

A Response to the Evaluation

Copyright (c) 2010 by David P. Duffie, M.D.

I appreciate Shea's response. I agree with him that the blessings and curses enunciated in Deuteronomy apply only in the covenant relationship with the Jews. Furthermore, I fully agree with him that the "promises and threatenings," i.e., the blessings and the curses, are both conditional. The Jews did not fulfill the conditions and therefore have received the curses.

In my understanding, however, there is an important distinction between promises and prophecies. I believe that Shea also recognizes some distinction between them; but he seems not to have applied that distinction to the conditionality question, at least not in the way that I have. We both see the restoration prophecies as having been partially fulfilled in history by the return of the exiles; and we both see in these prophecies a deeper import pointing toward greater things to come.

Beyond the historical fulfillment, Shea sees these prophecies--as does our SDA *Bible Commentary*--as predicting an exalted, world-prominent position of the Jewish nation in which she fights off her jealous enemies and establishes herself as an example and fountain of blessing for the entire world--or some such scenario based upon seeing the restoration prophecies as prophecies predicting such an earthly state of exaltation for the Jews. The fact that such a state never materialized necessitates that all the prophecies thought to be predicting such a state must be considered to have been conditional from the start. As predictions of what would happen on earth, they obviously failed. Happily, however, out of this failure there is found a solution: our conventional teaching correctly informs us that although these predictions were never fulfilled to literal Israel, as was the original intent, still in principle they will all be fulfilled for spiritual Israel in the earth made new.

But I question whether this whole matter of conditionality is really necessary. In effect, I would bypass the conditional prophecy circuit by understanding the restoration prophecies to be unconditional prophecies and depictions of the new earth state. In my view, instead of predictive prophecies that failed and need readjustment, we would have historical/typical prophecies that succeed and were never conditional. It seems to me that the confusion of prophecy with promise or blessing is largely responsible for the fact that the idealized earthly state that never materialized has been so generally considered to be the subject of prophecy instead of being seen as the product of speculation about what might have transpired had the conditions for blessing been met. The blessings were conditional. The restoration prophecies were not.

The latter had a typical fulfillment in history, but their main focus was upon their antitypical fulfillment in eternity. They were characteristically couched in the language and terms of earthly geography and political movements that were more immediately meaningful to the prophets themselves, who probably did not always comprehend the real eschatological significance of what they were hearing or seeing and describing. . . .

Shea is essentially correct in saying that except for rare instances like the prophecy of Jonah (which I did acknowledge to be conditional in my paper) I do indeed tend "ultimately" to deny a place for virtually any conditional prophecy. Shea calls this a weakness, an opposite extreme arrived at in overreaction to an excessive use of conditionality on the part of some, which we both deplore, at least as pertains to extra-covenantal relationships. What Shea calls a

weakness, however, I consider to be one of the main strengths of my paper. But that's all right; we just see things differently here. And I respect his position, which to him appears to be a proper balance between two extremes. I believe that he feels that it is especially in reference to the restoration prophecies that there is need to retain the concept of conditionality; whereas I feel that it is especially in these same restoration prophecies that the concept of conditional prophecy would far better be replaced by that of straight predictive prophecies, which, although often couched in historical/typical language, are not in themselves conditional, and need not be so considered.

Another factor to consider when reading my paper is that I take types to be much more inclusive and dynamic than some do. Shea's example of a type was a lamb, a single object. I would include entire sequences of events.