

an Excursus on Old Testament Priesthood (Wilmington, 1984); R. Martin-Achard, 'Israël, peuple sacerdotal', in R. Martin-Achard (ed.), *Permanence de l'Ancien Testament: Recherches d'exégèse et de théologie* (Geneva, 1984); H. Valentin, *Aaron: Eine Studie zur vor-priester-schriftlichen Aaron-Überlieferung* (Freiburg, Switzerland and Göttingen, 1978); A. Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest, according to the New Testament* (ET, Petersham, 1986); R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (ET, London, 1961); D. P. Wright, 'The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity', in G. A. Anderson and S. M. Olyan (eds.), *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, 1991).

P. ELLINGWORTH

PROPHECY, PROPHETS

Introduction

Prophecy is the most common means *God used to communicate with people throughout biblical history. The story of prophecy, from Genesis to Revelation, is the story of God speaking to people through human messengers, and thus it is the story of God's varying relationships with his people and with others. Speaking through the prophets, God guided kings and people by telling them how to act in specific situations, warned people when they disobeyed him, predicted events that he would bring about, interpreted events when they came about, and demonstrated that he alone was both ruler of history and a God who relates personally to his people.

The basic biblical principles regarding prophets and prophecy are found in the Pentateuch, especially in connection with *Moses, but a regular office of prophet, and bands of secondary prophets, are not fully established until the period covered by the later historical books and the prophetic writings. In the Gospels, *Jesus is seen as a great prophet, but much more than a prophet. The book of Acts and the epistles describe a gift of prophecy given to Christians which has lesser authority but much wider distribution than canonical prophecy, and prophecy is seen as the most valuable of the *Holy Spirit's many gifts to the church (see *Spiritual gifts). The Bible closes with a sobering yet magnificent

picture of the future in the prophecy of Revelation.

Prophecy and prophets in the Pentateuch

While NT authors identify both Abel (Gen. 4:1-8; Luke 11:50-51) and *Enoch (Gen. 5:18-24; Jude 14) as prophets, the first explicit mention of a 'prophet' (Heb. *nābî*) in the OT occurs when God tells Abimelech that *Abraham 'is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live' (Gen. 20:7, RSV). This suggests that a 'prophet' has a special relationship with God whereby his prayers will be answered, an idea that is revisited later in the OT (see below).

A messenger empowered by the Spirit of God

The nature of a prophet as a messenger of God is described by a human analogy in Exodus 7: 'And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land"' (Exod. 7:1-2). Moses is like God in that he gives a message to Aaron. Aaron is like a 'prophet' because he speaks the message that he has received. This fundamental idea of the prophet as a messenger of God pervades descriptions of prophets in both Old and New Testaments.

True prophecies are empowered only by the Spirit of God; only when the Lord places on the seventy elders some of the Spirit's empowering which has been on Moses are the seventy elders able to prophesy (Num. 11:25).

The prophet's message is not his own

What was implicit in the analogy of Moses and Aaron speaking to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1) is made explicit in Deuteronomy: the prophet has no message of his own but can only report the message God has given him. God promises that whenever he raises up a prophet like Moses, 'I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him' (Deut. 18:18). Even greedy and rebellious Balaam must submit to God; he says, 'Have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak' (Num. 22:38).

The uniqueness of Moses

Moses has a more direct relationship to God