

The Theology of the Old Testament

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When it comes to describing “the theology of the Old Testament,” not everyone is convinced that there is a single theology represented in these diverse books. Many scholars have, however, tried to find a point of unity for all the books, often by proposing a single unifying theme, such as *covenant*, or *the kingdom of God*, or *the Messiah*, or *God himself*. These proposals do provide genuine insights, but they are often too oversimplified to do justice to the variety of materials in the Old Testament.

It will be more fruitful to understand the Old Testament as a whole in terms of an unfolding story, with a number of basic components: *monotheism*, *creation and fall*, *election and covenant*, *covenant membership*, and *eschatology*. This chapter will first explain these components, so that we can summarize the overarching story. Then we will consider briefly how the various parts of the Old Testament relate to this unfolding story, and

consider how this provides a link to the New Testament authors' stance toward the Old Testament. The goal is to articulate some of the beliefs that will enable careful readers to profit more fully from reading the Old Testament books themselves.

The Components of the Story

1. *Monotheism.* There is only one true God, who made heaven and earth and all mankind. He made a material world that he is happy with, and he made it a fit place for human beings to live, and love, and serve. Every human being needs to know and love this God, whose spotless moral purity, magnificent power and wisdom, steadfast faithfulness, and unceasing love are breathtakingly beautiful. This one God rules over all things, and he will vindicate his own goodness and justice (in his own time). In ruling, God has not limited himself to working within the natural properties of what he has made, for he can go (and has gone) beyond these properties to do mighty deeds both in creation and in caring for his people.

The Old Testament invites Israel not simply to acknowledge the existence of this one true God, but to commit themselves to him in exclusive loyalty and love, centering their lives on the inestimable privilege of knowing him (Deut. 6:4–9). The fundamental character of this God is explained in Exodus 34:6–7, which focuses on his steadfast love and mercy (a passage frequently echoed in the rest of the Old Testament). The Old Testament also affirms that God is “righteous,” that is, morally pure and perfect. Although this righteousness certainly results in God’s work of punishing evildoers and vindicating his own moral character, the term commonly emphasizes God’s reliability in keeping his promises (e.g., Pss. 71:2; 116:5).

The Old Testament does not explicitly describe God as a trinity. Rather, with its references to God’s Spirit (e.g., Gen. 1:2), its use of “us/our” for God (e.g., Gen. 1:26), and its indications

or hints of a divine Messiah (e.g., Ps. 110:5; Isa. 9:6; see Ezek. 34:15, 23), it lays the groundwork for the fuller declaration of divine triunity that is found in the New Testament (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14).

2. *Creation and fall.* The one Creator God made the first human beings, Adam and Eve, with dignity and purpose; their calling was to live faithfully to God and to spread the blessings of Eden throughout the earth. Because Adam and Eve betrayed God’s purpose, all people since the fall are beset with sins and weaknesses that only God’s grace can redeem and heal.

3. *Election and covenant.* The one true God chose a people for himself and bound himself to them by his covenant (Ex. 19:4–6; Deut. 7:6–11). This covenant expressed God’s intention to save the people, and through them to bring light to the rest of the world, in order to restore all things to their proper functioning in the world God made. The land of Israel was to be a kind of reconstituted Eden, which would flourish as the people’s faithfulness flourished (or languish if the people were unfaithful). God’s covenants generally involve one person who represents the whole people (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, David); the rest of the people experience the covenant by virtue of their inclusion in the community represented. The representative is required to embody the ideal of covenant faithfulness as a model for those on whose behalf he has acted.

4. *Covenant membership.* In his covenant, God offers his grace to his people: the forgiveness of their sins, the shaping of their lives in this world to reflect his own glory, and a part to play in bringing light to the Gentiles. Each member of God’s people is responsible to lay hold of this grace from the heart: to believe the promises (see Paul’s use of Abraham and David as examples of faith in Rom. 4:1–25; see also Heb. 11:1–40), and then to grow in obeying the commands, and to keep on doing so all their lives long. Those who lay hold in this way are the faithful.

These people, as distinct from the unfaithful among them, enjoy the full benefits of God's love. Each Israelite is a member of a people, a corporate entity; the members have a mutual participation in the life of the people as a whole. Thus the spiritual and moral well-being of the whole affects the well-being of each of the members, and each member contributes to the others by his own spiritual and moral life. Thus each one shares the joys and sorrows of the others, and of the whole. Historical judgments upon the whole people often come because too many of the members are unfaithful; these judgments do not, however, bring the story of God's people to an end but serve rather to purify and chasten that people (often by removing unbelieving members).

It is important for Christian readers to sharpen their grasp of how the Old Testament uses words such as "salvation" and "judgment." When the Old Testament speaks of God "redeeming" his people (e.g., Ex. 15:13) or "saving" them (e.g., Ex. 14:30), it refers to God's gracious dealings for the sake of this corporate entity, the people: he calls it, he protects it, he purifies it, in order to foster the conditions under which the life of its members may flourish. The Old Testament can also speak of God giving "salvation" or "redemption" to particular persons (e.g., Pss. 3:2, 7; 19:14). Generally in the Old Testament, however, such expressions refer to members of the people experiencing the benefits of covenant membership, whether that be forgiveness of sins, or deliverance from some trouble or persecution, or something else—tracing everything back to the grace of God that led him to make the covenant originally and now to keep it in effect. When Christians speak of personal salvation, they usually are thinking of individuals in isolation, and so have a much narrower meaning in mind; they should consider whether the New Testament usage is closer to the Old Testament usage than they might have realized hitherto, including both every aspect of their lives and

their connections to other believers, and thus extending to a wider range of experience than simply their souls.

The "law," given through Moses, plays a vital role in the Old Testament. It is uniformly presented as an object of delight and admiration (e.g., Psalm 119), because it is a gift from a loving and gracious God. The law is never presented in the Old Testament as a list of rules that one must obey in order to be right with God; rather, it is God's fatherly instruction, given to shape the people he has loved and saved into a community of faith, holiness, and love, bound together by mutual support and care. The various laws, with their penalties for infractions and provisions for repayment, were designed to protect that community from the failures of its members, and the moral guidelines gave specific form to what the restored image of God would look like in the agrarian culture of ancient Israel. Right at the heart of this system is worship at the sanctuary, with its provisions for atonement and forgiveness for those who have gone astray. Sadly, only in a very few instances in the Old Testament do we see anything that even remotely matches this ideal, whether on a large scale (Josh. 22:1–34 is an excellent example, distinctive for its rarity) or on a small one (e.g., Boaz in the book of Ruth, who embodies the Lord's own kindness to a foreign-born "proselyte"). The prophets anticipated an era, after Judah's return from exile in Babylon, in which God's people would really take the law into their own hearts (e.g., Ezek. 36:25–27); the covenant renewal that the postexilic community experienced was, however, only a brief foretaste of that expectation. (Interpreters debate the way in which this relates to the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles—is it focused primarily on *Israel* laying hold of the covenant properly, or does it describe the new arrangement that Jesus's resurrection brought in?—but that is outside the scope of this chapter.)

5. *Eschatology.* The story of God's people is headed toward a glorious future in which all kinds of people will come to know

the Lord and join his people. This was the purpose for which God called Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3), and for which he appointed Israel (Ex. 19:4–6). It is part of the dignity of God's people that, in God's mysterious wisdom, their personal faithfulness contributes to the story getting to its goal (see Deut. 4:6–8).

The Old Testament develops its idea of a Messiah (eventually clarified as the ultimate heir of David) in the light of these components. The earliest strands of the messianic idea speak of an offspring who will undo the work of the Evil One and bless the Gentiles by bringing them into his kingdom (Gen. 3:15; 22:17–18; 24:60); the idea that kings will descend from Abraham (Gen. 17:6, 16) and Jacob (Gen. 35:11) becomes focused on the tribe of Judah, to which the obedience of the peoples will be brought (Gen. 49:10). The kings in David's line carry this idea forward. They are to embody the people: just as the people as a whole is God's son (Ex. 4:22–23), so also the Davidic king is God's son (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:26–27). The promise of a lasting dynasty for David (2 Sam. 7:16) becomes the expectation that a final heir of his line will one day arise, take his Davidic throne (in “the last days”), and lead his people in the great task of bringing light to the Gentiles (e.g., Pss. 2:8; 72:8–11, 17 [using Gen. 22:18]; Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–10; see Isa. 42:1–9).

The Parts of the Old Testament in Relation to the Story

The Old Testament is thus the story of the one true Creator God, who called the family of Abraham to be his remedy for the defilement that came into the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt in fulfillment of this plan, and established them as a theocracy for the sake of displaying his existence and character to the rest of the world. God sent his blessings and curses upon Israel in order to pursue that purpose. God never desisted from that purpose, even in the face of the most grievous unfaithfulness in Israel.

This overarching story serves as a grand narrative or worldview story for Israel: each member of the people was to see himself or herself as an *heir* of this story, with all its glory and shame; as a *steward* of the story, responsible to pass it on to the next generation; and as a *participant*, whose faithfulness could play a role, by God's mysterious wisdom, in the story's progress. ^{? would}

Some who have seen this category of Israel's story as a key to Old Testament theology have argued for reading the entire Old Testament *as a story*. This does not help the reader, for the very obvious reason that not everything in the Old Testament is narrative or “story.” For example, there are *laws* (in the Pentateuch), whose purpose was to protect equity and civility in the theocracy by guiding judges in what penalties to impose and by specifying the minimum standard of behavior necessary to preserve the theocracy (many of the specific laws do not intend to spell out the moral ideal for the members of Israel, which comes from likeness to God in the creation account and from the goal of community holiness; the “perfection” of the laws consist in the way they serve the social fabric of God's people); there is *wisdom* (in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, as well as in the Psalms), which helps the members to live well daily; there are *songs* (esp. the Psalms) that the people of God should sing in corporate worship; there are *poems* (esp. the Song of Solomon; see Prov. 5:15–20) celebrating such wonders as romantic love; and lots more. Therefore it is better to speak of reading the parts of the Old Testament *in relation* to its overarching story. That is, we can see the parts in relation to the Big Story that unifies the whole. The Proverbs help people to live their little stories in such a way as to contribute to the Big Story. The Psalms—many of which explicitly recount parts of the Big Story—help people live as faithful members of the worshiping corporate entity, the people of God. The Prophets keep recalling the Big Story, the direction in which Israel's story is headed, calling their audiences

to live faithfully in its light. The Big Story tells us that God's purpose is to restore our humanity to its proper function, and thus it reminds each person of the human nature he shares with every other human being, and of the duty and benefit of seeking the good of others. For example, enjoying the love of a faithful spouse is a way of experiencing renewed humanity—a way that displays God's goodness to the rest of the world (as in the Song of Solomon).

All of these factors explain why it is possible for the New Testament authors both to say that the Sinai covenant is done away with (see below), because it was focused on the theocracy, which had an end in mind from the beginning (when the Gentiles would receive the light in large measure)—and at the same time to affirm that this covenant has embedded in it principles that cannot pass away, because they are part of the larger story of which the Sinai covenant is one chapter.

The Old Testament as Christian Scripture

The Old Testament presents itself, then, as a story that is headed somewhere. The Old Testament closes with both anxiety and hope under Persian rule (see Malachi). The books of the Second Temple period (between the Old and New Testaments) continue this notion of Israel as God's people chosen for a purpose, but not all strands of this material make clear what that purpose is. Some of these Second Temple books offer endings for the story (e.g., in the Qumran community as the elect); but the faithful were looking for more. (For more information on the Second Temple period, see ch. 6.) The New Testament authors, most of whom were Jewish Christians, saw themselves as heirs of the Old Testament story, and as authorized to describe its proper completion in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the messianic era that this ushered in. These authors appropriated the Old Testament as Christian Scripture, and they urged their audi-

ences (many of whom were *Gentile* Christians) to do the same. There is debate over just how the New Testament authors used the Old Testament as Scripture, but the simplest summary of the New Testament authors' stance would be to say that they saw the Old Testament as constituting the earlier chapters of the story in which Christians are now participating.

This construct, of earlier and later chapters in the story of God's work for his people, allows us to understand how the Old Testament era and the Christian era will have elements both of continuity and of discontinuity. The Old Testament had looked forward to an internationalized people of God, without explaining exactly how that would connect to the theocracy of Israel (see Ps. 87:4–6). The theocracy defined the people of God as predominantly coming from a particular ethnic group in a particular land; Gentile converts (“sojourners”) were protected (Ex. 12:49; 20:10; 22:21; Lev. 19:10) but could not be full-status members of the theocratic community (see Deut. 14:21; 15:3. Num. 34:14–15 shows that land was allocated to Israelites alone). The New Testament abolishes the distinction (Eph. 2:19), because the theocracy as such is no longer in existence and many of its provisions are done away with (see Acts 10:34–35; Heb. 9:11–14). At the same time, the character of the one Creator God, and his interest in restoring the image of God in human beings, transcends the specific arrangements of the theocracy; hence, the moral commands of God apply to Christians as they did to the faithful in Israel (see Rom. 13:8–10).

Introduction to the Pentateuch

Gordon Wenham

The Name of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch (Gk. “five-volumed”) consists of the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy. The Hebrew term for it is *torah* (“law” or “instruction”), so this is how the New Testament refers to it (Gk. *nomos*, “law”). In the Hebrew Bible, the law is the first of the three major sections, and sometimes *nomos* may refer to the whole Old Testament (e.g., John 10:34). Although the Pentateuch contains many laws, it is essentially narrative with episodes of law-giving, but in the broader sense of *torah* all the Pentateuch can be seen as instruction, for it teaches as much through the history it records as by the law it gives. Another name for the Pentateuch found in some translations is “the five books of Moses.” This is also an apt description in that the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy provide a biography of Moses, and traditionally he has been seen as their main author.

The Pentateuch as Foundational to the Whole Bible

The Pentateuch is not simply the beginning of the Bible; it is also the foundation of the Bible. It serves to orient the reader for reading the rest of the biblical story line. It introduces the key promises that show God’s purposes in history and that lay the groundwork for the coming of Christ. Its theological ideas and ethical principles inform the rest of the Bible so that the subsequent books assume its authority and appeal to it as they evaluate people’s deeds and character. These points are illustrated briefly here:

1. *Orientation.* The beginning of a book sets its tone and gives clues to the author’s perspective. Genesis did this for the ancient world of polytheism by explaining that the world is created and controlled by only one God, not by a crowd of competing gods and goddesses. Similarly it speaks to today’s readers, who often are essentially atheists (whether consciously or unconsciously): it shows them what it means to believe that behind all the phenomena of nature and the laws of science there is an all-powerful, loving God who controls all that happens.

2. *Divine purposes.* The Pentateuch shows God’s intentions for his creation by describing what the world was like when he first created man and woman in the garden of Eden. Their sin sets back the divine program but does not defeat it, for God later calls Abraham and promises him descendants, land, and, most important of all, blessing through his descendants to all the nations. These promises are more fully developed in the later books of the Pentateuch.

3. *Theology and ethics.* The Pentateuch gives insight into God’s character and his ethical standards. It illustrates both his benevolence and his righteousness. He cares for mankind, creating man in his own image, providing him with food, and protecting human life from violent assault. Yet at the same time he demands moral behavior, from keeping the Sabbath to refusing

adultery or theft. Tales of punishment, from the flood (Genesis 6–9) to the golden calf (Exodus 32), demonstrate the danger of disregarding divine standards.

Content

A review of the contents of the Pentateuch shows that its center of gravity is *the law-giving at Sinai*. All of Exodus 19 to Numbers 10 is devoted to the events that occurred in the vicinity of Sinai: the declaration of the Ten Commandments, the building of the tabernacle, the laws governing sacrifice, entry to the tabernacle, and the celebration of the festivals. Closer examination of this central section suggests that its climax is *God's glory filling the newly built tabernacle* (Ex. 40:34–38) as a visible demonstration of his choice of and intimacy with Israel—a restoration of the situation in the garden of Eden, where God walked with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8).

But the outer frame of the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy is constituted by *the life of Moses*. Exodus 2 tells of his birth and providential upbringing in the Egyptian court, while Deuteronomy 34 describes his death. Exodus 3–15 describes his call to lead his people and the establishment of his authority over Pharaoh in the eyes of the Israelites (Ex. 14:31). Moses's approaching death colors all the final chapters of the Pentateuch. He is told to prepare for his death in Numbers 27, and the whole of Deuteronomy consists of his last appeals to the nation to serve the Lord faithfully. To this end he preaches three sermons and recites two poems (Deuteronomy 32–33) before he is granted a vision of the Promised Land and dies (Deuteronomy 34).

The book of Genesis serves as an introduction to the rest of the Pentateuch. It explains the context for Moses's life and ministry. It gives the origin of the nation of Israel and its tribes, and explains how they came to be living in Egypt though their ancestors had been promised the land of Canaan. The people of Israel

are to bring blessing to the nations, and the opening chapters of Genesis show the desperate need of the nations for blessing. The first avalanche of sin led to the universal judgment of the flood. The new start with Noah and his sons was again derailed, first by the sin of Ham (Gen. 9:20–29) and then by the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). In this general way Genesis explains the situation that Moses confronted, and various episodes in the lives of the patriarchs also show parallels to Moses's experience (for example, Abraham's exodus from Egypt in Gen. 12:10–20).

Time Span

It is striking that the earliest events in the Bible are dated more precisely than the later ones. For example, the different stages of the flood are dated to the exact day of the year (Gen. 7:11; 8:4–5). The ages of the pre-flood heroes at the fathering of their firstborn and at their death are carefully noted in Genesis 5. Taking these figures at face value, Archbishop Usher (1581–1656) calculated that the creation of the world occurred in 4004 BC. Using similar principles, Orthodox Jews hold that the year 2000 was the year 5760 (i.e., 5,760 years since creation).

Such a venerable interpretative approach cannot be glibly dismissed, but most conservative interpreters today believe that it does not account well enough for the literary conventions of Moses's day. For example, the genealogies do not claim to include every generation, and may skip any number of them. With respect to the long lives of the antediluvians (those who lived before the flood), some scholars think these numbers should be understood as their actual ages in years, while others think their ages expressed in multiple centuries may have a symbolic significance, in line with the practices of other ancient peoples. It is best to admit one's ignorance here; yet at least it can be said that Moses used these numbers to make a point about the antiquity and reality of his audience's forebears.

However, the dating of the Israelite patriarchs by the internal numbering system of the Old Testament is not so problematic. Conservative biblical scholars think it is likely that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in the late third and early second millennium BC, and that the Israelites entered Egypt either in the early nineteenth century BC (consistent with an early date for the exodus; see Ex. 12:40) or else in the seventeenth or sixteenth century BC, during the Egyptian Second Intermediate Period (1640–1532 BC). The Hyksos Dynasty that ruled during this time came from outside Egypt and therefore could have welcomed Hebrews like Joseph and his family to play a prominent part in Egyptian life.

The date of the exodus from Egypt is likewise controversial. Combining the biblical and extrabiblical evidence points to Solomon's temple being built in 967 or 966 BC. According to 1 Kings 6:1, Solomon began to build the temple 480 years after the exodus. If the author intended "480 years" as a literal designation, then working backward suggests the exodus would have been in 1447 or 1446 BC, which is the date preferred by many conservative Old Testament scholars today. However, on the basis of the description of the events surrounding the exodus (such as building the cities of Pithom and Raamses), most Egyptologists prefer a date in the 1200s—preferably after 1279 BC but certainly before 1209, when an Egyptian monument mentions that Israel was established as a people in the land of Canaan. If there is symbolism in the designation "480 years," then it is possible that the exodus took place in the early 1200s BC rather than in the mid-1400s.

Composition

For more than two thousand years, readers of the Pentateuch assumed that Moses was its author (see Mark 7:10). This was a natural conclusion to draw from its contents, for most of the laws are said to have been given to Moses by God (e.g., Lev. 1:1),

and indeed some passages are explicitly said to have been written down by Moses (see Deut. 31:9, 24). The account of his death could have been recorded by someone else, though some held it was a prophetic account by Moses himself (Deuteronomy 34).

But in the late eighteenth century, critical scholars began challenging the assumption of Mosaic authorship. They argued that several authors were responsible for writing the Pentateuch. These authors supposedly wrote many centuries after Moses, and were separated from each other in time and location. Complicated theories were developed to explain how the Pentateuch grew as different authors' accounts were spliced and adjusted by a series of editors. According to these critical scholars, it was likely that the Pentateuch reached its final form in the fifth century BC, nearly a millennium after Moses.

In the late twentieth century this type of critical theory was strongly attacked, not just by conservative scholars but also by those brought up on such theories. They argue that the theories are too complicated, self-contradictory, and ultimately unprovable. It is much more rewarding and less speculative to focus interpretative effort on the final form of the text. So there is a strong move to abandon the compositional theories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for simpler hypotheses. Thus some critical scholars would see the Pentateuch being an essentially fifth-century BC creation. Others suggest earlier dates. But none of these suggestions can really be proven.

The Pentateuch does undoubtedly claim to be divine in origin, mediated through Moses. Thus Moses should be looked to as the original human author. Indeed, as stated above, the Pentateuch looks like a life of Moses, with an introduction. But this need not mean that he wrote every word of the present Pentateuch. It seems likely that the spelling and the grammar of the Pentateuch were revised to keep it intelligible for later readers. Also, a number of features in the text look like clarifications for a later age. But

this is quite different from supposing that the Pentateuch was essentially composed in a later age. Rather, it should be seen as originating in Moses's time but undergoing some slight revision in later eras so later readers could understand its message and apply it to their own situations.

Theme

The theme of the Pentateuch is announced in Genesis 12:1–3, the call of Abraham: “Go from your country . . . to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Here God promises Abraham four things: (1) a land to live in; (2) numerous descendants (“a great nation”); (3) blessing (divinely granted success) for himself; and (4) blessing through him for all the nations of the world. God's benefit for the nations is the climax or goal of the promises: the preceding promises of land, descendants, and personal blessing are steps on the way to the final goal of universal blessing.

Each time God appears to the patriarchs, the promises are elaborated and made more specific. For example, the promise of an unidentified “land” in Genesis 12:1 becomes “this land” in Genesis 12:7 and “all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” in Genesis 17:8.

The fulfillment of these promises to Abraham constitutes the story line of the Pentateuch. It is a story of gradual and often difficult fulfillment. The birth of children to produce a great nation is no easy matter: the patriarchs' wives—Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel—all have great trouble conceiving (Gen. 17:17; 25:21; 30:1). But by the time they enter Egypt, Jacob's family numbers seventy (Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5). After many years in Egypt they have become so numerous that the Egyptians perceive them as a threat (Ex. 1:7–10), and when the first census is taken, they total 603,550 fighting men (Num. 1:46).

Similarly the promise of land is very slow in being fulfilled. Abraham acquires a well at Beersheba, and a burial plot for Sarah at Hebron (Gen. 21:30–31; 23:1–20). Jacob bought some land near Shechem (Gen. 33:19), but then late in life he and the rest of the family emigrated to Egypt (Genesis 46–50). The book of Exodus begins with the hope of a quick return to Canaan, but the stubbornness of Pharaoh delays Israel's departure. Their journey through the Sinai wilderness is eventful, and after about a year they reach Kadesh on the very borders of Canaan. There, scared by the report of some of the spies, the people rebel against Moses and the God-given promises, so they are condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 13–14). And of course the Pentateuch ends with Moses dying outside the Promised Land, and the people hoping to enter it.

For these reasons the theme of the Pentateuch has been described as the *partial* fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs. Such a description certainly fits the climactic promise that through Abraham and his descendants all the families of the earth would be blessed. The closest fulfillment of this in the Pentateuch is Joseph saving Egypt and the surrounding lands from starvation in the seven-year famine. But later on, Israel is seen as a threat by other peoples in the region such as the Moabites, Midianites, and Amorites. It is not apparent how or when all the peoples of the world will be blessed. At the end of the Pentateuch that, like the promise of land, still awaits fulfillment.

But the promise of blessing to the patriarchs and their descendants is abundantly fulfilled within the Pentateuch—despite their frequent lack of faith and their willful rebellion. For example, after Abraham lied about his wife and allowed her to be taken by a foreign king, the pair escape, greatly enriched (Genesis 12; 20). Jacob, forced to flee from home after cheating his father, eventually returns with great flocks and herds to meet a forgiving brother (Genesis 27–33). The nation of Israel breaks the

first two commandments by making the golden calf, yet enjoys the privilege of God dwelling among them in the tabernacle (Exodus 32–40). The Pentateuch is thus *a story of divine mercy to a wayward people*.

However, alongside this account of God's grace must be set *the importance of the law and right behavior*. The opening chapters of Genesis set out the pattern of life that everyone should follow: monogamy, Sabbath observance, rejection of personal vengeance and violence—principles that even foreigners living in ancient Israel were expected to observe. But Israel was chosen to mediate between God and the nations and to demonstrate in finer detail what God expected of human society, so that other peoples would exclaim, "What great nation has a god so near to it . . . ? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law . . . ?" (Deut. 4:7–8).

To encourage Israel's compliance with all the law revealed at Sinai, it was embedded in a covenant. This involved Israel giving its assent to the Ten Commandments and the other laws on worship, personal behavior, crime, and so on. Obedience to these laws guaranteed Israel's future blessing and prosperity, whereas disobedience would be punished by crop failure, infertility, loss of God's presence, defeat by enemies, and, eventually, exile to a foreign land (see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).

These covenantal principles—that *God will bless Israel when she keeps the law and punish her when she does not*—pervade the rest of the Old Testament. The book of Joshua demonstrates that fidelity to the law led to the successful conquest of the land, while the books of Judges and Kings show that Israel's apostasy to other gods led to defeat by her enemies. The argument of the prophets is essentially that Israel's failure to keep the law puts her at risk of experiencing the divine punishments set out in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Since New Testament times, Christians have seen the promises in the Pentateuch as finding their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Jesus is the offspring of the woman who bruises the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). He is the one through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). He is the star and scepter who shall rise out of Israel (Num. 24:17). More than this, many heroes of the Old Testament have been seen as types of Christ. Jesus is the second Adam. He is the true Israel (Jacob), whose life sums up the experience of the nation.

But preeminently Jesus is seen as the new and greater Moses. As Moses declared God's law for Israel, so Jesus declares and embodies God's word to the nations. As Moses suffered and died outside the land so that his people could enter it, so the Son of God died on earth so that his people might enter heaven. It was observed that the filling of the tabernacle with the glory of God was the climax of the Pentateuch (Ex. 40:34–38). So too "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14). The goal of the entire Bible is that humans everywhere should glorify the God whose glory has confronted them. Lost sight of in Eden, this goal reappears through Moses, on its way to final fulfillment through Christ.