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### **Book Review**

One of our modern understatement of Biblical prophecy is that position and provocateur of status quo are two sides of the prophetic coin. Joseph Blenkinsopp's *A History of Prophecy in Israel* provides a detailed summation of the position of prophet and the history of modern study thereof, from Ancient Near Eastern literature, archaeology and understanding. Far from prophets having an appearance of isolated madmen whose conspiratorial rant was captured on social media, these figures, tethered to a respected Mosaic lineage, were positioned among kings and military commanders with enough political clout to move an entire nation to battle or to their knees under a fast. Blenkinsopp's history moves the reader to see a much larger picture of the Biblical prophet within the political and highly spiritual context of the Ancient Near East. If one wants to understand how measurement of national power and politic go beyond numbers, this book will expound how the prophet's position with and direct access to Yahweh tethered not only all the nations but also their collective stories.

Walter Brueggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination* unleashes prophetic provocation upon static triumphalism and exploitative politics by presence with Yahweh's alternative story of a free God who leads his people in freedom. From numbness and despair to grief and amazement, prophets notoriously provoke society out of a bloated satiation by returning feeling and infusing divine hope. The historical lineage provided within uncovers the enslavement of Pharaoh's Egypt upon Moses' Israel has ironically extended its grip through Israel's history to throne and reign of Solomon, a contrast to an otherwise professed golden age of Israel.

Throughout this line the prophet stands to radically dismantle the royal consciousness through grief, word and action. Throughout this reading I personally experienced both realization and dismantling of personal bias and provocation of preconceived Biblical prophetic viewpoints as a result of reading this book.

Both Blenkinsopp and Brueggemann address the topic of prophecy and role of the Biblical prophet. Blenkinsopp's prophet is most concerned with history. His prophet is one from a long lineage and position of stature, respect and divine connection. Not in contrast but a flip side to the prophetic coin, Brueggemann's prophet is most concerned with role. His prophet is divinely tasked with awaking the spiritually sleeping giant that the status quo has induced into a satiated coma. As the dominant culture, led by a dominating kingship soaks in all culture, resources, peoples and even time (i.e. specifically the "eternal" attribution to its kingship) the subsequent culture is leached of life, nourishment and, dare we say, color.

Blenkinsopp's prophet was just as involved in the judicial, political and military decisions as a king and in the spiritual matters of the nation as a priest. The seat of the prophet was one of honor and often involved schools of prophets that provided training and a passing on of tradition and prophecies, including but not limited to the writings we have still today. These prophets were not drugged wanderers but intelligent and educated people with societal stature. Brueggemann's prophet arises amidst cultural intoxication through criticism of the present and a presentation of a hope-filled future. Life, through this view of the prophet, is injected into death, light is beamed into darkness, and freedom is declared over all captivity. The seat of his prophet was full of wisdom, common sense and equipped with every day emotions that proclaimed life and demanded daily strengthening through usage. While Blenkinsopp's prophet is one of documented

history, Bruggemann's prophet is one of active societal awakening. Blenkinsopp's prophets are  
have all died on the pages of scripture while Bruggemann's prophets live on through message,  
role and divine provocation.

The argument of Blenkinsopp is exactly what his title declares: a history of prophecy in  
which he keeps "our attention fixed on the actual phenomenon of prophecy in Israel  
(Blenkinsopp, 1)" and its placement within the larger context of Ancient Near East artifacts.  
Blenkinsopp does not appear to introduce his thoughts on theology but provide examination of  
what he knows from his own research and critique of others. At points throughout he promotes  
willingness to accept non-Israelite artifacts as evidence of actual prophecy and yet critical and  
less accepting of the Israelite prophetic artifacts we are attempting to study. As much as his  
portrait of the historical position of prophet greatly expanded my personal purview I was left  
wondering if the author actually believes the message given by these Biblical prophets and  
whether or not they held, and still hold spiritual significance beyond the political and national  
audience to whom they were spoken and recorded in centuries past.

Bruggemann, on the other hand, embodied the message of the Biblical prophet by  
extending said message (i.e. collective) to his readership today. This author's argument centers  
upon his desire to see prophecy return to its long-avoided place in ministry and again claim its  
status as a "crucial element" (Bruggemann, xxxvii). He expends his argument through retelling  
the Biblical prophetic perspective and placing upon the reader the need for key prophetic tasks  
amidst the royal consciousness of the day that is not too removed from the status quo of at the  
least modern American society. His conclusion, as the reader goes beyond this course's  
prescribed boundary, pinnacles in Christ Jesus and his resurrection from the dead as the ultimate

exclamation point in the overall prophetic provocation. I couldn't agree more and was greatly encouraged in my spirit and thirst for learning that this book is essential to assignment in our course of study.

Of the two books, I came alive with notes, highlights, escapades into scripture and cross references while engaging conversation with peers both during and since reading this book. I have further recommended it to no less than three friends in their exploration into discipleship with Christ Jesus. The Blenkinsopp text, on the other hand, was a very powerful aid to sleep induction.

Both Blenkinsopp and Brueggemann expanded my assumptions and presuppositions about Israelite prophecy. My view of the Biblical prophets as go-it-alone "X-factors" who might show up in the king's court at a moments notice with a life-altering message was challenged by Blenkinsopp to understand there were likely more prophets in the land as a profession than we have identified and recorded in our scriptural texts. The prophetic position was highly valued and fulfilled, even in other ANE nations outside of Israel. This helps me appreciate all the more the prophetic writings we have in existence today and increases my imagination about the context in which they each lived, spoke and experienced. I grieve the fact that more existed and the potential for their documentations has been lost without trace as to what their experience of Yahweh may or may not have been and how much greater our view of Yahweh could be today had records been documented and saved.

My view of prophets as nay-sayers and black sheep of the Israelite family was directly challenged by Brueggemann to recognize that role prophets played in awakening a society to the heart of Yahweh, from whom they drifted away by idolizing kings, powers and societal norms

that Yahweh himself purported and positioned. Prophet as criticizer and prophet as energizer is the ultimate dichotomy of Yahweh's continued people gift to humanity in awakening a sleeping, if not already dead, society from its slumber. This helps me perceive with greater interest the modern day prophets among us and encourages me to listen more intently to Yahweh's voice speaking in our midst through, not only his people then, but also his people now. If Yahweh is the same yesterday, today and forever, and his prophetic voice is intent on criticizing and energizing the peoples, then what is this alternative future he speaks into the status quo of our time? This I am compelled to pursue.