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Long Ago God Spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today, by William L. Holladay

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BOOK REVIEWS

LONG AGO GOD SPOKE: HOW CHRISTIANS MAY HEAR THE OLD TESTAMENT TODAY. By William L. Holladay. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995. Pp. x + 353. \$38; \$20.

Holladay's passionate conviction that Christians must "hear" the word of God in the writings which were Scripture for Jesus is apparent throughout this thematic introduction to the Old Testament. It looks first at the pervasive metaphor of the covenantal relationship between the sovereign God of the Jews and Israel; chapters on Israel's understanding of Law, of the "fear of God" and of the "wrath of God" develop aspects of this fundamental metaphor. Four chapters suggest ways Christian readers today can hear the word of God in those sometimes sordid or simply incredible or tedious accounts of "battles" or "signs and wonders" or "lists" of descendants. H. treats the prophetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom materials in separate chapters before turning to an issue which increasingly disturbs women today, the predominance of the male in the narratives and in the image of God as well. A final chapter on the Psalms, under the rubric of "worship," completes this introduction.

Interspersed with his summaries of these writings and their historical context is what H. calls a "manual of theological considerations that can stimulate a reading of the [OT] for *listening*—an expectant listening that heightens the possibilities for hearing God" (1).

Two examples might illustrate his approach. When reviewing the oracles of judgment against Babylon in Jeremiah 50–51 H. suggests that, much as the New Testament used Babylon as a symbol for Rome, so we might "ponder the possibility of seeing our own nation-state as an analogy of Babylon. . . . it may therefore be a useful exercise to ponder the place of the Church within our nation-state after the analogy of the Jews in Babylonian exile" (198). And when treating the Psalms of Lament where today's Christian reader might stumble over the frequent expressions of self-righteousness and hatred of enemies he suggests three approaches: an identification with the victims (a battered woman might find Psalm 41 describes her plight); perceiving the demons within us, such as "habit-forming substance or behavior" (312); and a listening to Jesus' own use of these psalms. In these ways H. hopes to reawaken a "listening" for the voice of God in the OT text today.

In the excellent chapter on male and female, H. deals with the status of women in Israelite society and the relevant texts about the status of males and females before examining at length three "crucial" texts (Genesis 1–3, Jeremiah 31:22 and the Song of Songs) and finding "guidance" on this issue from NT texts. If the "parity" of male and female in Genesis 1 is "never glimpsed, let alone expressed" in

most of the OT, then "in the crucial matter of relations between the sexes the [OT] does not in general offer God's direct voice" (288). Still, there are "occasional feminine images of God" (295) which remind us that in practice we must conceive of a personal God in images that are either male or female, while acknowledging that all talk about God remains metaphor.

H. has omitted those books which appear in Catholic versions (those classified as "Apocrypha" in other versions). It is an unfortunate decision, for these writings are also Scripture for Roman Catholics and there is material in those books which could have aided his interpretations. His treatment of the history of wisdom in Israel seems perfunctory without the inclusion of Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon, the latter a book included even in two early lists of the writings used in the early Christian churches.

While H. is careful to employ historical-critical perspectives for OT materials, locating writings in their probable historical context, he does not make the same effort for NT texts. Indeed, the reader might not know that there even was a historical-critical approach to NT texts or that each writing reflects something of the variety of distinctive theologies which contributed to the developed Christology of the end of the first century. This can often lead to misreadings of NT texts. Moreover, the absence of an extensive table of contents and of an index of subjects reduces this book's usefulness as a "manual"; while an index of scriptural passages is provided, it is not easy to find again a topic that one would like to reread or cite.

This book is, nonetheless, a remarkable effort. It is clear that H. strongly believes the OT is neglected today and that this neglect has impoverished the Christian tradition. Reading the book is like taking a series of seminars with a compassionate and erudite guide, whose own hearing of the word of God in the OT emerges in the process.

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OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY 1-2. By Horst Dietrich Preuss. Translated from the German by Leo G. Perdue. The Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 1995 + 1996. Pp. xii + 372; x + 438. \$34 each volume.

Preuss offers us a magisterial two-volume overview of historical theology as found in the Old Testament. The work abounds in references to classical and contemporary scholars, mostly German, and strikes one as solid, somewhat traditional, but open to new insights.

Preuss dates the Yahwist to the time of David or Solomon, argues strongly for the historical reality of Moses underlying both the Exodus and Sinai traditions, and accepts the Midianite provenance of "Yahweh" and the eventual formation of Israel as a union of tribes around a nucleus of Yhwh-worshippers arriving in Canaan from Egypt, in line with the usual interpretation of Joshua 24. But he shares the reserve