

IX

The Theology of the Old Testament

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THE THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE BIBLE

What is involved in a theological study of the Bible? The Bible may be studied from a number of perspectives, one of which is theological. There are specialized studies, such as the animals of the Bible, the men and women of the Bible, the social customs of biblical times, and biblical archeology. There are also the biblical tools which include commentaries, lexicons, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and handbooks. Just as each of these approaches to the Bible is different, so is a theological study.

Scholars divide biblical studies into six major divisions. First is introduction, which is concerned with background information about each book as to its author, date, literary form, and audience. Second are textual studies, which take up the manner in which the Bible has come down to us in its various manuscript forms. Third is a study of developmental aspects of biblical times in the form of OT or NT history. Fourth are exegetical studies of the sort found in commentaries. The exegete explains biblical sections in their own setting, then puts them in words which make sense now. Fifth are studies in the history of religion, which trace the development of religion chronologically either in the OT or the NT. Sixth is the theology of the Bible.

A theological study of the Bible differs from other studies in that it is concerned with that which gives unity to the Bible, the nearness or distance of other matters to that center, and a manner of organizing the materials of the Bible around that center.

THE THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Old Testament theology is concerned with finding the center of the OT, then unifying the thought of the OT from that standpoint. Various proposals have been made as to how OT theology should be done; and, since the time when it began as a discipline in the seventeenth century, the major approaches have been four. (1) Some have suggested that no center to the OT is obvious, so they have put to the OT those questions typical of systematic theology. A case in point is the *Old Testament Theology* of Ludwig Köhler (1935, E.T., 1957) organized in three parts: I. God, II. Man, III. Judgment and salvation. Otto J. Baab (1949) makes a similar assumption. (2) Others have proposed that Christ is the center of the OT. These include Wilhelm Vischer (E.T., 1949) and George A. F. Knight, who titles his book *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament* (1964). (3) Still others have seen the covenant as the center of the OT, principally Walther Eichrodt in his monumental two-volume work (E.T., 1961, 1967) and J. Barton Payne (1962). (4) A fourth group have seen the OT centering around God, who is characterized by certain mighty acts which reappear thematically throughout the OT. These include Gerhard von Rad in his two-volume *Old Testament Theology* (E.T. 1962, 1965) and G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament and Theology* (1969).

The position taken in this essay is that the scholar should not decide this matter on his own but should search the pertinent OT passages which declare that which is central or most important. These are passages which envision Israel at worship proclaiming who she is before God (as in Deut. 26:1-11; Pss. 136, 105, 106), in covenant renewal ceremonies (as in Josh. 24:1-28; Neh. 9:6-37), and in prayer

(as in Jer. 32:16-25; Dan. 9:3-19). An amazing similarity of affirmation appears in each of these places. At the center of OT thought is Yahweh, who is defined by certain great events in which he revealed himself to Israel. The most complete statement is that found in Nehemiah 9, which will essentially serve as the outline of OT theology in this essay.

From looking at the above Scriptures, one concludes that God is at the center of OT theology. But God is not so undefined that each scholar may fill in the blanks as he pleases. He is specifically the God who revealed himself to Israel through certain mighty events. He is known, not in his essence, but in his action. Therefore, the important affirmations about God in the OT are those mighty acts which receive recurring emphasis in the OT. These mighty events can serve as the manner of organizing the thought of the OT. They involve a God who creates and sustains, who made promises to the fathers, who acted in Egypt and at the sea, who trained his son in the wilderness, who put it in writing with his people, who cares by giving law, who commands the heavenly armies, who gives his son an inheritance, and who makes a promise to David.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

God Who Creates and Sustains

In Psalm 136 the first mighty work of God is creation. God is praised for his goodness and steadfast love. That goodness or love is not some glow which hangs over the universe, stirring up human emotions. It is concretely realized in creation itself. The psalmist indicates why he declares these characteristics of God:

To him who alone does great wonders,
 for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 to him who by understanding made the heavens,
 for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 to him who spread out the earth upon the waters,
 for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 to him who made the great lights,
 for his steadfast love endures for ever;

the sun to rule over the day,
 for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 the moon and stars to rule over the night,
 for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Psalm 136:4-9

Unique in the view of the created order declared in the OT is that the physical universe reflects the warmth and love which come from God. There is no suggestion that the universe is impersonal, unfeeling, cold, and material. The God who saved Israel at the sea is the same God who called forth the material universe. They both alike function in behalf of man and reflect the goodness of God.

One of the basic affirmations about creation in Genesis 1 is that God "saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (1:31). Even after man's sin caused nature to slip toward the abyss, its goodness remained.

Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
 and plants for man to cultivate,
 that he may bring forth good from the earth,
 and wine to gladden the heart of man,
 oil to make his face shine,
 and bread to strengthen man's heart.

Psalm 104:14-15

What does "good" mean in Genesis 1? The created order is good because it fulfills the purpose intended by God. Plants and grass are food for man and animals. They are good since they serve a function in the created order (Gen. 1:29-30). The goodness of creation is neither its orderly beauty, as with the Greeks, nor a moral quality, as with the Persians. The universe is good because each part contributes to and has function in the whole. (See Ps. 104:10-23.)

But because the function of these parts contributes to the welfare of man, the goodness of creation also has a moral dimension. One moral characteristic of the universe is its regularity or loyalty. The universe is faithful (regular) because God is faithful. Jeremiah indicates this quality as most obvious in the recurrence of day and night.

If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their

appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken.

Jeremiah 33:20-21

Other qualities are helpfulness and love. The material universe has these qualities because God continues to bring his blessings through physical channels (Deut. 28:11-12). The universe is lawful, not because it contains within itself natural law, but because God, who is faithful in promise, sustains it (cf. Col. 1:16-17).

Evil is present in the universe, but it is not ultimate. Satan, the adversary of man, is nevertheless answerable to God (Job 2:2-6). But because of Satan, who has a degree of freedom, the universe is no longer solely good since there are powers which oppose God. When man violates the command of God, he too adds to the spread of evil. The snakes turn against man (Gen. 3:15), the woman suffers pain in childbirth (3:16), and thorns and thistles infect the earth (3:18).

Because of its view of the created order, the OT steers clear of various extremes. Physical existence is a blessing because it is from God. Even the extreme cries of Job (Job 3) and Ecclesiastes (8:17) do not denounce the material order. Even if the physical order is polluted by sin, it is still God's; and he is completing his work in it (Ps. 50:10-12). At the same time the physical universe is not to be worshiped since it is not God (Ps. 90:1-2). Furthermore, it is less than God because it has been infected by human sin. The OT view is thus not pantheistic, that is, that God is all and all is God. The universe does not emanate from God, nor is it his outer physical nature (1 Kings 8:27). At the same time, however, God is not radically separated from his universe. His power and presence extend throughout its vast reaches (Ps. 139:7-8). He is transcendent, but not radically so. He is loving, caring, and involved.

God created the universe by his word; and, inasmuch as it fulfills his purpose, it is good. The universe is meaningful and loving, but in its present state it is not final. Man lives in the world. It is his home. But he does not worship the world. His love and worship are directed to God, the Maker

of heaven and earth (Deut. 6:4-5; Gen. 14:19-20).

In the OT, God not only brought the universe into existence, but he supports it through his sustaining word. The physical order continues moment by moment because of God's abiding presence. When his hand is opened, when his face shines upon the created order, all goes well.

These all look to thee,

to give them their food in due season.

When thou givest to them, they gather it up;

when thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good things.

When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed;

when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created;

and thou renewest the face of the ground.

Psalm 104:27-30

The orderliness of the universe is not due to natural law, but to the promise of God.

Neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

Genesis 8:21-22

He sustains it not only in its physical expression, but also in the life residing within it. He assists those who are his, even through the material order. When his people cry to him, he reaches out to assist. His appearance with his people in battle is often accompanied by natural phenomena, especially the thunderstorm (Judg. 5:4-5; 2 Sam. 22:8-16; Ps. 18:7-19). God is Creator and Sustainer. He also appears in the universe as Savior, rescuing those who cry out of their affliction. Even nature is affected by his action (Ps. 114). In fact, the OT does not distinguish among these three roles. He is one God. There is no dichotomy of spiritual and material, if by material one has in mind the physical universe. The only way in which the physical universe is less than spiritual (good) is through the forces in it which are at enmity with God. It is only where sin is

present that the material stands against the spiritual.

Where sin is rampant, God withdraws his sustaining word and the created order sinks back into chaos (Job 34:13-15). Micah declares that, when God arrives to put down rebellion, creation itself is affected:

For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place,
and will come down and tread upon the high places of
the earth.

And the mountains will melt under him
and the valleys will be cleft,
like wax before the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.

All this is for the transgression of Jacob
and for the sins of the house of Israel.

Micah 1:3-5

Jeremiah goes so far as to envision God reversing the order of original creation because of the transgressions of his people (Jer. 4:23-26). After the action of God, the countryside lies devastated. Everything has disappeared, leaving the earth as it was before God brought order out of chaos, light out of darkness, life out of death. The physical universe is not God himself, but neither is it impersonal material. The universe reflects the very person of God, for he is continually involved. He is Creator, Sustainer, and Activator.

But even after the universe sinks back into chaos, God does not abandon it. He is ever creating anew. This is especially the affirmation of the prophets as they envision events beyond the destruction of Israel. Jeremiah declares that the God who brought forth man and animals in the beginning can do it again:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:27-28

Isaiah sees the postcaptivity events as resulting in new

action of God which he calls new creation:

Remember not the former things,
 nor consider the things of old.
 Behold, I am doing a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
 I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
 The wild beasts will honor me,
 the jackals and ostriches;
 for I give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert,
 to give drink to my chosen people.

Isaiah 43:18-20

In the thought of the OT, God is at the center of the universe and of human life because he brought it into existence. It reflects his steadfast love and goodness. Despite evil which has interrupted God's plans, he continues to work in his world as Sustainer and Savior. In OT theology God is defined through his loving concern for the universe he has brought forth and for man created in his image.

God Who Made Promises to the Fathers

God is defined in the OT not only in his relationship to the physical universe, but especially through his relationship with man. Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). He stands at the apex of God's creation. This is obvious in Genesis 1 in that he stands last in an ascending order, and in Genesis 2 in that the one who is of most importance is there mentioned first. From these accounts it is clear that man is the center around which the created order radiates (Gen. 1:29). He is the creature most like and nearest to God, since he is made in his image. Even though the world was made for man, he is not to utilize it to his own ends, but responsibly. Man has dominion over his sphere (Gen. 1:26) just as God has dominion over the whole. Man has responsibility for his world (Deut. 20:19-20) just as God has for the whole. This is man's uniqueness. In this manner he is like God. Man is different in that he has abilities that are

Godlike, not that he contains an everlasting principle within himself. Man was not created to live forever. He had that prospect only through eating from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22). Because of sin he was evicted from the garden and cut off from the tree. God is the source of life for man. He does not have life as a substance or principle within himself.

If he should take back his spirit to himself,
and gather to himself his breath,
all flesh would perish together,
and man would return to dust.

Job 34:14-15

But man is also Godlike in his freedom. Just as God freely determines his universe, so man orders his own world. In his freedom man can live life on God's terms or on his own (Gen. 2:15-17). The rest of creation follows the course of nature.

Even the stork in the heavens
knows her times;
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane
keep the time of their coming;
but my people know not
the ordinance of the Lord.

Jeremiah 8:7

But man can go his own way, and most frequently he does.

The ox knows its owner,
and the ass its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people does not understand.

Isaiah 1:3

So God creates the world, bestowing upon it his loving care and concern. But the one creature whom God addresses and who in turn addresses God (Gen. 3:8-13)—man made in his image—absconds from his responsibility under God, upsetting the created order, plunging it back toward the abyss. Man turns his back on God, and communication is broken off (Gen. 3:22-24). The result is that communica-

tion is likewise disrupted with his fellow (Gen. 11:1-9). Man is then concerned only for himself. In so doing he breaks off from the basic character of God, which is loving action, and from the created order which reflects the love of God. Man in his self-centeredness is man the sinner.

Man is created in the image of God to realize his love and goodness in the created order. Instead, man pursues his own interests and becomes a sinner.

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 6:5

So what is God to do? His first impulse is to wipe man out. He decided to destroy him through a flood (Gen. 6:11-13). But God saved Noah, and through him the problem started all over again. Then God promised he would never again set out to destroy man (Gen. 8:21). As a loving God, however, he could not sit idly by and watch an endless succession of evil. What God did was to make a promise to the fathers; first of all to Abraham, then to Isaac and Jacob. The intent of the promise was that through them the original goodness of creation might in some measure be restored. It is significant that God made this promise. Even more significant, however, is the reason he made it. Through the reason, the theology of the promise is disclosed.

The basic theology of the promise to the fathers is found in the statement to Abraham:

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."

Genesis 12:1-3

God is taking up anew the task of sharing his love and goodness with the universe he has made and man within it. He plans to do it through a chosen people. To that end he plans to bless those chosen and in turn bless those with

whom they rub shoulders. The same promise was made to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and to Jacob (28:13-14). The promise also looked ahead to a multitude of descendants who would form a great nation. It was an open-ended promise.

In Genesis particularly, the manner in which God fulfilled this promise is indicated. In these accounts the patriarchs are those through whom God sought to bestow his goodness on the families of the earth. Because of the blessing of God Abram was a very rich man (Gen. 13:2). This blessing in turn rubbed off on Lot so that they were unable to live in the same region (13:5-7). Even Sodom and Gomorrah were rescued from their enemies by the elect of God. Abram wanted to make sure he blessed them rather than they him (14:19-24). Isaac was richly blessed even in the midst of a drought when he was living in the land of the Philistines (26:12). He did so well the Philistines grew jealous. They were not aware that by Isaac's presence they themselves were being blessed. Upon his departure they sought out Isaac to make a covenant so their blessings would continue (26:27-29).

Jacob and his son Joseph brought the goodness of God upon those with whom they lived. After Jacob had been in the household of Laban for several years, Laban became aware that he prospered throughout his estate. He sought out the cause and said to Jacob, "If you will allow me to say so, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you" (Gen. 30:27). Not only was Laban blessed; but, when he turned parts of his holdings over to Jacob, Jacob was likewise blessed. Joseph in his early years was a person with a tragic streak. But those with whom he associated prospered. "From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (39:5). Joseph eventually advanced until he was over all the granaries of Egypt. From that point on, Egypt was blessed. Pharaoh recognized this blessing and, when Joseph's family came to Egypt, requested that they be put in charge of his cattle (47:6).

Why did God bless these particular people? It was not

because of who they were or because of their great faith in God. Abraham's relatives served other gods when God called him (Josh. 24:2). There is no evidence in the OT to suggest that Abraham did otherwise before the call. Neither was it because the people of Israel were mighty among the nations (Deut. 7:7). Nor was it because they were holy people, though they were not as wicked as the other nations (9:4). The reason the Lord blessed them was "because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand" (7:8).

God chose Israel not just to shower gifts on them. He chose them as an avenue through whom to bless the nations. They were elected to service. As the prophets envisioned Israel's role in the world of the future, they saw her as a servant bringing blessings to the nations:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the preserved of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

Israel remembered the promise, at least part of the time, and her role in it. She identified God, not according to some quality or essence, but as the one who appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and promised his presence (Ps. 105:1-11). She remembered him as Creator, who in those events made glad the life of man (Ps. 104:15). The Creator was the same God who promised to continue distributing his gifts through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants (2 Kings 13:23).

God Who Acted in Egypt and at the Sea

It was particularly at the time of the exodus that God revealed himself as the one who held history in his hand. He did this through disclosing himself as Yahweh and through his action in Egypt and at the sea. But at the same time, he remained the Creator God who commanded the sea and it

obeyed. He was also the one who promised the fathers that they would be a great nation, sharing the gifts of God with others. It was because of his action in creation and with the fathers that he turned out to be the sort of God who lifted Israel from bondage in her moment of despair.

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush on the mountain and told him he would lead Israel out of bondage. Moses asked God what he should say to the people if they asked, "What is his name?" God replied, "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14). This phrase is a translation of the Hebrew verb *hayah*. In the context it is presupposed that from this root the Hebrew word Yahweh, translated "Lord," is derived. This is obvious from the next statement. "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever" (Exod. 3:15). It is assumed that it was not until the period of the Exodus that God revealed this name to Israel.

And God said to Moses, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them" (Exod. 6:3). The common name for God in the Semitic language is *'elohim*. The Hebrew phrase translated God Almighty is *El Shaddai*. The name Yahweh is of interest to us, for once again through it we are not given the essence or the inner nature of God. The RSV gives an alternate translation of *hayah* in the footnote "I will be what I will be." This is to say that Yahweh is the one who is known by his action. Man cannot hold God in a closed system and say this is the nature of God. God is the being whose future is open. He will define himself by what he does and it is not yet clear just what he will do in the future. By this action in Egypt and at the sea God disclosed the way in which during this time he fulfilled the promise to the fathers. It was not clear from the promise itself that these events would take place. On the other hand, God's helping hand in Egypt was consistent with the promise. But God is free to fulfill his promises in his own way. He will be what he will be. From the theology of the exodus period emerges additional knowledge about

God disclosed through his unique name Yahweh.

The clear affirmation from the OT is that God was at work in the series of events which occurred at the time of the exodus. The important question thus becomes what God hoped to accomplish through these actions. In Exodus 1-18 it is clear that God attempted (1) to create faith in his own people, and (2) convince Egypt and the nations of his might. These actions were, therefore, a continuation of the effort of God to pour forth his gifts upon all mankind. God could dole out all sorts of surprises for man, but they could turn out to be man's downfall rather than for his well-being. It is only when man recognizes that the gifts come from Yahweh and seeks his way that gifts can be utilized in a helpful manner (Deut. 8:11-20).

Before Israel left Egypt, Yahweh, through Moses and Aaron, undertook a series of signs and actions. The result was to bring the people to an intensity of faith. First, Moses and Aaron showed Israel the signs revealed by God in the wilderness. When the people saw, they "believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped" (Exod. 4:31). But that faith was not long lasting. When Pharaoh forced them to collect straw for their bricks, they began to doubt and lay the blame at the feet of Moses and Aaron (5:21). Then followed hard upon those signs the famous plagues. These too had the purpose of convincing the people of the power of Yahweh. This reason is given in Exodus 10:1-2:

... that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son's son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them; that you may know that I am the Lord.

God is known by Israel, not as a heavenly spiritual substance or as an impersonal source of energy, but as one who shows himself to man in his might and power. His power is over the whole of nature and man. He is able to redeem his people, utilizing all the forces of creation—frogs, gnats, flies, bad water, darkness—because he is the one

who created all things. All these events—this display of power—created a community of faith.

Through all these events the Pharaoh was finally persuaded to send the Israelites out of the land. But even as they left, he had regrets and sent his armies in pursuit. As the people neared the sea in the distance they saw the armies approaching. The enemy bore hard upon them, and they stood with their backs to the sea. They were once again plunged into doubt and great fear (Exod. 14:10-12). But the unexpected happened. The sea opened up. They crossed over on dry land. The pursuing Egyptians were destroyed as the sea came back together. Through these events they became believers. "And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses" (14:31).

The events at the exodus became crucial in the theology of Israel. She came to remember herself chiefly as a group of defeated people whose situation changed when "the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders" (Deut. 26:8). It was these events which formed the nation. Forever after, she remembered in times of crisis that God was a God who heard his people when they cried to him. He once again acted as he did at the sea. The recital of these events was central in the worship of Israel, especially in the yearly celebration of the Passover. So at the time of that observance these explanations are to be offered. "And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage'" (Exod. 13:14).

But the mighty deeds of that crucial time were not simply for Israel. They were also for Egypt and the nations. In fact, it is this explanation which is more frequently offered in Exodus. Yahweh tells Moses:

I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and

smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it; after that he will let you go.

Exodus 3:19-20

This was not just to destroy the Egyptians because God was against them, but to teach them of the power of Yahweh. "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them" (7:5). These events had results. The magicians became convinced that these were extraordinary acts. "This is the finger of God" (8:19). Several of those who owned cattle put them under shelters because of the hail (9:20). Even the Pharaoh himself was convinced (9:27), but he often relented (10:1). The hardening of the Pharaoh's heart served a purpose. The Pharaoh, because of his natural inclination to doubt the power of the God of these despised people, frequently relented (his heart was hardened) in permitting them to depart. But all this served God's purpose:

For by now I could have put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth; but for this purpose have I let you live, to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

Exodus 9:15-16

Through these events the power of Yahweh became known among the nations. They had a means through which to identify him—his name. Now they, too, should they be inclined, could respond and share in his gifts.

The great works of God in Egypt and at the sea had the desired results.

The peoples have heard, they tremble;
pangs have seized on the inhabitants
of Philistia.

Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of thy arm,
they are as still as a stone,

till thy people, O Lord, pass by,
 till the people pass by whom thou
 hast purchased.

Exodus 15:14, 16

Even Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard and was convinced (Exod. 18:1). "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians . . ." (Exod. 18:11). Jethro then proceeded to offer a sacrifice to God.

Through the exodus events God made known his might, power, and goodness, not just to Israel, but to the nations. Israel remembered these actions throughout her existence. In a real sense, the faith of theology of Israel centered around the exodus. It was the crucial manner in which God disclosed his identity in her experience. In the future as she contemplated her plight, she remembered that once before when she was enslaved God brought her out with a mighty hand. He could do it again, for he was that sort of God. In the days of Gideon God's people were oppressed. They cried to God as in the time of the exodus. He reminded them of what he had done in Egypt, then stated that they had come into this sad state of affairs because they had not given heed to his voice (Judg. 6:7-10). But he was still the God of the exodus. Through Gideon he delivered them from the hands of their enemies. The God of the exodus was also remembered in the days of destruction at the hand of the great world powers Assyria and then Babylon. Even when Israel was exiled in a distant land, her homeland denuded and the temple lying in rubble, the prophets remembered the God of the exodus and believed that he would again do what he had done in the former days.

Thus says the Lord,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
 who brings forth chariot and horse,
 army and warrior;
 they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

Remember not the former things,
nor consider the things of old.

Isaiah 43:16-18

Israel may have reversals. She may be sent back to Egypt (Hos. 8:11-14; 11:5-7). But there is always a new day. The God who engineered the first exodus is always capable of another. That is the hope in which Israel lives.

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when men shall no longer say, "As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt," but "As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them."

Jeremiah 23:7, 8

Yahweh is the God who will be what he will be. The first exodus does not limit God. It gives assurance that the future is in his hands. He is defined by the mighty, loving deeds he performs on behalf of his people when they cry to him in the depths of despair. Yahweh is the one who again and again takes up the cause of his people, redeeming them from bondage.

God Who Trains His Son in the Wilderness

After God brought his son through the sea with a mighty hand, he introduced him to the wilderness. God promised the fathers he would give them a land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). Now the time seems ripe. So why the forty-year delay? What does God hope to accomplish in the wilderness? The modern church school answer is that Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness as a punishment for their failure to go up and take the land. This is one of the reasons provided in the OT (Num. 14:32). But it is not the only one. There is a great theological depth to the wilderness experience that often goes unexplored. In the wilderness God is not only (1) punishing his son, he also is (2) preparing him for war and life, (3) creating trust, (4) loving him, and (5) acting for the sake of his own name.

God punished his son with forty years of wilderness wandering, not because he violated the law of God, but because of his inexplicable doubt. Yahweh had exhibited his might and power in Egypt. His people knew the amazing event at the sea. Now he told them to go up and take the land he had given them (Deut. 1:21). They sent up spies who reported that the land was as great as God had said, but the inhabitants were giants "and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers" (Num. 13:33). The report of the spies set up a great murmur in the camp. God had done wonders for these people. He had fed them with manna. But now they found reason to doubt the power of God. With that God's patience ran out. So he said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them" (Num. 14:11-12). Moses, however, persuaded God against that action and encouraged him to forgive them. God forgave, but he did not let them off scot-free. None of the present faithless generation was to inhabit the land. They suffered for their faithlessness because there was every reason to expect that they should be persons of great faith (Deut. 1:29-33).

The wilderness experience, however, is not seen singularly as punishment. Just as a man may achieve more than one objective with his son in a single event, so may God. A son who leaves home without saying where he is going may be told that he cannot go anywhere for a week except for routine matters.

But during that week the father continues to sustain his son. He may also teach him how to play pool or chess. According to the OT, God was not just punishing his son in the wilderness. He was also training him for war and for life. The reason given in Exodus as to why God did not immediately take his people to the land promised was to prepare them for the struggles ahead:

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest the people repent when they see war, and

return to Egypt." But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.

Exodus 13:17-18

In the wilderness, too, God disciplined his son, getting him ready for the tasks ahead. "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you" (Deut. 8:5). Through that action they learned that "man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (8:3). The point is that if man looks to God for food and then sees that God provides it, he should be willing to trust him in all realms of life. If God says this is the way to live and spells it out in statutes and ordinances, the person who has experienced God's sustaining love should trust him in these ways, too. When things are working out right, man often becomes heady and thinks he has made it on his own (Deut. 8:11-13). But God's way is the only one which works out in the end. God's son must learn to trust in God. The reason for the wilderness experience was "that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end" (8:16). So God punished his son for forty years in the wilderness. But he did not simply mark time until the forty years were completed. He utilized the wilderness as a training camp to prepare his people for life in the land.

God shows himself to be a God of love in the wilderness even at the same time that he punishes his son. "God bore you, as a man bears his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place" (Deut. 1:31). "Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years" (8:4). In fact, some of the prophets, working from the imagery of God and his bride, characterized the wilderness as Israel's honeymoon period. So Jeremiah, quoting God:

I remember the devotion of your youth,
 your love as a bride,
 how you followed me in the wilderness,
 in a land not sown.

Jeremiah 2:2

Ezekiel likewise talks about it as a period of betrothal and marriage (Ezek. 16:8-14). But how can it be a time when God's love flowed freely to his bride if it was also a time in which the anger of God was obvious?

How can one reconcile the love and wrath of God? As the OT reports it God is both at once. What is the basis of God's anger? Is it vindictiveness? No, God becomes angry when he reaches out in love toward his bride, but his love is rejected. In Numbers 14 God had lovingly prepared his people to take the land. He planned to go along and assist them in all their needs. But when they heard of the problems, they turned their back on the eager love and helpfulness of God (Num. 14:4). At that point God became extremely upset. He burned. His love had been thwarted. In fact, there is no embarrassment in the OT over characterizing God as a lover who is jealous over his love. "For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exod. 34:14).

Can love and wrath go hand in hand? The fact is that the opposite of love is not, as might be thought, wrath, but indifference. A husband who laughs off his wife's infidelity is not thought to love her, but to be indifferent. If he loved her, he would be upset at her attention to other males. In the tradition of Western philosophy we have been led to believe that such personal characteristics cannot really be attributed to God. But the God of the philosophers is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is personal as man is personal, for in fact man is made in his image. As personal, God has the traits of a person, though the height and depth of them far exceed these same traits in man. God is a loving God, but this at the same time entails wrath. The two go hand in hand. Wrath is not an independent characteristic of God. It is not the primary characteristic of God. Love is the primary characteristic of God. Wrath is secondary because it always follows upon the rejection of love by God's people. Love involves freedom—freedom to love or not to love. Freedom involves risk, for love may be rejected. Rejected love results in hurting, burning, suffering, and wrath. Therefore, despite the traditional Christian theology,

which rejects the suffering of God and affirms his impassibility, the God of the OT suffers. He does not deteriorate; he does not dissipate. But he suffers because he loves. God burns over the manner in which he reaches out to bless his children, but they are always turning their backs and seeking other lovers:

When I fed them to the full,
 they committed adultery
 and trooped to the houses of harlots.
 They were well-fed lusty stallions,
 each neighing for his neighbor's wife.
 Shall I not punish them for these things? says the Lord;
 and shall I not avenge myself
 on a nation such as this?

Jeremiah 5:7b-9

God loved his children in the wilderness but they continually rejected that love.

If God did not get anywhere in his efforts to obtain love from his people, why did he persist in seeking them out? From Numbers 11-36 it is particularly obvious that Israel was a stubborn and rebellious people. In the words of Ezekiel, in the wilderness "the children rebelled against me; they did not walk in my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezek. 20:21). Because of their infidelity God decided to pour out his wrath on them, to wipe them out right there in the wilderness (vs. 21b). But he did not. Why? "I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out" (Ezek. 20:22). God did not destroy them because he acted for the sake of his name. What can this mean?

The account in Numbers 14 helps us understand what is at stake in God acting for the sake of his name (see also Exodus 32). God is about to destroy his people in the wilderness (Num. 14:12). But Moses hears of it and reminds God what he is doing. God had brought his people up out of Egypt not only to give them a land and create faith in them, but also to make his name known among the peoples of the world so they too might be blessed (Exod. 9:16). His

purposes were larger than simply the welfare of Israel. If these purposes were to be accomplished, God's name needed to be known among the nations. He needed to act in view of this larger goal. Moses spoke to God in the midst of his anger, and reminded him:

Now if thou dost kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard thy fame will say, "Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to give to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness."

Numbers 14:15-16

God therefore preserved his people, but they were not home free. He did not destroy them, but that was no reason for ignoring their faithlessness. He kept them and led them in the wilderness for forty years. In that manner he maintained his purposes with the nations while at the same time disciplining his children. God's people on more than one occasion received more than they deserved because it fit God's larger purposes—his name's sake.

It is of interest that not only did Moses argue with God, he won the argument. There are various reasons. First, Moses did not tell God anything new. He simply reminded him of the purposes for which God was already at work. It would pose problems if an observation of a man resulted in new divine purposes. Second, it is the duty of a mediating party to step in when a loved one is so upset he cannot see straight. Abigail did this for her husband Nabal (1 Sam. 25:23-31). God's friends, such as Moses (on more than one occasion) and Phinehas, did this for him (Num. 25:10-13). Third, such action seems out of place for a deity. So it is, with the deity of philosophers! But the God of the OT is a person, and persons have exactly these characteristics. If God did not have these characteristics, he would no longer be a person. Fourth, God seems unusually concerned with man to listen to Moses. But in the OT this is exactly who God is. He is the one who has created man in his image. He is the one who continually reaches out to man in his *hesedh* (steadfast love) and he does so whether man responds or not. He is the one who ever listens as to know

how it is from the human side. The Christian should be the one least surprised that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has always had an ear open to man.

So important did certain prophets see the wilderness experience that they expected God to recreate his people after defeat and loss of their land, by bringing them once again into the wilderness. Hosea pictures God bringing his bride once again into the wilderness.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

And there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

Hosea 2:14-15

The wilderness is laden with a number of pregnant theological themes. It is especially instructive when God's people are in an in-between time. Those in Christ Jesus are so situated. They are between Christ's resurrection and their own.

God Who Put It in Writing with His People

Yahweh desires a continual, permanent relationship with his people. He is the God "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:6). Because he reveals himself as a God of this sort, his servants who preserved his word for later generations depicted him as one who entered into covenant affirmations with his people. These relationships were to continue into perpetuity (Exod. 31:16-17). Yahweh was not content to hang in there loose when it came to relationships. He desired something permanent. He put it into writing with his people.

Those who conveyed this characteristic of God's love utilized the ancient types of formal relationships or covenants. They used the forms of the time so that God in a genuine way would be disclosed in the experience of the

men and women who were accustomed to formal relationships expressed in these ways. There were basically three types of transactions which put relationships on a permanent basis. (1) There were personal agreements, for example the covenant which Jonathan made with David (1 Sam. 18:3). (2) There were political agreements, as when Gibeon made a covenant with Israel (Josh. 9:15). (3) There was the marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14). In the OT all these types of covenants are employed analogically to depict the relationship of God with his people. We are here concerned not so much with the covenant types, but with the grounds or theology underlying the covenants.

Various permanent affirmations of God preceded the great Mosaic covenant. Especially memorable are the promises of God to Noah and Abraham. Both of these covenants have ramifications for all men, but in enactment and form they are like the personal covenant of Jonathan with David. With Noah and David God made a commitment which bound him in permanent fashion. What is permanent about God is not so much a philosophical trait, such as spiritual essence, unlimited intelligence, Being Itself, or boundless energy. The permanence of Yahweh is defined through the commitments he makes, the covenants into which he enters. He is the one who is faithful in covenant.

There are two sorts of personal covenants, those of equals, as Jonathan with David, and those in which a greater person makes a personal promise to a lesser. Obviously no man stands on a level equal with God. Man is in no position to force a covenant from God. He may make a covenant with God as did Jehoiada (2 Kings 11:17), but he does not lay the terms of the covenant on God. Rather, he makes a commitment upon the terms which God has already laid upon him. Such is the covenant made by Josiah:

And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.

2 Chronicles 34:31

It is important to see that the covenant which God made with Noah and Abraham is not a covenant between equals. It is not a covenant in which two persons get together and spell out the responsibilities of the party of the first part, then of the party of the second part. It is a one-sided covenant made by God, the terms of which are determined by him. In fact, in both these cases, it is not man who is bound by contractual obligations, but God. He takes the obligation willingly upon himself for he is the one who reaches out for relationship. To Noah God promised "that never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). This promise of God prevails regardless of what man does. God binds himself to man and creation. Though, of course, man is expected to be faithful to his Creator (Gen. 9:1-7), God remains bound in promise regardless of what man does. Man did nothing to secure this promise. It came as the loving concern of the Creator for creation. No work on man's part is requested or expected. God is the covenant keeper, not man. Man is a creature of the dust (Ps. 103:14). He has no hold over God.

God likewise entered freely into a permanent relationship with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27). God did this, not because of Abraham's righteous works prior to the covenant (Josh. 24:2) or because Abraham was equal with God. This is in contrast with Jacob and Laban, who were equals in covenant. God entered into covenant because of his desire to continue spreading his good gifts to his people. In Genesis 15 it is only God who binds himself in the covenant. He walked between the divided halves of the animals (Gen. 15:17-18) as was customary in covenant ratifications. (See Jer. 34:18-19.) As the description is given, Abraham did not take the customary walk. This is apparently to indicate that the covenant was God's idea, not Abraham's. Through it God bound himself to man, and not the other way around.

The sign of the covenant, just as the bow was the sign of the Noachian covenant (Gen. 9:12), was circumcision (Gen. 17:11). Circumcision was neither the manner through which the covenant was secured nor maintained. It was not

a work of the one receiving it. But the covenant prevailed only where the sign was present (Gen. 17:14). Abraham and his descendants were expected to respond faithfully to the commandments, statutes, and laws of God (Gen. 26:4-5). But God would keep his promise even in face of gross violations of his will. He would keep it, not through all his people, but through the faithful remnant (Gen. 45:7; cf. Isa. 10:20-23).

In these covenant relationships God made his own personal promise to distribute his good gifts to men. He did this, not being forced to in any way, whether through human works or gentle persuasion through prayer. Nothing man could do made him worthy either to attain the covenant or remain in it once obtained. Through this relationship the nature of God is revealed. He is the one who pours himself out freely for man created in his image. He expects man's reciprocal love shown by his action in commandment keeping. But God's love is steadfast even in the face of flagrant human violation of that love.

The relationship of God with his people was also depicted in the manner of political agreements. The Mosaic covenant in form, if not in some measure in concept, is much like the ancient suzerainty treaty which was in widespread use in the Near East during the days of Moses. (For elaboration as well as reservations, see D. J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*, 1972.) The suzerainty treaty was one in which a powerful ancient emperor (suzerain) extended a covenant to a small vassal state on his borders. Preceding the extending of covenant was almost always some act in which the suzerain befriended the smaller country, usually through going to battle in its behalf when it was threatened by a large power. The suzerain then framed a covenant for the smaller country. He did not invite the vassal state's participation in the construction as if it had claims to advance. Rather, he set forth the terms of the covenant.

In the covenant the suzerain promised to continue to protect the small power. In return he expected faithful allegiance spelled out through specific stipulations. He himself gave his oath before the gods to uphold the cove-

nant. He expected a similar oath from the small state. He concluded the covenant by advancing blessings which would accrue from faithful execution and curses which would be forthcoming for violations. The covenant was extended through the good graces of the suzerain. It was assumed that he would be faithful in promise. In turn, from the vassal nation he expected faithful support. The form of the covenant usually (1) identified the suzerain, (2) spelled out what he had done for the small nation, (3) advanced the stipulations the suzerain expected the smaller nation to fulfill, (4) indicated arrangements for storing and periodic reading, (5) cited a long list of deities as witnesses, and (6) declared curses and blessings.

In concept, the Mosaic covenant is much like the suzerainty treaty. It provided an excellent vehicle in which God revealed his relationship with his people in a manner which they had experienced and which they understood. God himself was a sovereign Lord who had befriended a small band of people when they were enslaved in Egypt. He acted powerfully on their behalf and rid them of their oppressors. He then proceeded to make them a nation in their own right. On the way to their land he offered a covenant. He did it, not because of anything they had done (Deut. 9:6-12), but out of his love (7:8). In the covenant he affirmed that he would be their God, guiding, loving, protecting them (4:37-39), just as he had already done in Egypt. He expected them in turn to behave as his people, fulfilling his ways, identified in statutes and laws (4:39-40; 5:1-21). Unlike the Noachian and Abrahamic covenants, God expected his people to accept (ratify) the covenant (5:27). He also laid out specific stipulations (laws) for them to keep.

In this covenant there were works for the people to fulfill—works of the law. But law keeping needs to be understood in its proper perspective. Israel did not secure the covenant from God because of what she had done. He offered it out of his own freedom and love. Neither did Israel keep the covenant in force by keeping the law. God desires with his whole being that his people share in his goodness (Deut. 5:29; 6:24), and it is out of his love that the covenant promises accrue. But man can cut himself off or out of the

covenant with its blessing by a failure to keep its regulations (Deut. 8:19-20). Israel is therefore not in the covenant because of her lawkeeping. But when she fails to keep the law of God, he withholds the blessings which he so gladly wishes to extend (Judg. 6:7-10).

The form of the covenant reflects the ancient suzerainty treaty, and out of it this theology shines through. First, God identifies himself: "I am the Lord (Yahweh) your God" (Deut. 5:6). Second, he tells what he has done for these people before extending covenant, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt. . . ." Third, the terms of the covenant are set forth in the form of the Ten Commandments and the laws (5:7-21; 12-25). Fourth, the tables of the covenant are to be stored in the ark (10:5), and the covenant is to be read every seven years (31:10-11). Fifth, a list of deities would be cited as witnesses to the covenant. But Yahweh is one God (6:4), and he alone can serve as witness and prosecutor of the covenant. Sixth, the curses and blessings are listed:

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God."

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (cf. chs. 27-28)

In various places in the OT, God's relationship with his people is conceived as a marriage covenant, especially by the prophets. In this analogy Yahweh is the husband and Israel the wife. Yahweh desires that his wife be faithful and loyal. But if his bride seeks out the gods of the other nations to worship, then she (Israel) is being unfaithful or playing the harlot (Exod. 34:13-16). The marriage relationship is the most compelling, intense relationship known by man. The prophets intentionally employed this means of depicting the God-man relationship, because in their view the most profound relationship which a human may experience is with God. The person who is in covenant relationship with Yahweh, yet thwarts that relationship by seeking out other gods, can only expect to be subjected to the same wrath and fury to which a wife is subjected who spends her time in the bed of other lovers.

Hosea, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah especially depict faithless Israel as a faithless wife. The use of this analogy presupposes that God's relationship with his people is not simply a legal one, but a relationship of love in which promises are made to reserve oneself for the lover. Of course this takes a legal exterior form, namely, the marriage contract or covenant, but the motivation results from intense love.

Hosea does his theology out of the crisis of his own marriage. He married Gomer, who after a time sought out other lovers. He continued to care for her, however, despite her faithlessness. He did what he could to restore her to himself. Yahweh did the same with Israel his bride (Hos. 2:6-15). In fact, just as Hosea was told to take back his harlot wife, so Yahweh was willing and eager to take back his. He was willing to take her back, no questions asked, but not without strings attached. "You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you" (Hos. 3:3). God's love was so strong for his people that he continually struggled to return them to that relationship. To do so he tried various ways to bring them to their senses, including causing them to suffer. He caused them to suffer not because he is sadistic, liking to hear cries of anguish, but because this was the only way to bring them again to his love. "Come let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us . . ." (6:1). In some cases the only way a husband can secure faithful love from his wife is to deprive her of the checking account and threaten divorce. He does this not because he wants to see his wife squirm, but because he loves her and hopes that through this means she will return to his love.

Ezekiel employs the marriage analogy in a number of places but especially in chapters 16 and 23. The most vivid presentation is in chapter 16. There Ezekiel depicts Israel as a young girl who, unwanted by her parents, is left exposed in an open field (16:5). But God took her, cleaned her up, and entered into a pledge of marriage with her (16:8). God was giving and caring throughout the marriage (16:10-14). But Israel was not content with the love of God. "But

you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by" (16:15). So strong was Israel's lust that she used no discrimination whatsoever in seeking out lovers (cf. 16:31-34). It is clear that this harlotry consisted in worshipping the gods of other peoples and building altars to them (16:23-29). Because of 'such unfaithfulness Yahweh threatened to expose Israel's lewdness to her neighbors by letting her enemies overrun the country (16:39). But the separation is not to be permanent. God still loves his bride and he will take her back through an everlasting covenant (16:60).

Jeremiah used much the same analogy in an extended manner through Jeremiah 2-5. In an especially vivid section he depicted Israel as a harlot giving in to lovers while engaged in worship at the Baal shrines on the high places (Jer. 2:20-22). He considered Israel's passion so strong for Baal that he depicted her as a female animal in heat (2:24). "Who can restrain her lust?" Jeremiah saw God as continually seeking to bring his bride back, since he was a God of mercy (3:11-14; 4:1-4).

So strong did the prophets feel about depicting God's relationship with his people in covenant form that they even anticipated that a change of the ages would necessitate a new covenant. The problem, as they saw it, was not so much the covenant, but man the covenant breaker. The era of the new covenant would be days in which God would revamp man. Hosea was one of the earliest to offer such a vision. In that day, according to Hosea, God will betroth his people to himself in faithfulness (Hos. 2:20). The covenant God will make is not a revision of the law, but a revision of life on earth (2:18). Jeremiah also saw the problem as Israel's inability or unwillingness to keep the law of God. In the new day the law of God will be written on the heart (Jer. 31:33), implying not so much a new law, but a new manner in which the law is incorporated into the life of man. Ezekiel likewise speaks of a new covenant (Ezek. 34:25). In the day of the new covenant man himself will be redone so he will be able to keep it. Man will have a new heart (36:26)

and a new spirit, which will be God's spirit (36:27).

The covenant has many different forms in the OT, but through these shine certain theological foundations. First of all, God is the one who initiates the covenant out of love. Man is in no position to force a covenant from God. Second, God is always the superior in the covenant, determining its terms. Man can only accept or reject the covenant offered. Third, in some covenants it is only God who binds himself. In the Mosaic covenant the people accept the covenant and are bound to keep it. But God's covenants are never in force because humans keep them. They are in force because God has given them and sustains them. Failure to keep the stipulations of the covenant on man's part will exclude him from the covenant and its community, but law keeping has nothing to do with why one is in a covenant with God. He is there because God has loved him and called him into covenant relationship.

God Who Cares by Giving Law

The law of God in the OT is ensconced in the rest of the activity of God and receives its theological thrust therefrom. The law is not an independent entity standing above and beyond both God and man. It is not impersonal, but intensely personal, because it is the law of God. God selected Abraham and his descendants as the avenue through which he would share his goodness with the nations. The people of God were subdued in Egypt so that they no longer had a chance to bless, so God, out of his love and concern and in order to fulfill his plans for the rest of mankind, brought them out with a mighty hand. Because of his great love he protected and trained them in the wilderness. He entered into a covenant relationship with them because he desired a permanent love relationship, just as is the marriage relationship. The laws of God (and this is significant) are given by God so man can relate himself to God and be a continual recipient of God's love. The law of God itself, therefore, is an outcropping of the loving activity of God. God has given it so that man may enjoy continual fellowship with him and be blessed by the prolific fruits of

the land which he has given him to enjoy. The covenant is extended by God out of love. The law set forth the requirements of the covenant. The law, therefore, reflects not the wrath and hardness of God, but his love. The manner in which the loving action of God, the covenant, and the law (precepts) are seen as holding together is found in a Psalm of praise:

He has caused his wonderful works to be remembered;
 the Lord is gracious and merciful.
 He provides food for those who fear him;
 he is ever mindful of his covenant.
 He has shown his people the power of his works,
 in giving them the heritage of the nations.
 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
 all his precepts are trustworthy,
 They are established for ever and ever,
 to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
 He sent redemption to his people;
 he has commanded his covenant for ever.

Psalm 111:4-9

From an examination of OT materials it is apparent that the law serves at least two functions. First, it establishes the means whereby Israel knows what to do in order to enjoy fellowship with the holy God. Second, it lays the ground rules through which Israel may retain the land given by Yahweh and enjoy its produce.

In the latter part of Exodus, rules are set forth for the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle. The workmanship must be quality; the instructions are detailed. But all this serves a purpose. When the work is complete, then God in his glory is able to tabernacle with men.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. . . . For throughout all their journeys the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

Exodus 40:34-35, 38

Man, through keeping the law of God, enables God, who desires to dwell with him in love, to enter his presence and enjoy fellowship with him. Keeping the law has nothing to do with forcing God's presence. God desires to descend and be in fellowship with man. Rather, doing the law enables God's entry, for by so doing, a sanctified and holy place is provided, which is suitable for the dwelling place of a holy God.

But requisite to divine-human fellowship is not only a holy place, but a holy people. The law as given in Leviticus especially emphasizes the requirement that a holy God demands a holy people with whom to enter into fellowship. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy'" (Lev. 19:2). How is Israel to know the requisites for holiness? That is what the law does. It sets forth the demands. When Israel follows the demands, she is that holy people required by God, and as the result she enjoys the spiritual benefits of fellowship with him. This understanding is clear in that immediately following the demand for holiness, certain actions are set forth.

Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 19:3

Earlier in Leviticus, laws are spelled out which enhance holiness. The laws of sacrifice are provided so that sins may be removed (Lev. 4:26). Rules are set out for the priests who facilitate the sacrifice arrangements (Lev. 8-9). Rules are listed concerning the animals that are acceptable and those that are abominable. Should one eat meat from an unclean animal, he is deprived of fellowship with God (Lev. 11:43-45). There are also laws for purification of women (ch. 13), of lepers (chs. 13-14), and other infirmities (ch. 15).

The law is thus not an arbitrary set of rules which God gives so that when he speaks man jumps. The law enables man to present himself holy before a holy God so that he

may enjoy fellowship with him. As Paul affirms, the law is a pedagogue (RSV "custodian," KJV "schoolmaster"), but a pedagogue need not be harsh and unloving. One can look back on some of his teachers as very helpful and loving. Paul's point is that once one comes to a certain age he can make it on his own and no longer needs the guidance and protection of the pedagogue. As presented in Leviticus, the law is given by a loving and holy God to guide and protect man so that he can share the life of God.

In Deuteronomy the point is made over and over that God gave the law so that man would know what to do in the land God gave him. If man does what is proper, then God will ward off the enemies and provide rain for the crops:

And because you hearken to these ordinances, and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love which he swore to your fathers to keep; he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will also bless the fruit of your body and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the young of your flock, in the land which he swore to your fathers to give you. . . . And the Lord will take away from you all sickness; and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew, will he inflict upon you. . . . And you shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God will give over to you, your eye shall not pity them; neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

Deuteronomy 7:12-16 (cf. 6:20-24; 11:8-17)

In contrast, if the Israelites are not faithful to the law, they will lose all they have received:

And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 8:19-20

Failure to keep the law will bring parsimonious harvest (28:15-19), disease and pestilence (28:20-24), the enemy will successfully overrun the land (28:25-26), and all manner of trouble will befall the people (28:27-35).

Yahweh gives the law out of love. He reveals to man what man cannot learn by his own efforts so that he will enjoy abundantly God's good gifts. Man does not force the love of God by keeping the law. God gives it freely. Israel keeps the law so that she will not be cut off from the gifts which God always wishes to bestow upon man made in his image. The law does not stand apart from God. It is his. He does with it what he pleases. When he desires, he waives punishment for law breaking (2 Chron. 30:13-22). But man has not the prerogative of taking liberty with it. Yahweh is the God who seasons justice with mercy. "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily" (Hos. 14:4-5).

Even the nations other than Israel were subject to the law of God (Amos 1:3-2:3). But it is not the law which God thundered from Sinai. It is the law which God built into the world when he created it. God was wise in his creation and in the principles by which he brought forth the worlds. Therefore, wisdom is personified as assisting God when he set out on his work. "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old" (Prov. 8:22). The wise man is the one who searches experience and nature to learn the ways of God through and in them (Prov. 2:1-5). Since these principles are built into creation itself, they are valid for all men at all times. God thus gives his law to his covenant community. The rest of mankind, however, is subject to the law of God as discovered in nature. These rules are found in Proverbs and the other wisdom literature.

God Who Commands the Heavenly Armies

The God who gave victory at the sea received this notice: "The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name" (Exod. 15:3). Yahweh fought and won battles for his people, not because he relished blood and slaughter or continually sought vengeance but for the sake of his name. Through people who know and respect Yahweh, he is able to bring about his blessings (Exod. 15:13-18).

Yahweh won a number of other battles for his people as

Lord of the heavenly hosts (in Hebrew *Yahweh Seva'oth* or general of the heavenly armies. The conquest of Canaan is especially seen from this standpoint. The conquest of the land fulfilled the promise of God to Abraham. It was to bring to fruition the mighty works of God. The story of Joshua at Jericho reflects the conviction that the victory in Canaan did not depend on the strategic prowess of Israel, her implements of war, or her mighty men of valor. Rather it depended on the presence of the heavenly armies with Yahweh himself as general. Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua stood before the city (Josh. 5:13-15). A man appeared before him with sword drawn. When Joshua asked who he was, he replied, "as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." It is not clear who this was, whether an angel or Yahweh himself. But the point is that Yahweh with his heavenly armies stood prepared to enter into the fray against the enemy, thus assuring victory. Jericho fell without battle. It fell because the armies of Israel followed Yahweh's bidding (Josh. 6:1-21). In the phrase "commander of the army of the Lord" the word army in Hebrew is *Seva'oth*, in other places often translated "hosts," Yahweh is *Yahweh Seva'oth*, Lord of Hosts. It is clear that this is a military term from the statement of David to Goliath. "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel" (1 Sam. 17:45).

Israel fights battles on earth; but, when she is victorious, it is because of the heavenly armies doing their work behind the scenes. This view is expressed in the strange phrase uttered as both the life of Elijah (2 Kings 2:21) and Elisha (2 Kings 13:14) ended: "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" This utterance was made as Elijah was taken into heaven by a chariot of fire and horses of fire. But it was also made about Elisha at his death. The reason apparently is that when these prophets were present there also the heavenly armies gathered, so that earthly victory was assured—no contest.

In an incident at Dothan, Elisha and his servant were

surrounded by the armies of Ben-hadad (2 Kings 6:15-19). When the servant feared, Elisha prayed that his eyes might be opened so he could see the heavenly armies at their disposal. Then the young man looked and "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around about Elisha." Israel was not left to victory by her own resources. When she was faithful to Yahweh, his heavenly armies were available at her beck and call. All she needed to do was trust in Yahweh rather than in her own resources or those of her allies. But often she was not given to such trust:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
 and rely on horses,
 who trust in chariots because they are many
 and in horsemen because they are very strong,
 but do not look to the holy one of Israel
 or consult the Lord!

Isaiah 31:1

The wars of Israel were also Yahweh's wars when they fulfilled his purposes and when his people were obedient. The rules and theology for such warfare are found in Deuteronomy 20. When Israel goes forth to war, she is not to be afraid, for the God who brought her out of Egypt is with her. The army is first of all addressed by the priest as an indication that the outcome depends on God, not human strategy (Deut. 20:2-4). Afterward the officers address the troops. Not everyone is to be taken into battle. Those excluded have a new house (vs. 5), vineyard (vs. 6), a new wife (vs. 7), or are fearful and fainthearted. Not everyone needs to be mustered, since the outcome depends on the heavenly armies, not on the number of Israelites. (Recall that Gideon won with 300 God-picked men, Judg. 7:4-8.)

There were also rules about destroying populations, which should be scrutinized carefully in view of centuries of objections to the cruelty of the OT God. The destruction of populations depended on whether the people were outside the land promised or within. If they lived outside, terms of peace could be offered (Deut. 20:10). Only if these were refused were males to be put to the sword and women, children, and cattle taken as spoil (vss. 12-14). In the land of

promise, however, everything was to be utterly destroyed (vs. 16). But there was a reason. Throughout both the OT and the NT, something is more important than life, namely, righteousness or life acceptable to God. The people of the land are to be destroyed,

. . . that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 20:18

These people are to be destroyed, not because Israel is perfect, but because the inhabitants of the land had male and female cult prostitutes (Deut. 23:17-18), child sacrifice (Lev. 20:1-5), mediums and wizards (Lev. 20:6), as well as many other iniquities.

Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, "It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land; whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you."

Deuteronomy 9:4

Yahweh did not command this destruction on sudden impulse. In fact, according to a statement in Genesis, God waited until the stench became unbearable. "And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16).

Certain observations should be made concerning the wars of Yahweh. First, they were for the purpose of bringing his goodness, righteousness, and justice. Second, they were not for imperialistic purposes, beyond the initial conquest. God's people, after securing Palestine, did not take other territories. They only protected those of the initial promise. Third, the people so involved were to trust in God rather than their might or strategy. Fourth, wars in the NT age lost the OT purpose because, as the result of the coming of Christ, no longer were territories to be protected. All peoples now, regardless of continent, race, or time, were the people of God through Jesus Christ. But Yahweh fought for his people. He was the general of the armies. Israel

remembered the victories of Yahweh down through the centuries and because of them expected future victories.

“Therefore, as I live,” says the Lord of hosts,
 the God of Israel,
 “Moab shall become like Sodom,
 and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
 a land possessed by nettles and salt pits,
 and a waste for ever.
 The remnant of my people shall plunder them,
 and the survivors of my nation shall possess them.”

Zephaniah 2:9

God Who Gives His Son an Inheritance

In order to bless the nations through his son Yahweh promised him a land. “And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen. 17:8). It was to fulfill this promise that the grand events in Egypt and at the sea transpired (Exod. 6:8). God adopted Israel as his son (Deut. 26:5-6; cf. Ezek. 16:3-5) “. . . in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God bore you, as a man bears his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place” (Deut. 1:31). God is Lord of the nations. He makes arrangements for all people. But in a unique way he becomes father to Israel:

When the Most High gave to the nations their
 inheritance,
 when he separated the sons of men,
 he fixed the bounds of the peoples
 according to the number of the sons of God.
 For the Lord's portion is his people,
 Jacob his allotted heritage.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9

The other nations were assigned to the sons of God (angels? see Job 1:6). But Israel God took as his own special responsibility. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth . . .” (Amos 3:2). Israel was the oldest son of God. “Israel is my first-born son . . .” (Exod. 4:22). Therefore,

according to inheritance procedures, Israel was in line to receive the estate of Yahweh. In this case the estate received was Canaan, the land of promise (Deut. 4:38).

Israel received the land as a gift from the gracious God. He neither earned nor deserved it. He received it not to be used for his purposes but for the purposes of Yahweh. This was so because he had received it as a gift. God warned:

Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth; that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers, as at this day.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

God's intent was that all men be benefited by these land gifts he provided. The land did not belong to Israel, but to Yahweh. It was Israel's by inheritance. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). Because the land is God's, each person has a right to sustenance. Man is a property holder, but he holds it for the one who gave it to him as a gift. In turn he is to share with those who are needy. "And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you" (Lev. 25:35).

The gift of the land was not simply so that God's son would prosper. The purpose, continually obvious, is that God set out to bless the nations through his people and through the land which he had given them:

And he said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

.....
It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the preserved of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Isaiah 49:3, 6

The land is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to be a distribution warehouse from which God transports his good gifts to the peoples of the earth.

If God's son is responsible and behaves as God desires, he will continually enjoy the produce of the land and the wealth therefrom. He did not receive it as the result of his righteousness or his works. He does not continue in it because he worked to earn the right. But if his life is foreign to the ways of God, God will cast him out of the land; he will disinherit his son. "And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them . . ." (Num. 14:11-12). It is the conviction of those who wrote the great histories of Israel that the sons of Jacob are evicted from the land because they have proved faithless to Yahweh. The Assyrians and the Babylonians are Yahweh's instruments to prosecute his people for failure in covenant keeping:

I will cast off the remnant of my heritage, and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.

2 Kings 21:14-15

(See the extended statement about the reasons for the downfall of Israel and Judah in 2 Kings 17.)

The disinheritance of God is not something which results from a sudden, grand fit of anger on the part of Yahweh. He is "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love . . ." (Jon. 4:2). He tried many ways to get his people to return to him. He sent drought (Amos 4:6-8), blight and mildew (4:9), pestilence (4:10), and the enemy (4:10-11) in an effort to get his people to return. When all failed, however, Yahweh had no recourse but to cut his son adrift, to disinherit him. "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:12)

But disinheritance is not forever. Yahweh is a God loyal to his people. Despite their sin, following a time of punishment he will bring them back to the land and once again they shall serve him as his people:

“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
 shout, O Israel!
 Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
 O daughter of Jerusalem!
 The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,
 he has cast out your enemies.

.....
 At that time I will bring you home,
 at the time when I gather you together;
 yea, I will make you renowned and praised
 among all the peoples of the earth,
 when I restore your fortunes
 before your eyes,” says the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:14-15, 20

The hope of Israel lies not in her works. It lies not in a bootstrap operation whereby she makes herself holy to God. It lies in the expectation that God will break into the events of history, retrieve his people, and enter anew into a relationship of love and grace.

God Who Makes a Promise to David

Yahweh's intentions in the gift of the land are related to Israel's being faithful and continuing to occupy the assigned territory. If Israel is faithful, she needs no assigned human rulers. God will provide leadership as crises arise. This is obvious in the period of the Judges. The words of Gideon serve as the theology of these times. “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you” (Judg. 8:23). Despite Yahweh's protection and rule, Israel aspired to be like the nations and have a king (1 Sam. 8). Yahweh is seen as reticent, but finally went along, for he is always willing for man, made in his image, to bend his ear (Exod. 32:11-14). The first king, Saul, did not please God (1 Sam. 16:14). To David and his descendants Yahweh made a promise. Through this promise Yahweh took up in a new way the commitment he had already made with Abraham. A promise of continual support of a dynasty was not evident in the commitment to Abraham, yet not inconsistent with it. Yahweh is the one who fulfills his commitments in creative and often surprising ways. “I will

be what I will be" (Exod. 3:14). Now it was through the dynasty of David that the families of the earth would be blessed.

The covenant of God with David contained two parts. First was the promise that God would sustain the household of David in the kingship forever:

Yea, does not my house stand so with God?
 For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
 ordered in all things and secure.
 For will he not cause to prosper
 all my help and my desire?

2 Samuel 23:5

The second part of the promise affirms that God is not committed to any particular descendants except those who are faithful. Those who commit iniquity will be punished.

"He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

2 Samuel 7:13-17 (cf. Ps. 89:28-37)

The covenant with David in one sense is like those with Abraham and Noah in that its longevity depends upon God. Regardless of what the descendants of David do, the promise remains intact. But unlike those covenants, demands are made upon the humans involved in the promise. They are to receive the love of God as long as they are worthy. But when they turn their back on God, they will be judged and punished. On what basis? No list of rules is given anywhere. The language of Psalm 89, however, makes the grounds of punishment explicit:

If his children forsake my law
 and do not walk according to my ordinances,
 if they violate my statutes
 and do not keep my commandments,

then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with scourges.

Psalm 89:30-32

Here the language is that connected with the Mosaic covenant as given in Deuteronomy (4:40, 44; 6:1-3). God's promise to David therefore consists of the old, the Mosaic covenant, and the new, the commitment to a lasting dynasty. God in his freedom fulfills his promises as he wills, but always consistently with his prior promises.

The great histories of Israel as well as the prophets interpret events in Israel in light of the covenant with David. On the one hand, it is the ground of the hope that in some way or another Judah is indestructible. On the other, it means that catastrophic defeat may occur due to Israel's ingratitude and infidelity. The result is that whatever happens an explanation is forthcoming. There is always anticipation of the new day of God, grounded in the commitment to David. The manner in which the theology of the Davidic covenant throws light upon situations in the kingdoms sometimes takes surprising turns. But history is not arbitrary. It is the realm where God is winning his ways.

God promised the kingdom to David, but not necessarily all the kingdom. The day came, after David and Solomon, when the ten northern tribes broke off from the south. The divided kingdom became Israel in the north, with Samaria as the capital, and Judah in the south, with Jerusalem as the capital. But why did this split come about? How should it be interpreted in the light of the covenants of God? Clearly the author of 1 Kings understands these developments according to the clause in the Davidic covenant that God would punish the sons of David for faithlessness:

Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. . . . However I will not tear away all the kingdom; but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

1 Kings 11:11, 13

At times, in the view of the prophets, the promise to David made Israel overconfident. During the rule of Hezekiah the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem and her fall seemed inevitable; but miraculously, due to the work of the angel of the Lord, the Assyrians were forced to withdraw (2 Kings 19:35-37). As the reason for the withdrawal, the promise to David was cited (2 Kings 19:34). Because of this dramatic escape, a century later Jerusalem was claimed to be impregnable. After all, it was the place of the temple of God and he would not permit his temple to be destroyed. Jeremiah condemned such thinking as false. God need not preserve Jerusalem in order to maintain the dynasty of David.

Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." . . . For if you truly amend your ways and your doings . . . , then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever."

Jeremiah 7:4, 5, 7

Thus, even by the promise, the sons of David might sin so as to lose the very country itself. Nevertheless, it would not be forever:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Jeremiah 33:14-15 (cf. Isa. 11:1-9; Mic. 5:2-4)

The importance of the promise to David is particularly obvious in the writings of the Chronicler (1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah). Little is given by way of details about the north. The focus is on the south and the descendants of David. The covenant is presented there (1 Chron. 17:10-15). In this history David is remembered not only as king, but also as the founder of rules pertaining to temple worship. He took the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and established it as his capital. He brought the ark of the Lord into the city (16:1-3). To him was the site of the temple on the

threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite revealed (21:18–22:1). Furthermore, he set up the arrangements for the temple worship, especially for the music of the temple and those conducting it (1 Chron. 24–27). Because of the importance of all of this, David, as well as Solomon, is looked upon as a lawgiver in the manner of Moses. The placing of these two together in this manner is obvious in 2 Chronicles 8. Moses is remembered for his legislation concerning the sacrifices and the feasts, David for his concerning the temple service and music.

Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord upon the altar of the Lord which he had built before the vestibule, as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts. . . . According to the ordinance of David his father, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their offices of praise and ministry before the priests as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers in their divisions for the several gates; for so David the man of God had commanded.

2 Chronicles 8:12-14 (cf. 29:25-28; Neh. 12:45)

So David was especially significant in the manner in which the work of God to bring his goodness to the nations was interpreted. As Ezra directed the people to taking up once again the ways of God after almost total destruction by the Babylonians, he interpreted what had happened in the light of the covenant with David (Neh. 9:32-37).

Even in the midst of sure destruction, the great prophets never lost hope. Not that they believed Judah indestructible. They were well aware that faithlessness in the sons of David would result in defeat and exile. But at the same time they believed in the promise of God that he had established the house of David forever. They did not know how Yahweh would rebuild his nation from ruins and ashes. But they had confidence that he could and would.

In that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins,
and rebuild it as in the days of old;

that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name.

Amos 9:11-12

The promise to David interjected both uncertainty and permanence into the history of Israel. The permanence depended on the confidence that Yahweh is the God who keeps his promises.

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.

Hosea 3:5

The theology of the OT focuses upon the mighty acts of God. He defines himself to his people through his loving actions in their history. Certain of the acts are fundamental, and they become the grounds out of which the rest of the actions of God are interpreted. All of these actions are open-ended. The later interpreters of the ways of God, the historians and prophets, saw the new actions of God as repeating and going beyond the ancient acts. But the work of God was never completed in their days. The fulfilling of the promises of God was never culminated. God is always what he will be. The future is in his hand. History will take surprising turns. But the man faithful to God looks to the future in anticipation. The future is no accident. It is the arena in which God is fulfilling his promises of old. The route Yahweh takes will be consistent with his promises and the manner in which he has related to his people in the past.

Old Testament Theology and the Church Today

The OT is not complete in itself. It is open-ended. It points beyond itself. It was not accidental that Christians found the answers to the promises of God in Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time, it is not surprising that they searched the OT Scriptures in order to make sense out of who Jesus was and what he was about (Luke 24:44-49). For these reasons the OT and the NT are inextricably interlaced. The NT cannot be understood without the OT. It is the Christian conviction that the open-endedness of the OT is

taken up in Jesus. But whether one follows this path, obviously the OT is incomplete. It anticipates future action of God.

The OT, however, is more than the factual base out of which the NT is to be understood. The earliest Christians understood the OT as the very basis for achieving a proper relationship with God. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). When Paul and other Christians spoke of the Scriptures, they had in mind the OT. "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul can even speak of the OT as being authoritative for the Christian. "Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same?" (1 Cor. 9:8; read on through vs. 12 for the point) The OT, of course, does not have authority over the Christian in respect to the institutions which Christ replaced. Jesus Christ as high priest has replaced the priesthood of Aaron and Levi (Heb. 4-5). The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has replaced the animal sacrifices (Heb. 9-10). The earthly temple has been replaced by a heavenly temple (Heb. 9:1-5). The earthly Jerusalem has been replaced by a heavenly one (Heb. 12:22).

Though the institutions of the OT have passed away, the theology of the OT remains. In fact, on it is built the theology of the NT. Beginning with Jesus Christ the acts of God are different. But the reasons remain the same. The Testaments are one in their theology. God is still defined by his action, this time in Jesus Christ. "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus made God known through what he did and said. God still acts out of love for man made in his image. He still calls man to obedience. In the NT, therefore, Yahweh is defined as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:2). The prodigal son story of Luke 15:11-32 has the same theology of the mercy and forgiveness of God as does Hosea in his analogy of God as

father and Israel as son (Hos. 11:1-9).

The church today suffers malnutrition if a part of its diet is not the theology of the OT. In that theology are found the presuppositions for the Christian faith. From that theological base the apostles and teachers understood Jesus Christ and the response of God's people to him. The one committed to Jesus Christ, of course, ultimately asks the question as to how the action of God in the OT throws light upon Jesus. If these concluding remarks ring clear, then the reader should discover in this presentation of the theology of the OT not only the way of God with Israel, but also the way of God with each Christian as a servant of Jesus Christ.

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