

BOOK REVIEW  
*Texts that Linger, Words That Explode*  
Walter Brueggemann  
(Augsburg Fortress, 2000)

Generally speaking books that expose our Restoration Heritage to the rich history of the Old Testament and to a deeper understanding of its prophets are a welcome addition to our libraries. However, despite the author's concern to find some practical use for the prophetic message, this short work by Walter Brueggemann has a dark cloud hanging over its head and may be a disappointment to admirers of his other works.

Many points of the book need to be applauded. One of his primary points is that God's Word impinges upon human history and is active in changing the world. Several chapters of the book contain exhortations to Christians to address specific issues in bringing God's message to the world, and although one might disagree with Brueggemann's particulars, this is certainly a needed reminder. In addition he believes that prophetic speech is "human utterance of holy word," and it is precisely this impingement of God's word on human history that explodes on society revealing its deficiencies and challenging its assumptions. Such utterance of holy words is still needed today to give the church a distinctive voice by providing God's account of reality in a sea of competing accounts.

Brueggemann's dark cloud is his framework for interpreting the voice of the prophets. To him hearing the texts for today depends "upon a capacity for imagination and intuition," not a critical and contextual understanding of the passage. He illustrates how several people have used texts and "have permitted their own situations to determine the locus and intention of the text." Astute readers will quickly recognize the postmodern tendency which suggests that the biblical writers essentially gave up control of the meaning of their own words. The interpreter now determines the meaning as it suits his situation.

Karl Marx is used as an illustration. Marx used Isaiah 55:8 ("Your ways are not my ways, and your thoughts are not my thoughts.") to suggest to his government that he had an

entirely different way of thinking upon which he made judgments about the fate of the poor. None of his ideas had anything to do with the context of Isaiah's statement, however, but as Brueggemann sees it this text of Isaiah lingered for centuries until Marx used it to explode legitimately with new meaning in a completely new and imaginative context. Such is the lingering and exploding of the prophetic voice.

Imaginative use of a text might provide some interesting sermon material if that text weren't so violently wrenched from its context, but Brueggemann goes even further. He notes that the new covenant text in Jeremiah 31 lingered in Judaism until it exploded in Christianity to claim, in the Book of Hebrews, that Christianity had superseded the Old Covenant. Under Brueggemann's umbrella of imaginative interpretation, with texts lingering for centuries then exploding afresh, a new meaning has surfaced today which suggests that this new covenant is actually a renewed covenant with Judaism and has nothing to do with Christianity superceding it. Quite blatantly the author states that the Book of Hebrews has misread the text of Jeremiah. Within his framework of imagination and intuition Brueggemann considers it perfectly legitimate to contradict the clear meaning of a New Testament passage despite the fact that he admits, "...my approach is somewhat subjective."

In the introduction to the book Patrick Miller calls Brueggemann a contemporary prophet who does not preach comfortable sermons, and he notes, "There is an abrasiveness that comes from an authentic hearing of the word." Yet it also could be suggested that there is an abrasiveness which similarly provokes the listener when the Word is misread and misinterpreted. If a reader is looking for of the direction postmodern thought is taking biblical interpretation then this book will suffice, but be prepared to feel the same abrasiveness Paul must have felt as he walked the streets of Athens.

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