FOREWORD BY J. LIGON DUNCAN III

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

to the

OLD TESTAMENT

THE GOSPEL PROMISED

EDITED BY MILES V. VAN PELT

CONTRIBUTIONS BY

RICHARD P. BELCHER JR., JOHN D. CURRID,
WILLIAM B. FULLILOVE, MARK D. FUTATO,
MICHAEL J. GLODO, PETER Y. LEE,
MICHAEL G. MCKELVEY, RICHARD L. PRATT JR.,
JOHN SCOTT REDD, DANIEL C. TIMMER,
MILES V. VAN PELT, WILLEM A. VANGEMEREN, JOHN J. YEO

"For expository preachers and teachers of the Bible, this is truly a gold mine. Present and past members of the Reformed Theological Seminary faculty have produced a volume that is long overdue. Sound biblical-theological treatments of each book of the Old Testament, linked with good historical and literary comments, all conclude by pointing to the fulfillment of the texts in the person and work of Jesus. With this volume, no preacher should ever feel that preaching Christ from the Old Testament is too hard or too speculative."

Graeme Goldsworthy, Former Lecturer in Old Testament, Biblical Theology, and Hermeneutics, Moore Theological College

"For many Christians, the Old Testament is like a thousand pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Where do you start? It helps to look at the box top and see how it all fits together. That's what these superb teachers of the church do in this insightful book."

Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Core Christianity: Finding Yourself in God's Story*

"In this volume, a number of capable biblical scholars faithfully explore the Old Testament writings with sensitivity and sensibility. They do an admirable job not simply in describing the main themes and theology of each book but also in artfully showing that the Old Testament has a covenantal framework, a kingdom perspective, and Christ at its center. In brief, this is a superb volume, which provides an understandable and informative overview of the Old Testament. A great antidote to an embarrassing ignorance of the Old Testament by Christians."

Michael F. Bird, Lecturer in Theology, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia; author, *Evangelical Theology*

"The purpose of this work, 'to show how the vast, eclectic diversity of the Scriptures has been woven together by a single, divine author over the course of a millennium as the covenantal testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit according to the eternal decree of God the Father,' is grand in itself. Yet more noble still is the pursuit of that goal through the combined efforts of a great faculty who are honoring the fifty-year legacy of a blessed institution steadfastly committed to the inerrancy of God's Word and the historic distinctives of the Christian faith."

Bryan Chapell, President Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary; Senior Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois

"A high regard for Scripture as the authoritative Word of God percolates through every chapter of this collection. Moreover, it repeatedly displays flashes of insight into the redemptive-historical outworking of God's salvation plan for his people. You may not agree with the position of every author, but you will be challenged to seriously consider each carefully crafted essay, all of which are written at a very accessible level. The book achieves an excellent tone in its awareness of the many difficult questions that an honest reading of the Old Testament introduces. These contributors are also sensitive to canonical and literary concerns. Finally, this volume even includes teaching on the 'prophetic idiom,' and if you don't know what that is, then take up and read! I'm so glad that Van Pelt has gathered such an able band of brothers to produce this fine book."

Bryan D. Estelle, Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Salvation through Judgment and Mercy: The Gospel according to Jonah*

"Van Pelt and his colleagues offer every worshiper of Christ a means of drawing out the one story of the King and his kingdom as it runs through the Law and the Prophets. Their analyses of the individual books of the Old Testament reveal the beauty of the whole canon. *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* is intellectually enriching and pastorally faithful, helping the church to grow in love for the Savior through reading the Hebrew Bible. Congregants and Bible students will find great joy in reading their Scriptures with the aid of this work!"

Eric C. Redmond, Assistant Professor of Bible, Moody Bible Institute; Pastor of Adult Ministries, Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, Illinois

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Contents

Foreword

As we approach the five hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation of the Christian church, Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) is entering its fiftieth year. The seminary has existed for only a small fraction of the time of this important quarter of Christian history, but RTS has had and continues to have a significant role in this era in which Reformed theology has enjoyed a widely recognized renewal and influence in the global Christian world.

RTS came into being in a time when the mainline denominations and seminaries were administratively in the hands of theological moderates, neoorthodox, and liberals, but the growth curve was already with the evangelicals, both inside and outside the mainline. While denominational apparatchiks were trying to maintain a status quo that was already on the wane, growing numbers of Christians were becoming frustrated with theological educators who were indifferent to or hostile toward historic Christian confessional orthodoxy and unconcerned for the gospel work of the church. RTS was created to provide a robust, reverent, and rigorous theological education for pastors and church leaders, particularly in Presbyterian and Reformed churches yet also more broadly in the larger evangelical family, coming from the standpoint of a commitment to biblical inerrancy, Reformed theology, and the Great Commission.

Because RTS was confessionally defined but not denominationally controlled, the seminary could exercise influence in numerous denominational settings and in a variety of church traditions. Also, since the founders of RTS were connected to a global evangelical network, the seminary was able to have a worldwide reach from the beginning. Over the years, RTS has served over eleven thousand students from some fifty denominations: Presbyterian, Reformed, Baptist, Anglican, Congregational, and more. A seminary that began with fourteen students from one denomination in 1966 now has about two thousand students annually in eight cities in the United States, in its global distance education, and in a doctoral program in São Paulo, Brazil, with students from every continent representing dozens of denominations, and it is the largest Reformed evangelical seminary in the world.

During that time, the academic reputation and contributions of Reformed Theological Seminary faculty have grown. In biblical studies, the RTS faculty has established a pattern of widely appreciated excellence in the fields of the Old and New

Testaments. To give only a few examples, consider former RTS Old Testament professor O. Palmer Robertson, who played a significant role in the contemporary resurgence of covenant theology through his book *The Christ of the Covenants*. Former RTS-Jackson and current RTS-Charlotte Old Testament professor John Currid has produced a complete commentary on the Pentateuch and has done important work in archaeology and ancient Near Eastern studies. Longtime RTS-Orlando Old Testament professor Richard Pratt not only is a prolific author regarded for his excellent Old Testament scholarship, single-handedly producing topical articles for an entire study Bible, but also is known for his work on apologetics and prayer. Miles Van Pelt of RTS-Jackson may be the best biblical languages professor I have ever known, with an infectious passion for canonical, Christ-centered biblical theology. Former RTS-Jackson and current RTS-Orlando New Testament professor Simon Kistemaker served as the longtime secretary of the Evangelical Theology Society and completed the multivolume New Testament commentary begun by William Hendriksen. RTS-Orlando professor Charles Hill is not only an acclaimed New Testament specialist but also one of the world's top scholars in the eschatology of early Christianity. In addition, RTS-Charlotte president and professor of New Testament Michael Kruger is a recognized scholar of early Christianity and has made major contributions to recent discussions of the canon of Scripture. Indeed, Kruger and Hill, along with RTS-Orlando professor John Frame, were cited by D. A. Carson in a recent plenary address at the Evangelical Theology Society as having made outstanding contributions in the field of the doctrine of Scripture. RTS-Jackson New Testament scholar Guy Waters has published prolifically on various topics including ecclesiology and has helped reshape the current debates on the theology of Paul.

In an effort to pass along this world-class, faithful, consecrated scholarship to the next generation, the Old and New Testament professors at RTS—both past and present—have put together two new volumes: *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (edited by Miles V. Van Pelt), and *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (edited by Michael J. Kruger). There are several unique features and aspirations of these volumes. First, they are aimed at pastors and interested Christian readers, rather than fellow scholars. We at RTS value and produce resources intended for a scholarly audience, but the aim of these volumes is churchly edification, hence they are designed for accessibility. Second, they are written by scholars of biblical studies who are unafraid of and indeed very much appreciative of dogmatics. In many seminaries, even evangelical seminaries, there exists an unhealthy relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology, but at RTS we value both and want our students to understand their necessary and complementary value. To understand the Bible, and the Christian faith, one needs both the insights of a redemptive-historical approach and those of topical-doctrinal study. Third, these volumes unashamedly come from the standpoint of biblical inerrancy and Reformed theology. A high view of Scripture and a warm embrace of confessional Reformed theology are hallmarks

of RTS, and these ideals shine through these books. Fourth, these introductions are designed to be pastoral and helpful. Preachers, ministry leaders, Bible teachers, students, and others engaged in Christian discipleship are in view. We want to edify you and help you edify others.

May these volumes bless the church of Jesus Christ for generations to come as it seeks to know his Word better and to proclaim it to the nations.

J. Ligon Duncan III
Chancellor and CEO
John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology
Reformed Theological Seminary

Preface

Warning! This introduction to the Old Testament may not be what you expect. As the title for this book suggests, our work is intentionally and self-consciously nuanced. By producing a "biblical-theological" introduction, we have set out to provide a resource for pastors, teachers, and students of the Bible designed to articulate the message(s) of each individual Old Testament book in the context of the whole canon of Scripture. As such, we not only work to understand the meaning of each individual book in the larger context of the Old Testament, but we also recognize, affirm, and submit to the authoritative witness of the New Testament in establishing the full and final message of the Old Testament (e.g., John 5:39, 45–47; Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; Rom. 1:1–3; Heb. 12:1–3; 1 Pet. 1:11). In other words, our goal is not to dismantle the Scriptures into as many unrelated parts as possible but rather to show how the vast, eclectic diversity of the Scriptures has been woven together by a single, divine author over the course of a millennium as the covenantal testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit according to the eternal decree of God the Father.

Because of the book's design and intended audience, we have minimized interaction with higher-critical models of analysis and devoted greater attention to issues that stem from an analysis of the final form of the text as represented by the Hebrew Masoretic text preserved in the Leningrad Codex (B19). We have kept textual-critical discussions to a minimum, except where they significantly affect larger questions of interpretation (e.g., the book of Jeremiah). Different books will require different degrees of interaction with different introductory matters. For example, the issue of human authorship does require at least some introductory attention in a volume like this for the book of Genesis but less so for a book like Ruth. In each case, we have allowed the text, the pedagogical context, and the good sense of the author to establish a sensible approach to the various books in the Old Testament canon.

It is also important to note that the contributors to this volume all have different areas of interest and specialty within Old Testament studies. Additionally, we do not always agree on how to interpret every single issue (e.g., the interpretation of the Song of Songs, the characterization of the judges in the book of Judges, or the significance of the arrangement of the twelve Minor Prophets). It would be a shame not to allow these distinctives to percolate through the pages of this work and to stimulate the

interests of a variety of readers. However, in order to provide a measure of unity for the presentation of data by each author, we have chosen to organize the material in each chapter under the following six major headings: Introduction, Background Issues, Structure and Outline, Message and Theology, Approaching the New Testament, and Select Bibliography. By design, our intent is to provide readers with the preliminary information that will faithfully guide them through the biblical text in such a way as to understand the meaning of each biblical book in the context of the larger, overall message of Scripture. Those who labor as ministers of the Word of God are called to stand and proclaim, "Thus says the Lord." It is with this ultimate, practical goal in mind that we humbly offer our labor to the church.

When abbreviations are employed in the book, we have followed *The SBL Handbook of Style*, second edition. Also, unless otherwise noted, we have used the English Standard Version (ESV) for Bible translation.

<div style="text-align: right">Miles V. Van Pelt</div>

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANESSup	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series
ANET	James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
AOTS	Augsburg Old Testament Studies
AOS	American Oriental Series
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies

BJSUCSD	Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BMI	The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters
BRev	*Bible Review*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BTCB	Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CJT	*Canadian Journal of Theology*
ConcC	Concordia Commentary
COS	*The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002)
CTA	*Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques decouvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939*, ed. Andrée Herdner (Paris: Geuthner, 1963)
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CurBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2014)
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
EBS	Encountering Biblical Studies
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, trans. and ed. under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999)
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament

HOTE	Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJST	*International Journal of Systematic Theology*
Int	*Interpretation*
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAJ	*Journal of Ancient Judaism*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBPR	*Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research*
JBR	*Journal of Bible and Religion*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JHebS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KEL	Kregel Exegetical Library
LB	*Linguistica Biblica*
LBC	Layman's Bible Commentary
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MAJT	*Mid-America Journal of Theology*
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible

NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997)
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology (InterVarsity Press)
NSBTE	New Studies in Biblical Theology (Eerdmans)
NTSI	New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel
Numen	*Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OtSt	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RTR	*Reformed Theological Review*
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBJT	*The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SR	*Studies in Religion*
SSU	Studia Semitica Upsaliensia
STI	Studies in Theological Interpretation

SubBi   Subsidia Biblica

SymS   Symposium Series

TAPA   *Transactions of the American Philological Association*

TBC   Torch Bible Commentaries

TBS   Topics for Biblical Study

TDOT   *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis et al., 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006)

TJ   *Trinity Journal*

TLOT   *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997)

TLZ   *Theologische Literaturzeitung*

TOTC   Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

TynBul   *Tyndale Bulletin*

UCOP   University of Cambridge Oriental Publications

VT   *Vetus Testamentum*

VTSup   Supplements to Vetus Testamentum

WBC   Word Biblical Commentary

WTJ   *Westminster Theological Journal*

WUNT   Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

YOSR   Yale Oriental Series, Researches

ZAW   *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Introduction

Miles V. Van Pelt

You have heard it said that our Bible contains sixty-six different books written by an unknown number of human authors in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period of roughly fifteen hundred years with various and sometimes conflicting messages. But I say unto you that the Bible may also be understood as a single book by a single author containing both a unified message and a unified design (John 5:39, 45–47; Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; Acts 28:23, 31; Rom. 1:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:11). The Bible is like a large picture puzzle. Each puzzle piece (individual book) has its own unique shape and bears its own unique image. But these individual shapes were designed to fit together into something whole, and the image of the whole provides the context and makes sense of the smaller, individual images.

For this reason, it is helpful to understand that the Bible is *not* a love letter, a self-help guide, a history textbook, a story, a legal code, a collection of ancient letters, or a religious handbook, though these types of things certainly appear throughout the pages of the biblical text (diversity). Rather, altogether, the Bible is the record, the deposit, the testimony of God's good news in Jesus Christ (unity). It is a legal, objective, public document that describes and explains the covenantal relationship by which God has condescended and united himself first to this world and then to his people through Jesus Christ (function). And so, in order to understand the message of the Bible, we must labor to understand the *diversity* of its various parts, the *unity* of its overall message, and its *function* in the life of the people of God. It is vital that we work to understand this book, the whole of it, because the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles *and prophets*" (Eph. 2:20) and because this book is both living and life-giving (Ps. 119:25, 50; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12).

Because of its age, and the various foreign cultural contexts out of which the Bible emerged, it is often difficult to understand the message of the Bible and its significance for thinking and living in the twenty-first century. For example, what does it mean that Jesus is our High Priest (Gen. 14:18; Num. 35:9–34; Hebrews 7–9), and why does that matter in a context where high priests are no longer a part of

everyday life? To complicate matters further, the Bible contains two different parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, and at times these two parts appear to contradict each other. For example, which command should we follow, "an eye for an eye" (Ex. 21:24) or "turn the other cheek" (cf. Matt. 5:39)?

And so, before we turn to consider each of the individual books of the Old Testament in this introduction, it is important first to consider the message of the whole, which will ultimately make sense of the individual parts. When considering the whole, it is essential to begin with the entire Christian Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. It is especially important to understand how the apostolic testimony of the New Testament identifies and establishes the final meaning and design of the prophetic word contained in the Old Testament. This New Testament witness provides us with a unified conceptual framework by which we can comprehend the vast diversity presented to us in the pages of the the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is more complex, diverse, and removed from our modern contexts than the New Testament. Our English Bibles contain some thirty-nine books written by a number of different (identified and unidentified) authors between approximately 1400 and 400 BC. The Old Testament is also the larger of the two Testaments, constituting over three-quarters of the whole.[1] But we have not been left to our own devices when it comes to making sense of these ancient texts. The New Testament provides the final, authoritative context from which God's people can rightly understand the message and design of the Old Testament. But this relationship is not unidirectional. The Old Testament provides the background and conceptual categories for understanding the message of the New Testament. These two Testaments, in all their diversity, are forever united as the Word of God, and what God has joined together, let not man separate.

What then does the New Testament teach us about the Old Testament, in terms of both its message and its design or function?[2] The answers to these questions are certainly debated, but a helpful place to begin appears in Acts 28. At the end of this chapter, Luke summarizes the apostle Paul's two-year teaching curriculum as follows: "From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to *the kingdom of God* and trying to convince them about *Jesus* both from *the Law of Moses* and from *the Prophets*" (Acts 28:23; see also 28:30–31). If we pay attention, we will come to understand that Luke, through Paul, has provided us with the answers to two fundamental questions. First, what is the Old Testament about? And second, what is the design or function of the Old Testament?

According to Acts 28, Paul spent two years in Rome using the Old Testament to teach about Jesus and the kingdom of God. To this end, we contend that the Old

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[1] It is difficult to arrive at an exact percentage given the nature of counting Hebrew words. However, in the Hebrew Old Testament, there are approximately 473,020 words (including all prefixes with their own entry in the lexicon and pronominal suffixes) that appear in 23,213 verses. In the Greek New Testament, there are approximately 138,158 words that appear in 7,941 verses. By word count, therefore, the Hebrew Old Testament constitutes 77.3 percent of the Christian Bible. The Greek New Testament registers 22.7 percent. The word count in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) is higher than the original Hebrew and yields an even greater percentage for the Old Testament.

[2] A full answer to this question is well beyond the scope of this brief introductory chapter. The data provided here is limited to the scope and shape of this volume.

Testament—and the whole Bible, for that matter—is ultimately about Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus constitutes the sum and substance of the biblical message. He is God's gospel and the *theological center* for the whole of the Christian Bible. He is the source and the unifying force that makes sense of all the diversity found in the biblical record. With Jesus as the theological center of the biblical message, the kingdom of God functions as the *thematic framework* for that message. This is the theme within which all other themes exist and are united. It is the realm of the prophet, priest, and king; the place of wisdom and the scribe; the world of the apostles, elders, and deacons. Every biblical theme is a kingdom-of-God theme. If Jesus as the theological center gives meaning to the biblical message, then the kingdom of God as the thematic framework provides the context for that message.

In addition to the message of the Old Testament, we also catch a glimpse of its design in the abbreviated designation, "the Law of Moses and . . . the Prophets" (Acts 28:23). A longer description appears in Luke 24:44, where Jesus refers to the Old Testament as "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms." Here Jesus is referring to the arrangement of the Old Testament in its original, threefold division: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. These divisions constitute the covenantal structure of the Old Testament in the categories of *covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings). This Old Testament covenantal design also serves as the pattern after which the New Testament was constructed. Seeing and understanding this comprehensive canonical design will provide us with important contextual clues for how to read, understand, and properly apply the Old Testament in the church today.

The Theological Center: Jesus

Jesus is the theological center of the Old Testament. This means that the person and work of Jesus as presented in the New Testament (including his birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, and return) constitute the singular reality that unifies and explains everything that appears in the Old Testament. It is perhaps clear to us that Jesus is the theological center of, or at least the central figure in, the New Testament. But both Jesus and the apostles also understood the theological center of the Old Testament to be the same as that of the New Testament.[3] The Old Testament is the shadow, and Jesus is the reality (Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Consider how the apostle Paul chose to begin his letter to the Romans:

> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh. (Rom. 1:1–3)

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[3] Contra Marshall, who is representative of a large portion of evangelicalism: "It follows that the OT can hardly be called 'a book about Jesus' as if he were the principal subject. Where there is a future hope, it is centered on God himself and in some places on a messianic figure who is not identified. Jesus is not explicitly present." I. Howard Marshall, "Jesus Christ," *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 594.

In 1:1, Paul identifies himself as an apostle and states that he has been "set apart" for the good news or the "gospel of God." Then, in 1:2–3, Paul identifies the source and the content of this gospel. It is important to recognize that this gospel was not something new but something "promised beforehand." Following this statement about the gospel promised beforehand are three prepositional phrases that may change the way in which you think about the Old Testament. This gospel came (1) *through* his prophets, (2) *in* the holy Scriptures, and was (3) *concerning* his Son. The three prepositional phrases in 1:2–3 identify (1) the vehicle of gospel revelation, (2) the location of gospel revelation, and (3) the content of gospel revelation.

Paul states that the gospel promised beforehand came through the prophets, who functioned as the authorial instruments of God's Old Testament, covenantal revelation. Additionally, this revelation was deposited in, and constituted for Paul, the holy Scriptures. At this point it is important to remember that when someone like Paul mentions the Scriptures in the New Testament, he is referring back to the Old Testament. Thus, for Paul, the Old Testament is fundamentally the gospel promised beforehand. The last prepositional phrase in this series identifies the content of this Old Testament gospel revelation as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In other words, the Old Testament, which came through the prophets, is the gospel promised beforehand because it has as its subject Jesus Christ, not only as the eternal Son of God but also as the offspring of David "according to the flesh" (1:3).

Paul's assertions concerning the nature and content of Old Testament revelation are supported by statements Jesus made that have been recorded in the Gospels. The first one appears in Luke 24:25–27 (see also 24:44–45). After rising from the dead, Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus to instruct two very confused disciples:

> And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Consider that these two disciples were rebuked as "foolish" and "slow of heart" because they did not believe that the Old Testament testified to the person and work of Jesus. Three times in these few verses the word "all" is used to describe the comprehensive nature of this reality—*all* that the prophets have spoken, *all* the Prophets, and *all* the Scriptures. And then, once again, we encounter a prepositional phrase that identifies the content of this prophetic revelation in "all the Scriptures": Jesus said that all the Scriptures contain "the things *concerning himself*." In other words, Jesus tells us that he is the unifying principle, or theological center, of the Old Testament.

It is not difficult to understand what Jesus is saying here. However, for most of us, like the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking, it is difficult to believe and understand how this reality works throughout the whole of the Old Testament with all its various and diverse parts. Alec Motyer puts it this way:

The great Lord Jesus came from outside and voluntarily and deliberately attached himself to the Old Testament, affirmed it to be the word of God and set himself, at cost, to fulfill it (Mt. 26:51–54). This fact of facts cuts the ground from under any suspicion that the *doctrine* of biblical authority rests on a circular argument such as, "I believe the Bible to be authoritative because the Bible says it is authoritative." Not so! It was Jesus who came "from outside" as the incarnate Son of God, Jesus who was raised from the dead as the Son of God with power, who chose to validate the Old Testament in retrospect and the New Testament in prospect, and who himself is the grand theme of the "story-line" of both Testaments, the focal-point giving coherence to the total "picture" in all its complexities. . . . He is the climax as well as the substance and centre of the whole. In him all God's promises are yea and amen (2 Cor. 1:20).[4]

The encounter on the road to Emmaus was not the first time that Jesus had made such a bold and clear statement about the nature and content of the Old Testament. In a speech directed against those who opposed him before his death, Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40). Once again, we are instructed by Jesus in the New Testament that those who "search" and study the Old Testament must understand that these Scriptures "bear witness" (μαρτυρέω) to Jesus. This is the very same thing that the author of the book of Hebrews states after a lengthy rehearsal of Old Testament history in Hebrews 11—including Abel, Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. These people are called "a great cloud of witnesses" (μαρτύρων) in Hebrews 12:1. Notice that these men and women are *not* called a "great cloud of examples" but rather witnesses, who testify or bear witness to the person and work of Jesus and who call us not to imitate them but rather to fix our eyes *with them* on "Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (12:2).

The testimony of Jesus and the New Testament is clear. Jesus is the theological center of the Old Testament. He is the unity that makes sense of all the diverse material encountered in the Old Testament Scriptures. We will discover that as "the first" and "the last" (Isa. 44:6) and as the Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Jesus is the second Adam, the seed of the woman, the offspring of Abraham, the Ruler from Judah, faithful Israel, the Mediator of a better covenant, our eternal High Priest, the Judge who saves once and for all, the heir of David, the Prophet like Moses, the Wisdom of God, the incarnate Word of God. He was not joking when he declared of himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). We will never fully understand the Old Testament if we refuse to fix our eyes on Jesus when we read these Scriptures.

Goldsworthy is correct when he argues,

The hub of the church and of the life of the believer is Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. He is not only the hermeneutical center of the whole Bible, but, according to the biblical testimony, he gives ultimate meaning to every fact in the

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[4] Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996), 21–22.

universe. He is thus the hermeneutical principle of all reality . . . providing the center that holds it all together.[5]

Goldsworthy moves beyond understanding Jesus as the theological center for just the Old Testament or for the Bible as a whole. He extends this principle to include all reality, including "every fact in the universe." In order to begin to understand the Old Testament, or the Bible, or life in general, we must first assess our view of the person and work of Jesus as presented in Scripture. Perhaps our inability to comprehend the fullness and unity of the inspired Word of God stems from our anemic estimation of the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1–3, 14).

THE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The kingdom of God (also construed as the kingdom of heaven) constitutes the thematic framework for the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. This is the theme that comprehends and encompasses every other theme encountered in the Scriptures, from creation to new creation—including covenant, law, prophet, priest, king, redemption, wisdom, war, the nations, inheritance, divine presence, idolatry, clothing, judgment, salvation, faith, hope, love, and any of the many other themes that cut across the pages of the Bible.[6] These are all kingdom-of-God themes. This framework extends to the outer limits of the canonical corpus. It unites, coheres, stabilizes, and shapes all other biblical themes and concepts.

The beginning of Jesus's preaching ministry in the Gospel of Mark is described in this way: "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God is at hand*; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14–15). During the forty-day span between Jesus's resurrection and ascension, Luke summarizes the final days of Jesus's teaching ministry in the same way, "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and *speaking about the kingdom of God*" (Acts 1:3). From beginning to end, the message of Jesus about himself is described as the kingdom of God (heaven).[7] For three months, Paul taught in the synagogue at Ephesus, "reasoning and persuading them about *the kingdom of God*" (Acts 19:8). And later, for two whole years, Paul resided in Rome, "proclaiming *the kingdom of God* and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31). Here we come to understand that Jesus and the apostles used the designation *kingdom of God* (or *heaven*) to summarize the content of their teaching and preaching ministries, and the book from which they taught was the Old Testament (cf. Acts 28:23).

John Bright captures the significance of this theme when he writes,

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[5] Graeme L. Goldsworthy, "Biblical Theology as the Heartbeat of Effective Ministry," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 284.
[6] For a preliminary treatment of a vareity of biblical themes, see *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 365–863.
[7] This overarching theme for the Christian Bible is explicitly mentioned ninety-eight times in the New Testament. Of these ninety-eight occurrences, eighty-four (or 85 percent) occur in the Gospels.

For the concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible. Not only does it loom large in the teaching of Jesus; it is to be found, in one form or another, through the length and breadth of the Bible—at least if we may view it through the eyes of the New Testament faith—from Abraham, who set out to seek "the city . . . whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10; cf. Gen. 12:1ff.), until the New Testament closes with "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2). To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation.[8]

In the same way, Walther Eichrodt, in his two-volume *Old Testament Theology* from the 1960s, recognized the significance of this theme for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments when he wrote, "that which binds together indivisibly the two realms of the Old and New Testaments . . . is the irruption of the Kingdom of God into this world and its establishment here."[9]

When it comes to understanding Jesus as the theological center of the Bible, we begin to recognize that the Old Testament makes sense only in light of his birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. And the theme of the kingdom of God gives the context for this theological center and comes to expression in the Old Testament through what is commonly called *redemptive history*.[10] This is the organic, progressive movement of God's covenantal activity across time, from the creation of the universe in Genesis 1–2 to the new creation in Revelation 21–22. God's kingdom unfolds throughout the pages of Scripture from age to age and from epoch to epoch. It begins with creation and the fall (Genesis 1–3), declines in judgment with the flood and Babel (Genesis 4–11), picks up with the patriarchs (Genesis 12–50), builds to the nation of Israel in the wilderness (Exodus–Deuteronomy), and then climaxes in the occupation of the land under Joshua, the judges, and the Davidic dynasty in the land of promise (Joshua–Kings). But just as soon as God had given David rest from his enemies and established his dynasty and the temple in Jerusalem was completed, the infidelity of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 11) marked the beginning of Israel's decline into a divided kingdom and then into exile. Aspects of the exile are captured by some of the writing prophets and in books like Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra–Nehemiah in the Writings. The Hebrew Old Testament concludes with unfulfilled expectations concerning the promised return from exile (Ezra 1:1–4; 2 Chron. 36:22–23; cf. Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:6–9), causing us to wait for the arrival of the true King of the kingdom of God in the New Testament (cf. Mark 1:14–15).

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[8] John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 7.

[9] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:26.

[10] In addition to *redemptive history*, designations such as *salvation history*, *metanarrative*, or the German *Heilsgeschichte* are used to refer to the progressive, historical development and presentation of the biblical materials. However, it may be more accurate to employ the designation *covenantal history*, since this is the reality that motivates and shapes the presentation of history across the pages of Scripture, particularly in the categories of covenant prologue, covenant renewal, and covenant lawsuit (cf. the book of Genesis, esp. 15:7; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 1:9–3:29; Josh. 24:2–13; Judg. 6:7–10; 1 Sam. 12:6–12; Psalms 78; 105; 106; Neh. 9:5b–37; Acts 7; Hebrews 11).

The Covenantal Structure: Law, Prophets, and Writings

Having considered that the Old Testament is about Jesus and his kingdom, how then does the Bible work? One way to think about how to answer this important question relates to the shape or the final form of the Old Testament. Earlier we compared the Bible to a picture puzzle and indicated that the individual shapes and pieces of the puzzle find their ultimate meaning in their connection and contribution to the whole. An individual puzzle piece, by itself, has its own unique image and shape capable of description and analysis. But it is not until that individual piece is set into the context of the whole puzzle that we can understand its significance and contribution to the whole. The same can be said for the Old Testament. Each individual book in each individual section in each of the two Testaments maintains its own individual shape (structure) and image (meaning). But it is not until we understand the position of each book in the context of the whole Old Testament or Bible that we come to discover its full and final significance.[11]

The book of Ruth serves as a good example of this reality.[12] In our English Bibles, the book of Ruth follows the book of Judges. Its placement there is based on the chronological note that appears at the beginning of the book: "*In the days when the judges* ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab" (Ruth 1:1). According to the Babylonian Talmud,[13] however, the book of Ruth is located at the beginning of the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible, just before the book of Psalms. Its position in this ordering appears to be based upon the genealogy at the end of the book (4:18–22), where Boaz (Ruth's husband) is listed as the great-grandfather of David, whom the Babylonian Talmud identifies as the author/collector of the Psalms. Yet in the final form of the Hebrew Bible, the one still in print today, the book of Ruth appears just after the book of Proverbs. Its position here is both theologically and pedagogically motivated. Proverbs 31 concludes with the famous oracle taught to King Lemuel by his mother, the oracle of the "excellent wife" (Prov. 31:10–31).[14] The designation "excellent wife" appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible, twice in Proverbs (12:4; 31:10) and once in Ruth (3:11). Ruth is the only actual (rather than ideal) woman in Scripture ever to receive this special designation. And so, based upon its position after Proverbs, it appears that Ruth is intended to function as the illustration of the ideal woman presented in Proverbs 31.

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[11] For more on this topic see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, TBS 7 (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 1–8, 717–39, and Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15–43.

[12] For a superb treatment of this topic, see Stephen G. Dempster, "A Wandering Moabite: Ruth—A Book in Search of a Canonical Home," in *The Shape of the Writings*, ed. Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone, with the assistance of Rachel Stone, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 87–118.

[13] *Baba Bathra* 14b in the Babylonian Talmud represents the oldest known rabbinical order. It dates from between the third and sixth centuries AD. In this listing, the placement of books corresponds closely to the arrangement that appears in the current printed edition of the Hebrew Bible, with only two exceptions: Isaiah in the Latter Prophets and Ruth in the Writings. The position of the book of Ruth is described in *Baba Bathra* 14b, "The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the Book of Psalms, Job, Prophets, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles. Now on the view that Job lived in the days of Moses, should not the book of Job come first?—We do not begin with a record of suffering. But Ruth also is a record of suffering?—It is a suffering with a sequel [of happiness], as R. Johanan said: Why was her name called Ruth?—Because there issued from her David who replenished the Holy One, blessed be He, with hymns and praises."

[14] The Hebrew expression אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל is translated in various ways, such as "excellent wife" (ESV, NASB), "wife of noble character" (NIV), and "virtuous woman" (KJV).

At this point we are not interested in defending one position against another. Rather, the point is to illustrate that the position of a book in the Bible can impact how we interpret it. Is the book of Ruth a chronological footnote to the book of Judges, a geneological introduction to David—the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1)—or the narrative illustration of the excellent wife? The position of the puzzle piece matters. It shapes how we interact with both its message and its function. For this reason, it is worth taking a moment to briefly describe the final form of the Hebrew Old Testament and to defend our preference for treating the books of the Old Testament in this order, as they have been listed in the table of contents.

The arrangement of the books in our English Old Testament differs slightly from the arrangement of the books in our Hebrew Old Testament. It is important to note, however, that the English Old Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament contain the same books. They are simply grouped and arranged in different ways.

In the English Bible, the books of the Old Testament are arranged by genre, chronology, and authorship. As table 1 (p. 32) illustrates, the English Old Testament contains four main sections in which the books are grouped (more or less) according to their basic genre: law, history, poetry, and prophecy. The books in each of these sections are further positioned based on issues of chronology and authorship. For example, the five books of the Pentatuech were written by Moses (authorship) and appear in chronological order. The so-called Historical Books also appear in roughly chronological order. In the Poetical Books, those associated with Solomon are grouped together (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs), and the placement of Lamentations after Jeremiah is motivated by the tradition that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, even though the author is technically anonymous.

The arrangement of the books in the English Old Testament has come down to us from the Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate (ca. 400 AD). This Latin translation was used in the church prior to the emergence of English Bible translations during the Reformation. The arrangement of the books in the Vulgate may have been adopted from an older Greek translation called the Septuagint, but this is difficult to determine with certainty.[15]

In contrast, the Hebrew Bible includes three major sections: Law, Prophets, and Writings. These divisions predate the time of Christ, and it appears that he was familiar with them in his own day when he referred to the Old Testament in Luke 24:44 as "the *Law of Moses* and the *Prophets* and the *Psalms*."[16] Another possible clue appears in Matthew 23:35 (cf. Luke 11:51), where Jesus refers to the blood of two martyrs, "from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah." It

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[15] For more on the structure and design of the Old Testament, see Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (1985; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 15–51; Andrew E. Steinmann, *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2000); Greg Goswell, "The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible," *JETS* 51, no. 4 (2008): 673–88; and Goswell, "The Order of the Books in the Greek Old Testament," *JETS* 52, no. 3 (2009): 449–66.

[16] The designation *Psalms* for the third section represents the Jewish practice of naming the whole of something after what appears first in it. For example, the book of Exodus in Hebrew is called "these are the names" because those are the first words in the book. Today, we call this third section the "Writings." It is not uncommon in some circles to refer to the Hebrew Old Testament (or the English translations of it) as the "Tanak." This designation comes from putting together the first letters of each of the Hebrew names for these three sections: *torah*, *nevi'im*, and *kethuvim*.

English Bible Order	Hebrew Bible Order	
Pentateuch	**Law**	
Genesis	Genesis	
Exodus	Exodus	
Leviticus	Leviticus	
Numbers	Numbers	
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	
Historical Books	**Prophets**	
Joshua	Joshua	*Former Prophets*
Judges	Judges	
Ruth	Samuel	
1–2 Samuel	Kings	
1–2 Kings		
1–2 Chronicles	Isaiah	*Latter Prophets*
Ezra	Jeremiah	
Nehemiah	Ezekiel	
Esther	Book of the Twelve	
Poetry	**Writings**	
Job	Psalms	*Life in the Land*
Psalms	Job	
Proverbs	Proverbs	
Ecclesiastes	Ruth	
Song of Songs	Song of Songs	
	Ecclesiastes	
Prophets		
Isaiah	Lamentations	*Life in Exile*
Jeremiah	Esther	
Lamentations	Daniel	
Ezekiel	Ezra	
Daniel	Nehemiah	
The Twelve Minor Prophets	Chronicles	

Table 1

has been recognized that this is not a strictly chronological reference but rather a canonical reference. Abel is the martyr who appears in the first book of the Old Testament (Genesis 4), and Zechariah is the martyr who appears in the last book (2 Chronicles 24). Together, these two references by Jesus suggest that the Old Testament in his time contained three (not four) divisions, beginning with Genesis and ending with Chronicles (not Malachi). As indicated earlier, the way in which books are arranged can impact their interpretation. And so we must consider the implications for the arrangement of the Old Testament in the categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings and how that arrangement relates to the New Testament. Figure 1 attempts to illustrate that relationship by suggesting a covenantal arrangement for the Christian Bible.

	Law	Prophets		Writings		
Covenant Prologue	Exodus	Joshua	Isaiah	Psalms	Lamentations	**Covenant Epilogue**
	Leviticus	Judges	Jeremiah	Job	Esther	
	Numbers	Samuel	Ezekiel	Proverbs	Daniel	
Genesis	Deuteronomy	Kings	The Twelve	Ruth	Ezra	
				Song of Songs	Nehemiah	Revelation
				Ecclesiastes	Chronicles	
	Matthew			Paul's Epistles	1, 2 Peter	
	Mark	The Acts of the Apostles		Hebrews	1, 2, 3 John	
	Luke			James	Jude	
	John					
	Covenant	**Covenant History**		**Covenant Life**		

Figure 1

Figure 1 endeavors to display the canonical construction of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, in the categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings. The Old Testament is shaded in gray, signifying shadows of the realities (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1), and the bulk of it appears in the upper register of blocks. The New Testament appears in white, with the bulk of it showing up in the lower register of blocks. Genesis and Revelation serve as bookends to the whole. The labels appearing with the descriptor *covenant* serve to explain the nature of each of the major divisions. The books of the Law are the *covenant* books. The Prophets contain what will later be described as *covenant history*, and the Writings cover issues related to *covenant life*. In other words, the categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings are covenantal in nature.[17] The Bible, as a covenantal document, is also covenantal in its construction and design.[18] The image of the picture puzzle that

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[17] According to Rendtorff, "One might venture to say: in the first part of the canon *God acts*, in the second *God speaks*, and in the third part of the canon *people speak* to God and of God." *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 6. Dempster proposes that the arrangement of the Hebrew Bible grants readers a "comprehensive narrative framework" with poetic commentary. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 22. The works of Rendtorff and Dempster are outstanding in their attempts to characterize the significance of the final form of the Hebrew Bible and its significance for interpretation (macrocanonical hermeneutics). However, the categories of acting and speaking (Rendtorff) and narrative and commentary (Dempster) are both comprehended by the covenantal arrangement proposed here.

[18] Horton rightly argues that the "particular architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant. It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God's covenantal dealings in our

makes sense of the individual puzzle pieces, both in terms of placement and function, is *covenant*. The significance of the covenantal design for the Old Testament is reflected in the fact that the New Testament appears to have been arranged in the same way, as a mirror reflecting the Old Testament. And so the categories of *covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings) apply equally to the Old and New Testaments in each of their respective sections, as indicated in figure 1. It will be helpful to briefly consider how each of these sections work in both Testaments.

Covenant Prologue and Epilogue

The books of Genesis and Revelation are set apart in the Christian Bible as covenant prologue and covenant epilogue, the introduction and the conclusion to the whole. Though written at different times by different human authors from different cultures and in different languages, these two books were designed to fit together and shape the message of the Christian Bible. Every promise and covenant established in the book of Genesis (creation, redemption, Noah, Abraham) finds it fulfillment and consummation in the book of Revelation.

The close literary and theological relationship that these two books share (*protology* and eschatology) is demonstrated by the way in which Genesis begins and Revelation ends. This relationship is expressed through the literary device of chiasm, which also serves secondarily as a literary *inclusio* for the whole of the Bible. This chiasm is displayed in the following outline:

- **a** Creation of heaven and earth (Genesis 1–2)
    - **b** Marriage covenant: Adam and Eve—the bride comes to a garden-sanctuary from which rivers of water flow for the nations (Genesis 2)
        - **c** Satan's destruction promised (Genesis 3)
        - **c'** Satan's destruction accomplished (Revelation 20)
    - **b'** Marriage covenant: Lamb and bride—the bride comes to a city-sanctuary from which rivers of water flow for the nations (Revelation 21)
- **a'** Creation of new heaven and earth (Revelation 21–22)

By beginning and ending in the same way (but in reverse!), the Bible exhibits a remarkable level of unity in both design and purpose. This reality illustrates the role of a single divine author working in conjunction with numerous human instruments who participated in the writing process. This chiasm also appears to function as a canonical *inclusio*,[19] providing internal evidence for a closed canon.

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history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable diversity." Horton also contends that this "framework is largely hidden from view" but perhaps we are now beginning to recognize this grand covenantal framework. Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 13. Kline has argued that "biblical canonicity shows itself from its inception to be of the lineage of covenantal canonicity" and that "because Scripture is covenant, biblical canonicity, from beginning to end, belongs at the formal literary level to the more broadly attested category of authoritative treaty words. All Scripture is covenantal, and the canonicity of all Scripture is covenantal. Biblical canon is covenantal canon." Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989), 37, 75.

[19] *Inclusio* is a literary device used to mark the beginning and end of something by way of repetition. Examples appear in many of the so-called *hallelujah psalms* (e.g., Psalms 106; 113; 117:1–2; 135; 146–150).

Law: Covenant

There are four covenant books in the Old Testament (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)[20] and four covenant books in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). In each Testament, the covenant books are framed by the birth and the death of the covenant mediator and contain the accounts of their lives and teachings in the context of covenant administration. In the Old Testament, the framing is comprehensive, beginning with the birth of Moses in Exodus 2 and concluding with his death in Deuteronomy 34. In the New Testament, the framing appears within each individual book (distributive). For example, in Matthew the birth of Jesus is recorded in chapter 1 and his death in chapter 27. This pattern is variously repeated in the other Gospels.

In addition to the larger, structural relationships that exist between the covenant books of the Old and New Testaments, numerous internal elements also connect these books. For example, both Moses and Jesus share a birth narrative where they are born under the threat of death by a foreign ruler and must flee into Egypt to escape (cf. Exodus 1; Matthew 2). Additionally, both men deliver the law from a mountain, experience transfigurations, perform miracles, and suffer under the constant rebellion of their people as covenant mediators. In many ways, the gospel narratives of the New Testament work to portray Jesus as a second Moses figure.[21]

In addition to these major features of correspondence, there are also important aspects of discontinuity. For example, in Exodus 32:30–34, Moses offers up to the Lord his life on behalf of the people of Israel because their sin had provoked the threat of death. However, this act of substitution is denied to Moses. But when it comes to Jesus under the new covenant, his request to circumvent this path to salvation is denied (cf. Matt. 26:39), and he becomes the ultimate substitute for the people of God, bearing the curse of their sin by his own death. Another example includes the way in which these covenant narratives end. In the old covenant, the narrative ends with the death of the covenant mediator, Moses. With Jesus in the new covenant, however, the death of the covenant mediator is not the final word. Each of the new covenant narratives climaxes in Jesus's victory over death by way of resurrection. It is important to understand that these instances of discontinuity do not sever the relationship between the covenant books in the Old and New Testaments. Rather, they were designed to highlight the person and work of Jesus by way of contrast as the Mediator of a better covenant (cf. Heb. 3:3; 7:22).

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[20] Though a part of the Pentateuch with Exodus–Deuteronomy, the book of Genesis has been set apart from the other books in this canonical section (the Law). At the literary level, this division is achieved by means of poetic intrusion and type-scene. The book of Genesis ends with the poetic blessing of the twelve patriarchs by Jacob in Genesis 49 (poetic intrusion) and then the death of the blesser in Genesis 50 (type-scene). This literary combination is repeated at the end of Deuteronomy with the poetic blessing of the twelve tribes (patriarchs) by Moses in Deuteronomy 33 followed by the account of his death in Deuteronomy 34. In this way, the Law or Pentateuch is shown to have two parts: (1) Genesis and (2) Exodus–Deuteronomy. Thus, the identification of Genesis as a distinct covenant prologue is grounded in the literary construction of the Law.

[21] See Kline, "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre," in *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 172–203, and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 137–290.

Prophets: Covenant History

The books of the Prophets contain the history of God's people living under his covenant administrations and the prophetic interpretation of that history. In the Old Testament, the Prophets appear in two sections, the Former and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets consist of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books record the history of God's old covenant people and their tenure in the Land of Promise, from occupation in Joshua to exile in Kings. The material presented in this history is characterized by descriptions of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises and Israel's infidelity to that covenant. This aspect of God's faithfulness to the covenant functions as the literary frame for the Former Prophets and, as such, is programmatic for the interpretation of this material, as the following two texts from the first and last books of the Former Prophets demonstrate:

> Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. (Josh. 21:45)

> Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. (1 Kings 8:56)

The corresponding themes of God's faithfulness and Israel's infidelity already appear in Deuteronomy 29–31, which serves as the blueprint for the material presented in the Former Prophets. Here the pattern of occupation (Deut. 30:15–16; 31:13, 20), infidelity (29:25–26; 31:16, 20–21, 27–29), exile (29:27–28; 30:17–18; 31:17–18), and return (30:1–10) is established as the prophetic preword that shapes the characterization of Israel in the Former Prophets.

The so-called Latter Prophets consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (i.e., what English Bibles often call the Minor Prophets).[22] At one level, this material constitutes the authorized, inspired, prophetic interpretation of Israel's history under the covenant. "Thus," as Rendtorff observes, "the prophetic word becomes a commentary on the history of Israel in the time of the kings."[23] Once again, this material shines a spotlight on God's faithfulness to his covenant, on Israel's infidelity that resulted in their expulsion from the land, and on the hope of a return from exile and the restoration of covenant blessing.

The latter prophets were called to serve as God's covenant officials, as covenant lawyers prosecuting the Lord's covenant lawsuit against his unfaithful people, Israel. In other words, the latter prophets function as the Lord's prosecuting attorneys. The Law (Exodus–Deuteronomy) contains the covenant regulations that stipulate and govern the life of the people of God. It represents the standard by which they were to live. The Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings) provide the historical evidence that documents the Lord's faithfulness to the covenant along with Israel's pervasive

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[22] The Book of the Twelve is counted as a single book in the Hebrew Bible, much like Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are each counted as a single book.

[23] Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 7.

infidelity. These realities not only shape the content presented in those sections but aid in our understanding of how to use it in teaching and preaching.

Just as Deuteronomy 29–31 serves as the programmatic blueprint for the material that appears in the Former Prophets, so Deuteronomy 32 serves the same function for the Latter Prophets. Deuteronomy 32, the song of Yahweh, appears in the form of a covenant lawsuit[24] and represents the preliminary, prophetic witness against the people of God for their infidelity. It also establishes the literary and theological content of the Latter Prophets. In other words, Deuteronomy 32 represents the interpretive lens through which to understand and interpret Isaiah through Malachi. It is no accident that the song of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 32 and the entire corpus of prophetic literature both begin (cf. Isa. 1:2) with the call of heaven and earth to bear witness against Israel in the execution of Yahweh's lawsuit against his people. This song of witness includes a testimony of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness (Deut. 32:3–4, 7–14), Israel's infidelity (32:5, 15–18), judgment or the enactment of covenant curses (32:19–25), and then a surprising reversal where the lawsuit is "broken" and God's people are restored (32:36–43). This restoration takes place through an act of atonement by which the Lord "takes vengeance on his enemies" and "makes atonement for his land and people" (32:43, my trans.). It is this same pattern of judgment and restoration that the Latter Prophets exemplify in their anticipation of new covenant realities.

The New Testament includes a single book addressing *covenant history*, the book of Acts. This book also contains the account of the initial history of God's people under the new covenant, along with the prophetic-apostolic interpretation of that history.[25] If in the Former Prophets the goal of God's people was to occupy the land and establish God's name in Jerusalem (cf. Deut. 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2), then that goal is reversed in the book of Acts, where God's people are directed to move out from Jerusalem, to Judea, and then to the ends of the world in order to bear witness to God's name among all the nations.

Though not its own discrete unit like the Latter Prophets, the book of Acts contains within itself several programmatic speeches that function as the prophetic-apostolic interpretation of the history that is recorded in this book. Major examples include the speech of Peter in Acts 2, the speech of Stephen in Acts 7, and the speech of Paul in Acts 13. It is also worth mentioning that Stephen's speech functions as the final covenant lawsuit in the Bible. It was here that the Jewish religious leadership (the

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[24] The form of the covenant lawsuit is derived from the covenant form itself: identification of the judge, testimony of innocence, indictments, witnesses, judgment, and call to repentance. For more on this topic, see Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *JBL* 78, no. 4 (1959): 285–95; James Limburg, "The Root ריב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," *JBL* 88, no. 3 (1969): 291–304; G. E. Mendenhall, "Samuel's 'Broken Rîb': Deuteronomy 32.1–43," in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, ed. James W. Flanagan and Anita Weisbrod Robinson (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 63–73; Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rîb-Pattern)*, trans. by F. Cryer, JSOTSup 9 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); G. Ernest Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter J. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 26–46.

[25] In addition to the more general contours of covenantal function and content, additional elements may serve to connect this corpus of biblical literature. One such example may be the correspondence between the narrative account of Achan and his family in Joshua 7 and that of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. In both instances, the covenant ethic of the kingdom is displayed in the deaths of the covenant violators.

Sanhedrin) received the same declaration of judgment that fell upon the wilderness generation after worshiping the golden calf: "stiff-necked" (cf. Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Acts 7:51). These were the people who failed to enter into God's rest and possess his promises because of their unbelief, and so they perished in the wilderness. Stephen pronounces the same judgment upon the Sanhedrin. Then, by way of martyrdom, Stephen is identified with the prophets whom their fathers persecuted in the very same way (Acts 7:51–53, 59–60). Though slightly different in design, the Former and Latter Prophets occupy the same category of *covenant history* and share the same function as the book of Acts, the *covenant history* book of the New Testament.

Writings: Covenant Life

The books in this third and final category of the covenantal Canon are those labeled as *covenant life*. These books teach us how to think and live by faith in light of the covenant to which we belong. These are the more "practical" books in the Bible, and they include some of the more popular books used for preaching and teaching in the church today.

There are twelve books in this final section of the Hebrew Old Testament, Psalms through Chronicles. These books appear to have been arranged in two subsections: those that pertain to life in the land (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes) and those that pertain to life in exile (Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, and Chronicles). The sequence within which many of these books appear may be motivated by the pedagogical principle of exposition and illustration. For example, the most common type of psalm in the book of Psalms is the lament, and so Job follows as the illustration of what it looks like to experience suffering in life and to express that suffering through lamentation. Or consider the fact that the wisdom narrative of Ruth follows Proverbs 31, the exposition of the "excellent wife." The only historical woman in the Bible to receive this explicit designation is Ruth, the illustration of the "excellent wife." It may also be significant that the Song of Songs appears in conjunction with Proverbs 31 and the book of Ruth. In fact, it will be argued later that the Song of Songs functions as the counterpart to Proverbs 31 in terms of its basic function for training in wisdom. This subsection in the Writings concludes with Ecclesiastes, perhaps explaining the "vanity" or folly of a life without wisdom, a life lived "under the sun," meaning "without God."

The second subsection in the Writings (*covenant life*) begins with the book of Lamentations, which calls for God's people in exile to a life of faithfulness by waiting and hoping for the salvation of the Lord (cf. Lam. 3:25–31). Lamentations is then followed by the books of Esther and Daniel, containing the accounts of two people who lived faithfully in exile under the most difficult and challenging of circumstances. Esther and Daniel serve as examples for God's people, illustrating what it looks like to live a life of faith in exile, as aliens and strangers on the earth (cf. Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).

This section in the Old Testament concludes with Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles.

These books have been arranged in such a way as to characterize Israel's return from exile as falling short of the anticipated prophetic restoration (e.g., Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:6–9). From the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:1–4 to the decree of Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23, the promised return from exile did not exhibit the full restoration of the temple or the Davidic dynasty. And so the genealogies of Chronicles begin the search for the Davidic king from the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 2–4) and the Aaronic priest from the tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6). This book also highlights the work of planning and building the First Temple (1 Chronicles 22–2 Chronicles 7) and the celebration of the Passover that would anticipate a new exodus (2 Chronicles 30, 35), led by someone who would go up before God's people in a new conquest (2 Chron. 36:23).

It is not until we encounter the genealogies of the New Testament, in Matthew and Luke, that the genealogies of Chronicles find their expected fulfillment in the person of Jesus. He is the Davidic King from the tribe of Judah (e.g., Matt. 1:1; 12:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8), the eternal High Priest (e.g., Heb. 5:1–10), the Passover Lamb (John 1:29, 36), the new exodus (Luke 9:31), and the One who will lead God's people in the final battle of conquest (Revelation 19). In many ways, the book of Chronicles functions like the book of Revelation, bringing the whole of God's Old Testament Word into sharp focus by highlighting important people, institutions, and themes. It serves as the ideal canonical hinge connecting the Old and New Testaments. Like the book of Genesis, it begins with Adam and includes important genealogies. But it is the only other book in the Christian Bible besides Matthew to begin with a genealogy. There is little doubt that the book of Chronicles serves as the perfect conclusion to the Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Luke 11:51), anticipating that which would soon transpire in the opening Gospel accounts of the New Testament and beyond.

In the New Testament, the Epistles (Romans–Jude) serve the same basic covenantal function as the Old Testament Writings. They were designed to train God's people for life in the new covenant, both in terms of how we think (theology) and how we live (ethics). Paul's epistles serve as a good example. They are commonly divided into two main parts, the indicative and the imperative. In the first part (indicative), Paul describes the theological implications of the new covenant in light of the person and work of Christ (e.g., Romans 1–11). In the second part (imperative), Paul describes the practical or ethical implications of life in the new covenant. This method of presentation is not unfamiliar to Old Testament Wisdom Literature, a school of thought in which Paul was trained as a Pharisee. In the book of Proverbs, for example, the first section (Proverbs 1–9) presents readers with a theology of wisdom in opposition to folly. In the second section (Proverbs 10–31), readers encounter the practical or ethical implications of the life of wisdom. Based on the observations presented here, it seems reasonable to conclude that the correspondence between the *covenant life* books in the Old and New Testaments are intentional and provide readers with a macrocanonical hermeneutical lens through which to understand and apply this material appropriately in the life of the church.

Conclusion

We have come to understand that the Bible has (1) a theological center, (2) a thematic framework, and (3) a covenantal structure. This threefold perspective for biblical theology provides unity and comprehends diversity. When asked about the Bible's content, we can answer with confidence that it is about *Jesus and the kingdom of God*. When asked about the nature of the Bible, or how it works, our answer is simple: it works covenantally in the categories of *covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings), for both the Old and New Testaments.[26]

In this introductory chapter, we have labored to describe the larger biblical context that will help to make sense of each individual Old Testament book studied in the subsequent chapters, intentionally following the ordering of the books presented in the Hebrew Old Testament. This is the older tradition, and it is the tradition validated by Jesus and the authors of the New Testament. We have also seen that the New Testament books have been grouped and arranged after the pattern of the Hebrew arrangement for Old Testament books, *not* the English Bible arrangement! Thus, the construction of the Christian Bible in its macrocanonical structure exhibits an "intelligent design" that points to its ultimate, divine author and shapes the ultimate meaning or message of the one book.

This macrocanonical context helps us to understand the big picture, how the Old and New Testaments fit together and how the parts of each Testament relate to each other. It also shapes how we might interpret and apply each of the different books in each of the different sections in each of the different Testaments.[27]

We have also observed how Genesis and Chronicles fit together as the beginning and end of the Hebrew Old Testament. Both books begin with the figure of Adam and contain important genealogical lists that work to trace and identify the conquering, messianic seed of the woman that would fulfill all the covenantal promises of God and promote the consummation of the kingdom of God. But Chronicles also fits together with Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. These are the only two books in the Christian Bible that begin with genealogies, and the sought-after king and priest of Chronicles is found only in the arrival of the genealogical presentation of Jesus in the New Testament.

It may also be worth noting that the three sections of the Hebrew Old Testament—*covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings)—are glued together at the seams.[28] For example, the Old Testament Prophets and Writings begin with statements that express their dependence upon the Law by uniquely highlighting the protological importance of meditation on the "law of the Lord"

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[26] So Rendtorff argues, "Thus the variety of voices within the Hebrew Bible gains its quite specific structure through the arrangement of the canon." *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 8.

[27] Dempster similarly explains that "canonization provides a literary context for all the texts, creating one Text from many. The fact that the Hebrew canon is structured in terms of a narrative sequence with commentary means that canonization does not 'flatten' the text into a one-dimensional uniformity; rather, it provides for evolution, diversity and growth within an overarching framework in which the various parts can be related to the literary whole." *Dominion and Dynasty*, 42–43.

[28] Dempster has noted, "Moreover, the final compilers of the biblical text ensured that the text was to be understood as a unity. There are not only major groupings of books, but editorial 'splices' that join the major groupings of the books with each other. Therefore, both theological and literary points are made simultaneously." *Dominion and Dynasty*, 32.

"day and night" (cf. Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2). Additionally, the Law and the Prophets also conclude with the expectation of a prophet like unto but greater than Moses and Elijah (cf. Deut 34:10–12; Mal. 4:4–6; Matt. 17:3–4; Mark 9:4–5; Luke 9:30–33). This covenantal-canonical glue provides evidence that this arrangement is not accidental but intentional, instructional, and hermeneutical. The Prophets and the Writings are grounded in the Law, or covenant documents, but this material is also eschataological in nature, striving to identify the ultimate Prophet who will usher in the day of the Lord.

Finally, it is important to understand that this arrangement is ultimately christological. Jesus is the seed of the woman who has come to crush the seed of the serpent, and he is the offspring of Abraham who fulfills every covenantal promise (Genesis; *covenant prologue*). Jesus is also the better covenant Mediator, the true and better Temple, and the true and better sacrifice. Jesus came to keep and fulfill the law of God (Exodus–Deuteronomy; *covenant*). Jesus Christ is the true and better Israel who was totally and completely obedient to the law of Moses, earning the righteousness that we could not earn for ourselves. He is the seed of David, according to the flesh, the King of the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is also the true and better Prophet. Not only did he execute the ultimate prophetic lawsuit, but he bore its punishment for those who would receive his earned righteousness. He was not bound by the Old Testament prophetic messenger formula, "Thus says the Lord," but rather, spoke as Yahweh himself, "truly, truly I say to you" (Joshua–Malachi; *covenant history*). Jesus Christ is the true and better Wisdom, the ultimate praise of God, the very Wisdom of God (Psalms–Chronicles; *covenant life*). He is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). If you would understand the Old Testament, you must come to embrace Jesus, his kingdom, and the covenantal nature of his Word and work.

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Genesis

John D. Currid

INTRODUCTION

The name of the first book of the Hebrew Bible derives from the opening word of the Hebrew text, בְּרֵאשִׁית. This word means "in the beginning," and it is an appropriate designation because the book is about beginnings: the beginning of the universe; the beginning of time, matter, and space; the beginning of humanity; the beginning of sin; the beginning of redemption; and the beginning of Israel. By deliberating over Genesis, then, we are essentially engaging in *protology*, the study of first things. That the cosmos has a beginning implies that it also has an end and that everything is moving toward a consummation (the study of these last things is called *eschatology*). The Scriptures, therefore, present a linear history, a movement from inception to completion.

Scholars have commonly tried to distinguish between this Hebraic view of history and that of other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Many have argued that the pagan cultures of the time believed in a cyclical history, teaching that nature is locked in an unending sequence of birth, life, death, and rebirth. And therefore, the world is heading nowhere; it is merely in a ceaseless, natural cycle. In reality, that contrast is too simplistic. The ancients were actually quite aware of history, which the great volume of historical records these peoples kept confirms. The ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians were skilled and proficient in preserving historical documents, annals, and chronologies.[1] The contrast between the two conceptions of the universe really boils down to the question of what is the foundation of history. The Hebrews had a worldview that centered on God as the Lord and overseer of history.

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[1] See Pritchard, *ANET*; William K. Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*, trans. Robert K. Ritner et al., 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); D. Winton Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times*, Harper Torchbooks, TB 85 (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); and many others.

Everything that happens in the cosmos unfolds according to God's plan; he is the One who moves history from a beginning toward a final climax (Isa. 41:4; 43:1–15; 44:6; 48:12). He is sovereign and sits on the throne of history. The other cultures of the ancient Near East had no such theological conception.

BACKGROUND ISSUES

Authorship

For the past 150 years, the question of the formation and development of the book of Genesis, and the rest of the Pentateuch for that matter, has dominated Old Testament studies. Inquiries into authorship, date of writing, and place of writing have stood at the very forefront of Old Testament scholarship. Although people have asked such questions throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity, perhaps the first to struggle seriously with the issues was Jean Astruc (AD 1684–1766), a professor of medicine at the University of Paris. Astruc determined that someone brought together four original documents to make up the Pentateuch. He noticed that certain names for God dominated different parts of the literature, and this became one factor in determining what belonged to which source. He also believed that doublets—that is, a second telling of the same incident—demonstrated different sources. Although Astruc likely believed that Moses was the author of each of the four sources, his studies laid the foundation for the biblical criticism that would soon follow.

So what started the belief that Genesis was the writing of not one person but rather various authors whose sources redactors (i.e., editors) stitched together over time? Perhaps the most important impetus for this notion was the thinking not of a biblical scholar but of a philosopher. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) formed an influential worldview that argued that all things in reality are changing or in process. Everything is developing from lower to higher degrees of perfection. This process occurs by means of the dialectic that moves things from one state (thesis) to its opposite (antithesis) and finally achieves a higher synthesis between the two. It repeats itself so that higher states of existence come into being. This is a natural process that affects all areas of life: culture, social systems, political systems, biology, economics, and religion. It is an evolutionary view of existence.

One of Hegel's colleagues, a biblical scholar named Wilhelm Vatke (1806–1882), took and applied Hegel's philosophy to the study of the Old Testament and, in particular, to the formation of the Pentateuch.[2] This marked a major turning point because "the application of Hegelian philosophy to the study of the Old Testament led to [Julius] Wellhausen's [1844–1918] establishment of the modern Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch and eventually to the death of Old Testament theology."[3] Building upon these foundational presuppositions of Astruc, Hegel, and others, subsequent biblical scholars theorized that the Pentateuch was indeed a collation of numerous sources brought together by later editors. However, they did not

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[2] Wilhelm Vatke, *Die Biblische Theologie* (Berlin: Bethke, 1835).
[3] Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 32.

agree on the sources and how they were collated. For example, those who adhere to the Supplementary Hypothesis argue that there was one core document of the Pentateuch to which redactors added numerous fragments over the centuries. On the other hand, others argue that the Pentateuch lacks a core document altogether and consists merely of a mass of fragments from numerous sources that have been collated and edited (this is called the Fragmentary Hypothesis).

The major source theory developed in the nineteenth century was the Graf-Wellhausen Theory, otherwise known as the Documentary Hypothesis. This theory proposed four basic sources for the Pentateuch, referred to as J, E, D, and P:

1. **J** is the **Jahwist** (or **Yahwist**) source. This is a source that primarily uses the name Jehovah (that is, Yahweh) to refer to God. The J source is considered the oldest source, and it can be viewed in Genesis 2:4–4:26, and in portions of Exodus and Numbers. The originators of the hypothesis thought that it had been derived from the period of the united monarchy during the reigns of David and Solomon.
2. **E** is the **Elohist** source. It employs the name Elohim for God, and it comes from a later period than the J source. A later redactor, referred to as R^{JE}, put the two sources together.
3. **D** refers to the **Deuteronomist**. This material was written even later than the first two, and it was commonly seen as coming from the time of King Josiah in the second half of the seventh century BC. Another redactor, called R^D, brought together this material with J and E to create one document.
4. **P** is the **Priestly** and final source. It includes much of the cultic, sacred, and sacrificial material and matters related to the priesthood. Scholars who adopt the Documentary Hypothesis believe the P source was written late and should be placed during the exilic and postexilic periods.

While these are the four main sources for the Pentateuch, this position also argues that numerous smaller fragments, such as Genesis 14, were inserted into these primary documents.

Very few scholars today accept the Documentary Hypothesis as originally formulated; the issue of authorship has become much more complex. There is, in reality, little consensus among scholars regarding who wrote what and when, even though they continue to use the acronym JEDP. Additionally, many scholars argue that each of those four major sources resulted from various editors and redactors bringing together many other sources. What is clear is that much Old Testament scholarship denies the historicity of the material of the Pentateuch and claims that the material we do have is a result of centuries of literary evolution.[4]

Literary Analysis

In the last three decades, scholars from a variety of perspectives have called for a focus on the final form of the text as a literary whole. Standing at the forefront of

[4]For further discussion, see Carl E. Amerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983); Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991); Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985); and Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

this attention, Brevard Childs argued that exegesis should be based upon the final, canonical form of the biblical text.[5] This perspective has led many scholars to shift their focus away from merely working in source criticism to discovering the various levels of how the Pentateuch reached its final form. Leading this charge is Robert Alter, who wrote a truly groundbreaking work titled *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.[6] In this work, Alter defines a field of biblical study called literary analysis.

Literary analysis deals with what Alter calls "the artful use of language" in a particular literary genre.[7] This includes such conventions in Hebrew writing as structure, wordplay, imagery, sound, syntax, and many other devices that appear in the final form of the text. In Alter's own words, he defines it as follows:

> By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy.[8]

This literary approach has yielded much fruit in biblical studies, and it has allowed scholars once again to see the literary qualities of the final form of a text.

For example, when source critics engage a text like Genesis 38, the account of Judah and Tamar, they understand it as a mixture of source documents dominated especially by J and E, and many see no connection between this story and the surrounding account of Joseph's life. For example, von Rad argues in his Genesis commentary that "every attentive reader can see the story of Judah and Tamar has no connection at all with the strictly organized Joseph story at whose beginning it is now inserted."[9] Speiser agrees when he says, "The narrative is a completely independent unit. It has no connection with the drama of Joseph, which it interrupts."[10] Genesis 38 is, therefore, a mere interpolation, probably inserted by the J or Yahwist author.

Literary analysis, however, demonstrates something different. It asks, why has the story been placed here? And it concludes, in this case, that the text of Genesis 38 has been masterfully and artistically woven into the context of the Joseph story. For example, Sprinkle, summarizing Alter, observes that the same motifs occur in chapter 38 as in chapter 37:

> As Joseph is separated from his brothers by "going down" to Egypt, so Judah separates from his brothers by "going down" to marry a Canaanite woman. Jacob is forced to mourn for a supposed death of his son, Judah is forced to mourn for the actual death of two of his sons. . . . Judah tricked Jacob, so Tamar (in poetic

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[5] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). Also at the forefront of this perspective is James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88, no. 1 (1969): 1–18.

[6] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

[7] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12.

[8] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12–13.

[9] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 351.

[10] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 299.

justice) tricks Judah. . . . Judah used a goat (its blood) in his deception of Jacob, so the promised harlot's price of a kid plays a role in his own deception.[11]

The story of Genesis 38 also has thematic ties to the subsequent account, serving as a foil to the story of Potiphar's wife. Judah marries a Canaanite, and after his wife's death, he has sexual relations with a woman he thinks is a prostitute. Joseph, on the contrary, does not fall victim to sexual temptation. Thus, whereas Judah succumbs to the allurements of the Canaanites, Joseph refuses to give in to the wiles of the Egyptian female.

Literary analysis is essential in studying the book of Genesis, for although Genesis includes numerous genres, such as genealogy, poetry, prayer, and so forth, the predominant genre is narrative. Yet because Hebrew narrative can exhibit the "artful" use of language in various stages, the literary analysis of Genesis can become quite complex. For the purpose of this introduction, we will consider three basic stages of analysis, moving from the simplest to the more complex, which will serve as a starting point for the reader.

Stage 1: Leitwort ("Lead or Guide Word")

Definition: "The German term *Leitwort* refers to a word or root-word that appears repeatedly throughout a pericope, and it is one of the most common components of narrative art in the OT. The role of a *Leitwort* is to highlight and to develop the principal theme of a narrative."[12]

Genesis example: In the account of Jacob's stealing the blessing from Esau in Genesis 27, two *Leitworter* (the German plural of *Leitwort*) define the narrative's thematic purpose. The words that occur repeatedly are צַיִד ("game," seven times as a noun and four times as its cognate verb, "hunt") and מַטְעַמִּים ("delicious food," six times). Waltke observes that "Isaac is said to 'love tasty food' by Rebekah, Isaac himself, and the narrator. This repetition makes clear the story's message: Isaac's cupidity has distorted his spiritual taste. He has given himself over to an indulgent sensuality."[13]

Stage 2: Leitphrase ("Lead or Guide Phrase")

Definition: The German word *Leitphrase* refers to the repetition of a phrase or clause, rather than a single word, that dominates a text.

Genesis example: In Genesis 1, the phrase "And there was evening and there was morning, the [numbered] day" appears six times (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). That *Leitphrase* provides the temporal framework for the entire creation account.

Sometimes a pericope can be more complicated by including both stages of *Leitwort*

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[11] Joe M. Sprinkle, "Literary Approaches to the Old Testament: A Survey of Recent Scholarship," *JETS* 32, no. 3 (1989): 302.
[12] John D. Currid and L. K. Larson, "Narrative Repetition in 1 Samuel 24 and 26: Saul's Descent and David's Ascent," in *From Creation to New Creation: Essays on Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 51–62.
[13] Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, with Charles Yu (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 116–17.

and *Leitphrase*. Genesis 39:1–6, for instance, gives the account of Joseph's servitude to Potiphar, his Egyptian master, and contains a number of *Leitworter*: כֹּל ("all," five times), בַּיִת ("house," five times), יד ("hand," four times), and מַצְלִיחַ ("success," two times). It also includes a *Leitphrase*: "the Lᴏʀᴅ was with Joseph" (two times). The complexity of these literary forms becomes apparent when one considers a story later in the chapter that describes Joseph's service to an Egyptian jailer (39:19–23). This account features the same leading words used in the earlier one: "all" (three times), "house" (four times), "hand" (two times), and "success" (one time). As well, the leading phrase "the Lᴏʀᴅ was with Joseph" appears twice. These repetitions highlight an echo (which reminds me of a great Mark Twain quote: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme"); the recurring pattern demonstrates that Joseph is *successful* no matter what his earthly master places in his *hands* because *the Lord is with him*. This paradigm essentially repeats itself when Pharaoh later places *all* the *house* of Egypt into Joseph's *hands* (Gen. 41:37–45).

Stage 3: Leitmotif ("Leading Theme or Motif")

Definition: The German term *Leitmotif* identifies an account (which Alter also calls a *type-scene*) that is repeated, more or less, in different contexts.

Genesis example: In Genesis, the motif "she is my sister" appears three times (12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:6–11). On the first two occasions, Abraham tells a foreign ruler that his wife, Sarah, is really his sister, and in the third instance, Isaac says the same thing about his wife, Rebekah. All three instances are examples of the patriarchs attempting to save themselves from possible danger posed by foreign rulers. Scholars commonly attribute this repetition of narrative to the duplication of sources. In other words, different authors employed the same story for different episodes and purposes. In reality, that reasoning is wanting because the *Leitmotif* is the very essence of biblical narrative. It is one of the primary ways the biblical writer relates his material. The recurrent stammer or echo of the "she is my sister" theme connects these narratives in a meaningful way through the use of similar deceptive tactics—it worked twice for Abraham and once for his son.

Another example of the *Leitmotif* in Genesis is one that begins there and echoes throughout the rest of the Bible. The "barren wife" scene pictures an Israelite woman unable to bear children, and then, by some extraordinary means, she conceives and bears a son. The male descendant then grows up to be a leader or deliverer of God's people. The motif first appears in Genesis 11:27–30, where Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is barren. Isaac, of course, is born supernaturally to the aged couple. This scene is repeated in Genesis 25:20–21 (Rebekah and Isaac) and in 29:31 (Rachel and Jacob). The "barren wife" motif continues throughout the Old Testament with the stories of other barren women, such as Samson's mother (Judg. 13:2) and Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:2). This type-scene reaches its climax in the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary in the New Testament: he, of course, is the climactic deliverer of God's people.

STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE

Literary Structure of Genesis

Genesis can be divided into three major sections: (1) the creation of the world (1:1–2:3); (2) the primeval history of the world from Adam to Abraham (2:4–11:26); and (3) the history of the patriarchs (11:27–50:26). After narrating the creation episode, the author provides a highly structured account that covers the history from Adam to Joseph, signaling new and significant sections of material with the recurring *toledoth* formula. This formula in Hebrew (תּוֹלְדֹת) literally means "the generations of," and it stands behind the common heading "These are the generations of . . . ," which appears eleven times in Genesis (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

The word תּוֹלְדֹת is derived from the Hebrew root ילד, which means "to give birth, bear." Naturally, the formula often precedes a genealogy, which also generally includes narrative material. Its first appearance in 2:4 refers to the creation of the heavens and the earth and the subsequent objects or things that come forth from the subject named. The next occurrence of it relates to Adam and the subsequent people who descend from him. The book of Genesis is thus structured with a genealogical focus.

Theological Structure of Genesis

The basic message of the Bible has often been defined as creation, fall, and redemption. This is essentially correct. What often goes unrecognized is that these three distinctives are found in the book of Genesis and, in particular, in its first three chapters. Genesis 1–3, in reality, serves as a microcosm for the fundamental message of the whole Bible. We will consider each teaching in its order.

MESSAGE AND THEOLOGY

Creation

At the outset of the Old Testament, the reader is introduced at once to God in the essential fullness of his being. The author excludes all prefatory matter. To God and God alone is the reader brought: so Genesis declares, "In the beginning God . . ." (Gen. 1:1). The audience is to understand that the creation account is principally about God, not creation or humankind. It is theocentric and not anthropocentric. And in this passage in Genesis, God makes himself known through the works of his creative will, which the psalmist later recognized: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). It is also important to note that at the very beginning, the Old Testament provides no proofs for the existence of God. The Bible presupposes the very being of God; it does not need to be proven. Scripture stands on this very truth: God is.

God not only exists but also creates. Table 2 shows how the narrator recounts his creative work in Genesis 1 for each day according to a repeated structure.

1. Announcement	"And God said . . ." (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)
2. Command	"Let there be . . ." (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)
3. Report	"And it was so." (1:3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30)
4. Evaluation	"And God saw that it was good." (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)
5. Temporal Framework	"And there was evening and there was morning, the [first, second, etc.] day." (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31)

Table 2

This pattern has four theological implications. First, God's creative work was effortless; he spoke, and the universe came into existence. This mere verbal fiat displays God's awesome, crushing omnipotence (Ps. 33:6–9). Second, God's creative work was *ex nihilo*, that is, it came forth from nothing. All three dimensions of the universe—space, time, and matter—are brought into being at God's word (Heb. 11:3). Third, creation was an expression of God's will, and he instigated it and fulfilled it freely without any external compulsion (Rev. 4:11). Finally, the paradigm of creation underscores the doctrine of God's sovereignty. The Lord is Creator and King, and all things are subject to his rule because he made all things (Ps. 24:1–2).

Although the creation account of Genesis 1 centers on God and his work, it also defines the content of the creation. Verse 1 of the text designates it as "the heavens and the earth." The Hebrews had no single word to describe the universe in its totality, and so when they wanted to express the concept of all reality, they would use this phrase. It is a *merismus*, two opposites that are all-inclusive (cf. Ps. 139:8). The phrase is a totality of polarity, signifying that God created everything, including heaven and earth and all that is in them, on them, and between them (cf. Col. 1:16).

The narrator outlines the general content of God's work of creation in Genesis in a highly stylized structure (maybe even a "framework"), constructing three parallels within a seven-day design. Table 3 shows this structure.

Kingdoms/Domains		**Kings/Rulers**	
Day 1	Light (1:3–5)	Day 4	Light bearers (1:14–19)
Day 2	Sea, sky (1:6–8)	Day 5	Fish, birds (1:20–23)
Day 3	Land (1:9–13)	Day 6	Land creatures (1:24–31)
Day 7 Sabbath (2:1–3)			

Table 3

The six days of creation include two sets of three days in parallel. The first triad (days 1–3) describes the kingdoms being created, and the second triad (days 4–6) portrays the creation of the rulers over those kingdoms. Days 1, 2, and 3 directly correspond with days 4, 5, and 6, respectively. Because of this detailed repetition and structure,

some scholars have argued that the account is poetic.[14] Apart from its structure, though, Genesis 1 has very little in it that would classify it as Hebrew poetry. In fact, it has all the indicators that it is written as Hebrew narrative. However, it must be admitted that while it is not poetry, it is also not ordinary, common prose. It is narrative yet with an elevated style. Therefore, C. John Collins offers perhaps the best description of the genre of Genesis 1 when he calls it "exalted prose narrative."[15]

Theologians often describe the creation of mankind on day 6 as the "crown of creation" because humanity is the last thing created during the six days. In addition, mankind is the only entity created *imago dei*, that is, in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). The Hebrew word for "image" is צֶלֶם, and it appears sixteen times in the Old Testament. Originally the word meant "something cut from an object," as, for example, a piece of clay cut from a sculpture.[16] In such a case there exists a concrete resemblance between the object and the image. Thus, most of its occurrences in the Old Testament refer to idols that physically represent a god (e.g., 2 Kings 11:18). It is also used of a statue of a king that he sets up in a land he has conquered, symbolizing his sovereignty over that land (e.g., Dan. 3:1). This usage helps to demonstrate that, in regard to the creation of mankind, humanity is God's representative of God's rule over the earth.

Humans are not merely created in the image of God (*imago dei*) but are also to act like him (*imitatio dei*). It is a matter not merely of character but of function and activity. In Genesis 1–2, we see that mankind is to imitate God in three ways. To set the stage, Genesis 1:2 describes the state of the earth as תהו ("formless") and בהו ("emptiness"). In the first three days of creation (1:1–10), God subdues the formlessness and brings about an ordered world. He accomplishes this through the medium of the word by naming and separating different parts of the creation. In Genesis 2, man does the same thing, subduing and ruling over creation by cultivating the garden (2:15) and especially by naming the animals (2:19–20). His work is intelligent creativity, as was God's incipient labor. Secondly, in the final three days of creation, God fills the heavens with a starry host and fills the earth with animate life. Humankind follows that pattern by filling the earth with his progeny through reproduction (1:28) and also with produce through cultivation of the earth (2:15). Finally, on the last day of creation, God rests from his subduing and filling activity. It is certainly implied that mankind would do the same by working six days and resting on the Sabbath. This is later confirmed by the Sabbath laws (see Ex. 20:8–11, which ties the Sabbath to the creation).

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[14] Meredith G. Kline says, "Exegesis indicates that the scheme of the creation week itself is a poetic figure and that the several pictures of creation history are set within the six-work day frames not chronologically but topically." "Genesis," in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. Donald Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, and Francis Davidson, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 82. In later writings, Kline backed away from that claim by calling the genre of Genesis 1 "semi-poetic." Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *WTJ* 20, no. 2 (1958): 156. See, e.g., Meredith G. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48, no. 1 (1996): 2–15; Lee Irons and Meredith G. Kline, "The Framework View," in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2000), 217–56, 279–303.
[15] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 44.
[16] Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 548.

Creation is a *Leitmotif* that echoes throughout the Bible. In Genesis 9, for example, we see God coming to Noah after the flood and essentially renewing the divine mandate given to Adam at creation. In other words, the divine commission and blessing that God gave to Adam is replayed with Noah, who is thus a second Adam. So in Genesis 9:1, God commands Noah to be fruitful and multiply, using the identical expression employed in Genesis 1:28. Significantly, humanity's relationship to the animals is a central point to both stories (1:26; 9:2). Both accounts also highlight the idea of man in the image of God, a concept that occurs only in these two places in the book of Genesis (1:27; 9:6). Finally, the provision of food for mankind is also an important aspect of the two narratives (1:29; 9:3), and the Noahic story makes direct reference back to Genesis 1:29. The fact of the matter is that Genesis 9 is a re-creation account, that is, a second mandate patterned after the original mandate given to humanity in the garden.

The creational mandate of Genesis 1 echoes again in Exodus 1. In verse 7 of the latter text, the author explains that the Hebrews have been very active in reproduction in Egypt: "But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them." All five verbs in this verse mirror the language of creation. The writer is taking the audience back to the cultural mandate given in Genesis 1:28 and 9:7, demonstrating that the Hebrews are fulfilling the command to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth. Israel is, in a sense, another Adam attempting to keep the cultural mandate of Genesis 1.

Another example of creation as a *Leitmotif* in Scripture is the creation and preparation of a land for God's people to inhabit. We read in Genesis 1:9–10 how God divides the waters, brings forth land (אֶרֶץ, "earth, land"), and then abundantly supplies resources to sustain his people. The Old Testament repeats this pattern of water separation and land preparation two more times. Exodus 14:15–16 portrays God as dividing the waters of chaos, driving his people through the Red Sea on dry ground, and then taking his people to a new land where he will sufficiently supply all their needs. The echo underscores that land is a blessing to God's people: God creates it, prepares it, and leads his people into it. This pattern appears again in the book of Joshua, where God divides the waters of the Jordan River, drives his people through on dry ground, and places them in a land flowing with milk and honey (3:13–17). The repeated vocabulary in these accounts—"heap" (Josh. 3:13, 16; cf. Ex. 15:8) and "dry ground" (Josh. 3:17; cf. Ex. 14:21)—confirms that this is indeed a type-scene. Here again God has prepared a land for his people, a new garden of Eden, and he is placing them into that habitation by dividing the waters.

Fall

Genesis 3:1–7 is the description of mankind's fall into sin. Humanity's demise is a complex process involving a combination of factors: the temptation and lie of the Serpent, the twisted response of the woman, the human will to disobey, and the appeal of the tree to the physical senses that overwhelms the first humans.

First, the Serpent (that is, the Devil himself, or Satan; cf. Rev. 20:2) is described as "crafty," a word that reflects his deceptiveness and slyness (Gen. 3:1). This is immediately made evident when the Serpent approaches the woman in the garden and cunningly asks her about the commands of God. Second, when the woman answers the Serpent, she displays her ignorance of God's commands. The Lord's command to man was clear and direct in Genesis 2:16–17: mankind may freely eat from every tree of the garden except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they eat from that one tree, then they will certainly die. Third, the woman responds by twisting the word God had revealed. In her response to the Serpent (3:2–3), she exaggerates the prohibition ("neither shall you touch it"), she minimizes the privileges ("we may eat" rather than "you may eat freely"), and she minimizes the penalty ("lest you die" rather than "you will certainly die"). Fourth, the Serpent capitalizes on the woman's ignorance of God's word and pronounces a lie that "you will not surely die" (3:4; cf. John 8:44). And finally, once the prohibition is reasoned away, the practical and aesthetic appeal of the tree draws Eve. The first two humans then partake of the fruit that God had forbidden to them.

Man's disobedience to the command of God has far-reaching consequences, as the remainder of chapter 3 clearly demonstrates. The humans are, first of all, separated from God because of their sin. They have fear rather than fellowship with him, and thus they are alienated from God. They know, second of all, that they are naked, and so they cover themselves (3:7). They have shame rather than integrity and thus are alienated from one another. They are driven from the garden and thus alienated from it (3:17–19). They are alienated from eternal life (3:22).

The fall is also a *Leitmotif* that reverberates throughout Scripture. In particular, it generally prefigures the history of the nation of Israel. God called a people and delivered them from the land of Egypt through the Red Sea, and then he brought them into the land of Canaan by dividing the Jordan River. As we have already seen, these two episodes are considered re-creation events based upon Genesis 1. The land that he gives to his people is one that is "a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8), a veritable garden of Eden (Gen. 13:10; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; Joel 2:3). If Israel keeps the word of the Lord, then they will be blessed by him and remain in the Land of Promise (Deut. 28:1–14), but if they disobey, then God will drive them out of the land (Deut. 4:26–27). In the final outcome, Israel was expelled from the Promised Land because of their deep and repeated disobedience to the word of God.

Redemption

Genesis 3:14–19 is a prophecy spoken directly by the Lord, and it generally spells out the forthcoming history of humanity. God pronounces a postfall order to the universe that finds its essence in verse 15, where God proclaims that he will "put enmity between you and the woman." The noun "enmity" is the main topic of the verse because it appears as the first word in the Hebrew text. The term simply means

"to be an enemy to." As a noun it occurs five times in the Old Testament, and in each instance it signifies hostile intent to the degree of killing another (cf. Num. 35:21–22; Ezek. 25:15; 35:5). The first part of the conflict is between the Serpent ("you") and the woman, and, of course, this discord began earlier in the chapter. A second stage of the conflict is then defined: "between your offspring and her offspring" (Gen. 3:15). The Hebrew term for "offspring" is commonly used for lineage, descent, or seed, and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (referred to as the Septuagint) normally renders this word as "sperm," which reflects the idea of posterity. Here we are introduced to the concept of two-seed theology, in which the theme of conflict can be traced through the history of mankind, all the way to the end of time (Rev. 12:13–17).

The conflict will reach its climax in a battle between two individuals: the Serpent ("you") and another figure ("he"). It is rightly concluded that this latter figure is the Messiah. The writer mentions the "he" first in the line perhaps to demonstrate his primacy and preeminence in the confrontation. And in the battle, the "he" strikes a blow to the Serpent's head, which is a mortal, deadly wound, while the "he" only receives a blow to his heel, one that is certainly not fatal. Thus, God promises in this verse that he will send a Redeemer to crush the enemy.[17] Readers can understand the remainder of Scripture as an unfolding of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15. Redemption is promised in this one verse, and the Bible traces the development of that redemptive theme to its very conclusion.

The theological structure of Genesis 1–3 as creation, fall, and redemption is mirrored in the eschatological conclusion of the Bible. The book of Revelation reverses the order of the sequence. The opening sections of John's vision center on the redemptive work of the Messiah (e.g., Rev. 5:5–6; 7:9–10). This is followed by the judgment and defeat of Satan (e.g., Rev. 12:13–17; 20:1–6) and his fall into the lake of fire and sulfur (Rev. 20:7–10). The final chapters of Revelation describe a new heavens and a new earth, a re-created order based upon the garden of Eden in Genesis 1–2.[18] Included in this eschatological picture is a lush garden-like existence with a river of life running through it and the Tree of Life in it (Rev. 22:1–5). In addition, whereas the institution of human marriage was established at the original creation, this re-creation scene contains the marriage feast of the Lamb and his people, they who constitute his bride (Rev. 19:6–9; 21:9).

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[17] Certainly not all agree that this verse is messianic. Some argue that the word "he" actually refers to the seed earlier in the verse and thus that it could easily refer to Israel rather than the Messiah. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 355; von Rad, *Genesis*, 90; and Martin H. Wouldstra, "Recent Translations of Genesis 3:15," *CTJ* 6, no. 2 (1971):194–203. Other important works have been published that give great weight to the messianic interpretation. See T. Desmond Alexander, "Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995), 19–39, and C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997):139–48.

[18] For a fascinating study of this idea and many other echoes, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

Excursus: Genesis 1–11 and Ancient Near Eastern Literature

One of the great dilemmas in the interpretation of the pre-Abrahamic literature of Genesis is its relationship to the writings of the surrounding cultures of the ancient Near East. The two great events of these early chapters of Genesis are the creation and the flood. Accounts of similar stories are found in the literary corpus of numerous nations, such as Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and Ugarit. Simply put, the issue is that many of these pagan tales have numerous parallels, some that are quite detailed, with the biblical narratives. There is no doubt that a relationship exists between the Genesis writings and those of the surrounding cultures, but the question is, what is the nature and extent of that relationship?[19]

As an example, we will consider the deluge recorded in Genesis 6–9 and other ancient Near Eastern flood accounts.[20] Mythological stories of a great flood are found in many of the various cultures of the ancient Near East. The event of a massive deluge is so well known that in some cultures, such as at the city of Ugarit, the flood account became a paradigm for school texts and copyists. In addition, flood stories are not relegated to a particular time period but appear in a variety of cultures throughout the third to first millennia BC. The earliest reference to a great flood is perhaps the Sumerian King List, which dates to the twenty-second century BC.[21] Versions of the flood have been found in Sumer, Assyria, Babylon, Ugarit, and Egypt.

The flood story in the Epic of Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia, for example, is in some respects nearly identical to the biblical narrative.[22] It begins with a divine warning of a coming doom. The hero of the flood is then commanded to build a ship, which he does, and then he loads it with his relations and animals. The gods send torrential rains that destroy humanity. The flood subsides, and the ark lands on Mount Nisir. Utnapishtim, the hero, sends forth birds to see if the land has dried up. After everyone disembarks from the ship, Utnapishtim sacrifices to the gods, and they in turn bless him. "Not only are many of the details parallel (to the biblical account), but the structure and flow of the stories are the same. Such overwhelming similitude cannot be explained as a result of mere chance or simultaneous invention."[23] There is a clear relationship between these stories, but we must define the nature of that connection.

Many biblical historians simply assume that the biblical account of the flood is fundamentally no different from the pagan, mythic narratives. S. R. Driver comments, "There can be no doubt that the true origin of the Biblical narrative is to be found in the Babylonian story of the Flood."[24] According to this position,

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[19] Recent literature on this issue includes Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005); Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008); and John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

[20] For a more detailed discussion, see John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 47–63.

[21] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); and Pritchard, *ANET*, 265–66.

[22] See Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[23] Currid, *Against the Gods*, 55.

[24] Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 6th ed. (London: Methuen, 1907), 103.

the Hebrew writers essentially borrowed the well-known flood myth from their neighbors and then "accommodated [it] to the spirit of Hebrew monotheism."[25] Thus, the Hebrew authors were, in the famous words of one historian, "guilty of crass plagiarism."[26]

As one considers the relationship between the flood account in the Bible and those in the surrounding nations, it is important to recognize that there are major differences between them. And these distinctions are not merely matters of detail; they exist at the deeper level of worldview, theology, and belief. For example, all the flood stories of the ancient Near East, except the Hebrew narrative, are polytheistic. And these many gods often act humanly, that is, with the same desires, faults, and needs as humans. There is a striking lack of morality among the gods: they often appear petty, self-absorbed, and depraved. To the contrary, the biblical account pictures one God who is in sovereign control of the entire flood episode from beginning to end. He is righteous and just.

Bruce Waltke concludes that the "most radical difference in the two accounts is the Bible's investing the story with a covenant concept."[27] The covenant is a binding contract and relationship between God and mankind, one that has been initiated and administered by him. The covenant highlights God's personal relationship with and commitment to his people (Gen. 9:8–17).

Still, how does one account for the many parallels that do exist between the biblical flood account and ancient Near Eastern myths of the deluge? One possibility is that the biblical tradition does not directly depend on the other accounts. Perhaps they are independent versions of a much earlier story and tradition. They are perhaps two separate traditions that stem from an actual, historical flood. I have written elsewhere:

> If the biblical stories are true, one would be surprised not to find some references to these truths in extra-biblical literature. And indeed in ancient Near Eastern myth we do see some kernels of historical truth. However, pagan authors vulgarized or bastardized those truths—they distorted fact by dressing it up with polytheism, magic, violence, and paganism. Fact became myth. From this angle the common references would appear to support rather than deny the historicity of the biblical story.[28]

Another distinct possibility is that the Hebrew writers, well aware of and familiar with pagan flood myths, were writing to dispute and impugn those other stories. In other words, they consciously and subversively used polemics against those other accounts in order to taunt them and to show that they are counterfeit. Polemics of this type serve to extol the Lord as the only true God and to expose the pagan gods as mere charlatans and pretenders.

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[25] Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 107.

[26] See Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible: Two Lectures Delivered before the Members of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft in the Presence of the German Emperor*, Crown Theological Library 1 (New York: Putnam, 1903).

[27] Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 291.

[28] John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 32.

Genesis 12–50 and the History of the Patriarchal Period

In Genesis 9–11, the biblical author stresses the wickedness of mankind, demonstrating that humanity acts the same as before the flood. The line of Ham is in great rebellion against God, and at Babel humans disobey the commands of God and attempt to establish themselves as sole rulers of the earth. It is the beginning of humanism. The Lord, however, begins to prepare a new nation to carry his word to mankind, and for this purpose he chooses Abraham to be the father of his chosen seed.

Many biblical historians place the patriarchal period in the first half of the second millennium BC.[29] However, certainly not all scholars agree with this chronology. For instance, Gosta Ahlstrom comments:

> It is quite clear that the narrator of the Genesis stories did not have accurate knowledge about the prehistory of the Israelites. That was not necessary either, because his purpose was not to write history. The social milieu and customs we meet in these texts, as well as the many peoples the patriarchs had contact with reflect a much later time.[30]

This statement reflects a dominant hermeneutic of suspicion that exists among many scholars. Benjamin Mazar, for example, accuses contemporary scholarship of going way too far in attempting to find "corroboration of the antiquity of the patriarchal accounts."[31] But the reality is, when all is said and done, that the narratives of the patriarchs best fit into the cultural environment of the Middle Bronze II period (2000–1550 BC) in ancient Palestine.[32] The excursus on "Archaeology and Genesis" explores a few of the areas of investigation that lend support to this chronology.

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[29] See, for example, Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 313–72.
[30] Gosta W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 186. See, as well, John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); and Benjamin Mazar, "The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis," *JNES* 28, no. 2 (1969): 73–83.
[31] Mazar, "Historical Background," 76.
[32] For a chart of the ages of antiquity, see John D. Currid, *Doing Archaeology in the Land of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 19.

Excursus: Archaeology and Genesis

The cities mentioned in the patriarchal stories of Genesis, such as Bethel, Hebron, Jerusalem, and Shechem, were occupied during the Middle Bronze II period. Hebron, for example, is located at Tel Hebron, approximately twenty miles south of Jerusalem. During the Middle Bronze II age, it was a major settlement covering some six to seven acres. It was fortified and contained some major building complexes. A cuneiform text from this period discovered at Hebron indicates that it was a major administrative center and perhaps a capital city for the region.

Shechem was founded during the Middle Bronze IIA period (2000–1800 BC). The site contained a large urban compound with a monumental building that some have identified as a temple. It was, however, probably not a religious

structure but rather the residence or palace of a local chieftain. Like most of the settlements during this period, Shechem lacked walls and had no fortifications. By the Middle Bronze IIB–C period (1800–1550 BC), though, Shechem began to fortify. Excavations have uncovered a thriving urban center at the time.[33]

All the sites listed above are located on what is called the "spine" of the central hill country of Canaan, which goes from Shechem in the north to Hebron in the south. The patriarchs commonly used this route (Gen. 12:6; 13:18; 35:27).

The depiction of the lifestyle of the patriarchs in Genesis 12–50 is congruous with what we know about the Middle Bronze II period. This was a period of urbanization but also one of large migrations of people throughout the ancient Near East. The patriarchs were, first of all, pastoralists. "Pastoralism is a subsistence category, that is, it defines the means of their livelihood. They were keepers of herds and flocks. They were also *seminomadic*. They were not sedentary but made seasonal movements with their flocks and herds to find adequate water, sufficient forage, and good climate conditions. . . . They did not live in cities but normally camped outside them."[34]

Although the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are never mentioned in any extrabiblical texts, their stories accurately reflect the time of the Middle Bronze II period.[35] So testify thousands of discovered tablets at the site of Mari in western Mesopotamia, which date to the first half of the eighteenth century BC, during the Middle Bronze II period. The Mari archive includes mainly economic, legal, and administrative texts. Yet these also reflect the cultural, political, and sociological manners of the time, and the setting described by the Mari tablets has many parallels with the narratives of the patriarchs found in Genesis.

We could cite many examples. For instance, both Mari and Genesis portray a dimorphic society, in which there is a social dichotomy between tribal chieftains, like Abraham, and powerful urban centers or city-states. Both literatures exhibit this dichotomy in the customs of economic exchanges between the city dwellers and the nomads, the concept of "resident aliens," and the nomads' common practice of camping in the vicinity of large cities. The social structure in both is organized in a three-tiered system: extended family, clan, and tribe. They also have other quite similar customs, such as census taking, inheritance laws, covenant oaths, and the prominence of genealogies. And the literatures of the two cultures even mention many of the same personal names and place names, such as the cities of Haran and Nahor.

Archaeologists made another important archival discovery at Nuzi, a site located near the Tigris River in Mesopotamia that was at its height in the mid-second millennium BC. To date, the archive contains some five thousand tablets.

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[33] For a good study of the material remains from this time, see Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 174–231.

[34] John D. Currid and David P. Barrett, *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 69.

[35] Some have attempted to identify the name Abram on the triumphal relief of Shoshenk I at Karnak. Rings 71–72 appear to read "Fort of Abram" as a place name. To what "Abram" refers, however, is uncertain, and to tie it to the patriarch Abraham is a stretch. The identification of the place with the patriarch has a long history, and it first appears in Wilhelm Spiegelberg, *Aegyptologische Randglossen zum Alten Testament* (Strassburg: Schlessier und Schweikhardt, 1904), 14.

These texts, like the Mari documents, are devoted primarily to social, economic, and administrative matters. Many of them are routine business and legal texts. They do, however, shed considerable light on the customs of the patriarchal period in Genesis. For example, the Nuzi corpus includes an account of a man exchanging his inheritance rights for a sheep, not unlike Esau's selling of his birthright to Jacob in Genesis 25:29–34. In addition, the Nuzi texts consider a blessing binding and irrevocable, and that helps to explain why Isaac was unable to revoke the blessing he gave to Jacob even though it was given under false pretenses (Gen. 27:30–33). It was also a custom at Nuzi for a couple without a male offspring to adopt a son as an heir, and in exchange for the inheritance, the adopted son would care for the couple in their old age and make certain they received a proper burial. If a son was born to the couple after the adoption had taken place, much of the inheritance then reverted to the son by blood. These practices, of course, are reminiscent of Abraham's adoption of Eliezer of Damascus as the heir of his house because of Sarah's barrenness (Gen. 15:2–5).

According to the laws of Nuzi, the family gods (*teraphim*) played a vital role in the process of inheritance, for whoever possessed these images was considered the rightful heir. No wonder Laban was in a panic over the loss of his household gods when Jacob fled from him to Canaan (Gen. 31:33–35). Laban, in reality, was more concerned about the whereabouts of his gods than about his relatives and flocks.

We could consider other texts as well. The Execration Texts from Egypt, beginning in the reign of Senwosret III (1878–1841 BC), reflect a landscape in Canaan that is much in line with what we read in the patriarchal stories in Genesis. This is congruous with the Middle Bronze II period in Canaan.

Joseph in Egypt

The Middle Bronze II period was one of migration throughout the ancient Near East (see "Excursus: Archaeology and Genesis" on pp. 57–59). The Egyptians were so concerned about it that they constructed a huge canal running from Pelusium on the Mediterranean Sea to Lake Timseh just to the east of the Wadi Tumilat.[36] The canal measured 65 feet wide at the bottom and 230 feet wide at the surface level. The Egyptians used it to some extent for irrigation but primarily for defense and containment, that is, to keep Asiatics out and slaves in. In addition, Pharaoh Amenemhet I (1991–1962 BC) ordered that a series of Egyptian fortresses be built on the eastern border of Egypt to control Asiatic migration. Asiatic migration into Egypt was the setting of the Joseph story in Genesis 37–50.

The Joseph narrative fits well into the Egyptian cultural milieu of the early to mid-second millennium BC. At the beginning of the story, Joseph was brought to Egypt

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[36] Amihai Sneh, Tuvia Weissbrod, and Itamar Perath, "Evidence for an Ancient Egyptian Frontier Canal: The Remnants of an Artificial Waterway Discovered in the Northeastern Nile Delta May Have Formed Part of the Barrier Called 'Shur of Egypt' in Ancient Texts," *American Scientist* 63, no. 5 (1975): 542–48; and William H. Shea, "A Date for the Recently Discovered Eastern Canal of Egypt," *BASOR* 226 (1977): 31–38.

and sold there by Midianites (Gen. 37:28). Egypt had a large caste of foreign slaves at any given period in its ancient history, and many arrived by way of a thriving slave trade. In fact, so many slaves came from Asia (i.e., Canaan, Hatti, and Mesopotamia) that the Egyptian word for "Asiatic" became synonymous with "slave." Joseph was sold for twenty shekels of silver, a common price for a male slave between five and twenty years of age during the first half of the second millennium BC.[37]

After Joseph was falsely accused of molesting Potiphar's wife, he was placed in prison. Imprisonment was a punishment unknown in the law codes of the ancient Near East, including in biblical legislation. However, it is well attested in Egyptian documents, and therefore, the story accurately echoes the culture of ancient Egypt. The story line of the episode regarding Potiphar's wife is not unique in the literature of the ancient Near East. This "spurned seductress" motif, in fact, occurs in ancient Egypt in a text called "The Tale of the Two Brothers."[38] One brother accuses the other of forcing a sexual relationship on his wife. The wife, in reality, is the deceitful one, and she blames the situation on her brother-in-law, who, like Joseph, refused her advances. The story ends differently, however, as the husband kills both his brother and, after discovering the truth, his wife.[39]

After a long term of imprisonment, Joseph is freed and elevated to a high position in the Egyptian government through his God-given ability to interpret dreams, most importantly the dreams of Pharaoh. Through interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph prophesied a coming time of great famine in Egypt, which allowed the Egyptians to prepare for the disaster. As I note elsewhere, "At least as early as the Middle Kingdom the Egyptians believed that dreams were a means used by the gods to reveal the future to humans. In fact, the Egyptians collected written dream omens. The structure and content of these dream omens are quite similar to the dream accounts in the story of Joseph. It is tempting to think that Joseph was really defeating the Egyptians on their own ground."[40]

Pharaoh then places Joseph "over the land of Egypt" (Gen. 41:41). He was likely the vizier in Egypt, whose duties are spelled out in a document from the Tomb of Rekhmire from the mid-second millennium BC. The vizier was the "grand steward of all Egypt," and all the activities of the nation were under his purview. Rekhmire was vizier under Thutmosis III, and he served as overseer of the treasury, chief justice, police chief, war minister, secretary of agriculture, secretary of the interior, and other positions. Aside from Pharaoh, the vizier was often the most powerful leader in Egypt.

The author of Genesis spends an extraordinary amount of time discussing the life of Joseph. It can properly be described as a novella, a "short long story" or a "long short story." Why does the writer give so much space (Genesis 37, 39–50) to it? His overarching purpose seems to be to demonstrate how all Israel ended up in the land

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[37] This is the same price as in the Code of Hammurabi, laws 116, 214, and 252. It was written in the eighteenth century BC.
[38] John A. Wilson, "The Story of the Two Brothers," in Pritchard, *ANET*, 23–25.
[39] See Currid, *Against the Gods*, 65–73.
[40] Currid and Barrett, *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas*, 75. The most important collection of dream omens from Egypt is the Chester Beatty Papyrus III, which may date as early as the nineteenth century BC. See Alan H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*, 3rd series, Chester Beatty Gift (London: British Museum, 1935).

of Egypt. This, then, lays the groundwork for God's greatest redemptive act of the Old Testament, the Lord's deliverance of Israel out of the land of darkness and his bringing the people to the Land of Promise.

When all is said and done, it should be clear that the vast majority of the patriarchal narrative material fits nicely into the first half of the second millennium BC. The details appearing in these narratives that perhaps reflect a later date—such as the mentioning of the Philistines (e.g., Gen. 21:32)—are, in the grand scheme of things, very few in number and merely represent an updating of the material by the biblical author.[41]

Centrality of the Covenant

The relationship that God has with his people in the book of Genesis is defined by a covenant or treaty concept. In the ancient Near East, people, leaders, and nations formalized relationships using an oath that followed a particular structure and was commonly written down.[42] Those in the ancient Near East employed two types of covenant forms: those governing relationships between *equal* parties and those specifying relationships between *unequal* parties. The second type of covenant was between an overlord or suzerain (the superior party) and a vassal (the inferior party). Many of the extant treaties were between a king and his subjects. Well over half the suzerain/vassal treaties uncovered through archaeology come from the Hittite Empire of the second millennium BC, while others survive from the first millennium BC, including the Hittites, Assyrians, Egyptians, and others.

In Genesis, the suzerain/vassal covenant form determines the relationship between God and his people. Within this structure, the suzerain, as the more powerful party, takes on most of the responsibility for the stipulations of the treaty. Although the vassal also has certain obligations, because of his limited capabilities and resources he is not held accountable to the same extent and degree as the suzerain. The suzerain or sovereign, because of his position, is also the one who initiates the covenant agreement. The oath between the two parties is predominantly to the point of life and death. Because of all these common elements, this type of covenant has been appropriately defined as "a bond in blood sovereignly administered."[43]

The covenant is a pact that God makes with his people throughout history in which he will be their God and they will be his people (called the "Immanuel Principle," that is, "God is with us"). The church today is in covenant with God, as Jesus secured a new covenant with his people through his life, death, and resurrection (Matt. 26:28). The new covenant, however, is the final manifestation of the covenant concept in Scripture. This concept begins with the covenant that was in operation in the garden

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[41] For further development of this idea, see Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 368–72.

[42] For an introduction to this study, see Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963); Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966); Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17, no. 3 (1954): 50–76.

[43] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 4.

of Eden prior to the fall of mankind into sin, which we call the covenant of works (Hos. 6:7). After the fall, in the book of Genesis, God renews and reestablishes the covenant (the covenant of grace) with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. Later in biblical history, the Lord renews the covenant with Moses, with Joshua, and with David as the covenant mediators between Israel and God. It is important for the church today to understand that the covenant originates in Genesis, develops through the Old Testament, and then finds its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of the final covenant mediator, Jesus Christ.[44] In that way, the church can see that the very promises that God made to Abraham and to the other patriarchs are the very ones that he has made to his people today.

Covenant with Noah

In Genesis 6:18, the Lord says to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you." God's grace comes to Noah in covenantal form. This is the first time that the word "covenant" (בְּרִית) is used in the Bible, although as we already mentioned, such a covenant relationship between God and mankind was in effect in the garden. In fact, the language of the covenant with Noah closely reflects that of the covenant that existed in Eden. It should be noted that this covenant with Noah was initiated and established by God prior to the flood coming on the earth.

After the flood, God reaffirms the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:8–17). A common element of any ancient Near Eastern treaty between a suzerain and a vassal is that the royal party must initiate and establish the binding agreement.[45] That is the case here, as God says, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you" (9:8). The covenant established is ongoing, as reflected in verse 11, where the verb "establish" (קוּם) signifies the maintaining and renewing of the initial activity.[46] As with many covenants in the ancient Near East, the suzerain provides a physical sign for the vassal that symbolizes the reality of the covenant relationship. Such signs as exchanging sandals (cf. Ruth 4:7), dividing animals (Gen. 15:9–10), and signing pledges are well known from the literature. The sign here is a "bow in the cloud" (Gen. 9:13) which is likely a reference to a rainbow.

The Hebrew term for "bow" normally refers to a commonly used weapon in the ancient Near East. Pagan mythologies often employed the weapon to portray gods taking up the bow to engage in battle against other gods or humans. In the Mesopotamian creation legend, after Marduk destroys Tiamat and the gods of chaos using a bow, the gods hang his bow in the sky, and it becomes a constellation.[47] A parallel may be at work here. In the story of Noah, God hangs his bow in the sky perhaps to signify the end of hostility, the beginning of peace, and the renewal of the covenant with mankind.[48]

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[44] William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1984).
[45] William J. Dumbrell, "The Covenant with Noah," *RTR* 38, no. 1 (1979): 1–9.
[46] Speiser, *Genesis*, 58–9.
[47] Pritchard, *ANET*, 69.
[48] Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," *CBQ* 49, no. 2 (1987): 187–211.

Covenant with Abraham

In Genesis 15, after Abraham has settled in the land of Canaan, the Lord appears to him in a vision in order to establish the covenant with him. The formal inauguration of the treaty begins with God making a declaration of self-identification: "I am the Lord" (15:7). In many covenant documents of the second millennium BC, kings similarly commence treaties with a statement of self-identification.[49] God then briefly reviews the history of the relationship between Abraham and himself, and he promises to him the land of Canaan as a possession. A covenant ceremony follows in which the Lord orders Abraham to gather some animals, sever them, and place them in two separate but parallel rows. Abraham is arranging a typical ancient Near Eastern ritual for the ratification of a covenant (cf. Jer. 34:15–20).

The purpose of the ritual is to invoke a curse. The parties are, in effect, inviting God to cut them in two, like the animals, if they do not keep their covenant promises. In the ancient Near East, "Animals are an obvious substitute for human beings in ceremonial curses."[50] So the fate of the animals points to what would befall mankind if they violated the covenant.

In the midst of the ceremony, God issues a promise regarding the future of Abraham's posterity. They will enter bondage for four hundred years, be redeemed, and then eventually gain possession of the land of Canaan. This prophecy essentially establishes the nation of Israel, giving them national identity in the context of covenant making.

Finally, in ancient Near Eastern covenants like this one, both parties to the covenant would walk through the midst of the severed animal parts. We witness here, however, that only God, in a fire theophany (or visible manifestation of God), passes through the pieces (Gen. 15:17). He is taking on full responsibility for the promises of blessings and curses in the covenant. However, it "is not right to say that Gen. 15:18 contains only a promise, but no obligations (for Abram). The obligations were built into the making of the covenant, and without obligation to loyalty there would have been no promise."[51] Thus, Abraham is required to be a loyal covenant keeper, and God, by passing through the animals alone, is ensuring that Abraham will be compliant.

Whereas Genesis 15 describes the inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant, Genesis 17 declares the institution of the covenant seal, one that Abraham and his posterity would wear on their very flesh. This chapter also adds details to the earlier agreement: for instance, it highlights to a greater degree the eternal, binding nature of the covenant and the possession of a land. It also specifies Abraham's obligations in the treaty; in particular, all the male members of his household are to be circumcised.

Circumcision is not a Hebrew invention, nor did the people of God uniquely use it. For example, the Egyptians from their earliest periods used circumcision; a number

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[49] For an example, see Pritchard, *ANET*, 203.
[50] George E. Mendenhall, "Puppy and Lettuce in Northwest-Semitic Covenant Making," *BASOR* 133 (1954): 29.
[51] Arvid S. Kapelrud, "The Covenant as Agreement," *SJOT* 1 (1988): 33.

of tomb scenes from the Old Kingdom (ca. 2575–2134 BC) depict the practice. In Egypt, it appears to have been a sign of ritual purity and was a requirement "for men who were going to serve in the temples."[52] The uniqueness of circumcision for the Israelites is that it symbolizes inclusion in the covenant community established by the Lord.

Covenant with Isaac

After Abraham dies, the Lord appears to Isaac in a theophany (Gen. 26:1–6), as he had done with Abraham. In this short section, the promises of the covenant that God had given to Abraham are now repeated for Isaac. He receives the promise of an innumerable posterity (cf. 15:5; 22:17), as many as the stars of heaven; the promise of a land to inherit (cf. 15:7, 18–21); and the promise that nations will be blessed through him (cf. 12:3; 18:18). At the very heart of this covenant declaration is the Immanuel Principle, that is, God's promise that "I will be with you" (26:3; cf. 17:8). This episode, therefore, constitutes a covenant renewal: the covenant God made with Abraham is now applied to the promised seed of Abraham, his son Isaac.

Covenant with Jacob

After Jacob flees for his life from Esau to the land of Haran, the Lord appears to him on the way in a dream theophany. The text describes the picture that he sees as "behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And, behold, the Lord stood above it." (Gen. 28:12–13a). The Hebrew word for "ladder" (סֻלָּם) occurs only here in the Old Testament, and it stems from the noun סֹלְלָה, which means "mound."[53] It is perhaps related to the Akkadian word *simmiltu*, which means "steps." The dream picture is one of a series of steps that lead up to an entrance or gate into the heavenly city.

This theophany in a dream confirms Jacob as the true heir of Abraham and the recipient of the covenant. God speaks to Jacob, and he gives him promises that are quite similar to the ones he made to Abraham in Genesis 13:14–17. In fact, much of the wording of the two exchanges is exactly alike.[54] God pledges that he will make Jacob's posterity numerous like the dust of the earth, that he has given to them the land of Canaan, that all the families of the earth will be blessed through Jacob and his descendants, and that God is with Jacob and his seed (28:13–15). Jacob names the place Bethel, which means "house of God" (28:19).

Later in the Jacob pericope, the Lord commands Jacob to move back to Bethel, and there he reveals himself to the patriarch in another theophany (Gen. 35:9). He again speaks to Jacob and says essentially the same thing he had spoken to Abraham in Genesis 17:1–8. Table 4 shows the similarities.

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[52] Jack M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 1:378.
[53] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), 700.
[54] Zeev Weisman, "National Consciousness in the Patriarchal Promises," *JSOT* 31 (1985): 55–73.

Element in Genesis 35	Parallel in Genesis 17
1. Introduction: "I am God Almighty" (35:11)	17:1
2. "be fruitful and multiply" (35:11)	17:2, 6
3. "nations shall come from you" (35:11)	17:4–6
4. "kings shall come from your own body" (35:11)	17:6
5. "the land" (35:12)	17:8
6. "to your offspring" (35:12)	17:8

Table 4

As I say elsewhere, the "conclusion to be drawn here is that the covenant promises to Abraham are renewed in their totality to Jacob. Jacob's change of name (Gen. 35:10) to Israel further signifies that the promises of God are to come to pass through the person of Jacob: he is the promised seed through whom the people of God are to come, a descent that finds its climax in the person of the Messiah."[55]

The reality is that the covenant concept defines the relationship of God and his people not merely in the book of Genesis but throughout the entirety of Scripture. The unfolding nature of the covenant and its promises throughout the remainder of the Bible is one of the great unifying theological themes in Scripture. It truly highlights the homogeneity of the Bible's message.

Approaching the New Testament

The book of Genesis lays the foundation for a proper understanding and interpretation of all Scripture. If the church is to have a good and full view of basic biblical doctrines with regard to such topics as sin, judgment, salvation, the character of God, the Messiah, and a myriad of other relevant and central subjects, it must begin with the study of Genesis. Many of these doctrines are found in seed form in Genesis, and they need to be traced throughout the rest of the Bible as they develop and unfold.

Although this idea is simple, in reality it receives little attention today in biblical studies.[56] For example, when one reads about ecclesiology—and, in particular, eldership—it is surprising how infrequently authors pay attention to the office of elder in the Old Testament. It is important that one does the work of *protology* when considering biblical ideas and themes. Thus, if one wanted to discern the proper role of labor in the believer's life, one ought to study that mandate for work given by God to Adam in the garden of Eden. That cultural mandate is as relevant today as it was in the first human environment.

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[55] John D. Currid, *Genesis*, vol. 2, *Genesis 25:19–50:26*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2003), 165.
[56] Consider the following important works by Graeme Goldsworthy: *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991); *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament*, new ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994); and, for an application of this methodology in preaching, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). On preaching from the Old Testament, see also Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006).

The New Testament, in its history, its theology, and its doctrine, does not appear in a vacuum; it developed out of the teachings of the Old Testament. This method of interpretation mirrors that of Jesus, who, for example, when he was asked about the nature of marriage, responded by quoting Genesis 2.

In addition to establishing a foundation for understanding the rest of the Bible, Genesis also foreshadows the central event of Scripture: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We've already mentioned the prophetic word given in Genesis 3:15, which speaks of a coming seed of the woman who will crush the Serpent's head and redeem humanity. The New Testament itself often refers or alludes to Genesis in explaining the way of the gospel. From the showcase of patriarchs who modeled faith in God's promises in Hebrews 11 to Christ explicitly connecting God's preservation of Noah in the flood with God's preservation of his people when judgment comes (Matt. 24:36–44), Genesis includes many images that prefigure the gospel. One of the most significant is the picture of Adam sinning in the garden and thus bringing death upon all people. The apostle Paul comments that Adam was a type of the One who was to come (Rom. 5:14). This second Adam, Jesus Christ, brings life for his people and not death. As Paul further comments, "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many" (Rom. 5:15).

We could explore many such parallels, but the point is clear: Genesis lays the groundwork for the whole of the Bible, both as a historical and theological prologue and as a shadow of the gospel that would be made visible in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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MILES V. VAN PELT (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Alan Belcher Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages and the academic dean at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He also serves on the pastoral staff of Grace Reformed Church in Madison, Mississippi.

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