

*VESTNIKI TSARSTVA: BOGOSLOVIE VETKHOZAVETNYKH PROROKOV. [MESSENGERS OF THE KINGDOM: THE THEOLOGY OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS].* BY ALEKSEI PROKOPENKO. TVER': TPK, 2015. Pp. 411. ISBN 978-5-9905130-8-2; 150.00 UAH.\*

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The Old Testament, particularly the theology of the Old Testament prophets, is a subject that has seriously lacked attention on the part of both church and academic communities in the post-Soviet setting. Therefore, any contribution to this topic is doubtless of value. *Messengers of the Kingdom* by Aleksei Prokopenko was published in 2015. According to the author, the book was the result of a seminar conducted at Word of Grace Church. It is intended for a wide circle of readers who wish to be acquainted with the prophetic books of the Old Testament. What contribution to research on Old Testament teaching does this book make?

The book consists of six sections. The first, the introduction, discusses the subjective side of the prophetic phenomenon. The author examines the most frequently-used terms in the Old Testament: אִיבֵּן (*nabi*, “prophet”), הַזֶּה (*choze*, “seer”), הָאֵר (*roe*, “seer”), and אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים (*ish Elohim* “man of God”). However, the survey of terms is done superficially, apparently without the use of theological reference literature, such as *NIDOTTE*<sup>1</sup> or *TDOT*.<sup>2</sup> Later on it is asserted that the distinction between prophets and priests consisted in the absence of hereditary continuity, the character of transmitted news, and the absence of prescriptions in the Law. The author postulates that “the prophets transmitted new revelation” (p. 26). This can lead the reader into error, since the message of the prophets could not contradict Torah. Prophecy could either interpret Torah, or call (invite) to Torah; however, it could not convey new teaching.

“Prophetic calling” is examined through the examples of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. According to 2 Peter 2:1, the key difference from false prophets was the absence of calling. Inasmuch as the main criterion for verifying a prophecy is its fulfillment, the author writes: “If a prophet ‘guessed right’ in 90% of all cases, and did not hit the mark 10% of the time, then he had to be recognized as a false prophet” (p. 31). However, in this section nothing is said about those canonical prophecies that were not fulfilled during the lifetime of the prophet. The reader will find this information only at the very end of the book. The portrait of the false prophet is superficial and one-sided. The author remains

<sup>1</sup> *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974-2015).

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silent concerning the fact that false prophets were also patriots of their kingdom, who wished it well and desired its flourishing.

The main role of a prophet was “to be God’s loudspeaker” (p. 33). This deductive argument is taken from Exodus 4:15-16, where Moses and Aaron act in the roles of the source and transmitter of prophecy. The author maintains that since Aaron could not alter the essence of the message, neither could prophets influence prophecy. However, this supposition does not take into consideration those instances when the prophet nevertheless was able to influence the essence of the message, for example Amos 7:1-6. The author identifies but does not reveal the significance of the messenger’s formula, which deprives the reader of the opportunity to see the prophet in the context of the historical-cultural background of the ancient Near East.

In addition, a list of the prophet’s functions is presented: judgment, witness, prediction, indication, morality, and correction. Obviously, this list does not qualify prophets from the perspective of ancient international relationships, inasmuch as it does not take into consideration prophecies against other nations and says nothing about what relationship these prophecies had to the people of ancient Israel and Judah.

The author concludes the first section with the chapter “Getting acquainted with the prophets,” where an analysis is given of names, dates, and basic ideas. Earlier the author stated that he would not examine in detail the authorship, date, and structure of each book (p. 14). Probably for this reason, instead of examining the results of a critical approach to these issues, the author acquaints the reader with dates taken from the *Study Bible* edited by John MacArthur. On p. 57 he speaks of the destruction of Samaria in 722 BCE. The reader should take care, since this text goes beyond information from the historian Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, IX.14). The historical background is presented superficially, without reference to corresponding literature.

Sections two through six are dedicated to the object of the prophetic phenomenon, that is the content of the message itself. The author employs five “views”: above, behind, immediate, to the side, and forward. The second section is dedicated to the view from above, where the author regards those themes involving God, His qualities and His Words. Looking behind in the third section he examines teaching about the past, although historical information is treated quite superficially. In the fourth section, looking at the immediate view, directly before the reader, the author describes themes of sin, judgment, and salvation.

The fifth section, the view from the side, is dedicated to pagan nations. The subject is the conversion and salvation of other peoples; Christocentric and eschatological interpretations are adapted for several prophetic passages. The sixth section, the view forward, examines a picture of world history on the basis of the Book of Daniel. The concept of the “Day of the Lord” is used as unique to Old Testament prophets, and also the author’s own “schedule” of eschatological events is offered. For example, 2,300 evenings and mornings are considered 6.3 years (p. 180), and the heavenly army is the people of Israel. The author selectively employs a grammatical analysis, his own logic, and imagination to interpret the prophecies.

“God’s kingdom” is the longest chapter of the final section. The author devotes 110 pages to it, since the theme of the kingdom occupies a central place in Scripture (p. 237). Information on this theme in the prophetic books is divided into four areas: political, spiritual, household and economic, and natural. In the first part, the situation of Israel in the Promised Land, the presence of God in Jerusalem, and the history of the Messianic Kingdom, transformed into an Eternal Kingdom are discussed. The spiritual sphere includes God’s relationship with people: the New Covenant, repentance, Israel’s cleansing and service to God, including the temple and temple service. The author examines the use of the Mosaic Law during the Kingdom, especially those precepts concerned with ritual cleanliness. Information about the temple draws mainly on the Book of Ezekiel, but nothing is said about the difference between Ezekiel’s temple and Mosaic standards.

The household and economic spheres of the Messianic Kingdom are issues of demographic, social, and economic aspects: the mass return of the Jews, building projects with the help of non-Jews, the increase of riches and well-being. Concerning the natural sphere, the author describes changes in the living and non-living natural world during the Millennial Kingdom. Israel’s landscape changes, as does the climate of Palestine and the human being’s physical characteristics. However, in this section the reader will see the use of no other literary resources besides MacArthur’s *Study Bible*. The changes in the animal world consist in the transformation of predators into herbivores (p. 284), which will be a local phenomenon. But here the author asserts: “The only blood that will be shed anywhere around the temple will be that of sacrificial animals...” If the reader has any doubts about what sacrifice might be relevant during the time of Christ’s rule, the answer must be sought in other chapters.

The second half of the section reveals various aspects of teaching on the Kingdom. Various methods of interpreting eschatological prophecies are surveyed. As a proponent of the literal method of interpretation, the author criticizes the allegorical method.

As for the question of sacrifice in the Millennial Kingdom, the author considers that since “*Shekhina*” will be present in the Kingdom, it follows that sacrifices will become a necessity. They will be the instrument for expressing reverence for the visible presence of the glory of God. The author directly transfers the laws regulating temple service to the epoch of the Millennial Kingdom. In that case, the reader may conclude that the sacrifice of Christ is insufficient to remove ritual pollution. It follows that sacrifice with the spilled blood of animals remains a necessity for born-again Christians.

The reader may ask why, in the epoch of the Church, when a believing person has become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), there is no need to bring sacrifices for similar conditions? The author offers no answer to this question, but assumes that the availability of temple utensils also confirms the necessity of sacrifice. According to the author’s logic and literal method of interpretation, the necessity of ritual sacrifice is conditioned by the period of the presence of God’s glory on an earth polluted by sin. However, in the new earth this will not be necessary (p. 341).

The final chapter, “Messiah King,” is dedicated to the qualities, ministry, and goals of the Messiah. A Christocentric method of reading of a few miscellaneous Old Testament

texts is employed. There is no classification in the chapter; that is, it is not clear which text is considered messianic and for what reason. Most likely the reader will come up with more questions concerning this chapter than useful information. The information offered is superficial in nature and is often not even explained. For example, it is asserted that Jesus “as the Anointed One, contains in himself the roles of all three of the anointed: He is King, prophet, and priest” (p. 347). However, when and where did Jesus undergo the ritual of anointing? The author transfers the names and titles from Isaiah 7 and 9 to Jesus. But where and when was Jesus called Emmanuel? Wonderful Counselor? Everlasting father? Prince of peace? Unfortunately, the reader will not find any information in this chapter concerning the development of this theme.

Let us summarize. The book is written for a wide circle of readers; it reads easily; no difficult academic theological terminology is used. It contains a wide range of varied information, however, for this reason it is not profound. The book’s place in the academic context is determined by its eschatological position, dispensational premillennialism. As a result, it uses the historical-grammatical method and a literal interpretation of biblical texts.

The book could be useful to those who are interested in the beginnings of Christian theology. For students of Christian higher learning institutions, beginning with the Bachelor’s level, the book cannot serve as a textbook, in spite of the fact that it is written by a Russian-speaking author for a Russian-speaking audience. Considering the brisk growth of Christian education and the abundance of contemporary foreign literature, the use of this book in subsequent academic research is an open question and quite unlikely.

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