

## ISAGOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN THE WRITING PROPHETS

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Petre Semen, *Introducere în teologia profetilor scriitori* (Iași: Trinitas, 2008), 368p.

The Introduction to the Theology of the Writing Prophets authored by Father Petre Semen inevitably continues the volume Introduction to the Old Testament Biblical Theology. The latter was shaped into the requirements of the curriculum of the Departments of Theology and into the recent necessities of Old Testament studies.

In the previous volume, in addition to making a general introduction, the author presented the historical books from an isagogical and theological point of view. In the present volume, prophetic writings are emphasized; thus, minimal knowledge is given to those who wish to understand the theology of the prophets. I would mention that this is the first Romanian study in the specialty literature that separately presents the notions concerning the prophetic writings. The previous volumes and studies offer only particular information about the structures or ideas of prophetic books. That is the reason why professor Semen's book is important for the Romanian Old Testament theology.

In the first part of the book, the author makes an introductory study on the main elements of the prophetic act. First, the writer marks the limits of Jewish prophetism and the prophetism of other cultures. The prophetic phenomenon of the chosen people has particular traits. According to Semen, prophetism was seen in Israel as “a religious institution initiated by Yahwe, with a well-defined purpose: to support or to replace the other institutions in order to encourage monotheism, especially in periods of crisis” (p. 2). For this reason, Jewish prophetic manifestation is obviously different from the way in which foretellers or clairvoyants from other civilization foretold messages.

Later, the author defines and separates divine prophetism from pseudo-prophetism that emerged because of various reasons inside the chosen people. Genuine prophetism is presented antithetically: it was not a continuous condition like priesthood, and it did not depend on the family, tribe or social class. God and not the prophet took the prophetic initiative. Prophets always moralized people on their sins and avoidance of God. Prophets were usually rejected in their country and nobody listened to their

words. They had many conflicts with the royalty and with the sacramental priesthood, since they tried to change spiritual life.

After insisting on the fact that prophecy did not cease to exist from Samuel to Malachi (approximately 700 years), father Semen mentions the number of prophets (48 men prophets and 7 women prophets) and divides them into two categories: old/non-writing prophets and new/writing prophets. The latter belong to two categories according to the size of their work: major and minor writing prophets. There are other types of division according to factors such as chronological order, the period when they made their prophecies (the Assyrian period, the Haldaic period and the Persian period), or the Babylonian slavery (pre-exile, exile and post- exile prophets).

Last in the general section is a brief presentation of the stylistic traits of prophets. The author tackles their manner of expression and how Messiah was received.

The work has a special part which analyses all prophetic writings from Isaiah to Malachi, concerning isagogical, theological and other aspects related to Old Testament messianism. The introductory part brings into discussion various aspects about the author of the books, the authenticity and the peculiar characteristics of the writing. We have to say that the author does not intend to present exhaustively these aspects: he mentions them and indicates his purpose.

Semen dedicated much attention to the division of the book. The draft of the book indicates the main aspects of the writing. This section makes connections with the main events in the history of the chosen people and of other people they interacted with. The syntheses concerning the thematic structures of the book are remarkable. This general view facilitates a better understanding of the theological dimension.

The theological part of the book focuses on doctrinal and specific aspects of the prophetic work. The author insists on those structures which are definitory for the prophetic messianic teachings. He identifies both messianic texts and their new testamentary corresponding events. In order to support his ideas, he resorts to patristic and contemporary theological testimony.

Father Semen clearly stresses the messianic character of Isaiah's book. Therefore, he interprets the most important messianic texts: Messiah's birth (7:14), the attribute of the enigmatic infant (9:5-6), messianic peace (11:6-9) and Saint John the Baptist (40:3-11). The author makes a detailed analysis of the hymns to Ebed-Yahweh (42:1-4; 49:4-9; 50:4-9; 52:13; 53). He calls them a gospel before the Gospels, since he makes a parallel to the New Testament.

We must mention the characteristic elements of a specific book, in no way related to the above. In the case of Daniel, he presents his prophecies in a context of world history. Hosea's prophecies are topical, while Amos introduces religious and moral teachings.

It seems possible that an introduction and conclusion would have been very useful in understanding the author's position regarding the subject.

As we have seen, we can certainly affirm that father Semen's book is of great use for understanding the isagogical and theological aspects of the prophetic writings. The study closes a gap in the biblical theology of the New Testament. Therefore, we are looking forward for its third part that will analyse the last section of the Canon of the Old Testament, which is the section of didactic and poetical writings.