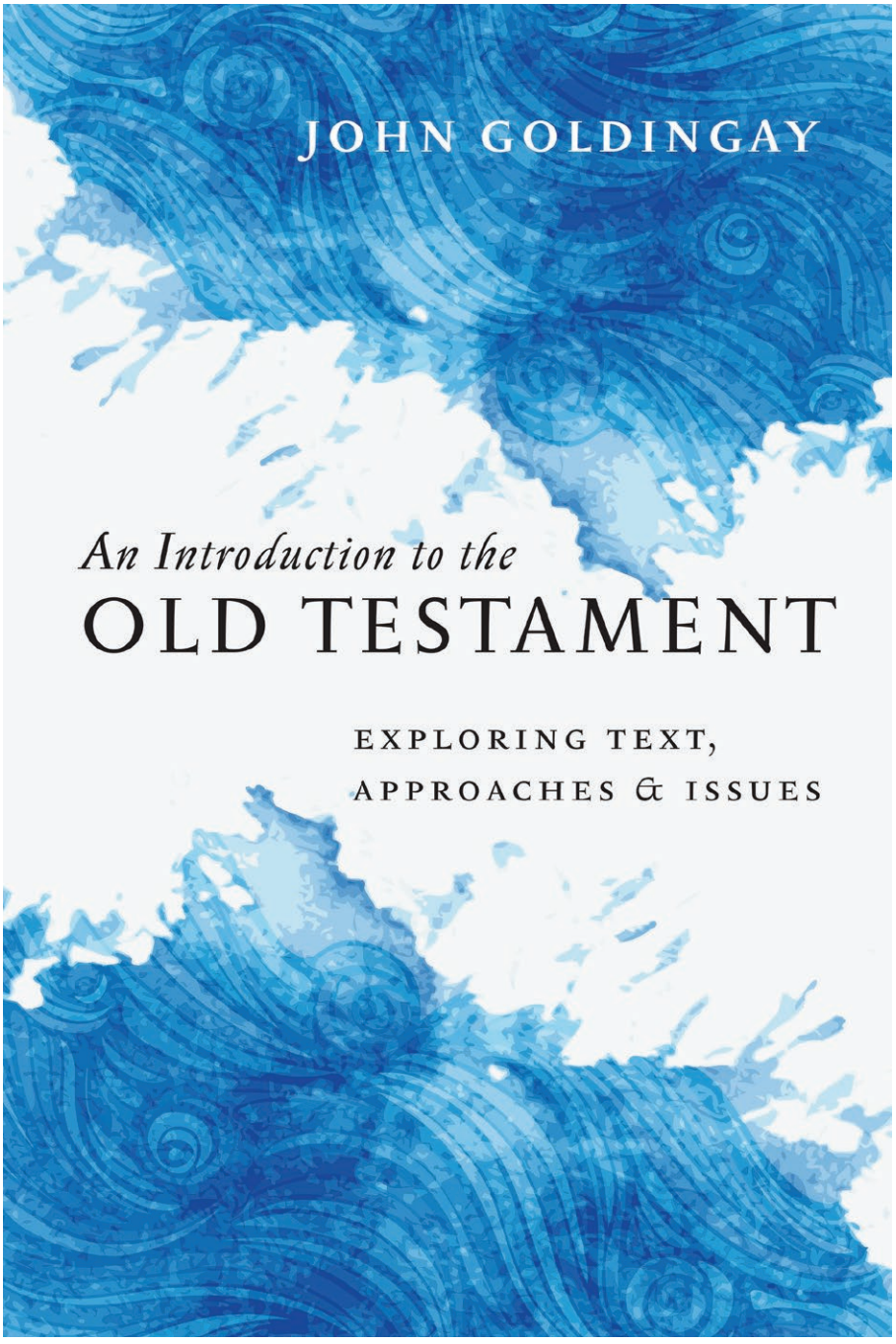

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Contents

Part One INTRODUCTION

1 01 Approaching the Old Testament

The "Old Testament" is the Christian term for the collection of scrolls in Hebrew and Aramaic that the Jewish community accepts as its Scriptures, and to which it often refers as the "Torah [or Law], the Prophets and the Writings," or "Tanak" for short (from the initial letters of the three Hebrew nouns "Torah," "Nebi'im," "Ketubim"). Scholars often refer to them as the "Hebrew Bible." The books were written at different times between about the eighth century and the second century B.C. We don't know when they became a defined collection, when they became the "Scriptures." From a Christian viewpoint, it's significant that as far as we can tell, it's the collection of Scriptures that Jesus and his first followers would have recognized; most of the books are quoted in the NT.

Nearly half the OT comprises narratives telling the story of the world's creation and then the story of Israel over the centuries. Incorporated into the first part of this narrative are substantial swathes of instructions about how Israel should live. The OT goes on to include a collection of works preserving the messages of some prophets and a collection of poetic and prose works offering teaching about sensible ways to live everyday life and examples of praise and prayer for people to use.

The OT refers to other historical records, prophets and teachers that are not included in the OT; we have examples of such works from other Middle Eastern peoples contemporary with Israel. The ones in the OT are the examples that Israel preserved as having permanent significance for the people of God. There are also many other Jewish works from the centuries just before or just after Christ, some of which came to be used in the church along with the works in the OT. They are referred to as the "Apocrypha" (the "hidden" books) or as the "Deuterocanonical Writings." The latter of these two terms is clumsier but more appropriate. The word "canon" means "ruler," and "deutero" means "second"; the OT (the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings) are the primary canon, and these are a second canon. As far as we know, these books never were regarded as Scripture by the Jewish com-

munity, and they are not quoted in the NT. (The NT does quote from Enoch, which is not part of most versions of the Apocrypha, though the Ethiopian Church did come to recognize it, perhaps because it is quoted in the NT.) See further 118.

What's the appropriate way to go about studying the OT? It's tricky discussing that question at this point because you can really answer it only by getting involved in doing the study. So what I am doing here is giving you conclusions that I have come to.

1. I read these books as the church's Scriptures, the canon or ruler for my thinking and life. As we often put it, they are "the Word of God." I therefore need to study them self-critically. Where they say something different from what I'm inclined to think, I assume that I'm the one who's wrong. As people often put it, I accept the authority of the Scriptures.
2. In addition, they are works of literature, the products of Israel's history, created through human processes, emerging from their Middle Eastern context. So I seek to understand them as human, historical, contextual documents, and not read into them meanings that would be alien to their writers and their first readers. That principle includes not reading NT ideas into them. Their being human and contextual doesn't mean that they are limited because they came into being before the modern age and before Jesus, that they are bound to contain mistakes. It does mean that we have to understand them in their context.
3. In this connection, I use the methods of biblical criticism, not to criticize the text, but to understand it. Over time, "biblical criticism" came to be understood as criticizing the Bible, but it started off as a commitment to asking questions about the way church leaders and scholars interpreted the Bible, so as to let the Bible speak for itself. It's that use of biblical criticism that interests me.
4. Because most church leaders and scholars in the West have been middle-aged white men, being critical also includes seeking to study the OT from perspectives other than those of middle-aged white men. Since I'm one of those, do read books about the OT by other kinds of people.

1 02 The Old Testament as Scripture

Students sometimes ask how I got interested in the OT. There are some jokey or superficial answers to the question. My theology degree program required Greek, whereas Hebrew was optional; but I had already studied Greek, so I could fit in Hebrew. The OT came first in the program; if church history had come first, I would have fallen in love with that instead. Further, I undertook my undergraduate study at a time when scholarly OT study was going through what seemed a positive and confident phase, and OT study felt exciting in that respect. More seriously, I had two outstanding OT mentors: John Baker, who modeled how you could undertake university academic study of the OT and also be a priest, and Alec Motyer, a seminary teacher and priest who was a great preacher on the OT.

Yet these considerations from years ago are not the reasons why I am passionate about the OT now. My enthusiasm issues from my ongoing involvement with it. I love the stories about Israel's ancestors, about the leaders in Judges, about Jonah and Esther. I love the boldness of the prayers and praises of the psalms. I love the way the prophets confront Israel with challenges to faith and to faithfulness. I love the courage with which Job and Ecclesiastes raise questions. Indeed, it's the facing of questions that I love as much as anything. The OT is relentlessly realistic about human beings and about life, but it never steps away from staying in conversation with God about such matters.

I also continue to be enthusiastic about getting at the OT's own meaning in its context. I want to see things through the eyes of Genesis or Isaiah or Lamentations. My Christian faith will sometimes enable me to perceive things in the OT that I might otherwise miss; it will give me ways into the OT. But I want to see what's there, and I want the OT to correct my Christian assumptions when they need correction. And I've proved for myself that when I can work out what these books would mean for the Israelites for whom they were written, there's a good chance that I can find my way to what it might mean for me.

I make the assumption that where the OT says something scandalous, it's more likely to be right than I am. I sometimes get the impression that students assume that a professor's job is to reassure them that the Bible says nothing different from what they believe already. After all, the students are good Christian people, and they ought to be able to trust their worldview and presuppositions. I think that it's wiser to assume that we are decisively shaped by the culture in which we live, and that we are likely to be quite wrong in some of our beliefs and presuppositions. Thus, when I see the Bible saying something different from what I think, that's a moment when studying the Bible becomes especially interesting. So you won't find this book doing much to make the OT more comfortable to read.

Is this passion of mine simply my peculiarity, like my enthusiasm for jazz? There are two sorts of reasons for Christians to see if they can share this involvement. One is that Jesus and the NT writers shared it. For them, the OT simply was the "Scriptures," given for them to benefit from and be shaped by (2 Tim 3:14-17). It was vital for them to see that their faith was in keeping with these Scriptures. The other is that as a consequence the church accepted them and has passed them on to us as part of the church's heritage and rule for life and thinking.

The trouble is that the OT isn't what we would expect. We would expect God's revelation to be nice, so that its stories would give us examples of people living good lives with God. But the Bible makes clear at many points that to be the Word of God, Scripture does not have to be nice or to make us feel good. We would expect biblical history to give us examples of people living faithful lives and to make it very clear what was their message. Joshua, Judges and Samuel don't do so. So we may have to change our views on what God would want to give us and ask why God wanted to give us what he did. It is these nasty stories (e.g., the Levite's concubine) as well as the nice stories (e.g., Hannah) that are designed to change our thinking, our lives and our relationship with God.

1 03 Reading the Old Testament as the Word of God in Its Own Right

1. The NT encourages us to get wisdom for life from the OT. These writings are able to teach us and train us in righteousness (2 Tim 3:14-17).
2. However, it's not true that the NT lies hidden in the OT, and that the OT is revealed in the NT. The OT tells us how God really related to people and really spoke to them. God did so in ways that were designed for them to understand; they were not obscure. The NT then tells us that the OT is the inspired and authoritative Word of God, which we should therefore take with absolute seriousness. It doesn't need decoding.
3. The OT thus isn't a sneak preview of Jesus. Jesus isn't all God has to say; God has lots of other things to say, and he has said lots of them in the OT. If we narrow the OT down to what the NT says, we miss these things. It is the case that lenses provided by the NT sometimes help us see things that are there in the OT. But if we want to understand what God wants us to understand from the OT, we do best not to think too much about the NT because that tends to narrow our perspective.
4. It's not true that the OT God is a God of wrath, and the NT God a God of love. In both Testaments, God is one who loves to love people, but who is prepared to be tough when necessary.
5. It's not true that the OT offers a partial or incomplete or imperfect revelation. Or rather, there is one thing that the OT doesn't tell you but the NT does. That thing is (amusingly) the fact that some people are going to hell. Neither hell nor heaven comes in the OT. But the NT does also tell you that it's possible to enjoy resurrection life: that because Jesus rose, we will rise.
6. It's not true that the OT is a religion of law, and the NT a religion of grace. Because of this misunderstanding I don't follow the practice of referring to the opening books of the OT as the "Law." I rather keep the

Hebrew word "Torah" (which means "teaching"). In both Testaments, God relates to people on the basis of grace but then expects them to live a life of obedience.

7. It's not true that the OT is a book of stories about people who are meant to be examples to us. You only have to read the stories to see this point. Both Testaments are books of stories about what God did through people, often despite who they were not because of who they were. If anyone is an example to us in the OT, it's God (see Lev 19:2), not even people such as Abraham, Moses or David.
8. One aspect of the wisdom that the NT expects us to get from these books is that they show how Israel went wrong (see 1 Cor 10:1-13). We can easily make the same mistakes that Israel made. The Israelites failed to enter into God's real rest (Ps 95); we could do the same (Heb 3–4).
9. It's not true that you can do whatever you like to your enemies in the OT. "Loving your neighbor" includes loving your enemy; your enemies usually are the people who live near you, who attack you or defraud you. Of course, in the NT there's no event like Joshua slaughtering the Canaanites; but the NT doesn't disapprove of such acts by OT heroes such as Joshua (see, e.g., Heb 11).
10. The OT is the record of how God spoke to the people of God and acted in their lives, and acted in the affairs of the nations. We can discover from it more about what God is like and what God says to us and how God may be involved in our world.
11. So the OT is designed to transform our lives. The way it does so is by setting our lives in the context of the story of what God had been doing with Israel, seeing us in a relationship with God (of praise, protest, trust, repentance and testimony), setting our thinking in the context of an argument as it encourages us to face questions, and thus rescuing us from the limitations of what we believe already. The OT is there to help the people of God live concretely, worshipfully, wisely and hopefully. It's to help us see what God is like and to live with God.

1 04 The Books in the Old Testament

In most English Bibles the *content* follows the Hebrew Bible, but the *order* follows the Greek Bible, called the "Septuagint," which is mostly a translation from the Hebrew made in the third and second centuries B.C. and also includes the Second Canon or Apocrypha (see 118). So here are two lists of the works that appear in the two versions, in the two different orders. In the Greek/English list, in square brackets I also include the books in the Second Canon (though there's some variation in different versions of the Second Canon). In this book, partly because we are following the content of the Hebrew Bible, we will also follow its order: first the Torah, then the Prophets, then the Writings.

Hebrew Bible	Greek and English Bibles
The Torah Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	**The Pentateuch and First History** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, leading into Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings
The Former Prophets Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings	
	The Second History (These come in the Writings in the Hebrew Bible) Chronicles, 1 and 2 Esdras (two versions of Ezra–Nehemiah), Esther (a longer version) [Judith, Tobit, Maccabees] [Another work also known as 2 Esdras, an apocalypse, also appears in the Latin Bible]

Hebrew Bible	Greek and English Bibles
	The Poetic Books (These come in the Writings in the Hebrew Bible) Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job [Psalm 151, Odes, including the Prayer of Manasseh, Wisdom, Ben Sira]
The Latter Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve Shorter Prophets	**The Prophets** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel (a longer version), the Twelve Shorter Prophets [Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah]
The Writings Psalms, Job Proverbs The Five Scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther) Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles	
The Latter Prophets in Hebrew are thus approximately the same as the Prophets in Greek and English. In the Hebrew Bible Joshua through Kings are the Former Prophets (former in order, not time).	

Although the Jewish community uses the order in the first column and the Christian community the order in the second column, quite likely both orders originally came from the Jewish community. But it's worth remembering that the question of order (and of exactly which books belong) would not be so much of an issue in the centuries before the invention of the codex (that is, something like a book) in Christian times, for which you would need to put the books in an order. When the Scriptures took the form of individual scrolls, it wouldn't mean so much.

The two orders do suggest complementary ways of seeing the message that issues from the collection of books. The Jewish order broadly moves from past to future to present. The Christian order broadly moves from past to present to future.

1 05 How Did Old Testament Books Get Written?

My wife, Kathleen, is writing a novel. The story takes place in NT times, so she does lots of research into what was going on and what life was like in places such as Jerusalem and Rome, but the story itself then comes out of her head. Actually, she might say that it comes *to* her rather than coming *from* her; she transcribes what comes. In due course she will edit the story, so that its eventual published form will be different from what she is writing at the moment. Something analogous will happen to this book that I am writing. Publishers in the United States like to edit books for authors, so there will be phrases in this book that I didn't write. In my own writing I am sometimes starting from scratch, sometimes taking up an outline that I use in class and expanding it, so that the paragraphs will never have been in written form before. Elsewhere in this book I shall sometimes reuse sections from lectures that I have written out. So books come into existence in different ways.

How did people write books in the Bible's world? Things that the writers say and comparisons with other works from the Middle Eastern world suggest that the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the biblical authors did not issue in their writing books in ways different from the ones that were customary in their culture. For instance, biblical laws, proverbs, psalms and poems are similar in form to those of other Middle Eastern writings. Evidence within the Bible tells us something of the ways their authors went about writing, and this study confirms that they wrote in similar ways to other peoples. The Holy Spirit's involvement inspired them to write great (inspired, authoritative) examples of these forms of literature, but the human processes whereby they came into being were the same as those for other peoples.

What can we tell from the OT books themselves about how they got written?

1. Some books look as if they were written from scratch, like Kathleen writing her novel. It seems this was true of short stories such as Jonah, Ruth and Esther. We cannot get behind them to sources or earlier versions or raw

materials. It has been suggested that the Torah was written from scratch in the Persian period, without the use of earlier sources or versions.

2. Some books were based on ones that already exist; they are new editions of those earlier books. Chronicles is an example. Chronicles' story of Israel from David to the fall of Jerusalem is based on the story in Samuel–Kings; or possibly both are based on some other version of the story that no longer exists, but this possibility doesn't affect the point. We know that it is so because many sections of Chronicles are word-for-word the same as a section of Kings, or differ only in small ways. There are theories of this kind about the origin of the Torah; that is, that the Torah as we know it may have come into existence through an author writing the story, which later was supplemented by extra materials of various kinds.
3. Some books are a kind of collage. We can see how Ezra–Nehemiah combines materials that the compiler has derived from various sources: lists of people who returned from exile and who took part in rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, copies of correspondence between the Jerusalem authorities and the Persian court, first-person accounts by Ezra and Nehemiah of things that they did, and third-person accounts of the temple rebuilding and other events, accounts apparently written by other people. Someone then assembled these materials and put them together. There have been similar "fragmentary" theories about the origin of the Torah; that is, that it issued from the compilation of pieces that had never before been brought together.
4. Joshua–Judges–Samuel–Kings also has something of the nature of a collage, but in addition there are indications that it went through more than one edition.
5. About a century after the four Gospels were written, the theologian Tatian interwove them to produce the *Diatessaron*, a "harmony" of the Gospels, as Matthew and Luke had produced their Gospels by conflating earlier versions of the story. The dominant view of the Torah's origin has been such a "documentary" or "source" theory; four earlier documents were combined to produce it.

1 06 Old Testament Story and Old Testament History

The OT as a whole tells a story. One could think of it as a story with six acts and a number of scenes. (A much more detailed version of the story can be found in "How to Read the Bible"; see 119.)

1. (a) God created the world, but things went wrong.

   (b) God almost destroyed the world, then started it off again; but it went wrong again.

2. (a) God called a particular family through which to bring the world blessing and promised that it would become a great people with its own land.

   (b) The people did grow, but they had to take refuge in Egypt, and they ended up as serfs there, so God had to rescue them from Egypt, proving himself greater than the king of Egypt.

   (c) God appeared to them at Sinai and laid down his expectations for many areas of their life.

   (d) On the way to their land they frequently rebelled, and God decided that this entire generation could not go into the land.

3. (a) The next generation did occupy the land and divided it among their clans.

   (b) The subsequent generations became more and more wayward religiously and socially. In addition, they couldn't hold their own in relation to other peoples.

   (c) They therefore asked to have a king like other peoples. Saul, David and Solomon were the first kings. David and Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem.

4. (a) The nation then split into two, Ephraim in the north and Judah in the south. Ephraim was especially disloyal to Yahweh and was conquered by Assyria. (On the names Israel, Ephraim and Judah, see 116.)

(b) Judah wasn't much more loyal than Ephraim was, and it was conquered by Babylon; Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

5. (a) Persia replaced Babylon as superpower and allowed the Judahites to restore the temple, though many stayed abroad rather than returning to Jerusalem.

   (b) Ezra brought the Torah to Jerusalem and sought to reform Jerusalem in light of it.

   (c) Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls and joined Ezra in this work.

6. (a) Greece replaced Persia as superpower, then its empire fell apart. The Seleucid Empire, based in Syria, and the Ptolemaic Empire, based in Egypt, took turns controlling Judah.

   (b) The Seleucids sought to impose pagan worship in Jerusalem. The Judahites rebelled, and Yahweh rescued them, so that they were then independent until the Romans arrived.

Such is the outline of the OT story. But sometimes we may suspect that this story wasn't designed to be history as it actually happened (the creation story is the obvious example). Some archaeological discoveries mesh with the story. For instance, they indicate that someone destroyed the great city Hazor in Galilee in the time of Joshua, and that there was substantial development of settled life in Canaan in the period to which the book of Judges refers. Some archaeological discoveries don't mesh with the OT's own story. For instance, they do not suggest that Jericho was there to be destroyed in Joshua's day. Some events in the story feature in Middle Eastern or Greek records and histories. For instance, Assyria, Babylon and Persia had their own records of some of their actions in relation to Ephraim and Judah. But most of the events don't feature there; virtually nothing does before about the eighth century B.C. There are thus varying scholarly views about how historical the OT story was designed to be and actually was.

Thinking about these questions is complicated by the existence of different scholarly views on when different parts of the OT were written. In the course of this book we will come back to these questions at appropriate points, especially in connection with the accounts of creation, of Israel's ancestors, of the exodus and of Israel's emergence in Canaan.

1 07 A Timeline for the Old Testament

1200	1260 The exodus (Moses)	
	1220 The entry into the land (Joshua)	
		Israel in conflict with,
	1125 The judges (e.g., Deborah)	**e.g., Philistines**
1100		
	1050 Saul	
	1010 David	
1000		**Israel**
	970 Solomon	**independent**
	930 Division into two kingdoms: northern Israel (Ephraim), southern Judah	
900		
	850 Elijah and Elisha	
800		
	Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah ben Amoz	**Assyria**
	722 Ephraim falls to Syria; Ephraimites exiled	**in control**
700		
	Jeremiah, Nahum, Habbauk, Zephaniah	
	622 Josiah's reform	**Babylon**
600	Ezekiel	**in control**
	587 Jerusalem falls to Babylon; Judahites exiled	
	Lamentations, Obadiah, Isaiah 40–55	
	539 Babylon falls to Persia; Judahites free to return, rebuild temple	**Persia**
500	Haggai, Zechariah, Isaiah 56–66	**in control**
	Joel, Malachi	
	458 Ezra brings Torah to Jerusalem	
	445 Nehemiah rebuilds walls	

400		
	333 Persia falls to Alexander; he dies (323), empire splits	**Greece**
300		**in control**
	Judah controlled by Syria (the Seleucids) or Egypt (the Ptolemies)	
200	198 Jerusalem moves from Egyptian to Syrian control	
	167 Antiochus Epiphanes introduce pagan worship to temple	
	Daniel's visions; Jerusalem delivered	**Judah independent**
100	63 Pompey visits Jerusalem	**Rome in control**

Here are some things to note from this timeline.

1. I haven't given any dates for events in Genesis, because Genesis itself doesn't give hard dates and neither is there information from elsewhere in the ancient Middle East that helps us with dating.
2. People sometimes get the impression that the exile in 587 is the closing event of OT times, but actually the exile is not much more than half way through the story from Moses to the end of the OT period. The OT story continues for over four more centuries in telling of the restoration of Judah after the exile, and of events in the Persian and Greek periods, though we do lack a continuous account of that story of the kind that Exodus to Kings gives for the earlier part of the story.
3. In the way Israel's story unfolds, a key factor is the rise of the great empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece. A grasp of this sequence of empires is key to understanding why Israel's story unfolds as it does and to understanding the messages of the different prophets.

1 08 Fact and Truth in the Old Testament

If the OT is wholly reliable as a guide to who God is, who we are and how we may relate to God, must it be factual at every point in order to be really the Word of God? Views on the factual nature of the OT belong at various points on a spectrum. At one end is the conviction that the whole OT narrative is literally factual. God created the world in six days; all Israel's ancestors were involved in the exodus; Jonah was swallowed by a fish. In the middle is the conviction that the OT story is basically reliable history, but none of those specific elements need be factual. There are more and less conservative versions of that view. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that the OT is basically an imaginative story created in late OT times. Again, there are more and less radical versions of that view (maybe David and Ezra existed, maybe they didn't). My guess is that most scholars who view the OT as Scripture take some version of the middle view. But there are evangelical scholars who take the first or the last view.

There are no grounds within Scripture or outside Scripture for saying that the whole of Scripture is factual. Responding to the challenge of biblical criticism in the late nineteenth century, B. B. Warfield made the inspiration of Scripture the basis for believing that the history in Scripture is factually inerrant. But this inference is not based on Scripture. When the Bible describes biblical narrative as inspired, its point is that it therefore speaks beyond its original context (it speaks to us) and it is effective (it does things to us), not that it's necessarily factually accurate at every point. It's the best possible human history. Inerrancy is not a scriptural doctrine, but rather a nineteenth-century one.

On the other hand, there are both theological and critical grounds for doubting whether it is simply a made-up story. For the story to "work," it needs to be basically factual. The authors of the exodus story would hardly have thought that their story made sense if there was no exodus and the story issued from their imagination.

We can trust God's providence to have ensured that Scripture's narrative is accurate enough. Yet this trust does not give grounds for expecting it to be inerrant. God did not need to provide us with an inerrant Bible, just with a Bible that is approximately accurate. So if its history seems to be not quite accurate, we needn't worry. It's still God's inspired Word, able to speak to us and do things to us—the nonfactual as well as the factual parts. It doesn't matter if we don't know where fact stops and fiction starts. The basis of our assurance that the OT is God's Word is not that we can show that it's history or that we know who wrote it, but that Jesus gave it to us and that it speaks to us. We don't believe in Jesus because of the authority of Scripture; we believe in Scripture's authority because we know that Jesus is God's Son. I trust the OT because I trust Jesus, not the other way round.

We might expect God's revelation to be like Joseph Smith's tablets, or Moses' tablets or prophecy—given directly from heaven. Scripture itself tells us that the opposite is the case. Most of Scripture is things such as psalms, letters and proverbs. That is, the Scriptures look like the ordinary human writings of the culture. As far as narrative is concerned, Luke 1:1-4 tells us how a biblical author goes about writing history: the same as anyone else.

What is history like when written by a traditional society? There are no Middle Eastern historical works to compare the OT narratives with, but there are Mediterranean ones, such as the work of the Greek historian Thucydides. He brings together (1) historical narratives; (2) traditional stories; (3) products of imagination—stories and speeches; (4) evaluation. We would expect that the kind of "history" that the Holy Spirit inspired would be the kind that people such as Thucydides wrote; and it is what we find in books such as Samuel and Kings. They include historical material, but we can't always tell which elements are historical. Yet that's not a problem because the whole of each book is inspired by the Holy Spirit, not just the historical bits. The OT story is true, and it has a historical basis, but it is more than merely a factual account of the event.

In seeking to discover what God wanted to say through the OT and what God wants to say to us through it, we can read it as it is without fretting about where lies the boundary between the history and elaboration, because we know it is true even where it is not factual.

109 When the Old Testament Is Parable Not History

In 108 we considered the nature of the great "historical" narratives that provide the framework for the OT as a whole. Their story needs to be basically factual because its message is about something that happened. If it didn't happen, there is no gospel. We have noted that these inspired narratives can incorporate imaginative and other nonfactual elements, but they still have a factual base. Yet God also inspired fictional stories such as Jesus' parables. Some messages are best communicated through parables. Parables are true but not factual. It could also be an open question whether some entire biblical books are parable not history, or are a mixture. And it could be that God leaves us to work out whether we are to take particular stories as history or parable.

Jesus sometimes explains to people that he's about to tell a parable, but other times he expects them to work it out (e.g., Lk 15:11–16:31). How might he expect them to do so? Among the features of his stories that put us on the track of their being parable not history are (1) humor and irony; (2) exaggeration (things are larger than life); (3) "stock" characters; (4) schematic structure; (5) numerical schemes; (6) formulaic neatness and closure. The Gospels as a whole are not formulaic, ironic or exaggerated. The parables are fictions within a basically historical story. They are supportive of it because they help to explain what it means. They are also supported by it because without the factual Gospel story the parables would just be interesting stories that provide us with no basis for believing in their truth.

This insight about the Gospels and the parables transfers to the OT. While the great OT narrative needs to be basically historical for it to work, OT stories such as Ruth, Esther and Jonah have features of the same kind as the parables (humor, exaggeration and so on), which points to their being like the parables. They are Spirit-inspired, true parables, as are some elements in other books such as Genesis 1–11 and the stories in Daniel. They are true but not very factual (I say "not very factual" because I suspect that

they usually have a factual kernel somewhere, but it may not be the most vital thing about them).

Realizing that these stories are parables rather than history helps us to take them really seriously as the Word of God because we know that the Holy Spirit specially inspired them to portray the way God deals with us. They aren't mere history. In her book *Poetic Justice*, Martha Nussbaum has suggested something of the importance of fiction in a way that helps us see why the Holy Spirit would inspire fiction in the Bible.

1. By its nature, history records only things that once happened. Fiction tells of the kind of things that happen to people in such a way as to invite us into the stories and wonder about ourselves.
2. History records things that happened. Fiction expresses a vision of how things could be or should be, or a sharpened version of how things are. It invites us to imagine the world differently.
3. History traditionally focuses on national events and "important" people. Fiction characteristically deals with ordinary people living ordinary lives, or with issues as they affect ordinary people.
4. Fiction portrays human beings with human hopes, fears, needs and desires, realized in specific social situations. Readers learn both from the similarities and the differences in the context.
5. The factual nature of history invites us to relate to it objectively. Fiction invites us to involve ourselves in it emotionally and in our inner world. It invites response. It is disturbing.
6. In particular, fiction invites us to engage with real individual people and communities that exist and matter in their own right and not only as part of a larger historical process or purpose.
7. Outside the Bible (in the ancient world and the modern world) fiction has always been a major serious way of engaging with fundamental theological, philosophical and moral issues.

These considerations show why the idea that the Bible includes fictional stories fits the Bible's nature.

1 10 Reading the Old Testament Premodernly, Modernly and Postmodernly

Those points about how OT books got written, about the "mixed" nature of OT history, and about the importance of parable or fiction can be seen in light of premodern, modern and postmodern ways of thinking and reading.

1. **In the premodern era,** readers assumed that the people named in the books' headings wrote them. Moses wrote the Torah, Joshua wrote Joshua, Samuel wrote 1 Samuel, David wrote Psalms, Solomon wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, Isaiah wrote all of Isaiah, Jeremiah wrote all of Jeremiah. Readers could use these convictions as keys to understanding the books.
2. Readers could therefore feel that the Bible came from important people who had lived lives close to God and could speak reliably about God's ways, and were people who lived close to the events and could therefore speak reliably about them.
3. Readers could also take for granted that the stories related events that happened, just as they happened. So you could add up the years that people lived and come to, say, 4004 B.C. as the date when the world was created.
4. Readers assumed that the OT talked about Jesus in prophecy and type.
5. **In the modern era,** readers took nothing for granted. Everything had to be proved. So biblical critics asked about the evidence for those assumptions about authorship and concluded that it wasn't very good. For example, the Torah issued from the interweaving of several versions of the story that came from different centuries, all later than Moses. Conservative critics sought to use modern methods to show that it was still possible to maintain the premodern assumptions.
6. If the books were written by anonymous authors, readers could feel that the Bible emerged through the Holy Spirit's inspiring ordinary people like us, and not just through great heroes.

7. When readers didn't take anything for granted in investigating the books' background, their work had the possibility of providing evidence regarding OT history that did not depend on faith.
8. They assumed that the OT talked about the events of its day, not about Jesus.
9. **In the postmodern era,** readers begin from the fact that it's impossible to prove very much in the modern way. The twentieth-century consensus on questions of authorship and OT history collapsed, and no other consensus has emerged. One reason is that the nature of the material is such that it does not yield the information that we are looking for. We are asking questions that it will not answer.
10. This doesn't mean that readers go back to premodern views, because the data that led to the modern theories are still there. We can know that Moses didn't write the Torah, that Isaiah didn't write all of Isaiah and so on. But we have no other grand theories to put in the place of the traditional ones.
11. In the postmodern era Christians can combine premodernity and modernity in a new way. We read the books as they are, trusting them. We seek to do so with open eyes; we do not revert to what premodern tradition said they say. In this sense, we approach them critically. We use whatever keys seem to unlock aspects of the text, trying different ones until we find one that opens the lock without forcing it. We practice what has been called "believing criticism."
12. Sometimes the historical approaches of modernity open the lock; sometimes they don't.
13. We assume that in the OT God was speaking to Israel about the affairs of its day, but this doesn't preclude God speaking about the future, nor does it preclude God's speaking being significant for Christian faith.
14. The postmodern approach doesn't claim to support or prove the idea that the OT is God's Word. When used by Christians, this approach presupposes that the OT is God's Word, partly on the basis of Jesus having given the OT (see 108), partly in order to give it the chance to prove it as we let it loose among us.

1 11 The Geography of Canaan

The boundaries of the land of Israel often changed, but its heartland is the mountain chain the bulk of which is now known as the West Bank or Judea and Samaria or Palestine. It averages twenty miles or so east to west, stretches about fifty miles north and south of Jerusalem, and ascends to 3,000 to 4,000 feet (1,000 meters). The rain falls chiefly on the western slopes, so that side is the most fertile land; the eastern slopes get very dry. Before David's day, Jerusalem was just a village; the key cities were Hebron in the south, Shechem in the north. After the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., the Assyrians moved people from other parts of their empire here; and after the reestablishment of the Judahite state after the exile, the relationship between Samaria and Judah often was tense, both politically and religiously.

North, west and south of this chain is a semicircle of plains, well watered in the north but drier the farther you go south. Apart from Jerusalem, the great cities are here. It was mostly here that the Canaanites lived; hence early Israel emerged more in the mountains, where there was scope to settle. The northern plain is the scene of the great battles in the OT.

Further north is another mountainous area. The traditional northern boundary of the land is Dan; from Dan to the traditional southernmost town, Beersheba, is 150 miles. Farther south than Beersheba is desert. To the east is the deep valley of the River Jordan, emptying into the Dead Sea, one thousand feet below sea level. West to east, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, is fifty to eighty miles. Beyond the Jordan the mountains rise again. The Torah recounts how, when the Israelites approached Canaan from the east, some of the clans settled there. To the far northeast is Mount Hermon; to its south are the fertile regions of Bashan and Gilead. Through Bashan runs a road from Damascus and the north and east, on its way to the Mediterranean and Egypt. It's the route that Israel's ancestors will have taken (the Jordan fords are named after Jacob's daughters), as later will Judahites going into exile and returning.

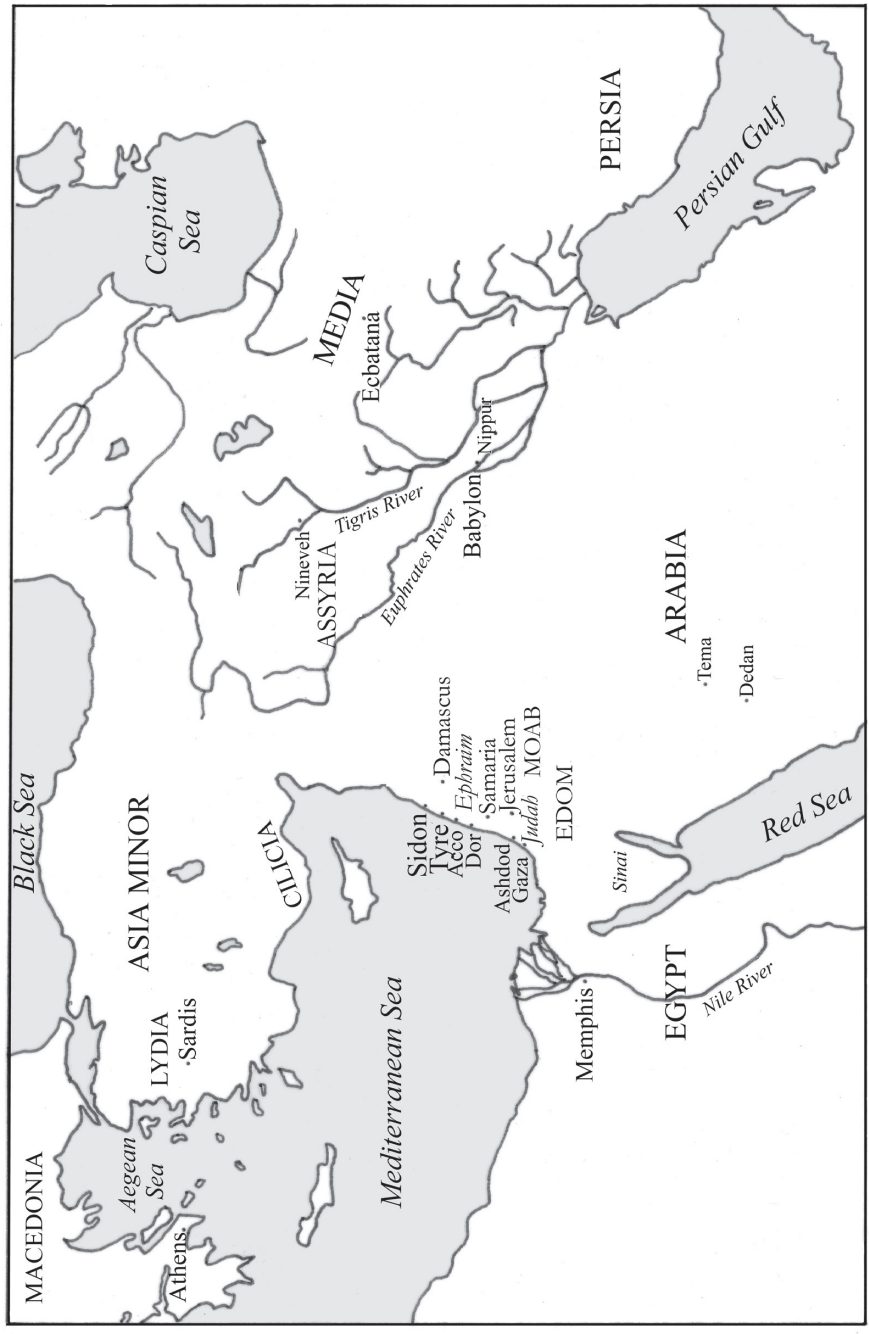
1 12 The Geography of the Middle East

Canaan sits at a crossroads of geography and history; perhaps its location is why God placed his chosen people there. To the south are Egypt and the countries of Africa, from which the OT describes the Israelites as coming to Canaan. For much of the OT story Egypt was a major regional power if not a superpower, the land of oppression where Israel locates the beginnings of its story but a place of refuge in the exile and henceforth a major Jewish center.

To the east, beyond the area immediately across the Jordan, is desert. To the east and northeast of the desert are the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and the centers of the great Middle Eastern superpowers: Assyria, then Babylon, then Medo-Persia. It is this Mesopotamian plain that is the background to the stories of the garden of Eden, the flood and the tower of Babel, and it was from this direction that God brought Abraham and Sarah to Canaan. It was Assyria that put an end to Ephraim, Babylon that destroyed Jerusalem and took people into exile there, and Medo-Persia that facilitated Judah's restoration and controlled it for two centuries until the Greeks arrived.

To the west are the Mediterranean and the countries of Europe, the direction from which the Philistines came to settle in the coastal plains of Canaan at about the same time that the Israelites were establishing themselves in the mountains. From this same direction, toward the end of the OT story, Greece took over from Medo-Persia as the superpower that controlled Judah (then the Romans later came from the same direction, but that's another story).

Isaiah 19:23-25 is an illuminating passage to look at in light of the map. The prophecy looks forward to a day when there will be a metaphorical highway between Egypt, which will be God's people, Assyria, which will be God's handiwork, and Israel, which will be God's possession.



1 13 How Did the Old Testament Come to Be the Old Testament?

We don't know when the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings came to count as the Scriptures. It used to be said that the "Synod of Jamnia" in A.D. 90 made the decisions. The so-called synod was a long-running set of discussions at Jamnia (modern Yavneh, near Tel Aviv) among the leadership of the Jewish people during the half-century following the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The focus of these debates lay on discussing the framework of the Jewish people's life now that the temple had been destroyed. These discussions did include some debate concerning the status of some of the books in the Scriptures, but the debates don't imply the making of decisions about what should be in the Scriptures. If anything, they presuppose that the Scriptures are long-established; thus these scholars are making slightly theoretical points, like Martin Luther when he sought to downgrade NT books such as James and Revelation. The Jamnia theory was attractive because it provided a way of avoiding saying that we don't know when the scriptural canon was finalized. Actually, we don't know.

On some theories, the Jewish community made decisions on this matter some centuries later. On another theory, the de facto decision was taken after Jerusalem's deliverance from Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 B.C., when the book of Daniel was included in the Scriptures on the basis of the way this deliverance had proved that the visions were a true revelation from God. The expression "de facto" is important. Discussion of when the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings finally became Scripture has been confused by talk in terms of "the closing of the canon," the assumption that at some point there must have been a meeting that decided, "These books and no others are the Scriptures." More likely the development of a collection of books that the community recognized as normative Scriptures was a gradual one, and at some stage, without anyone deciding that it should be so, no more books were added. Perhaps 164 B.C. was indeed the last occasion when a book was

added, and perhaps a Jewish meeting five hundred years later did declare the canon closed; but we do not know.

Given that we have no information on when the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings (and no other writings) became Scripture, there are two sorts of argument for recognizing them as the definitive OT. One is that in accepting Jewish Scriptures at all, the church is recognizing its continuity with and its dependence on the Jewish people, and it is appropriate that it should let the Jewish community itself be the body that determines what these Scriptures are. It is not the church's job to decide on the Jewish Scriptures. The other, related consideration is that if we were able to ask Jesus, Peter or Paul what books were in the Scriptures, then the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings are as near as we can get to knowing what would be their answer to that question.

Could the church (or Judaism) today decide to add to the Scriptures or, for that matter, to take away from them? Three points must be made. First, it would be inappropriate to think of adding writings from a later period, because theologically the reason why the OT and NT are the Scriptures lies in their relationship with the story of how God brought about the world's redemption in the process that came to a climax with Christ. They issue from and they witness to that process. Subsequent works may be just as true and edifying, but they do not have that significance. Second, suppose that we discovered another prophecy by Isaiah or another letter by Paul. Could we add that to the Scriptures? A related consideration is that determining what books should count as Scripture was also part of the process whereby God brought about the world's redemption. There likely were other prophecies and epistles that were accepted as having come from God, but the Scriptures were not designed to include all such inspired works. To seek to add to the collections that Judaism and the church established in OT and NT is to imply that they were. Third, yes, it would be perfectly possible to add books to the OT. You simply have to convene a meeting of an authoritative body representing all Jewish groups and all Christian groups and get them to agree on the matter. Good luck.

1 14 How Old and How Reliable Is the Old Testament Text?

For our main knowledge of the text of the OT we are indebted to the work of Jewish scholars who saw that it was preserved over the centuries. But if it was copied by hand for centuries, how sure can we be that it didn't get altered a lot?

There are admittedly many little differences between translations of the OT. Here is the beginning of Psalm 89 in two different translations:

> I will sing of the Lord's loyal love forever. (CEB)
>
> I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever. (NRSV)

Where the CEB has "loyal love" and the NRSV has "steadfast love," these are simply different ways of translating the Hebrew word *ḥesed.* But further, in the CEB the psalm is talking *about* God, in the NRSV the psalm is talking *to* God. Why that little difference?

All printed Hebrew Bibles have the same text in them, which makes for a differentiation over against the NT. There are many Greek manuscripts of the NT, which all differ in tiny ways. So in chapter after chapter editors have to make up their mind which manuscript is likely to be the nearest to what the NT author wrote. As a result, editions of the Greek NT all diverge slightly from each other.

With the OT, the situation is otherwise. For a thousand years after Christ, Jewish scholars took care of the Hebrew Bible, and this care included trying to make sure of holding on to traditions about matter of detail in the text such as the accents on words. The word for "tradition" is *masorah*, so these scholars are called the "Masoretes." About A.D. 1000 this work came to a climax when these scholars agreed on the right text of the Hebrew Bible, which is thus called the "Masoretic Text" (MT). The oldest and thus most authoritative example of the Masoretic Text is the Aleppo Codex (named thus because it was long in Aleppo in Syria), but a third of it is missing. The oldest complete copy in existence is one made by Samuel ben Jacob in Egypt

about 1009. And it is this manuscript that appears in any modern Hebrew Bible. The manuscript itself is now in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg; the city used to be called "Leningrad," so the manuscript is known as the Leningrad Codex (a codex is a manuscript that is in the form of a book rather than a scroll).

Only a very few older manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible survived the Masoretes' work in determining what they believed was the true text. That fact raises two questions, one practical and one theoretical. The practical one arises from the fact that there are passages in the OT that don't seem to make sense, which leads one to wonder whether the text had been altered. The theoretical one is whether the text might have been altered even when it does make sense. Where could we go from here with regard to these two questions?

Long before the Masoretes' time, the OT had been translated into other languages such as Greek, Latin, Aramaic and Syriac, and one possibility is to translate these translations back into Hebrew and see whether the Hebrew text that they might have used is different from the MT. It is this process that produces the NRSV version of the opening of Psalm 89; it follows the Greek translation, the Septuagint. At other points, translators have simply guessed at what the text might have been. The marginal notes in modern translations usually tell you where they have thus "corrected" the MT.

The fact that our oldest copy of the Hebrew OT is only a thousand years old explains the importance in this connection of the discovery beginning in 1947 of the "Dead Sea Scrolls" at Qumran, a Jewish monastery by the Dead Sea. This discovery gave us a cache of manuscripts of OT books or parts of books that were a thousand years older than the MT and thus much nearer to the writing of the books. There are many small differences in the Qumran manuscripts from the MT, like those between translations such as the Septuagint and the MT. Indeed, sometimes their text corresponds to one that had been hypothesized by that process of translating back into Hebrew from a text such as the Septuagint. But all are matters of detail. There is nothing that makes a significant difference to our understanding of the OT. The differences are more like the differences between one modern translation and another.

1 15 Old Testament Translations and the Name of God in Translations

All the recognized modern translations of the Bible are more or less accurate, though they have different philosophies of translation (e.g., whether to be more word for word or more phrase for phrase). In addition, they may be more or less inclined to correct the Masoretes' work. I like the NRSV and the TNIV for study and preaching because they are fairly word for word and use gender-inclusive language (i.e., they do not use "men" when the biblical writers would have meant "men and women"). I also like the Jerusalem Bible and the New Jerusalem Bible because they keep the name of God instead of replacing it with "LORD" or "GOD." The background of that practice is as follows.

Most modern translations replace the name of God, "Yahweh," by the ordinary words "LORD" or "GOD" (in small capitals). Only when translations have the words "Lord" or "God" (not in small capitals) does their wording mean that the text has the actual words for "Lord" or "God" rather than the name "Yahweh." This practice, begun in ancient times, of replacing the name by one of these words avoided giving the impression that Israel's God was just a weird Israelite God with a strange name, and it safeguarded against taking Yahweh's name in vain. Over against these advantages are some disadvantages.

- It's often significant that the OT uses God's actual name—for example, when the text says "Yahweh is God" (as opposed to, say, Marduk being God).
- It was a privilege to be invited to call God by name, part of being invited into a relationship with God. It seems a shame to refuse the invitation and thereby distance ourselves from God, as odd as refusing to use the name "Jesus."
- Like the name "Jesus" (which means "savior"), the name "Yahweh" is not just a label. It has a meaning. Yahweh explained to Moses that it defines Israel's God as one who is always with his people in ways that are needed

by changing situations ("I am who I am," "I will be what I will be," "I will be with you"). It's a shame to lose what the name stands for.

- Using the particular word "Lord" instead of that name "Yahweh" introduces into OT faith a patriarchal, authoritarian cast that it does not otherwise have. The name encourages a personal relationship, but the title "Lord" encourages a distanced, subordinating relationship.

In the nineteenth century the American Standard Version of the Bible, a revision of the King James Version, restored the use of the name, though it spelled it as "Jehovah." This traditional pronunciation implies a misunderstanding. In the Hebrew Bible, scribes eventually incorporated in the text a reminder to say "Lord" (or "God") not "Yahweh."

It worked as follows. Most of the Bible is written in Hebrew; the exceptions are the middle parts of Daniel and Ezra, which are written in Aramaic, a sister language. Other closely related languages include Ugaritic (an older Canaanite language) and Akkadian (the contemporary language of Babylonia). Written Semitic languages such as Hebrew don't have vowels. Readers are expected to be able to work them out (it's a little like the modern-day language of text messaging). It is still the case with modern Hebrew. This system works when you are used to speaking the language, but not when this ceases to be so. Jewish scholars therefore devised systems of dots and dashes to indicate vowels for the sake of people who were less familiar with Hebrew. The Masoretes incorporated these in the text, on the basis of their knowledge of how the text should be read. When they came to the name of God, the copyists put the vowels of the words for "Lord" (*ʾădōnāy*) or "God" (*ʾĕlōhîm*) into the consonants *yhwh* in order to remind people to use the substitute words "Lord" or "God." It is this substitution that produces the name "Jehovah," which is a non-word; it combines the consonants of *yhwh* and the vowels of *ʾădōnāy*.

Because Jews gave up using the name, we are not absolutely sure about its pronunciation, but "Yahweh" is our best guess as to the way the people who wrote the OT would have pronounced it. The basis for thinking that "Yahweh" is the right pronunciation is some comments in early church writers about what Jews had told them regarding the pronunciation.

(On OT translations, see further 119.)

1 16 Israelites, Hebrews, Jews; Israel, Judah, Ephraim

The names for peoples in the OT and the NT cause confusion.

Israel	(1) The ancestor Jacob. (2) The people descended from Jacob's twelve sons. (3) After Solomon's day, the people who belonged to the northern state—the majority of the people as a whole. "Israel" is then set over against "Judah," which denotes the southern clans. But the OT also refers to the northern state as "Ephraim" (the name of the biggest of the northern clans), and it is less confusing if one follows this practice. Ephraim (Israel in the sense of the northern state) went out of existence with the fall of Samaria in 722; (4) The people of God. In this sense, the people of Judah can constitute Israel.
Hebrews	(1) In the OT, more a sociological entity than an ethnic one; it suggests people from ethnic minorities, without proper status. It thus does not refer to Israelites in particular. (2) In NT times, Hebrew-speaking Jews as opposed to Greek-speaking Jews.
Judah	(1) One of Jacob's sons. (2) One of the twelve clans, which traced its origins back to Judah the man. (3) After Solomon's day, the southern state (of which Judah was the biggest clan). (4) After the exile, a province of the Persian Empire, known in Aramaic as "Yehud."
Jew	A shortened version of the word *yĕhûdî*, which denotes a member of the clan or province of Judah/Yehud. As Judah/Yehud became the heart of Israel in the Second Temple period, *yehudim* ("Jews") became a term for all members of the people of Israel and became a regular term for members of this religious community rather than members of an ethnic group. But the term *yehudim* hardly occurs in the OT. There, *yehudim* would exclude most Israelites.
Judea	A Roman province, which included Judah, Samaria and Idumea. (In Ezra's and Jesus' time the Judahites/Judeans saw the Samarians/Samaritans as insufficiently loyal to Yahweh, but the Samaritans, at least, returned the compliment; they accepted only the Torah, not the Prophets and the Writings, and saw the Judeans as too liberal.)

Thus, we conclude that the people of God in the OT are "Israelites." It's confusing to call them "Hebrews" or "Jews." Here is an overview:

Some other names that cause confusion:

1. "Canaanites" is a general-purpose word for the peoples of Canaan, the area where Israel came to live, but it doesn't denote a specific group—it's rather like the term "America," which can denote the United States or refer to the Americas more broadly. Something similar is true about "Amorites" (see 234).
2. "Hittites" usually denotes not people from the great Hittite Empire in Turkey but members of a smaller people in Canaan.
3. Chaldeans or Kaldeans were people from southeast Mesopotamia who gained control of Babylon in OT times, so that "Chaldeans" comes to denote "Babylonians."
4. Jerusalem and Zion are both terms for Israel's capital, but in origin "Jerusalem" is more a political term, and it is the name one would see on signposts if there were any. "Zion" is more a religious term—it refers to Jerusalem as the place where the temple is.

17 New Testament Lenses for Looking at the Old Testament

I want to understand the OT in its own right, yet a Christian perspective does sometimes help one to see what's there in the OT. The NT itself looks at the OT with a range of lenses. A lens enables you to see things; different lenses bring different things into focus.

1. Christians are most familiar with the Jesus lens. Jesus' birth involved an odd sequence of events; the OT helps Matthew understand them (see Mt 1:18–2:23). Jesus experiences opposition and rejection from his own people, but this reaction is not surprising when considered in light of the people's treatment of God and of God's prophets in the OT. Jesus' death somehow sorts out relationships between God and us, but how does it do so? The institution of sacrifice in the OT helps us to understand how it does so. In the OT, God spoke in many different ways, and you may not be able to see how they fit together, but now God has spoken in his Son, who helps you see how they fit together (Heb 1:1). He brings not a new revelation, but a focused embodiment of the old revelation.

2. The NT uses the church lens. "You are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people to be [God's] possession . . . , you who once were no people but now are God's people, who were not shown mercy but now have been shown mercy" (1 Pet 2:9-10). Nearly all the terms in this description come from Exodus 19:6 and Hosea 1–2. How are members of the church to cope with wrongful treatment by other people? By following Jesus' example, which he received from Isaiah 53; so Isaiah 53 is not only a passage of which he was a fulfillment, but also a passage of which they are called to be a fulfillment (1 Pet 2:21-25). First Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 3–4 similarly look back to the OT for a reminder of how easily the people of God can lose their place with God; Israel's story is instructive for the church.

3. The NT thus gets much of its understanding of what it means to be the church from what the OT says about Israel. The implication is not that the church replaces Israel, but the emergence of the church as a body

semi-separate from Israel does raise the question how the church should understand Israel, and the Israel lens is one with which the NT looks at the OT to find the answer to this question (see, e.g., Rom 9).

4. The NT uses the mission/ministry lens. How is Paul to understand his commission as an apostle? He understands it in the terms Jeremiah used for his commission (Gal 1:15; cf. Jer 1:5). Specifically, how is he to understand his commission to bring the gospel to the Gentile world? In Isaiah 49:6 God's servant sees himself as having such a commission, and Paul applies these words to himself (Acts 13:47).
5. How are we to understand the dynamics of our relationship with God and God's relationship with us? In Matthew 5:3-12 Jesus outlines an answer, in which practically every line takes up phrases from the OT, mostly from Isaiah and Psalms. Jesus makes a new creative whole out of the elements that he takes from the Scriptures, but it is from there that he gets his raw materials for an understanding of spirituality. The NT uses the spirituality lens. Paul's exhortations about praise and prayer in Ephesians 5 and 6 likewise assume that the Psalms are a place where Christians will learn to pray.
6. How am I to become mature as a man or woman of God? Paul reminds Timothy that he has been nurtured on the OT Scriptures and that they provide the answer to this question (see 2 Tim 3:14-17). Elsewhere as an example: How should we treat our enemies? The OT says it is by feeding them (Rom 12:20).
7. How are we to understand the world of the nations and the superpowers? In the NT this question comes into prominence in Revelation, where the significance of Babylon (i.e., Rome) is a key issue. It has been said that there is not a single actual quotation from the OT in Revelation, but there is hardly a verse that would survive if you removed the OT allusions. And the world lens is of great importance to Revelation's reading of the OT.

A whole series of questions (how shall we think of Jesus, of the church, of Israel, of mission and ministry, of our relationship with God, of the world) provide lenses with which to ask questions about the OT and open up aspects of the OT. Christians sometimes assume that *the* point about the OT is its prophecies of Jesus. This assumption does not come from the NT.

1 18 The Apocrypha or Second Canon

From the second century A.D. onwards, churches in different areas treated as Scripture a broader collection of scrolls than just the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. As far as we know, these works were not recognized as Scripture by the Jewish community, and they are not quoted by Jesus or the NT authors.

Some questioning of these books' status in the church goes back to Jerome, who produced a new translation of the OT for the church (the translation that came to be called the "Vulgate") around A.D. 400 and noted that these other books came only in the Greek or Latin Bible and not in the Hebrew Bible. But the questioning became a formal issue only in the sixteenth century, when Martin Luther declared that these "Apocrypha" had only a secondary authority, as edifying reading but not as having theological authority. In response, at the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church affirmed that they were fully part of Scripture. Luther was followed by John Calvin and the Anglican reformers, but the Westminster Confession later declared that these books "are of no authority in the Church of God."

Our main copies of the books in the Second Canon are in Greek or Latin, but some were originally written in Hebrew. And although all of them were written after about 300 B.C., some are older than the latest books in the OT. And while some of them raise theological questions, it's often felt that the OT books also do so. Further, some of the books in the Second Canon seem ethically questionable; it would then seem doubtful whether one can say that they are edifying.

Theologically, three features of the Second Canon stand out. First, it talks more about what happens after death than the OT does, and in this respect it parallels the NT. The account of martyrdoms in 2 Maccabees 7 emphasizes the resurrection of the martyrs. The theme recurs in 2 Maccabees 12:39-45, where Judas's faith in the resurrection makes him want to pray for God to forgive men who have died in battle but who have disobeyed the Torah (this passage about prayer for the dead was one that made the Second Canon stick in Luther's gullet). Second, Wisdom and Ben Sira bring together wisdom and

Torah, whereas the OT wisdom books keep them separate. Third, the Second Canon assumes that the story of the Maccabean crisis, of God's deliverance and of events in the decades that followed belongs in the context of the Scriptures that tell of God's activity from the beginning through to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Books of Maccabees take up the story again three centuries later. The Second Canon thus again compares with the NT, which generates narrative about historical events and implies the conviction that God has again acted in a way that takes up Israel's story (see further 507).

The following are the books that most often appear in the different versions of the Second Canon.

1–2 Maccabees: Two accounts of Antiochus's persecution of the Jewish community in the 160s B.C.

3 Maccabees: An account of an earlier persecution and deliverance at the end of the third century B.C.

4 Maccabees: An exhortation to live by reason rather than emotion, appealing to the Maccabean story.

Wisdom of Solomon: A book of teaching in the tradition of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiasticus or Ben Sira or Sirach: Another wisdom book of this kind, not to be confused with Ecclesiastes.

Judith: The story of a Jewish widow who beheads one of Nebuchadnezzar's generals, Holofernes.

Tobit: The story about a faithful exiled Ephraimite and his restoration from blindness.

Greek Esther: An expanded version of Esther's story, making explicit God's involvement.

Greek Daniel: A version of Daniel with several further stories and expressions of praise and prayer.

Greek Jeremiah: A version of Jeremiah amplified by the book of Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah.

1 Esdras: A Greek version of material about the temple from Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

2 Esdras: An apocalypse reflecting on the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The Prayer of Manasseh: A prayer designed to suggest his repentance reported in 2 Chronicles 33.

Psalm 151: Testimony attributed to David in connection with his anointing and his defeat of Goliath.

1 19 Web Resources

See the note on web resources at the beginning of this book.

120 An Old Testament Glossary

Explanations or definitions of hundreds of terms in the Old Testament and terms used by scholars (and used in this book).

121 How to Read the Bible

A brief introduction to the Bible as a whole, more basic than this book.

122 Introduction: Further Resources

a. How Translations Emend the Text

b. Which Is the Best Translation of the Old Testament?

c. Large Numbers in the Old Testament

d. Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament

e. Death and Afterlife in the New Testament

f. Satan in the Old Testament

g. Satan's Fall

h. The Soul

123 (Anything else I dream up after this book is published)

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