

## **A Basic Introduction to Old Testament Theology: Thematic Possibilities** **By Bob Young**

### **BASIC THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS**

The Bible addresses basic questions. A typical list includes God (theology proper), the Bible (revelation, knowing, epistemology), human beings (anthropology), Christ (Christology), sin (hamartiology), salvation (soteriology), the spirit world (Holy Spirit, pneumatology), the church (ecclesiology), and last things (eschatology). A proper study of these topics begins with God.

- What is God like?
- What matters to God?
- What did God put us here to do?
- When we begin by focusing on God, how do we transition to “the basics”?
- How can we integrate these basic categories of biblical thought?

The purpose of this brief introduction is to suggest some integrating “threads” that make the Old Testament story memorable and allow the student to see possible connections to the New Testament. The specific themes focused here include blessing, promise, pact/covenant, choice, God’s presence among his people, and the development of the people of God. All of these themes find counterparts in the New Testament.

The introduction is developed keeping in mind the Hebrew division of the OT Scriptures (law, prophets, and writings) rather than using the more well-known English order (law, history, wisdom, major prophets, minor prophets).

*Note: How shall we study and understand theology? Biblical theology, in its simplest form, seeks to understand the theological message of a section of Scripture. One can speak of the theology of a certain book or author, or of the theology of the OT or NT. Synchronic theology looks at all of the chronological “times” together, and is thus generally a tool to develop topical studies and systematic theology that crosses multiple time periods or multiple biblical books. Such studies may complement biblical theology, but they represent a distinct endeavor. One problem with synchronic theology is that it often evades the important question: what does this particular “time” say? Or, what does this particular book say? What is the theology of Mark, Habbakuk, Malachi, or Titus?*

### **OUTLINE OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY: LAW AND (FORMER) PROPHETS**

Genesis	Choose blessing
Exodus	Choose freedom
Leviticus	Choose holiness
Numbers	Choose obedience
Deuteronomy	Choose life
Joshua	Choose service/faithfulness
Judges	Choose victory
[Ruth	Choose love]
1 Samuel	Choose God as king
2 Samuel	Choosing the heart of God
1 Kings	Choosing God’s judgment
2 Kings	Choosing God’s redeeming chastisement

*This outline suggests basic categories for preaching the biblical story and for preaching the gospel—God, human nature, human value and dignity, God’s saving actions, human response, community, eternity.*

## **GENESIS: THE NATURE OF GOD**

*This brief overview provides a framework for this study: the desire of God to bless, which desire is renewed in the blessing and promise to Abraham, and refocused throughout the Old Testament story.*

- Gen 1:1, creation, excludes other gods, means that the material world is pure
- Genesis begins the story about a God who has the power to create and to recreate. This God blesses his creation, makes promises, saves and delivers, and is present in human experience.
- Human beings are created in God's image, as living beings. God makes his human creation as dual nature beings, capable of living in this world and also as spiritual beings; he also gives his human creation free choice.
- God makes human beings for relationship, with the capacity to live on this planet, as spirits that move around on this planet in physical bodies.
- Genesis 3:1-6, the two trees in the garden illustrate two possible approaches to God: grace and works
- Genesis 3:9, God calls his creation; this concept is unique to Judaism and Christianity in all of the world religions
- Genesis 3:15, the enemy and the challenge, a prophecy of hope
- God provides clothing, we have the first recorded death
- Genesis 4-11, multiplied "sin stories" raise the question: where is relief?
- God desires to bless his creation, he will bless through rescue and recreation

## **THE LAW—Genesis to Deuteronomy [5 books in Hebrew Bible]**

GENESIS—the word of promise; choose blessing

- Primeval history
- Ancestral stories
  - Isaac—the son who was not spared
  - Joseph—God's providence and pledge of surety

EXODUS—the people of promise; covenant people, Ex 19:1-6; choose freedom

- Deliverance from Egypt, Passover; God blesses and consecrates his people
- Living water, Ex 17
- Covenant confirmed, Ex 19-24
- Righteous advocate, Ex 32

LEVITICUS—the promise and purity; choose holiness

NUMBERS—participation in the promise; choose obedience

- The bronze serpent, Num 21

DEUTERONOMY—the place of God's promise, choose life

## **FORMER PROPHETS—Joshua to 2 Kings [4 books in Hebrew Bible]**

JOSHUA—promise, presence and pact; choose faithfulness

JUDGES—problems with the promise; choose to live by principles

[RUTH—technically belongs to the writings, represents older chronological dates]

1 SAMUEL—the promise short-circuited; choose God as king

2 SAMUEL—the promise renewed; choose the heart of God

1 KINGS—the promise ignored; choosing God's judgment

2 KINGS—the promise forgotten; choosing God's redeeming chastisement

**LATTER PROPHETS—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve [4 books in Hebrew Bible]**

*These generally fit within the framework of the former prophets (which we usually call the books of history), although these books include exilic and post-exilic prophetic writings.*

**THE WRITINGS [11 books in Hebrew Bible]**

*It is also the case that the writings are to be inserted into the framework of the former prophets (the books of history.)*

Psalms	Proverbs	Job	Ecclesiastes	Song of Songs
Ruth	Lamentations	Daniel		
1 Chronicles-2 Chronicles	Ezra-Nehemiah	Esther		