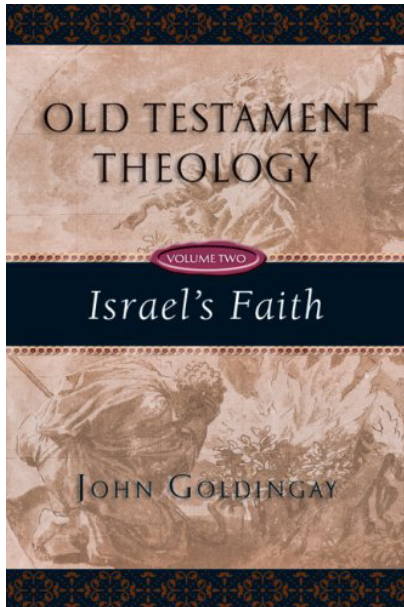


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Goldingay, John

Old Testament Theology, vol. 2: Israel's Faith

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This is volume 2 of an anticipated three-volume *Old Testament Theology*. The first volume was published in 2003 (John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*). Although the second volume can stand on its own, it is useful to understand how Goldingay has conceptualized the three volumes. His short introduction to the second volume (15–20) and his somewhat longer introduction to his first volume (1:15-41) are helpful here even if they are rather brief. The division into three volumes is based partly on canonical groupings of First Testament books and partly on central concerns found predominantly in those canonical groupings. Volume 1 focuses on what the narrative texts of the Pentateuch and historical books say about God and Israel. The gospel story begins with creation and then proceeds through central historical events. Chapters of the first volume are: “God Began”; “God Started Over”; “God Promised”; “God Delivered”; “God Sealed”; “God Gave”; “God Accommodated”; “God Wrestled”; “God Preserved.” Volume 2 focuses on the prophetic and wisdom books and Psalms, which include more “discursive thinking” about the nature of God and Israel. Volume 3 will focus on what God expects humans to do in their everyday lives, which can be found in the Psalms and instructional material in the Torah. More briefly one might say (19): volume 1 tells about what God and Israel did; volume 2 tells about who God and Israel are, and volume 3 will tell us how people should live in light of this.

The second volume begins with a short preface and introduction (13–20). The body (21–833) is composed of seven major chapters (“God, “Israel”; “The Nightmare”; “The Vision”; “Humanity”; “The World”; “The Nations”). After the body one finds a brief conclusion, a bibliography, an author index, a subject index, and a scripture index.

Goldingay explains briefly about the arrangement of topics (18). Chapters 2–3 deal with what can be learned about God and Israel. Chapters 3–4 speak about Israel’s future, including an announcement of disaster and a promise of restoration. Chapter 6 deals with humanity in general, including Israel. Chapters 7–8 deal with the created world and the nations. He suggests the order reflects the expanding horizon that is reflected in the First Testament.

In terms of the topics chosen, this work is similar to topical works of such scholars as Walther Eichrodt and will be useful for systematic theologians because they are concerned about similar topics. Goldingay hopes that this will allow some dialogue with theological works such as those of Barth, Pannenberg, and Moltmann (1:18). As Goldingay states: “Old Testament theology seeks to formulate the inherent nature of Old Testament faith in the analytic, critical and constructive categories that help us interact with it in our own age” (1:17). Such categories and modern concerns that people bring to the Bible are legitimate as long as one is sensitive to the concerns of the biblical texts themselves. The danger in the past has been that too often such categories and concerns have been forced upon the biblical texts.

One might raise a number of questions about how one reads the second volume in light of the first. One such question relates to chapters 3 and 4. Why do chapters 3–4, dealing with the future, come at this place in his theology? Goldingay admits that volume 1 dealt with the past for Israel. Why should one separate the past from the future in two separate volumes? Should not the future be included in the narrative flow of the story and thus be placed in the first volume? Is Goldingay influenced too much here by traditional categories of hamartiology and eschatology?

Goldingay partly justifies the inclusion of eschatology in the present volume by saying that it is only in prophetic and apocalyptic texts that hopes for the future are clearly expressed. As he says, “Narrative, does not tell us directly or explicitly the hopes of their authors or hearers” (350). Perhaps in a similar way he might argue that it is the prophets who explicitly make clear the consequences of sins, which would justify chapter 4 of this volume (254). In some respects, this parallels what Gerhard von Rad did in his two volumes of *Old Testament Theology*, in which narratives were covered in volume 1 and the prophets were dealt with in volume 2. While the separation of narratives from prophets does fit the Christian canon well, the juxtaposition of the Former and Latter

Prophets in the Jewish canon is a meaningful connection as well. The pervasive doctrine of retribution in the First Testament in which certain actions in the past and present lead to certain consequences in the future seems overlooked when one addresses matters of the past in the first volume and matters of the present and future in the second volume. Is there not a doctrine of retribution that underlies not only the narrative theology but also the discursive theology?

In such a gigantic work, it is problematic to suggest that any topic has been treated too briefly. Still, it seems that the world and God's relationship to the world is hardly given the attention it deserves. It was good that the first chapter of volume 1 was "God Began: Creation." Goldingay develops the topic appropriately as not only a prologue to the ongoing history. Still, he devotes only about eighty pages to the topic in the first volume. The subsequent nine chapters are devoted to God's actions in history (about 750 pages). In the second volume, the chapter on world is about eighty pages long. In comparison, nearly 680 pages is devoted to people (Israel—about 340 pages; humanity in general—about 120 pages; the nations—about 120 pages). While Goldingay is not unaware of attempts by scholars to see the central importance of creation in the Bible, he seems tied much more to the view of salvation history as the central category for theology.

Each of Goldingay's chapters is divided into sections, and each of the sections is divided into shorter sections of about one to two pages. He gathers together scattered texts particularly from the prophets, wisdom material, and psalms and uses them to illustrate and explain the various concerns of the sections. Goldingay often presents detailed exegesis of particular texts. This arises in part from his commentaries on Psalms, Daniel, and Isaiah.

In the chapter on God, when Goldingay addresses traditional themes such as omniscience and predestination, he is careful to show how these ideas are nuanced within the Bible and is critical of facile usage of prooftexts that are made to say more than they should. When he speaks of omnipresence, he addresses issues of hiddenness and absence. While Yahweh may be able to know all things, he often speaks as if he does not know how people will respond to his actions. There are many helpful discussions of topics like these throughout his work.

Goldingay is intentionally selective in his treatment of particular texts but does not avoid difficult texts. While he agrees that there is theological diversity within the First Testament, he states that "We cannot identify a single faith articulation in the text, but we might be able to construct one out of the diversity, even if we find ourselves leaving out some ambiguities and antimonies, and even if we grant that the end result needs to recognize once more that we see only the outskirts of God's ways" (17). It is not always clear how

and on what basis Goldingay selects from the diversity. Sometimes it would have been helpful to the reader to hear more about the diversity.

Goldingay spends most attention on the final level of the biblical text and does not base theological reflection on earlier levels of the text. While he addresses specific linguistic details of the text, he spends little time discussing the historical contexts that gave rise to these texts. There is little sense of any development of ideas throughout the Bible or the fact that different texts might depict such ideas in different ways. They appear to be more “timeless truths” that were held at all times and places and were relevant to all times and places. In this sense Goldingay engages in a kind of canonical reading in which any and every text of the First Testament that relates to a particular topic may be used in the discussion. This is partly a confessional perspective because Goldingay is convinced that every text has some theological relevance. More than that, however, it is one of the problems with such a topical approach.

In the introduction to his first volume, he argues that “the biblical gospel is not a collection of timeless statements such as God is love. It is a narrative about things God has done” (31). Yet when Goldingay addresses “discursive language” in volume 2, it seems that he is back to “timeless truths” once again. Since he gives little attention to the historical, social, and ideological contexts out of which specific texts emerge, it seems that such discursive language ends up being “timeless truths.”

Still, there is value in gathering together texts from throughout the Bible on particular topics as Goldingay does without spending great effort in giving the background of every discursive statement. Sometimes that does not seem to be very theologically fruitful. For instance, in the chapter on the “consequences of sinfulness (278-310), Goldingay has gathered together texts and allusions throughout the prophets that relate to the following topics: defilement, corruption, rejection, rebuff, abandonment, withdrawal, wrath, darkness, attention, blinding, exposure, shame, war, wasting, annihilation, expulsion, pollution, withering, dissolution, and death. This section presents a catalogue of language used to elaborate in various ways the consequences of sin. It helps one to recognize the formulaic language that becomes part of the theological vocabulary used typically in prophetic books for many times and places for the consequences of sins. In some ways such language becomes “timeless” and capable of reuse over and over again. Still, such a catalogue hardly allows one to learn which language might be unique to a particular prophet or a particular time and place. It is difficult to see how prophets have developed this language in new ways. It is difficult to recognize, for instance, how some language, such as “pollution,” arises out of priestly concerns.

While Goldingay prefers the term “First Testament” to Old Testament, he views this First Testament as part of the larger Christian Bible. He seems favorable to referring to his work as a “Biblical Theology of the Old Testament.” The textual corpus he studies is the Protestant First Testament, and there are few if any references to deuterocanonical/apocryphal works. At the end of most of his major chapters and in scattered other places he shows how ideas and themes from the First Testament continue in and are central to the Second Testament. He is interested in reading the texts forward into the Second Testament, however, and not trying to read Christian faith back into the First Testament.

He is convinced that the First Testament should be read separately from the New Testament and that Christians need to know what the First Testament has to say on its own, not simply in light of what the New Testament or later Christian faith says. He states that the New Testament has little to say about the created world (730) or the nations (832) and that New Testament writers assumed the truth and importance about these topics. He indicates that the problem is when some Christians assume that, since the New Testament has nothing to say about these topics, they are not important.

Here Goldingay provides a helpful model for how Christians ought to read the Old Testament and how they should relate the messages found within the two Testaments. He takes the First Testament texts seriously and reads them carefully. He affirms the authority of the First Testament texts and points out the importance of the messages of these texts for Christians. As he notes, “I have found that the Old Testament has a capacity to speak with illumination and power to the lives of communities and individuals. Yet I also believe it has been ignored and/or emasculated and I want to see it let loose in the world of theology, in the church and in the world” (1:18). This volume contains a rich resource for theological reflection of the First Testament and suggests how such reflection may still engage us today.