

RBL 06/26/2000

Schniedewind, William M.
The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period

JSOTSup 197

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995. Pp. 275, Cloth, £27.50/\$41.00, ISBN
1850755507.

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In this extremely valuable study, a revised version of a doctoral dissertation completed at Brandeis in 1992, Schniedewind examines aspects of continuity and distinction in post-exilic prophecy. Emphasizing that the study of the post-exilic period must break out of the assumptions of Wellhausen analysis--that post-exilic religion was in decline, so post-exilic prophecy was also in decline--Schniedewind details the emergence of a new kind of prophet, the inspired messenger, who no longer simply receives the "word of God," but interprets the "word of God." Schniedewind is particularly interested in the book of Chronicles, which "provides us with a unique opportunity to see the ideas of a post-exilic writer concerning the pre-exilic period," and in which "emerges a picture of the inspired text interpreter set against the portrait of the classical prophets" (p. 11).

The book consists of six carefully constructed, extremely dense chapters as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction offers a review of scholarship on post-exilic prophecy and concentrates on the flurry of recent work on prophecy and prophets in Chronicles. In fact, Schniedewind's book is a response to critical issues raised by studies of Chronicles during the last two decades: the form-critical aspects of the prophetic speeches, the Chronicler's use of earlier traditions, the prophetic role of the Levites, the relationship between the prophet and the king, and the prophetic references in the source citations. Each of these issues is explored in subsequent chapters.

Schniedewind begins chapter 1 (pp. 31-79) by analyzing prophetic titles (i.e., *nabiy*, *hozeh* "man of God") and inspiration formulas (messenger, intermediary, possession, and enactment formulas) used by the Chronicler. He then compares and contrasts them with their use elsewhere in biblical literature. Schniedewind concludes that although the bearer of a prophetic title is the messenger of God, there are also messengers from God who do not bear prophetic titles but are still inspired by God. In the case of these inspired messengers, a variety of inspiration formulas act in lieu of a

prophetic title as a claim to prophetic speech. Further, Schniedewind asserts that the developments and innovations in inspiration formulas used in the book of Chronicles reflect the author's own days in which a distinction was made between "prophets" and other figures who "prophesied." Thus, the Chronicler used classical prophetic formulas ("thus says YHWH"; "the word of YHWH came to") with those who had prophetic role labels. On the other hand, he used non-classical formulas (i.e., "the spirit clothed") for figures who did not have prophetic role labels.

Chapter 2 (pp. 80-129) analyzes the prophetic speeches by grouping them according to the prophetic titles (prophets) and inspiration formulas ("inspired messengers") discussed in chapter 1. Schniedewind concludes that the most obvious difference between the speeches is the audience addressed. Inspired messengers like the Levite Jahaziel address the people, while speakers with prophetic titles address themselves to the king, a distinction which implies that the role of the prophet would end with the monarchy. Further, their roles differ markedly. Inspired messengers serve to exhort and warn (2 Chr 15:7; 20:15). Prophets, however, "are called upon to answer the questions of causality which the Deuteronomistic History left open" (p. 127). Although there was no role for the prophet in the Chronicler's kingless post-exilic society, Schniedewind argues that there "was still a role for *prophecy* and ultimately, for a 'prophetic voice'" (p. 128). It is in Chronicles that we begin to see a new kind of prophecy, namely inspired interpretation of traditional texts, authorized by the spirit of God, which revitalized God's word for the Chronicler's contemporary community.

Chapter 3, "The 'Word of God' in Transition" (pp. 130-62), takes up the Chronicler's resignification of the "word of YHWH" (from prophetic oracles to "the law of Moses"), and his reinterpretation of the prophecies in Samuel-Kings. Boldly rewriting the word of God, the Chronicler revitalized the traditions of Samuel-Kings for his own post-exilic generation. Thus, for a community which placed increasing importance on the temple, "the Chronicler rewrites and recontextualizes the dynastic oracle so that it justifies the building of the temple and introduces his comprehensive description of the temple and its institutions" (p. 143). Further, the Chronicler's post-exilic setting, in which the written word was gradually replacing the oral word of the prophets, led to his resignification of the very term which classical prophecy uses for the prophetic word, "word of YHWH." In Chronicles, the "word of YHWH" comes to refer to the entire Mosaic legislation. Indeed, Schniedewind asserts that the "deuteronomistic depiction of Moses as both prophet and lawgiver portends the merging of prophecy and law as the 'word of YHWH'" (p. 137).

The key role which the Levites play in Chronicles is the topic of chapter 4 (pp. 163-88). Schniedewind argues that the general characterization of Levites as prophets is unwarranted because although prophecy is attributed to the heads of the levitical singers (Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun), it is not attributed to the Levites as a group, nor are Levites who do not belong to the levitical singers given prophetic titles. The Chronicler did, however, consider levitical music to be inspired and regarded composing and performing

music in the temple as "prophetic activity." Schniedewind points out that the preeminent role of the Levites in Chronicles conforms to the Chronicler's social reality, "reflecting the Chronicler's notion of who were the more important players in the social organization of post-exilic Israel" (p. 186).

Responding to James Newsome's doctoral dissertation, *The Chronicler's View of Prophecy* (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1973), chapter 5 (pp. 189-208) addresses the question of royal prophecy and focuses, in particular, on David's prophetic role in Chronicles. Although David does have a special position in the books of Chronicles, Schniedewind contends that "the frequent claim that Chronicles represents the Davidic kings as prophets is overstated" (p. 207). Rather, David's special position relates to the founding of the cult and building the temple. He was inspired to build, a kingly task, not to speak, a prophetic task. "The Chronicler portrays David, 'the man of God' and the establisher of the temple, as a type of Moses, 'the man of God' and establisher of the tabernacle" (p. 237). It is precisely this characterization which legitimates David as temple builder and organizer of its worship.

The ultimate goal of chapter 6, "The Prophets as Historians: The Source Citations of Chronicles" (pp. 208-30), is to see how the prophets in the source references (who largely correspond to prophets known from the Deuteronomic History) fit into the Chronicler's overall view of prophecy. "The Chronicler's use of prophets in his source citations is the precursor to later Judaism, which held that history writing was the role of prophets" (p. 228). By calling prophets "historians," Schniedewind means to say "that the Chronicler thought that prophets had the role of interpreting past events and giving these events contemporary relevance" (see Hanani's speech, 2 Chr 16:7-10) (p. 228). This understanding seems to underlie the reference to the "midrash (exposition, interpretation) of the prophet Iddo" in 2 Chr 13:22.

The book's final chapter, "From Prophets to Inspired Interpreters" (pp. 231-52), succinctly summarizes the conclusions of the study. It also develops the implications of Schniedewind's observations for the date, authorship, and purpose of the books of Chronicles.

The Word of God in Transition is a masterful work, beautifully, at times eloquently, written. Schniedewind uses charts to great advantage throughout the book. There are, however, blemishes in the work that are the result of careless editing or proofreading. For example, there are errors in the Hebrew on pages 70, 141, and 177, and the English in footnote 31 on p. 143 should read, "These types of ambiguities . . . are. . . ." In a book as dense as this, repetition is a useful device to remind readers of previously made points. My only criticism is that Schniedewind tends to be too repetitious, reminding us, for example, that "the possession formula is not typical of classical biblical prophecy" in chapter 1 and again on pages 108, 110, 114, 116, 119, and 125. Schniedewind's study of

Chronicles is comprehensive and convincing. In every case, he exercises scholarly caution in formulating conclusions based on data that at times are only suggestive, but the cumulative effect of his arguments leads one to agree with the assessments he makes. This book will certainly enjoy further momentum and refinement as other scholars adopt Schniedewind's agenda as their own. (12/96)