interpreted exactly or hyperbolically in light of emotive undertones. He writes,

¹⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶ Ibid., 237.

Most prophecy is full of emotion, because the prophets are addressing a desperate situation. . . . The hyperbole gets the point across better. . . . Of course sometimes an emotional statement can be exact, but the pattern is that the stronger the emotion, the more likelihood of the inexactness. Hyperboles, in effect, stretch the truth in order to increase the impact of words.¹⁷

Although one must question Sandy's argument that hyperbole is stretching the truth (especially in light of the fact that God cannot lie as per Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18), his primary point is that surface meanings may not always be the correct meanings. Sandy cites examples of judgment and the use of the word "forever" to underscore his point that the prophets often take poetic license to shock their listeners.

Sandy then makes an argument that prophecy is primarily metaphorical: "Prophecy is powerful and problematic for one tall reason: the creative use of language, poetic expression, arresting and emotive metaphors. If figures of speech were sequoias on the landscape of prophecy, prophecy would be densely forested, and the most common tree in the woods is metaphor."¹⁸ He argues this from a philosophical view of language,

This new understanding of metaphor charted the course for the research of more recent decades. The reasoning went like this: if language is essentially a medium for expressing reality, then language itself is metaphorical. And if language is in essence the making of metaphors, then metaphors not only express what we perceive but influence what we perceive.¹⁹

As a result, Sandy believes that the readers in the current age are too far removed to understand some of the metaphors used in the original language and culture.

As a natural consequence of his view of the metaphorical nature of prophecy, Sandy asserts that many of the discussions

¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

of blessing and cursing in the Bible are primarily metaphorical. He considers each description of God in each chapter of the Bible to be one piece of a puzzle that contributes to the overall understanding of God.²⁰ As a result, he urges a reconsideration of the premillennial and amillennial views of prophecy:

Central to amillennialism is the belief that many Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel will be fulfilled in the church. Central to premillennialism is the belief that many Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled in a future nation of Israel. In both cases there may be a limited understanding of how prophecy speaks. When it seems improbable that Old Testament prophecies will be literally fulfilled in the future Israel, amillennialists assume they were meant to be spiritualized and fulfilled in the church. When certain Old Testament prophecies seem not to have been literally fulfilled before the first advent, premillennialists assume that they will be fulfilled in a future Israel. For the chosen people, especially messianic Jews, descriptions of a regathering in Jerusalem are assumed to predict a great day when everywhere will recognize their Messiah. However, in light of how the language of destruction and blessing works—illocution, visualization, conditionality, stereotypical features and the like (see pp. 83-97)—these viewpoints need to be reevaluated carefully.²¹

In other words, Sandy argues that the actual fulfillment in a spiritualized or literal sense should not always be expected since much of prophecy is metaphorical and should not be taken in this vein. In fact, Sandy considers prophecy to be a very divisive issue:

Though not the *raison d'être* for this book, if improving our understanding of prophecy can help us be obedient to the Word of God, then something really valuable may be accomplished. Unfortunately we are heirs of a fractured Christianity. Theological posturing and pontificating about various issues—prophecy being near the top of the list—distracts us from a high

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

calling. Jesus gave us the priority to promote and preserve unity. We are to be a community united on all fronts. My prayer is that we can achieve a sense of common hope and less division regarding prophecy.²²

The Role of Speech Act Theory in Sandy's View

This section will describe the relationship between speech act theory and Sandy's view of prophecy. The previous section described his metaphorical view of language and his belief that the blessings and curses of the Bible are not necessarily to be taken at face value. The way in which he defends this view is by utilizing speech act theory to show that the function of prophetic language often prevails over the form.

For instance, while referring to Vanhoozer, he writes, "What a speaker intends to communicate is known as illocution or speech acts. Because a word may have meaning that transcends its dictionary definition, illocution must be carefully considered. Only when the function of what is said is clear can the language be understood."²³ As a result, Sandy argues for three ways in which an illocution can be analyzed: "Illocution can be analyzed from three perspectives: what speakers intend to express based on their perspective on the subject, how the communication is expressed and what impact the communication has on its hearers."²⁴ Consequently, Sandy says that prophetic communication is often performative because it intends to produce some action on the part of the hearer. Therefore, he writes,

The *function* of the statements in the Bible can be as important for understanding their meaning as the *content* of the statements. But if the illocution of a communication is not shared by the author and the hearer, then the hearer will not recognize the author's intended meaning. Ignorance of illocution leads to

²² Ibid., 208-9.

²³ Ibid., 80.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

exegetical fallacies. Awareness of illocution will help guide interpreters to correct understandings of Scripture.²⁵

This statement demonstrates Sandy's belief that speech act theory must be integrated into the process of prophetic interpretation. Without a strong understanding of speech act theory, a correct exegetical interpretation is not possible.

In light of this understanding, Sandy describes how the blessing and cursing language of the OT cannot be taken at face value. He shows how other cultures and literature of a similar time period used illocutions:

The illocution of these threats is obvious. By imagining the worst possible consequences, kings sought to strike fear in the hearts of potential violators. Of course the chance that things this bad could happen was remote. Yet respect for the gods meant that these things could not be discounted completely. The gods, after all, were called in as witnesses.²⁶

After evaluating the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28, Sandy gives the following keys to understanding the language of judgment: (1) hyperboles of harsh language were common to the ancient world; (2) human language is inadequate to describe God's wrath; (3) God's wrath was visualized in extreme language; (4) fixed phases of judgment were applied to varying situations, and (5) words may function beyond dictionary definitions.²⁷ He then concludes,

This visualized language of judgment is actually a form of metaphor. It is describing the whole of God's judgment, but it refers to it by its parts. Technically it is a synecdoche. It is a painting portraying condemnation, and each specific is a brush stroke on the larger canvas. It is the language of hyperbolic metaphor. . . . What has been stated regarding the language of judgment applies in similar fashion to the language of blessing. Though the latter receives much less press, the blessings of

²⁵ Ibid., 82.

²⁶ Ibid., 84.

²⁷ Ibid., 89.

obedience are just as real. This discussion of how God's wrath and love are expressed, particularly in the Pentateuch, provides essential background for the language of the prophets. The prophets will say many of the same things in the same ways.²⁸

Sandy concludes that speech act theory is useful for interpreting the highly metaphorical language of the prophets who based their prophecies on the metaphorical language in Deuteronomy 28-30. Since this language was designed to evoke a certain response in the readers who lived in an agrarian society, one should be cautious not to read too much into the details. Only with this insight can anyone understand the prophets and the threats that they prophesy.

Implicitly Conditional Prophecy

This section will review Sandy's view on implicitly conditional prophecy. Sandy considers most prophecies to be implicitly conditional. He cites verses such as Jeremiah 18:7-10 in order to defend his view. Sandy perceives a tension between the perpetual possession of the land in the Abrahamic covenant along with the perpetual rulership of a king from the line of David on the Davidic throne and the prophecies of Jeremiah. He argues based on Jeremiah 4:10 that Jeremiah felt as though God had deceived the people with unconditional promises which He later retracted. However, the New English Translation of the Bible offers this alternative translation, "You have surely let this people be deceived by some who are saying, 'You will be safe.'" ²⁹ This is more likely because the words "you will be safe" were consistently expressed by the false prophets and not necessarily by God (cf., Jer 6:14; 8:11; 14:13; 23:16-17).³⁰ Sandy also questions whether God may have changed his mind about some of these covenants. He believes that the only way to know if a prophecy is conditional is by viewing it after

²⁸ Ibid., 90.

²⁹ Biblical Studies Press, *Net Bible: New English Translation*, Second Beta Edition, (Spokane, WA.: Biblical Studies Ps, 2003), 1297.

³⁰ Ibid.

fulfillment, and that would be of no value to the original recipients of the prophecy.

While discussing the conditional nature of prophecy Sandy writes, “Unfortunately it is not always clear even in retrospect what parts of the covenant were unconditional, what parts were conditional, and what parts will hyperbolic. At least from the surface level of the text, God can appear to change his mind, but conditionality is not always stated.”³¹ He even raises the question of whether all prophecy may be considered conditional. Rather than answering the question, he simply concludes, “Actually it [prophecy] would be less of a problem if we could determine when promises of blessing were subject to being conditional, if we knew when prophecies were given in hyperbole, if we knew when to take the words at face value.”³² Not only that, but Sandy is unwilling to make a strong statement on the open view of God: “The issue of God changing his mind brings up the openness of God debate; here I make no attempt to take sides.”³³ He answers the question with a question, “Unexpressed conditions are common in human communication. Is that true for divine communication as well?”³⁴

Sandy’s View of Fulfillment of Prophecy

Sandy’s belief in the metaphorical nature of prophecy affects how he views the fulfillment of prophecy. He considers prediction to be only one type of prophecy, and the most important function of a prophet was to enforce the covenant between God and the Israelites. He writes,

If the primary point of prophecy is that God’s patience has a breaking point and his wrath has a beginning point, how much of prophecy is really predictive? Though the ferocity of God’s wrath is incomprehensible, the prophets sketched ways in which the teeth of his wrath would take savage bites out of the disobedient.

³¹ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 47.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

Since the intent of the sketches was striking prosecution rather than interesting information, perhaps the lead in prophets' pencils was too thick to spell out details about the future.³⁵

For Sandy, the urge to control and know the future is the result of a culture that emphasizes science fiction movies and palm readers. Because Christians realize that they cannot control the future, many of them try to know the future by feverishly attempting to interpret the details of prophecy. He even noticed this trend in his students: "Their tendency toward complete literalism underscores an important point: reading prophecy superficially may quickly lead to false conclusions about meaning."³⁶ Thus, Sandy considers a literal reading of prophecy to be overly superficial at times.

While researching prophecy that has already been fulfilled, Sandy concludes,

The already fulfilled prophecies demonstrate a pattern of translucence rather than transparency. The intent was apparently not to give specific information about the future. Rather than predict with precision, the prophets sought to prosecute with power. In some cases pronouncements were fulfilled explicitly. But even then it had not been possible to know before fulfillment what would be fulfilled transparently.³⁷

For this reason, Sandy argues that prophecies such as Joel 2:28-32 were fulfilled at Pentecost by reading it in light of Acts 2.³⁸ According to Sandy, since biblical prophecies were not understood until their fulfillment, one should not expect prophecy to reveal details of the future.

Sandy's Argument from Apocalyptic Literature

This section will describe the implications of Sandy's view of apocalyptic literature for his analysis of prophecy. Sandy

³⁵ Ibid., 133.

³⁶ Ibid., 135.

³⁷ Ibid., 146.

³⁸ Ibid., 152.

categorizes the genre of prophecy under three headings: oracles of salvation, announcements of judgment, and apocalyptic.³⁹ He considers apocalyptic literature to be significantly different from the other two headings.

For instance, Sandy writes,

Apocalyptic, however, can be a message unto itself and tends to have a message different from prophecy...Though the typical characteristics of apocalyptic are not difficult to grasp, its striking differences in technique leave many readers bewildered. While prophecy is figurative and poetic, apocalyptic is visionary and fantastic. While prophecy proclaims God's acts of judgment and blessing, apocalyptic pictures a completely different world of never-seen-before examples of good and evil...As a result, readers are often left puzzled by what they encounter...⁴⁰

Sandy argues that apocalyptic literature often presents its message in visions and symbols and the message itself is often shrouded in mystery. Prophecy, on the other hand, is often direct speech from God that predicts both immediate and distant judgment and salvation.⁴¹ In Sandy's opinion, the message of apocalyptic literature is difficult to determine and deeply symbolic.

It is this symbolic view of apocalyptic literature that causes Sandy to assert that apocalyptic should be looked at through a soft focus lens. He writes, "Allusion and symbolism seem to characterize these aspects of the vision. No kingdom is specified. No person is specified, no heavenly creatures are specified. Generally, the images lack precision."⁴² Especially troubling of this analysis of Daniel 8 is the fact that Daniel 8:21 specifies that the kingdom being spoken of is Greece, and the large horn is the first king. A similar deduction is made while interpreting Revelation 12 and 13: "With a vision of such enigmatic and symbolic proportions, any chance of correct

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 117.

interpretation may seem remote. However, since vivid scenes like this are typical of apocalyptic, we can draw on similar examples to make our way through the maze.”⁴³ He concludes that moving from the general to the specific brings uncertainty with respect to the details of apocalyptic that should not be surprising considering the nature of apocalyptic literature. Thus, Sandy summarizes the method for interpreting apocalyptic as follows:

From the surface vision in Daniel 8 we learned that while apocalyptic may seem on the surface to describe the future in detail, in point of fact it does not. Some details may in the end match up with a precise event, but it would have been impossible to see that in advance. . . . Reading apocalyptic, then, is best done from a distance. Like ancient hearers, we need to take in the sweep of the narrative. Apocalyptic uses allusions and symbols that may be peculiar but in the larger context combine to depict scenes of unusual vividness and emotion...How does the language of apocalyptic work? It tends to be more allusive than precise, more impressionistic than realistic, more fantastic than literal. Consequently we will not understand the parts of the story until we have read the last page.⁴⁴

Sandy believes that understanding apocalyptic literature will lead one to understand Revelation and other apocalyptic writings in a more symbolic way. Rather than trying to identify the fulfillment in specific detail, one should simply understand how the prophet communicates the overall message to the people.

Summary

The description of Sandy’s view thus far has demonstrated that his dependence on the philosophy of communication causes him to argue that the function of prophecy is more critical than the content of prophecy. Based on speech act theory, he asserts

⁴³ Ibid., 122.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 128.

that prophetic illocutions are more performative than instructive in nature. As a result, he believes that the blessings and cursing in the OT and NT should not be taken literally but metaphorically. Therefore, Sandy considers much of prophecy to be implicitly conditional. Sandy's metaphorical view of prophecy in apocalyptic literature leads him to emphasize understanding the overall message of apocalyptic and not concerning oneself too much with the specific identification of details. Sandy concludes that one cannot specifically determine whether a prophecy has been fulfilled or is unfulfilled, is conditional or unconditional, or is intended to be taken literally or figuratively until after it has been fulfilled. Therefore, one should simply obey the message that the prophet was intending to communicate and not pay too much attention to how the details will be worked out.

Evaluation of Sandy's View

This section will endeavor to evaluate Sandy's view of prophetic language. First, this section will demonstrate that Sandy's arguments are primarily directed against interpreters that sensationalize current events and are not utilizing the consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Second, this section will show that Sandy deemphasizes the apologetic nature of prophecy and overemphasizes language theory that promotes an experiential response to prophecy. Third, attention will be given to Sandy's contrast between literal and figurative interpretation of prophecy. Fourth, this paper will argue that Sandy's use of speech act theory should not be used in interpretation but hermeneutics. Fifth, Sandy's view of implicitly conditional prophecy and fulfillment of prophecy will be shown to be an inadequate representation of the Biblical record. Finally, Sandy's theological method will be contrasted to that of traditional dispensationalists, and the traditional dispensational view of prophecy will be shown to be superior to Sandy's method.

Straw Man Argument

As previously mentioned, Sandy directs his arguments against individuals who see the fulfillment of prophecy in recent and anticipated events such as the Y2K bug and events in the Middle East.⁴⁵ While some prominent individuals like John Hagee, Jack Van Impe, and, to a lesser extent, Hal Lindsay might advocate this view, they are not representative of the large majority of futurist premillennial dispensationalists who employ a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. In fact, if they were interpreting many of these prophecies literally, they would not consider current events to fulfill many of the prophecies that they quote. Stallard writes,

Actually, the problem with sensationalists is not precisely a focus on Bible prophecy. It is a mapping of biblical prophecy to current events. In other words, it is the wrong use of Bible prophecy that comes to the surface. Dispensational premillennialists are futurists because of their literal interpretation. They actually abandon this futurism when they act like historicists and place fulfillment of end-time prophecy in the present (usually involving events related to the coming tribulation). At best, the present time is the possible set up for the end-time days.⁴⁶

Thus, the problem with these individuals is not their attention to prophecy but their inappropriate use of it.

The Apologetic Nature of Prophecy

One aspect of prophecy that is underemphasized in Sandy's work is the apologetic value of prophecy. In fact, the fact that God can make predictions and bring them to pass is one of the

⁴⁵ Ironically, some dispensationalists were the primary advocates of not overreacting to the Y2K crisis. See Mike Stallard, "Y2k: Mass Hysteria or Prophetic Event?" (Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA), Spring 1999), 1-15.

⁴⁶ Mike Stallard, "Why Are Dispensationalists So Interested in Prophecy?," (Conservative Theological Society, Fort Worth, TX, August 2005), 2.

things that makes Him greater than all false gods. Isaiah 46:9-11 says,

Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it (NASB).

Note in this passage, that God will bring everything that he has predicted to pass. He does this by his authority, and it is not conditioned on man's response.

Another aspect of the apologetic nature of prophecy is that God will bring his plans for the national future for Israel to pass. Stallard comments on this aspect of prophecy while refuting some arguments of the open view of God,

But the vast majority of the prophecies flow from the biblical covenants, which relate to the nation of Israel. The fact that the Bible's prophecies with respect to Israel have found fulfillment throughout history time and time again has great apologetic value since it points toward the divine origin of Scripture. Therefore, open theism destroys the apologetic value of most of the Bible while at the same time leaving future fulfillment as an open question.⁴⁷

By making most, if not all, prophecy implicitly conditional it should be no surprise that some reviewers like Bibza consider Sandy's statements to be more in line with covenant theology than dispensationalism. As previously mentioned, Sandy views the 144,000 Jews in Revelation 7 as representing the martyred saints when the text clearly states that they come from national Israel, and Revelation 14 places them as having survived the tribulation without being martyred.

⁴⁷ Mike Stallard, "The Open View of God and Prophecy," (Conservative Theological Society, Fort Worth, TX, August 2001), 14.

Second, one must question whether Sandy is overemphasizing language theory in his description of how God communicates. Nowhere does Scripture report this dilemma God was allegedly faced with in communicating with mankind. One must remember that God created mankind and that he created means to communicate with him. God is fully capable of communicating in a language that is completely understandable and accurately portrays reality. From the very beginning, God communicated clearly with Adam without using metaphorical language in every statement.⁴⁸

Third, one must question Sandy's inherent assumption that God primarily communicates in prophetic language that is relatable to the human experience. As previously mentioned, God clearly communicated to Adam the consequence of sin as death, even though Adam had not experienced death as of yet. God additionally tells Isaiah that his thoughts and ways are not consistent with those of humanity in Isaiah 55:8-9 and he proceeds to tell Isaiah that his word will accomplish the purpose that it was set to accomplish in Isaiah 55:11. In fact, Sandy's caution against an approach that is cerebral almost to the exclusion of the emotional and his argument that the purpose of prophecy is to pre-experience the heavenly future is consistent with a Gadamerian view of interpretation in which the reader interprets and provides meaning to the text through the lens of experience. A traditional dispensationalist understanding would put the experience in the realm of application under the rubric of systematic theology and not place it in the process of interpretation.

⁴⁸ Sandy argues that God's statement in Genesis 2:17 was a translucent one and not fulfilled as expected on page 248 of his book. However, if one applies Sandy's own logic of God only speaking of language that reflects the human experience, how would Adam have been able to conceive of any death whether physical or spiritual?

Evaluation of Sandy's View of Literal Interpretation of Prophecy

As previously mentioned, Sandy argues that a reevaluation should be made of a consistent historical-grammatical approach to prophecy. Sandy argues that more examination should be made of the intent of the prophecy than the content of the prophecy. If the intention of the prophecy was to evoke a response on the part of the reader, then the primary way of doing so was through symbolic language. As a result, Sandy argues that much of prophecy is metaphorical in nature and should not be read in a clear, plain, and normal way.

Traditional dispensationalism considers prophecy to be the key to determining how literal one's hermeneutic is. Amillennialists and dispensationalists have both often argued that they possess a literal interpretation of the Bible. For instance, John Calvin wrote,

Origen, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the bark of the letter, there lurk deeper mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories.... Scripture, they say, is fertile, and thus produces a variety of meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely.⁴⁹

However, the source of disagreement has consistently revolved around prophecy. Puckett writes regarding Calvin, "Old Testament texts that, if taken literally, promise a time of great earthly blessing for God's people, are usually given a spiritual (or allegorical) interpretation by Calvin. He usually demonstrates the validity of his spiritual exegesis by pointing

⁴⁹ Jean Calvin and Calvin Translation Society, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 21:135.

out that the prophecy in question has not had literal fulfillment.”⁵⁰ Puckett defends this assertion by referring to Calvin’s interpretation of Jeremiah 31:38:

The meaning is that God would again care for that city, as the Temple would become as it were his royal throne and earthly sanctuary. At the same time when the Prophet affirms that the extent of the city would not be less than it had been, we see that this prophecy must necessarily be referred to the kingdom of Christ: for though Jerusalem before Christ’s coming was eminent and surrounded by a triple wall, and though it was celebrated through all the East, as even heathen writers say that it excelled every other city, yet it was never accomplished, that the city flourished as under David and Solomon. We must then necessarily come to the spiritual state of the city, and explain the promise as the grace which came through Christ.⁵¹

From this example one can note a methodological difference between Calvin and a dispensational understanding of prophecy. When Calvin could not find a literal fulfillment of the prophecy, he assumed a spiritual fulfillment in the church.

This contrasts with a dispensational understanding of prophecy. Stallard summarizes the dispensational approach:

An interpreter cannot pick and choose what he wants to be literal and what is figurative when there is no evidence of a figure of speech or extended metaphor.... To do so is inconsistency at its best. One of the reasons that dispensationalists focus on prophecy is that its interpretation almost becomes a barometer by which one’s overall approach to the text can be stabilized.⁵²

Thus, in a dispensational hermeneutic, prophecy should not be interpreted metaphorically unless the text clearly indicates so.

⁵⁰ David Lee Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 110.

⁵¹ Jean Calvin and Calvin Translation Society, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 10:150.

⁵² Stallard, “Why Are Dispensationalists So Interested in Prophecy?,” 4.

Sandy argues that both schools of thought should reexamine their hermeneutic. He argues that one should not expect literal fulfillment of prophecy that was intended to provoke a response on the part of the audience. He does so by arguing that most prophecy is metaphorical and should be taken metaphorically. In the amillennial system, the prophecy was taken literally, but the fulfillment was taken allegorically in light of the New Testament. In the dispensational system, the prophecy is taken literally and the kind and extent of the fulfillment is to be expected. In Sandy's system, neither the prophecy nor its fulfillment should be interpreted in a historical-grammatical way because much of prophecy is metaphorical.

This view of prophecy is problematic for many reasons. Sandy often speaks of how prophecy is problematic for the current audience to interpret, yet at the same time, his approach undercuts the importance of prophecy for the original audience. How could the original audience hope in fulfillment or expect judgment for disobedience if the prophecy is only metaphorical? A literal interpretation of prophecy gave both the early church and the present church hope. A metaphorical view of prophecy eliminates part of this motivation for holy living. Stallard says,

Now this is not to say that Peter and Paul do not address other concerns even in these epistles. However, it is to show that, at least for Christians who were being oppressed for who they were, the first point of the sermon is the Second Coming of Christ. This focus has been common in traditional dispensationalism. If such emphasis leaves a theological loophole for social disengagement in the present age, then so does the teaching of Peter and Paul. As we discuss the issue of how best to express the character of the present age and any empowerment available to us to better the lot of those around us, we must do so without demeaning the great hope we have in the Second Coming of Christ. In fact, it is safe to say that prophetic hope for the Christian is perhaps the primary basis for present endurance and optimism.⁵³

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

Thus, Peter encourages believers in 2 Peter 3:11-16 to look for “the coming of the day of God” and to believe in a promise of a “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” He argues that this expectation will result in believers being “found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.” However, if all of this is metaphorical and conditional, one will have difficult time applying this command. Furthermore, if one cannot be certain of the fulfillment of prophecy until after it is fulfilled, how can anyone truly place hope in the fulfillment of the prophecy if it may be implicitly conditional?

Sandy’s argument that the promised rewards must be spiritual and not physical harkens back to a similar argument made by Calvin and Augustine. Augustine taught regarding premillennialists, “As they assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. They who do believe them are called by the spiritual Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians.”⁵⁴ Regarding this same group Calvin said, “Those who assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life, observe not how great an insult they offer to Christ and his kingdom. If they are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ himself, into whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into immortal glory; if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary.”⁵⁵ One must note here that their objection to a physical kingdom and a physical reward was not based on anything indicated in the text. Instead, they based their decision on the incompatibility of the physical reward with their spiritual system. In a similar vein, Sandy’s view of language as indicating a deeper spiritual truth

⁵⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, electronic ed., 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Galaxie Software, 2000), 20.7, page 427.

⁵⁵ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia,: Westminster P, 1960), 2:995-96.

(which has much in common with allegory) precludes him from arguing for physical rewards or crowns based on his belief that the crowns were something that would have motivated a first century Christian. As Bibza notes, Sandy's arguments on points such as this fit much more in line with a covenant theologian's view of prophecy than a dispensational one.⁵⁶

The disagreement on these matters is not as minor of a point as Sandy's plea for unity portrays it to be. He writes, "If improving our prophecy can help us be obedient to the Word of God, something really valuable may be accomplished."⁵⁷ Peter's precise argument was that having faith in the future fulfillment of the more certain prophetic word will lead to holy living. In fact, in the last days mockers will question the validity of prophecies (2 Pet 3:3). Therefore, describing how prophecy will be fulfilled in the future is not mere pontificating and posturing, but it significantly affects lives. If Sandy honestly believes that one should "achieve a sense of common hope and less division regarding prophecy,"⁵⁸ then one must question why he wrote a book that seeks to reexamine how amillennial and premillennial theologians have traditionally interpreted prophecy. Surely he did so because seeking the truth is a higher commitment than preserving unity. However, if that is his reason for introducing a book that will cause considerable debate, surely he should not reprimand individuals who are honestly dealing with the text for the specific purpose of giving futuristic interpretations that bring hope to the church. Perhaps the words of Chafer best describe why truth should be valued as much, if not more, than unity on this matter:

The plea that the prophetic portions of the Bible present problems over which men disagree is not a worthy release from their claims. There are no more problems in *Eschatology* than in *Soteriology*. It happens that owing to the central place accorded

⁵⁶ James Bibza, "Review of *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* by D. Brent Sandy," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33 (Spring 2004): 391-93.

⁵⁷ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 208.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

Soteriology by the Reformers, and in subsequent theological writings, it has had a measure of consideration not given to prophetic truth. Disagreements as divergent as Calvinism and Arminianism have never been urged as a reason for the neglect of *Soteriology*, but disunity of the slightest degree among teachers respecting *Eschatology* has been seized as a reason for its neglect.”⁵⁹

One should also question Sandy’s support of Vanhoozer’s distinction between a literal and a literalistic view of prophecy. Sandy defines the *sine qua non* of prophetic interpretation to be regarding the nature of prophetic language as poetic, metaphoric, rhetorical, urgent, hyperbolic, and fantastic.⁶⁰ He contends that illocution, hyperbole, and stereotypical language are often used to express the unspecified realities of judgment so the normal dictionary meaning of words will often not be the intended meaning of words.⁶¹ Whereas traditional dispensationalism assumes the clear, plain, and normal interpretation of prophecy, Sandy assumes a metaphorical interpretation that depends largely on speech act theory. However, Vanhoozer and Sandy oversimplify their case in arguing that dispensationalism can be literalistic. The traditional historical-grammatical form of interpretation allows for metaphors, hyperbole, and other figures of speech, but it does not assume them as Sandy does.

Additionally, dispensationalists do not believe that words have to fit the normal dictionary definition of the word. This is an overly simplistic characterization of literal interpretation. Advocates of the historical-grammatical interpretation argue that context and authorial intent determines the meaning of the word. Thus, a dispensationalist normally will not say that the interpretation of a verse must be exactly as the dictionary definition would suggest. A dispensationalist will also leave room for language that would be specific to that culture that are

⁵⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, “An Introduction to the Study of Prophecy,” *BSac* 100, no. 397 (January 1943): 102-3.

⁶⁰ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 197.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

similar to the list of English and French metaphors found on Sandy's book on pages 211-13. Unlike Sandy, dispensationalists consider this type of language to be the exception of biblical prophecy and not the rule.

Some of Sandy's arguments that most of language is metaphorical must also be evaluated. For instance he writes,

This new understanding of metaphor charted the course for the research of more recent decades. The reasoning went like this: if language is essentially a medium for expressing a reality, then language is itself metaphorical. And if language is in essence the making of metaphors, then metaphors not only express what we perceive but influence what we perceive.⁶²

In his footnote to this quotation Sandy refers to Ricoeur's, Vanhoozer's, and Gill's work on *Wittgenstein and Metaphor*.⁶³ Traditional dispensationalists would not consider the works of these individuals as primary research on which to build a hermeneutic of prophecy.

However, even if these individuals did appropriately provide a basis for constructing a hermeneutic for prophecy, one must question whether they and Sandy overgeneralize the role of metaphor in language. One must wonder whether Sandy and they would want their books to be read literally or metaphorically. Even if one analyzes Sandy's quotation in which he argues for the metaphorical nature of language, one must also notice he only uses one metaphor which is "charting the course." The rest of his statement could be easily taken at face value.

Evaluation of Sandy's Use of Speech Act Theory

Earlier it was demonstrated that Sandy considers the use of the principles of speech act theory to be essential to interpretation. As previously mentioned, he considers the nature of language to be performative. As a result, he believes that

⁶² Ibid., 60.

⁶³ Ibid., 239.

ignorance of illocution leads to exegetical fallacies and awareness of illocution will help bring about a correct understanding of Scripture.⁶⁴ Consequently, Sandy considers the function of prophetic statements to be more important than the content because prophecy was not written to simply inform but to evoke a response on the part of the hearers.

Sandy's view undermines the apologetic nature of prophecy because it does not account for the numerous times that a prophecy was given and the result of the prophecy could not be changed. For instance, when Samuel prophesied to Saul that the kingdom would be taken out of his hand and Saul begged for mercy, Samuel responded, in 1 Samuel 15:28-29, "So Samuel said to him, 'The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.'" If Samuel's prophecy were just to get a response from Saul, then one would imagine that Saul's response would be all that was necessary to undo the original prophecy. However that is not what happened.

Nathan reported God's judgment to David in 2 Samuel 12:10-12 by saying "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give *them* to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" David's response to Nathan was, "I have sinned against the LORD." According to Sandy's model this would have been all that God desired. However, God used Nathan say to David in verses 13-14, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." David's response was to pray for more mercy, but God had already determined what He would do.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 82.

The greatest challenge with Sandy's view is his integration of speech act theory in the hermeneutical process. Although speech act theory may contribute to systematic theology, it should not be integrated into the interpretive process. Even worse, it should not be considered to be essential to the interpretive process and used to overturn the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the prophetic texts.

Evaluation of Sandy's View of Implicitly Conditional Prophecy

Sandy's emphasis of the performative nature of language leads him to argue that the majority of prophecies in the Bible are implicitly conditional. Sandy believes statements in human language are often implicitly conditional, so one should not be surprised that God makes similar statements. Furthermore, he considers there to be tension between some of the covenantal promises and some of the prophets' declarations of judgment.

Sandy's main argument for implicitly conditional prophecy comes from his position that the Abrahamic covenant promised that the Israelites would be in the land forever and that the Davidic covenant promised everlasting reign in the Davidic dynasty. Sandy asserts that Jeremiah believed that God was deceiving them in making these promises. Sandy resolves this by arguing that some aspects of the covenant were conditional and that God could change His mind.⁶⁵ Stallard powerfully addresses the fulfillment of the covenant promises of the Old Testament:

In other words, God is saying that his prior unconditional and absolute promise to David could not be changed, altered, or annulled by the later free actions of the various Davidic kings. God knew ahead of time that many of them would fail, but asserted that He was not open to the cancellation of the entire covenant package. Only the individual's participation in the experience of blessing under the covenant would be cancelled. The significance of this truth for the present debate is no small

⁶⁵ Ibid., 46.

matter in light of the fact that the covenant promises (especially Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants) are interconnected and that the vast majority of prophetic details in the Old Testament text relate to these same covenant promises.⁶⁶

The interconnectedness of the promises is critical for anticipating a future fulfillment for national Israel. Sandy treats individual prophecies as though they were divorced from the unconditional royal grant covenants they were based on. Within those covenants were conditions for the individual enjoyment of the blessings, yet the promises of those covenant were repeatedly reaffirmed (cf. Jer 32:37-44; Isa 55:3; Ezek 16:60-63; 37:26-28; Ps 89:3-4, etc.).

One aspect that may be closely tied with Sandy's view of implicitly conditional prophecy is his resistance to speak about the open view of God. Although this article does not want to interpret his silence as a tacit admission of supporting the view (a more likely reason is his attempt at preserving unity in doctrinal discussions about prophecy), it must be noted that many of Sandy's arguments parallel those that free will theists use to defend their position. For instance, like Sandy, Boyd considers Jeremiah 18:1-12 to be a key passage in the debate. He writes,

If the Lord exhaustively foreknows what will definitely transpire in the future, it is impossible for him to genuinely intend to curse or bless a nation and then later genuinely reverse his plan. In other words, it's difficult to avoid denying the premise of this entire passage, and all passages like it. If the classical understanding of God's foreknowledge is correct, God eternally knows exactly what he will and will not do and what every nation will and will not do. There can be no authentic reversal. Only when we accept this, I submit, can passages like Jeremiah 18:7-

⁶⁶ Stallard, "Open View of God and Prophecy," 46-47.

11 be cleared of any hint of disingenuousness. The verse speaks about God as he truly is: He plans, He responds, He changes.⁶⁷

Boyd's arguments contain a similarity on the relativity of the cursing and blessing prophecies as well as a belief that God can change His mind.

Boyd, like Sandy, also argues that most prophecies are conditional. Stallard writes,

First, he affirms that many (if not most) prophecies are conditional [emphasis original]. The impression he gives with his use of the words *many* and *if not most* is that this category covers most of the biblical prophecies. The idea of conditionality means that there is no absolute one-to-one relationship between prediction and fulfillment. Furthermore, Boyd believes that such an absolute view of prophetic passages is often inadequate even when the text says that God has stated the prophecy in a 'settled' way.⁶⁸

As Stallard notes, if this be the case, then one must question how any person can derive any hope in the fulfillment of any prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled.

Evaluation of Sandy's Arguments for Fulfillment

Regarding the nature of fulfillment Sandy writes,

How will prophecies be fulfilled? Are the detailed theories of the twentieth century (of premillennial dispensationalism in particular) valid interpretations of prophecy and apocalyptic? While many have assumed that prophecy reveals specific scenarios of future events, we may need to rethink those approaches. Futurespeak is rich in poetic imagery. Its function transcends the surface meaning of its words. Reading and hearing

⁶⁷ Gregory Boyd, "Passages That Reflect a Partly Open Future," Christ Victor Ministries, accessed August 5, 2005, <http://www.gregboyd.org/gbfront/index.asp?PageID=429>.

⁶⁸ Stallard, "Open View of God and Prophecy," 2.

the words of prophecy and apocalyptic should thrill every faithful follower with a hope focused on the Christ of prophecy.⁶⁹

However, once again, Sandy misses the overall connectedness of the dispensational system. It is not that everything is postponed to the future in dispensationalism. Dispensationalism sees unity in God's overall prophetic plan as Stallard says,

Admittedly, this great volume of prophetic teaching is not all about end-time events such as the tribulation, Second Coming, and the eschatological kingdom. However, the interconnectedness of areas of theology show that prophetic passages relative to the end-time days fit within a larger scheme of God's overall plan. In the history of dispensationalism, this has been called the panorama of the ages or the picture of the biblical purposes of God in history. Oftentimes it is presented through the lens of the various dispensations. These dispensations culminate in the final kingdom age and demonstrate that history is going somewhere. Thus, the eschatological kingdom age is seen from this angle as a part within a whole. Dispensationalists have not ignored the other parts, but they have exercised some excitement about their place within the flow of God's work leading up to the final stages of the divine plan: 'One of the distinctives of biblical Christianity is that God knows and reveals the future (Isaiah 46:8-11). Only God can do that. Thus, the future is settled, and not open to change.... We can have confidence that God will continue to carry out His plan for the ages, and we who are Christians have a significant part in that plan.'⁷⁰

Stallard's analysis is critical for understanding the overarching dispensational framework. It is not that dispensationalists are solely focused on charting the future, but they are interested in connecting God's inerrant and inspired Word in the past, present and future to see his ultimate plan. Not only does

⁶⁹ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 188.

⁷⁰ Stallard, "Why Are Dispensationalists So Interested in Prophecy?," 3. The quotation within Dr. Stallard's quotation comes from Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting the End Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001), 25.

dispensationalism have a hope focused on the Christ of prophecy, but it also encourages a hope in God's faithfulness to fulfilling his promises.

One area where many traditional dispensationalists will have a difference of opinion is with Sandy's analysis of the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2. Sandy unequivocally states that the unexpected fulfillment of this prophecy comes on the day of Pentecost with little or no discussion of the difficulties of this interpretation.⁷¹ He only writes, "Some argue that only part of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on Pentecost, but that is begging the question."⁷² Stallard's evaluation of Sanders's use of this passage can also be applied to Sandy:

Dispensationalists have offered more than one proposal concerning Acts 2:16-21. Many dispensationalists have recognized that there is no fulfillment of the details of the Joel 2 passage in Acts 2:16-21 such as the universality of the outpouring of the Spirit, the cosmic signs, and the presence of the day of the Lord tribulation. Furthermore, the context of the restoration of Israel to its land, which is part of the presentation of Joel does not seem to be clearly spelled out in Acts 2. Therefore, many dispensationalists have argued for analogous fulfillment⁷³ or for a view of openness to the soon fulfillment of Joel's prophecy if Israel nationally repents.⁷⁴ Sanders' terse presentation on this passage does not do justice to the wide-ranging debates about the use of the Old Testament in the New, especially in such crucial passages. He just assumes, without exegetical comment, that the passage is a Day-of-Pentecost fulfillment in a way not expected at all and apparently disconnected with the actual Old Testament

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 247.

⁷³ [Stallard cites the following] For example, see Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1912; reprint, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), 52-53.

⁷⁴ [Stallard cites the following] For example, see Zane Hodges, "A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2" in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. John R. Master and Wesley R. Willis (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 167-80.

promise in its own context. Such an approach emasculates the Old Testament text.⁷⁵

Unfortunately, Sandy uses a passage that has the unique labeling of ἀλλὰ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου to demonstrate a model for fulfillment with little or no clarification for those readers who are unaware of the issues involving that text.

Another area where many dispensationalists will disagree with Sandy is on the lack of attention he gives to any fulfillment of prophecies that were directed to national Israel. One key quotation by Sandy in this regard is

When certain Old Testament prophecies seem not to have been literally fulfilled before the first advent, premillennialists assume that they will be fulfilled in a future Israel. For the chosen people, especially messianic Jews, descriptions of a regathering in Jerusalem are assumed to predict a great day when Jews everywhere will recognize their Messiah. However, in light of how the language of destruction and blessing works—illocution, visualization, conditionality, stereotypical features and the like (see pp.83-97)—these viewpoints need to be reevaluated carefully.⁷⁶

What Sandy fails to mention is that the promised restoration for Israel is not only mentioned in the prophetic language of the OT, but it is also mentioned in the canonical language of the major covenants (Abrahamic, Davidic, Palestinian, etc) as well as the NT epistolary language. For instance, since Sandy is prone to interpret the OT prophecy in light of its view in the NT (as that is his next point of discussion on page 206 after mentioning the premillennial dispensational view of prophecy), it is important to mention Romans 11:25-29 which says in the NASB,

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—

⁷⁵ Stallard, “Open View of God and Prophecy,” 11.

⁷⁶ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 206.

that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here Paul clearly associates the OT prophecy in Isaiah 59:20 with the nation of Israel (as distinguished from the Gentiles) and looks for a literal fulfillment of this promise in the future by national Israel. The traditional dispensational view is that the church should interpret it the same way.

Finally, Sandy does little to address how the existence of implicitly conditional prophecy would be possible in light of the test of accuracy for a true prophet. Deuteronomy 18:22 says in the NASB, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” This text very clearly states that the primary test of a true prophet would be the accuracy of his predictions. Although Sandy acknowledges that this test validated a true prophet,⁷⁷ he does little to explain how this could be possible if most of all prophecy is implicitly conditional. In other words, if that were the case, any prophet who was accused of being false could simply declare that the prophesied judgment or blessing was implicitly conditional and the response of the people failed to bring it about. However, Deuteronomy 18 does not provide a basis for this exception. In fact, this test also applied during the exile. Ezekiel 13:9-11 says in the NASB,

So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you

⁷⁷ Ibid., 149.

may know that I am the Lord GOD. It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash; so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out.

Thus, since God inspired and led the true prophets, one would assume He had the foresight to bring their prophecies to pass.

Evaluation of Sandy's Overemphasis of the Apocalyptic Genre

Another challenge of Sandy's view is his overemphasis of the apocalyptic genre. Sandy argues that both prophecy and apocalyptic are distinct forms, and there is enough similarity between Revelation and Jewish apocalyptic writings to label Revelation as apocalyptic. As previously mentioned, Sandy argues that apocalyptic should be read from a distance without interpreting too much about the future. Sandy commits the error of genre override⁷⁸ in his arguments from the basis of the apocalyptic genre.

Thomas powerfully argues that the analysis of literary genre is a fairly recent phenomenon and that the classification of Revelation as an apocalyptic work contradicts the clear statements within Revelation that classify it as a prophetic work (see Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, and 19). He argues that unlike much apocalyptic literature, Revelation is not pseudonymous nor pessimistic about the future and that the Messiah has already come and laid the groundwork for his future victory through his redemptive death. Furthermore, Revelation has some epistolary features in Chapters 2 and 3 that are uncharacteristic of typical Jewish apocalyptic literature.⁷⁹ Additionally, Sandy asserts that it was the result of the prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit that

⁷⁸ For a definition of genre override see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 323-48.

⁷⁹ Mal Couch, ed., *The Gathering Storm: Understanding Prophecy in Future Times* (Fort Worth, TX: 21st Century P, 2005), 33.

would distinguish it from non-inspired apocalyptic works like that of the Shepherd of Hermas. As a result, Thomas believes that the prophetic nature of Revelation will only allow for a literal interpretation.⁸⁰ He writes,

If Revelation is a prophecy, it must be treated as other prophecy. Its details must be objectively meaningful and historical...The preferred approach to the Apocalypse is to interpret according to the normal principles of grammar and facts of history, remembering the peculiar nature of predictive prophecy throughout the Bible. This is usually referred to as ‘literal’ interpretation. One may wonder how a book of symbols and visions such as Revelation can be interpreted literally. This is not so difficult to understand if one keeps in mind that the symbols and visions were the means of communicating the message to the prophet, but they have a literal meaning unless otherwise indicated in the text. They do not furnish the grounds for interpreting the text in a nonliteral fashion.⁸¹

Thomas makes an important distinction. The existence of symbolism in Revelation does not justify interpreting the book figuratively. John gives clues when the symbols are to be interpreted in a nonliteral fashion (cf. Rev 11:8).

In addition, Sandy labels many statements as apocalyptic when they are not. For instance, he argues that John’s statement that Christ will “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” in Matthew 3:12 is apocalyptic when it is a statement that is made in a narrative portion of Matthew.⁸² He labels 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter 2:3, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4, and many others as apocalyptic when they are clear statements made in epistles.⁸³ He categorizes Matthew 13:43 as apocalyptic even though it is a description of a parable.⁸⁴ In other words, when statements in narrative, prophetic, epistolary, or parabolic material have sensational language about the future, Sandy labels them as

⁸⁰ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 323-25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁸² Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 175.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 175-83.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

apocalyptic and then states that they should be interpreted metaphorically. However, the fact that these statements occur outside of what many would consider apocalyptic genre shows that Sandy should take more care in advocating a metaphorical hermeneutic for any sensational language.

Sandy's Hermeneutical Method for Interpreting Prophecy

While Sandy tries to base his view on a linguistic, objective analysis of prophecy, it is primarily a result of a distinction in theological method from traditional dispensationalism. Sandy makes speech act theory essential to exegesis instead of placing it within the category of systematic theology. He interprets OT prophecy in light of this assumption. Furthermore, Sandy interprets prophetic fulfillment in light of the NT statements that trump the literal meaning of the OT prophecy. However, the issue of a literal hermeneutic is more a matter of theological method than simply linguistic analysis, as Sandy supposes. Sandy summarizes his hermeneutical method for interpreting prophecy as the following:

1. Since prophecy is powerful language that is designed for dramatic impact on its hearers, one should listen with the heart and not just the head;
2. Since the prophets were prosecuting attorneys pronouncing God's wrath on guilty sinners, look for evidence in the prophetic and historical books for the condition of the people at that time;
3. Since prophecy promises incredible rewards for overcomers, explore the full range of what heaven on earth will be like;
4. Since prophecy is poetic, seek to understand what a prophet meant by taking into account literary features like metaphors and hyperbole, rhetorical techniques, unexpressed conditions, stereotypical language, and rich symbolism. Do not take the nature of the words superficially, but focus on the function of the language. Since biblical prophecies were not understood until they

- were fulfilled, do not act expect prophecy to provide a blueprint for the future;
5. Since prophecy may describe the same idea with a variety of images, look for overarching themes. If you do not understand the intent of the prophetic expression, it may be time to step back and take in the big picture. Not understanding some things does not imply not understanding everything;
 6. Since prophecy draws on present and earthly language to describe future and heavenly scenes, expect the future reality to exceed your wildest imagination;
 7. Since prophecy has been subjected to many different interpretations, focus on what we can agree on by being humble and considerate of other views of prophetic fulfillment.⁸⁵

One can note from Sandy's method that systematic theological assumptions actually precede the exegetical process of interpreting the prophecy. Very little of Sandy's recommendations is hermeneutical per se, but it is primarily theological. Cultural considerations are not performed at the level of systematic theology but at the level of interpretation. Sandy argues that the individual circumstances should be considered, yet there is no emphasis on the promises that are made specifically to Israel. Speech act theory has a high priority in how prophecy is interpreted. Consequently, he introduces the process of interpreting prophecy with the emotions of the heart at a hermeneutical level which would incorporate the reader's response in the interpretive process. He also says that if one does not understand the details of the prophecy, one should focus on the big picture of the prophecy itself. Even the process of interacting with contrary views is placed under the rubric of hermeneutics and not systematic theology.

In Sandy's description, Sandy left out some of the methodological steps that he actually utilizes in his method for interpreting prophecy. First, he interprets both the Old and New Testament prophecy in light of the performative function of

⁸⁵ Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 199-200.

language as espoused by speech act theory.⁸⁶ Second, he merely mentions that metaphor is a literary feature of language, but his book argues that most prophecy is metaphorical. Third, he interprets the fulfillment of OT prophecy in light of the pattern espoused in the NT of prophecies that were said to be fulfilled. Thus, he advocates interpreting the OT in light of the NT.

Contrast of Sandy's Method with Stallard's Method

In contrast to Sandy, Stallard proposes a theological method that summarizes the methodology of many traditional dispensationalists. Since dispensationalists interpret prophecy with the same historical-grammatical method as the rest of Scripture, this method will be a helpful contrast to Sandy's. Following is the logical order of priority that Stallard proposes:

1. The recognition of one's own preunderstanding
2. The formulation of a biblical theology from the Old Testament based upon literal interpretation (grammatical-historical method of interpretation) of the Old Testament text
3. The formulation of a biblical theology from the New Testament based upon literal interpretation (the grammatical-historical method of interpretation) of the New Testament text, which method includes the backgrounds arrived at via point 2 above
4. The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all inputs to theology including points 2 and 3 above⁸⁷

This contrast lies at the heart of the difference between Sandy's method and the traditional dispensational one. Stallard writes,

The proper sequence of theological method based upon a correct understanding of the progress of revelation prohibits the reading of the New Testament into the Old, although expansion and

⁸⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁷ Mike Stallard, "Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 35.

enhancements are allowed. This is not literal interpretation of the Bible in general, but *the guaranteeing of literal interpretation of the Old Testament through the use of a correct theological method*. Thus, literal interpretation tied to correct theological method is a distinctive of dispensationalism.⁸⁸

Stallard's argument is helpful in demonstrating that Sandy's method has little in common with traditional dispensationalism and that his arguments are less about linguistic analysis and more about theological method.

Contrast of Sandy's Method with Other Traditional Dispensationalists

Although Sandy specifically states that he did not write his book to advocate premillennial dispensationalism, his views will be contrasted with traditional dispensationalist views. The purpose of this exercise is to show that although he has been trained in dispensationalism and has worked for dispensationalist institutions, his views are completely contrary to dispensationalism and should not be advocated by proponents of dispensationalism. Secondly, this section will argue that the dispensationalist historical-grammatical interpretation of prophecy is superior to the model Sandy proposes.

Walvoord's article entitled "Interpreting Prophecy Today Part 1: Basic Considerations in Interpreting Prophecy" gives several principles for interpreting prophecy:

1. Words are to be understood in their normal, natural sense unless there is firm evidence in the context that the word is used in some other sense.
2. Each statement of Scripture should be interpreted in its context. This usually means that a word should be interpreted in its immediate context, although sometimes usage in other passages is also relevant. A common fallacy, however, is to read into a passage something that is found elsewhere in the Bible instead

⁸⁸ Ibid.

- of allowing the immediate context to have primary weight.
3. A text of Scripture must always be seen in its historical and cultural contexts, and the intended meaning of the author is important. Conservative scholars, however, recognize that the Bible is not only a work by human authors, but is also inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in some cases even the human author did not understand entirely what he was writing.
 4. Scripture should be interpreted in the light of grammatical considerations including such important matters as tense and emphasis.
 5. If the language of Scripture is figurative as is sometimes the case, this should be clearly established by the context itself and not by a priori considerations.⁸⁹

From the beginning, one can see some distinctions between Walvoord and Sandy. Walvoord argues that the natural sense is to be preferred unless there is firm evidence to the contrary. He also says that the context alone and not a priori considerations determine whether the language is figurative. In contrast, Sandy asserts on the basis of speech act theory that prophecies are generally metaphorical and one cannot be certain whether or not they were to be taken literally until after their fulfillment (which once again would be difficult for the original audience to be certain of). In contrast to Sandy's straw man presentation of the dispensational way of interpreting prophecy, Walvoord's interpretation does not leave everything completely to the future (in fact, he argues that one half of prophecies have already been fulfilled),⁹⁰ but allows for the divine inspiration of Scripture and grammatical considerations to determine the nature of the fulfillment.

Walvoord argues that prophecy is not a special case of biblical interpretation and it should be taken literally as many of

⁸⁹ John F. Walvoord, "Interpreting Prophecy Today Part 1: Basic Considerations in Interpreting Prophecy," *BSac* 139, no. 553 (January 1982): 7-8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

the prophecies regarding the first coming of Christ were fulfilled in their normal sense. In fact, Stallard recounts a discussion he had with Walvoord on interpreting prophecy literally:

In our discussion I finally asked him this question: ‘What is the greatest issue facing dispensationalism today?’ His answer, without hesitation was the following: ‘It is what it has always been, the inerrancy of the Bible.’ What he meant was the literal hermeneutic followed by dispensationalists was the only approach which allows the Bible to be harmonized properly so that its inerrancy could be fully established. This fit well with earlier statements by Walvoord to the effect that one can be a liberal and be an amillennialist and perhaps a postmillennialist. However, it is impossible to be a liberal and at the same time a dispensational premillennialist.... At least part of Walvoord’s view stems from dispensationalism’s attempt to let distinctions stand throughout the Bible so as not to produce a false and forced unity.⁹¹

Sandy goes to almost the opposite extreme by questioning a literal interpretation of prophecy but advocating a forced unity.

Chafer also argues that prophecy should be interpreted in its “reasonable and grammatical meaning.”⁹² He states,

The Bible terminology is always the simplest of any literature. Where symbolism is employed in the text, it will, almost without exception, be so indicated. Whatever the prophetic message may be, it is dependent upon language-simple terms known to all-for its conveyance, and he who tampers with or distorts those terms cannot but reap confusion. The plan of God respecting future things has broken upon the mind of many worthy scholars when they have determined to let the Bible’s simple prophetic terminology bear the message that it naturally conveys. At once the entire story of the future becomes clear and free from complications. It is not implied that there are not difficult situations to be confronted; but it is asserted that humble

⁹¹Stallard, “Why Are Dispensationalists So Interested in Prophecy?,” 9.

⁹²Chafer, “Introduction to the Study of Prophecy,” 104.

acceptance of the declarations in the natural meaning of them will yield a right understanding of the all but complete prophetic message.⁹³

Once again, there are some clear distinctions between Chafer's view of prophecy and Sandy's. Chafer argues that prophecy should be interpreted literally and the natural meaning of prophecy will bring a true understanding of the prophetic message. Furthermore, he argues that prophecy should be interpreted symbolically only when the text warrants it.

Ryrie writes regarding the role of literal hermeneutics in prophetic interpretation: "The hermeneutical principle is basic to the entire dispensational system including its eschatology ... dispensationalism is the only system that practices the literal principle consistently. Other systems practice literalism but not in every area of theology or on all parts of the Bible.... Consistent literalism is at the heart of dispensational theology."⁹⁴ Ryrie's point is that all conservative Christian systems interpret the Bible literally to some degree. What differentiates dispensationalism from others is that dispensationalists try to interpret the entire Bible as literally as possible. In contrast to Ryrie's definition of literalism as clear, plain, and normal interpretation, Sandy argues for degrees of literalness. By advocating that prophecy should not be interpreted literally most of the time since it is primarily metaphorical, Sandy takes away one of the true marks of dispensationalism and shows on the hermeneutical barometer Stallard mentioned earlier that his approach is not dispensational.

Whereas Sandy argues of the dilemma God faced in communicating with man, Ryrie affirms God's sovereign ability to communicate with man: "If God be the originator of language and if the chief purpose of originating it was to convey His message to man, then it must follow that He, being all-wise and all loving, originated sufficient language to convey

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 8th ed. (Chicago,: Moody, 1973), 158.

all that was in His heart to tell man.”⁹⁵ Sandy argues that language begins with man’s need to communicate, and Ryrie argues that language begins with God’s desire to communicate. Sandy’s philosophy of language is primarily man-centered and Ryrie’s is God-centered. Ryrie believes that God does not want to communicate in a way that is confusing to man, but Sandy consistently views prophecy as problematic. Ryrie asserts that God communicates in the way that is most comprehensible to man and can be interpreted in a clear, plain, and normal way. If even his invisible attributes can be clearly seen in the natural world (cf. Rom 1:20), would it not make sense that He can communicate those attributes in words as well?

Ryrie also refers to the apologetic value of the OT prophecies about Christ that were fulfilled literally. According to Ryrie, only the clear, plain, and normal interpretation of prophecy preserves objectivity. He says, “To try to see meaning other than the normal one would result in as many interpretations as there are people interpreting. Literalism is a logical rationale.”⁹⁶

Finally, Ryrie argues that the dispensationalist hermeneutic is the most consistent. He writes,

In other words, the nondispensationalist position is simply that the literal principle is sufficient except for the interpretation of prophecy. In this area, the spiritualizing principle of interpretation must be introduced. The amillennialist uses it in the entire area of prophetic truth: the covenant premillennialist uses it only partially. This is why the dispensationalist claims he is the only one who uses literalism consistently.⁹⁷

However, much of Sandy’s book describes how difficult it is to be consistent with interpretation because of the performative nature of language. As a result, he leaves his readers with more questions than answers.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

Since it has been demonstrated that Sandy's position is not in any way consistent with traditional dispensationalism, one must still answer the question as to whether his model is better than the traditional dispensationalist hermeneutic. In terms of the portrayal of divinity, the traditional dispensational model preserves the glory of God as the Divine Communicator who is completely capable of communicating to humanity in plain language. Sandy paints a picture of a perplexed God who is limited to communicate in human experience. With respect to the Scriptures, the traditional dispensational model is the most consistent with the promissory nature of the royal grant covenants made to Israel and the clear statements in Deuteronomy 18 that establish a test of a true prophet. Sandy's model is based largely on questionable texts that were carefully chosen to indicate a metaphorical use of language.

The dispensational system is also the most logical way of interpreting prophecy. Wolfe gives four criteria for validating epistemological systems: consistency, coherence, comprehensiveness, and congruity.⁹⁸ As Ryrie has shown, traditional dispensationalism is the only system that offers a consistent approach to prophecy with clear guidelines for interpretation. Traditional dispensationalism is the only system that comprehensively applies a hermeneutic to all aspects of Scripture. Traditional dispensationalism is also the only system that offers an appropriate explanation for the vast majority of prophecy that has already been fulfilled (especially Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in literal fashion). Finally, the dispensational framework is the only system that is able to coherently explain how the Bible fits together in the past, present, and future. As a result, there is no warrant for a change in the hermeneutical approach to prophecy of traditional dispensationalism.

⁹⁸ David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief*, Contours of Christian Philosophy (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1982), 55.

Conclusion

This review of Sandy's hermeneutical method for prophetic interpretation as expressed in *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* has evaluated Sandy's arguments on the goal of prophetic communication, literal versus figurative communication, his use of speech act theory, his view of implicitly conditional prophecy, his arguments on fulfillment of prophecy, his arguments regarding apocalyptic literature, and his hermeneutical method for prophetic interpretation. This article demonstrated that Sandy's arguments are not consistent with a traditional dispensational hermeneutical method for prophetic interpretation. For most traditional dispensationalists, prophecy is interpreted with the same literal historical-grammatical approach that is applied throughout the Bible. When contrasted with the dispensational method for interpreting prophecy, Sandy's method was found to be inconsistent with the Biblical view of prophecy and less consistent, coherent, comprehensive, and congruous than the dispensational approach. Additionally, his approach minimizes the glory of God as a capable Divine Communicator. For this reason, this writer sees no need to change the traditional dispensational hermeneutical approach to prophecy, but instead would consider the traditional dispensational interpretive method to be the best approach to interpreting prophecy.

View Biblical Prophecy Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. Each figure explicitly advocated open theism and dealt with the challenging issue of how biblical prophecy is compatible with an open view of God's foreknowledge. However, it not only contributes to the study of prophecy and the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible by analyzing the textual history and interpretative history of prophetic books - the former being concerned with the manuscripts of prophetic books found in Qumran and elsewhere, the latter being focused on para-prophetic texts and commentaries - it also investigates the phenomenon of active prophecy. It looks at the relation between prophecy and divination and how prophets relate to their social more.