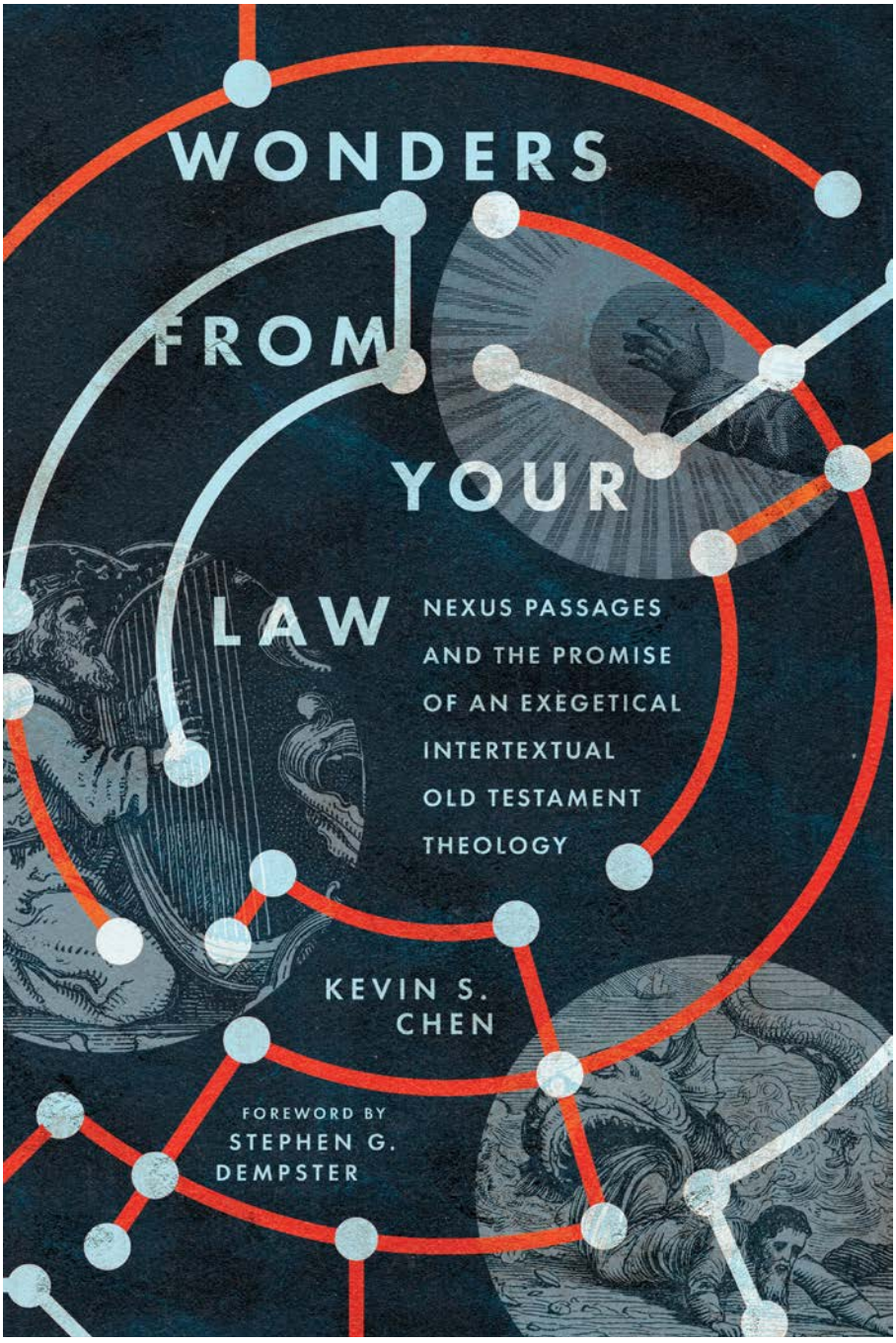

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NEXUS PASSAGES AND THE STORY OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE

This chapter situates the study of nexus passages in the context of Old Testament theology as a discipline. The ultimate purpose is to present the analysis of nexus passages as a constructive evangelical approach to Old Testament theology. In order to do this, it is necessary to show continuity with both the story of Old Testament theology as a discipline and evangelical theological commitments. Understanding this story in turn requires understanding the parent discipline of biblical theology, which has influenced both the origin and development of Old Testament theology. The analysis below is not a mere rehashing of the history of interpretation but engages key figures (e.g., Gabler, von Hofmann) and issues (e.g., the term *historical*, the existence of a center) for the sake of a better understanding of this discipline and how the analysis of nexus passages contributes to it.

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY IN THE SHADOW OF JOHANN PHILIPP GABLER'S PROGRAM FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The discipline of Old Testament theology is a subset of the discipline of biblical studies and more specifically of biblical theology, which is commonly traced to Johann Philipp Gabler even if, strictly speaking, it did not begin with him.[1] His seminal treatise, *De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae*

[1]For a detailed treatment of the origins of biblical theology that goes beyond and often before Gabler, see John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,

et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus (1787), concerns "the proper distinction between biblical theology and dogmatic theology."[2] Gabler argues that biblical theology is "of historical origin, conveying what the holy writers felt about divine matters." Dogmatic (or systematic) theology, on the other hand, is "of didactic origin, teaching what each theologian philosophises rationally about divine things, according to the measure of his ability or of the times, age, place, sect, school, and other similar factors." Citing examples from the history of theology, Gabler remarks, "Dogmatic theology is subject to a multiplicity of change along with the rest of the humane disciplines. . . . But the sacred writers are surely not so changeable that they should in this fashion be able to assume these different types and forms of theological doctrine." In his opening comments, Gabler had expressed his more general concern about "those who use the sacred words to tear what pleases them from its context in the sacred Scriptures" and "do not pay attention to the mode of expression peculiar to the sacred writers . . . [and] express something other than the true sense of these authors." In contrast, biblical theology emphasizes the Bible's historically situated meaning and is careful "to distinguish among each of the periods in the Old and New Testaments, each of the authors, and each of the manners of speaking which each used as a reflection of time and place, whether these manners are historical or didactic or poetic." Gabler's concern with the historical author's intended meaning appears yet again in his desire to avoid "new dogmas about which the authors themselves never thought."[3]

1995), 117-57. See also Joachim Schaper, "The Question of a 'Biblical Theology' and the Growing Tension Between 'Biblical Theology' and a 'History of the Religion of Israel': From Johann Philipp Gabler to Rudolf Smend, Sen.," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 3.1:628-35. Scobie starts with the Bible itself and downplays Gabler but in so doing obscures the differences between biblical theology as a discipline and the more general task of accurately interpreting the whole Bible or a large portion thereof. This is because his concept of biblical theology goes beyond such as a discipline. See Charles Scobie, "The History of Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 11-20.

[2]See English translation by John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 134-44, followed by commentary through 158.

[3]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 135-40.

Even as Gabler's treatise set forth a path for biblical theology, it also revealed the challenge of the task itself, including the classic problem of the unity of the Testaments. He remarks, "The sacred books, especially of the New Testament, are the one clear source from which all true knowledge of the Christian religion is drawn." While affirming that "all the sacred writers are holy men and are armed with divine authority," Gabler further asserts that "not all attest to the same form of religion; some are doctors of the Old Testament [i.e., 'basic elements,' Gal 4:9] . . . others are of the newer and better Christian Testament."[4] Whereas there is no questioning the importance of the New Testament for Christianity, Gabler thus goes further by his sharp distinction between Old Testament and New Testament forms of religion and what later became Old Testament theology and New Testament theology. Significantly, the role of Old Testament theology within biblical theology is left hanging. If the New Testament is "the newer and better Christian Testament," what place is there for an older, worse, less-Christian Old Testament?

Gabler's idea, citing Samuel Morus (a respected theologian of that time), was to search for "universal ideas" (or "notions") in various parts of the Scriptures, expressed in a way "consistent with its own era, its own testament, its own place of origin, and its own genius." Comparison of different passages would show "wherein the separate authors agree in a friendly fashion, or differ among themselves; then finally there will be the happy appearance of biblical theology, pure and unmixed with foreign things." John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge explain that Gabler's aim was to find those parts of Scripture that are "trans-historical" and to "isolat[e]" and "eliminate" the Bible's "purely historical characteristics . . . leav[ing] the truth exposed." An example of something having "purely historical characteristics" is the "Mosaic rites [or law]."[5]

Even if Gabler's project were to be followed through, it would set out to demonstrate the theological unity of Scripture without requiring literary and textual unity. By relying on universal ideas, Gabler has given up on any

[4]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 134, 139.
[5]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 141-42, 147-48.

unity based on the authorially intended meaning that he so values elsewhere. In the end, this meaning is important to Gabler and must be respected but is not the direct means by which biblical theology relates to the unity of Scripture. As Loren Stuckenbruck comments, "Biblical theology for Gabler only *begins* by determining the meaning of the text from the perspective of the biblical authors. . . . Herein lies an ambiguity which Gabler apparently never fully resolved. . . . Historical interpretation *does not define the task or goal of biblical theology so much as it involves a necessary starting point to be transcended*." Indeed, Gabler above referred to a "pure" biblical theology ultimately based on universal ideas. Thus, although Gabler's approach "begins with the application of a historical method, [it] does not retain the historical as a check once a later stage of the analysis has been reached."[6] Robert Morgan relatedly sees "filtering" or "sifting" of biblical data at each step in Gabler's process, with the initial historical and exegetical step already being "neutraliz[ed]" in the next step, "despite his insistence that this must not happen."[7]

Gabler's use of universal ideas brings with it a certain externality to the biblical text itself. According to Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, this concept is "based on the philosophical doctrine that universal truths are more real than the particulars from which they are derived. . . . [Morus] compares the process of eliciting universal truth from Scripture with the process of eliciting universals from particulars in philosophy."[8] To be consistent, Gabler's rejection of imposing one's own ideas on the text should be equally applied to the potential imposition of universal ideas as unifying principles for biblical theology. Indeed, Stuckenbruck calls this a "synthetic, reductionary method. . . . From the outset, a value judgment within the biblical canon is operative."[9] Magne Saebø likewise refers to Gabler's "way of

[6]Loren Stuckenbruck, "Johann Philipp Gabler and the Delineation of Biblical Theology," *SJT* 52 (1999): 143-44, 47, emphasis original. Again, "Once the exegetical process has been carried through, historical context no longer offers a check for the derived universal ideas" (152).
[7]Robert Morgan, "Gabler's Bicentenary," *Expository Times* 98, no. 6 (1987): 164-67.
[8]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 156, which footnotes Morus's *De notionibus universis in theologia*, 239. Gabler "hoped that modern rational methods would help him identify what is essential" (Morgan, "Gabler's Bicentenary," 165).
[9]Stuckenbruck, "Johann Philipp Gabler and the Delineation," 145.

reducing the biblical material . . . to its general theological concepts, whereby the emphasis is now on the latter." Furthermore, if the New Testament is basically in accord with these ideas, even embodying them, and the Old Testament much less so, how does one avoid imposing New Testament universals onto the Old?[10] Is there a substantive difference between biblical theology and New Testament theology (which can also invoke the OT as background) if the universals are the same?[11] What is the real value of the historical meaning of the Old Testament for Christians?

Gabler's aforementioned comments about the vast differences between the Testaments show that he did not believe authorial meaning to be consistent across Scripture. Furthermore, by focusing simply on the views of Moses, David, Solomon, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, Gabler does not clearly distinguish between the meaning of a character's words in specific parts of a biblical book and the authorial meaning of the book as a whole. For example, Jesus' words are of greatest importance to Christians, but methodologically speaking, he was not an author and must be distinguished from the respective authors of the Gospels. Even if a character within a book is also taken as the author of the whole book (e.g., Moses and the Pentateuch), the meaning of this character's words in a particular passage and the author's meaning as expressed through the whole book cannot simply be equated. The many examples of direct speech uttered by Moses in the Pentateuch, each with their own context and emphasis, are not equivalent to the meaning of the Pentateuch. Indeed, based on Gabler's comments, there does not seem to be a clear category for the authorial meaning of a biblical book. Such confusion also relates to confusion of the categories of text and event (e.g., a person's spoken words at a specific time in history but included in a biblical book that itself bears meaning), as discussed in the introduction.

[10]Magne Saebø, "Johann Philipp Gablers Bedeutung für die Biblische Theologie," *ZAW* 99, no. 1 (1987): 9. Saebø characterizes Gabler's "conceptual constancy of Scripture" ("begriffliche Konstanz der Schrift") as "probably above all that of the NT" ("wohl vor allem die des NT"; 9). All German and foreign-language translations are my own.

[11]E.g., Robert Morgan, "New Testament Theology as Implicit Theological Interpretation of Christian Scripture," *Int* 70, no. 4 (2016): 392: "Ideally a Christian biblical theology would perhaps be a New Testament theology that includes as much Old Testament theology as is implied by the newer religion's dependence on and critical reception of the older Testament."

Gabler's lower view of inspiration reveals what is likely a contributing factor to his position. In wanting to "investigate what in the sayings of the Apostles is truly divine, and what perchance merely human," and "whether some of [their opinions], which have no bearing on salvation, were left to their own ingenuity," it is clear that Gabler's conception of biblical theology cannot be adopted wholesale by those who hold to verbal plenary inspiration, even if he was thinking of the example of women wearing veils in the preceding context of his treatise. This may partially explain why Gabler wants to extract universal ideas from what is, for evangelicals, already a universal biblical text, inspired by God in its entirety. Elsewhere, Gabler relatedly remarks, "In the sacred books are contained the opinions not of a single man nor of one and the same era or religion."[12] While containing some elements of truth, this emphasis on diversity moves away from traditional views on the divine authorship of Scripture. Stuckenbruck accordingly observes that Gabler's emphasis on "particularity and historicality . . . relativizes the doctrine of inspiration."[13]

In relation to a unity of Scripture rooted in the biblical text, the impact is that once certain passages are sifted out (e.g., as not "truly divine . . . [and] perchance merely human"), the scope of the discussion has subtly but significantly changed from the canonical text to some subset of it. This is a fundamentally different starting point from believing that the canonical text in its entirety is inspired (2 Tim 3:16) and then pursuing the historically situated, authorially intended meaning of the text for biblical theology. At the same time, the problem of a canon within a canon has persisted in biblical theology even for evangelicals, but for different reasons (e.g., the inherent challenge of demonstrating the unity of such a vast corpus). Either way, the textual unity of Scripture based on historically situated, authorially intended meaning often has been left aside, seemingly ruled out at the outset in the task of biblical theology.[14] It is this de facto presupposition that needs to be reconsidered. Behind it lies a host of

[12]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 143, 139.
[13]Stuckenbruck, "Gabler and the Delineation," 145.
[14]E.g., Craig Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation: Introduction," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids,

assumptions about the nature and meaning of Scripture, its constituent books, and its countless passages. The literary, textual, and theological unity of Scripture should be treated as an open question, beginning with the Old Testament.

To be sure, the demonstration of such a unity is an overwhelmingly large task, involving the determination of the historically situated, authorially intended meaning of every Old Testament book, along with their varied unifying interrelationships. Such thoroughgoing unity must be hard-won, that is, demonstrated exegetically, examining one piece of evidence at a time. With respect to these interrelationships, nexus passages are especially useful and illuminating.

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY FROM ITS BEGINNINGS TO J. C. K. VON HOFMANN TO TODAY

Old Testament theology: Early decades. "Biblical theology," in the "modern sense of the description of the theology of the Bible in the Bible's own terms," was not a term coined by Gabler in his 1787 treatise but had been used already in G. T. Zachariae's recently published five-volume work, *Biblische Theologie*.[15] Gabler commends Zachariae's work in his treatise while at the same time suggesting it can be improved on.[16] Gabler's work did not immediately result in the recognition of biblical theology as a distinct discipline, but over time his influence exceeded all others.[17] Ludwig Diestel's classic work on the history of (Christian) Old Testament interpretation names George Lorenz Bauer as the first to investigate Old Testament theology separately from biblical theology (1796).[18] Although his

MI: Zondervan, 2004), 1: "In large swathes of the academy we have in practice, if not in theory, given up on our attempts to articulate the unity of the Bible on its own terms."

[15]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 138niii, 149. See note 1 above.

[16]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 138. On 151-55, Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge further argue for Gabler's direct dependence on and revision of Zachariae. For discussion of Zachariae's work, see Stuckenbruck, "Johann Philipp Gabler and the Delineation," 141-42; John Sandys-Wunsch, "G. T. Zachariae's Contribution to Biblical Theology," *ZAW* 92, no. 1 (1980): 12-21.

[17]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 149; Saebø, "Johann Philipp Gablers Bedeutung," 15.

[18]Ludwig Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes in der christlichen Kirche* (Jena: Mauke, 1869), 709, 712. See also Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology: A Proposal* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 5; Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 150.

ideas developed independently from Gabler, Bauer was coming from "the same intellectual background" and "tackled the same problems," such that this separation is not surprising.[19] As mentioned above, Gabler believed that the two Testaments represented different religions and characterized the New Testament as "the newer and better Christian Testament." The history of Old Testament theology has been treated at length many times over, and what follows is a selective treatment that highlights aspects that provide helpful background for current issues in evangelical biblical theology and for my approach.[20]

According to Diestel, Bauer organized his material under the two main categories of theology proper and anthropology. Bauer warned against imposing ideas from later times and instead recommended comparison with ancient Near Eastern and Greek concepts. However, Diestel characterizes Bauer's treatment of the Old Testament in fourteen or fifteen sections, which included separating Genesis from rest of the Pentateuch and concluding with the later psalms, "a tearing of the material" ("eine Zerreissung des Stoffes"). Even worse, Diestel sees the same underlying deistic rationalism as continuing with Gottlob Philipp Christian Kaiser (1812), whose comparative, religious-historical treatment of Judaism is a "shocking caricature" ("abschreckenden Carricatur"), guided by and classified under a universalist framework. Kaiser emphasizes a "world-God" (*Weltgott*) in contrast to national gods (e.g., Israel's), which miss an alleged universalist monotheism. He detects this world-God in the older books of the Old Testament (e.g., the Pentateuch) but as coming from a very late editor (*Bearbeiter*) influenced by Persian thought and mythology rather than Abraham, Jacob, or Moses. As Diestel observes, Kaiser has accepted "a full uniformity of Old Testament ideas with pagan conceptions and myths."[21]

[19]Schaper, "Question of a 'Biblical Theology,'" 640.

[20]E.g., Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 117-57; Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 10-27; John Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985).

[21]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 712-14.

Without endorsing the extremes to which later scholars sometimes went, Gabler's program for biblical theology did have in it the seeds for the history of religions.[22] His aforementioned belief that the Old Testament and New Testament espouse two religions is already a basic framework for the history of the Jewish and Christian religions. Furthermore, if these two religions are, in Gabler's words, not from "the same era," then it is easy to understand why Bauer sought ancient parallels from the regions surrounding Israel for better understanding. A similar extrabiblical move is hinted at in Gabler's own treatise. In calling for the consideration of the ideas of Moses, David, Solomon, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles for biblical theology, he also says, "For many reasons we ought to include the apocryphal books for this same purpose."[23] Even though Sandys-Wunsch maintains the distinctiveness of biblical theology based on its attachment to some form of revelation or ongoing authority in the Bible, the boundary between biblical theology and history of religions was undefined from the outset, and the sense in which biblical theology is biblical (i.e., focused on the biblical text) likewise muddled, whether by extrabiblical apocryphal books or by sources for other ancient religions.[24]

In this regard, the titles of early works on Old Testament theology are telling.[25] Bauer's 1796 *Theology of the Old Testament or Outline of the Religious Concepts of the Ancient Hebrews. From the Most Ancient Times Until the Beginning of the Christian Epoch* equates Old Testament theology with tracing Hebrew religious thought in a way that goes beyond the scope of

[22]Sandys-Wunsch, "G. T. Zachariae's Contribution to Biblical Theology," 23, calls Zachariae, who influenced Gabler, "the father not only of biblical theology but also ultimately of the history of biblical religion."

[23]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 140.

[24]Sandys-Wunsch, "G. T. Zachariae's Contribution to Biblical Theology," 17: "The assumption that there is some sort of revelation or at least ongoing authority in the Bible is what distinguishes biblical theology from a history of biblical religion." See Schaper, "Question of a 'Biblical Theology,'" 625-50. Gerhard Ebeling writes that "limitation to the canon of scripture has also become problematic" because of the need to consider religious background for comparison, and more importantly, an account of the "historical development" requires it (e.g., pre-Christian Judaism, contemporaneous extracanonical books). Ebeling, "The Meaning of 'Biblical Theology,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 6, no. 2 (1955): 221; see also Charles Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 85.

[25]The titles below have been translated from Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 712-14 nn13, 15, 18.

the Old Testament text itself ("Until the Beginning of the Christian Epoch"). Likewise, Kaiser's 1812 *The Biblical Theology or Judaism and Christianity According to the Grammatical-Historical Method of Interpretation and According to a Frank Position in the Comparative-Critical Universal History of Religions and in the Universal Religion* implicitly equates biblical theology with Judaism and Christianity, explicitly subordinated to a universalist, history-of-religions framework. Similarly, the next work mentioned by Diestel in his survey is C. P. W. Gramberg's *Critical History of the Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (1829), which, though more detailed and objective than Kaiser, still treats the Old Testament as "only an aggregate of 'religious ideas.'"[26]

Such approaches to biblical theology often subdivided the Old Testament into additional historical periods. This periodization accords with the spirit of Gabler's proposal, which, as noted above, emphasizes that Old Testament and New Testament religion are not from "the same era" and recommends "distinguish[ing] among each of the periods in the Old and New Testaments, each of the authors, and each of the manners of speaking which each used as a reflection of time and place."[27] For example, W. M. L. de Wette divides the religion of the Old Testament into an earlier Hebraism and later, degenerated (!) Judaism after Ezra. Influenced by de Wette, Gramberg divided the Old Testament and its "religious ideas" into seven periods (excluding everything pre-Davidic because of its uncertainty) and the apocryphal books into six periods.[28] Hans Frei notes that the use of distinct historical periods to understand the Bible can be traced back to Johannes Cocceius in the seventeenth century, who used it in his covenant theology and "became the remote progenitor of the so-called *heilsgeschichtliche Schule* of the nineteenth century."[29] This salvation-historical school and its influence will receive extended attention in the following section.[30]

[26]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 714.
[27]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 139.
[28]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 714-15. The second and third periods run parallel (respectively, from after Hezekiah until shortly before the exile, and from Uzziah to Josiah).
[29]Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 46.
[30]For examples of periodization among evangelicals, see Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1948), vii-x (e.g., the Mosaic epoch and the prophetic epoch of revelation); Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965),

The early decades of Old Testament theology as a discipline saw a variety of external, often philosophical, frameworks used by scholars. Diestel notes the special influence of the philosophy of Jakob Friedrich Fries on de Wette's work.[31] Brevard Childs characterizes de Wette and others as "introducing a heavily philosophical reading under the influence of Kant and de Fries, which again focused on symbolic interpretation of ethical concepts from the Bible."[32] On the other hand, Kaiser's aforementioned views involved a universalist framework as well as accounting for mythological influence. Childs's summary assessment of this period is that "there went a search for a new philosophical framework by which to integrate the biblical material over and above a straightforward historical reading," whether idealism, idealism mixed with Romanticism, or historical evolution.[33] Morgan likewise remarks that Gabler's original proposal "was overtaken by more ambitious schemes which fused historical criticism and theological interpretation."[34] As Sandys-Wunsch explains, "It may well be that one of the limitations of biblical theology as a whole is that it is inextricably bound up with the philosophical outlook of the times when it was written."[35]

This leads to the realization of a great irony in the discipline of biblical theology: since Gabler, biblical theology sought a distinction and greater freedom from the external, unifying control of dogmatic theology but often substituted other external, unifying systems in its place. An absolute, presuppositionless freedom was in fact never possible, but such substitutions, no matter what kind, still easily lapse into imposing meaning onto the biblical text, the very thing Gabler was trying to avoid. He identified the intruding influence of ever-changing dogmatic systems on biblical interpretation, but the subsequent course of biblical theology would also

57-63 (seven dispensations); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 247-48, 253-56 (three stages: creation to David/Solomon, prophetic eschatology, Christ).

[31]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 715.

[32]Childs, *Biblical Theology: A Proposal*, 5.

[33]Childs, *Biblical Theology: A Proposal*, 6-7.

[34]Morgan, "Gabler's Bicentenary," 164. Brian Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 4-5, also emphasizes theological interpretation in contrast with an objectivist approach.

[35]Sandys-Wunsch, "G. T. Zachariae's Contribution to Biblical Theology," 17.

be influenced by changing philosophical systems.[36] The underlying problem is that biblical theology simultaneously wants both a historical treatment of the biblical text *and* a means to unify it, but the inability of this historical method to produce unity then requires a supplementary method that is not historical and undermines this fundamental emphasis. Historical-critical methodology instead tends to fragment the biblical text (e.g., sources, literary strata) and thus shifts the ground of historical meaning, which then must account for potentially varying dates for different portions of the same passage and accordingly determine for each what literary context is relevant and what is not. Historical meaning itself thus disintegrates under the same historical-critical method used to discover it.[37] Indeed, a little over a century after Gabler's seminal treatise, George Gilbert assessed his impact through (critical) scholars who "have brought out with hitherto unknown clearness the rich variety of Scripture" and "helped to destroy that idea of the unity of the Bible which prevailed before the Reformation."[38]

J. C. K. von Hofmann's salvation-history approach. A nineteenth-century scholar worth extended consideration because of his influence on contemporary evangelical biblical theology is J. C. K. von Hofmann, one of the key representatives of a "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) approach.[39] Even though von Hofmann's ideas are not adopted wholesale today, his salvation-historical framework is sometimes treated as axiomatic among evangelicals. For example, while acknowledging that there are different definitions of biblical theology historically, Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum define its current usage in terms of salvation history and favorably cite Geerhardus Vos's evangelical redemptive-historical approach as a "legitimate" approach to biblical theology.[40] While there are certainly ways of using salvation history less as a guiding framework and

[36]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 137-38.
[37]See Brevard Childs, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie. Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Donner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 90-91.
[38]George Gilbert, "Biblical Theology: Its History and Its Mission. II.," *The Biblical World* 6 (1895): 358.
[39]John Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *JETS* 44, no. 1 (2001): 6, 8-10.
[40]Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 27-28, 30, 32.

more as one aspect among many, its use as a framework is sufficiently widespread to merit attention here.[41]

Noting the influences on von Hofmann's approach and scholarly responses to it provide helpful context for his ideas. Hans-Joachim Kraus passingly mentions both theological influences on von Hofmann's *Heilsgeschichte* (e.g., Cocceius, Johann Albrecht Bengel, Friedrich Schleiermacher) and influences from the study of history (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Leopold von Ranke).[42] In a lengthy article about von Hofmann's thought, Ernst-Wilhelm Wendebourg concludes that von Hofmann "basically remains rooted in romantic thought. . . . It is therefore understandable that Hofmann is seen again and again in close proximity to idealism . . . a child of romantic and idealistic historical speculation."[43] When Diestel's magisterial work was published in 1869, he referred to von Hofmann's approach as a "new school," since it had begun to be set forth relatively recently in 1841 in the first volume of *Weissagung und Erfüllung im alten and im neuen Testamente* ("Prophecy and Fulfillment in the Old and New Testaments").[44]

Von Hofmann saw his prophecy-fulfillment scheme as especially able to encompass the biblical material.[45] This scheme is based on knowing "the

[41]E.g., James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 41, 43, 46-47. Benjamin Gladd writes, "At the heart of biblical theology is the unfolding nature of God's plan of redemption as set forth in the Bible," which is not a "'flat' biblical theology." See Gladd, "Series Preface," in *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, by L. Michael Morales (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), ix-x. On the popular level (Crossway, 9Marks, Gospel Coalition), note the emphasis on tracing progressive revelation, the divine "saving plan," and the story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation in Chris Bruno, "10 Things You Should Know About Biblical Theology," Crossway, February 10, 2017, www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-biblical-theology/. Likewise, Graeme Goldsworthy acknowledges the debate concerning what biblical theology is but ultimately emphasizes a historical process and favorably cites Vos' definition oriented toward progressive revelation and salvation history. See Goldsworthy, "What Is the Discipline of Biblical Theology," 9Marks, February 26, 2010, www.9marks.org/article/what-discipline-biblical-theology/. Though not as emphatic, see the reference to "the biblical story of redemptive history" in "Biblical Theology," Gospel Coalition, accessed June 1, 2020, www.thegospelcoalition.org/topics/biblical-theology/.

[42]Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), 226.

[43]Ernst-Wilhelm Wendebourg, "Die Heilsgeschichtliche Theologie J. Chr. K. v. Hofmanns in ihrem Verhältnis zur romantischen Weltanschauung," *ZTK* 52, no. 1 (1955): 103-4. Original: "Im Grunde bleibt er dem romantischen Denken verhaftet. . . . Es ist darum verständlich, daß Hofmann immer wieder in großer Nähe zum Idealismus gesehen ist . . . ein Kind der Romantik und der idealistischen Geschichtsspekulation."

[44]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 699.

[45]J. C. K. von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung im alten and im neuen Testamente* (Nördlingen: Beck, 1841), 1:1.

starting point and endpoint of [salvation] history."[46] He explains, "If it is true that all things, big and small, serve to bring about the unification of the world under its head, Christ [see Eph 1:10], then there is nothing in world history in which is not something divine [note the Romantic impulse], nothing for which the promise must remain necessarily foreign." In particular, he boldly asserts, "Israel in all its institutions and in its history is a prophecy of the future."[47] Kraus describes von Hofmann as seeing a "congruence" between revelation and history, as well as a close relationship between "act-revelation" (*Tatoffenbarung*) and "word-revelation" (*Wortoffenbarung*).[48] It is probably no coincidence that these two types of revelation are also foundational to Vos's evangelical redemptive-historical approach.[49]

Significantly, von Hofmann is working with a broader definition of *prophecy* that goes beyond predictive statements made in direct speech and includes historical parallels, similar to typology.[50] He generalizes that "a future event can also be depicted in an earlier one and presented in advance," like a Roman triumphal procession did for Caesar Augustus.[51] Salvation history and typology are also frequently linked in modern evangelical biblical theology. Citing von Hofmann, Graeme Goldsworthy makes this connection in his own salvation-historical approach. Goldsworthy further links typology on the hermeneutical level to *sensus plenior*.[52]

Salvation history and typology are in turn intertwined with the concept of progressive revelation, which is not simply about revelation taking place gradually over time and climaxing in Christ but emphasizes the increase in substantially new revelatory knowledge resulting in significantly greater

[46]Von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 3. The original reads "that history" (*jener Geschichte*), where "that" refers to the "history of the works of salvation" (*Geschichte des Heilswerkes*) in the previous sentence.
[47]Von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 7.
[48]Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung*, 227-28.
[49]Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 6-7. Vos engages Gabler, rationalism, and the influence of evolutionary theory (9-11), but the index of subjects and names does not include von Hofmann.
[50]Regarding the connection to typology, see Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 699, 720; Eberhard Hübner, *Schrift und Theologie: Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie Joh. Chr. K. von Hofmanns* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1956), 89-90, 92-95.
[51]Von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 15. The preceding context uses the example of Abraham's justification in Gen 15:6 being fulfilled by his obedience (Jas 2:23).
[52]Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 242-44, 247, 243-56.

clarity concerning Christ and the gospel. The concept of progressive revelation itself has been attributed to Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752). He explains, "Gradually God advances in laying open the mysteries of his kingdom, whether the things themselves or the times. What was kept concealed initially was then later understood openly. What is given in whatever age, the saints should embrace it, taking no more, accepting no less."[53] Bengel's statement expresses not only the self-evidently gradual nature of revelation but also the relative obscurity of revelation in earlier stages. Such initial concealment suggests that the Old Testament is inherently insufficient and unclear, especially its earlier portions.

The significance of Bengel's principle was felt already in the nineteenth century, with Gustav Friedrich Oehler calling it "at that time . . . quite new," and Franz Delitzsch appreciating it as "one of the most precious utterances of Bengel's."[54] Although predating von Hofmann (1810–1877) by over a century, Bengel himself can be seen as another precursor of a salvation-historical approach, as shown through his interest in (linear) biblical chronology.[55] Bengel's special attention to the book of Revelation as the crown jewel of Scripture accords with his views on progressive revelation and salvation history.[56] The confluence of progressive revelation with salvation history is thus quite natural for Bengel, as it is today.

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[53]Johann Alberti Bengel, *Ordo Temporum* (Stuttgart: J. B. Mezler, 1770), 257 (§8.1). Original: "Gradatim Deus in patefaciendis regni sui mysteriis progreditur, sive res ipsae spectentur, sive tempora. Opertum tenetur initio, quod deinde apertum cernitur. Quod quavis aetate datur, id sancti debent amplecti, non plus sumere, non minus accipere." See Sailhamer's translation in *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 125. Relatedly, see Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Sechzig erbauliche Reden über die Offenbarung Johannis*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: J. C. Erhard, 1758), 505. Bengel writes, "God deals with his secrets sacredly: he does not give to all everything at once, but each one at the right time in the right order and measure, to whom it belongs, according to his will." Original: "Gott gehet mit seinen Geheimnissen heiliglich um: er gibt nicht allen alles auf einmal, sondern ein jedes zu rechter Zeit in rechter Ordnung and Maasse, denen, für die es gehöret, nach seinem Willen."

[54]Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, rev. trans. George Day (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 31n3; Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. Samuel Ives Curtiss (repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 38n1. Delitzsch uses it to explain why the protoevangelium in Gen 3:15 "should be first recognized so late, and should be first fully and completely disclosed through the New Testament" (38).

[55]Charles Fritsch, "Bengel, the Student of Scripture," *Int* 5, no. 2 (1951): 205, 212-14; Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 4, 175-76.

[56]Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair Reynolds and Eunice Paul (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1983), 30-33; Julien Lambinet, "Les principes de la méthode exégétique de J. A. Bengel (1687–1752), piétiste du Württemberg," *Ephemerides Theologicae*

Back to von Hofmann, like Gabler he also departs from a traditional view of inspiration but in a different way, saying, "Every working of the Spirit on men in his service may be called inspiration." His broadened view of inspiration includes the example of the Spirit coming on Samson and enabling him tear a lion into pieces like a young goat (Judg 14:6), such that "wherever a man says or does something, which is willed by God for an extraordinary purpose, there is a wonder and inspiration." This understanding of inspiration to include both what someone "says or does" corresponds to the aforementioned categories of "word-revelation" (*Wortoffenbarung*) and "act-revelation" (*Tatoffenbarung*). In the same context, von Hofmann explicitly rejects the traditional limitation of inspiration to the writing of Scripture as a "willful limitation of a word of far-reaching significance."[57]

Together with his Christian interpretation of history, von Hofmann's broadened definitions of both prophecy and inspiration correspondingly encompass certain historical events or acts. Thus, von Hofmann argues, "All progress of the history of this people [i.e., Israel] is thereby explained as the progress of the history of salvation, since its result was the circumstances of the birth of Jesus." Unlike other national histories, "the history of Israel serves as preparation for Christ." For its part, the Old Testament "is a predepiction of Christ and his transfigured community." For this purpose of presenting Christ in the world are "history and prophecy at the same time," even "prophesying history" ("weissagenden Geschichte") and the work of the Spirit.[58] Von Hofmann thus blurs the line between prophecy and history.

By now it should be apparent how von Hofmann's salvation-historical approach to biblical theology worked, including its dependence on broadened conceptions of prophecy and inspiration. Diestel characterizes von Hofmann thus: "History, above all that of the OT, is the outworking of the divine economy; this kingdom-history is understood as the main theological purpose, not in its natural conditionality and concrete reality,

Lovanienses 89, no. 4 (2013): 253, 257-58, 265-68; Martin Brecht, "Johann Albrecht Bengels Theologie der Schrift," *ZTK* 64, no. 1 (1967): 105-9, 111-16.

[57]Von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 25-26.

[58]Von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 36, 39-40.

which is indeed only a shell, but only in so far as the individual events are somehow predepictions of Christ." This approach is obviously a far cry from historical-critical approaches, which center on historical-critical results ("reality") while often offering much less in relation to Christ as seen above. Diestel, himself a critical scholar, sees von Hofmann as disinterested in historical facts, valuing only symbols, types, and prophecy, and pejoratively characterizes him as a "theosopher [who] does not want to know that the OT is also a tradition."[59] Though not a traditional conservative either, von Hofmann, for his part, subtitled his work "A Theological Approach" ("Ein theologischer Versuch"), which contrasts with critical approaches.[60]

Accusations of theosophy aside, it is true that what drives von Hofmann is not the authorially intended, historically situated meaning of the Old Testament text. Instead, says Diestel, "The entire Old Testament is only important as a long chain of divine acts and divine speech." He sees von Hofmann's approach as naive and focusing on "only witnesses of revelation" rather than "of religious faith" (e.g., Gabler).[61] Sailhamer, who also engages von Hofmann at length, highlights the subtle but significant "tendency to reduce Scripture to the role of witness to revelation, rather than the source of revelation . . . [i.e.,] the orthodox notion that revelation rests in the written words of Scripture."[62] Arlis John Ehlen relatedly says of von Hofmann, "It is the *Heilsgeschichte* itself that is primary. The Scriptures are secondary, the faithful deposit of the historical development of revelation."[63]

Although evangelicals would never go this far, those who embrace salvation history as a framework for biblical theology still need to discern this

[59]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 699, 705.

[60]Von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung*, 1. Regarding von Hofmann's merely relative theological conservatism, see John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 104. Rogerson writes, "Delitzsch . . . stayed much closer to Confessional orthodoxy than did Hofmann."

[61]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 699.

[62]Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 65.

[63]Arlis John Ehlen, "Old Testament Theology as *Heilsgeschichte*," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 35, no. 9 (1964): 532. Similarly, he sees in Wizenmann, an eighteenth-century precursor of von Hofmann, the belief that "history is the primary thing, and the testimony to it given by the Scriptures is already one step removed; theology must be interested primarily in the former rather than the latter" (528-29). See also Gustav Weth, *Die Heilsgeschichte: Ihr universeller und ihr individueller Sinn in der offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1931), 87.

inherent tension, lest it lead to confusing the relationship between revelation and Scripture (i.e., all Scripture is revelation), and correspondingly that between salvation history and Scripture, which should be distinguished.[64] Sailhamer further characterizes von Hofmann thus: "It was not the text of Scripture that was messianic. It was history itself that was messianic. It was not Israel's historical writings that were messianic but the history that Israel itself experienced."[65] Whereas biblical theology is concerned with exegesis of authorial meaning, von Hofmann's approach instead focuses on "witnesses of [divine] revelation" within the Old Testament and construes them in a unifying salvation-historical framework.

Von Hofmann's salvation-historical framework is certainly preferable for evangelicals compared to many other frameworks discussed above. His Christocentrism is naturally also quite appealing for many evangelicals. Nevertheless, what must be borne in mind is that von Hofmann's framework relies heavily on the New Testament and is not rigorously based on an exegesis of the Old Testament text. The aforementioned critique of the use of external, often philosophical systems to achieve unity in biblical theology thus applies again to this extrinsic salvation-historical framework. Martin Brecht's assessment of Bengel applies to salvation-historical approaches generally: "Scripture as a system . . . is not detached from chronology. . . . The system of chronological-economic thought has for Bengel the same significance as metaphysics for orthodoxy. It is the framework of his thought structure. . . . Chronology thus constitutes the unity of Scripture."[66]

As suitable as it can be as a Christian philosophy of history or even as a provisional framework for biblical theology, the problem with using chronology to organize Scripture is that at best it produces a weak unity because chronology can unify just about anything historical. Putting things

[64]Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 67. An example of this confusion can be found in Richard Gaffin, "The Redemptive-Historical View," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley Porter and Beth Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 91-93. Despite his affirmation that "Scripture is itself revelation," he also calls it "a witness to revelation," which confuses the issue. Of similar effect is his use of the category of "deed revelation" alongside "word revelation."

[65]Sailhamer, "Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," 8.

[66]Brecht, "Johann Albrecht Bengels Theologie der Schrift," 115.

on a timeline automatically yields a kind of temporal-sequential unity. Certainly salvation history also provides a high-level framework and story line that includes creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Nevertheless, it does not deal adequately with the many-sided features of the Old Testament text and can be reductionistic with respect to exegesis of the Old Testament. Salvation history as a kind of unifying historical-theological principle for Scripture cannot be disproven (for the Christian), but it does not prove much about the literary and textual unity of Scripture either. Though writing about the biblical theology movement (see below), Childs aptly points out, "By stressing history, the fragmentation of the Bible which was associated with literary criticism was overcome. Behind all the sources and redactions was the one continuing line that joins the Old and the New Testament."[67] In other words, emphasis on historical continuity enables one to overcome fragmentation of the text of Scripture. The same could be said of evangelical reliance on salvation history as a unifying framework, even if the nature of this fragmentation has less to do with critical scholarship and more with the inherent difficulty of perceiving the unity of Scripture on rigorously exegetical grounds. Either way, the literary and textual unity of Scripture remains unaddressed.

Although von Hofmann's approach may still be considered biblical insofar as it accords with certain important aspects of biblical teaching, salvation history for him remains first and foremost a historical-theological framework, not a rigorously exegetical one that gives full voice to the meaning of each book and its constituent passages. After analyzing examples of von Hofmann's exegesis, Eberhard Hübner concludes that von Hofmann "is committed to theological exegesis" and recognizes historical issues (some of which are historical-*critical*) but subordinates them to theological interests.[68] These theological interests are not only salvation historical but sometimes from systematic theology.[69] Thus, his exegesis "is

[67]Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 40; see also Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 84.
[68]Hübner, *Schrift und Theologie*, 94, followed by Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung*, 229.
[69]For salvation-historical influences, see Hübner, *Schrift und Theologie*, 84-90. For systematic theology, see 82 (analogy of faith), 91.

not in the first place determined by historical and philological factors but theological ones."[70] The problem is not that von Hofmann's exegesis naturally involved presuppositions (as all exegesis does), even theological ones, but that the fundamental distinctiveness of biblical theology from a priori theological frameworks is compromised in his salvation-historical "theological exegesis." Even if some historical-critical issues are largely excluded for evangelicals, the above discussion still relates to some evangelical use of salvation history for biblical theology.

While having merit for a Christian view of history and a theologically based Christocentrism, its linear, chronological nature as a framework for biblical theology is also reductionistic because Old Testament books and especially the Old Testament canon in their final form(s) do not fit smoothly into a linear-chronological framework, even if this framework is combined with a major biblical theme such as salvation or redemption (i.e., salvation/redemptive history). In order for the Old Testament material to be made to fit this framework, the Old Testament canon must be broken apart (because the books are not in chronological order), its books rearranged, and then the material within each book sometimes also rearranged (e.g., Psalms, Daniel).[71] The Christocentric witness of the Old Testament would also be better demonstrated from first principles, that is, exegesis.

It is true that Scripture tells of a clear beginning and end to history and as such has an important linear element in its *message*, but its canonical *form* in both Old and New Testaments is a mixture of chronological and nonchronological, even cyclical elements (e.g., Kings in relation to the

[70]Hübner, *Schrift und Theologie*, 88. Original: "ist nicht in erster Linie an historischen und philologischen, sondern an theologischen Tatbeständen gemessen." Likewise, Hübner says regarding another example on 89, "Hofmann's biblical exegesis stands under an entire determined heuristic principle" ("Hofmanns Schriftauslegung einem ganz bestimmten heuristischen Prinzip untersteht"). See also Wendebourg, "Heilsgeschichtliche Theologie J. Chr. K. v. Hofmanns," 73; Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung*, 228.

[71]Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 77: "To work from the final form is to resist any method which seeks critically to shift the canonical ordering. Such an exegetical move occurs whenever an overarching category such as *Heilsgeschichte* subordinates the peculiar canonical profile, or a historical-critical reconstruction attempts to refocus the picture according to its own standards of aesthetics or historical accuracy." See also Christopher Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 30-31, 72, 92; Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 170, who cites the examples of Ruth and Chronicles as chronologically displaced in the Tanak.

preexilic prophetic books and Chronicles, as well as the four Gospels).[72] Since biblical theology emphasizes the categories of the Bible itself, this form must be thoroughly respected, even as we abstract its message from its form and contents. Certainly, this canonical form has major linear elements (e.g., Genesis–Kings; Revelation) and is more linear than it is cyclical, but a linear chronological framework still cannot do justice to the full scope of biblical material as we have it in its canonical form. Christopher Seitz thus distinguishes between canonical Scripture's own presentation of history and historical-critical linear presentations.[73]

Salvation history as a unifying framework ultimately depends not on exegeting the authorial meaning of the Old Testament but on a Christian view of history more broadly. Even though evangelicals (including myself) affirm this view of history, there remains a crucial difference between affirming the *reality* of salvation history and using salvation history as a *unifying framework* for biblical theology. Likewise, a Christian philosophy of history that encompasses the biblical witness (i.e., from the top down), even if it is supported by select key passages, should not be equated with demonstrating the literary, textual, and ultimately theological unity of the Old Testament from the ground up.[74] Using salvation history as a unifying framework for biblical theology thus runs the risk of missing significant parts of the historical meaning of the Old Testament text because it does not arise organically from exegesis. It is as though the theological systems that concerned Gabler, as well as the universal ideas that he essentially substituted for them and the philosophical systems used by others, were in turn replaced by von Hofmann by a salvation-historical framework. None of these frameworks should be confused with a unity thoroughly based on exegesis of the historical meaning of biblical authors.

[72]See Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 159, who refers to the "suspension" of the canonical story line in the Latter Prophets and in the Writings until its resumption in the book of Daniel. Scobie also draws attention to cyclical and/or nonlinear elements in the Bible (*Ways of Our God*, 152-53, 192).

[73]Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 69-72. However, for Seitz the figural version of history in the canon does not rely much on predictive prophecy, as its views of providence and divine sovereignty focus on "retrospective accordance and typological fit" (69).

[74]Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 56.

To be sure, modern evangelical approaches to biblical theology that employ salvation history often combine it with extensive, fruitful exegetical work.[75] The continuing issue, however, is that when salvation history is used as a major unifying principle, the priority of the historical author's meaning can get confused. Exegetical fruit from such eclectic approaches is always a helpful contribution to our knowledge of the Bible, but insofar as biblical theology seeks an exegetically derived unity of Scripture, the classic problems remain, whether we look at modern approaches, von Hofmann, Gabler, Bengel, or many others. Moreover, it is probably no coincidence that the concepts of salvation history, typology, and progressive revelation favor the New Testament over the Old Testament, in accordance with the views of von Hofmann, Gabler, and Bengel.[76] The aforementioned vague relationship between biblical theology and the study of history is thus reflected not only in a history-of-religions approach (later shaped by Julius Wellhausen) but also in that of salvation history.

Old Testament theology during the last hundred years. In the twentieth century, the influence of history of religions and salvation history on biblical theology continued in the well-known works of both Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. Defining the "concern" of Old Testament theology as being "to construct a complete picture of the OT realm of belief," Eichrodt relates this task to "a double aspect" of "comparative study of religions" (even "constant reference" thereto) and of "looking on towards the New Testament . . . [in] historical development," the latter involving a

[75]E.g., Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007); Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). Hasel refers to Eduard König's esteem for the reliability of the OT and call for the use of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation but still characterizes König's work as a "hybrid" that includes "a history of the development of Israelite religion" (*Old Testament Theology*, 25).

[76]Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 31n3: "Bengel himself wrote nothing on the Old Testament, except as his *Ordo Temporum* includes the Old Testament. . . . Disjointed suggestive hints in connection with the Old Testament are to be found scattered everywhere in his numerous writings." Andrew Helmbold notes that early in his career Bengel worked with Hochstetter on a German Bible "wherein the punctuation was made to conform to the Hebrew acccents [sic]" and "wr[o]te an essay on the Hebrew accents," and later in life, he wrote a preface to his son-in-law's commentary on the Minor Prophets. See Helmbold, "J. A. Bengel:—'Full of Light,'" *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6, no. 3 (1963): 73.

"movement [which] does not come to rest until the manifestation of Christ, in whom the noblest powers of the OT find their fulfilment."[77] These two aspects broadly align with history of religions and salvation history. Eichrodt adds that the unity of the Testaments is not only historical but also consists of "a mighty living reality" of "the irruption of the Kingship of God into this world and its establishment here."[78]

Von Rad does not attempt a complete picture of Israel's faith but instead focuses on the "credal statements," viewed in relation to "those contexts in the saving history [n.b.] in which it was arranged by Israel." Over time, these statements "grow into . . . enormous masses of traditions" and "are completely tied up with history." Elsewhere, von Rad relatedly identifies the subject matter of Old Testament theology as "Israel's own explicit assertions about Jahweh." These statements focus on the relationship between Yahweh and Israel specifically with respect to "continuing divine activity in history," that is, "divine acts in history," as regarded by Israel's faith. Von Rad has in mind not something "systematically arranged" but "many traditions which little by little combined into ever larger complexes of tradition. Theologically, these accumulations were in a state of constant flux."[79] In their respective ways, the works of Eichrodt and von Rad thus show the influence of history of religions and salvation history. Even von Rad's typical association with tradition history can be related to the history of religion.[80] It is true that von Rad contrasts his approach with

[77]Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:25-26.

[78]Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* 1:26.

[79]Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 1:vi, 105-6, 112.

[80]Rolf Rendtorff discusses the relationship between von Rad and a "comparative" (*vergleichende*) approach to *Religionsgeschichte*, including his references to elements of neighboring religions. See Rendtorff, "Gerhard von Rad und Religionsgeschichte," in *Theologie in Israel und in den Nachbarkulturen*, ed. Manfred Oeming et al. (Münster: LIT, 2004), 18-21. For the relationship of *Traditionsgeschichte* to *Religionsgeschichte*, see Henning Paulsen, "Traditionsgeschichtliche Methode und religionsgeschichtliche Schule," *ZTK* 75, no. 1 (1978): 26, commenting on Gunkel (whose influence can be seen in von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1:v), "The distinction and convergence [of tradition-historical method] with religion-history are altogether not obvious. . . . The effect of a certain interchangeability of religion-history and tradition-history can arise" ("Unterschied und Konvergenz mit der Religionsgeschichte werden durchaus nicht ersichtlich. . . . der Eindruck einer gewissen Austauschbarkeit von Religions- und Traditionsgeschichte enstehen konnte").

the critical reconstruction of Israel's religion, but his interest in Israel's historical traditions is still a diachronic retracing of the development of these religious ideas.[81]

The uncertain relationship between biblical theology and the study of history appears again in the so-called biblical theology movement, also of the twentieth century. This movement emphasized that the Bible was a theological book and a unity, while also making "God's revelation of himself in history central to biblical theology."[82] There is some resemblance to von Hofmann's approach here.[83] Craig Bartholomew notes that this movement's "emphasis on God's acts in history," though seemingly solving some problems, ultimately was criticized by James Barr and Langdon Gilkey, who exposed its attempt to strike a middle course between church and academy, orthodoxy and liberalism.[84] Relatedly, the uncertain relationship between the biblical text and extrabiblical sources as material for biblical theology has persisted.[85]

From an evangelical perspective, an article by Elmer Martens that surveys the field from 1978–2007 beginning with Walter Kaiser brings us closer to the present day. Martens characterizes Kaiser's scheme as "giving progressive revelation through history a prominent place in his outline." Even as canonical and narrative approaches have arisen (e.g., Brevard Childs and John Goldingay, respectively), Martens notes the continuing problem of "how 'history' as a category should function within an OT theology." Reminiscent of the nineteenth-century scholars discussed above, he points out the strengths of a historical-chronological approach

[81]For von Rad's use of the term *religion*, see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1:v, 112. According to Rendtorff, modern *Religionsgeschichte* tends more toward "the reconstruction of the history of religion of *Israel* . . . with only sporadic sidelong glances at other ANE religions" "Gerhard von Rad und Religionsgeschichte," 22; ("die Rekonstruktion der Geschichte der Religions Israels . . . mit nur sporadischen Seitenblicken auf andere altorientalische Religionen").

[82]Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation," 5.

[83]Childs highlights the movement's emphasis on "the revelation of God in history," which was not new and became "the central characteristic of the Erlangen Theology of the mid-nineteenth century" (*Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 39). Von Hofmann taught at Erlangen during this time. Wendebourg refers to him as "Der Erlanger Theologe" ("Die heilsgeschichtliche Theologie J. Chr. K. v. Hofmanns," 64), and Hübner calls him the "bedeutendste Vertreter der sog. Erlanger Schule" (*Schrift und Theologie*, 9).

[84]Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation," 4-10.

[85]Childs, *Biblical Theology: A Proposal*, 8-9.

as "the ease with which one can then organize material into eras" and the formation of a "bridge from the OT to the NT [that] is then easy to cross." He also observes that since von Hofmann, "Conservatives have had a penchant for the category of history as a way of ordering the OT," which he characterizes as a "linear approach." Martens himself further believes that history should be "given an important but not an exclusive place" in Old Testament theology. Although he mentions challenges to a historical approach, such as critical interpretations of history and the difficulty of deriving theology from history, he remains committed to the "historical dimension" and "historic progression" in Old Testament theology. Among other things, Martens ultimately calls for a nuanced "deference to 'history'" and attention to "the dynamic movement in the biblical message" (cf., Eichrodt as cited above), whatever the approach. His comments show preference for a nuanced historical approach, even as he sees possible additional potential for the canonical approach, the viability of a "qualified thematic approach," and "large possibilities" for a narrative approach.[86]

Of course, a narrative approach has some natural resonances with Martens's interests, since history is naturally conceived of as a narrative. What Martens apparently does not see as a significant problem are the aforementioned issues with an exegetically extrinsic linear-chronological framework for biblical theology as it relates to the exegesis of the Old Testament and its literary and textual unity. Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm's recent work, *Understanding Old Testament Theology*, engages many more recent works and somewhat similarly classifies approaches to Old Testament theology as emphasizing history (whether events or narrative), theme (whether single or multiple), and/or contexts such as canon.[87] In any case, the aforementioned fundamental challenges to biblical theology still remain, such as its distinction from systematic theology and other external frames of reference, the nature of historical methodology, and the quest for the unity of Scripture.

[86]Elmer Martens, "Old Testament Theology Since Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.," *JETS* 50, no. 4 (2007): 673, 675-77, 690.

[87]Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm, *Understanding Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020). In addition to canonical context, this work also discusses approaches based on the reader's context, such as Jewish biblical theology and postmodern approaches.

THE DEBATE OVER THE CENTER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

As seen above, works on Old Testament theology often deal with themes. In some cases, a single theme or set of related themes is used as an organizing principle, or center, especially in the writing and presentation of Old Testament theology. Richard Davidson lists fifty (!) such centers that have been proposed by various Old Testament and/or biblical theologies.[88] Davidson and Martens both raise the issue of how a particular organizing theme is chosen and verified as correct.[89] Occasionally, proposals are made for *a* center (or something merely central), not *the* center.[90] Still, there appears to be a high level of subjectivity in the choice of any kind of center. When a single theme is insisted on as the center, there is the additional risk of reductionism, which leads Gerhard Hasel to seek a "multiplex approach with the multitrack treatment of longitudinal themes."[91] Proposals involving formulas or complex/multiple themes as a center (e.g., James Hamilton's "God's glory in salvation through judgment" involves three or four concepts) provide broader coverage but can still be charged with reductionism.[92] We might ask how many major themes there are in the Old Testament (ten to thirty?) and what they are.

To move the discussion beyond unnecessary either-or dichotomies, we should first recognize that these major themes are interrelated. After all, we can probably agree that such themes as God, promise, covenant, Israel, God's glory, God's kingdom, salvation, wisdom, temple, and so on are all major themes and are interrelated, even if these interrelationships can be

[88]Richard M. Davidson, "Back to the Beginning: Genesis 1–3 and the Theological Center of Scripture," in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, ed. Daniel Heinz, Jiří Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Dept., Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009), 5-9.

[89]Davidson, "Back to the Beginning," 10; Martens, "Old Testament Theology," 676.

[90]E.g., Dane Ortlund, "Is Jeremiah 33:14-26 a 'Centre' to the Bible? A Test Case in Inter-canonical Hermeneutics," *EvQ* 84, no. 2 (April 2012): 120. Ortlund argues that this passage is a center but not the center to the Bible. Andrew Abernethy and Gregory Goswell call the theme of God's kingship "central" but not "the center." See Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 5.

[91]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 205.

[92]Regarding formulas, see Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 143-45, 151-53. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.

construed in different ways.[93] It is also still possible that one or a few themes are more central or even the center. To be sure, knowledge of major themes is often arrived at through works that emphasize one or a small number of them as *the* center, but as more and more major themes are discerned and set forth as such, the actual benefit may be a deeper awareness of major themes in the Old Testament, simply because it is impossible for all of the proposals for a single center to be correct.

In view of this, a logical next step would be to discern the overall configuration of major themes and whether a true center can be demonstrated. Without such a perspective, it will be difficult for biblical theologians who use this approach to get beyond various proposals of a small number of these themes vying for preeminence. At the same time, whether an eschatological Messiah is a major theme in the Old Testament is highly disputed, and this question affects the overall configuration of major themes. While attempting no definitive list of what these major themes are, the present work will argue that the eschatological Messiah is not only a major theme but the integrative center of the Old Testament (see below), since he often appears in compositionally strategic passages (e.g., nexus passages) as the climactic expression of major Old Testament themes, starting in the Pentateuch and across the Tanak. There is thus a relationship between the literary and textual integration achieved by nexus passages and the exegetically derived, theological integration of the Old Testament in the eschatological Messiah. Significantly, this center is supported by exegesis that is also sensitive to the composition of Old Testament books and of the Tanak.

Even as I hold to the eschatological Messiah as center, it is important to recognize that scholars seem to be working with different definitions of what a center is. Hasel himself contrasts "an organizational center on the basis of which the OT can be systematized" with "a theological center." Elsewhere he refers to an "organizational center" as a "central concept," "central idea," or "central element." He nevertheless objects to making "a

[93]For a recognition of multiple major themes, minor themes, and their grouping, see Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 87, 91.

single concept or a certain formula into an abstract divining-rod with which all OT expressions and testimonies are combined into a unified system," since "the multiplex and multiform nature of the OT resists such handling of its materials and thoughts." On the other hand, Hasel's theological center "functions as a unifying aspect despite its richness and variety, but it is not capable of being used as an organizing or systematizing principle or criterion for writing an OT theology." As for this theological center, "God/Yahweh is the dynamic, unifying center of the OT." He emphasizes that this "dynamic, unifying center" is not "a static organizing principle on the basis of which an OT theology can be structured," while still ultimately relating to the Old Testament's "hidden inner unity."[94] Thus, Hasel's standard discussion includes at least two definitions of *center*.

In the buildup to these conclusions, Hasel also treats some proposals that imply still other conceptions of what a center is. For example, his discussion of von Rad's later views on the centrality of the Deuteronomistic theology of history seems to concern another kind of center: the center of the Old Testament and its theology as yet another (component) theology, that is, the Deuteronomistic theology of history.[95] Even though Hasel classifies von Rad under the category of "a single concept, theme, motif, or idea as the center of the OT," von Rad's use of the Deuteronomistic theology of history as a center remains distinct and considerably more complex than other views in this category. Perhaps Hasel's preference for a theological center has influenced his lumping all other proposals together as "organizational center[s]."[96] In any case, von Rad's center still raises questions of how the Deuteronomistic theology of history is determined, what it is, and why it should be preferred.

Hasel also cites Siegfried Herrmann's view that Deuteronomy itself is the center of the Old Testament because it captures so many key Old Testament issues and ideas.[97] Proposing a biblical book as center is yet another

[94]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 163, 139, 141-42, 144-45, 168, 171, 206.
[95]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 146-50, which use the language of a "secret center" and "historico-theological center."
[96]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 151, 160, 163.
[97]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 156-57.

conception of what *center* can mean, distinct from defining it as a single or small number of concepts (e.g., covenant), a theological center (i.e., God), or a component theology (e.g., the Deuteronomist's). This kind of center may be called a textual center and can consist of a text of any length, whether a book or a passage. Davidson, for example, proposes Genesis 1–3 instead.[98] Like von Rad taking the Deuteronomistic theology of history as center, taking a biblical book such as Deuteronomy as center requires additional explanation as to what precisely the nature of such a center is. Ironically, there is a certain recursiveness to both types of centers, in which the original question concerning the center of the Old Testament (a text) and of Old Testament theology has led to proposals of centers that require us to determine what an embedded component theology is or what a constituent text means. The precise meanings of these centers are not self-evident, unlike single- or few-concept centers (e.g., covenant) or Hasel's theological center (i.e., God/Yahweh).

Thus, the center of the Old Testament can refer to a single- or few-concept center, a theological center, a component theology, a textual center, or perhaps something else still. Thus, productive discussion concerning the existence and nature of a center of the Old Testament and Old Testament theology should include clear explanations of what kind of center is meant. An additional distinction should be made between a central concept that attempts to systematize the Old Testament from the top down and a thread that can merely be found in the material itself without necessarily systematizing it.[99] A similarly weaker conception would be that of a "common denominator" in the Old Testament material.[100] Moreover, whereas salvation history has been considered a center, von Hofmann's classic formulation predates the efforts to derive a center from the Old Testament during the last century and instead is focused on a historical-theological framework involving a Christian philosophy of history.[101]

[98]Davidson, "Back to the Beginning," 11-19. Even though Davidson calls his proposal a "theological center" (by which he means "center," it seems; see 5, 9-11), this should not be confused with Hasel's specialized use of the same phrase. See also Ortlund, "Is Jeremiah 33:14-26 a 'Centre,'" 119-38.

[99]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 165-66.

[100]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 162, 168.

[101]Davidson cites Cullmann as an example of a scholar who holds to salvation history as the center of Scripture ("Back to the Beginning," 6). Scobie further adds von Rad, Goppelt, and Ladd (*Ways*

Despite my recognition of more kinds of centers than Hasel, his distinction between an organizational center and a nonorganizational center (e.g., his theological center) is still useful because it highlights the relationship between a proposed center and the writing and presentation of Old Testament theology. He repeatedly points out that proposals for an organizational center cannot do justice to the Old Testament material in all its variety. What Hasel seems to have in mind would be an Old Testament theology whose table of contents organizes the Old Testament material in terms of a static single or few central concept(s), a formula, or the like.[102] Citing David Baker with approval, he believes that there is a unity to the Old Testament but not through a single concept.[103] Hasel thus seems to be objecting to what could also be called punctiliar (e.g., systematizing the entire OT under a single concept) or linear (e.g., a table of contents for an OT theology doing the same) conceptions of a center.[104]

Although Hasel does not use spatial ideas to express his views, other scholars do, such as George Fohrer's "dual concept" around which the Old Testament material can be grouped.[105] Fohrer uses two-dimensional, spatial imagery of the two foci of an ellipse to describe his center (the rule of God and the communion between God and humankind). Baker, in an older

of Our God, 86). For earlier discussion of a center, or principle (*Prinzip*), from de Wette to Eichrodt, see Rudolf Smend, *Die Mitte des Alten Testaments: Exegetische Aufsätze* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 30-40, where this principle is referred to Israel's religion, religious ideas, and religious history. Such a center is obviously quite different from the one that we attempt to derive exegetically in this work.

[102]E.g., Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 160 ("the organizing principle for the writing of an OT theology"), 163 ("an organizational center on the basis of which the OT can be systematized"), 168 ("an organizing or systematizing principle or criterion for writing an OT theology"). For his use of *static* in this way, see references to a "static organizing principle" on 170-71.

[103]Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 167. See also David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 385: "The Old Testament is a unity and has some unifying factor which makes it such. . . . [But] no one unifying factor can adequately embrace the whole." Also, "There is indeed a unity in the Old Testament but it cannot be expressed by a single concept" (386). See also David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 152: "No single concept can sum up the meaning of the whole Old Testament." Baker does believe in the Bible's "unity in diversity" (230-36) and "the centrality of Jesus, the Christ of the Old Testament and the New" (281).

[104]See Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 154. There he criticizes single-center proposals for being based on an "unspoken presupposition which has its roots in philosophical premises going back to scholastic theology of medieval times." He extends this critique to dual centers on 157.

[105]Georg Fohrer, "Das Alte Testament und das Thema 'Christologie,'" *Evangelische Theologie* 30, no. 6 (1970): 295.

edition of one of his works, uses a three-dimensional elliptical cylinder with Christ as center, two foci as God/Yahweh and Israel, concentric layers of the cylinder as election, promise, covenant, kingdom, and so on, and the cylinder's length corresponding to historical time.[106] Adapting Baker's model, Davidson uses a circular cylinder (i.e., no foci) to explain his view of Genesis 1–3 (and its seven major themes) as center.[107] Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays use the spatial imagery of a spiderweb to illustrate what they set forth as the "cohesive center" for the Bible (i.e., God's relational presence), which connects to other major themes but not necessarily always directly.[108]

What these different conceptions of a center suggest is that there still may be a way to describe and envision a satisfactory center for Old Testament theology. It may not be an organizational center in the way that Hasel conceives of it, but neither need it be his theological center, that is, God/Yahweh, which Charles Scobie says is "to state the obvious."[109] As a sort of (lowest) common denominator, the unity that this theological center achieves is naturally weak. The exegetical-compositional, integrative center that I propose is neither organizational nor theological according to Hasel's categories.

Due to their strategic role within their books and within the Old Testament, nexus passages, which should not be confused with textual centers (see above), will help us begin to see an exegetically derived, integrative center of the Old Testament. As I will show first in chapter four, the convergence and use of major themes to prophesy of the eschatological Messiah suggests that he is the exegetical and compositional center of the Pentateuch and its theology.[110] The Pentateuch and its

[106]Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 1st ed., 386.

[107]Davidson, "Back to the Beginning," 26-28. He also uses a many-faceted diamond as an illustration (11, 14, 23, 26). Though it is illustrating a hermeneutical framework for biblical theology rather than a center, see the analogy of a two-dimensional map for three-dimensional reality in Christopher J. H. Wright, "Mission as Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in Bartholomew et al., *Out of Egypt*, 138-40.

[108]J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), 4-5. They contrast this with a wheel, whose spokes all directly connect to the hub.

[109]Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 94.

[110]Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*; Kevin Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

theology in turn are both foundational to the whole Old Testament and have affected the writing and theology of other Old Testament passages and books.[111] As Sailhamer argues, this pentateuchal hope is reinforced by the seams of the Tanak (Deut 34/Josh 1; Mal 4/Ps 1; 2 Chron 36), which provide an overarching structure for the Old Testament and reinforce the same center.[112] He points out that the conclusions of both the Pentateuch and the Prophets look forward to the return of prophecy (Deut 34:10-12 [see also Deut 18:15-18]; Mal 4:5), the opening passages of both the Prophets and the Writings commend meditation on Scripture (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2-3; see also Mal 4:4), and the one who is to "go up" and build the temple in 2 Chronicles 36:23 can be understood as the messianic son of David (see 1 Chron 22:10-11). Several other Old Testament books emphasize this Messiah's coming to an equal or even greater degree as compared with the Pentateuch (e.g., Samuel, Isaiah, the Twelve, Psalms, Daniel), and still others show the clear impact of the Pentateuch's messianic hope (e.g., Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Chronicles) through direct prophecy of this Messiah reinforced by mediating themes such as the Davidic covenant and/or new covenant.

Even though this center is not the center of every Old Testament book when considered individually and hence is not an organizational center, these books still orbit and are within the gravitational pull of the messianic center via the Pentateuch and the Tanak's seams.[113] Since the Old Testament is not one-dimensional, its center and the relationship of this center to the whole can also be envisioned in multiple dimensions. Analogous to the solar system, there is no inherent reason why the distance between each book and this center must be equal, so long as (1) the messianic center itself is sufficiently supported by the Pentateuch, a critical mass of

[111]E.g., Kevin Chen, "Psalm 110: A Nexus for Old Testament Theology," *CTR* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 49-65.

[112]Sailhamer, "Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," 11-23; Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 56, 152, 169, 217-18.

[113]Given the reality of shorter books and books with special emphases (e.g., Song of Songs, Lamentations, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah), it is a lot to ask for any proposed center to be the center of every book without exception. Hamilton also uses solar-system and gravity language and imagery to describe the center of biblical theology without playing it out as I do here (*God's Glory in Salvation*, 53, 355, 512, 555).

additional Old Testament books, and the Tanak's overarching structure; and (2) the remaining books are genuinely connected to this center.

This connection can be immediate or mediated. If immediate, a book may have, in descending order of strength, the same center as the Old Testament, the center of the Old Testament as an explicit major theme (e.g., through prominent messianic prophecies), or the center of the Old Testament as an explicit minor theme (still through messianic prophecy). If mediated, a book may relate to the center of the Pentateuch/Old Testament through relatively indirect intentional foreshadowing of the Messiah (e.g., Judg 5; see chapter 4), mediating themes (e.g., Davidic covenant, new covenant, kingdom, wisdom), and/or historical continuity (e.g., Pentateuch and Joshua through Kings). Moreover, every Old Testament book has the Pentateuch as its literary, textual, and theological foundation, is intertextually related with the Pentateuch, and has the Tanak and its seams as a literary-theological framework. Even though some Old Testament books are not overtly messianic, they are still framed by the Pentateuch's prophecies of exile and the subsequent arrival of the Messiah "in the last days" (Gen 49:1, 8-12; Num 24:14-19; Deut 4:25-28; 31:16-29). In many cases, this eschatological hope is cast in terms of history (e.g., the exodus), which reinforces the unity of Old Testament by linking history and eschatology.[114]

Like the planets in our solar system, each book has its unique character and also exerts its own gravitational pull (e.g., Wisdom literature, Song of Songs), just as Earth and other planets do on their moons and other orbiting objects. This three-dimensional conception of the center of the Old Testament is both dynamic (e.g., planetary and lunar motion) and respects the uniqueness of each book (e.g., its genre). Considered by itself, each planet or book can be investigated for its unique composition and center, even as the eschatological messianic theology of the Pentateuch and the seams of the Tanak (reinforced by other key books and passages) hold the entire dynamic corpus together.

[114]See von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2:112-18, 299-300, 365.

PARAMETERS FOR EVANGELICAL APPROACHES TO OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

Given the inherent challenges to defining and doing biblical theology, as seen above, carving out a space for evangelical Old Testament theology is not straightforward. The influence of Gabler means that biblical theology has strong roots in critical scholarship, including its rejection of a traditional view of inspiration. Moreover, while having a historical emphasis, biblical theology has ambiguous relationships to the study of history and history of religions. Whether from an evangelical perspective or not, biblical theology often also depends on a working solution to the problem of the unity of the Testaments, which is reflected in some proposals for biblical theology favoring the New Testament. Furthermore, there is the related problem that the unifying framework used, whether philosophical or otherwise, is frequently extrinsically imposed on the biblical text, analogous to the dogmatic categories that Gabler wanted to avoid. In this case, the distinction between biblical and systematic theology that he argued for is severely weakened.

Evangelical approaches to Old Testament theology are characterized first and foremost by a high view of biblical inspiration. Sailhamer remarks, "The notion of an inspired text of Scripture has played an important, indeed central, role in the growth and development of OT theology," be it through belief in traditional verbal inspiration or varying degrees of rejection of this doctrine.[115] Indeed, this is the fundamental difference between evangelical biblical scholarship and critical scholarship more broadly, and it is an important one for biblical theology. Evangelical approaches naturally also distinguish between biblical and systematic theology in some way (while sometimes also attempting some integration) and correspondingly follow biblical theology's classic historical emphasis.

Although evangelicals basically agree on the historical accuracy of the biblical record (including miracles) and God's sovereignty over and direct involvement in history, the ambiguous nature of what it means for

[115]Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 152.

biblical theology to be historical carries over from the broader discipline to evangelical approaches. A salvation-historical approach is obviously historical, but *historical* refers here to the unfolding of a historical process and a linear-chronological historical framework for biblical theology. On the other hand, the word *historical* can be used to describe a biblical author's original, historical meaning. This usage concerns what the Bible itself teaches, compared to what meanings might be imposed on it by philosophical or theological frameworks. Here, *historical* does not refer primarily to a historical sequence of events but the historical situatedness of authorial intent. As seen above, Gabler himself used the word in this way when he referred to "a biblical theology, of historical origin, conveying what the holy writers felt about divine matters," in contrast to "a dogmatic theology of didactic origin." Likewise using *historical* with reference to the (authorial and textual) meaning of the Bible itself, he remarks, "Biblical theology, as is proper to historical argument, is always in accord with itself when considered by itself."[116] Gabler's classic proposal was not focused on the historical succession of events recorded in Scripture (e.g., salvation history) but rather on sifting the results of exegesis through universal ideas (or notions), which can then be properly used by dogmatic (systematic) theology.[117]

Within this broader context of biblical theology as a discipline, evangelical biblical theology can thus be historical in more than one way. Salvation-historical approaches are certainly historical, but so are those approaches that thoroughly prioritize historical, authorial meaning without relying on a salvation-historical framework, as in this book. As shown above, this kind of historical emphasis can be traced back to Gabler himself. Sailhamer sees a similar use of the term *historical* earlier in Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781) and even earlier in the seventeenth century (e.g., Salomon Glassius) in connection with the grammatical or literal

[116]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 137. More clearly, biblical theology "deals only with those things which holy men perceived about matters pertinent to religion, and is not made to accommodate our point of view" (144).

[117]Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction," 141-44. Gabler was attentive to the respective eras of biblical authors, but for the purpose of exegesis (139-40).

sense (*sensus literalis*).[118] The "literal, that is historical, sense" (*sensus literalis sive historicus*) is found still earlier, in Martin Luther.[119]

The implication that salvation history should be seen as only one evangelical approach to biblical theology is important because of the strong influence of Vos's evangelical redemptive-historical approach. As mentioned above, Gentry and Wellum hold him in high esteem, even calling him "the evangelical pioneer of a legitimate approach to biblical theology." In their reckoning, biblical theology as a discipline can be traced through two paths, one legitimate and one illegitimate, tied to the Enlightenment, Gabler, and other critical scholars.[120] Wellum and Gentry are right to highlight the major impact that the doctrine of inspiration has on biblical theology, but the problem with their "two [distinct] paths" accounting of biblical theology is that it does not show enough awareness of the likely influence of some ideas from critical scholarship on Vos himself, who conceived of biblical theology as "History of Special Revelation."[121] He explains, "Biblical Theology deals with the material from the historical standpoint, seeking to exhibit the organic growth or development of the truths of Special Revelation from the primitive pre-redemptive Special Revelation given in Eden to the close of the New Testament canon."[122] This conception of biblical theology along with the above discussion of Gabler and von Hofmann shows that Vos's redemptive-historical approach shares

[118]John Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 44 (2001): 195, 198, 201-2, 205-6.

[119]Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 247: "Wherever Luther speaks of the significance of history is usually meant this literal, that is, historical sense." Gerhard Ebeling refers to the "sensus literalis bzw. [respectively] historicus" as a generally accepted foundation for exegesis and also refers to it as the "literal historical sense" (*sensus literalis historicus*). See Ebeling, "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," *ZTK* 48, no. 2 (1951): 182-83; see also Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung*, 9-11.

[120]Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 28-30; see also Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 41-47. His tracing of biblical theology to Scripture itself resembles Scobie (see note 1 above).

[121]Vos, *Biblical Theology*, v. Ehlen says that the approaches of Beck and von Hofmann bear "the specific character of a history of revelation" ("Old Testament Theology as *Heilsgeschichte*," 530). See also Weth, *Heilsgeschichte*, 55, 81, 83, 85, 87.

[122]Vos, *Biblical Theology*, v-vi. He also writes, "Biblical Theology is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible" (5). See also Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 7.

some fundamental categories with nonevangelical approaches, including Gabler's historical emphasis and von Hofmann's emphasis on salvation history, tendency to treat Scripture as witness to past instances of revelation and as a history of revelation, and categorization of revelation into word-revelation and act-revelation.

The influence of Vos on evangelical biblical theology today is well-documented and acknowledged by evangelical scholars themselves.[123] This means that there is a probable trail of influence all the way back to von Hofmann, even if he is only sometimes recognized. Goldsworthy is aware of von Hofmann but still proceeds to say, "That biblical theology is salvation history is a commonly held evangelical position."[124] Without relying on Vos but likewise emphasizing the historical element in terms of historical events, the organization of biblical material into eras, and development over time, Martens's requirement that Old Testament theology emphasize "the historical dimension" and "historic progression" fits well with salvation history. Though he does allow for other approaches to history in Old Testament theology such as canon and story, he still sees canonical approaches (for Martens, those that follow a canonical ordering of the Old Testament books) as problematic because the "dynamic nature of God's interaction with humans is at risk when historic progression is set aside" and because such canonical approaches are "prone to some choppiness."[125] Nevertheless, the major contributions of Sailhamer, Paul House, and Stephen Dempster, for example, still stand on their own merits even though salvation history is not prominent in their work.[126]

Vos deserves credit both for carving out space within the discipline of biblical theology for evangelicals and for leading the way for many subsequent evangelical scholars to follow his general path. Nevertheless, his

[123]Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 9, 19-21; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 31n20, 32n26; Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 43 (including n35).

[124]Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 57; see also Martens, "Old Testament Theology," 676.

[125]Martens, "Old Testament Theology," 677.

[126]Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*; Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 53-57. Dempster recognizes a large block of commentary (Latter Prophets, Ruth through Lamentations) within the narrative story line of the Tanak (*Dominion and Dynasty*, 159).

undeniable impact does not mean that salvation history should be equated with evangelical biblical theology. He set forth an influential way for evangelicals to approach biblical theology, but there is no reason to conclude that it is the only (general) way for evangelicals to approach the topic, nor even that its framework is a required part of an evangelical approach. Neither should such a narrow conception of what it means for biblical theology to be historical (e.g., salvation-historical) be used as a criticism of other approaches that are historical in terms of rigorously holding to the author's historical meaning, especially because both share common ground concerning the historical accuracy of Scripture and God's sovereignty over and direct involvement in history. As argued above, the focus on the historical author's intent is traceable to Gabler himself and is more faithful to what the Bible itself teaches (i.e., the exegesis of passages and books) because it does not invoke an exegetically extrinsic framework such as salvation history.

Neither should progressive revelation be treated as an axiom in evangelical biblical theology, or biblical interpretation for that matter. Taking Bengel's view as the classic understanding, we need to distinguish between the self-evident realities that revelation did not happen all at once and climaxed in the first coming of Christ, on the one hand, and the supposed nature of progress in this stream of revelation, on the other. For Bengel, this progress was related to revelation in earlier times being obscure and concealing certain things. When applied to the Old Testament, such an approach is ambiguous and opens the door for unsubstantiated assumptions that affect Old Testament interpretation. If all that is meant is that divine revelation climaxes in Christ (Heb 1:1-2; see also Jn 1:1, 14), then there is no problem. But if, along with this, the possibility is excluded a priori that an exegesis of the Old Testament that seeks the author's intent can show a messianic vision within the Old Testament itself, then progressive revelation has unfairly biased the exegesis of the Old Testament before it has even begun.

If Bengel's concept of progressive revelation is to be thoroughly supported, the Old Testament material itself suggests some major difficulties. For example, if Moses was the greatest prophet who ever lived (besides

Jesus himself) related to his uniquely face-to-face relationship with the Lord (Num 12:6-8; Deut 34:10), and if he wrote the Pentateuch, then why would subsequent books of the Old Testament, written by prophets with a less intimate knowledge of God than Moses, necessarily *exceed* the Pentateuch in the quality and scope of their revelatory content? How do we know that the relationship between their respective writings is not the other way around, or equal?[127] Relatedly, if Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the clearest messianic prophecy in the Old Testament (for the sake of argument), how do Old Testament passages and books written subsequently progress beyond this climactic passage? Such questions contrast with Vos's position that progressive revelation is organic and can be likened to a seed that eventually becomes a full-grown tree.[128] Could not the prophecies of the Lion of Judah in Genesis 49:8-12, the star from Jacob in Numbers 24:17-19, and the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 all reveal the tree rather than just a seed (or seedling)? Furthermore, does a coherent chronological ordering of the Old Testament material even exist that suggests such progressive revelation over time, even if this progression need not be uniform?

Bengel's greater interest in the New Testament and especially the book of Revelation suggests that these more detailed questions about Old Testament interpretation were not the primary drivers of his concept of progressive revelation. Instead, this concept gives the impression of lumping the Old Testament material together simplistically. In the end, there is no disputing the climactic coming of Christ and *additional*, helpful revelation over time, but progressive revelation, in its common usage and thoroughly applied to the Old Testament material, remains unsubstantiated.[129] Thus, Scobie remarks concerning progressive revelation, "Many rightly utter words of caution."[130]

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[127]Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 232; Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1977), 41, 44, 86-87, 89-91, 94.
[128]Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 7.
[129]For a response to the idea that Old Testament authors could not have known much about the Messiah, see Chen, *Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 19-20.
[130]Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 91.

Based on evangelical works on biblical theology, parameters for evangelical Old Testament theology include a high view of biblical inspiration, a distinction between biblical and systematic theology, and a genuine attempt at some kind of historical approach. This historical aspect certainly includes belief in the historical accuracy of the Bible, God's sovereignty over history, his direct involvement in history, and even the reality of salvation history itself. However, the use of salvation history as a unifying framework for biblical theology is not essential to an evangelical historical approach. Attention to the authorial meaning and what the Bible itself teaches, which evangelical approaches broadly embrace, is also historical but can be rigorously carried through methodologically such that it reveals the literary, textual, and theological unity of Scripture, rendering exegetically extrinsic frameworks such as salvation history unnecessary to this end. Likewise, neither is the use of progressive revelation necessary to evangelical biblical theology. I argue elsewhere that the common use of typology is not necessary either.[131] Within this broader framework, evangelicals have exercised the freedom to emphasize various themes and/or present results topically, book by book (including in different orderings), or otherwise.

For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the word *canonical* is used with different meanings by scholars, including evangelicals. As pointed out above, Martens uses it with reference to the presentation of Old Testament theology book by book in a (Hebrew) canonical ordering. Hamilton also follows this usage, as does Dempster.[132] However, Bruce Waltke calls his own approach "canonical" related to his belief in the unity of the Old and New Testaments, even though his organization does not follow such an ordering.[133] Sailhamer's canonical approach, set forth in a methodology-focused work, proposes a Hebrew canonical ordering but was never fully worked out for the entire Old Testament.[134] He actually preferred to

[131]Chen, *Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 12-23.
[132]Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 64-65 (including n113); Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 33-35, 47-51.
[133]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 10.
[134]Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 197-252. His *Meaning of the Pentateuch* deals with OT theology but focuses on the Pentateuch.

describe his approach as "compositional."[135] On the other hand, Childs's canonical approach is a *critical* approach that attempts to overcome the (textual) fragmentation of historical criticism through the unifying effect of the canon and the continuing use of canonical Scripture by the church.[136] Significantly, his proposal does not depend on a traditional view of inspiration and still allows for some use of historical criticism.[137]

The unity achievable by evangelicals, however, is more far-reaching because the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture implies both its historical accuracy and its divinely authored, organic unity. In other words, a high view of inspiration sees strong bonds between the divine author and the human author, as well as between these authors and Scripture as the Word of God written. The biblical text is in turn historically accurate with respect to the historical events it records. Though distinct entities, (biblical) text and (historical) event are in harmony and linked strongly together. Furthermore, as the product of a single divine mind, Scripture as a text is coherent and interconnected for readers to perceive. The arrows in figure 1.1 represent these continuous relationships among the divine author, the human author, Scripture (including its intrinsic interconnectedness), and history, all of which are rooted in inspiration (the result of the two arrows on the left). The figure reinforces the fundamental importance of inspiration, and how fragmentation results when it is abandoned.[138] In the present work, I attempt to show that the divinely authored unity of Scripture is literary, textual, and ultimately theological.

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[135]E.g., Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 48, 149, 160, 219, passim. See also Kevin Chen, "Gleanings from the John H. Sailhamer Papers at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary," *Southeastern Theological Review* 9, no. 1 (2018): 108.

[136]Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 91-92, 99-100, 112-13. The effect of canon is not static but was a "canonical process," including canonical shaping and redaction. See Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 70-71, 73.

[137]Childs sees inspiration as concerning "the uniqueness of the canonical context of the church" (*Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 104). Regarding historical criticism, see 106-8, 112-13.

[138]The weakness of Childs's approach is also implied. He effectively wants to leave off the arrows that concern inspiration and the connection between text and event, and instead "Scripture" ← "readers" (church) to attain the unity of Scripture. His canonical unity arises from a canonical process and the church rather than from divine inspiration.

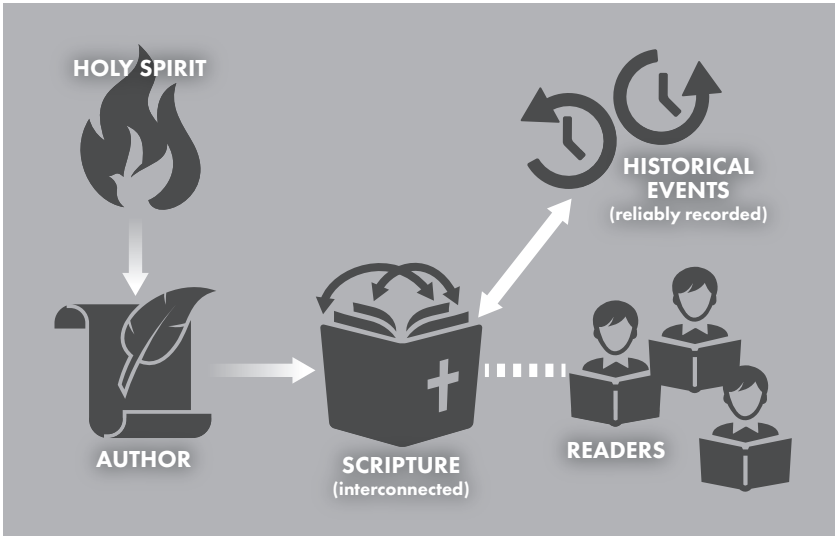

Figure 1.1. Inspiration, dual authorship, historical reliability, and unity of Scripture

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY THROUGH ITS NEXUS PASSAGES

The approach to Old Testament theology in this work follows within the broader evangelical stream outlined above. I affirm the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, the historical accuracy of Scripture, the historical reality of biblical events, the sovereignty of God over history, and his direct and sometimes supernatural involvement in it. Along with others, I distinguish between biblical theology and systematic theology in that biblical theology begins by asking what the Bible itself teaches considered on its own terms, in contrast with primarily using other categories. Where my approach differs from other approaches that also emphasize exegesis of the author's historical meaning is that this priority is maintained throughout the entire task of Old Testament theology. In other words, there is no appeal to an exegetically extrinsic framework to unify the biblical material, whether Gabler's universal ideas, von Hofmann's salvation history, or otherwise. This is because I believe that exegesis of the author's intent can demonstrate the literary, textual, and theological unity of the Old Testament. Inherent to the Old Testament text itself, nexus passages are especially useful to this end.

In the search for authorial intent, I believe it is best to keep hermeneutical first principles to a minimum so as to avoid imposing meaning on the biblical text as much as possible.[139] I limit these first principles to inspiration, the existence of authorial intent, and the communication of this intent through entire books of Old Testament. There is even a sense in which the coherence of each biblical book is not truly a first principle but something that can be supported inductively from exegesis of these books. Treating salvation history, progressive revelation, and/or typology as hermeneutical first principles easily compromises the priority placed on exegesis and authorial intent in biblical theology, and so is excluded. The fewer presuppositions the better, lest any of them prove unreliable.

Even Christocentric theology does not need to be a first principle. To be sure, the Christocentric nature of Scripture is important, but this reality is far more striking and persuasive when it is the result of exegesis rather a presupposition of it. Likewise, the *regula fidei* is important not simply because it is the historic tradition of the church but because it arises from the proper interpretation of the Scriptures. This is not to suggest that it is possible for interpreters to completely avoid influences from our theology, the New Testament, or our varied life experiences, since such influences exist even when we are not conscious of them. Nevertheless, given such influences, the fundamental issue is still whether the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, bear an authorially intended witness to Christ. Building on existing work in this area, I believe that the Old Testament can be shown to bear such witness to Christ, its exegetical-compositional, integrative center. In other words, that "in him [i.e., Christ] all things hold together" (Col 1:17) can be demonstrated to be true not only of creation generally (Col 1:15-16) but also of the Old Testament itself on the literary and textual level.

[139]Sandys-Wunsch warns, "Our axioms of exegetical procedure may only appear to be axioms because we have not looked hard enough at the idea of truth on which they are based" ("Zachariae's Contribution to Biblical Theology," 17). He continues, "In some respects we are less competent in philosophy and the critical analysis of our presuppositions than the scholars of the eighteenth century. Having fallen into a pragmatic approach to our discipline, we tend to forget the non-biblical origin of so many of our concepts such as 'history of salvation,' 'existential awareness,' 'authenticity' and so on'" (23).

CONCLUSION

This chapter positions the study of nexus passages in the context of the academic discipline of Old Testament theology. Rather than attempt a comprehensive history of the discipline, I have selectively engaged key figures and issues that have shaped Old Testament theology to provide context for the present state of the discipline and for my approach. The study of nexus passages is an evangelical approach that also thoroughly holds to Gabler's original emphasis on the author's historical meaning. By arguing for the theological, even Christocentric, unity of the Old Testament based on literary and textual grounds, this approach does not rely on external unifying frameworks such as salvation history. The rest of this book attempts to validate this approach through examination of ten nexus passages from across the Tanak.