

ROBIN ROUTLEDGE

OLD TESTAMENT
THEOLOGY

A THEMATIC APPROACH



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1. APPROACHES TO OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY¹

The Old Testament as Christian Scripture

The Christian Bible comprises the Old and New Testaments and, from earliest times, Christians have accepted the OT alongside the NT as canonical and normative for faith. It is impossible, here, to trace the growth and development of the OT canon. Its make-up was essentially as we know it by the NT period,

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1. See e.g. Bernard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 1–47; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP, 1996); F. F. Bruce, 'The Theology and Interpretation of the Old Testament', in G. W. Anderson (ed.), *Tradition and Interpretation: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 385–416; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 1–114; Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985); *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (London: SCM, 1992), pp. 3–106; Ronald E. Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study* (London: Lutterworth, 1976); *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978), pp. 1–25; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology*

though there was still debate about the acceptability of some books up to the so-called Council of Jamnia in AD 90, when some kind of a consensus about the contents of the canon appears to have been reached.²

'Old Testament' or 'Hebrew Bible'?

'Old Testament' is a Christian designation.³ It is common in some circles to refer, instead, to the 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Hebrew Scriptures'. Though not strictly accurate, since some parts are in Aramaic (Ezra 4:8 – 6:18; 7:12–26; Jer.

Footnote 1 (*continued*)

(Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), pp. 11–57; Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958), pp. 11–36; R. W. L. Moberly, 'Theology of the Old Testament', in David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (eds.), *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Leicester: Apollon; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 452–478; see also introductory articles in *NIDOTTE* 1:14–205.

2. After the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Jamnia became a centre for study of the Scriptures, including discussion about whether certain books (e.g. Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ezekiel), which were already generally accepted, should continue to have canonical status. While it is unlikely that there was an official 'Council of Jamnia', decisions taken there in AD 90 probably did result in some formalization of its content. For further discussion of the OT canon, see e.g. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985; paperback with CD-ROM, 2002), pp. 102–114; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: IVP, 1977), pp. 260–288; H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1950); William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederick William Bush (eds.), *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 598–605.
3. Because 'old' might suggest out of date and no longer relevant, some prefer the designation 'first testament'; see e.g. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove: IVP; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003–6), 1:15; see also Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Deo, 2005), pp. 746–749. I do not think this testament has outlived its theological usefulness; nevertheless, though not perfect, 'Old Testament' has a Scriptural basis and has been used by Christians for many centuries. For a range of views on this question, see Roger Brooks and John J. Collins (eds.), *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament: Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 5 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

10:11; Dan. 2:4 – 7:28),⁴ this designation recognizes that before it became part of the Christian Bible, the OT was (and continues to be) Jewish Scripture, and emphasizes both the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and the fact that Christianity has not replaced Judaism.⁵ Nevertheless, though certain texts are held in common by Christians and Jews, the way they are interpreted and the use made of them is different. This can be seen, for example, in the order of the books. In the (Jewish) Hebrew Bible the last book is Chronicles, which has as a key emphasis the building of the Jerusalem temple. After describing its destruction by the Babylonians, the book closes with the edict of Cyrus, which opens the way for the Jews to return and rebuild the temple (2 Chr. 36:22–23). Thus the book points to a new beginning for God's people after the exile, a new beginning linked, particularly, with the restoration of their religious life, including the birth of Judaism. The (Christian) OT ends with the prophecy of Malachi, which points to the coming of the day of the Lord that will be preceded by the return of Elijah. This opens the way for the NT focus on John the Baptist and his announcement that the kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus Christ. With a different canonical ordering, the same Scriptures prepare their respective readers for different fulfilments.⁶

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4. The Jewish acronym Tanak (Torah [Law], Nevi'im [Prophets], Ketuvim [Writings]) might be more accurate, though this designation also has faith content and does not allow for the different ordering of books in the OT.
 5. Judaism is also a later development of the faith of the first testament, generally linked with the reforms of Ezra after the exile, which has developed over the centuries. References to the 'Jewishness' of the OT (and of the NT) can imply that Jews are in a better position to understand it than westernized Gentiles with a history of anti-Semitism. One common view, represented by David H. Stern, in his *Complete Jewish Bible* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Resources International, 1998), is that the whole Bible is Jewish and, because there is an essential continuity between the faith of the first testament and Judaism, Christianity needs to be set within a Jewish religious and cultural context. In my view that argument is flawed. Judaism is no less a development of the faith of the first testament than Christianity is.
 6. The order of the OT is influenced by (though not identical to) the LXX, the version most commonly quoted by NT writers. The LXX groups books based on literary content: Law, History (including Chronicles), Writings/Poetry and Prophecy (including Daniel). The order and division of the Hebrew Bible seems to have been accepted during the NT period: *from . . . Abel to . . . Zechariah* (Luke 11:51) indicates a text that runs from Genesis to Chronicles (Zechariah is mentioned in 2 Chr.

This is linked with biblical theology, which has as one of its goals an appropriate relating of the Old and New Testaments.⁷ How that may be achieved, and how the OT may function as an authoritative document of the Christian church is a subject of debate, and aspects of that debate are considered below. However, because it includes discussion about the relationship between the testaments, biblical theology is a Christian, rather than a Jewish, task. Jews are interested in the Tanak, but not in its function in relation to the NT. In fact theology of the first testament has also, so far, been a predominantly Christian task, with much Jewish scholarship expressing opposition to (or at least a suspicion of) doing theology.⁸ Barr notes the view of Tsevat that a true Jewish theology would need to include the Talmud and the Mishnah, which are as inseparable from the Tanak for Jewish readers as the NT is from the OT for Christian readers.⁹

Footnote 6 (*continued*)

24:20–22), and reference to ‘the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms’ (Luke 24:44) points to the threefold division of the Tanak. This suggests that the acceptance of a different order by the church was not accidental but has theological significance. The generally accepted order of the books of the OT in the western church appears to go back to Jerome’s Latin Vulgate (AD 382), which became the standard in the west.

7. For further discussion of biblical theology, see below, pp. 37–42.
8. On this discussion, see James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM, 1999), pp. 286–311; Rendtorff, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 740–749; Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), pp. 183–238.
9. Brueggemann wants Christians to recognize Jews as ‘co-readers’, accepting that it is legitimate for one to read the OT text towards the NT while the other reads it towards the Talmud; see e.g. Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), pp. 1–3. Rendtorff too looks for a common Jewish–Christian reading of the OT/Hebrew Bible; see e.g. Rolf Rendtorff, ‘Towards a Common Jewish–Christian Reading of the Old Testament’, in Brooks and Collins, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 89–108. However, the significance of the OT cannot be separated entirely from the whole of which it is part; see Jon D. Levenson, ‘Theological Consensus or Historicist Evasion? Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies’, in Brooks and Collins, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 109–145; also in Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), pp. 82–105.

Jon D. Levenson sets out his objections in the essay ‘Why Jews Are not Interested in Biblical Theology’,¹⁰ and he too notes the importance of Jewish tradition, including Midrash and Talmud. Another issue is the centrality of the quest for unity in biblical theology. Levenson maintains that Judaism recognizes, and is happy to live with, tension and inner argument within the text. A third issue raised by Levenson is the emphasis in theology on belief over practice.

By contrast, Goshen-Gottstein does point to the need for Tanak theology within Jewish scholarship, analogous to (Christian) biblical theology. Perdue gives a lengthy list of Jewish scholars working in this area (including Goshen-Gottstein, Marvin Sweeney and Michael Fishbane).¹¹

Another factor in the Christian view of the OT was the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in the early Christian centuries. The first Christians were Jews, and their only sacred text was the OT, which was interpreted as being fulfilled in Christ. As the church spread beyond its Jewish roots, we see a growing tension between Gentile converts and those who saw Christianity as an extension of Judaism. Opposition to Judaizing tendencies led to the OT being given a spiritual interpretation; viewing it, in effect, as a Christian book that had been misunderstood by the Jews.¹² As the gospel continued to spread among Gentiles, and the number of Jews coming into the church reduced,¹³ a total separation of Christianity and Judaism became inevitable. That reduced the problem of Judaizing, but raised the question of what to do with the OT Scriptures that were not

10. In Brooks and Collins, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 33–61.

11. Perdue, *Reconstructing*, pp. 194–225; see also Hasel, *Basic Issues*, pp. 34–38. Frymer-Kensky notes the emergence of biblical theology within Jewish scholarship as an alternative to rabbinic interpretation – opening the possibility of dialogue between biblical and rabbinic ideas; see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, ‘The Emergence of Jewish Biblical Theologies’, in Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (eds.), *Jews, Christians and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, Symposium (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), pp. 109–121.

12. This is a key emphasis of the *Epistle of Barnabas* (see below, pp. 44–45).

13. One factor in the relationship between Christians and Jews seems to have been the Bar-Kochba revolt (AD 132). Bar Kochba was seen by many, including Rabbi Aqiba, as a messianic figure. Christians could not accept that and did not join the rebellion. This led to acrimony between Jews and Christians, made worse by the severity with which the Romans put down the uprising. From then on few Jews seem to have become Christians.

part of the religious heritage of those now coming into the church. Some, such as Marcion, wanted to devalue the OT in relation to the NT. Opposition to Marcion by the mainstream church resulted in the affirmation of the value of the OT for the church, though still as an essentially Christian document.

Christians see themselves as both the people of the new covenant, which was announced by the prophets and inaugurated by Jesus, and also the heirs of the promises of the Old Covenant, which find their ultimate fulfilment in Christ. Thus the OT is not simply a Jewish text that has been taken over by the church; it is part of a divine revelation that reaches completion in Jesus (e.g. Heb. 1:1–2; 2 Pet. 1:19–21). As such it is both appropriate and necessary for us to approach its study as Christians, and to recognize that the OT Scriptures have an important place in our religious heritage.¹⁴ Implicit within this view is the conviction that the OT writers look more widely than the relationship between God and Israel. It is possible, within the OT, to discern the working out of the divine purpose to reveal God's holiness and glory throughout the whole of creation.¹⁵ This has two aspects. It is seen in judgment on those whose proud rebellion seeks to usurp the glory that belongs to God alone. It is seen too in the salvation of those from all nations who respond to God in faith and obedience, and their acceptance alongside Israel in the coming kingdom, which includes too the redemption of the created order, and the creation of new heavens and a new earth. For Christians this purpose reaches its fulfilment in Christ. It begins, though, within the OT, and a proper understanding of God's purpose for the world and of the divine perspective on history is impossible without the OT. The universal nature of God's purpose implies, further, that the OT has a crucial relevance for our understanding of mission.¹⁶

The challenge of the Old Testament

For Christians, to accept the OT as part of the canon of Scripture is to recognize its divine authority. It is God's Word, and as such is authoritative and normative for the life and faith of God's people. Thus the study of the OT continues to be important for Christians. But it raises difficulties. The OT is, on the one hand, part of the Christian Bible, but, on the other, it is also a

14. See also B. W. Anderson, *Contours*, pp. 3–7; Brueggemann, *Theology*, pp. 733–735; Childs, *OT Theology*, pp. 8–9; *Biblical Theology* (1992), pp. 25–26, 55–69.

15. This is discussed in more detail below, pp. 311–315.

16. See 'God and the nations', below, p. 311.

document of the history and religion of Israel.¹⁷ Its historical, cultural and religious background is different from ours; its practices and beliefs are unfamiliar, and in some cases may even be offensive. So how are we to read the OT in a way that takes it as authoritative for our faith and conduct?

Some scholars between the first and second world wars (particularly in Germany) wanted to remove the OT from the canon, and so take away its authoritative status.¹⁸ Later liberal Protestantism does not go that far, but there is a tendency to downgrade the importance of the OT, and especially of passages that do not fit with ethical norms derived from the NT and from social conventions and what are sometimes seen as human rights issues. The OT reflects the historical development of Israel's faith, which means that some parts have more direct significance for the church than others. However, if we attach value and significance to the OT only when it agrees with the NT, or only when it fits in with modern social values, then we are denying it any real authority of its own. We need a way of viewing the OT that recognizes different levels of direct relevance to the life of the church, but also acknowledges the authoritative status of the OT as a whole.

For some, the key to unlocking the OT is found in the conversation between the risen Christ and the disciples on the road to Emmaus when, *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself* (Luke 24:27). The aim, then, is to find Christian, and more particularly Christological, significance in the OT.¹⁹ In one sense,

17. For a discussion of the relationship between the testaments, see David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: A Study of the Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1991).

18. Adolf von Harnack described the retention of the OT within the canon after the nineteenth century as 'the result of religious and ecclesiastical paralysis' (*Marcion: das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*, 2nd ed. [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924], p. 217), and Friedrich Delitzsch described the OT as 'the great deception' (*Die grosse Täuschung*, 2 vols. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1920-1]). E. Hirsch argues that the OT was retained as part of the Christian canon only as the result of a radical reinterpretation by the NT and the church, which may now be discarded (*Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1936]); see also L. Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 2-3; also, D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments*, pp. 48-57, 84.

19. See D. L. Baker's discussion, *Two Testaments*, pp. 94-104; Baker notes the importance of the work of Wilhelm Vischer. See also Goppelt, *Typos*, pp. 1-2.

of course, all Christian theology, including OT theology, must be Christological.²⁰ As Christians we recognize that the OT is a witness to Christ: it contains the promise of which Christ is the fulfilment, the shadow that points to Christ as its reality. And some texts may be related directly to Christ (though opinion is divided about which ones). However, it is impossible to treat the whole of the OT in that way without resorting to imaginative spiritualizing and allegorizing of some of its parts, and neglecting other parts altogether.²¹ Bright notes the way some OT passages were allegorized by the Church Fathers:

Moses seated in prayer, his arms outstretched . . . makes the sign of the cross of Christ, and it was by this sign that Amalek was overcome by Jesus (Joshua) through Moses (so Ep. Barnabas, Tertullian, Cyprian, Justin, *et al.*). So too the scarlet cord which the harlot Rahab let down from Jericho's wall . . . signifies redemption through the blood of Christ (so I Clement, Justin, Irenaeus, Origen, *et al.*), while the three [*sic*] spies (so Irenaeus) were doubtless the three persons of the Trinity; Rahab herself (so Origen) is the Church, which is made up of harlots and sinners.²²

Allegory played an important part in giving value and relevance to the OT, particularly in the (Greek) Alexandrian school.²³ However, in Antioch, which was more Hebraic in its thought and culture, there was a growing emphasis on

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20. According to Jacob, 'A theology of the Old Testament which is founded not on certain isolated verses, but on the Old Testament as a whole, can only be a Christology, for what was revealed under the old covenant, through a long and varied history, in events, persons and institutions, is, in Christ, gathered together and brought to perfection' (*Theology*, p. 12). This is not an argument, though, for reading Christology into the OT, but for recognizing an essential unity of theology between the OT and NT.
21. In Luke 24:27 Jesus is not suggesting, as is sometimes claimed, that we can find direct references to him in every OT text. Rather, he sets his ministry, and in particular his suffering and death, in the context of a divine purpose being worked out through the pages of the OT that finds its ultimate fulfilment in him.
22. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1967; repr. Biblical and Theological Classics Library; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 81.
23. Influential figures in the Alexandrian church include Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–215) and his more eminent pupil Origen (c. AD 185–254), and later Athanasius (c. AD 296–373).

a more literal and historical view of the OT.²⁴ This debate continued until the fifth century AD, when it gave way to a fourfold approach to the text (set out first by John Cassian): (1) literal/historical, (2) allegorical, (3) anagogical/spiritual, and (4) tropological/moral. Cassian relates this to the view of Jerusalem:

Jerusalem can be taken in four senses: historically as the city of the Jews; allegorically as the Church of Christ, anagogically as the heavenly city of God . . . tropologically, as the soul of man, which is frequently subject to praise or blame from the Lord under this title.²⁵

This approach was championed by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, though allegorical interpretations remained popular until the Reformation. The Reformers rejected the significance attached to allegory, and elevated the first principle, the literal/historical. Luther, for example, describes allegories as ‘empty speculations and the froth . . . of the Holy Scriptures. It is the historical sense alone which supplies the true and sound doctrine.’²⁶

Charles Spurgeon, the nineteenth-century Baptist preacher who founded Spurgeon’s College, wanted his students to be aware of deeper meanings within a text, but also pointed to the dangers of taking the approach too far. He notes the example of the preacher who took as his text the words of the baker to Joseph in Genesis 40:16, *on my head were three baskets of bread*, and preached a sermon on the Trinity!²⁷ Certainly, heavenly and spiritual realities may be represented by things on earth: OT sacrifices point to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice; the redemption of the people of Israel in the exodus and Passover point to the believers’ redemption from sin; the Song of Solomon may speak of the relationship between Christ and the church or Christ and the soul. As Christians we may look for a deeper, spiritual significance in OT passages, but does that mean an OT text has value only if it can be given a Christian interpretation? Again, this is an approach that denies to the OT any authority of its own. It results in OT texts being used as either hat-pegs for NT sermons, or

24. Key figures here were Theophilus (who became Bishop of Antioch around AD 169), Eusebius of Caesarea (c. AD 263–340), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. AD 350–428) and John Chrysostom (c. AD 347–407).

25. *Conferences* 14.8.

26. Quoted by Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 197–200 (198); see also A. Skevington Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (London: Tyndale, 1946), p. 25.

27. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976), p. 98.

illustrations with no real theological weight. There is also the danger (as, for example, with interpretations of the Song of Solomon) of spiritualizing so much that we miss the real point of what the OT is saying.

Spiritualizing or Christianizing the OT in this way, or treating it as a source of sermon illustrations or of theological proof texts, may avoid some of the difficulties, but the price is to impose meaning on it. It does not allow the OT to speak for itself. Certainly the OT points forward to the coming of Jesus, and for Christian readers is incomplete without the NT. But it is also Scripture in its own right. Its writers were moved by the Spirit of God and its pages reveal truths about God and about his dealings with his people and his world. The NT writers were rooted in these Scriptures and built on them; thus it is also true that the NT is incomplete without the OT.²⁸ Sometimes the message of the OT may be difficult to understand; sometimes it may be difficult to separate the message we need to hear and apply to our own lives and circumstances from its cultural and historical background. The answer to these difficulties, though, is not to impose another interpretation on the text. We need, instead, to give serious consideration to how we can remain true to the OT as Scripture: as the word of God, which continues to be normative and authoritative for the life of the church. This is one of the key challenges to confront OT Theology.

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28. Commenting on what the OT means for the proclamation of the church, Wolff notes, 'the proposition that the Old Testament can be properly understood only in the light of the New . . . stands in need of its converse: The New Testament Christ-event can be fully understood only in the light of the Old Testament . . . no New Testament writer felt he was in a position to witness to Jesus Christ without constantly opening and quoting the Old Testament'; see Hans Walter Wolff, 'The Hermeneutics of the Old Testament', in Claus Westermann (ed.), *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 160–199 (187–188). Goldingay makes a similar comment: 'the Old Testament's insights must be seen in the light of those of the New, but only as we immediately add that it is necessary to see the New Testament's insights in light of those of the Old' (*OT Theology*, 1:21–28 [21]); see also *OT Theology*, 2:18–21. Sailhamer argues that as a Christian task, OT theology is only the first part of a biblical theology that must also include the NT, but emphasizes the need to consider the OT in its own right, claiming that 'the Old Testament not only stands on its own but the New Testament stands on its shoulders'; see John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 23.

Old Testament theology: a brief historical overview²⁹

Historical and systematic theology

Over the years scholars have approached OT Theology in several ways.³⁰ One emphasis is on a *systematic* or *dogmatic* approach. A systematic theology attempts to organize the central tenets of faith as a series of categories and propositions, and to collect the biblical material that relates to them. A key aim of this is to set out what the Bible says in a way that makes it accessible and relevant to the life and faith of the church, to interpret the theological principles contained within the Scriptures into principles and practice for the church, and in doing so to give some kind of order and unity to what we believe. With regard to the OT, Jacob defines this approach as ‘the systematic account of the specific religious ideas which can be found throughout the OT and which form its profound unity’.³¹

This way of coming to the OT has value, and a number of helpful OT theologies adopt this methodology (including Jacob’s own); but weaknesses are

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29. See further B. W. Anderson, *Contours*, pp. 16–31; Brueggemann, *Theology*, pp. 1–60; Childs, *OT Theology*, pp. 2–17; *Biblical Theology* (1992), pp. 4–69; Clements, *Century*, pp. 118–149; Hasel, *Basic Issues*, pp. 10–27; John H. Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985); House, *OT Theology*, pp. 13–52, 548–559; Elmer A. Martens, *NIDOTTE* 1:172–184; Patrick D. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, JSOTSup 267 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 142–181; Ben C. Ollenburger, ‘Old Testament Theology before 1933’, in Ben C. Ollenburger (ed.), *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future*, SBTS 1 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 3–11; Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995–6), 1:1–19; Sailhamer, *OT Theology*, pp. 117–175. See also Perdue, *Reconstructing*, pp. 25–75. This builds on his previous work, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), in which he discusses the demise of the historical method as the dominant approach to OT theology. In this second volume Perdue describes what he sees as the current status of OT theology and discusses the relationship between biblical theology and the history of religion (*Religionsgeschichte*) approach; he also points to new approaches to OT theology – including liberation and feminist theologies.
30. Hasel notes ten methodological approaches to OT Theology (*Basic Issues*, pp. 28–114); see also House, *OT Theology*, pp. 54–57. There is some overlap between them, and the current discussion will focus only on what appear to be the most important.
31. Jacob, *Theology*, p. 11.

also apparent in some systematic approaches, and maybe inherent within the approach itself. The OT was not written as a theological document, and a systematic approach necessarily involves imposing an alien order and structure on it. While it may be right to look for coherence in the text, there is also diversity and theological development within the text, and that is not often taken into account in systematic theologies. Another problem is the tendency to be selective in quoting texts: using those that support a particular proposition, while leaving more difficult passages aside.³² Also, and this is a particular issue for OT theology, it is common for the categories of systematic theology to be drawn from the NT or from the needs of the church. This means that discussion may focus on issues of interest to us, but not necessarily of concern to the Bible writers; as a result we may find ourselves seeking answers to questions they never thought of asking. There is also the danger that the OT may be treated as little more than a source of proof texts, with little regard for it as authoritative revelation in its own right.

Historically the church dominated dogmatic theology. Before the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church imposed its own interpretation on the Bible, an interpretation that reinforced its own beliefs and structures.³³ The Reformation was, in part, a reaction against that: it attempted to set the interpretation of the Scriptures free from the authority of the church and, instead, to bring the church under the authority of the Scriptures.³⁴ After the

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32. This is directly related to the approach. In a systematic theology that might already be several hundred pages in length it is impossible to deal, in detail, with difficult biblical texts. Inevitably, then, systematic theologies set out a more general ‘overview’, but leave some anomalies.
33. The Roman Catholic Church continues to set Scripture alongside Apostolic Tradition as the basis for ‘the rule of faith’. In theory this gives considerable weight to Scripture; in practice, Scripture is viewed and interpreted through the lens of church tradition. In the constitution on divine revelation from the 2nd Vatican Council, *Dei verbum* (1965), which emphasizes the importance of Scripture, the church remains the final arbiter: ‘all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God’ (3.10).
34. The Reformers embraced the idea of *sola scriptura* (an expression possibly first formulated by John Wycliffe), the belief that Scripture alone should determine matters of faith, and that the interpretation of Scripture did not depend on the teaching of the church. See Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 191–195.

Reformation, however, it became apparent that many important passages of Scripture were unclear, and could admit several, sometimes conflicting, interpretations. This led to calls among Protestants for an orthodox interpretation of key biblical texts, and so, to some extent at least, the church took over again.

The critical approach to the Bible was a further attempt to break free from the authority of the church and church dogmatics. A key influence on thinking from the late seventeenth century onwards, which characterized the Enlightenment,³⁵ was *scientific rationalism*. The two main tools in the search for knowledge and truth, not only in the physical sciences but in all areas of life, were *scientific inquiry* and *reason*. Before this, the Bible had been (at least in theory) the source of knowledge and the arbiter of truth; now it became, itself, the object of critical assessment and analysis, with apparent discrepancies and inconsistencies put under the microscope. Many opposed rationalism to Christian faith, emphasizing the priority of human reason and rejecting whatever could not be explained rationally, such as the supernatural, including miracles and the idea of Scripture as supernatural revelation.³⁶ And among biblical scholars who did not see such a stark antithesis between rationalism and faith there was, nevertheless, a move towards ‘enlightened theology’, which adopted the rationalists’ critical approach to the Bible.³⁷ The church’s orthodox interpretation of Scripture was viewed as an obstacle to these new ideas, and this led, especially in the nineteenth century, to a separation between the church and biblical scholarship, which moved to the universities.³⁸

35. This term usually refers to the intellectual movement in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which included philosophers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume and Kant. Its roots, though, go back further to the work of Descartes and others. The Enlightenment provides the foundation for what became known as ‘modernism’.

36. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 251–253.

37. One such approach, ‘neology’ (new word/science) was advocated by Johann Semler, in the mid-eighteenth century as an attempt to synthesize rationalism and tradition. The critical approach that characterized rationalism is also evident in the work of W. de Wette (1780–1849), who is associated with the beginnings of the modern critical approach to the OT. De Wette did not attach much historical value to the OT, though (in contrast to many rationalists) he saw its ‘mythological’ content as an important expression of religious ideas. See Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 257–320.

38. Wellhausen resigned from his position of teaching ministerial students at Greifswald in 1882 because he felt his approach was not preparing them for ministry in the evangelical (Protestant) church in Germany.