

of those self-identified as ‘no religion’ (from 15 to 25 percent), while during the same period, people self-identified as Christians dropped from 72 to 59 percent (93). So it seems to me that the megachurch movement is creating a false impression that Christianity is growing, with the appearance of large congregations, while small congregations are struggling and the actual percentage of the population attending church is declining.

Possibly one of the most important contributions of this research is to highlight the significance of spiritual growth and the social activism of this type of congregation. The five congregations represented in this study see community work as an integral part of their mission. Regarding the high level of social engagement of these large communities of believers, the authors suggest “the main motivating factor from a theological perspective is that individuals and churches engage in social ministry because they are motivated out of love and compassion for their neighbors” (332). This is a good sign of the health of its members, one can say. However, the percentage of volunteers in relation to its total membership is low. Despite how one feels about the positive influence of megachurches in Christianity, this study contributes to our understanding of how effectively some large congregations in a major city of the globe can thrive and benefit their locality through social engagement. In this context, size does matter, for a large congregation has more human capital than a smaller one. This study also provides examples of leadership development and volunteer mobilization that are admirable.

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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Chou, Abner. *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018. 251 pp. Softcover. USD 23.99.

Dr. Abner Chou (ThD, The Master’s University) serves as the John F. MacArthur Endowed Fellow at The Master’s University in Santa Clarita, California, where he teaches biblical studies. Besides authoring numerous articles, his works include a commentary on Lamentations and *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Wipf and Stock, 2013). In the present volume, Chou begins from the premise that God requires an accurate interpretation of His Word (Acts 17:11; 1 Tim 4:13–15; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2). To achieve this Chou proposes we study the intertextual hermeneutics of the biblical authors themselves. The readers’ job then is to align their thoughts after them (the authors) to properly discern and apply their method of knowing the truth.

The book is divided into seven chapters and a final two-page conclusion. Chapter one begins by establishing the literal-historical-grammatical method as the one used by the authors of Scripture. Chou also posits Scripture’s dual authorship—God and human author (2 Pet 1:20–21)—a concept requiring

the centrality of authorial intent over against a postmodern text-centered hermeneutic or reader-response approach. Chou's thesis is that the Old Testament inner-textual hermeneutic is the same hermeneutic the apostles applied. And as later readers apply this method, they too are engaged in a "hermeneutic of obedience."

Chapter two unpacks Chou's presuppositions and method. He first notes that the presupposition inherent in postmodern deconstructionism essentially breaks down the line of communication between author → text → reader. Consequently, if the author's intent is truly unknowable, the reader will be left with any number of subjective, and most likely erroneous, messages. However, if Scripture claims that God himself spoke through the prophets (2 Pet 1:21; Acts 28:25), the text becomes inextricably linked to its Author, providing the reader with a meaning that cannot be broken (John 10:35). As such, "readers do not have hermeneutical freedom, but hermeneutical accountability" (28). Thus Chou's first presupposition is to discern the intent of the dual authors, a process that requires the guidance and sanctification of the Spirit who inspired the writing. Chou's second presupposition takes us from the text's meaning (author's intent) to the text's significance—this includes the text's ramifications, implications, and applications. The third presupposition is the reality of intertextuality. Chou notes that approximately one in twenty New Testament verses quotes the OT. This interconnectedness of the Scriptures is present not only in ancient Jewish writings but in the internal evidence of Scripture itself.

Chapter three explores the prophet as an exegete and theologian. On a prescriptive level, Chou notes how the authors of the OT use various introductory formulae to establish the authority of Scripture. On a descriptive level, the prophets are interconnected by referencing each other's ideas. Chou notes these main ideas as overarching concepts—such as covenant, law, and creation—which guide the flow of Israel's story. Regarding particular details, Chou notes the intertextual use of specific terminologies or motifs such as seed, remnant, and eagle. Chou then presents three examples of prophetic exegesis. First is Jeremiah and Ezekiel's use of Exodus (Jer 31:28–29; Ezek 18:2–3; cf. Exod 20:5, Deut 5:9). Here Chou notes that rather than misinterpreting Moses (believing children must be punished for their parent's sins) the prophets are correcting Israel's misunderstanding of the second commandment, which indicates punishment only for those children who actively partake in their parent's hatred of God.

In the second section—the prophet as a theologian—Chou looks at the intertextuality of the Davidic covenant and the *protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15. Regarding the first, Chou notes that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are intertwined with, and converge in, the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7), "the covenants converge into this covenant—making the one who fulfills the Davidic covenant the one who completes the covenantal promises of God" (76). This convergence of the covenants is likewise noted in 1 Kgs 4:20–5:6. This is picked

up by Amos (9:11) who moves past the fall of the Davidic dynasty to God planting Israel in the land (v.15). Hosea then builds on this framework adding “the nation will return to [a second] David their king (3:5). Finally, Micah adds that the Messiah will come from the birthplace of David (5:2). Thus, the prophets do not just reiterate similar motifs, like the vine or Messiah, but build on each other to advance theology with new revelation. Finally, Chou treats the intertextuality of Gen 3:15 providing five reasons that show Moses understood it as encapsulating a messianic component. The *protoevangelium* is then expanded in Ruth, 2 Sam 7:12; Pss 8:6; 72; 110:1; Mic 7:17; and Isa 27:1. Thus the prophets not only reiterated prior prophetic themes but encouraged the nation by expanding these theologies.

Chapter four discusses the directionality and intentionality of the prophets. Chou argues that the prophets did not speak better than they knew, but better than we give them credit for. In other words, the prophets not only spoke to their time and contemporaries but also intentionally set up future prophets with fodder for subsequent revelation. Chou begins by looking at Moses, whose writings set up a framework for how the nation should live after his death (Deut 3:23–39). Asaph then continues by reiterating much from Moses, recording Israel’s subsequent infidelity (Deut 1:18–32; Ps 78:8, 22). Solomon’s prayer continues what Moses and Asaph began (1 Kgs 8:1–62), and in Daniel’s prayer are echoes of Solomon’s emphasis on God’s grace, forgiveness, and restoration based on the temple (Dan 9:16–17). Finally, Nehemiah repeats Israel’s history with similar wording (9:1–38). In this trajectory we note both prophetic directionality and intentionality; for not only do they affirm past prophecy, but they also point forward by claiming their writings as profitable for future generations (Ps 119:89; cf. 22:30–31; 78:6; 103:7), their law as binding to future generations (Deut 4:10; 25–30; 5:3), and their poetry to be sung by subsequent generations (Deut 31:19; Ps 4:1; Hab 3:19). Finally, the very nature of prophecy and promises likewise indicates the future focus and application of the prophets’ words.

In the second part of chapter four, Chou looks at three case studies regarding the intentionality of the prophets; the most notable concerns Matthew’s use of Hos 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Chou addresses the question of whether Hosea intended to look to the future, particularly to the coming Messiah. He believes Hosea meant to point to the Messiah since the king is also God’s son (Pss 2:7; 116:16), thus God’s son Israel and God’s son the Davidic king are equated. Next Chou explores Paul’s statement that the rock guiding Israel was Christ (1 Cor 10:4), noting Moses’s testimony of Yahweh as a rock (Deut 32:4, 12, 18), and sees evidence of Christ in the association of the Angel of God with the pillar of cloud (Exod 14:19; 13:21; cf. Exod 23:20–23). Finally, Chou looks at Matthew’s use of Isaiah 7:14 regarding the virgin birth, showing that the context indicates this child as the Son who will conquer the exile (9:6) and ultimately restore the world (11:1–12).

Chapter five explores the apostolic continuity of the prophetic hermeneutic. First, Chou notes the apostolic introductory formulae, stating he found nearly two hundred instances where the apostles point back to the OT, thereby claiming the prophetic precedent as authoritative, intentional, and foundational for their apostolic writings. Second, he notes that the apostles call themselves prophets and servants, terms used for the prophets. Third, the apostles refer to their writings as scripture (Mark 1:16; 16:7) and claim them as not only on par with OT writings (John 20:31) but as the continuation of the prophetic inspiration (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10; 1 Thess 5:20; Rev 1:3). Fourth, Chou notes that the NT is replete with intertextual usage of the Old, spanning from Matthew—who continues the storyline begun by Moses—to Revelation, “a masterpiece” of OT intertextuality. In short, “if the apostles claim to build upon the prophets’ intent and logic, if they depict themselves as the prophets continued, and if they read the Scriptures intertextually like the prophets, then most likely they continue the prophetic hermeneutic” (131).

In the second half of chapter five Chou addresses some objections to continuity. First is the apostles’ use of the term “fulfilled,” which some argue implies a prior prophecy; yet fulfillment also has the broader meaning of working out prior revelation. Next Chou briefly resolves the difficult passages introduced in chapter four—such as Matthew’s reference to Jesus as the new David (Matt 2:15; cf. Hos 11:1), Paul’s reference to Jesus as the rock (1 Cor 10:4), and Paul’s use of Christ as the seed (Gal 3:16)—and then tackles seven additional intertextual passages, one involving John’s use of the psalms in John 19. Did David intend these psalms to point to the Messiah? Chou argues David wrote certain psalms cognizant that they pointed to the Messiah’s fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (e.g. Ps 110:1–3; cf. 2:7; 72:1–20). A second intertextual example is Peter’s use of Ps 16:10 (cf. Acts 2:26–28; 13:35) as a prophecy that Christ would resurrect. Is David speaking better than he knew or better than we give him credit for? Chou argues for the latter. Being “abandoned to Sheol” would mean being left in the grave, and “not being abandoned” would imply the resurrection. Additionally, Ps 16 speaks of “God’s holy one” which refers only to the Messiah (1 Sam 2:9–10). Finally, he looks at parallel language in Pss 16, 22, and 86:13 to confirm that Ps 16 deals with eschatological resurrection. In conclusion, Chou distinguishes between new revelation (Christ’s life and teachings) and the apostles’ careful reading and application of the OT Scriptures. While we cannot claim new revelation, we can and should follow their careful reading and intertextual hermeneutics to draw fuller meaning from the Scriptures.

Chapter six focuses on the specific *modus operandi* of the apostles. In a statement that could well apply to the whole book, Chou admits that the topic of this chapter could fill volumes. Chou’s conservative approach is to look at how the NT authors see (1) the big picture of redemptive history and

(2) its application of OT passages relating to Christology, ecclesiology (Adam/humanity motif), soteriology, and morality/law. Chou first explores Christ, the Gospels, and Acts, noting they all view redemption history in harmony with the OT storyline: beginning with creation/genealogies/seed (John 1:1, Matt 1 cf. Ruth 4:13–22) and climaxing in Christ, the new David. Christologically, Jesus identifies himself as the stone of Ps 118:22 and Isa 28:16 (cf. Matt 21:41), which Peter affirms in Acts 4:11. The title of suffering Servant is in the Gospels and continues into Acts. Furthermore, Christ affirms He is the “my Lord” of Ps 110 (Matt 22:44), and in Acts, Peter likewise identifies Jesus as the one indicated by this Psalm (2:34–35). Ecclesiologically, Christ refers to himself as the “Son of Man” fulfilling the messianic prophecy of Daniel 7. In Acts, Stephen identifies Christ as “the Son of Man,” standing in heaven. And Paul’s Damascus road experience likewise affirms Christ as the Son of Man/second Adam, thus providing a new head for the church. Soteriologically, Christ quotes from Lev 18:5 (Luke 10:27–28) to indicate the necessity of covenant obedience to gain life. Morally/legally, Christ’s sermon on the mount becomes a new Sinai experience, where Christ explains the spirit behind the law.

Next Chou looks at Paul’s writings where the big picture of redemptive history views the church as God’s precious possession (reflecting and advancing Exod 19:6 via Titus 2:14), now also with the inclusion of the Gentiles, a prophecy that is fulfilled by Paul’s own calling to minister to the Gentiles (Gal 1:16). Christologically, Paul alludes to Ps 110:1 where Christ is seated at God’s right hand (Eph 1:20–22), Jesus is also the stone of salvation (Rom 9:31–33; cf. Isa 28:16; Ps 118:22) and the suffering Servant (Phil 2:7; cf. Isa 53:3) who secures justification (Rom 4:25; cf. Isa 53:11) and makes peace through His death (Col 1:20; cf. Isa 53:5). Ecclesiologically, Christ is the New Adam (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45) providing a new headship for the church. He is the cornerstone of the new temple (Eph 2:20; Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16) in which we are being built. Soteriologically, Paul uses Isaiah 53 to underscore that Christ bore our sin (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:4; Eph 5:2; Phil 2:7–8; Titus 2:14) and God’s wrath (Rom 3:25–26) on our behalf. Hebrews, James, Jude, and the writings of John are each explored in this manner, with Chou noting how each author adheres to the same overarching plan of redemption and works it out intertextually in their various passages.

In chapter seven Chou affirms that while the traditional hermeneutic of Christianity has been correct, his study can supplement traditional hermeneutics in the following ways. First, we must understand the author’s historical context by grasping the redemptive-historical situation of a book and its significance for a certain passage. Second, we must collect all the dots (interconnected texts) via concordances and commentaries and then begin to connect them. And third, we should focus on the precise nuance of a term which will often provide a connective theme. Chou concludes by stating

that the intertextual approach helps us (1) worship God for His mighty acts and the beauty of His revelation; (2) understand theology through Scripture's revelation of God's character and Christ's supremacy; (3) morally respond to cultural issues in ways that harmonize with biblical guidelines; and (4) adopt a worldview and lifestyle consistent with redemptive history. For, in the end, God will not ask whether the Bible was relevant to us, but whether we were relevant to the Bible (225).

There is much in Chou's book that I value. His task—to demonstrate the inner- and intra-textual cohesiveness of the Scriptures and create a hermeneutical paradigm for the Bible student—is massive and laudable. Considering that few scholars have engaged such a study—among these Kaiser, Beale, and Davidson—Chou is to be commended and, I would suggest, modeled. Additionally, I appreciated Chou's transparency in noting his presuppositions and his consistency in their application. Finally, I heartily agree with his thesis: that today's reader, guided by the Holy Spirit (and armed with a good concordance or commentary), can interpret Scripture using the same method—intertextuality—as the biblical authors, helping reap a more bountiful harvest as God continues to lead His church into greater light and unity.

One potential weakness I noticed in Chou's articulation is on hermeneutics. While Chou mentions macro and micro levels about major themes and specific texts or motifs (219–220), it would have been helpful had he presented the three levels of hermeneutical interpretation: micro (textual/exegetical), meso (doctrinal/systematic), and macro (philosophical presuppositions). The importance of unearthing biblical philosophical presuppositions, such as the ontology of anthropology, is evident in Chou's study of how Christ uses Exod 3:6 (Luke 20:37). Chou rightly notes that “the God of” is a covenant declaration pointing to God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises to the patriarchs. He then notes that Moses makes a distinction between being “gathered to his people” (Gen 25:8) and actual burial (47:30). However, Chou then concludes that “Moses implies the patriarchs are not dead and gone but alive and awaiting the future promise” (42). This presupposition—of the soul's immortality either in heaven or hell—goes counter to Chou's method of a truly literal and exhaustive intertextual study. While Scripture reveals the macro-hermeneutical presupposition regarding human ontology (soul sleep/conditional immortality), unless this is identified and affirmed, the predominant nonbiblical presupposition (which assumes human immortality) will prevail and ultimately subvert the hermeneutical task.

Furthermore, Chou says his book does not treat systematic theology because “the issue of the New Testament's use of the Old revolves primarily around biblical theology” (71). However, I would argue that much of what Chou does in this volume is systematic in that he portrays the authors of Scripture not only as exegetes who look at the details but as theologians who connect

those details to overarching patterns or systems embedded in Scripture. It is precisely these overarching patterns that comprise the systematic effort.

In conclusion, I believe Chou's *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers* is a compelling and much-needed work in the area of hermeneutics. Thankfully it is also an easy and enjoyable read, accessible for all lovers of Scripture—whether layperson, pastor, seminary student, or seasoned scholar. And while the reading is at times not seamless (Chou humbly admits he is not the greatest writer), he more than makes up for any lack in that area by providing the reader an exhilarating and interactive experience, where the sheer volume of texts analyzed will require reading with Scripture close at hand, ready to record the many wonderful insights gleaned.

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Fink, Sebastian, and Robert Rollinger, eds. *Conceptualizing Past, Present, and Future: Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium of the Melammu Project Held in Helsinki / Tartu, May 18–24, 2015. Melammu Symposia 9*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018. viii + 659 pp. Hardcover. USD 180.00.

*Conceptualizing Past, Present and Future* represents a broad treatment of issues concerning the historiographical representation of past, present, and future in pre-modern literature. The book, edited by Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger, brings to the public the general proceedings of the Ninth Symposium of the Melammu Project held in Helsinki on May 18–24, 2015. The volume is comprehensive in its reproduction of all the presentations of that symposium, having forty-two specific presentations adapted into chapters. It is to be placed among studies organizing and exploring nuances of Mesopotamian historiography (e.g. Mario Liverani, *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, Studies in Egyptology and the Ancient Near East [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004]) and that of Greek compositions (e.g. Carmine Catenacci, *Il tiranno e l'eroe: storia e mito nella Grecia antica*, *Lingue e letteratura Carocci 145* [Roma: Carocci editore, 2012]). Unlike most of its predecessors, however, the volume brings together studies dealing with temporal perceptions of cultures spanning from five thousand year-old Sumerian documents to the Greek historiography of the seventh century BCE.

The volume is divided into eight parts, each of which contains an introduction, chapters developing the topic under discussion, and a final response to them. Such an arrangement seems to reflect the particular disposition of the conference underlying the composition of the book itself. The first section of the book (9–74) elaborates on the role of narratives for conceptualizing the past in pre-modern compositions. In the introduction to the section, John Marincola observes presentations of this section are particularly informed