

It is well at this moment to pause briefly to examine a few of the principles and aims which we have before us in the course in the Old Testament Prophetic Books. Our object is not primarily to learn what the books teach. It is to get sound methods of interpretation. Now in this connection I would like to mention first the so-called grammatico-historical method of interpretation. This method I am convinced is the proper method to use in interpreting any section of the Bible. The amillennialists make their mistake in restricting this method to the historical and didactic portions of the Scriptures, and in excluding it from the prophetic portions to which they apply utterly vague principles. The premillennialists may err in the opposite direction. That is to say, they may choose simply to select isolated verses here and there, and put them together in the form of a teaching without regard to context or local situations. This is equally wrong with the vague amillennialist method. Both of them should apply the historical-grammatico method of interpretation.

Now just what do we mean by the grammatico-historical method of interpretation? It is a method of interpretation which first looks at the words and examines them from the viewpoint of grammar. It says, "What does this particular word mean?" But it also examines it in the viewpoint of history. That is to say, it says, "What did this particular word mean at the particular period at which this was written?" It seeks for evidence as to the use and understanding of these words at that time. It seeks to find what would have been understood by the hearers who received these words. What did the forms of language used convey as to meaning at that time? What was the thought background of the people who heard them? For language is a method of communication which seeks to convey ideas to a man in terms of something which is already familiar to him. It is only thus that language can be used properly. The Bible is not just a set of symbols which had no meaning to the people at the time at which it was written, but which assumes meaning in our later day. It is rather words addressed to the people at the time. This does not mean, of course, that they would be able to understand everything which came before them at