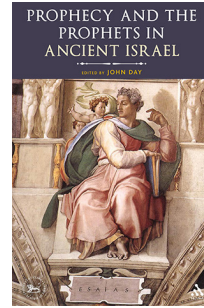


Book Review

John Day.

Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar
The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014 (ISBN #:978-0567299369).

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This volume edited by John Day consists of twenty-three essays originally delivered as papers to the Oxford Old Testament seminar between Jan. 2006-Oct. 2008. These essays offer a major contribution to the study of prophecy and the prophets in ancient Israel ranging from the earliest history of the ancient near East, to the Old Testament, and leading up to the beginning of the New Testament time period. These essays have been revised and expanded since, and the collection is the product of a global academic effort.

This work consists of four parts. Part I covers the ancient near Eastern context of prophecy which offers a historical and cultural foundation for later prophecy in ancient Israel. Part II addresses specific prophetic themes such as the concept of the prophetess within the Hebrew Bible, and the ideas of interpersonal forgiveness within the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Part III views prophecy and the prophets through sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives. Part IV concentrates on prophecy and prophets in specific biblical books.

Part I describes the ancient Near Eastern cultural context of prophecy in ancient Israel and the Old Testament. The very first essay by Martti Nissinen provides a comparison of extrabiblical and ancient Hebrew prophetic sources. Ancient Israelite prophecy is but a part

(albeit distinctive in its own right) of a larger picture of a prophetic tradition within the Ancient Near East. The similarities between the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and extrabiblical prophetic writings are evident, in particular the book of Amos and the Assyrian oracle of Bayâ. In the book of Amos “the relationship between Amaziah, Amos and Jeroboam corresponds well with what we know about the relationship between priests, prophets and kings,” in many other Near Eastern prophetic documents (Nissinen, 13). Nissinen also traces the condition of prophecy in the post-monarchical period of Israel’s history, noting the strong Babylonian influences upon Israelite prophecy.

Part II consists of two essays on specific themes of prophecy—the first being the prophetess in the Hebrew Bible, and the second being the concept of interpersonal forgiveness in the Hebrew prophets. In the fourth essay, H.G.M. Williamson indicates that there are “five references to individual prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible,” which interestingly the Talmud lists seven, of which only three correspond with those mentioned unequivocally in the Hebrew Bible (Williamson, 65). Williamson presents the first prophetess as Noadiah, who is mentioned as challenging Nehemiah’s building campaign (Neh.6:14). The second prophetess is Moses’ sister Miriam. The third prophetess is Deborah the judge of Israel, of whom Williamson argues can and should be categorized as a prophetess

and argues such from textual evidence found in Judges 4, although contends that “it is not clearly phrased in such a way as to compel that title” (Williamson, 69). However, according to Williamson, it remains clear that written prophecy remains a male preserve.

Part III provides an overview of the prophetic books and the biblical topic of prophecy from a sociological, anthropological and psychological perspective. Prophecy is reexamined in light of former social criticism within prophetic scholarship to properly understand prophecy in an accurate sociological environment within ancient Israel. The Israelite prophets are compared to parallel forms of prophecy, such as that of shamans and spirit mediums, found in extrabiblical Near Eastern cultural and religious milieus. Israelite prophecy is scrutinized under psychological interpretation as well.

Finally Part IV reviews prophecy and prophetic tradition within specific Old Testament books. This is the largest part of the book. It begins with prophecy in Deuteronomy, which “devotes more attention to prophecy—its foundation at Horeb/Sinai, its purpose, and its potential for abuse—than to any other national institution or office, including even kingship” (Day, 151). The coverage extends through the Minor Prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Malachi and Zephaniah, through the Major Prophets such as Deutero-Isaiah and Jeremiah, and up to the introduction of prophecy in the New Testament.

John Collins’ essay “The Sign of Immanuel” in Part IV, offers a prophetic challenge to traditional evangelical theology. Collins contends that “it behooves anyone with an interest in messianism or Christology to try to sort out its original intention and early interpretation,” arguing that the text needs to be read in its original literary and historical

context (Collins, 225). Collins argues through prophetic and textual evidence that the “prophecy” of Immanuel does not point to the coming messiah, but has real implications for King Ahaz during whose reign this prophecy was spoken. According to Collins, Isaiah initial message to Ahaz was one of reassurance which is entirely plausible given the politico-historical context of the Syro-Ephraimite war. Moreover, Isa. 7:1 corresponds closely to 2 Kgs. 16 which includes a narrative about Hezekiah, pointing perhaps to a prophetic connection.

Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar edited by the prominent scholar John Day, delivers a diverse examination of prophecy in ancient Israel. This work is a part of the Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies formerly known as the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, which consists of works of similar scholarly focus and inquiry into more infrequently discussed topics in Old Testament scholarship. The authors of this work provide rich multi-disciplined discourse on a critical element of Old Testament scholarship—Hebrew prophecy and Israelite prophets within the history of the prophetic tradition—often regrettably overlooked in historical and contemporary scholarship. The contributing authors write in somewhat of an erudite manner, making this work suitable mainly for scholarly purposes and pursuits. Many topics in these essays have been left out of modern day scholarship whether for deficiency of knowledge, or scarcity in resources. However, the participating scholars bring rarely discussed topics of prophecy and the prophetic tradition to the forefront of Old Testament scholarship.