

Book Reviews

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012). Pp. xvi + 158. \$25.

Brueggemann returns to wrestling with the prophets of Israel, moving beyond analysis of the texts to recall the church to its prophetic role. In six chapters B. fleshes out his guiding thesis: “prophetic proclamation is an attempt to imagine the world as though YHWH—the creator of the world, the deliverer of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we Christians come to name as Father, Son, and Spirit—were a real character and an effective agent in the world” (p. 2).

In the first chapter, “The Narrative Embedment of Prophetic Preaching,” the reader is led to consider how this initial thesis challenges the narrative that dominates American life, which B. names as “therapeutic, technological, consumerist militarism.” B. builds his case with a second thesis: “prophetic proclamation is the staging or performance of a contest between two narrative accounts of the world and an effort to show that the YHWH account of reality is more adequate and finally more reliable than the dominant narrative account that is cast among us as though it were true and beyond critique” (p. 3). B. challenges further saying, “Membership in that alternative narrative is consequently realized and enhanced though socialization in education and pastoral nurture” (p. 4).

The titles of the following five chapters outline B’s use of the prophetic literature of the Bible to reveal both the process and product of the prophetic voices as they addressed the myths, narratives, and institutions of the royal theology of Jerusalem. He suggests that such a process and its product are needed to speak to the grief and loss left by the failure that the myths, narratives, and institutions embodied in the American self-identity.

In chap. 2, “Prophetic Preaching as Sustained, Disciplined, Emancipated Imagination,” B. reminds us that the prophets of Israel addressed the royal theology of the Jerusalem establishment and offered a covenantal alternative to that dominant narrative. The prophetic “imagination” concentrated on the actions of God in creation, exodus, and covenant. Prophetic imagination today must focus on hope in the God who acts for God in the world God created.

Brueggemann examines the terrible loss that the prophets perceived in chap. 3, “Loss Imagined as Divine Judgment.” He calls contemporary preachers to echo the prophets in

facing the “*reality of loss*” that is ignored by the contemporary dominant narrative. Like the prophets of Israel, our prophetic preachers must proclaim that none of our former solutions will save the world as we know it. B. calls our attention to the use of the language of lament (woe) and judgment (therefore) that shattered the denial and unacknowledged grief experienced in Judah/Israel.

In the fourth chapter, “A Lingering Place of Relinquishment,” B. returns to his initial thesis as a way to make sense of the long, lingering reality of God and Israel’s state of grief. He turns to the psalms of lament in which Israel, despite its loss, assumes that it can still cry out to God and that God is obligated to respond. B. demonstrates how our prophetic heritage provides the necessary language to address the loss and grief denied by those wedded to the myths and institutions of the American narrative. Yet the prophetic lament is not the finale of prophetic preaching. Beyond the grief is the hope for a divine response that will overcome the sense of cultural and political loss. B. states, “In a society either beset by denial (that refuses to acknowledge loss) or committed to despair (that settles into abiding loss), the prophetic task is the voicing of *the process of loss* that moves from grief to possibility” (p. 96).

That movement into possibility is the subject of chap. 5, “The Burst of Newness Amid Waiting.” The prophets and psalmists called grieving Israel to look up from its losses, and to wait for the Lord to act in the midst of that loss. Such hopeful waiting requires the renewal of trust in the goodness and faithfulness of God’s nature.

Chapter 6, “The Continuing Mandate,” brings forth from the prophetic process and product a call for truly prophetic preachers to speak to the grief, discomfort, and fears of our current reality. Such words will emerge from those who immerse themselves in the prophetic journey of the Bible and who step forth with the courage to set out on that same journey in our time.

In returning to the prophetic literature of the Bible, B. challenges the church to speak the truth to the loss, discomfort, and fears that challenge the myths, narratives, and institutions of the American identity. He calls us to the hard faithfulness of waiting for the Lord our God to act faithfully for us.

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CHRISTOPH A. GASSER, *Apokryphe Psalmen aus Qumran: Ihr Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Kanon* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2010). Pp. 201. Paper €28.80.

Gasser’s work is the revised version of his doctoral thesis written under the supervision of Klaus Seybold (Basel, 2002). G.’s thesis addresses two topics rather than one. Discussing four earlier publications, which, though based on different approaches and considering different issues, all touch on the question of the canon and the Qumran psalms, G. deals with the Qumran psalms manuscripts’ significance for the understanding of the canon and the process of canonization (chap. 2). He also offers a short commentary on 4QPs^f and 11QPs^a (chaps. 4 and 5).

Two short chapters that precede the two more extensive parts of the book are only loosely connected. A brief first chapter offers a description of the history of the discovery of the scrolls, and another short chapter preceding the fourth discusses the possibilities of