

Martin Luther's Hermeneutics of the Old Testament Prophecy:

The Case of Isaiah 1

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Introduction

The book of Isaiah held a prominent place within ancient Israel, Judaism, and early Christianity, and it continues to play a vitally important role in contemporary Judaism and Christianity. Isaiah has been enormously influential in various historical and theological contexts, such as the cult of the Virgin Mary, anti-Jewish polemic, medieval passion iconography, and twentieth-century Christian feminism and liberation theology, as well as modern Zionism, global peace, and ecological movements.¹⁾ Isaiah's significance in Christianity is related to the book's christological implications in particular, and Isaiah has been known in the Church from early times as more

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** Abbreviations: "LW" for *Luther's Works*, 56 vols. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986; "WA" for *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 72 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-2007; "WA DB" for *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Bibel*, 12 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906-61.

1) John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

evangelist than prophet. Accordingly, the book of Isaiah has been considered as ‘the Fifth Gospel’ because of Christian predilections for finding in it an account of the life and suffering of Jesus Christ.²⁾

Given Isaiah’s importance for the life of the Church, it is no wonder that there has been a significant body of commentaries on Isaiah in the history of Christian exegesis. Among the Greek Fathers, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodore Heracleensis, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrus, John Chrysostom, Hesychius, Didymus the Blind, and Procopius of Gaza either preached or wrote commentaries on the book of Isaiah. Among the Latin Fathers, Jerome wrote a full commentary on the book in its entirety, while Augustine, Godefrid, Alan of Lille, and Joachim of Fiore commented partially on Isaiah.³⁾ In medieval periods, Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, Hugh of St. Cher, Nicholas of Lyra, and Dionysius the Carthusian wrote complete commentaries on the book. Especially, many editions of new commentaries on Isaiah were published in the sixteenth century by Protestant commentators such as Oecolampadius (1525), Zwingli (1529), Luther (1532), Muenster (ca. 1540), Brenz (1550), Castellio (1551), Musculus (1557), Calvin (1551, revised in 1559), and Bullinger (1567).⁴⁾

Christian exegetes in general have perceived the book of Isaiah as the Church’s sacred text for communicating the gospel of Christ, and the history of interpretation manifests that the book has often been a key point of polemical debates between Judaism and Christianity till today. Among contemporary scholars, Brevard S. Childs and C. A. Evans in particular have

2) Ibid.

3) For a brief summary of the history of interpretation of Isaiah, see David C. Steinmetz, “John Calvin on Isaiah 6,” *Interpretation* 36 (1982), 156-70.

4) Ibid, 157.

argued that there are undeniable parallels between Isaiah's prophecies of good tidings (40:1-11; 41:21-29; 52:7-12; 60:1-7; 61:1-11) and the New Testament's proclamations of the good news, and therefore the gospel of Jesus Christ in the New Testament can be rightly called Isaiah's gospel in the Old Testament.⁵⁾ According to Childs and Evans, it is theologically and canonically valid to argue that Jesus Christ in the New Testament indeed fulfilled what Isaiah promised in the Old Testament concerning the coming kingdom.⁶⁾ Against this notion of agreement among the authors of the two Testaments, John Sawyer and Ross Wagner have insisted that the New Testament authors misused the original intention of Isaiah which should be investigated in its own historical context. They have contended that the New Testament authors' predominant concern in their employment of Isaiah's prophecies was to 'authorize' their mission to the Gentiles and to 'prove' that it was right for Jesus to begin his ministry among the Gentiles, rather than among the Jews in Jerusalem.⁷⁾ According to Sawyer

5) See Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004); C. A. Evans, "From Gospel to Gospel: The Function of Isaiah in the New Testament," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, vol. 2, ed. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 651-91.

6) Childs, 6: "The coming of the kingdom is not simply a promise, but a divine reality experienced in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not merely proclaim the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God; he has realized it through his life and death."

7) See Sawyer, 34; J. Ross Wagner, "Moses and Isaiah in Concert: Paul's Reading of Isaiah and Deuteronomy in the Letter to the Romans," in *As Those Who Are Taught: The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL*, ed. Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 87-8. For a full discussion of Paul's interpretation of Isaiah, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Florian Wilk, *Die Bedeutung des Jesajabuches für Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Paul and*

and Wagner, the New Testament authors, including Paul, appropriated and even distorted Isaiah's prophecies for the purpose of legitimating their apologetic mission to the Gentiles: 'a new light' shines onto the Gentiles, while the condemnation would be given to those who reject the Gospel, especially to the Jews.⁸⁾

What is striking is that the apparently modern question of 'how to read Isaiah critically' has been constantly raised in each period of the history of Christian exegesis. Not only contemporary biblical scholars but also early, medieval, and early modern exegetes have addressed the vitally crucial question of whether the Church's christological reading of Isaiah is faithful to its historical meaning given to ancient Israel. If the New Testament seems to add a meaning different from the historical sense given in the Old Testament context, which sense between the two is more real and authentic?⁹⁾ Does the Church's christological appropriation of Isaiah's prophecies distort the prophet's primitive intention by imposing an alien sense to the original meaning?¹⁰⁾ Considering the issue of the sense of

Isaiah "In Concert" in the Letter to the Romans (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

- 8) Sawyer, 35: "A book that has brought comfort and hope to Jews in exile in all ages, down to and including the present century, has often been used by Christians as a vicious weapon to wound and damage them, and this is a use of Isaiah which can be documented right back to the Gospels and Acts."
- 9) For a discussion of the New Testament use of the Old Testament, see Dennis Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Study of the Bible in an Age of Rapid Cultural Change* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: Die Typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981).
- 10) For a discussion of the sense of Scripture, see J. Barr, "The Literal, the Allegorical, and Modern Biblical Scholarship," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (1989), 3-17; Childs, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

Scripture, this article will investigate Luther's hermeneutics of the Old Testament prophecy and will introduce Luther's suggestion of how to read the book of Isaiah properly. Firstly, it will discuss Luther's hermeneutical principles of the Old Testament in general with the backdrop of the medieval hermeneutics and will explain that Luther's exegetical distinctiveness is related to his conception of the dialectics of two kinds of preaching office. Secondly, this article will examine Luther's perception of the Old Testament prophet and will argue that Luther viewed the prophet primarily as 'preacher' of both law and gospel. Thirdly, the study will focus on Luther's exegesis of Isaiah 1 as a case study and will demonstrate how Luther's hermeneutics, his view of the prophet as preacher, and the method of transition between the two literal senses were played out in his practice of exegesis.

1. Luther's Hermeneutics of the Old Testament in Its Medieval Context

Many scholars have pointed out that the reformation in the sixteenth century was inaugurated by Luther's hermeneutical revolution, namely, Luther's new discovery of principles of

1977), 80-7; R. E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of a Sensus Plenior," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953), 141-62; "The Sensus Plenior in the Last Ten Years," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963), 262-85; "The Problems of the Sensus Plenior," in *Exégèse et théologie: Les saintes Ecritures et leur interprétation théologique*, ed. G. Thils and R. E. Brown (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1968), 72-81; V. S. Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986), 241-79; C. J. Scalise, "The 'Sensus Literalis': A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical Exegesis," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 42 (1989), 45-65.

scriptural interpretation which were either forgotten or unknown to the medieval Church.¹¹⁾ Yet, there is little consensus whether Luther's hermeneutical discovery is absolutely unprecedented and therefore can be called 'new' in the history of exegesis. For instance, by examining Luther's earliest lectures on Psalms (1513-15), James S. Preus insists that Luther's discovery of hermeneutical principles was a gradual development rather than a sudden departure from the traditional scheme of medieval fourfold sense of Scripture (the *Quadrigena*).¹²⁾ Gerhard Ebeling and Bernhard Lohse agree with Preus that Luther's new hermeneutics was influenced by the notion of 'a double literal sense' initiated and developed by Nicholas of Lyra and Faber Stapulensis in particular.¹³⁾ Because of the continuity with the

11) See Raymond F. Surburg, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 24 (1953), 241; Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 19 (1984), 124.

12) Preus, "Old Testament Promissio and Luther's New Hermeneutic," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967), 145. Also, see Robert M. Grant, *The Bible in the Church: A Short History of Interpretation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 101: "The letter teaches what has been done, the allegory what you are to believe, the moral what you must do, and the anagogy where you are heading." For a discussion of the medieval *Quadrigena*, see Berly Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964); Henri De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, vol. 1. The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

13) Gerhard Ebeling, "The Beginnings of Luther's Hermeneutics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993), 457. Also, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 51: "Luther still followed the traditional style of commentary, retained till 1518, thus the subdivision of glosses between the lines and in the margins, as well as the more detailed scholia. In many passages he also referred to the fourfold sense of Scripture, to the distinction between the *sensus literalis*, *allegoricus*, *tropologicus* or *moralis*, and the *sensus anagogicus*. More significant than this

traditional method of interpretation, they tend to consider Luther's hermeneutics of Scripture as 'hermeneutical reorganization,' or 'hermeneutical syncretism.'

It is true that the early Luther, in his earliest lectures on Psalms in particular, still employed the allegorical scheme of the patristic exegesis and that Luther's understanding of the literal sense in the early stage was not so much dissimilar with the late-medieval distinction between a literal-historical and a spiritual-prophetic sense. Luther's new hermeneutics of law and gospel and his clear rejection of the traditional principles, however, are found in his later treatises against Jerome Emser in 1521, to which the above scholars have paid relatively less attention.¹⁴⁾ In the treatise, "Concerning the Answer of the Goat in Leipzig," Luther argues that Emser follows the same hermeneutical method of Origen, Jerome, and Dionysius and that all of them attempted to find a hidden spiritual (allegorical) sense beyond the literal (plain) sense of Scripture.¹⁵⁾ Luther specifies that their prioritization of the spiritual sense over the literal sense of the Old Testament results from their Platonizing understanding of the Pauline antithesis in 2 Corinthians 3:6: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."¹⁶⁾ According to Emser,

retention of traditional methods is the concern for the christological sense of the text as well as for the distinction between Spirit and letter."

- 14) The titles of Luther's four treatises against Emser in 1521 are as follows: 1) "To the Goat in Leipzig"; 2) "Concerning the Answer of the Goat in Leipzig"; 3) "Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book of Goat Emser in Leipzig-Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner"; 4) "Dr. Luther's Retraction of the Error Forced upon Him by the Most Highly Learned Priest of God, Sir Jerome Emser, Vicar in Meissen."
- 15) LW 39:175; WA 7:647: "My Emser uses and interprets this [2 Corinthians 3:6] to mean that Scripture has a twofold meaning, an external one and a hidden one, and he calls these two meanings "literal" and "spiritual." The literal meaning is supposed to kill, the spiritual one is supposed to give life."
- 16) For a discussion of the history of interpretation on the letter and the Spirit,

in contrast to the life-giving ‘Spirit’ of the New Testament, the literal sense of the Old Testament, unless spiritually understood, is merely an unedifying and dead ‘letter’ and does not have any theological value.¹⁷⁾ Against the disrespecting view of the literal sense of the Old Testament, Luther proposes that the Pauline antithesis between the letter and the Spirit is concerning two kinds of preaching office, that is, the killing office of ‘law’ and the saving office of ‘gospel’; the proper division of Scripture is the distinguishing of law and gospel, instead of the dualistic division between the literal and the spiritual sense.

Luther explains the new hermeneutics of law and gospel more in detail in the preface of the Old Testament, which was first published in 1523 when he finished the translation of the five books of Moses and was later inserted in the 1534 version of the complete Bible.¹⁸⁾ In the preface, Luther maintains that

see D. R. Reinke, “From Allegory to Metaphor: More Notes on Luther’s Hermeneutical Shift,” *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973), 386-95; Wai-Shing Chau, *The Letter and the Spirit: A History of Interpretation from Origen to Luther* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Morwenna Ludlow, “Spirit and Letter in Origen and Augustine,” in *The Spirit and the Letter: A Tradition and a Renewal*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes and Günter Bader (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 87-104.

17) See Gerhard Forde, “Law and Gospel in Luther’s Hermeneutic,” *Interpretation* 37 (1983), 243.

18) After completing the translation of the New Testament in March 1522 in Wartburg, Luther began translating the Old Testament in its entirety, following the order of the Pentateuch (1523), the historical books (1523), the wisdom literatures (1524), and the prophetic books (1532). After the completion of the translation of the Old Testament Apocrypha, Luther collected all the translations of the biblical books and published them in one volume as Luther’s complete German Bible in 1534. Since it was originally the preface to the translation of the Pentateuch in 1523, the preface’s references are primarily to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and Luther’s comments on the historical and prophetic books are relatively brief.

there are two primary reasons of why the Old Testament should never be despised. Firstly, the Old Testament is the foundation and the proof of the New Testament.¹⁹⁾ From Luther's view, the Old Testament, like the New Testament, has certain promises of Christ in itself by which the biblical ancients were kept in faith, and the book of Genesis in particular which entails the specific promise of 'the seed of the woman' is without doubt an 'evangelical' book. Since Luther considers that the *scopus* of Scripture as a whole is Christ alone, not only the New Testament but also the Old Testament ultimately point to Christ, and even in the Decalogue, the summary of the law, Luther can find gospel, insofar as God promises to be present with the words.

Secondly, Luther asserts that the Old Testament should never be replaced, since it is primarily 'a book of laws' that teaches humans what to do and not to do. Although the Old Testament has certain divine promises, Luther believes that the chief teaching of the Old Testament is the teaching of laws, and the book intends not only to reveal human incapability of fulfilling God's commandment but also to accuse humans of their hatred of the lawgiver deeply hidden in the bottom of the heart.²⁰⁾ Luther makes clear that the Old Testament is not so much a sort of code book for regulating external works but a book of divine and spiritual laws concerned with the heart. Thus, the preaching ministry of law is to render humans to accept God's sheer judgment that no one is able to fulfill God's commandment internally, since it reveals that everyone keeps it either from fear of punishment or love of reward. In fact, Luther's new hermeneutics of law and gospel is related to his theological understanding of how God works for human salvation.²¹⁾ In Luther's view, God first burdens human

19) LW 35:236; WA DB 8:11.

20) LW 35:366; WA DB 7:3-4.

conscience by the killing ministry of law (the letter) and He drives the accused sinners to the saving ministry of gospel (the Spirit), and these two dialectically related preaching ministries are present in both of the Testaments.²²⁾

2. Luther's View of the Old Testament Prophet and the Method of 'Transition'

Luther in the preface to the Old Testament mentions that "the prophets are nothing else than administrators and witnesses of Moses and his office."²³⁾ Given Luther's perception of Moses' role as 'an agent of sin' and 'a dispensation of death,' Luther seems to assume that the Old Testament prophets share the

21) LW 39:188; WA 7:658: "These [the law and the gospel] then are the two works of God, praised many times in Scripture: he kills and gives life, he wounds and heals, he destroys and helps, he condemns and saves, he humbles and elevates, he disgraces and honors...He does these works through these two offices, the first through the letter, the second through the Spirit."

22) It should be noted that Luther does not consider that the preaching office of the law is necessarily same as the Old Testament itself, just as the ministry of the gospel is not simply equated with the New Testament. The Old Testament also contains certain promises of Christ, namely, the gospel, whereas the New Testament sets Christ not only as a 'gift' but also as an 'example' to demand one's works: both of the offices are present in both of the Testaments. See Markus Wriedt, "Luther's Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 106: "The gospel cannot be limited to the body of text laid down in the New Testament, nor can every single Scripture verse be exclusively assigned either gospel or law. Their respective functions are revealed in the context of complex relationships, the personal situation of the listener or reader, and God's plan of salvation as a whole."

23) LW 35:247; WA DB 8:29.

same office of Moses to reveal human sinfulness by the killing ministry of law. Interestingly, Luther in the preface divides Moses the lawgiver's audiences into three groups and argues that the ministry of law is applied to each group for different purposes. Among the three kinds of pupils of law, the first group of audiences do hear Moses' preaching of law but they simply despise it, believing that it does not concern them at all. The second group of audiences, according to Luther, are those who attempt to fulfill the divine law by their own power without grace and presumptuously conclude that they have satisfied it by doing outward works. In the strictest sense, Luther believes that Moses did not bring the law to these two groups, since they do not understand the true nature of the preaching ministry of law.²⁴⁾ From Luther's perspective, only the third group of audiences can grasp the proper meaning of the ministry of law and finally realize their own incapability of achieving what it demands. In other words, the preaching ministry of law that both Moses and the Old Testament prophets undertake is first and foremost 'to kill' the hearer.²⁵⁾

As discussed above, however, it should be noted that in Luther's thought the preaching ministry of law is dialectically related to the preaching ministry of gospel, and these two kinds of preaching office are present in both of the Testaments.

24) See Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 19. Luther believes that God employs the law for the purpose of revealing his wrath to those two kinds of pupils and ultimately destroys the open sinners and the false saints at the end.

25) LW 35:244; WA DB 8:23: "Therefore we see that these many laws of Moses were given not only to prevent anyone from choosing ways of his own for doing good and living alright, as was said above, but rather that sins might simply become numerous and be heaped up beyond measure. The purpose was to burden the conscience so that the hardened blindness would have to recognize itself, and feel its own inability and nothingness in the achieving of good."

Although the chief teaching of the Old Testament is the ministry of law, the book in its entirety is also a foundation and proof of the New Testament. In the same manner, although the chief ministry of law is to kill, its ultimate purpose is to lead the third group of audiences to the saving ministry of gospel. Put it differently, the Old Testament prophets are primarily preachers of law, but because of the inherent dialectical relationship between the two preaching ministries, the goal of their proclamation is not for condemnation and despair *per se* but for faith and salvation.²⁶⁾ Luther explains his conception of the Old Testament prophets as ‘preachers of law as well as of gospel’ in the preface to the lectures on Joel (1524):

All the prophets have one and the same message, for this is their own aim: they are all looking toward the coming of Christ or to the coming kingdom of Christ. All their prophecies look to this, and we must relate them to nothing else.²⁷⁾

According to Luther, the Old Testament prophets cannot be considered as administrators or interpreters of law in a narrow sense. Nor are they a sort of ‘foretellers’ of future events. Instead, Luther understands their prophecy as ‘proclamation’ in that the

26) See G. Sujin Pak, “Luther and Calvin on the Nature and Function of Prophecy: The Case of the Minor Prophets” in *Calvin and Luther: The Continuing Relationship*, ed. R. Ward Holder (Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 23: “Luther repeatedly called the prophet a preacher, depicted him as preaching, and referred to his proclamations as “sermons.” He often took brief detours from his comments on the text in order to expound on the power of preaching. Moreover, the view of the prophet as a preacher is thoroughly consistent with what Luther named as the prime subject of Old Testament prophecy: Christ and the Gospel; for Luther the Gospel was always something preached or proclaimed.”

27) LW 18:79; WA 13:88: “Omnium prophetarum una est sentential: hic enim unus est scopus, ut in futurum Christum seu in futurum regnum Christi respiciant. Huc omnes eorum spectant prophetiae nec alio sunt referendae.”

prophets' primary task is to hold the people in faith in the coming Christ so that they can cling to Christ with the Word.²⁸⁾ To their contemporary people, to the third group of audiences in particular, the prophets first preach the law (commandment) so that they can hear God's sheer judgment, and then the prophets drive them to listen to the word of promise (gospel) so that their terrified conscience can be assured by God.

In the preface to his lectures to Isaiah (1527), Luther calls the prophet's two kinds of preaching ministry as the prophet's aim, design, or intention, and for Luther it is indeed twofold: 1) when the prophet condemns sins in one place and praises righteousness in another, he speaks to his contemporaries concerning the physical kingdom, and this is the major part of his prophecy; 2) meanwhile, however, the prophet also prepares his audiences to the coming of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.²⁹⁾ Remarkably, Luther perceives this twofold intention of the prophet as being related to the two literal senses of Scripture. As examined above, Luther's new hermeneutics of law and gospel rejects the dichotomous division between the spiritual and the literal sense. Accordingly, when the prophet speaks of his contemporaries' sin in the physical kingdom, Luther regards that it is without doubt a literal (plain) sense of prophecy. When the prophet speaks of the coming Christ in the spiritual kingdom, for Luther it is also a literal sense of Scripture, not a spiritual, or spiritual-prophetic sense as late-medieval exegetes had traditionally assumed. In other words, Luther believes that the prophet employs a hermeneutical

28) Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. by Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 109.

29) LW 16:3; WA 31.2:1: "Ita ergo Esaias multa dicit de suo populo et regno corporali, alibi damnat peccata, alibi iusticiam Laudat, et videtur tota prophecia ferme ad populum directa esse, attamen eciam parat et suspendit interim animos populi ad Christi regnum futurum."

method of ‘transition’ between the two literal senses of Scripture, when they performs the two kinds of preaching ministry according to their twofold intention. Just as the prophet’s proclamation of law to his contemporary audiences in their historical context is a literal meaning, the prophet’s promise of the spiritual coming of Christ is also a literal meaning of his prophecy.

Luther specifies further that the Old Testament prophet makes a smooth transition between these two literal senses of Scripture, one concerned with the physical (historical) kingdom, the other regarding the spiritual kingdom:

The rule and government of that particular people teaches how they were helped and protected by God at one time and forsaken and punished at another, and the prophet intersperses these accounts with references to Christ and to us.³⁰⁾

The reason why Luther views the prophet’s intention as being twofold and understands the prophet’s method of writing as transition between the two literal senses is clear. In Luther’s thought, the two literal senses, which are concerned with the physical kingdom and with the spiritual kingdom respectively, are engaged with the dialectical relationship between law and gospel. The Old Testament prophet, according to Luther, is first and foremost a ‘preacher’ of law as well as of gospel, and therefore when the prophet condemns his contemporaries, he at the same time leads them to the promise of Christ. While the prophet speaks of the rule and government of the physical kingdom of the Jews, he at the same time encourages his audiences to anticipate the coming kingdom of Christ. Luther praises the Old Testament prophet as an excellent rhetorician

30) LW 16:4; WA: 31.2.2: “Regnum et administratio istius populi docet, quomodo nunc sint a deo adiuti et tuti, nunc deserti et puniti, quibus rebus intermiscet propheta Christum atque nos.”

and in Luther's eyes, the prophet makes a transition of speaking between the two literal senses, between the two kingdoms, and between law and gospel in such a fluent way that it is not easy to recognize when the prophet changes the subject matters of his speech.

3. The Case of Isaiah 1

In this part, I will demonstrate how Luther's new hermeneutics of law and gospel and his conception of the prophet's method of transition are actually played out in his exegesis by examining Luther's lectures on Isaiah 1 in particular. Luther begins his lectures on Isaiah 1 by explaining the prophet's historical situation first, and it clearly reflects his high regard of the literal sense of Scripture discussed above. Luther understands Isaiah as a contemporary prophet of Micah and Hosea in the Old Testament who prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.³¹⁾ Luther comments that the primary subjects of Isaiah's prophecy need to be understood in the historical context and they can be categorized as such: 1) prophecies regarding the coming captivity in Babylon; 2) prophecies of the return from the captivity; 3) prophecies of the advent of Christ. It is evident that Luther's division of Isaiah's prophecies is concerned with his perception of the prophet's twofold intention explained above: Isaiah as 'preacher

31) LW 16:5; WA 31.2:2. Luther stresses that Isaiah prophesies in a surprisingly paradoxical situation. Uzziah, Jotham, and Hezekiah, under whom Isaiah condemns the Jews and foretells the impending destruction of the physical kingdom, are among the most praiseworthy kings in the Jewish history, and during this peaceful and prosperous time under the godly kings, says Luther, everyone tends to believe that he is righteous.

of law' condemns his audiences in the physical kingdom by threatening of impending deportation to Babylon; at the same time Isaiah as 'preacher of gospel' promises his contemporaries not only the physical return from Babylon but also the coming of Christ in the spiritual kingdom. Luther says,

But this is Scripture's way: first to terrify, to reveal sins, to bring on the recognition of oneself, to humble hearts. Then, when they have been driven to despair, its second office follows, namely, the buoying up and consolation of consciences, the promises.³²⁾

It should be noted that in the lectures Luther's distinguishing of the physical and the spiritual kingdom is not so much dichotomous as dialectical. Just as law and gospel are different and yet dialectically related to each other, for Luther the physical kingdom of the Jews and the spiritual kingdom of Christ are distinguishable and yet dialectically associated with each other. Luther's idea of the dialectical relationship between the two kingdoms is closely engaged with his conception of the 'particularity of the Jews' in human history. From Luther's perspective, the physical kingdom of the Jews is absolutely unique in history, since God's definite promise of the coming of Christ was offered to them exclusively: "But the prophet speaks of happenings in the life of the Jewish people, not only of past events but also of future events, something no histories of the Gentiles can do."³³⁾ Because of the Jews' particular

32) LW 16:6; WA 31.2:3: "At hic est scripturae modus primum terrere, revelare peccata, cognicionem sui inducer, humiliare corda, quibus ad desperationem adactis tum sequitur alterum illius officium, nempe ereccio et consolacio conscienciarum, promissiones."

33) LW 16:5; WA 31.2:2: "Loquitur autem propheta de rebus gestis populi Iudeorum, non tantum de praeteritis, sed eciam de futuris, id quod nullae possunt ethnicorum historiae."

position, that is, the first heir of the promise in the divine plan of salvation, Luther considers that the 'physical' kingdom of the Jews is nonetheless 'spiritual,' although the two realms should never be equated.³⁴⁾

In addition to the division of the primary subjects of the book according to Isaiah's twofold intention, Luther in the lectures places the prophet's contemporary audiences into three distinct groups: 1) carnal and gross sinners; 2) show-off saints, 3) those who are of God. Luther's categorization of Isaiah's Jewish contemporaries is relevant to his view of the 'three kinds of audiences of law' discussed above. In Luther's thought, 'carnal and gross sinners' among Isaiah's audiences belong to the first group in general who do hear the preaching of law but reject it immediately. 'Show-off saints,' according to Luther, belong to the second group of audiences who presumptuously believe that they have fulfilled divine laws perfectly by performing external works. Luther insists that in the strictest sense Isaiah's prophecy, that is, his proclamation of law and gospel, was offered to 'those who are of God' among the contemporaries; only the third group of audiences can properly understand Isaiah's twofold intention that the preaching ministry of law is to kill and to drive them to the saving ministry of gospel.

Explaining Isaiah's twofold intention and the prophet's contemporary Jewish audiences, Luther in the lectures articulates how Isaiah employs the method of 'transition' between the two literal senses. In his exegesis of Isaiah 1:9 in particular, Luther utters that the third group of Isaiah's Jewish audiences represents 'a few survivors,' and they are in fact 'the seed' of the spiritual kingdom of Christ. As said above, the particular position of

34) LW 16:14; WA 31.2:9: "Promiserat deus se fore deum Abrahae et seminis eius in perpetuum, propter hanc promissionem semper manent in Iudeis, qui ad Christum pertinent et propter Christum oportuit manere regnum Iudeorum, qui in eo voluit nasci et praedicare et mori, videlicet lil promissus.

the physical kingdom of the Jews results from God's promise of Christ offered to them, and from Luther's perspective the definite promise of Christ's advent is in the strictest sense given to the third group of people only, that is, 'those who are of God.' According to Luther, 'a few survivors,' or 'the remnants' among Isaiah's contemporary Jews signify the root and the stump from which the spiritual kingdom of Christ would arise. In Luther's view, the 'physical' kingdom of the Jews can be regarded as 'spiritual' because of the existence of the third kind of audiences, the remnants, and when Isaiah prophesies to them, he makes a smooth transition between speaking of the physical kingdom and of the spiritual kingdom. Luther comments,

Therefore this people could not be completely rejected until the lawful reign of Christ had come. And this is why the prophets move over from the physical kingdom to the spiritual, even though they are regarded as fanatics for not preserving the order.³⁵⁾

Regarding Luther's view of 'a few survivors,' Preus argues that by the time of the second Psalm lectures (1518-21), it is evident that Luther developed the notion of the 'faithful synagogue' as being identified with the historical remnants of the Jews. ³⁶⁾ In his Isaiah lectures, Luther specifies that the Jewish remnants are no one but the third group of hearers of law and the promise of grace was offered to them in specific. Because of the continuity between the faithful synagogue (the Jewish remnants) and the Church, Luther makes clear that Christians can take the faithful synagogue in the Old Testament

35) LW 16:27; WA 31.2:19: "Ideoque non potuit hic populus in totum reiici, donec venisset legitimum regnum Christi. Atque haec est causa, cur prophetae a regno corporali transeant ad spiritual, ut putentur esse phanatici nec servare ordinem."

36) Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 217.

as a model and norm for their faith. As to Luther's conception of the historical continuity between the synagogue and the Church, Childs's observation is worthy to be noted:

Therefore, we see a parallel between faithful Israel, who has embraced God's salvation while continuing to long for Christ's spiritual advent, and the true church of the New Testament, which continues to live in the same tension between being already redeemed, but not yet. In sum, according to Preus, Luther's supercessionist theology respecting the Old Testament was radically altered by a new grasp of a faithful witness to Christ preceding the period of the new covenant.³⁷⁾

In Luther's view, the remnants, the third group of hearers of law among Isaiah's contemporary Jews, are the very reason of why Isaiah employs the method of transition between speaking of the physical kingdom of the Jews and the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Since the seed of new spiritual people is hidden inside the crowd of old physical people, while Isaiah speaks to his contemporary multitudes concerning impending judgment such as the Babylonian captivity, he at the same time speaks to the remnants regarding Christ's advent in the spiritual kingdom.

Conclusion

In his examination of the history of Christian interpretation of Isaiah, Childs concludes that there is a 'family resemblance' among Christian exegetes ranging from the patristic and the medieval commentators to the Protestant exegetes such as Luther and Calvin. Childs summarizes four primary features of the

37) Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, 190.

Christian exegesis of Isaiah as such: 1) acknowledgment of the divine authority of Scripture; 2) emphasis on the unity of the Two Testaments; 3) the divine as well as human authorship of Scripture; 4) the book's christological implications.³⁸⁾ Childs's observation is right in that Luther in the lectures without doubt shares the characteristics of the Christian exegesis of Isaiah, and Luther's conviction that the *scopus* of Scripture in its entirety is Christ is based on the traditional view of the unity of the Old and the New Testament. Despite the apparent continuity, however, it is also evident that Luther's interpretation of Isaiah introduced noticeable changes in the history of exegesis.

First of all, Luther in the lectures on Isaiah does not consider Isaiah primarily as an 'evangelist' of Christ as both patristic and medieval commentators had traditionally assumed.³⁹⁾ As examined above, from Luther's perspective Isaiah is first and foremost a 'preacher' of law as well as of gospel. Luther's view of Isaiah as preacher is relevant to his distinctive understanding of the Pauline antithesis between the letter and the Spirit. Luther believes that Paul's intention of distinguishing the letter from the Spirit is not so much about the literal and the spiritual sense of Scripture as about two kinds of preaching ministry. According to Luther, the Old Testament prophet performs not only the killing ministry of law but also the saving ministry of gospel. Thus, it is clear that Luther perceives the Old Testament prophet's primary office in the light of his new

38) See Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, 299-324.

39) See Pak, "Rethinking Prophecy: The Functions of Prophecy in the Writings of Argular von Grumbach and Martin Luther," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 14 (2012), 153: "If one takes into consideration the shifting views of prophecy promulgated by early sixteenth-century Lutheran and Reformed male leaders, one would need to operate with a definition of prophecy that does not singularly focus upon prediction, vision and ecstasy. Rather, the focus would need to be upon the function of prophecy in relation to the interpretation of Scripture."

hermeneutics of the dialectical relationship between law and gospel. While the Old Testament prophets share the chief ministry of Moses, that is, to condemn sinners and to reveal their inability to fulfill laws, they at the same time not only proclaim God's physical deliverance but also offer the spiritual promise of the coming Christ. From Luther's eyes, the Old Testament prophet's primary duty is 'to kill' as well as 'to save.'

It is important to note that Luther's perception of the prophet as preacher of law and gospel is associated with his high regard of the 'literal' sense of Scripture. Luther does not divide the senses of prophecy dichotomously, as if the prophet's message to his contemporaries were the literal-historical meaning and his promise of Christ were the spiritual meaning of prophecy. Luther's hermeneutics of the Old Testament prophecy has nothing to do with an exegetical attempt to find an allegorical sense beyond, underneath, or around the literal-historical sense of Scripture. Instead of a dualistic juxtaposition of the literal and the spiritual sense, Luther's suggestion of the proper reading of the Old Testament prophecy is to recognize the method of 'transition.' The Old Testament prophet, according to Luther, makes a smooth and subtle transition between the two literal senses of Scripture, one related to the physical kingdom of his contemporary Jews, and the other concerned with the spiritual kingdom of Christ. In the lectures on Isaiah 1 in specific, Luther makes certain that the prophet applies the method of transition to the third group of audiences in particular, that is, those who are called 'a few survivors,' 'the remnants,' or 'the faithful synagogue.' Isaiah the preacher speaks to the particular group of people in the historical context, and according to his twofold intention, Isaiah makes a transition between speaking of God's impending judgment (law) and of His plan of salvation (gospel). Because of the historical continuity between the faithful synagogue and the Christian

Church, Luther suggests that the Old Testament prophecy's literal-historical meaning does not need to be spiritualized for Christians. From Luther's perspective, if the reader correctly understands the prophet's intention 'to kill' and 'to save,' God's word will do its work for him properly.

<주요어>

마틴 루터, 성서해석사, 구약의 예언, 예언자, 이사야, 율법과 복음, 성서의 문자적 의미

<Key words>

Martin Luther, History of Exegesis, the Old Testament Prophecy, the Biblical Prophet, the Book of Isaiah, Law and Gospel, the Literal Sense of Scripture

* Received March 8, 2017, Revised March 26, 2017, Accepted March 31, 2017

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<초록>

마틴 루터의 구약 예언 해석

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송인서

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본 논문은 성서 해석사라는 보다 넓은 관점에서 마틴 루터의 구약 성서 예언에 대한 이해를 상술함을 주 목적으로 한다. 본 연구는 서론에서 Brevard Childs와 C. A. Evans, 그리고 John Sawyer 와 Ross Wagner 와 같은 학자들이 제시한 비평적인 이사야 해석에 대한 다양한 현대적 견해들을 간략히 소개한다. 학자들의 이사야에 대한 두 가지 상반된 주장들을 배경으로, 본 연구는 과연 루터가 ‘어떻게 이사야를 비평적으로 읽어야 하는가?’라는 신학적 질문에 도움이 될만한 대답을 줄 수 있는지 살펴보고자 한다. 본 논문은 먼저 중세의 사중적 해석 (the medieval Quadriga)의 관점에서 루터의 해석학적 발견을 개괄적으로 설명한 후, 루터가 바울의 ‘문자’와 ‘영’의 이분법을 ‘문자적 의미’와 ‘영적 의미’의 분리가 아닌, ‘율법’과 ‘복음’의 변증법적 관계로 이해했음을 기술한다. 본 연구는 또한 루터가 구약의 예언자를 단순히 율법의 집행자, 임박한 심판의 예고자, 또는 미래 오실 그리스도에 관한 전도자라는 역할로 이해한 것이 아니라, 오히려 ‘율법과 복음의 설교자’로 인식하였음을 주장한다. 루터의 율법과 복음의 변증법적 해석학과 그의 ‘설교자’로서의 예언자 이해를 바탕으로, 본 논문은 루터가 주장하는 구약 예언자들의 공통적인 전달 수단(방법론), 즉, ‘두 문자적 의미들 사이의 전환(transition)’에 대해 설명한다. 끝으로 본 소고는 루터의 이사야 1장 강해의 사례 연구를 통하여 루터의 새로운 해석학, 설교자로서의 예언자의 역할, 예언자의 방법론에 관한 이해가 실제 주석에서 어떻게 적용되었는지를 살펴보고자 한다.

<Abstract>

Martin Luther's Hermeneutics of the Old Testament Prophecy:

The Case of Isaiah 1

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The article's primary goal is to articulate Martin Luther's interpretation of the Old Testament prophecy in the broad history of Christian exegesis. The study begins with introducing two major views of the proper meaning of Isaiah in the relationship between the two Testaments proposed by Brevard Childs and C. A. Evans on the one hand and John Sawyer and Ross Wagner on the other hand. Considering the opposite views of Isaiah suggested by contemporary scholars, the study aims to examine Luther's thought of the proper way of interpreting the Old Testament prophecy. Firstly, the article discusses Luther's hermeneutics of Scripture with the backdrop of the patristic and medieval division between the spiritual and the literal sense. In contrast to the positions of James S. Preus and Gerhard Ebeling, the study demonstrates that Luther's rejection of the medieval *Quadrigena* results from his view of the Pauline antithesis of the letter and the Spirit as distinguishing of law and gospel. The article moves to examine Luther's perception of the Old Testament prophet and contends that Luther regards the prophet primarily as 'preacher' of law as well as gospel. Also, the study elaborates Luther's articulation of the prophet's method of 'transition' between the two literal senses and explains how it is related to his conception of the dialectical

relationship between law and gospel and between the two kingdoms. Finally, the article examines Luther's lectures on Isaiah 1 as a case study and demonstrates how Luther's hermeneutical principle, his view of the prophet as preacher, and the method of transition were actually played out in his exegesis.

