

Consensus

Volume 18

Issue 1 *Issues in Church Life*

Article 13

5-1-1992

Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament

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Recommended Citation

Neeb, John H. C. (1992) "Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament," *Consensus*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol18/iss1/13>

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Even with this detracting feature, Hubbard's volume remains an important resource for any wishing insight into this beautiful and well-known story.

This tale of two commentaries, then, underscores the obvious: any commentary series is bound to show some unevenness. If Robertson on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah is the "worst of times" to be avoided, Hubbard on Ruth represents the "best of times": welcome and worth seeking out.

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Prophetic Oracles of Salvation

Claus Westermann

Translator Keith Crim

Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991

283 pp. with bibliography

This book is a welcome companion to Westermann's now classic *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 1967 (reprinted with new forward 1991; original 1964). Since that work dealt only with the forms in which judgment was announced, it was incumbent on the new emeritus professor at the University of Heidelberg to investigate the prophetic salvation oracles. Westermann does a thorough job of what he sets out to accomplish, "to develop from a survey of all the prophetic oracles of salvation a grouping of these oracles on the basis of their structure and content" (15). In a well-organized fashion, he presents four distinctive types of salvation oracles. The first group, the major group, is an unconditional proclamation of salvation. Chiefly in Deutero-Isaiah, this literary form has its origin in worship as God's response to the lament of the individual (65). Westermann proposes that Deutero-Isaiah developed the form of the oracle of salvation by analogy to the oracle of salvation to the individual (especially the king in Assyrian texts, p. 42). The prophet creatively adapts these forms to proclaim the liberation of Israel from Babylonian captivity. In addition, in these oracles the salvation announced for Israel is open to the people of all nations and the regaining of political power and influence for Israel is not proclaimed.

The oracles of group 2 follow the pattern "proclamation of judgment on the enemy"—proclamation of deliverance for Judah-Israel, with the full weight placed on the destruction of the enemy.

The third group of salvation oracles (termed nonprophetic) is characterized by its conditional quality. The new possibility is conditional upon obedience to God's commands. Westermann proposes that oracles from the mouth of the prophets which contain exhortations and warnings were derived from the deuteronomic updating of the prophetic words (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15-18) after the collapse of the nation (587 BC).

The fourth group, primarily additions to the text, treat the fate of the ungodly contrasted with that of the godly.

Excurses on the messenger formula *koh 'amar yhwh* (thus says the Lord), "days are coming", and "on that day" are most valuable. E.g., of the 105 times the expression *bayyom haku* (on that day) is found in the prophetic books, it introduces oracles of judgment in 35 instances and oracles of salvation in 57.

A brief summary and conclusion review the key points of the book. Westermann comments on the significance of the salvation oracles for biblical theology. The salvation proclaimed in the text investigated in this study always involves a community; whereas, in the New Testament, salvation proclaimed in the gospel primarily involves individuals. The *shalom* so often proclaimed in these oracles means both salvation and peace. The grace made real through deliverance from exile includes of necessity the restoration of all other areas of life as well. The individual participates in this salvation only as a member of the community (272).

Westermann has gained renown as a form critic, par excellence. His masterful commentary *Isaiah 40-66*, 1969 (Old Testament Library) already provided the outline for this genre. In fact, one would benefit from reading the commentary along with the book for a full treatment of the oracle of salvation. The distinctions between the announcement of salvation and the assurances of salvation are more clearly delineated in his commentary. The treatment of the primary form "promise of salvation" is more clearly presented and explained in his commentary with the four examples cited on page 42: Isaiah 41:8-13, 14-16, 43:1-7; 44:1-5.

One becomes aware of the weakness of a strict form critical analysis. At points Westermann pushes this approach to its extreme. In his zeal to develop a taxonomy of forms one is left with the impression of trying to fit square pegs into round holes. The attempt to fit all the oracles into four groups is not entirely successful as the fourth group is finally a small collection of additions utilizing a wisdom motif.

He also relies heavily on the history of traditions school in the dating and development of various themes and motifs. E.g., he assigns the proclamation of a royal saviour (Israel 9:2-7; 11:1-9) to the exilic or postexilic period. Contemporary literary critics would be very suspect of his sweeping statements about "late oracles" and "composite compositions" (86).

Of what use is this book? This book has a rightful place on the pastor's desk when it's time to prepare the sermon. It just could dispel the notion that the prophets are all doomsday preachers. Why not preach a series of sermons on the salvation oracles in Isaiah during Advent! In series A on 1 Advent with Isaiah 2; on 2 Advent with Isaiah 11; on 4 Advent with Isaiah 7. On the Nativity of our Lord bring in the climax with Isaiah 9. 3 Epiphany is another opportunity with Isaiah 9. There is easy access to Westermann's comments on these texts through the scripture index.

Another perk for your hearers! No disembodied spirituality here! "These OT oracles know nothing of a peace of soul in isolation" (272).

This salvation has an impact on all other areas as well. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!" And who knows, you might be motivated to preach on a text not in the lectionary, such as, Isaiah 43:1b, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." Fear not!

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Loci Theologici

Martin Chemnitz

Translated, with an introduction by J.A.O. Preus

St. Louis: Concordia, 1989

2 volumes, paginated consecutively: 768 pp.

"*Si posterior non fuisset, prior non stetisset*"—so ran the old maxim, reportedly coined by Roman Catholics, concerning the "two Martins", Chemnitz and Luther: (freely rendered) "If the second had never arrived, the first would not have survived." In the view of many, both then and now, the phrase contains a significant truth. The dynamic, polemical, existential biblicism of Luther's theology was surely sufficient to the overthrow of the abuses of late medieval theology, but its style and unabashedly unsystematic approach did not lend themselves easily to the establishment of a full-scale churchly dogmatics. The impetus toward dogmatics came, not from Luther, but from Melanchthon, whose *Loci communes* and whose several efforts to edit and defend the *Augsburg Confession* gave ground both for development and dispute within Lutheranism. Chemnitz's *Loci theologici* took Melanchthon's *Loci* as their point of departure, but elaborated the themes of the many theological topics and, in addition, provided a solid doctrinal synthesis for Lutheranism as it moved beyond the internal disputes of the mid-sixteenth century into the era of the *Formula of Concord*. Together with his masterful study on *The Two Natures in Christ*, his *Enchiridion*, the treatise on *The Lord's Supper*, and his exhaustive *Examination of the Council of Trent*, the *Loci communes* or *Loci theologici*, as they are sometimes called, provided a doctrinal foundation suitable to the rise of orthodox Lutheranism in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Given the importance of the work of Chemnitz, the publication of this first translation of the greater part of the *Loci theologici* constitutes a theological event of some importance. As the translator notes (14), "we now possess in English more of the writings of Chemnitz than of any other Lutheran from the time of Luther himself down to the close of the period of orthodoxy." In addition, inasmuch as Chemnitz consistently cited and