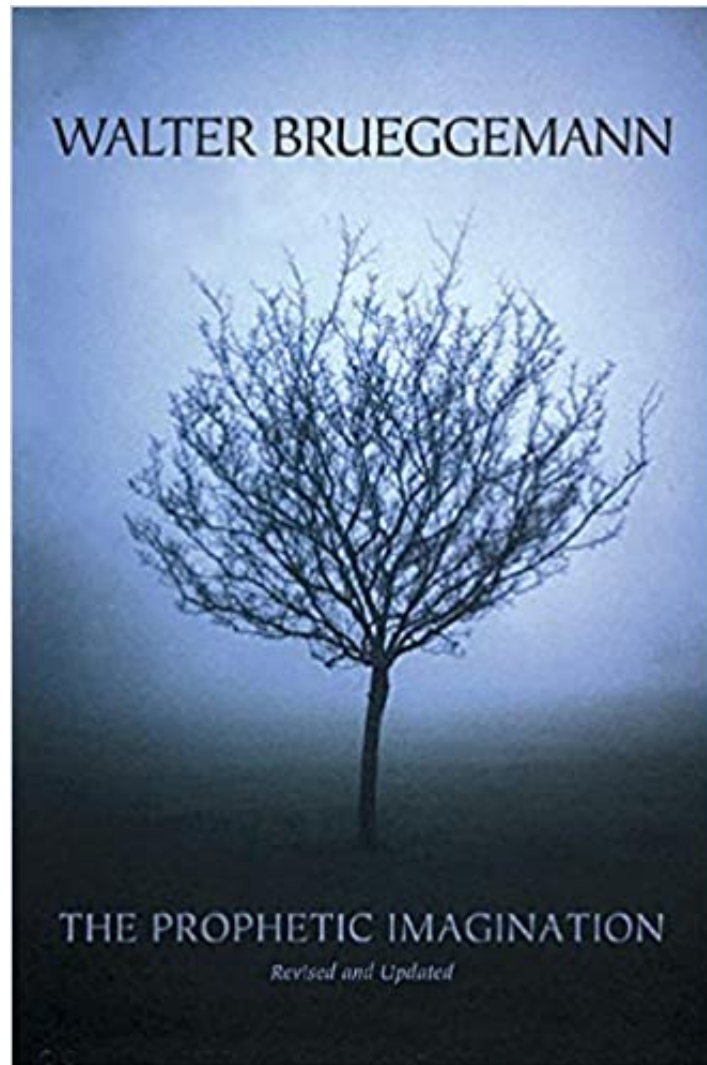


The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd Edition

by

Steve Sheinkin



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Synopsis

In this challenging and enlightening treatment, Brueggemann traces the lines from the radical vision of Moses to the solidification of royal power in Solomon to the prophetic critique of that power with a new vision of freedom in the prophets. Here he traces the broad sweep from Exodus to Kings to Jeremiah to Jesus. He highlights that the prophetic vision and not only embraces the pain of the people but creates an energy and amazement based on the new thing that God is doing. In this new edition, Brueggemann has completely revised the text, updated the notes, and added a new preface.

Sort review

About the AuthorWalter Brueggemann is William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the author of more than thirty books and commentaries.

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What people say about this book

Conrad Johnson, "The Voice that Trumps Business-as-usual. The Prophetic Imagination, by Dr. Walter Brueggeman, has sold over one million copies in its second printing and deservedly so. Now, more than ever, we need to closely examine the biblically historically power of language to counter culture a status quo, populist mindset that abnegates an alternative reality which offers the Creator's freedom through anguish and energizing, unlimited force. Students (and admirers) of language need not be theologically inclined in order to appreciate the Chomsky-like tone regarding the hegemony of cautionary and hopeful prophecy as outlined in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as pointed out by Brueggemann. It's still the articulate, anguished scream of the little man against the powers that be which foresee destruction yet offer visionary change in the face of, what the author labels, 'royal consciousness', as personified in the struggle between the Moses of Exodus and the Pharaoh of an oppressive Egypt against the Hebrews in the ancient Middle East and, to a final extant, Jesus Christ against the Jews and their failure to perceive the spirit behind the Law, the spirit of agape love, as given to Moses and the Israelites. Some things will never change like absolute governmental power that inevitable trends toward blind and merciless oppression of society's marginalized. But Brueggeman, like Chomsky, examines the tour de force manifested by powerful (and prophetic) forces of imagination that wield language as a new construct versus reality in the everyday life of an established regime that necessarily must be deaf to the pleas of poverty and helplessness, because if rulers acknowledge the chinks in their armor of authority, they will be forced to admit that imperfection inevitably can and must lead to change and, quite often, revolution. For fiction writers and lovers, Brueggeman references what he calls the 'savage artistry' of Flannery O'Connor and her Southern Gothic style of bringing hurt and (what the author herself) calls Christian Realism to the forefront of literary consciousness. Taking the interpretation of her work beyond the limited anti-capitalist vision of Chomsky and others, such as Canadian author and social activist, Naomi Klein who necessarily prescribe to a one world view of alternative realities, Brueggeman writes in his preface: I am sure, nonetheless, that the joining of "prophetic" to "imagination" leads inescapably in an artistic direction in which truth is told in a way and at an angle that assures it will not be readily cooped or domesticated by hegemonic interpretive power. This begs the question: How is it possible to limit God's power at all? (Matthew 19:26) Pharaoh tried and failed as Brueggeman reminds us of the events recorded in Exodus--Moses personally confronting the royal consciousness and speaking unseen kingdom truth to power. The idea was unthinkable, laughable and finally irritating beyond degree, these words from a lowly Hebrew shepherd demanding Egypt set God's people free and, consequently, upset the entire internal balance of economy--no more loathsome slave labor to sweat blood over a grandiose infrastructure. "And how many legions does the Pope in Rome have?" reportedly asks one long dead military commander at a command from the Holy See. But a swipe at Catholicism here must be left as an aside if we are to press on with biblical truth and the alt-reality that

comes from above. Moses, indeed, was the first, and perhaps foremost, prophet in a long line of Old Testament prophets that continued, more often than not against the threat of execution, to remind the royal consciousnesses (both Jew and Gentile) that God uses His word to first create a New Other-world Order in the hearts and minds of mankind before backing it up with force if His message of justice towards the poor and marginalized is not recognized and acted upon. Only believers in the gospel can and will believe the anguish voiced by Isaiah and Jeremiah and others towards the Make Israel Great Again movement whiteout leaning on the God that delivered them from slavery for help and guidance. Worshipping the might of men and country is as old as Methuselah and always prone to inevitable collapse, either by invasion or internal moral decay. After all, what's wrong with just following the Ten Commandments? Wouldn't everyone agree that the world would be a better place? But it can't be done, can it? Therefore, Brueggeman's submission that "prophetic must be imaginative because it is urgently out beyond the reasonable". And, just because it is so, it is unpalatable for the powers that be to tolerate it simply for that reason--the heavenly language of hope and promise, coupled with the harsh condemnation of exposing business as usual--defies control. And without control, the royal consciousness smells chaos and a threat to its power. Indeed, things must go on as they are. Certain 'adjustments' in the body politic will be necessarily endured (drain the swamp, etc.), but the New Boss will always remain as the Old Boss unless he is replaced by the Lord himself. With respect to Western (and more specifically, American) status quo, Brueggeman states that: It is evident that in our American society, as in those brutal contexts, there are two types of imagination, that of "the generals and their opponents," or that of consumer ideology and its resisters. The fact is that we in American society too easily live "inside this imagination" when prophetic imagination is capable of enabling us to live inside "God's imagination" Clearly, human transformative activity depends upon a transformed imagination. Numbness does not hurt like torture, but in a quite parallel way, numbness robs us of our capability for humanity. This is exactly what the writing of such authors as Flannery O' Connor attempt to do--shock us back into a morality incapable of our own making and willpower. The first step towards believing is hearing and the voice of the Old Testament prophets remind us of that. (Romans 10:17) Or who can stand against the poetic, prophetic anguish of those like Jeremiah without having their consciousnesses pricked? Only the very hard of heart says Scripture: "Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword, to the sword; those who are for famine, to famine, and those who are for captivity to captivity." Or the uncovering of national sin and pride by the same prophet: "This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, declares the Lord, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. I have seen your abominations, your adulteries and neighings, your lewd shorings, on the hills in the field, Woe to you, Jerusalem! How long will it be before you are made clean?" Of course, nobody likes to tell the emperor that he has no clothes, let alone that he will be metaphorically raped for his sins and the sins of his people, so it's no wonder that a prophet's life is always cut short. Yet the good news is that along with this brazen

clarity of vision and warnings, the messenger offers a new reality, eternal and pure, which the established can never hope to aspire to--one that threatens the very fabric of man's immoral nature, even in the least wicked. It's is God's very own promise of salvation from, what the Buddhist's call, the Wheel of Life--a way out for good that comes only through hearing which leads to faith. This penultimate counter culture voice has never been originated by man in the truest sense. Utopian cults come and go, speculations and governmental promises offer hope and change, but only the Kingdom of God which was spoken of to the backwoods rebels of Galilee first, and which did not originate in the halls of the royal Congress amidst the hilltops of Jerusalem, can break the chains that bind. Divine imagination is the main ingredient and, without it, we will never be able to eat our way into a perfect world in this life as Brueggeman so colorfully explains. The Prophetic Imagination, is a book, not only for theologians, but one for those of us who admire the power of ideas and the utilization of poetic language to facilitate a crack in the universe of an otherwise prosaic existence that offers little in a world full of political speculation, limited goodwill and no meaning beyond that which is offered by decree for God has spoken. See more of my reviews at [...]"

Peter Murphy, "PROPHETIC IMAGINATION: personal reaction.. An excellent assessment of the role of the prophet firstly to imagine a different world: God's world, and realize that in preaching or presenting an alternative world view. What the author terms 'the royal kingdom' - meaning all human empires and social, institutional structures, contrasted with the Kingdom of God. Brueggeman constantly returns to the theme of the prophet in society, not isolated, but with a social mission and message, a point he labours to reiterate. The book is very readable and logical in its development and his main theme - prophet as envisaging a better world - remains timeless. My cautions are twofold: a) that the work - originally written in the 1970's - at times seems to reflect a Marxist analysis of society, (perhaps borrowed from the liberation theology movement of that time), at times presenting the prophetic-evangelical mission of the gospel in adversarial language: challenge, change, tear down, make irrelevant, destroy: in other words, to change society and liberate peoples by tearing down the false social structures that imprison or chain the poor; and b) Although revised more recently, the work appears to be existentially that of the 1970's, with little conceptual revision, other than referencing. Worthy of consideration, the book contributes to the understanding of the prophets and the prophetic mission of the church, but should be read with those cautions in mind."

Jeremy Myers - Writing at RedeemingGod, "A little hard to read, but well worth the effort. If there is one thing the world needs today, it is prophets. Not the zany kind you get in some Pentecostal and Charismatic churches where apparently the goal is to put the Psychic Hotline out of business. No, Bruggeman paints a portrait of the Biblical prophet as one who contends against the normal order of society and culture which has set itself up at the expense of the marginal, the outcast, the poor, and the weak. Bruggman calls this "the royal consciousness" but I think we

could also refer to it as "the Powers that Be" and here in the United States goes by such names as "the multinational corporation" and "politics in Washington D. C." Bruggeman argues that the prophet does not contend against such entities with arms and use of force, but with the much more powerful weapon of imagination and creativity. To make this point, he uses the examples of Moses against Pharaoh, Jeremiah against the Monarchy, and Jesus against the religion of Israel. One of the things that so struck me about this book is that ever since I was in high school, every time I took one of those odd (and error-prone) "spiritual gift inventory" tests, I always came up with "Prophet" as my top spiritual gift. When I was a pastor, and because I didn't believe that prophets (the way I thought of them) were in use today, I interpreted this to mean that I was to proclaim or "forthtell" the Word of God, rather than foretell future events or predict the future. Bruggeman has given me a window by which to look at the world and current events through the lens of prophetic imagination. Imagining a different world. A different way of doing things. A different order. A way of living and being that creates an alternative community to the methods of Pennsylvania Avenue, the antics of Hollywood Boulevard, and the religion of Main Street. Though this book was hard to read, it is going in my Burning Books list because it set my mind on fire. The most encouraging element of the book for me was near the end. I have so many doubts, fears, and misgivings about the route in life I am currently traveling. But right at the end, Brueggemann wrote this: "I, like most of the others, am unsure that the royal road is not the best and the royal community the one which governs the real "goodies." I, like most of the others, am unsure that the alternative community inclusive of the poor, hungry, and grieving is really the wave of God's future. ... There is no unanguished way out of it. It does make clear to us that our ministry will always be practiced through our own conflicted selves. No prophet has ever borne an unconflicted message, even until Jesus" (p. 118). Conflicted and anguished and uncertain about the path I'm on and the future I imagine certainly describes my mental state. But if Brueggemann is right, then this is exactly where I want to be. So, I will "imagine on," and see where the rabbit hole leads."

Chris Juby, "Life-changing scholarship. Few books have had such a deep impact on me. In the couple of years since I first read this, I've found myself mulling on it continually and referring to it regularly. The book offers a fascinating account of the operation of Biblical prophecy, which transposes itself into a challenge for the prophetic witness of the Church today. The overall effect is simultaneously thrilling and disturbing. My role as worship, media and arts coordinator at my church has been significantly shaped by the realisation that substituting 'artist' for 'prophet' throughout the book in no way diminishes the sense or the challenge. For sure, this is a work of serious scholarship so it's not light reading, but it's the furthest thing from stale or inaccessible and would edify anyone who takes the time to engage with it."

Tony Butler, "Wow!. This book is another of those "coming home" moments which seem to occur with alarming regularity as a long life gathers to its close. It needs to be read and re read in

order to first grasp the prophetic message and then to slowly allow that message to shape one's preaching, ministry and the fellowship of which you are a part (a fragment of that Body which is the local Church). On holiday in Liverpool, wandering the City and talking to needy people, helps to ground the teaching. For this experience: Thank you Walter Brueggemann, Brother in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

rep, “Don't miss this!. A great book,very stimulating.Requires concentration as it is also very intellectual. Worth persevering though.”

Matt Wilson, “Deliciously Dense. This is the first book in a long time that I've tabbed the pages of with labelled post-its. It's a book I expect to return to again and again in years to come. Journeying through the scriptures by tracing the steps of the prophets a strong theme develops, that it's the prophet's task to startle and excite those who are numb and depressed into believing that newness is possible, imminent, even tangible. 'The Prophetic Imagination' contains more delicious quotes than I could ever mention. So why only 4 stars and not 5? The one drawback is that for all but the most academic of readers the language is very dense and at times even verging on inaccessible. Definitely worth having a crack at it anyway though.”

Jackie Cook, “Five Stars. interesting read well written for ease”

The book by Steve Sheinkin has a rating of 5 out of 4.5. 233 people have provided feedback.

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