

Messianic Prophecy and English Translations

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Very properly, the NIV11's handling of messianic prophecies has been a topic of exploration and concern among us in WELS recently. It is good for us to focus on these prophecies, because every passage that speaks about our Savior Jesus Christ is precious to us. We are very much concerned that these passages be presented properly in our English translations.

In this paper I intend to explore the topic of messianic prophecy in general. Then I will share some thoughts on how these prophecies are translated into English, and I will comment on what we find in the NIV11.

The nature of Old Testament prophecy—direct/rectilinear

It is generally recognized that there are different types of messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. Wilbert Gawrisch and John Brug speak about three types of prophecy: direct prophecy, typical prophecy, and prophecy with an intermediate fulfillment.¹

Direct messianic prophecy is prophecy that has only one fulfillment—Jesus Christ. The Old Testament writers through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sometimes made predictions about the coming Messiah that find their fulfillment in Jesus and in Jesus alone. It was the original intention of these prophecies to direct readers to the coming Messiah and no one else. This type of prophecy is sometimes also called “rectilinear” prophecy, since it goes in a straight line to the Messiah.

Two examples of direct prophecy that are commonly given are Isaiah 7:14 and Psalm 16:9-11.² In Isaiah 7:14, the prophet predicted that “the virgin will be with child.” It is understood that this could refer only to Mary and Christ, since no other virgin has ever borne a child. In Psalm 16:10, David wrote: “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” When Peter quoted these words on Pentecost, Peter said that David was not talking about himself in these verses, but “he was a prophet,” and “seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:29-31). Peter's words lead interpreters to understand this prophecy as a direct, rectilinear prophecy about Christ.

Two other passages that could be looked upon as rectilinear prophecies are Micah 5:2 and Zechariah 9:9.³ Around 725 B.C. the prophet Micah predicted that a ruler would come from Bethlehem who would be the peace of the people of Israel. To whom but Christ could this refer? Around 500 B.C. the prophet Zechariah predicted that Jerusalem's king would ride into town on a foal of a donkey. Did this ever happen apart from Christ?

The nature of Old Testament prophecy—typical

¹ Wilbert R. Gawrisch, *Introduction to the Psalms*, (Mequon: Seminary Mimeo Co., 1973), p. 37; and John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1–72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), pp. 16-18.

² David Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), p. 123. See also Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1–72*, pp. 16,17.

³ These are two examples given by Alfred von Rohr Sauer, “Problems of Messianic Interpretation,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 35, No. 9 (October 1964), p. 568.

In addition, Old Testament writers sometimes speak of a person, thing, or event as a type or foreshadowing of the coming Messiah. This can happen in two ways. Old Testament writers sometimes refer to something from their own life or previous history that foreshadows the coming Messiah. The bronze serpent was a foreshadowing or type of Christ on the cross. Jonah and the fish was a foreshadowing or type of the resurrection of Christ. This is what Gawrisch and Brug refer to technically as “typical prophecy.” Sometimes, Old Testament writers also look ahead to the future and make a prediction about the coming Messiah that includes a person, thing, or event in the future that will be a foreshadowing or type of Christ. There are one or more preliminary fulfillments together with a final, ultimate fulfillment in Christ. This is what Gawrisch and Brug call a prophecy with an intermediate fulfillment. In both cases, however, there is a person, thing, or event that is a pattern, a foreshadowing, or a type of the coming Savior. In this paper, I will refer to all of these prophecies as “typical prophecies.” Many writers use the term “typological prophecy” for the same thing.

The best example of a prophecy with more than one fulfillment are God’s words to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16:

When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

To whom do these words refer? The Bible itself guides us to see several fulfillments. In 1 Chronicles 22:6-10, it is evident that Solomon was a fulfillment of these words (cf. also 1 Kings 5:5; 8:18-21; 1 Chronicles 28:5-7; 2 Chronicles 6:7-11). Then Psalm 89:29-32 goes on to say that the other kings in the Davidic dynasty were also a fulfillment. Finally, the same language is used to describe Christ in the New Testament. The angel Gabriel said to Mary: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32-33). The Bible itself takes the language of the 2 Samuel 7 prophecy and applies it to Solomon, to Solomon’s descendants, and to Christ. This should settle the matter. It is possible for Biblical prophecies to have multiple fulfillments.

Other examples of typical prophecy are Psalm 41:9 and Zechariah 11:12,13.⁴ In Psalm 41:9, David wrote, “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” It is understood that David is first of all speaking about Ahithophel. But Jesus also quotes the verse in John 13:18 as referring to Judas. In Zechariah 11:12,13, the prophet Zechariah presumably receives 30 pieces of silver and throws them “into the house of the LORD to the potter.” In Matthew 27:5-10, the New Testament says that these words were fulfilled when Judas threw his 30 silver coins into the temple, and the money was used to buy the potter’s field.

Exegetical debate—direct or typical?

It is not so easy to know in every case, however, whether a biblical prophecy should be interpreted as a direct prophecy of Christ or as a typical prophecy. This is particularly the case with the

⁴ Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Bread of Life From Heaven: The Theology of the Means of Grace, the Public Ministry, and Church Fellowship* (Mankato: MN: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2009), p. 47; and Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 123.

psalms. When David wrote things that fit with Christ or are quoted in the New Testament as fulfilled in Christ, we may legitimately wonder: Is he speaking about his own experience as a foreshadowing of his greater Son, Jesus Christ? Or, is the Spirit of Christ in him (1 Peter 1:11) leading him to write only about Christ, without any reference to his own circumstances?

These are questions that we may be unable to answer definitively in many cases, and not surprisingly, there is a variety of opinion among Christian interpreters. Augustine, who spent 30 years of his life writing a commentary on the psalms, considered the psalms in their entirety to be a prophecy of Christ.⁵ Lutheran expositor H. C. Leupold considered only four psalms to be directly messianic: 22, 45, 72, 110.⁶ Walter Kaiser listed 11 psalms as directly messianic: 2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 68, 69, 72, 109, 110, 118.⁷ Carl Manthey Zorn (1846-1928) in his *Devotional Commentary* gave a list of 29 psalms (in addition to Psalm 145) that he considered to be directly messianic: 2, 8, 16, 21, 22, 24, 40, 45, 47, 67, 68, 69, 72, 87, 89, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 109, 110, 113, 117, 118, and 132.⁸

Discussion on this topic goes on among careful Christian expositors of all denominations. But the debate has been particularly active in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod over the years.

Missouri Synod

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many LCMS theologians, such as George Stoeckhardt (1842-1913), Ludwig Fuerbringer (1864-1947), and Walter A. Maier I (1893-1950), took the position that there are no typical prophecies in the Old Testament. There are only direct, rectilinear prophecies. Their main argument was that typical prophecy would violate the interpretive principle of *sensus literalis unus est*. This traditional Lutheran principle was articulated by C. F. W. Walther in “The True Visible Church of God on Earth,” where he wrote: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church maintains that there is but one literal sense.”⁹ Ludwig Fuerbringer in his *Theological Hermeneutics* wrote, “Another common error of exegetes with regard to Messianic prophecies must be avoided: he must insist that these prophecies may have only *one* meaning, not two or more. Direct Messianic interpretation over against the so-called typical interpretation [*sic*].”¹⁰ In other words, according to these theologians it is impossible for a passage to refer to both Solomon and Christ, because then there would be two meanings in the words, and it is impossible for words in Scripture to have two different meanings.

This view has persisted in the LCMS among some, especially at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The Department of Exegetical Theology at Fort Wayne issued an “Opinion” about “Hermeneutical Principles” in 1977 in which they wrote:

⁵ Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms, 1–32*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Volume 15, introduction by Michael Fiedrowicz (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), pp. 24, 44.

⁶ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 21.

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 92, 93, 240, 241. Kaiser is president emeritus at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and is a highly respected evangelical writer on Biblical prophecy. Though he holds to millennialism, his millennialism is not prominent in this volume.

⁸ Carl Manthey Zorn, *The Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, translated by John F. Sullivan (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), p. 702.

⁹ C. F. W. Walther, “The Evangelical Lutheran Church, The True Visible Church of God on Earth,” Thesis XVI, D, in *Walther on the Church*, translated by John M. Drickamer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 177.

¹⁰ Ludwig Ernst Fuerbringer, *Theological Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Classroom* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), p. 21.

7. Consequently, when Scripture (e.g. Matt. 1:23) asserts that a given prophecy (e.g., Is. 7:14) was “fulfilled” in a given person, this person must be regarded as the sole fulfillment of the prophecy concerned. . . .

18. Likewise, any prophecy which is predicated of a grammatically singular subject must be interpreted as finding its sole fulfillment in one specific person unless the context or the analogy of faith compels the exegete to accept a collective interpretation (the rectilinear approach as opposed to a generalizing approach); no prophecy may be interpreted in a typological manner or any other way which would, for example, see a reference to David as well as Christ in Psalm 2.¹¹

In an essay in 1980, Fort Wayne professor Raymond Surburg wrote: “All those who make direct predictive Messianic prophecies typological violate the hermeneutical principle that a text has only one intended sense and does not have multiple meanings.”¹² Rolf Preus and his sons continue to promote this view on the Luther Quest internet discussion forum.¹³

What do such exegetes do with 2 Samuel 7, the parade example of typical prophecy? Of course, they say that it refers only to Christ and not at all to Solomon. Ludwig Fuerbringer said, “Most of the newer positive exegetes say that the reference is equally to Solomon and to the Messiah. This very passage is one of their proofs for the typical exegesis. . . . The consequence of this exegesis is that some words have more than one meaning. . . . The *sensus unus literalis* of Scriptures is destroyed by this exegesis and also the clarity of the Bible.”¹⁴

This interpretation of 2 Samuel 7 can also be found in Kretzmann’s *Popular Commentary of the Bible*. Kretzmann wrote, “The constant repetition of the phrase ‘forever, for eternity,’ again forces the conclusion that we must look beyond Solomon, to the eternal existence of the Son here concerned. . . . This, of course, may rightly be said only of Christ.”¹⁵

The problem is, however, that the Bible itself takes the language of 2 Samuel 7, including the word “forever,” and applies it explicitly to Solomon. Read 1 Chronicles 22:6-10:

Then he [David] called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon: “My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever’” [Emphasis added] (cf. also 1 Chronicles 28:5-7).

¹¹ Posted on July 2, 2011 in a discussion on Luther Quest: <http://www.lutherquest.org>.

¹² Raymond F. Surburg, “The Proper Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Prophecy,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (December 1980), pp. 26, 27.

¹³ Visit the archives at <http://www.lutherquest.org>.

¹⁴ Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Exegesis of Messianic Prophecies*, mimeographed lecture notes, p. 37.

¹⁵ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament*, Volume 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), p. 521.

Obviously the word “forever” in this context needs explanation. Solomon will not rule forever personally, but his family line will be on the throne forever through his great Descendant, Jesus Christ. Still, the word “forever” is used in this passage as it speaks specifically about Solomon.

It is interesting what Kretzmann wrote about 1 Chronicles 22:6-10. His only comment was: “Here the prophecy of 2 Sam. 7,12-14 is taken in its narrower sense, although the Messianic element is not wanting.”¹⁶ At 1 Chronicles 28:6 he wrote, “The relationship [between God and Solomon] thus being typical of that obtaining with Christ, to whom the entire prophecy, 2 Sam. 7, 12ff. pointed forward.”¹⁷ These cryptic comments seem to allow a “narrower sense” and a “typical” understanding to some degree in connection with 2 Samuel 7.¹⁸

Thinking in the LCMS gradually shifted on this topic. In 1921 William Arndt published an article in *Lehre und Wehre* that began to open the door to typical prophecy.¹⁹ Paul Kretzmann did explain Jeremiah 31:15 and Hosea 11:1 in a typical manner.²⁰ By the time of the *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* in 1979 and the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (CSSB) in 1986, the typical approach was mainstream and dominant in LCMS publications, even though some at Fort Wayne continued to hold to the other position. Today, some observers wonder what is left as direct prophecies in published LCMS exposition. The CSSB explains Psalm 2, 16, and 110 as typical prophecies. The CSSB also explains Isaiah 7:14 as typical. The note at that place says, “Mt 1:23 understood the woman mentioned here to be a type (a foreshadowing) of the Virgin Mary.”²¹

Missouri Synod professor Andrew Bartelt has even argued that Psalm 16 may be typical, because Peter’s argument in Acts 2:29-31 may be an example of what can be called “dialectical negation.”²² Dialectical negation is a Hebrew idiom where a statement is negated over against another statement. What is meant is that the negated thing is not the only thing or the most important thing. The other contrasted item is more important. Amos said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). He meant, “I desire *not just* sacrifice, but *more so* mercy.” Joel said, “Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13). He meant, “Rend *especially* your heart, and *not so much* your garments.” We may say: “Christmas is a time for Christ, and not for presents,” but we may still have presents under the tree. So Bartelt suggests that Peter may have meant, “David was *not so much* speaking about himself, but *especially* about Christ.”

It is no surprise that *The Lutheran Study Bible* (LSB) (2009) has comments that reflect a typical understanding of very many if not most Messianic prophecies. About Psalm 22, the LSB says, “While many human beings have shared these feelings, this psalm finds its greatest fulfillment in Jesus Christ,

¹⁶ Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary*, p. 681.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 689.

¹⁸ Luther, on the other hand, considered 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 22 to be two different messages from God, with 2 Samuel 7 referring only to David and 1 Chronicles 22 only to Solomon—a tenuous position in my mind. See *Sermons of Martin Luther*, Volume 6, edited by John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprint of 1908 edition published by The Luther Press), pp. 186-188.

¹⁹ William Arndt, “Typische Messianische Weissagungen,” *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 67 (1921), pp. 359-367.

²⁰ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, The Old Testament*, Vol 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), pp. 457, 647.

²¹ *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, edited by Robert G. Hoerber (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 1029.

²² Andrew H. Bartelt, “Dialectical Negation: An Exegetical Both/And,” In “*Hear the Word of Yahweh*”: *Essays on Scripture and Archaeology in Honor of Horace D. Hummel*, edited by Dean O. Wenthe, Paul L. Schrieber, and Lee A. Maxwell (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), p. 63. This same argument appears in a footnote in “Prophecy and Typology,” adopted by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, May 21, 1996, pp. 10,11.

who spoke it from the cross.”²³ About Psalm 118, the LSB says, “It may have been written for celebrations at the time of David or for the celebrations of the second temple. . . . However, it was destined to find greater fulfillment when sung at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (v 26, Jn 12:13) and when He Himself referred to it regarding His death and resurrection (vv 22–23; Mt 21:42–44).”²⁴ In connection with Isaiah 7:14, the LSB says, “There are two signs. On the one hand, the Lord was promising Ahaz that in short order—during the nine months and weaning process of typical childbirth—He would deliver Judah from the two kings (v 16) threatening them. . . . On the other hand, the Lord promised something remarkably different from a typical pregnancy, . . . The Son of God would be born of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit.”²⁵

Those who support typical prophecy point out that it does not need to be viewed as a violation of the *sensus literalis unus est* principle.²⁶ The “one sense” principle “was directed against the medieval practice of allegorizing and attaching to Scripture a fourfold sense, a practice defended and followed by the Roman theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries.”²⁷ With prophecy, a passage can have “one sense” that happens to be fulfilled in installments, with “each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow.”²⁸ The intended sense of a prophecy can be “deep and wide enough to leave room for a multiple, i.e. a partial and a final, fulfillment.”²⁹

Also, those who support typical prophecy point out that just because the New Testament says that an Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in Christ, that doesn’t necessarily mean that Christ is the *only* fulfillment. It doesn’t automatically exclude other preliminary fulfillments.

WELS

The theological leaders of the Wisconsin Synod, in contrast to Missouri, never had a strict, “rectilinear-only” mindset.³⁰ WELS theological leaders always acknowledged both direct and typical prophecy. Adolf Hoenecke wrote approvingly about the typical understanding of Hosea 11:1 in an article published in 1904.³¹ In a sermon study on Psalm 22 in 1905, August Pieper allowed for the possibility of typical interpretation in general, although he rejected it in the case of Psalm 22.³² In his *Isaiah II* commentary, August Pieper spent several pages on the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. He wrote:

²³ *The Lutheran Study Bible*, edited by Edward A. Engelbrecht (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), p. 865.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 961.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1101.

²⁶ This point is made by Walter R. Roehrs, “The Typological Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (November 1984), p. 215.

²⁷ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), p. 325.

²⁸ L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 153.

²⁹ Paul Peters, “Book Review on *Bible Commentary, The Minor Prophets* by Theodore Laetsch,” *Quartalschrift (Theological Quarterly)*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (April 1956), p. 157.

³⁰ William J. Hassold, “Rectilinear or Typological Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 37 (March 1967), p. 155.

³¹ Adolph Hoenecke, “Über den Schriftbeweis in der Konkordienformel,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1904), p. 122.

³² August Pieper, “An Exegetical Study of Psalm 22, For Use in Lenten Preaching,” translated by John Jeske, *The Wauwatosia Theology*, Vol.1, edited by Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), p. 293.

Prophecy frequently has a way of locating future events of the same general kind in the same level of time, regardless of the actual date of their occurrence. . . . Isaiah . . . really is prophesying of Christ and of the New Testament and the eternal kingdom of God, even though his view is directed first of all to the deliverance of the Old Testament people from Babylonian despotism.³³

Pieper also was open to the possibility that part of a psalm or a prophecy could be rectilinear and part could be typical. In his mind, it was not an “all or nothing” proposition. He wrote, “It surely is not impossible for typical and rectilinear prophecy to be combined in the same psalm.”³⁴

How does a person decide if a passage is rectilinear or typical? August Pieper gave his criteria in his study of Psalm 22: “The question as to whether the messianic character of the psalm is typical or rectilinear will be determined by whether the message of the psalm goes beyond the historic figure of the type or remains within the reality of that figure.”³⁵ In other words, a person has to look at the Old Testament text and evaluate whether or not it fits with the Old Testament person or situation. According to Pieper, if the description does not fit with the Old Testament type, then it must be a direct prophecy.

The problem is, of course, that this involves a subjective judgment call, and different interpreters may come to differing conclusions. When David said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1), is it possible that he was thinking in part about his own condition? When Solomon wrote, “All kings will bow down to him” (Psalm 72:11), is it possible that he in part was thinking hyperbolically about himself? Even within WELS, it is fair to say that there has been some variation in the interpretation of specific passages—whether interpreters view them as direct or typical.

Many WELS pastors cherish the memory of Wilbert Gawrisch as our psalms professor. He was a strong proponent of the direct, rectilinear understanding of Psalm 8 and other prophecies that traditionally have been considered to be rectilinear. He wrote an article that still is worth reading today, “Luther and Psalm 8.”³⁶ He required that all students spend some time reading in Zorn’s book on the psalms.

Strong arguments can be given for the reality of rectilinear psalms.³⁷ The most natural reading of Acts 2:25-31 leads to the conclusion that Psalm 16:8-11 is a direct prophecy of Christ (cf. also Acts 13:35-37). The same could be said about Psalm 110:1, quoted in Acts 2:34. The use of Psalm 2:7 (“You are my son; today I have become your father”) in Acts 13:32-33 and Hebrews 1:5 leads easily to this conclusion. When Psalm 2:8 predicts, “I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession,” this fits literally with Christ and not with David.

However, Paul Peters, a professor of Old Testament at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1939–1966, was very open to typical interpretation. He criticized Laetsch’s rectilinear understanding of Jeremiah 31:15 and Hosea 11:1.³⁸ In his *Quarterly* article on Isaiah 7:14, Peters stated that the royal psalms “rest upon a typical groundwork” and have “points of connection with contemporaneous

³³ August Pieper, *Isaiah II*, translated by Erwin E. Kowalke (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), pp. 84, 86.

³⁴ Pieper, “An Exegetical Study of Psalm 22, p. 293.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

³⁶ Wilbert R. Gawrisch, “Luther and Psalm 8,” in *Luther Lives*, edited by Edward C. Fredrich, Siegbert W. Becker, and David P. Kuske (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1983), p. 85-97.

³⁷ A number of these arguments were shared with me in private conversation with Joel Fredrich, a professor at Martin Luther College.

³⁸ Paul Peters, “Book Review on *Bible Commentary, Jeremiah* by Theodore Laetsch,” *Quartalschrift, Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (October 1953), p. 302, 303; and “Book Review on *Bible Commentary, The Minor Prophets*,” p. 157.

history.”³⁹ Though he considered David to be speaking only about the Messiah in Psalm 110, he considered Psalm 2 to be typical just like 2 Samuel 7.^{40 41} At a pastors’ conference in the 1960s, Paul Peters reportedly stated that Isaiah 7:14 is the only messianic prophecy about which one can be absolutely certain that it is a direct prophecy.⁴²

A personal opinion

At this point I will present my long-held convictions about this matter. I have always felt that it is commendable for confessional Lutherans to be so concerned about the messianic prophecies. The time spent wrestling with rectilinear and typical prophecy is time well spent. It shows a love for Christ and a devotion to careful exegesis of God’s Word. But I have also felt that confessional Lutherans shouldn’t fight with each other over which prophecies are direct and which are typical, as long as interpreters see Christ as the ultimate and greatest fulfillment of the prophecies. These are exegetical questions, about which orthodox teachers can in good faith come to different conclusions, and they are not a matter of true and false doctrine. Where one stands on these issues, it seems to me, should not be some sort of litmus test for Lutheran orthodoxy.

Some people fear that with typical prophecies, the message about Christ is bound to be pushed into the background or diluted. William Arndt was of the opinion that some typical interpretations “cut down the meaning of the Messianic prophecy to the human size of the type, and then these shrunken words will not fit Christ any more.”⁴³ But that doesn’t need to be the case, and it certainly was not what happened for Old Testament believers with the 2 Samuel 7 prophecy. Though David and others understood that the 2 Samuel 7 prophecy found an immediate fulfillment in Solomon, that didn’t stop them from recognizing that there would be a greater Son of David who would bring about a greater fulfillment (cf. Acts 2:30-31). Isaiah built on the 2 Samuel 7 prophecy and predicted that a divine Son would be born who would “reign on David’s throne . . . forever” (Isaiah 9:7). Ezekiel simply referred to the coming Messiah with the name “David” (Ezekiel 34:23,24).

In addition, there is no reason to think that typical prophecy is somehow second class or inferior. Certainly, when rectilinear prophecies are recognized, they have a position of special importance because they present Christ clearly without any deviations. But Paul Peters wrote, “A prophecy that is Messianic by type is in no wise Messianic in an inferior sense.”⁴⁴ Gaylin Schmeling concurred, “Typological prophecy is just as supernatural as rectilinear prophecy.”⁴⁵ John Brug commented: “All three types of messianic prophecy are real prophecy given by God. In the typical prophecies, the prophets did not simply write statements about Old Testament events or people that New Testament writers would later borrow and apply to Christ. The prophets did not understand all the details concerning the fulfillment of their prophecies, but they did understand that they were writing about Christ for our benefit (1 Pe 1:11,12).”⁴⁶

³⁹ Paul Peters, “Isaiah 7:14-16,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 2, (April 1961), p. 113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 113.

⁴¹ This essay, “Messianic Prophecy and English Translations,” had an extra sentence here with a footnote when the essay was first published in July 2011. The sentence was inaccurate and was removed on October 1, 2012. I have left the footnote number so that all the footnote numbers in the revised edition remain the same as in the original edition. I am sorry for the error and the inconvenience. (From T. Nass – October 1, 2012).

⁴² Private email correspondence with David Valleskey, June 20, 2011.

⁴³ William Arndt, “What Does *Almah* Mean?” in the WLS essay file, March 3, 1970, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Peters, “Isaiah 7:14-16,” p. 102.

⁴⁵ Schmeling, *Bread of Life*, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1–72*, p. 18.

Personally, when I read Zorn on the psalms, I appreciate his thoughts about Christ in the 30 psalms that he considers to be direct prophecies of the Messiah. But it strikes me as odd that in the other psalms, he seems to focus entirely on David and the Christian believer, even though the content of some of these “non-messianic” psalms is quite similar to the “messianic” psalms. For example, in Psalm 30 David rejoiced that the Lord raised him up from the grave (not altogether unlike Psalm 16). But expositors like Zorn usually say nothing about Christ in Psalm 30. Zorn doesn’t hear the voice of Jesus in Psalm 31, even though Christ quoted Psalm 31:5 while on the cross. Zorn says that Psalm 21 refers exclusively to Christ, but then he takes its partner, Psalm 20, as referring only to David. For Zorn, a psalm is either all Christ or all David. This is undoubtedly because he held to the old Missouri “rectilinear only” view of prophecy. He didn’t believe that typical psalms are possible.

I wonder to myself: “Wouldn’t it be better to look for both David and Christ more generally in all of them?” Sometimes I think that we in WELS reject the “rectilinear only” prophecy view in theory, but we follow it somewhat in our practice, by labeling psalms either as messianic (then it refers exclusively to Christ) or non-messianic (then we don’t mention Christ at all). I personally lean toward the typical understanding of most all of the psalms, rather than the segregation into two groups. As has been rightly said: “In a certain sense, every psalm is messianic since the whole life of David and the whole history of Israel point to Christ.”⁴⁷

But here is exactly the point where Christ-centered Lutheran expositors may come to different conclusions, and we should allow for different opinions since these are legitimate exegetical questions. No one should be stigmatized as more or less Lutheran, as long as they see Christ as the grand and ultimate fulfillment. In my mind, the intramural skirmish among Lutherans between what is direct and what is typical is the wrong battle. The right battle is the fight against those who deny predictive prophecy altogether.

The real enemy

The real enemy of all of us is higher criticism, which denies the possibility of predictive prophecy and says nothing at all about Christ as the intended goal of Old Testament prophecy. All around us are interpreters who remove the Messiah totally from the Old Testament, because of their rationalistic and anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions. This is what conservative Lutherans should fight against in united fashion, no matter whether we lean toward the rectilinear or the typical side of the issue.

In this regard, I have had an experience that perhaps few others have had. I have sat in a University of Wisconsin–Madison graduate school classroom in Hebrew studies where the higher critical method was the operating principle. In such a classroom, there is no room for predictive prophecy in the interpretation of the Old Testament. I still remember the day when I was reporting on Job 19:23-27. I gave my report in the expected fashion. Then the professor unexpectedly asked me who I thought Job was talking about when he talked about the “redeemer.” I said that I understood him to be talking about Jesus Christ. I was subsequently called into the professor’s office and reminded that the higher critical method is used in the UW classroom. This means that New Testament concepts are not to be read back into the Old Testament. I, of course, reminded him that he was the one who put me on the spot with his unexpected, personal question!

As another example, I recently read a commentary on the book of Joel written by Marvin Sweeney, a professor of Hebrew at a Methodist school of theology. In his comments on the “Pentecost prophecy” of Joel 2:28-32, he did not write one syllable about the fulfillment of the prophecy on

⁴⁷ Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1–72*, p. 19.

Pentecost—not even a passing comment in a footnote.⁴⁸ This is classic higher criticism: Interpreters should read the Old Testament text entirely within its own historical context, and they should not bring later ideas from a different place into the mix. This is what we need to guard against.

The Bible makes clear that Christ is the center of the Old Testament

In the battle against higher critics on predictive prophecy, we as Lutheran expositors have the most powerful ammunition—the inspired writings of the New Testament. We can be confident that Christ is the center of the Old Testament and that Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment in Christ because the New Testament clearly says so.

Here is my list of New Testament passages that prove that we should find Christ in the Old Testament. As a teacher of the Old Testament, these passages have been very significant to me in my daily work. I like to keep them ready at hand and quick on the mind.

- Luke 24:27 – And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
- Luke 24:44-47 – He [Jesus] said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
- John 5:39 – [Jesus:] “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”
- John 8:56 – [Jesus:] “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”
- John 12:41 – “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.”
- Acts 2:29-31 – [Peter on Pentecost:] “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.”
- Acts 3:24 – [Peter in Jerusalem:] “Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.”
- Acts 10:43 – [Peter in Cornelius’ house:] “All the prophets testify about him [Jesus Christ] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
- Acts 18:28 – “He [Apollos] vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”
- 1 Peter 1:10-12 – Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

⁴⁸ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets, Volume One: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), pp.173-176.

Without a doubt, we are to find Christ in the Old Testament! The New Testament proves it. As Luther said, “This much is beyond question, that all the Scriptures point to Christ alone.”⁴⁹

Speaking of personal experiences, I would also like to share what happened on the night before I began teaching as a Hebrew professor at Martin Luther College. On the night before my first college class, I received a hand-delivered package from a student who had come to school from Watertown, Wisconsin. It was a package from my predecessor Paul Eickmann, who had retired. In the package was a large crucifix with this note: “For decades this crucifix hung in the study of E.E. Kowalke. For 25 years it has hung in my office. It is now yours. Be sure to preach Christ crucified. PE.” How moving and memorable this was for me! For 16 years now the crucifix has been hanging in the Hebrew classroom at MLC as a daily reminder: Old Testament teachers among us are to find Christ in the Old Testament.

How this discussion plays out in English translations

By now, you may be wondering what this extended presentation about biblical messianic prophecy has to do with English Bible translations. After all, aren't we simply interested in comparing English translations to see how they handle the Old Testament prophecies? Well, all of this understanding about messianic prophecy is necessary as a backdrop for our discussion about English translations.

The common practice that we find in published English translations is this: *If a word refers exclusively to a person of the triune God, it should be capitalized. If a word refers to a human being who is a type or foreshadowing of Christ, the word should not be capitalized, because it isn't exclusively referring to God.*⁵⁰ In effect, when it comes to messianic prophecies, translators are forced to decide whether each passage is a direct prophecy about Christ or whether it is typical. Translators show their interpretive judgment by whether or not they include capitalization.

Now let's compare some translations. In the following chart, I've included those translations that are of most interest to us. I have tried to include all of the passages that are regularly recognized as being messianic, in addition to some that are debated.⁵¹ I assume that if a word or pronoun is capitalized, that is the indication from the translators that it is a direct prophecy about Christ. If it is not capitalized, it is not a direct prophecy.

Out of the nine translations surveyed, five have the policy of also capitalizing *pronouns* that refer to the triune God (KJV, NKJV, NASB, HCSB, AAT). Four translations do not have this policy (NIV84, NIV11, RSV, ESV). When a translation desires to capitalize pronouns, it obviously has many more passages in which it needs to make a decision whether or not the passage is a direct prophecy of Christ. A number of these passages are included. With these passages, of course, the data are not applicable with the four translations that do not have this policy.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, “Avoiding the Doctrines of Men” (1522), translated by William A. Lambert and revised by E. Theodore Bachmann, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 132.

⁵⁰ I can't offer a source that states this principle in detail, but one can sense that this is how translations function. The “Introduction to the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*” simply says: “Nouns and personal pronouns that clearly refer to any person of the Trinity are capitalized.” Cf. *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2009), p. xlii.

⁵¹ Two resources that were helpful in compiling the list of passages were: Forrest Bivens, *Selected Messianic Prophecies*, Summer Quarter of the South, June 11-14, 2007; and Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, pp. 237-242.

Capitalization of possible messianic titles (and pronouns where applicable)

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Gen 3:15 – and you will strike h is heel.	—	his	His	—	—	him	his	His
Gen 9:27 – May Japheth live in the tents of Shem, (Both Bivens and Kaiser list this as a possible messianic prophecy, with the “he” pronoun referring to the Messiah.)	—	he	he	—	—	him	he	he
Gen 22:18 – through your o ffspring all nations . . . will be blessed,	offspring	seed	seed	descendants	offspring	seed	offspring	Descendant
Gen 28:14 – All . . . will be blessed through . . . your o ffspring.	offspring	seed	seed	descendants	offspring	descendants	offspring	Descendant
Gen 49:10 – until he comes to whom it belongs	he to whom it belongs	Shiloh	Shiloh	he to whom it belongs;	tribute	Shiloh	He whose right it is	SHILOH [Man of Rest]
Num 24:17 – A s tar will come out of Jacob; a s cepter will rise	star scepter	Star Scepter	Star Scepter	star scepter	star scepter	star scepter	star scepter	Star Scepter
Dt 18:18 – I will raise up for them a p rophet like you	prophet	Prophet	Prophet	prophet	prophet	prophet	prophet	Prophet
1 Sam 2:10 – He will give strength to his k ing and exalt the horn of his a nointed.	king anoointed	king anoointed	king anoointed	king anoointed	king anoointed	king anoointed	king anoointed	king anoointed
1 Sam 2:35 – I will raise up for myself a faithful p riest,	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest
2 Sam 7:12 – I will raise up your o ffspring to succeed you,	offspring	seed	seed	offspring	offspring	descendant	descendant	Descendant

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
2 Sam 7:12 – he will be my <u>s</u> on.	son	son	son	son	son	son	son	Son
1 Chr 17:11 – I will raise up your <u>o</u> ffspring to succeed you,	offspring	seed	seed	offspring	offspring	one of your descendants	descendant	Descendant
1 Chr 17:13 – he will be my <u>s</u> on.	son	son	son	son	son	son	son	Son
Job 9:33 – If only there were <u>s</u> omeone to arbitrate	someone	daysman	mediator	umpire	arbiter	umpire	no one	umpire
Job 16:19 – Even now my <u>w</u> itness is in heaven;	witness	witness	witness	witness	witness	witness	witness	Witness
Job 19:25 – I know that my <u>R</u> edeemer lives,	redeemer	redeemer	Redeemer	Redeemer	Redeemer	Redeemer	Redeemer	Redeemer
Job 33:23 – if there is an <u>a</u> ngel on his side as a <u>m</u> ediator,	angel messenger	messenger interpreter	messenger mediator	angel mediator	angel mediator	angel mediator	angel mediator	One sent Mediator
Ps 2:2 – against his <u>A</u> nointed <u>O</u> ne.	anointed	anointed	Anointed	anointed	Anointed	Anointed One	Anointed	Anointed
Ps 2:6 – I have installed my <u>K</u> ing on Zion,	king	king	King	king	King	King	King	King
Ps 2:12 – Kiss the <u>S</u> on,	his son	Son	Son	his feet	Son	Son	Son	Son
Ps 8:4 – the <u>s</u> on of <u>m</u> an that you care for <u>h</u> im	human beings them	son of man him	son of man him	son of man him	son of man him	son of man him	son of man him	son of man him
Ps 8:5 – You made <u>h</u> im a little lower than the heavenly beings	—	him	him	—	—	him	him	Him
Ps 8:6 – everything under <u>h</u> is feet:	—	his	his	—	—	his	his	His

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Ps 16:10 – you will not abandon me to the grave,	—	my	my	—	—	my	me	Me
Ps 16:10 – nor will you let your Holy One see decay.	faithful one	Holy One	Holy One	godly one	holy one	Holy One	Faithful One	Holy One
Ps 21:1 – the king rejoices in your strength.	king	king	king	king	king	king	king	king
Ps 22:1 – my God, why have you forsaken me ?	— —	my me	My Me	— —	— —	my me	my me	My Me
Ps 22:16 – they have pierced my hands and my feet.	—	my	My	—	—	my	my	My
Ps 31:5 – Into your hands I commit my spirit;	—	my	my	—	—	my	my	my
Ps 34:20 – he protects all his bones,	—	his	his	—	—	his	his	your
Ps 40:7 – it is written about me in the scroll.	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	Me
Ps 41:9 – my close friend . . . has lifted up his heel against me .	—	mine / me	my / me	—	—	my / me	my / me	My / Me
Ps 45:1 – I recite my verses for the king ;	king	king	King	king	king	King	king	King
Ps 45:6 – Your throne, O God , will last for ever and ever;	God	God	God	divine throne	God	God	God	God
Ps 55:12 – If an enemy were insulting me ,	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	me

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Ps 69:4 – Those who hate me without reason	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	Me
Ps 69:9 – for zeal for your house consumes me ,	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	Me
Ps 69:21 – They put gall in my food	—	my	my	—	—	my	my	My
Ps 72:1 – Endow the king with your justice, O God,	king	king	king	king	king	king	king	King
Ps 72:17 – All nations will be blessed through him ,	—	him	Him	—	—	him	him	Him
Ps 78:2 – I will open my mouth in parables,	—	my	my	—	—	my	my (v. 1)	my
Ps 89:29 – I will establish his . . . throne as long as the heavens endure.	—	his	his	—	—	his	his	His
Ps 109:25 – when they see me , they shake their heads.	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	me
Ps 110:1 – The LORD says to my Lord :	lord	Lord	Lord	lord	Lord	Lord	Lord	Lord
Ps 110:4 – You are a priest forever,	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest	priest	Priest
Ps 110:5 – The Lord is at your right hand	—	thy	Your	—	—	Your	Your	your
Ps 118:22 – The stone . . . has become the capstone ;	stone cornerstone	stone head stone	stone cornerstone	stone head	stone cornerstone	stone corner stone	stone cornerstone	stone cornerstone

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Ps 118:26 – Blessed is h e who comes in the name of the LORD	—	he	he	—	—	the one	He*	He
* Capitalized at the beginning of a sentence.								
Ps 132:17 – I will make a h orn grow for David, and set up a l amp for my a nointed one.	horn lamp anointed	horn lamp anointed	horn lamp Anointed	horn lamp anointed	horn lamp anointed	horn lamp anointed	horn lamp anointed	Horn Lamp anointed
Prov 8:22 – The LORD brought m e forth	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	My
Prov 8:30 – I was the c raftsman at his side.	constantly	one brought up	master craftsman	master workman	master workman	master workman	skilled craftsman	Master Workman
Is 4:2 – the B ranch of the LORD will be beautiful	Branch	branch	Branch	branch	branch	Branch	Branch	plant
Is 8:14 – a s tone . . . and a r ock that makes them fall.	stone rock	stone rock	stone rock	stone rock	stone rock	stone rock	stone rock	stone rock
Is 8:18 – and the children the LORD has given m e.	—	me	me	—	—	me	me	Me
Is 9:6 – to us a c hild is born, to us a s on is given,	child son	child son	Child Son	child son	child son	child son	child son	Child Son
Is 11:1– A s hoot will come up from the stump of Jesse	shoot	rod	Rod	shoot	shoot	shoot	shoot	Shoot
Is 11:2 – From his roots a B ranch will bear fruit	Branch	Branch	Branch	branch	branch	branch	branch	Branch
Is 11:10 – the R oot of Jesse will stand as a banner	Root	root	Root	root	root	root	root	Descendant

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Is 19:20 – he will send them a <u>s</u> avior and <u>d</u> efender,	savior defender	saviour great one	Savior Mighty One	savior will defend	savior defender	Savior Champion	savior leader	Savior to defend
Is 28:16 – I lay a <u>s</u> tone in Zion, . . . a precious <u>c</u> ornerstone	stone cornerstone	stone corner stone	stone cornerstone	stone cornerstone	stone cornerstone	stone cornerstone	stone cornerstone	stone Cornerstone
Is 30:20 – your <u>t</u> eachers will be hidden no more	teachers	teachers	teachers	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher
Is 42:1 – Here is my <u>s</u> ervant, whom I uphold,	servant	servant	Servant	servant	servant	Servant	Servant	Servant
Is 49:3 – You are my <u>s</u> ervant, Israel,	servant	servant	servant	servant	servant	Servant	Servant*	Servant
Is 49:5 – he who formed me in the womb to be his <u>s</u> ervant	servant	servant	Servant	servant	servant	Servant	Servant*	Servant
Is 50:7 – I have set <u>m</u> y face like flint,	—	my	My	—	—	My	My	My
Is 52:13 – See, my <u>s</u> ervant will act wisely;	servant	servant	Servant	servant	servant	servant	Servant*	Servant
Is 53:11 – my righteous <u>s</u> ervant will justify many,	servant	servant	Servant	servant	servant	Servant	Servant*	Servant
Is 55:4 – I have made him a <u>w</u> itness, . . . a <u>l</u> eadership and <u>c</u> ommander	witness ruler commander	witness leader commander	witness leader commander	witness leader commander	witness leader commander	witness leader commander	witness leader commander	witness prince commander
Is 55:5 – nations that do not know <u>y</u> ou will hasten to <u>y</u> ou,	—	thee	you	—	—	you	you	you

* The 2003 edition of HCSB did not have “Servant” capitalized in these chapters. This shows that the HCSB editors are continuing to wrestle with these decisions.

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Is 61:1 – the LORD has anointed me to preach good news	—	me	Me	—	—	me	Me	Me
Is 63:2 – Why are your garments red,	—	thine	Your	—	—	Your	Your	Your
Jer 23:5 – I will raise up to David a righteous Branch ,	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch
Jer 23:5 – a King who will reign wisely	King	King	King	king	king	king	king	King
Jer 30:9 – they will serve . . . David their king ,	king	king	king	king	king	king	king	King
Jer 30:21 – Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise	leader ruler	nobles governor	nobles governor	prince ruler	prince ruler	leader ruler	leader ruler	Prince Ruler
Jer 33:15 – I will make a righteous Branch sprout	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch
Ez 17:22-23 – I myself will take a shoot . . . I will break off a tender sprig . . . I will plant it	shoot tender sprig	tender one it	one of . . . tender one it	sprig tender one	sprig tender one	sprig tender one it	sprig tender sprig it	branch tender twig it
Ez 21:27 – until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs	—	he	He	—	—	He	He	the Righteous One
Ez 34:23 – I will place over them one shepherd , my servant David	shepherd servant	shepherd servant	shepherd servant	shepherd servant	shepherd servant	shepherd servant	shepherd servant	Shepherd Servant
Ez 37:22 – There will be one king over all of them	king	king	king	king	king	king	king	king

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Ez 37:24 – My <u>s</u> ervant David will be <u>k</u> ing over them, and they will all have one <u>s</u> hepherd.	servant king shepherd	servant king shepherd	servant king shepherd	servant king shepherd	servant king shepherd	servant king shepherd	servant king shepherd	Servant King Shepherd
Dan 7:13 – before me was <u>o</u> ne like a <u>s</u> on of <u>m</u> an,	one son of man	one Son of man	One Son of Man	one son of man	one son of man	One Son of Man	One son of man	One Son of Man
Dan 9:26 – the <u>A</u> nointed <u>O</u> ne will be cut off	the Anointed One	Messiah	Messiah	an anointed one	an anointed one	Messiah	Messiah	the Anointed
Hos 3:5 – the Israelites will . . . seek . . . David their <u>k</u> ing.	king	king	king	king	king	king	king	king
Hos 11:1 – Out of Egypt I called my <u>s</u> on.	son	son	son	son	son	son	son	son
Joel 2:23 – the autumn rains in righteousness	autumn rains	former rain	former rain	early rain	early rain	early rain	autumn rain	Teacher for righteousness
Micah 2:13 – <u>O</u> ne who breaks open the way . . . Their <u>k</u> ing will pass through before them	The One King	breaker king	The one king	He who opens king	He who opens king	breaker king	One who King	One who king
Micah 5:2 – one who will be <u>r</u> uler over Israel	ruler	ruler	ruler	ruler	ruler	ruler	ruler	One Who is to rule
Hag 2:7 – the <u>d</u> esired of all nations will come,	what is desired by	the desire	the Desire of All Nations	the treasures	the treasures	the wealth	the treasures	the Desire
Hag 2:23 – my <u>s</u> ervant Zerubbabel . . . I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen <u>y</u> ou,	servant	servant thee	servant you	servant	servant	servant you	servant you	servant you

<u>NIV84</u>	<u>NIV11</u>	<u>KJV</u>	<u>NKJV</u>	<u>RSV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>NASB</u>	<u>HCSB</u>	<u>AAT</u>
Zec 3:8 – I am going to bring my servant, the Branch .	Branch	BRANCH	BRANCH	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch
Zec 6:12 – Here is the man whose name is the Branch ,	Branch	BRANCH	BRANCH	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch	Branch
Zec 9:9 – See, your king comes to you,	king	King	King	king	king	king	King	King
Zech 11:13 – the handsome price at which they priced me !	—	I	me	—	—	I	I	Me
Zech 12:10 – They will look on me , the one they have pierced,	—	me	Me	—	—	Me	Me	Me
Zec 13:7 – Strike the shepherd , and the sheep will be scattered,	shepherd	shepherd	Shepherd	shepherd	shepherd	Shepherd	shepherd	Shepherd
Mal 3:1 – the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire,	messenger	messenger	Messenger	messenger	messenger	messenger	Messenger	Angel
Mal 4:2 – the sun of righteousness will rise	sun of righteousness	Sun of righteousness	Sun of Righteousness	sun of righteousness	sun of righteousness	sun of righteousness	sun of righteousness	Sun of Righteousness

Total passages with titles = 68

Capitalized in each translation:

17 (NIV84)	11	15	33	6	11	22	23	51
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Total passages with pronouns = 31

Capitalized in each translation:

—	—	1	11	—	—	6	7	23
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Observations—Beck

The first impulse of a casual reader of these charts might be: “We should go with the AAT (Beck) because it sees Christ so fully in the Old Testament!” However, as you look beneath the surface, you can see that Beck followed the interpretive principles of Ludwig Fuerbringer and the old Missourians. He understood all, or at least almost all, messianic prophecy to be direct or rectilinear, and not typical.⁵² He therefore went down a path that has not been walked by WELS theologians in the past.

Look at how Beck translated 2 Samuel 7:22. He capitalized “Son,” thereby indicating that the reference must be to Christ alone, and not in any way to Solomon. In Psalm 41:9 he capitalized “My.” Are we willing to say that David was in no way referring to Ahithophel in this psalm? In Isaiah 8:18 he capitalized “Me.” Was Isaiah not referring to his two sons in this verse? In Zechariah 11:13 he also capitalized “Me.” Are we willing to say that Zechariah was in no way referring to himself in this verse? In short, according to the principles of interpretation that have been commonly taught and practiced in WELS, Beck has too much capitalization. He fails to recognize the possibility of typical prophecy.

Beck also has some inconsistencies. He seems to put capitalization into Old Testament passages automatically when the New Testament says that they are fulfilled in Christ. But there are some surprises. He didn’t put capitalization into Psalm 78:2 (cf. Matthew 13:35). Although he capitalized “Stone,” “Cornerstone,” and “Rock” in the New Testament (Matthew 21:42, Romans 9:33) and in Isaiah 28:16, he didn’t capitalize these words in Psalm 118:22 or Isaiah 8:14. And he didn’t capitalize “your” in Psalm 110:5.

Curiously, in a recent radio interview about the AAT, LCMS professor Andrew Steinmann criticized Beck for not putting in enough capital letters! He says that Beck caught the well-known messianic prophecies, but he missed putting in capital letters in many lesser-known prophecies.⁵³ I noticed that Beck didn’t capitalize anything in Psalm 21, a royal psalm considered messianic by Zorn. He capitalized the second part of Psalm 8, but not the first part. He didn’t capitalize anything in Ezekiel 17:22-23 and other places.

Observations—NKJV and ESV

Looking at the chart, our next impulse might be to prefer the NKJV, because it too is very rich with capital letters, seeing Christ in many places. To a large degree, it may reflect capitalization the way that some among us would prefer. However, when you look beneath the surface, you see that the NKJV, like all the rest, is not totally consistent, and there obviously are judgment calls that could be questioned. In the book of Psalms, for example, the NKJV has capital letters in five psalms, indicating that they are direct messianic prophecies: 2, 22, 45, 72, and 110. All pertinent words throughout those entire psalms are capitalized. However, almost none of the other psalms have any capital letters, including some psalms that have commonly been understood as direct messianic prophecies in WELS.

John Brug says about Psalm 69 that it is “The Messiah’s Prayer,” comparable to Psalm 22 “as a graphic prophetic description of Christ’s suffering.”⁵⁴ The NKJV has no indication that it is messianic.

⁵² Beck’s disapproval of typical prophecy and his allegiance to Stoeckhardt, Fuerbringer, and Walter A. Maier I can be seen in William A. Beck, “What Does *Almah* Mean?” March 3, 1970, pp. 12,13, available in the WLS essay file.

⁵³ Andrew Steinmann, interview about Beck’s *An American Translation*, on *Issues, Etc.* with Todd Wilken, May 17, 2011, available at: <http://www.podtrac.com/pts/redirect.mp3/issuesetc.org/podcast/752051711H1S1.mp3>.

⁵⁴ Brug, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 632.

There is no special capitalization, and the heading says, “An Urgent Plea for Help in Trouble.” Brug calls Psalm 118 “one of the foremost messianic psalms.”⁵⁵ But the NKJV has no special capitalization, and the heading simply says, “Praise to God for His Everlasting Mercy.” Psalm 118:26 reads: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.” Surprisingly, the NKJV does not capitalize the pronouns in Psalm 16: “You will not leave my soul in Sheol” (Psalm 16:10). The NKJV also does not include capitalization in Psalm 69:21: “They also gave me gall for my food.” In the one verse where NIV11 added capitalization (Micah 2:13), it is interesting to note that the NKJV does not have it. And, the NKJV capitalizes the pronouns in Isaiah 49:1-2 and 5-9 (a “servant song”), but not in verses 3-4. Without a doubt, there is variety when it comes to messianic capitalization in the published translations, and a person can find things to criticize in every translation.

It is also worth noting what the ESV did with messianic prophecies, since many in WELS are looking at the ESV these days. In short, the ESV is very similar to NIV11, with a limited use of capitalization. The ESV made very few changes from the RSV. This is not surprising when a person is aware of the nature of the ESV in general, as a slight modification of the RSV.⁵⁶ The ESV added capitalization only in Psalms 2, 45, and 110. Perhaps surprisingly, the ESV did not add capitalization in Psalm 16, and the ESV shifted the translation of Genesis 49:10 so that the messianic character of the passage, which was evident in the RSV, is no longer apparent. It is hard for me to see how anyone would argue that the ESV is preferable to the NIV11 in the way that it handles messianic prophecy.

Observations on capitalization in general

In regard to messianic capitalization in general, a person has to recognize that the whole matter is subjective and open to varying opinions. It is not a black and white matter. It is not easy. There was no capitalization in the original Hebrew manuscripts, so all capitalization is the result of interpretive decisions, and we will never agree perfectly with any translation. If we had a room full of WELS Old Testament teachers, they probably would not agree totally among themselves on which prophecies should have capital letters as direct prophecies and which should not. So we should keep the overall difficulty of the task in mind before we too quickly praise or too quickly condemn a translation for what it does.

We should likewise recognize that careful instruction from a Christ-centered teacher or book will be needed with the messianic prophecies, no matter what translation is used. No translation will solve the matter of messianic prophecies for the reader. We shouldn’t expect too much from a translation in this regard.

It is my suspicion, in addition, that the way capitalization is commonly carried out can actually be misleading in one way. Since we have more or less come to expect capitalization in passages that are referring to the Messiah, when we find a passage that doesn’t have capitalization, we instinctively conclude that the Messiah must *not* be referred to. But maybe the Messiah is just as much intended in some of these passages (cf. Ez. 17:22-24 and the “tender sprig”) as in those that have capitalization. In effect, *the incomplete and inconsistent capitalization that is in all translations can rob the messianic content of some passages for readers*, because readers rely on the capitalization to indicate if it is messianic or not.

⁵⁵ John F. Brug. *A Commentary on Psalms 73-150* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), p. 325.

⁵⁶ For a review of the ESV by this author, see Thomas P Nass, “Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation,” available at the website of the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee: <http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/bible-revision-new-international-version-2010>.

For example, in the book of Job in many translations “Redeemer” is capitalized in chapter 19, but “witness” is not capitalized in chapter 16. I think the average reader will conclude that Christ is spoken about in chapter 19, but Christ is *not* spoken about in chapter 16. For the average reader, the occasional capitalization takes away the messianic content from the passages that are not capitalized. I personally was surprised to see that NIV11 removed capitalization from “Redeemer” in Job 19, and I’m not sure that I’m happy about it. But I suspect that they wanted to make Job 19 similar to the other passages in the book where Job speaks about a supernatural helper from above. Then the reader will be forced to figure out for himself where Christ is, and the reader may wind up seeing Christ in more places.

This is why our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Old Testament faculty actually recommended to the NIV revision committee that they remove all capitalization from Old Testament messianic passages. They did not want the translation to cut off legitimate interpretive options for its readers. Personally, I have liked some capitalization when I have seen it. But if there were no capitalization, readers would be forced to wrestle with the content on their own, and they would more likely have their eyes open to messianic possibilities in all places, whenever they read the Old Testament.

Observations on the NIV11—capitalization

But how has the NIV11 handled messianic prophecy? It strikes me that NIV11 is not that different from the NIV84, which we have become used to. But there are some changes. First, capitalization has been removed in four places.

- Job 19:25 – “redeemer”
- Psalm 2 – “anointed,” “king,” “son”⁵⁷
- Psalm 16 – “faithful one”⁵⁸
- Psalm 110 – “lord”⁵⁹

Capitalization has been added in one chapter:

- Micah 2 – “The One,” “King”

It seems to me that these changes can be explained in the same general way: *The NIV11 takes some passages as typical prophecies that it previously had taken as direct, rectilinear prophecies. The NIV11 takes one passage as a direct prophecy that it previously had taken as a typical prophecy.* What is behind the changes is the very thing that we have been discussing in this paper. There are judgment calls about whether a prophecy is speaking exclusively about the Messiah, or whether there is some human type or intermediate fulfillment in addition to the Messiah.

It seems clear that the NIV capitalization policy is to use capital letters sparingly for what it considers to be a messianic *name* or *title* without any other fulfillment. It sees “the Branch” as such a name. Also the “Root” (Isaiah 11:10; cf. Revelation 5:5, 22:16), and now the “King” who breaks open the way in Micah 2. It is fair to say that many of us might have preferred that more passages go into this category. But we must remember that these capitalizations can be debated in every translation.

The NIV11 is apparently considering all the psalms to be typical. In removing the capitalization from Psalms 2, 16, and 110, the NIV11 is now treating these psalms in a way that is more consistent with other similar psalms such as Psalms 20, 21, 45, 72, and 89. Since all of these psalms were written by

⁵⁷ Capitalization has also been removed in Acts 4:26 and Acts 13:33, where Psalm 2 is quoted. It has been retained in Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5.

⁵⁸ Capitalization has also been removed in Acts 2:27 where Psalm 16 is quoted.

⁵⁹ Capitalization has been retained in Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42, and Acts 2:34 where Psalm 110 is quoted.

kings like David, the NIV11 allows for them all to find a preliminary reference in their own historical setting.

Here it is important to recognize, however, based on our previous discussion, that *when capitalization is dropped, it is not an indication that the translators intend to remove the messianic character of the prophecies*. It is only an indication that the translators felt that these passages are typical prophecies and not direct prophecies, or maybe they wanted to allow the reader latitude to decide. It would be unfair to charge the NIV11 with “removing Christ” from the Old Testament. They simply are allowing for a preliminary fulfillment in addition to Christ in some passages.

Do we know that this was the intention of the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT)? As was reported in the “Supplemental Report for the 2011 WELS Convention,” our WELS Translation Evaluation Committee had a two-hour interview with Douglas Moo, the chairman of the CBT. We specifically asked him about the notions of the CBT on messianic prophecy. He quickly and unequivocally stated that all the members of the CBT believe that the Old Testament prophecies find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. They believe that there are intermediate fulfillments for many of the prophecies, however, in addition to the final, complete fulfillment in Christ and the restoration of the messianic era. The translators of the CBT are not practitioners of the higher critical method. They are evangelical Christians who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and the supremacy of Christ.

Certainly, we may each have our own opinion about how many Old Testament passages should have messianic capitalization. I am not defending all the translation decisions of the NIV11. But it would be an overstatement to charge the NIV11 with false doctrine in its handling of messianic prophecies, insinuating that the translation has removed Christ. At most, some could say that it has weaknesses from their point of view. The NIV11, quite frankly, is simply walking the same path as the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* and *The Lutheran Study Bible*, which many of us have been using regularly in WELS.

It seems to me that the people who truly have a right to be troubled with the capitalization in the NIV11 are the people who hold to the old Missouri, “rectilinear only” approach to messianic prophecy. For such people, removing capitalization *is* removing Christ, because they would say that typical prophecy is impossible. For them, “anointed one” with the lower case means only David and *not at all Christ*. However, people who recognize the possibility of typical prophecy (which has always been taught by WELS theologians) recognize that a passage without capitalization may well be speaking about Christ as its ultimate and final fulfillment. For them, “anointed one” with the lower case may be David *and Christ*. Removing capitalization does not mean that Christ has been removed.

In addition, if we are surprised by the fact that the NIV11 has removed capitalization in four places, we should keep in mind that NIV84 did not have capitalization in many places where we might have expected it, and yet WELS seemingly was comfortable with this translation. The NIV84 did not capitalize “king” in Psalm 45:1, or “servant” in Isaiah 53, or “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7, or “king” in Zechariah 9:9. Likewise, the KJV used capitalization very sparingly. The KJV did not capitalize “redeemer” in Job 19, “anointed” in Psalm 2, “root” in Isaiah 11:10, or “servant” in Isaiah 53. It didn’t capitalize pronouns in Psalm 110: “until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The fact is that we have learned to live with many inconsistencies in this matter with both the KJV and the NIV84, and our ability to find Christ in the Old Testament has remained strong in spite of it.

Observations on the NIV11—other matters

Apart from capitalization matters, there are a few other changes dealing with messianic prophecies in the NIV11, including the addition of some footnotes. Here is what I have found:

- Psalm 8:4-6 – Gender inclusive: “mankind” and “human beings” and “them”
- Psalm 45:6 – Footnote: “Here the king is addressed as God’s representative.”
- Psalm 72 – The Hebrew verbs are translated as a prayer (“May the king do these things”) rather than as a future reality (“The king will do these things”).
- Proverbs 8:23 – Changed from “I was appointed from eternity” to “I was formed long ages ago.”
- Isaiah 7:14 – Footnote: “Or *young woman*”
- Daniel 7:13 – Footnote: “The Aramaic phrase *bar enash* means *human being*. The phrase *son of man* is retained here because of its use in the New Testament as a title of Jesus, probably based largely on this verse.”
- Daniel 8:17 – Footnote: “The Hebrew phrase *ben adam* means *human being*. The phrase *son of man* is retained as a form of address here because of its possible association with “Son of Man” in the New Testament.”

In regard to Psalm 72, it is a commonplace in Hebrew grammar that the verbs in this psalm can legitimately be translated either as jussives (“may he”) or as imperfects (“he will”). This is an exegetical question with two valid options. Many translations actually go back and forth in the translation of the psalm, as the NIV84 did. Maybe the jussive/prayer translation fits a little more comfortably with the human king Solomon and maybe some translations prefer it for that reason, but certainly it was proper for Old Testament believers also to pray for the Messiah to come and rule, using the thoughts of this psalm. Regardless of whether a person considers the psalm to be a rectilinear prophecy or a typical prophecy of Christ, I don’t see that there is an issue of significance in the changes here.

About Proverbs 8:23 it is fitting to have more concern, if you consider this passage to be talking about Christ. We confess in the Nicene Creed that Christ was “eternally begotten of the Father; . . . begotten, not made.” The NIV11, therefore, may make us cringe when it has “wisdom” say, “I was *formed* long ages ago.” However, it should be noted that some Lutheran interpreters think that the passage is talking about God’s attribute of wisdom, and not Jesus Christ. My seminary notes interpret the passage that way. Also, the Hebrew verb in Proverbs 8:23 admittedly is very uncertain. There have been numerous suggestions in addition to “appointed” and “formed.” Finally, this section in NIV11 still says that wisdom was given birth from God (v. 24,25), it was present before God began creating (v. 24-26), it was at God’s side during creation (v. 27-30), and it found special joy in the human beings that were created (v. 31). It seems to me that one can still take the words of NIV11 and think about Christ with them, in spite of the weaknesses and difficulties.

From the list of changes in NIV11, I think the most significant and legitimate concerns are found in connection with Psalm 8 and Isaiah 7:14. Let’s consider these passages in a little more detail.

What about Psalm 8?

In regard to Psalm 8, let’s start by comparing the new NIV with the NIV84 and the TNIV, to see for ourselves what has happened in the latest revision.

NIV84

Ps. 8:4 – what is man that you are mindful of him,

the son of man that you care for him?

Ps. 8:5 – You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings*
(* Or *than God*)

and crowned him with glory and honor.

Ps. 8:6 – You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet:

TNIV (2005)

Ps. 8:4 – what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them,*
(* Or *what is a human being that you are mindful of him,*)

human beings that you care for them?*
(* Or *a son of man that you care for him?*)

Ps. 8:5 – You have made them* a little lower than the heavenly beings*
(*Or *him*)
(* Or *than God*)
and crowned them* with glory and honor.
(* Or *him*)

Ps. 8:6 – You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:*
(* Or *him ruler . . . his*)

NIV11

Ps. 8:4 – what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
(* Or *what is a human being that you are mindful of him,*)

human beings that you care for them?
(* Or *a son of man that you care for him?*)

Ps. 8:5 – You have made them* a little lower than the angels*
(*Or *him*)
(* Or *than God*)
and crowned them* with glory and honor.
(* Or *him*)

Ps. 8:6 – You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:*
(* Or *him ruler . . . his*)

NIV84	TNIV (2005)	NIV11
<p>Heb 2:6 – “What is <u>man</u> that you are mindful of <u>him</u>,</p>	<p>Heb 2:6 – “What are <u>mere mortals</u> that you are mindful of <u>them</u>,</p>	<p>Heb 2:6 – “What is <u>mankind</u> that you are mindful of <u>them</u>,</p>
<p><i>(* Or What is a human being that you are mindful of him,)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or What is a human being that you are mindful of him,)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or What is a human being that you are mindful of him,)</i></p>
<p>the <u>son of man</u> that you care for <u>him</u>?</p>	<p><u>human beings</u> that you care for <u>them</u>?*</p>	<p><u>a son of man</u> that you care for <u>him</u>?*</p>
<p><i>(* Or the son of man that you care for him?)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or the son of man that you care for him?)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or the son of man that you care for him?)</i></p>
<p>Heb 2:7 – You made <u>him</u> a little* lower than the angels;</p>	<p>Heb 2:7 – You made <u>them</u> a little* lower than the angels;</p>	<p>Heb 2:7 – You made <u>them</u>* a little* lower than the angels;</p>
<p><i>(* Or for a little while)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or You made him lower than the angels for a little while;)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>
<p>you crowned <u>him</u> with glory and honor.</p>	<p>you crowned <u>them</u>* with glory and honor.</p>	<p>you crowned <u>them</u>* with glory and honor.</p>
<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>
<p>and put everything under <u>his</u> feet.”</p>	<p>and put everything under <u>their</u>* feet.”</p>	<p>and put everything under <u>their</u>* feet.”</p>
<p><i>(* Or his)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or his)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or his)</i></p>
<p>Heb 2:8 – In putting everything under <u>him</u>, God left nothing that is not subject to <u>him</u>. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.</p>	<p>Heb 2:8 – In putting everything under <u>them</u>* God left nothing that is not subject to <u>them</u>*. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to <u>them</u>*.</p>	<p>Heb 2:8 – In putting everything under <u>them</u>* God left nothing that is not subject to <u>them</u>*. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to <u>them</u>*.</p>
<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>	<p><i>(* Or him)</i></p>
<p>Heb 2:9 – But we see Jesus, . .</p>	<p>Heb 2:9 – But we see Jesus, . .</p>	<p>Heb 2:9 – But we see Jesus, . .</p>

What has happened is that the NIV11 has made these verses gender inclusive, both in the psalm and in the quotation in Hebrews 2. The generic “man” has become “mankind,” and “son of man” has become “human beings,” and “him/his” has become “them/their.” However, in the Hebrews 2 quotation, the NIV11, unlike TNIV, has retained “son of man,” no doubt to tie the psalm prophecy more directly to Christ with its wording.

What are we to make of this? First, we should notice that the NIV84 did not capitalize “man” or “son of man” in Psalm 8:4. This means that NIV84 did not consider these verses to be a direct, rectilinear prophecy of Christ. In so doing, the NIV84 was in sync with the other published translations, except the AAT (Beck). None of the translations in the above survey capitalized “son of man” in Psalm 8:4, and only Beck capitalized the pronouns in Psalm 8:5.

All of these published translations, except Beck, seem to be following the most common understanding of Psalm 8—that it is a typical psalm. With this understanding, Psalm 8 talks about the high position of mankind at the time of creation. But it also leads readers to think about the Messiah who

would carry out governance over all things fully and completely as the ideal human being. With this understanding, it is appropriate not to capitalize “son of man” in Psalm 8, since it is first of all referring to human beings in general. Of course, we don’t expect Beck to follow this interpretation, because he follows the “rectilinear only” approach to messianic prophecy.

The quotation in Hebrews 2 is often interpreted in the same way. The writer to the Hebrews says that we don’t really see human beings exercising control over all things in this world, as Psalm 8 suggests. Much is out of our control as human beings. However, by faith we know that Christ, the human being par excellence, is exercising control over all things.⁶⁰ So Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 8. What human beings did partially in the creation, Christ does perfectly as the Son of Man. This is the understanding that I see in the People’s Bible volume on Hebrews.⁶¹

Of course, many Lutheran theologians have preferred to read Psalm 8 as a direct messianic prophecy, including Luther, Gawrisch, and others. Hebrews 2 can easily guide an interpreter down this path. Christ is superior to the angels because in the world to come he will rule all things as the Son of Man. We don’t see Christ fully exercising his rule now because death, the final enemy, has yet to be put under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Hebrews 10:13).

So Psalm 8 once again puts us into the delicate debate about direct versus typical prophecy, elaborated on earlier in this paper. Needless to say, we will not solve this debate here. It is an exegetical question, where Lutheran interpreters even of our own synod have come to different conclusions.

What is important to note, however, is that none of the published translations except Beck interpret Psalm 8 as a direct prophecy of Christ. If we are minded to be critical of the NIV11 because it doesn’t see Christ directly in Psalm 8, then we should be critical also of the NIV84, ESV, NKJV, NASB, and the rest. None of them capitalize “son of man” in Psalm 8:4. The line of thought in the NIV11 is really no different than the NIV84 and the other major published translations.

The change is that “son of man” has gone to “human beings” in Psalm 8:4, and the singular pronouns (him/his) have become plural (them/their) in Psalm 8:4-6. Even if we prefer a typical understanding, we very likely do not appreciate these changes. We know that “son of man” is a messianic title that can easily lead people to think about Christ in the psalm. It maybe was a trigger for people to connect Psalm 8 with Christ when Hebrews was written. The singular pronouns “him” and “his” certainly make it easier to make a connection with Christ as the ultimate fulfillment.

However, it is well demonstrated that “human being” is a good English equivalent for the Hebrew expression “son of man.” If the meaning of the psalm is that God put people over the original creation with the intention that Christ would one day rule as the ideal human being, then I don’t see that the overall message of the psalm is undermined or lost in NIV11. The gender inclusive language may make the connection with Christ less apparent on the surface, but on the basis of Hebrews 2, Christ can still be recognized to be the ultimate fulfillment. In other words, if Psalm 8 is typical, I don’t know that the NIV11 needs to be condemned. In my mind, it has a weakness, but not false doctrine. And, we should remember that all the other major translations except Beck read Psalm 8 as typical also.

⁶⁰ This is the point of the reference to Psalm 8 in the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII:27. In his state of exaltation, Christ makes full use of his divine majesty *according to his assumed human nature*, and Psalm 8 prophesied that Christ would rule the whole world not just as God but also *as man*. This point is equally true whether Psalm 8 is considered to be rectilinear or typical.

⁶¹ Richard E. Lauersdorf, *Hebrews*, The People’s Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986), pp. 18,19.

What about Isaiah 7:14?

The significant change in Isaiah 7:14 is the addition of a footnote: “Or *young woman*.” If we in WELS were to produce our own study Bible with the NIV11, I admit that we would probably put in a note at this point wishing that this footnote did not exist. We would say that this footnote isn’t needed, and it doesn’t help in this context. I think we would say a similar thing about the footnote at Psalm 45:6, which, while intending to make it clear that the psalm could be typical, makes it sound as if Christ might be excluded.

But again, we have to be conscious of the fact that not everything is entirely black and white here either. It is well demonstrated in liberal and conservative studies that the Hebrew word *almah* used in Isaiah 7:14 is not the normal Hebrew word for “virgin.” Looking at parallel passages, other occurrences of the Hebrew root, ancient translations, and cognate languages, we can see that the basic meaning of *almah* is something like “a young woman of marriageable age.”⁶² There is “no instance where it can be proved that *almah* designates a young woman who is not a virgin,” but the girl’s virginity is not primarily in the picture.⁶³ So, a person could argue that the NIV11 footnote is attempting to be fair with the Hebrew lexicography.

Also, it is fair to say that many people understand Isaiah 7:14 to be a typical prophecy, allowing for fulfillment in the time of Ahaz (cf. 7:16 and 8:4). For this reason, some may want a translation (like “young woman”) that allows the prophecy to fit more naturally both in Ahaz’s time and with the Messiah. I mentioned before that both the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* and *The Lutheran Study Bible* understand the prophecy as a typical prophecy. I don’t find that this understanding is common in WELS circles.⁶⁴ But I have found one WELS publication that understands the prophecy as typical. Theodore Hartwig, in his commentary on the book of Matthew, which for a long time was used as a classroom textbook at Dr. Martin Luther College, wrote:

Through His prophet the Lord granted unbelieving King Ahaz a sign which the king did not want. A maiden was with child. As with other Old Testament signs, pictures, and promises, this prophecy could have meaning for the near present as well as the distant future. In King Ahaz’s time, then, the maiden with child had become mother in the natural way. In Matthew’s time the maiden with child had become mother in a supernatural way. Careful word study in the Bible also takes the historical context into account.⁶⁵

Interestingly, from what I have read, there is nothing in the historical record about Jewish believers ever expecting the Messiah to be born of a virgin. J. Gresham Machen in his monumental defense of the virgin birth wrote, “We have considerable information about pre-Christian Jewish thought regarding the Messiah; yet in that information a virgin birth of the Messiah has no place; the silence of

⁶² J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1930), p. 288.

⁶³ Allan A. Macrae, “*Almah*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 672.

⁶⁴ WELS writings that understand Isaiah 7:14 as a rectilinear prophecy include: August Pieper, “The Great Prophecy of the Virgin’s Son in Its Historical Setting,” translated by John Jeske, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (Summer 1994), pp. 186-204, also found in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 1, edited by Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), pp. 331-350; Paul Peters, “Isaiah 7:14-16,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July 1961), pp. 170-195; and John Braun, *Isaiah 1–39*, *The People’s Bible* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), p. 104.

⁶⁵ Theodore J. Hartwig, *The Evangel in Fulfilment: Life in Christ with Matthew* (New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1974), p. 5.

our sources of information is complete.”⁶⁶ Machen considered Isaiah 7:14 to be a prophecy of God that “became fully intelligible only after the fulfillment had come.”⁶⁷ Jewish Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim listed 456 Old Testament passages that were applied to the Messiah in ancient rabbinic writings such as the Targums, the Talmuds, and the Midrashim, but Isaiah 7:14 is not listed.⁶⁸ On this basis, many scholars conclude that the full meaning of what God intended with the Hebrew word *almah* may not have been generally apparent to Old Testament believers.

Still, Matthew 1:22,23 says: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son.’” This passage states that God’s intended message with the Isaiah prophecy was that a *virgin* would conceive and bear a child. Mary’s pregnancy *as a virgin* fulfilled this prophecy. This meaning was very possibly not understood by many in pre-Christian times. But Matthew 2 settles it for us as Bible-believing Christians. It is appropriate to translate “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14, and we are glad that the NIV11 kept “virgin” in the text.

Conclusions

All of the discussion above leads me to three conclusions in regard to messianic prophecy and the NIV11.

1) We need to realize that no published translation is going to carry the day when it comes to messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. All of the major translations have inconsistencies. None of them include capitalization exactly as we would prefer. This is a topic where careful instruction from a Christ-centered teacher or book will be needed to supplement the Biblical text, no matter what Bible translation is used.

2) I don’t see that the handling of messianic prophecy in NIV11 is a reason to discard the NIV11. If a person is open to the possibility of typical prophecy, there isn’t that much to be critical of. The NIV11 has not removed Christ from the Old Testament. There may be differences of opinion among us on exactly how to understand and represent specific messianic prophecies. But where there are concerns about the NIV11, I would call them weaknesses and not false doctrine. And all translations have weaknesses.

3) Maybe the best option for WELS at this point is to continue with the NIV, but to produce our own WELS study Bible with the text of the NIV11. With our own study Bible, we could offer Christ-centered explanations to the messianic prophecies, and we could help explain passages with weaknesses in the NIV11 text.

⁶⁶ Machen, *The Virgin Birth*, p. 296.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁶⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), pp. 710,723.

An Addendum to: “Messianic Prophecy and English Translations” July 2012

Thomas P. Nass

Since the publication of “Messianic Prophecy and English Translations” in July 2011,¹ there has been much discussion about OT messianic prophecy in WELS—from which I, as well as many others I’m sure, have benefited. In this paper, I would like to comment on four topics that have surfaced in the past year in regard to messianic prophecy, with the goal of keeping our synodical discussion going forward. The four topics are:

- I - Titles vs. descriptive words,
- II - Capitalization in the Psalms,
- III - Prospective vs. retrospective prophecy, and
- IV - The relationship between the OT and the NT.

I - Titles vs. descriptive words

A point that could have been made more clearly in “Messianic Prophecy and English Translations” in regard to the capitalization of names in OT messianic prophecies is this: Sometimes the issue is not whether or not the prophecy is considered to be a direct prophecy or a typical prophecy. Sometimes the issue is whether the word is considered to be a title or a simple descriptive word. The English convention is that titles or names should be capitalized. Simple descriptive words should not be capitalized, even when they refer to God. This distinction plays into some of the messianic passages referred to in the original paper.²

You can easily see this distinction, first of all, in passages that refer to God generally. In the psalms, for example, the NIV11 capitalizes King (5:2), Most High (8:8), Savior (18:46), Redeemer (19:14), Mighty One (42:4), Almighty (68:14), Holy One (89:18), and Maker (95:1). It assumes that these are titles or names for God.

But the NIV11 does not capitalize shield (3:3), refuge (9:9), stronghold (9:9), helper (10:14), portion (16:5), cup (16:5), strength (18:1), deliverer (18:2), fortress (18:2), horn (18:2), support (18:18), light (27:1), salvation (27:1), help (30:10), hiding place (32:1), joy (43:4), delight (43:4), guide (48:14), hope (71:5), confidence (71:5), portion (73:26), sun (84:11), dwelling (91:9), and defense (118:14). It assumes that these are descriptive words and not titles.

Admittedly, this distinction is not always easy to make, and it can cause grief for the editor who has to make a judgment call. The NIV11 sometimes capitalizes Rock in the psalms (18:46) and sometimes it doesn’t (31:2). Likewise the NIV11 goes back and forth on Shepherd (capitalized in 80:1 but not in 23:1) and Judge (capitalized in 94:2 and not in 8:11). Is the word a title, or is it simply describing

¹ This “Addendum” assumes that the paper from July 2011 has been read. It is available on the website of the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee at:

<http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/Messianic%20Prophecy%20and%20English%20Translations.pdf>.

² I am grateful especially to Prof. John Brug for pointing this out.

something about God? Is it a name or an ordinary metaphor? Of course this is a problem in English that was not present in the original Hebrew, since Hebrew has no capitalization.

Examples in messianic passages

This differentiation is present also in messianic passages. For example, consider Isaiah 9:6 in the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB):

For a child will be born for us,
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on His shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

The HCSB clearly understands this passage to be a direct messianic prophecy, shown by the fact that it capitalizes “His.” But it doesn’t capitalize “child” and “son.” Obviously it doesn’t regard these words as titles or names in this context, but rather as descriptive words that simply describe something about the coming descendant of David. The ESV and NIV11 do the same thing with “child” and “son.”

Without a doubt, translators face some tough judgment calls in this regard. Consider Isaiah 11:1,2,10 in the HCSB:

¹Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—
a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a Spirit of counsel and strength,
a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.
¹⁰ On that day the root of Jesse
will stand as a banner for the peoples.
The nations will seek Him,
and His resting place will be glorious.

Once again, the HCSB shows that the passage is a direct messianic prophecy by the capitalization of “Him.” However, it doesn’t capitalize “shoot,” “branch,” or “root.” The HCSB obviously understands these words as metaphors and not titles here. But in Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15, the HCSB does capitalize “Branch” as if it is a title in those passages.

If you compare the ESV, you find that it has exactly the same capitalization scheme in these passages. The NIV11, however, capitalizes “Branch” and “Root” in Isaiah 11, but not “shoot.” Why? Maybe the NIV11 notices that “Branch” and “Root” show up elsewhere apparently as titles or names (“Branch” in Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12; “Root” in Romans 15:2; Revelation 5:5; 22:16). “Shoot” does not.

Some other words in messianic contexts that are difficult to sort out—whether or not they are titles—are:

- Deuteronomy 18:18 – shepherd
- Isaiah 52:13; 53:13 – servant

- Ezekiel 34:23 – shepherd
- Micah 5:2 – ruler
- Zechariah 9:9 – shepherd
- Malachi 3:1 – messenger.

In short, capitalization in messianic passages is not only dependent on whether the prophecies are direct or typical. English translators are also considering whether the words are titles or descriptive words.

II - Capitalization in the Psalms

That being said, however, in the passages that are most under scrutiny currently in WELS concerning the NIV11—psalms such as 2, 16, and 110, the driving issue is not whether or not the words are titles. This is evident because the key words under discussion in these chapters are words that everyone would agree are titles and not descriptive words. In Psalm 2, the contested words are “son” and “anointed one.” In Psalm 16, it is “holy one/faithful one,” and in Psalm 110 it is “lord.”

In these passages, the issue is whether or not the psalms are referring directly to Jesus Christ or not. My original paper stated: *If a word refers exclusively to a person of the triune God, it should be capitalized. If a word refers to a human being who is a type or foreshadowing of Christ, the word should not be capitalized, because it isn't exclusively referring to God.*³ In the past year, I have discovered that some translators use capital letters on rare occasions for a typical psalm if Christ is very prominent.⁴ But in general, one senses that titles in typical psalms are not capitalized; titles in direct messianic psalms are.

That this is the case with the NIV11 was confirmed for the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee (TEC) by an email exchange with Dr. Douglas Moo, the head of the Committee on Bible Translation. Because the topic of messianic prophecy in the NIV11 has been so much discussed among WELS, the TEC asked Dr. Moo to clarify what the policy of the NIV11 translators was, especially in regard to the capitalization of words in messianic psalms.

It may be useful to share two paragraphs from his email response. In reading these paragraphs, keep in mind that they were part of an email response from Dr. Moo, and not a formal, proofread, and published document. But these paragraphs can give insight into what is going on with the NIV11. Dr. Moo wrote:

Our general approach is to reserve caps in titles for places where the text is explicitly referring in context to deity. This holds true, for instance for the difference between “king” and “King” in the Psalms. We had significant debates about texts such as Ps. 110:1, where the second “lord” is explicitly applied to Christ in the NT. We finally decided to keep it lower-case here out of respect for the immediate context. While no one on CBT has any doubt whatsoever that such passages are “messianic” and that Messiah Jesus is divine (this would never even have been a matter of discussion: we are all committed orthodox Christians!), we also think it is important that translations help readers follow the canonical contours of Scripture, allowing for “intermediate” fulfillments of some of the prophecies about a future king (a la Kaiser’s line of promise approach).

³ Thomas P. Nass, “Messianic Prophecy and English Translations,” p. 11.

⁴ Cf. Kenneth L Barker, *The Accuracy of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 34-35; and *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), p. 943.

In our Psalm 8 footnotes, we do not cap “him” because we think the basic, original referent is to “human being.” Christ ultimately fulfills that role of the “ultimate” human being, so of course Psalm 8 ultimately applies to him. But we think it important that readers understand what Ps. 8 is doing in its original context and not read the psalm as “narrowly” messianic.⁵

One can debate whether or not this is a good policy. However, it seems evident to me that this in a general way is also what the other major published translations do, including the HCSB and the ESV. It’s not just the NIV11. Since little attention was given to the HCSB and the ESV in last year’s paper, “Messianic Prophecy and Bible Translation,” maybe we can look briefly to see what these translations do in the psalms.

The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)

When the TEC met with representatives of the HCSB in December 2011, we were told that there is a strong inclination among at least some of the HCSB translators and the newly formed HCSB Oversight Committee to see direct messianic prophecies in the OT. We were happy to hear this. In 2010 Broadman & Holman published a fascinating book by Michael Rydelnik entitled *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?*, in which the author argues the case for direct messianic prediction in the Old Testament.⁶ Rydelnik was a member of the HCSB translation team.

However, it is evident that the HCSB considers only two psalms to be direct prophecies, Psalms 2 and 110. The HCSB capitalizes the titles in Psalms 2 and 110, indicating that they are talking about Christ either as direct prophecies or as typical prophecies that have Christ as the predominant referent. But none of the other psalms have similar capitalization either in part or in whole, indicating that they are not considered to be direct prophecies of Christ.

This conclusion is confirmed by the *HCSB Study Bible*, prepared by many of the same people involved in the HCSB translation. Psalms 2 and 110 have notes that see Christ as the only one who ultimately fulfills the psalm.⁷ Other psalms, including Psalms 8, 16, and 22 have notes that mention Christ in addition to other human referents.⁸ The notes for psalms like Psalm 45 and 72 do not say anything

⁵ Email from Dr. Douglas Moo received on December 8, 2011.

⁶ Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010).

⁷ Psalm 2 – “In this context, the anointed One is the Davidic king who is ultimately, in the progress of divine revelation, Jesus Christ.” (*HCSB Study Bible*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010, p. 882).

Psalm 110 – “Although the psalm seems to address the Davidic dynasty, the ideal is never realized except in the Messiah” (p. 991).

⁸ Psalm 8 – “Psalm 8, on one level taken to be a reference to mankind and the dominion conferred on him by God, also applies to the son of man as Jesus Christ” (p. 2116).

Psalm 16:9-11 – “Though in its original context it is possible to understand the terminology as meaning deliverance from death, it can also be used to describe resurrection from the dead. The language is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for both possibilities. The NT usage is within the range of meaning and is, according to Peter, the meaning that God ultimately intended in reference to Christ” (p. 894).

Psalm 22 – “In his suffering the psalmist foreshadowed the Messiah. In His suffering, Jesus identified with the psalmist” (p. 901).

about Christ.⁹

Here are Psalm 2 and 110 in the HCSB. Pay special attention to the capitalization (emphasis mine). Of course, the HCSB has the policy of capitalizing pronouns that refer to God, so the intentions of the HCSB translators are all the more evident in this regard.

Psalm 2

Why do the nations rebel
and the peoples plot in vain?
² The kings of the earth take their stand,
and the rulers conspire together
against the LORD and His Anointed One:
³ “Let us tear off their chains
and free ourselves from their restraints.”

⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord ridicules them.

⁵ Then He speaks to them in His anger
and terrifies them in His wrath:

⁶ “I have consecrated My King
on Zion, My holy mountain.”

⁷ I will declare the LORD’s decree:
He said to Me, “You are My Son;
today I have become Your Father.

⁸ Ask of Me,
and I will make the nations Your inheritance
and the ends of the earth Your possession.

⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron;
You will shatter them like pottery.”

¹⁰ So now, kings, be wise;
receive instruction, you judges of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with reverential awe
and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Pay homage to the Son or He will be angry
and you will perish in your rebellion,
for His anger may ignite at any moment.
All those who take refuge in Him are happy.

(There are footnotes that offer a lower-case
rendering for all the underlined words.)

Psalm 110

This is the declaration of the LORD
to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand
until I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

² The LORD will extend Your mighty scepter from Zion.
Rule over Your surrounding enemies.

³ Your people will volunteer
on Your day of battle.

In holy splendor, from the womb of the dawn,
the dew of Your youth belongs to You.

⁴ The LORD has sworn an oath and will not take it back:

“Forever, You are a priest
like Melchizedek.”

⁵ The Lord is at Your right hand;

He will crush kings on the day of His anger.

⁶ He will judge the nations, heaping up corpses;
He will crush leaders over the entire world.

⁷ He will drink from the brook by the road;
therefore, He will lift up His head.

⁹ Psalm 45:6 – “God’s throne was linked with the king because Israel’s king was to function as God’s co-regent over His kingdom” (p. 926).

Psalm 72:1-4 – “The king of Israel was to function as Yahweh’s royal representative and co-regent over His kingdom” (p. 949).

(I cite these notes not to approve of them, but to show the translation philosophy of the HCSB translators.)

Now notice the lack of capitalization in Psalms 8 and 22, which are often considered to be direct prophecies among us.

Psalm 8

Yahweh, our Lord,
how magnificent is Your name throughout the earth!

You have covered the heavens with Your majesty.

² Because of Your adversaries,
You have established a stronghold
from the mouths of children and nursing infants
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I observe Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which You set in place,

⁴ what is man that You remember him,
the son of man that You look after him?

⁵ You made him little less than God
and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You made him lord over the works of Your hands;
You put everything under his feet:

⁷ all the sheep and oxen,
as well as the animals in the wild,
⁸ the birds of the sky,
and the fish of the sea
that pass through the currents of the seas.

⁹ Yahweh, our Lord,
how magnificent is Your name throughout the earth!

Psalm 22:1-18

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Why are You so far from my deliverance
and from my words of groaning?

² My God, I cry by day, but You do not answer,
by night, yet I have no rest.

³ But You are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ Our fathers trusted in You;
they trusted, and You rescued them.

⁵ They cried to You and were set free;
they trusted in You and were not disgraced.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by men and despised by people.

⁷ Everyone who sees me mocks me;
they sneer and shake their heads:

⁸ "He relies on the LORD;
let Him rescue him;
let the LORD deliver him,
since He takes pleasure in him."

⁹ You took me from the womb,
making me secure while at my mother's breast.

¹⁰ I was given over to You at birth:
You have been my God from my mother's womb.

¹¹ Do not be far from me, because distress is near
and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong ones of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ They open their mouths against me—
lions, mauling and roaring.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are disjointed;
my heart is like wax,
melting within me.

¹⁵ My strength is dried up like baked clay;
my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.
You put me into the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me;
a gang of evildoers has closed in on me;
they pierced my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ I can count all my bones;
people look and stare at me.

¹⁸ They divided my garments among themselves,
and they cast lots for my clothing.

Psalm 16 is somewhat confusing in the HCSB. None of the pronouns are capitalized (even “me” in verse 10!), so the impression is given that this is understood as a typical psalm, not referring directly to Christ. Yet “Faithful One” in verse 10 is capitalized.

Psalm 16

Protect me, God, for I take refuge in You.

² I said to Yahweh, “You are my Lord;
I have nothing good besides You.”

³ As for the holy people who are in the land,
they are the noble ones.

All my delight is in them.

⁴ The sorrows of those who take another god
for themselves will multiply;

I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood,
and I will not speak their names with my lips.

⁵ LORD, You are my portion
and my cup of blessing;

You hold my future.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me
in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

⁷ I will praise the LORD who counsels me —
even at night my conscience instructs me.

⁸ I keep the LORD in mind always.

Because He is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad
and my spirit rejoices;

my body also rests securely.

¹⁰ For You will not abandon me to Sheol;
You will not allow Your Faithful One to see
decay.

¹¹ You reveal the path of life to me;
in Your presence is abundant joy;
in Your right hand are eternal pleasures.

There may be other surprises in messianic passages that surface in our synod-wide study of the HCSB. I notice that the pronoun “his” is not capitalized in Genesis 3:15 where we may have expected it: “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” Unfortunately, many scholars also view this passage as a typical prophecy, referring first of all to strife between humans and snakes.

In the matter of messianic prophecy, it will be hard to find a translation that pleases everyone. Very likely we would have a hard time agreeing among ourselves on exactly how to handle all these

passages. If we were to publish our own translation, would we capitalize “King” in Psalms 45 and 72? What about Psalms 21 and 89?¹⁰

The English Standard Version (ESV)

The ESV shows itself to be remarkably similar to the HCSB with its capitalization in messianic psalms. The ESV capitalizes the titles in Psalms 2 and 110, but nowhere else. The ESV thereby suggests that Christ is predominant in Psalms 2 and 110 to a degree that he is not in any of the other psalms.

When you look at the notes in the *ESV Study Bible*, prepared by many of the same people who participated in the ESV translation,¹¹ you see that all of the messianic psalms are described in a typical way, even Psalms 2 and 110.¹² But a particularly strong connection to the Messiah is seen in Psalms 2, 72, and 110, with the strongest connection in Psalm 110. This note introduces Psalm 110: “Like Psalms 2 and 72, this psalm goes well beyond the achievements of any merely human heir of David and thus looks forward to the Messiah; in fact, unlike those two psalms, it is almost entirely future in its orientation [emphasis mine].”¹³ On the basis of this note, I wonder why the translators capitalized the titles in Psalms 2 and 110 but didn’t capitalize “king” in Psalm 72.

In connection with Psalm 16:9-11, the *ESV Study Bible* has a very pointed note to indicate the typical nature of the psalm: “If the apostles meant that David’s words were a straight prediction of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is difficult to know what function the psalm could have played in ancient Israel; the congregation would have scratched their heads in puzzlement every time they sang it.”¹⁴ With Psalm 16:10, the ESV significantly does not capitalize the title in the OT, but when the passage is quoted in the NT, it does capitalize the title.

Psalm 16:10 – ESV

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.

Acts 2:27 – ESV

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
Or let your Holy One see corruption.

¹⁰ Zorn understands all of these psalms as direct messianic prophecies. Cf. Carl Manthey-Zorn, *The Psalms*, tr. John F. Sullivan (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2005).

¹¹ Please notice that I’m referring to the *ESV Study Bible* published by Crossway, and not *The Lutheran Study Bible* published by Concordia Publishing House.

¹² Psalm 2 – “When the people of God sing Psalm 2, they remind themselves of how God made David and his descendants to be kings in order to enable them to fulfill the very purpose for which Abraham was called. . . . The psalm also looks to the future, when the Davidic Messiah will indeed accomplish this.” (*ESV Study Bible*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, p. 943).

Psalm 8 – “This is a hymn of praise, enabling the Lord’s people to celebrate their privileged place in the created order.” (p. 948).

Psalm 22 – “It is better to see the psalm as providing a lament for the innocent sufferer, and then to see how all the Gospels use this to portray Jesus as the innocent sufferer par excellence.” (p. 963).

Psalm 45 – “This is a hymn celebrating a royal wedding. . . . Many have supposed that these words must address the Davidic king, either as foretelling Christ or as a type that Christ would eventually fulfill. Although the OT does foretell a divine Messiah (e.g., Isa. 9:6), this kind of interpretation does not easily fit this context. It seems better to think that the song speaks to God about his throne (“your throne, O God”), namely, the one that the heir of David occupies, and then goes on to describe the divine ideals for a king’s reign.” (p. 992,993).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1084.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 956.

Recently I was surprised to hear the opinion expressed that the ESV presents Christ more clearly than either the HCSB or the NIV11.¹⁵ I personally have to be shown evidence of this before I will accept it. The ESV does keep “son of man” in Psalm 8 and it does capitalize in Psalm 2 and 110 (like the HCSB in both respects). But in my mind, the ESV makes the messianic prophecy less clear than the HCSB and the NIV11 in some other passages such as the following:

Genesis 49:10

ESV – The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

HCSB – The scepter will not depart from Judah
or the staff from between his feet
until He whose right it is comes
and the obedience of the peoples belongs to Him.

NIV11 – The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

Daniel 9:25

ESV – Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.

HCSB – Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks and 62 weeks.

NIV11 – Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’

Perhaps our synod-wide study of the ESV, the HCSB, and the NIV11 will provide a clearer evaluation about the way that these translations handle messianic prophecy. It is evident to me, however, that all three translations recognize direct prophecy in the prophetic books. But all three reflect a typical understanding of most if not all of the psalms.

So, if people are dissatisfied with the NIV11 because it reads the psalms in a typical fashion, they may notice some modest improvement in the HCSB and the ESV, since the NIV11 has a few renderings and footnotes that are more overtly objectionable. But very likely such readers will not be swept off their feet by the HCSB or the ESV either. When it comes to messianic prophecy, it strikes me that the undergirding interpretive philosophy of the HCSB and the ESV translators is much the same as that of the NIV11 translators.

¹⁵ This was stated in a paper by Rev. Mark Cordes presented at the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference on April 18, 2012. Cf. “God’s Word Is Clear,” p. 21.

In this regard, it is also interesting to read the notes for Isaiah 7:14 in the *HCSB Study Bible* and the *ESV Study Bible*. Both allow for a typical understanding of this prophecy. The *HCSB Study Bible* states: “The context indicates that the preliminary fulfillment of this sign must have taken place within a few years of its utterance— . . . Many scholars feel that the referent is a woman whom Isaiah would marry and, if so, then the birth is mentioned in 8:1,4. This may be the immediate fulfillment of this sign. But its ultimate and more exalted fulfillment is noted in Mt 1:23.”¹⁶ The *ESV Study Bible* admits that some interpreters see a “single fulfillment” and some see a “double fulfillment,” and that “faithful interpreters can be found on either side of this debate.”¹⁷

III – Prospective vs. Retrospective Prophecy

One disturbing reality that has become more apparent to me in the past year in the discussion of OT typical prophecies is this: Some evangelical Christians do not consider OT typical prophecies to be genuine predictions of the future. Rather, they imagine that OT prophets had only their contemporary situation in mind. Later, the NT writers applied the words of the prophets to Christ and NT events, even though these events were not originally envisioned in the text.

The labels sometimes used for the two viewpoints are “prospective typology” and “retrospective typology.”¹⁸ Typical prophecy is “prospective” if the historical person or event (the “type”) was divinely intended to lead people to think about someone or something greater in the future. Typical prophecy is “retrospective” if the historical person or event (the “type”) was found to have a fuller meaning in the future, but the fuller meaning was unexpected until it happened.

In this discussion, the main point of debate is the human author and the human readers. Evangelical Christians generally recognize that God knew what would happen with the prophecies, and wherever there is a fuller meaning, God intended it from the start. But people try to think into the mind of the human author. Did David have it in his mind that his words carried a fuller meaning? Did David intend that his words would guide others to think about the coming Messiah? Or was David only writing about himself, and then when the Messiah came, the early Christians noticed the correspondence? Is there a “fuller sense” (*sensus plenior*) intended by God that was not intended by the human author?

We know that Scripture answers this question. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter said about David that “he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:30-31). Philip told Nathanael, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). About Isaiah, the apostle John wrote, “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (John 12:41). The Bible itself says that the OT writers spoke and wrote about Jesus. Typical prophecy is prospective.

¹⁶ *HCSB Study Bible*, pp. 1137,1139.

¹⁷ *ESV Study Bible*, pp. 1254, 1255.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, “The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986), p. 196. Discussion of this issue may also be found in: Darrell L. Bock, “Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), pp. 110-111; and Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), pp. 388-390. Perhaps predictably, there is a recent Zondervan “Counterpoints” volume: *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

We also think of 1 Peter 1:10: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” The prophets didn’t know all the details about the coming of the Savior, and they had to study their own prophecies.¹⁹ But they knew that they were speaking about “the grace that was to come to you.”

An example of the retrospective approach is Peter C. Craigie’s commentary on the psalms. In regard to Psalm 16, Craigie says: “The psalm, with respect to its initial meaning, is neither messianic nor eschatological in nature. Yet it is apparent that in the earliest Christian community, the psalm was given a messianic interpretation with respect to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”²⁰ A more general statement can be found in an article by Tremper Longman III: “It is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure.”²¹

The retrospective approach is also apparent in Rodney J. Decker’s “An Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version NT.” About Psalm 8 he writes, “The entire reference of the psalm as originally written and intended refers *only* to human beings. . . . There is no hint here of anything Messianic.”²² About Hebrews 2, Decker says that “the reference is only to humans through the end of v. 8.”²³

Although this Decker essay has been posted on the TEC’s website under “Other Resources,” no one on the TEC subscribes to these comments of Decker about Psalm 8. We posted this essay for other reasons—it is perhaps the most thorough-going review of the NIV11 that one can find on the internet. At the top of our “Other Resources” category, we make clear that the items in this category do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the TEC.

In regard to Psalm 8, there is a difference of opinion among us, and there has been historically. In my seminary notes on Hebrews 2, I notice that Prof. Armin Panning explained Psalm 8 as a typical psalm, as does Rev. Richard Lauersdorf in the People’s Bible commentary. Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch advocated taking Psalm 8 as a direct messianic prophecy.

But I trust that everyone in WELS who considers Psalm 8 to be a typical psalm understands it in a prospective way. Psalm 8, according to the prospective view, says that God put people over the original creation with the intention that one day Christ would rule all things as the ideal human being. Christ is included as the ultimate, perfect fulfillment. With Psalm 8, therefore, it was God’s intention to lead people to think about the coming Savior, just as it was God’s intention with the other typical prophecies to lead people to think beyond the “type” to the “antitype.” The messianic content was inspired by the Holy Spirit from the start as a faith-building message for OT readers.

To what extent the OT authors and OT people grasped the messianic content, of course, is another matter. We shouldn’t go too far in either direction. When we look at the NT, we see that believers like Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna had a clear conception of the essentials of the messianic plan. The Holy

¹⁹ Note that the prophet Daniel said his vision was “beyond understanding” (Daniel 8:27; 12:8).

²⁰ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 158.

²¹ Tremper Longman III, “The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. S. E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 13.

²² Rodney J. Decker, “An Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version NT,” p. 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Spirit who inspired the messianic prophecies obviously used them to create and strengthen faith. Yet, it is true that the 12 disciples seemed slow to grasp things (Acts 1:6), and Jesus implied to the men on the road to Emmaus that they should have gotten more out of the OT than they did: “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25). But regardless, the messianic content was present in the OT prophecies from the start.

Retrospective Approach in Current Translations?

A troubling question in this discussion is the following: Did the NIV translators remove the capitalizations in Psalms 2, 16, and 110 because they wanted to show more favoritism to the retrospective view of typical prophecy? Did they change Psalm 8 because they didn’t see Christ in it? If these things were true, it would not make us happy.

In this regard, it is interesting to see comments by CBT members. CBT Chairman Douglas Moo in the article referred to earlier states that he views typical prophecy in a prospective way—with the qualification that individual authors and readers may not always have understood the full meaning intended by God.²⁴ Moo obviously is not an advocate of the retrospective position.

It is also worth reading the CBT’s “Notes” about Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2. The Committee indicates that they struggled with the fact that some interpreters of Hebrews 2 do not think that Jesus is in mind until verse 9, and others think that he is in mind earlier.²⁵ Their “solution” was to translate Hebrews 2:6 in this way: “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? [emphasis mine]” Again, this may not cause us to jump for joy. But the CBT intended to make it possible to see Christ included in Hebrews 2:6-8. Their “Notes” specifically say that the plural pronouns in Hebrews 2:6-8 “refer to all people, including Jesus [emphasis mine].”²⁶ We may debate whether Christ is presented clearly enough in Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:6-8 in the NIV11. But certainly it was not the intention of the NIV11 translators to make it impossible to see Christ.

A problem in OT translation is that it not easy to make all these distinctions clear. If one person thinks that a typical prophecy is prospective with messianic content from the start and another person thinks that a typical prophecy is retrospective without messianic content from the start, how would their Bible translations differ? If they followed the modern convention of capitalizing titles for direct messianic prophecies and not capitalizing titles for typical prophecies, then there would be no difference in the translations. There is only so much that a translation can do to make things perfectly clear.

In addition, retrospective inclinations could be a factor also with other translations besides the NIV11. It was noted above that some HCSB translators, like Michael Rydelnik, are in favor of direct messianic prophecy. But the HCSB translation team also included Tremper Longman III, quoted earlier as rejecting prospective typical prophecy.

Included in the ESV translation team were Vern Poythress and Frank Thielman. In regard to Psalm 22:12-18, Poythress wrote that the messianic understanding revealed in the NT was “not ‘in’ Psalm 22 by itself.”²⁷ In regard to Genesis 3:15 and other texts, Thielman wrote, “The difficulty in seeing such

²⁴ Moo, “The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” p. 196,197.

²⁵ “Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation,” August, 2010, p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁷ Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” in *The RIGHT Doctrine from the WRONG Texts?*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 108.

texts as references in their original contexts to the Messiah and the circumstances of his life seems to demand some other approach.”²⁸

In short, the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV all had translation teams broad enough to include people with varying opinions about typical prophecy. There is only so much that we can expect from any of the current English translations. It will be up to the reader to operate with the proper understanding, having been taught at some point about messianic prophecy.

IV – The relationship between the OT and the NT

In connection with our synodwide study of messianic prophecy, there has been some wholesome discussion about the relationship of the OT with the NT. There have been good reminders that we read the entire Bible as a unified book inspired by the same Holy Spirit. We appreciate Augustine’s dictum: “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed” (*In Vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat*).²⁹ Especially, we are eager to see Christ in the OT, because Christ himself told us: “These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39).³⁰

How does the NIV11 fare in this regard? Here I think that it is possible to overstate things when commenting on the NIV11. One recent paper articulates the translation philosophy of the NIV11 in this way: “The Old Testament is translated in isolation from the New Testament.” It says, “The modern translational philosophy employed by the CBT erects a firewall of sorts between the Old Testament and the New Testament.”³¹ I fear that this accusation, standing on its own, is too broad and all-inclusive.

What is fair to say is that the translators of the NIV11 have chosen to read the psalms as typical psalms rather than direct, rectilinear psalms (cf. Moo’s email). Some in WELS who favor direct prophecy may feel that the NIV11 has gone too far in this regard, and it may lead them legitimately to search for a different translation. It is also fair to say that the NIV11 sometimes does not translate an OT passage in harmony with a NT quotation where we wish that they had. (Psalm 104:4/Hebrews 1:7 and Habakkuk 2:4/Galatians 3:11 may be examples). But that doesn’t mean that the NIV translators are reading the OT totally apart from the NT.

Reading the Bible with a “firewall” between the OT and the NT is one of the bedrock operating principles of the historical-critical method, which insists that the OT be interpreted entirely on its own, without any input from a later source such as the NT. Translations prepared by higher-critics, therefore, have major differences in their OT translations from those prepared by evangelical Christians.

The NIV11, however, as well as the HCSB and the ESV, have been prepared by translators who hold to the inerrancy of the Bible and who see a unity between the two testaments and the God described in them. These translations do not show the radical separation between the OT and the NT that is seen in higher-critical translations. This is one reason why the TEC has recommended the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV for consideration by WELS.

²⁸ Frank Thielman, “Jesus B.C.,” *Christianity Today* (March 4, 1996), p. 61.

²⁹ Augustine, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri Septem*, 2.73.

³⁰ A presentation of this point, with numerous Bible passages, was included in the paper “Messianic Prophecy and Bible Translation,” pp. 10,11.

³¹ Rev. Glenn Schwanke, “Messianic Prophecy in the NIV 2011,” p. 1,2, available at the website of Pastor Schwanke’s church: <http://www.peacehoughton.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Messianic-Prophecy-Schwanke-updated-2-24-12.pdf>.

Perhaps it would be useful to give some examples of how the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV all show an overall, evangelical Christian orientation in the way that they approach the OT in comparison with translations prepared by higher-critics. It is evident that the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV do read the OT through the eyes of the NT.

Examples of the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV reading the OT in view of the NT

As one example, OT translations prepared by higher critics will generally not have “Spirit” or “Holy Spirit” (with capital letters), because higher critics assume that the doctrine of the Trinity was a NT innovation. In contrast, the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV regularly do have “Spirit” and “Holy Spirit” in the OT. Look at Genesis 1:2.

Genesis 1:2

NRSV (New Revised Standard Version, 1989) – a wind from God swept over the face of the waters

CEB (Common English Bible, 2011, a new translation prepared by higher-critical scholars) – God’s wind swept over the waters.

NIV11 – the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters

HCSB – the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters

ESV – the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

As another example, one can look at OT passages that speak about the afterlife. Most higher critics assume that OT believers did not have notions of an afterlife, so statements about the afterlife are commonly changed in their translations. Translations prepared by evangelical Christians do not follow this path.

Psalms 23:6

NRSV – I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long

CEB – I will live in the LORD’s house as long as I live

NIV11 – I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever

HCSB – I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live

(This one surprises me in HCSB. Elsewhere the HCSB does affirm afterlife in the OT.)

ESV – I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever

In regard to messianic passages, it is informative to see what translations do with the Protevangelium in Genesis 3:15. The NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV maintain a singular pronoun, undoubtedly with a view toward its fulfillment in Christ. The latest translation by higher-critics (the CEB) does not.

Genesis 3:15

CEB – I will put contempt between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers.

They will strike your head, but you will strike at their heels.”

NIV11 – And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

HCSB – I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

ESV – I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

It is also interesting to see what the translations do with the concept of “seed/offspring” in other passages that are commonly recognized as messianic prophecies. The conservative Christian translations retain the word “offspring” which can be understood as a singular, finding fulfillment in Christ. Consider Genesis 26:4:

Genesis 26:4

CEB – I will give you as many descendants as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all of these lands. All of the nations of the earth will be blessed because of your descendants.

NIV11 – I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.³²

HCSB – I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky, I will give your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring,

ESV – I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

One more example to show that the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV have been translated by conservative Christians who are approaching the OT through the eyes of Christian faith is Psalm 22:16.

Psalm 22:16

NRSV – My hands and feet have shriveled;

CEB – oh, my poor hands and feet!

NIV11 – they pierce my hands and my feet

HCSB – they pierced my hands and my feet

ESV – they have pierced my hands and feet

So once again, I believe the issue is this: the NIV11 translators have decided to translate the psalms as if they are typical rather than direct prophecies about Christ. They have decided to translate the psalms with an increased sensitivity to the historical context, without denying the messianic content. We can debate whether or not we are comfortable with this. But we should be careful not to overstate the case or to accuse them of following principles that they themselves would deny.³³

Letting the NT guide the interpretation of the OT?

On the heels of the previous discussion is this question: To what extent should the NT guide us in our interpretation of the OT? In a recent WELS writing, the following principle has been articulated in an unqualified way: “New Testament interpretations of Old Testament passages should be accepted.”³⁴

³² In these passages the NIV11 is following the principle that a collective noun in a messianic prophecy should be retained as a singular so that the fulfillment in Christ is evident. We can only wish that they had followed this policy also in Psalm 8 with “son of man.”

³³ In the footnote to Daniel 7:13, the NIV11 translators explicitly mention that the NT guided them to their rendering. Also, the fact that the NIV11 has “virgin” in the text at Isaiah 7:14 was undoubtedly influenced by the NT.

³⁴ Schwanke, “Messianic Prophecy in the NIV 2011,” p. 26.

Without a doubt, this principle resonates within all of us, since we were trained to operate with the notion that “Scripture interprets Scripture.” When I teach about the error of millennialism, I stand on my head to impress on students that the NT took the restoration prophecies of the Hebrew prophets and said that they are fulfilled spiritually in the church and ultimately in heaven. The NT in its interpretation of these prophecies gives us the right interpretation.

But in regard to messianic prophecy, we should remember that just because the NT quotes an OT verse and says it is fulfilled in Jesus, that doesn’t mean the prophecy must be considered a direct prophecy of Christ. In the catena of OT messianic prophecies collected in Hebrews 1, the author of Hebrews includes 2 Samuel 7:14: “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.” This verse is uniformly recognized in WELS to be a typical prophecy that found fulfillment first in Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:6-10) and the other Davidic kings (Psalm 89:29-32). Still, 2 Samuel 7:14 is quoted as a messianic prophecy because it found its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. NT quotations, therefore, do not necessarily solve the question of whether OT prophecies are direct or typical. Translations that favor typical interpretations are not necessarily ignoring the NT witness.

In addition, when it comes to translating the OT, something also needs to be said on the other side as a qualification or limitation of this principle.³⁵ This principle as a blanket assertion—that the NT interpretation of OT passages is always accepted—could be misapplied in the realm of Bible translation. Sometimes the wording of NT quotations, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is slightly different from the Hebrew OT. This happens especially when the NT quotes the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew OT. In such cases, it has never been a Lutheran principle of Bible translation that OT passages need to be translated in exactly the same way as the NT.

To illustrate this point, we could first look to some renderings of Martin Luther. Luther is rightly associated with the interpretive principle that the OT should be interpreted in view of the NT. But for Martin Luther, this did not mean that the NT quotation of individual words and passages was normative when translating the OT. Note these examples from Luther’s translation.

Genesis 47:31 quoted in Hebrews 11:21

Hebrews 11:21 – [er] neigte sich gegen seines Zepters Spitze
(he leaned against the top of his staff)

Genesis 47:31 – neigte sich Israel auf dem Bette zu den Häupten
(Israel leaned on the head of the bed)

Psalms 8:6 (English verse 5) quoted in Hebrews 2:7

Hebrews 2:7 – Du hast ihn eine kleine Zeit der Engel mangeln lassen
(you let him be inferior to the angels for short time)

Psalms 8:6 – Du wirst ihn lassen eine kleine Zeit von Gott verlassen sein.
(you will let him be forsaken by God for a short time)

Isaiah 9:2 quoted in Matthew 4:16

Matthew 4:16 – die da saßen am Ort und Schatten des Todes
(they who sat on the place and the shadow of death)

Isaiah 9:2 – die da wohnen im finstern Lande (they who sat in the dark land)³⁶

³⁵ Prof. John Brug states this principle in “Principles and Practices of Bible Translation,” p. 3, but he offers some useful qualifications on p. 14 and p. 20.

³⁶ Luther translates all 18 occurrences of the Hebrew word *tsalmavet* with the notion of “darkness” and never as “the shadow of death,” even though the NT quotations have “shadow of death.”

It is interesting to see how these same passages fare in the NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV. In two of the three passages, the NIV11 actually does put the NT rendering into the OT original (where Luther didn't!). The HCSB, like Luther, has the NT rendering in zero of the three; the ESV has the NT rendering in one of the three.

Genesis 47:31 quoted in Hebrews 11:21

Hebrews 11:21 NIV11 – as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Genesis 47:31 NIV11 – as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Hebrews 11:21 HCSB – he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

Genesis 47:31 HCSB – Israel bowed in thanks at the head of his bed.

Hebrews 11:21 ESV – bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

Genesis 47:31 ESV – Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.

Psalms 8:5 (Hebrew verse 6) quoted in Hebrews 2:7

Hebrews 2:7 NIV11 – a little lower than the angels

Psalms 8:5 (H6) NIV11 – a little lower than the angels

Hebrews 2:7 HCSB – lower than the angels

Psalms 8:5 (H6) HCSB – little less than God

Hebrews 2:7 ESV – for a little while lower than the angels

Psalms 8:5 (H6) ESV – a little lower than the heavenly beings

Isaiah 9:2 quoted in Matthew 4:16

Matthew 4:16 NIV11 – on those living in the land of the shadow of death

Isaiah 9:2 NIV11 – on those living in the land of deep darkness

Matthew 4:16 HCSB – for those living in the shadowland of death,

Isaiah 9:2 HCSB – on those living in the land of darkness.

Matthew 4:16 ESV – and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,

Isaiah 9:2 ESV – those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,

My seminary notes for Genesis 47:31 indicate that Prof. E. H. Wendland told us that we didn't need to translate the OT verse in harmony with the NT quotation. He advised keeping the masoretic vowel points (*mittah* – bed) rather than emending the vowels to harmonize with the Septuagint and the NT (*matteh* – staff). Similarly, Prof. Kenneth Cherney regularly advises Isaiah students to translate Isaiah 40:2 with the wilderness as the place where the *road is prepared*, since that is what is natural for the Hebrew parallelism and accents—rather than the wilderness as the place where the *voice cries out*, as it shows up in the NT quotations (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; John 1:23). When it comes to Bible translation, it is not the case that the NT interpretation is always normative for the OT original.

The more I work with translations, the more I sense that translation issues rarely fall into neat, tidy rules. The discussion is highly nuanced. The NIV11, the HCSB, and the ESV were all produced by conservative Christians who come at the OT with the perspective of Christian faith. Yet, in translating individual passages in the OT, they sometimes find reason to put the NT interpretation into the OT

translation and sometimes not. We may agree with many of their decisions, and we may disagree with others. But we should be careful not to overstate the case, and we should realize that these translations made decisions on a case-by-case basis, just as we would.

Conclusion

The conclusion to this “Addendum” is similar to the original paper from a year ago. The messianic prophecies of the Bible will need to be supplemented with careful instruction from a Christ-centered pastor or from Christ-centered printed materials, no matter what translation is used. Certainly, we need to select the best translation possible. But no translation will carry the day alone with this topic.³⁷ What will keep our church on the right path are teachers trained in Biblical, Lutheran doctrine who will take whatever English translation is on the podium or pulpit and use it to present Christ in the Biblical, Lutheran way that they were trained.

³⁷ In this regard, last year’s paper hinted at the potential usefulness of WELS producing its own study Bible.