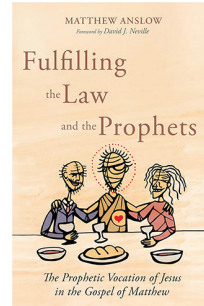


Book Review

Matthew Anslow, .
*Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets:
The Prophetic Vocation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*
Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022.
Pp. 394 £61.36 ISBN: 166672341X.

Reviewed by, Rubin James Yi McClain, University of Glasgow



Matthew Anslow, author of *Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets*, delivers an important theological tome. This work compellingly argues that the Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus' prophetic vocation like that of the prophets of Jewish Scripture and in a way that is firmly planted in the first-century prophetic milieu. Even though Matthew abundantly references prophecy and prophets, it has been consistently undervalued as a source for explaining Jesus' prophetic vocation (p. xxv). Anslow contends that the Gospel of Matthew extensively draws from various prophetic sources and uses prophetic language to portray Jesus, to beckon Israel and others towards covenantal faithfulness.

The book is divided into seven substantial chapters, broken further into two larger segments. The first segment encompasses the background and social world of Matthew and the general milieu of prophecy in the first century Syro-Palestine (chs. 1–2). These chapters are comprehensive, presenting the background for interpreting Matthew and establishing the narrative and exegetical components of the book.

The author begins with the chapter, “Matthew: Background, Social Setting, Narrative,” laying a crucial foundation by

providing essential background information of the book, its narrative, and the intended audience. An aspect of this enlightening section includes evaluating pharisaic and rabbinic notions of prophecy that help clarify the antagonism between Jesus and pharisaical groups, which might be rooted in a conflict over the true source and dimension of prophecy (p. 63).

In the second chapter, “Understanding Jewish Prophecy in the First Century CE,” Anslow adeptly positions Jesus within the prophetic milieu of the first century. Much of this chapter is written to unpack the socio-history of prophecy, which enhances Jesus' prophetic actions in the Gospel. In recasting Jesus within this background, we can see that he is firmly understood in relation to other Jewish prophets of his time (p. 125).

The second segment of the book encompasses an exegetical and theological analysis, forming the core of the tome (chs. 3–7). The first chapter of this section is titled “Which of Jesus' Words and Actions are ‘Prophetic?’” which outlines the logic of the author in discerning which texts are incorporated in the study. The author's methodology involves scrutinizing episodes in Matthew that exhibit shared features with other Gospels while also displaying a distinctive Matthean element (p. 131).

In the subsequent chapter, titled “The Beatitudes as Prophetic Speech,” the author

conducts a thorough examination of the Beatitudes using the narrative critical method. This analysis yields insightful observations, including the idea that Jesus' prophetic calling entails faithful adherence to the Torah, as elucidated through the Beatitudes. The author also points out that this section of the Gospel is not typically associated with Jesus' prophetic vocation (pp. 181–84).

Anslow expands his exploration of prophetic teachings and actions in the fifth chapter, titled "Eating with Sinners as Prophetic Act". The act of eating with sinners embodies past prophetic examples that combines the dramatic nature of previous prophets with the imagery of covenantal faithfulness associated with cuisine. Additionally, Jesus' prophetic acts of eating with sinners foretells of the eschatological banquet of God (pp. 206–13). This chapter, like the previous one, is full of novel insights about Jesus' prophetic vocation. The author successfully unpacks these prophetic acts while considering Jewish tradition, the first-century milieu, and its socio-economic realities.

In the sixth chapter, "Jesus' Temple Action in Matthew as Prophetic Action," Anslow evaluates a frequently associated event in Jesus' prophetic ministry. Through a meticulous examination of the scholarly debates, narrative context, and comparison with other prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, he further underscores Jesus' prophetic vocation (pp. 236–63). An important aspect of Matthew's depiction of Jesus is his healing in the temple, which the author regards as central to the temple cleaning episode (p. 255).

In the concluding chapter, "Matt 23

as Prophetic Speech," the exegetical and theological exploration ends. Here, the author interprets the woes and judgment on Jerusalem in Matthew 23 in connection to Jesus and his prophetic vocation. Especially interesting is his comparison of Jesus of Nazareth with Jesus' son of Ananias, further emphasizing the local prophetic milieu (pp. 282–86).

Anslow effectively articulates his argument, employing insights from Matthew's socio-history while utilizing a narrative critical approach to explore Matthew's Gospel. A strength of this tome is the expanded analysis of Jesus' prophetic ministry and identity, such as the Beatitudes and the episodes where Jesus eats with sinners. These examples expand on Jesus' prophetic ministry within texts that are typically underappreciated in this regard (chs. 4–5). An allure of this work is epitomized in the sections that provide novel insights for his argument. For example, an especially strong section is where the author evaluates Jesus' critique of the temple through the prophetic lineages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and contemporary prophets, which serve to firmly situate Jesus within these prophetic traditions (pp. 236–63).

However, something to keep in mind is the exhaustive first two chapters of his work. Although important, almost half of his book is devoted to background, socio-history, and context. Anslow does recognize the length of these two chapters and advises some to skip ahead if needed (p. xxxiv). Related to this concern is the tediousness nature of certain parts of his work. For instance, the abundant nuance in differentiating different types of prophets and prophecies could be communicated in a more succinct and

condensed form (ch. 2). In credit to Anslow, and like his honest self-examination in the introduction of his text, recognizes at the very least, these prophetic classifications are anachronistic (p. 119). It is not that this level of differentiation is unimportant, quite the contrary. Instead, the concern with these sections has more to do with their function in the larger scheme of the argument and how they serve the second half of his analysis.

Overall, Anslow offers a compelling work that aids our understanding of Jesus' prophetic vocation as defined and articulated in the Gospel of Matthew. Utilizing a broader socio-historical analysis to undergird his investigation, he successfully situates Jesus within the milieu of his time as well as within the prophetic lineages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. I commend this work for anyone interested in the prophetic aspects of Matthew's Gospel and who desire to better understand Jesus' identity and ministry through this lens.

