

**Kathleen M. Rochester, *God the Leader: A Journey through the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020). xii + 225 pp. \$29 paperback.**

It is not often that a biblical scholar chooses to engage in detail with the topic of “leadership.” Kathleen Rochester brings her expansive scholarship in reading the OT to bear on the subject of leadership via a journey through the OT considering the ways particularly in which God is revealed as “Leader.” The decidedly theological and biblical approach is a welcome contribution to a field of study dominated by business and organizational models and concerns. Further, the directions of most leadership studies begin and end with the individual leader rather than finding their orientation and direction set in relation to God as leader. Rochester further engages the topics proposed via pastoral experiences and concerns for those who may serve in their own church contexts.

Rochester leads the reader through the texts of the OT without slavishly moving book-by-book, text-by-text, but instead makes use of storying, motifs, and themes as drafting a sort of map of God as leader across the landscape of the OT. Each chapter includes multiple questions related to the text of the book and the texts of the OT considered. These questions make for ready application, further critical thinking, careful self-reflection, and pastoral insight. The first chapter treks across the terrain of Genesis and Exodus with chapter two carrying the Pentateuchal accounts further by specifically drawing upon the Ten Words/Commandments for a re-hearing of the Torah. In these chapters Rochester offers such topics as care for the overlooked (22-29), worship (51-60) and living in community. Chapter three engages several ethical issues including such a thorny one as the issue of war/warfare (with an eye upon the commands of Deuteronomy and the actions of Joshua) and God as warrior in the OT. Chapter four addresses numerous images of God in the OT such as king, shepherd, father, mother, husband, wise guide, host, helper, and rock. Chapter five carries the readers through the prophetic traditions to address God’s leadership in uncertain times followed by offering specific exemplars in the messages of Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Chapter six peaks behind the veil of God’s hiddenness as leader in wisdom, poetry, and Megilloth texts of the OT. Chapter seven closes out the volume by pointing toward the future hope of God’s leadership over Israel and the world in the texts of the post-exilic period and those with a clear missional orientation toward the inclusion of the Gentiles.

Rochester’s writing style is intentionally more popular throughout (as noted in the introduction) and includes only minimal footnotes. This should not dissuade readers from taking the book’s claims seriously as

being informed throughout by scholarship that underlies the engagements with the OT. Rochester also shows a penchant for interweaving the pastoral and global perspective through use of stories sewn within the fabric of the biblical engagements. This provides both practical illustrations and food for thought demonstrating years of diverse and thoughtful engagement with issues of leadership put to practice. Rochester does not shy away from exposing poor leadership not only in Scripture, but also in life and ministry and seeks to find ways to grow in wisdom and knowledge from both positive and negative examples.

Should there be any real criticism of this welcome volume to the field, it is that the language of “God the Leader” (while theologically accurate) seems to take up into itself characteristics of God as if “leader” was the all-in-all catch for all other matters. While this is not argued in the volume, the subtle use of “leader” as catch-all may function as an idolizing of the idea of “leader.” Certainly God is “leader,” but this is demonstrated most significantly in God taking on flesh and dwelling among us, taking on the form of a servant, and seeking to serve rather than be served. In no way has Rochester argued otherwise, but the subtlety of church culture that seeks to bring all things under the heading of “leader” enters the dangers of that which seeks to be over rather than that which is always self-giving and springs from love for the other. This caveat aside, Rochester paints a beautiful portrait of the God of the OT that remains open to our genuine response of obedience in faith to receiving the love of this God for us and for all. Such a divine leader that serves is the only one worthy to be served absolutely. Rochester is to be commended for such a project.

This volume would make an excellent supplemental text to a college/seminary course on leadership or even leadership from a biblical perspective. While it is not technical, it is practical and rooted in a rich and careful reading of the OT. Because it is not technical, it would also make for a helpful read for church and para-church leaders for personal development and for the discipling of others in considering what God’s leadership looks like as a means of reflecting on what the reader’s leadership ought to look like.

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